



## Religious Faith and Doubt in Late Medieval Spain: Soria circa 1450-1500

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## RELIGIOUS FAITH AND DOUBT IN LATE MEDIEVAL SPAIN: SORIA *CIRCA* 1450-1500\*

For the religious person, doubt has always been an intrinsic part of faith, yet its exact nature, and in particular its intellectual quality, is slippery and hard to define. It does seem clear that religious doubt did exist in late medieval Europe, as a function of the "faith" which was so elaborately, expensively and apparently genuinely expressed in the Catholic church. Yet Lucien Febvre asserted, in his magisterial study of Rabelais and the "problem of unbelief", that in the sixteenth century "atheism", in any sense recognizable to the modern world, was still inconceivable. Rather, in a society which was entirely coloured by religion "atheist" was simply a term of abuse, like "anarchist" in the France of 1900 or "communist" in the 1930s, used to describe anyone who appeared to think differently from the common herd and who was prepared to be active, for example in politics.<sup>1</sup> Recently Bernard Hamilton has expressed the same opinion concerning the middle ages. For him, atheism in that period "in a theological sense . . . seems to have been virtually non-existent". There were people, generally called "Epicureans", who denied that God either could or would influence human events, and Dante consigned them to the sixth circle of hell, amid burning tombs (*Inferno*, x:14); but to claim that there was no God at all seemed to be beyond the possibilities of anyone.<sup>2</sup> In recent years it has become ever more feasible to base a discussion of religious doubt in this period on documentary evidence. Since Febvre wrote, in 1940-2, and largely as a result of the school of historical thought and writing which he, Marc Bloch

\* Earlier versions of this article were given as papers to the annual conference of historians of medieval Spain (Leeds, September 1986), the "Antiquary" Visiting Scholars Programme of the Denys Hay Medieval and Renaissance Seminar (Edinburgh, February 1987) and the annual conference of the Hispanists' Association of Great Britain and Ireland (Birmingham, March 1987). The author is grateful for the constructive criticism received on these three occasions and has tried to take account of it.

<sup>1</sup> Lucien Febvre, *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais*, trans. Beatrice Gottlieb (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), pp. 418, 131.

<sup>2</sup> Bernard Hamilton, *Religion in the Medieval West* (London, 1986), p. 189.

and others inspired, knowledge of the religious experience of ordinary medieval people has immensely increased. Current works, such as Hamilton's, can thus reflect a range of published studies, based on personal accounts of such experience and reports of the beliefs and behaviour of individuals. This means that Febvre's acute, and often prescient, observations may now be tested in a new way.

In this transformation of the study of the history of religion, the records of the papal and Spanish Inquisitions have played a vital part. Their use in this way is still not, however, uncontroversial. Ellis Rivkin and A. J. Saraiva, for example, have condemned such sources generically as fabrications, the former as part of his attempt to show that Spanish *conversos*, or converts from Judaism, were never true Jews, but rather embraced Christianity with enthusiasm; and the latter on the grounds that, as a wholly materialist historian, he felt constrained to believe that the Holy Office was only interested in confiscating the goods of rich *conversos*, and trumped up both evidence and charges to that end.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, most of the specialists who have immersed themselves in Inquisition material, including Ladurie and Wakefield in France, Pullan in Venice, and Beinart, Révah, Dedieu and Henningsen in Spain, rightly hold a much more positive view of the wealth and complexity, as well as the verisimilitude, of such documentation.<sup>4</sup> There are, of course, real dangers in attempting to use Inquisition records without due care.

<sup>3</sup> Ellis Rivkin, "The Utilisation of Non-Jewish Sources for the Reconstruction of Jewish History", *Jewish Quart. Rev.*, xlviii (1957-8), p. 193; Ellis Rivkin, "How Jewish Were the New Christians?", in Josep M. Solà-Solé, Samuel G. Armistead and Joseph H. Silverman (eds.), *Hispania Judaica: Studies on the History, Language and Literature of the Jews in the Hispanic World, i: History* (Barcelona, 1980), pp. 105-15; A. J. Saraiva, *Inquisição e cristãos novos*, 2nd edn. (Oporto, 1969).

<sup>4</sup> Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou: village occitan de 1294 à 1324* (Paris, 1975), trans. as *Montaillou: Cathars and Catholics in a French Village, 1294-1324* (London, 1978); Walter L. Wakefield, *Heresy, Crusade and Inquisition in Southern France, 1100-1250* (London, 1974); Brian Pullan, *The Jews of Europe and the Inquisition of Venice, 1550-1670* (Oxford, 1983); Haim Beinart, "The Records of the Inquisition: A Source of Jewish and Converso History", *Proc. Israel Acad. Sciences and Humanities*, ii (1967), pp. 211-27; I. S. Révah's controversy with Saraiva is surveyed in Gérard Nahon, "Les Sephardim, les marranes, les Inquisitions péninsulaires et leurs archives dans les travaux récents de I. S. Révah", *Revue des études juives*, cxxxii (1973), pp. 5-48, esp. pp. 33-5; Jean-Pierre Dedieu, "Les archives de l'Inquisition, source pour une étude anthropologique des Vieux-Chrétiens: un exemple et quelques réflexions", in Joaquín Pérez Villanueva (ed.), *La Inquisición española: nueva visión, nuevos horizontes* (Madrid, 1980), pp. 906-7; Gustav Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate: Basque Witchcraft and the Spanish Inquisition* (Remo, 1980), esp. pp. 61-2; Gustav Henningsen, "El 'banco de datos' del Santo Oficio: las relaciones de causas de la Inquisición española", *Boletín de la Real Academia de la Historia*, clxxiv (1977), pp. 547-70.

Peter Burke, for example, rightly warns that Inquisitors may have put ideas into suspects' heads, but Pullan is none the less wise to regard such material as, at the very least potentially, "the key which unlocks the mind of the people, rather than merely revealing their public acts and their private transactions".<sup>5</sup>

At least as far as Spain is concerned, the bulk of Inquisition material which has so far been used in the study of the history of religion consists either of the records of trials or else of the so-called *relaciones de causas* or *de procesos* — that is, lists of those tried, together with some details of their offences and punishments, which were prepared by local tribunals, particularly after 1550, for the supreme council of the Inquisition, the "Suprema", in Madrid. However, the Sorian material to be considered here comes from a different kind of source. It consists of a "book of declarations", which contains 444 statements made by individuals to the Inquisitors of Soria and Osma diocese, in north-east Castile near the borders with Aragon and Navarre, mostly in 1486 and 1502, when the "edict of grace" had been proclaimed. In these pages, 247 men and 71 women are accused of various offences, which were thought by the witnesses to be of interest to the Inquisition. The accused cover a wide social range, the largest representation being of craftsmen, artisans, clerics (including both parish priests and friars), notaries, doctors and surgeons, and university graduates. There were also members of noble households, merchants and traders, and a small number of tenant farmers (*labradores*). Particularly significant and useful is the considerable proportion of women, about a quarter, among both accused and witnesses, though it is worth noting that many of the women referred to in denunciations are not named, but simply described in terms of their family ties to men. Fifteen out of 71 women are thus unnamed, but only twelve out of the 247 men. This relative lack of interest in the names of women serves to illustrate the restriction which was applied by a predominantly male-orientated society to female religious life and experience. This remained anonymous in or absent from the statements even of ordinary members of the population.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1978), pp. 74-5; Pullan, *Jews of Europe*, p. 117.

<sup>6</sup> Archivo General de Simancas, Valladolid, Patronato Real, Inquisición, legajo 28/73, fos. 937'-1121". The register, which is incomplete at both the beginning and the end, is entitled *Libro de declaraciones de testigos sobre delitos en que entiende el Santo Oficio de la Inquisición de Soria y otras partes* [Book of Witnesses' Declarations Concerning Offences Involving the Holy Office of the Inquisition of Soria and Other Parts] and lacks fos. 964-7, 982-6, 1012-61. The surviving manuscript has been  
(cont. on p. 6)

The richness and variety of the material offered by these witnesses has been compared by José María Monsalvo Antón to the contents of Bishop Jacques Fournier's famous register concerning Montaillou and district.<sup>7</sup> However, it is necessary not merely to appreciate the merits of the sources, but also to place them in the general context of religious life in late medieval Europe. Here controversy may arise. In the field of Hispanic studies, both historical and literary, it is customary to view all evidence concerning the religious lives of Spaniards in terms of what is normally regarded as the overriding social problem of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries: the reception into Christian society of large numbers of converts from Judaism and their descendants. Monsalvo Antón, who is the first scholar to attempt to interpret the Soria "declarations", lies firmly in this tradition, which is generally accepted by specialists outside the Iberian peninsula as well as within it. Thus for him this is a *converso* source, displaying as its most conspicuous features nostalgia and reverence for Judaism as a faith, the continued observance of the commandments of Torah (the "Law") and scepticism and irreverence towards Christianity, arising out of that continued faith in Judaism.

It will become clear that there is in fact good reason to suppose that many of those accused in these statements, as well as many of the witnesses, were indeed *conversos* who either reported to the Inquisition, or else were denounced for, activities which dated back, in some cases, to the 1430s and 1440s. However, the purpose of this examination of the Soria evidence is not primarily to add to the rapidly expanding bibliography of the Iberian *conversos*. Instead it will come to the material from the angle of European studies of religion, both "popular" and "élite". At this stage, the question is simply raised: how much of the evidence contained in these statements relates specifically to Judaism and conversion from Judaism, and how much could have occurred anywhere in late medieval Europe in entirely different religious and social contexts?

## I

There are, to begin with, two main arguments for accepting Monsalvo

(n. 6 cont.)

transcribed and edited, with the minor omission of certain repetitive procedural phrases, by Carlos Carrete Parrondo under the title *El tribunal de la Inquisición en el obispado de Soria, 1486-1502*, as *Fontes Iudaeorum Regni Castellae*, ii (Salamanca, 1985), this edition being used here.

<sup>7</sup> José María Monsalvo Antón, "Herejía conversa y contestación religiosa a fines de la Edad Media: las denuncias a la Inquisición en el obispado de Osma", *Studia Historica*, ii (1984), pp. 109-38, describes the area of investigation as "a real 'Montailou' in the lands of the Duero" (p. 115).

Antón's analysis and regarding the Sorian accused as primarily, if not entirely, *conversos*. The first is that the witnesses' statements are full of references to Jewish belief and practice. Thus Christian men and women were accused, on numerous occasions, of continuing to observe Jewish dietary laws, carrying on Jewish prayer and Sabbath ritual, together with ceremonies associated with family events such as birth and death, and even of more public adherence to the Jewish religion, such as visits to booths during the Feast of Tabernacles (Succoth), and the keeping of Passover and the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). Some *conversos* were said to have used prayer-shawls in the open air, when they thought they were unobserved, while others gave oil for lamps in synagogues or even continued to attend services.<sup>8</sup> All these cases may be paralleled in other parts of Spain which had large *converso* populations in the same period, such as Toledo and Ciudad Real, in New Castile.<sup>9</sup> The second argument for regarding this as a *converso* source is the fact that forty-eight of the witnesses, thirty-six men and twelve women, were unbaptized Jews. Their evidence was collected in the period between 1488 and 1492, when the national expulsion took place. They lived in various places in the diocese of Osma, such as Aranda de Duero, Coruña del Conde and above all Soria itself, where twenty of the male witnesses and nine of the females lived in the community in the castle. They were mostly craftsmen, some of them rabbis, or else women married to men of similar status.<sup>10</sup> Thus unbaptized Jews played an important part in the collection of evidence against *conversos*, until they were expelled from Spain in 1492. The issue of Jewish testimony to the Inquisition was always controversial, and such evidence was little used in some areas, such as Trujillo and Puebla de Alcocer in Extremadura. In other places, though, it was used extensively, for example in the Aragonese town of Teruel, where at least thirteen

<sup>8</sup> Examples in *Tribunal de la Inquisición*, ed. Carrete, no. 259 p. 116 (hereafter cited in the form 259/116), 93/51, 89/50, 81/48, 3/18, 373/155-6, 255-6/115, 109/57, 180/89, 111/59, 91/50, 123/65-6, 60/41, 380-1/159, 400/166, 402/167, 315/133, 2/17, 22/29, 26/30, 243-4/111, 9/22, 12/24, 75/46, 277/122.

<sup>9</sup> Pilar León Tello, "Costumbres, fiestas y ritos de los judíos toledanos a fines del siglo XV", in *Simposio "Toledo Judáico"*, 2 vols. (Toledo, 1972), ii, pp. 67-90; Renée Levine, "Women in Spanish Crypto-Judaism, 1492-1520" (Brandeis Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 1982); Haim Beinart, *Conversos on Trial: The Inquisition in Ciudad Real* (Jerusalem, 1981).

<sup>10</sup> *Tribunal de la Inquisición*, ed. Carrete, 2/17, 3/18, 4/18, 5/18-19, 6/19-20, 7/20, 9/22, 11/23-4, 12/24-5, 13/25, 20/28, 27/30-1, 30/32, 49/37, 55/39, 56/39, 57/39-40, 58/40, 59/41, 66/43, 67/43-4, 69/44, 70/44-5, 75/46, 76/46, 78/47, 81/48, 82/48, 91/50, 96/52, 113/61-2, 114/91, 115/62-3, 116/63.

Jews are known to have given testimony against *conversos*. They included two rabbis, Simuel and Yomtov, the community butcher and the collector of the *sedaca*, or charitable fund. The Jews, and in particular the rabbis, were asked to confirm that certain of the *conversos'* practices were Jewish "ceremonies", which was the term in the Inquisition's jargon for the precepts of the Mosaic law and the Talmud. In the celebrated case of the accumulation of evidence against the *converso* family of Bishop Juan Arias Dávila of Segovia, between 1487 and 1490, well over fifty Jews took part.<sup>11</sup> It would indeed be hard to argue effectively that those affected by such testimony were not, at the very least, likely to be *conversos*.

Some individuals even openly admitted that they would rather still be Jews. According to a loquacious informer, Juan de Salcedo, a *converso* tailor named García López said, when coming out of church in Soria at Christmas 1498, just after the priest had announced the services for the week:

When we were Jews, we were bored stiff by one Passover each year, and now each day seems to be a passover (*pascua*) and feast-day and it's all a burden and excessive . . . Before, the festivals were subject to us, but now we are subject to them. And when we were Jews we were masters, but now we are captives.

In about 1475 Constanza Díaz, wife of Gonzalo García de Quemada, was a wine-seller in a small passage near the Esilla gate in Aranda. Nearby a service was in progress in a synagogue. Some male passers-by began to make fun of the worshippers, but Constanza told them off: "Be quiet, don't say that or make fun of them. It's a house of prayer and they're saying the psalms of David, and serving God by doing it".<sup>12</sup> It seems clear, then, that in this region very many converts from Judaism to Christianity, together with, in the case of early fifteenth-century conversions, their descendants, hankered after the old religion. They were also likely to be irreverent towards Christianity; and this sample further suggests that, making due

<sup>11</sup> Haim Beinart, "Jewish Witnesses for the Prosecution of the Spanish Inquisition", in *Essays in Honour of Ben Beinart: Acta Juridica* (Capetown, 1978), pp. 37-46; Haim Beinart, *Trujillo: A Jewish Community in Extremadura on the Eve of the Expulsion from Spain* (Jerusalem, 1980), pp. 93-4, 100-2, 304-5, 333-5; Haim Beinart, "The Spanish Inquisition and a *Converso* Community in Extremadura", *Mediaeval Studies*, xliii (1981), pp. 445-71; John Edwards, "Jewish Testimony to the Spanish Inquisition: Teruel, 1484-7", *Revue des études juives*, cxliii (1984), pp. 333-50; *Proceso inquisitorial contra los Arias Dávila segovianos: un enfrentamiento social entre judíos y conversos*, ed. Carlos Carrete Parrondo, *Fontes Iudaeorum Regni Castellae*, iii (Salamanca, 1986).

<sup>12</sup> *Tribunal de la Inquisición*, ed. Carrete, 364/149 (the Spanish term *pascua* is used to refer to all the major festivals of the Christian year: that is, Christmas, Easter and Whitsun), 371/154.

allowance for the different proportions of the sexes it included, women took a significantly larger part in domestic Jewish observance, and especially in keeping dietary laws and the Sabbath, while men were far more commonly involved in Jewish commitment outside the home and in speaking, and especially reading, Hebrew. In terms of general nostalgia for the old faith, however, women were particularly prominent in relation to their numbers.

## II

It is possible to interpret many of the expressions in word and action of hostility towards Christianity, which are to be found in these statements, as signs of continuing allegiance to Judaism. Many *conversos* were accused of not behaving correctly or of showing insufficient reverence during mass. It was the custom at the time for the laity to gaze at the consecrated host and adore it when it was shown to the congregation at the elevation. Keeping one's eyes shut, apparently in prayer, was interpreted by witnesses as a sign of dissent and of continuing adherence to Judaism. Thus it was said of Gonzalo Sánchez Caballero that, although he showed reverence while mass was being celebrated in St. Stephen's Church, Soria, during the elevation "this witness [Juan de Nuncibar] looked and saw that . . . Gonzalo . . . never looked at God and that he lowered his eyes and began to pray from a book". The witness's own eucharistic devotion was not, of course, in question in this case. Other examples also show that the doctrine of transubstantiation, especially as represented in the ritual of the elevation of the host, was a stumbling-block to many *conversos*. Simón the tailor said, "Look what the Old Christians worship, a bit of bread and a bit of wine". In a village near Soria in 1501 Diego Martínez el Viejo, a travelling stall-holder and *converso* from the city, said, when people were talking about a friar who had recently said his first mass, that the whole business was "a matter of sorcery (*obra de hechicería*)". In Roa in a rare case of this kind involving a woman, Pedro Alonso's wife Isabel said, "I know that what they elevate at the altar is not God but his image (*figuranza*)".<sup>13</sup> The use of material religious images by the church was also likely to

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 46/36-7, 405/168, 370/154, 358/146-7. According, for example, to later editions of the *Lay Folk's Mass Book*, the faithful had to show devotion by bowing their heads before gazing at the consecrated host, which was the obvious reason for introducing the rite of elevation in the first place: Rosalind and Christopher Brooke, *Popular Religion in the Middle Ages, 1000-1300* (London, 1984), p. 117; John Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400-1700* (Oxford, 1985), p. 68.

offend former Jews. Thus along with many other *conversos*, Diego, an old-clothes-dealer in Roa, referred to crosses and statues as just “wood”; while Lope de Maluenda, in a church in Soria, referred to the Inquisition constable as “the constable of the idols”.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, many converts found it difficult to accept the place of Mary in Catholic teaching and life. One reaction was irreverence. When someone came to ask Cristóbal Cubero of Soria to contribute to the light burning before a statue of Mary, he said, according to Juan de Salcedo, “Go into mourning, you and she, and you won’t see any more than she does. Those boozers [*borrachones*, presumably referring to a confraternity or possibly the clergy] drink it all in honour of Our Lady”.<sup>15</sup>

Some *conversos* tried to compare the mass with their former, Jewish worship. Antón Tapiazo, a Sorian shoemaker, concentrated on the differences of ritual and behaviour. According to Juan de Salcedo, he said, “In the synagogue they used to sit on benches and wear their hoods, and how in the church they knelt on their knees and got up again lots of times, and it seemed as though they were playing ‘bobbing up and down’ [*susete, posete*, apparently some kind of game]”. Diego López of Berlanga, on the other hand, took a rather more learned and theological view of the differences. He said in Soria in 1492, when talking to Juan de Salcedo about “the things of the mass”:

I tell you the truth, that what’s said in the mass is the psalms which the Jews used to say in prayer, and the epistle is what was in the prophecies which the Jews used to read, and the gospel was from Genesis and it’s all from the old law, and it’s all good and I don’t find any other doubt or thing I don’t understand, except for the gesture they make when they elevate. They say they see God there. That I can’t believe for the world, nor do I know where they could prove it, as it isn’t there, any of it, in the old law, but it must be some names they find there, in which they say they can see any kind of figure [or sign], and I can’t believe it for the world, nor is there any law in the world where such a thing appears.

Thus in a rather rambling and confusing way, resembling the “stream of consciousness”, and perhaps due more to Salcedo’s faulty memory than to Diego’s own mental processes, the Catholic interpretation of the Old Testament as prefiguring Christ is here rejected, along with the doctrine of transubstantiation.<sup>16</sup>

The increasing spiritual fervour of the approach to Easter particularly brought out *conversos*’ hostility to Christianity, and there were

<sup>14</sup> *Tribunal de la Inquisición*, ed. Carrete, 323/135, 84/49.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 132/70-1 (possibly a reference to Ps. 115.5’s condemnation of idols, “They have mouths, but cannot speak, and eyes, but cannot see”).

<sup>16</sup> *Tribunal de la Inquisición*, ed. Carrete, 354/145, 132/70-1.

some female offenders as well as male. In Gumiel de Izán on Good Friday 1502 two women were talking about a friar's preaching of the Passion and the fact that many women wept. The accused, one Catalina, said that the friar had fooled them, "that Our Lord had suffered death and passion, and why was there any need to do anything about it?". One Easter Sunday in the 1490s Salcedo reported Alonso de San Clemente's wife saying in Soria, "May I be cursed by God if I can believe that it happened like that, rather that someone got it all up to do harm to the Jews". The Christian doctrine of the incarnation and atonement seems to have caused trouble to a number of *conversos*. Once again according to Salcedo, a Sorian broker called Santacruz had said to him, while watching Passion devotions, "What man living is there who would believe that God put himself under such temptation? And that he [Jesus] was the son of God? What father would there be who would push his son into a thing like this?".<sup>17</sup> On similar lines, in about 1485, Diego Delgado, a servant of the governor of Soria Castle, expressed the opinion to Salcedo that Jesus was no more than a heretic within Judaism and was crucified as such; while in 1501 a tenant farmer from Aranda reported that, about thirty years earlier, he had heard a Franciscan friar say publicly in a sermon "that Jesus Christ was a Jew and died a Jew; and another friar of the aforesaid order, who was called Villalobos, defended him and said the same and that he would defend him".<sup>18</sup>

### III

So far there has been little or no difficulty in placing the statements of accused individuals in a *converso* context, and it may well seem obvious that any attacks on the Inquisition itself, which might be found in these sources, should be similarly regarded. Once again, there is a large majority of men among those accused of such statements. It seems, for one thing, to have been quite generally believed that the Holy Office habitually convicted suspects on the basis of false testimony. Alvaro de Pardo of Aranda, for instance, said that in his opinion "in Castile more than fifteen hundred people have been burned by false witnesses". When Diego, a worker with limestone in Aranda, was challenged for making a similar assertion, he replied that if he did not say it "there were another hundred that would say it". Even if Alvaro's estimate of the number of burnings was some-

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 154/80, 350/143.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 368/151-3, 309/131.

what wild, it seems probable from the available evidence that Diego's comment was near the mark. On another occasion, a different witness reported, Diego made his point more bluntly: "I swear to God or to the Corpus Christi, which I worship, that of those they burned at Aranda, none of them was a heretic, and that the fathers [Inquisitors] burned whom they liked". The witness said he could not believe that they would do such a thing, but Diego replied by showing his opinion of the ordinary Spaniards who indeed provided the Holy Office with much of its evidence: "I swear by the body of Christ that there are more stupid farmers than there are black pigs".<sup>19</sup>

The other main accusation against the Inquisition was that it arrested people in order to be able to confiscate their goods, which would happen automatically as soon as a suspect was taken into custody. In a rare case an entirely female scene produced a clear statement of this view. Four women described how they had been baking bread in Quintana del Pidio (Burgos) in 1501 when the subject of the Inquisition came up. María, wife of Pedro Maestre, admitted that she had said, "For my life, I'm afraid". When asked why, she replied, "Because they say that they ask for the Pater Noster and the Ave Maria and the Credo and the Salve Regina and other things, a man [*sic*] will be afraid". To this Juana, wife of Juan Pérez, added, "Cursed be the fear I have now. The whole thing's a rip-off (*sacadi-nero*)". Sometimes there seems to have been a personal reason for individuals to show bitterness towards the tribunal and not merely fear that their ignorance of Christianity would be exposed. Rodrigo de San Martín of Aranda, for instance, said not only that those burned were "no more guilty than the angels in heaven", but also that "the fathers had gone with the Devil, that one of them had died raving [or rabid], that another walked through the house of the Devil and that the [Inquisition] constable was lost as well". Others resorted to mockery. Rodrigo de Madrid, a crossbowman in Aranda who had been "reconciled" after being found guilty by the Inquisition, said when putting on his *sambenito* (penitential garment with crosses on the front and back), "Bring me the she-wolf with her cubs". Lope del Castillo, on the other hand, dreamed of escape. In Cuenca in 1489 he said "that he swore to God that if the inquisitions stopped for a little he would go to a seaport, and there he would be a Moor or Arab, or whatever he liked, and he would be there with whoever he liked". This apparent search for some kind of private Utopia or

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 303/129, 307/130, 232/108.

land of Cockaigne inevitably opens up more widely the question of opposition to the Inquisition. A parish priest in Quemada, for instance, was said to have been frightened when he heard that the Soria tribunal was about to investigate his area. Was this necessarily the reaction of a “judaizing” *converso*?<sup>20</sup>

Not all those who feared the Inquisition were bound to be doing so from a Jewish point of view. There may have been many reasons why parish priests were denounced by their parishioners, and the women of Quintana del Pidio did not have to be of Jewish origin in order to worry about the prospect of having publicly to recite the basic Latin formulas of contemporary Catholic devotion. Thousands of their non-Jewish contemporaries, all over Europe, would have been in similar difficulty. It is not, therefore, inevitable that the Sorian Inquisitors were dealing entirely with *conversos*. There is a universal dimension to some of the accusations in these statements. They included generalized attacks on Christianity or attacks on specific aspects of the church’s teaching; blasphemy, which moved easily into humour and obscenity; materialistic views about this life and scepticism about an afterlife; a belief in the validity of other religions and the possibility of achieving salvation by following them; and, finally, the use of magic.

Many of the unorthodox statements which do not explicitly derive from Judaism concern the life and person of Jesus, beginning with his birth. The parish priest of Ribilla, for instance, was reported to have preached about the nativity. He was talking about the scene in which, “where Our Lady was, there were many angels and archangels and many precious stones and pearls, and that . . . the parish priest of Ribilla had said that he had plenty of precious stones like that in his straw-barn or stable”. The archpriest of Aranda, Martín Fernández de Espinosa, was listening to the sermon, and said afterwards, “and he said well . . . Where the cow and the beast [*sic*] were, what would there be except big turds (*cagajones*), and it’s the same in my mule’s stable”.<sup>21</sup> Others doubted Jesus’s miracles, as recorded in the gospels, for example, the feeding of the five thousand. In the fields around Vinuesa, near Soria, in about 1485 a group of peasants was reaping. They had stopped for dinner and found they were short of bread. The witness, Juan del Espinar of Vinuesa, said, “We have plenty of

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 293-6/126-7, 232/108, 298/128, 379/158-9, 227/105-6.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 227/105-6. There are several Ribillas in the area, one in the modern province of Soria and three others in Burgos. This document does not specify to which it refers.

bread, thank God. With less bread, God gave plenty to more than five thousand people". Alonso López de Villareal then said that God never had the power to do such a thing. Similar doubts arose about the belief, commonly held in the middle ages, that on Holy Saturday, between the crucifixion and the resurrection, Jesus descended into hell and "harrowed" it, in order to release the souls of those who had died before having the opportunity to hear his message. María de Horozco, wife of Alonso Rodríguez, a *converso* of Soria, reported that Ana, wife of another *converso*, had remarked that, if Jesus had really descended into hell, he would never have come out again. The woman seems to have been a robust sceptic, doubting the possibility of miraculous resurrection as well.<sup>22</sup>

Blasphemy, too, is lovingly, and literally, recorded in the Soria register. Most commonly, it occurred in the context of games, when players under stress emitted streams of invective containing expletives which the Inquisition's notaries, at least at this pre-trial stage, did not see fit to delete. Gambling was often involved, and much blasphemy seems to have taken place in drinking-houses, over dice, backgammon or cards.<sup>23</sup> Accusations of blasphemy were also provoked by outdoor games, such as the Sorian amusements of bowls, skittles and, from the neighbouring Basque country, pelota. During a game of bowls, for instance, in Coruña del Conde on St. Just's Day 1494 Bernaldino Pajarillo cried out in disgust, "I reject the whore of a God!". In Aranda in 1500 the surgeon, Master Bernal, urged on his slowing bowl with the cry, "Get there! Get there! May Jesus Christ never flourish!". When playing pelota in Soria in 1487 Rodrigo, a draper, was said to have shouted, "I don't believe in God, bugging St. John!". Perhaps the richest mixture is to be found, however, in the desperate utterance of a gambler, Lope de Vallejera, formerly page to the countess of Denia, and later a citizen of Roa. In about 1478 he was said to have cried out, "I reject the fucking Jewish whore of a God!". No such accusation arises, however, in any other than a situation of stress, though some of the humorous and sceptical views expressed in these documents contain the same ideas in a more decorous form.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 281/123, 265/118.

<sup>23</sup> John Martin, "Popular Culture and the Shaping of Popular Heresy in Renaissance Venice", in Stephen Haliczer (ed.), *Inquisition and Society in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1987), p. 119.

<sup>24</sup> *Tribunal de la Inquisición*, ed. Carrete, 5/18, 39/34, 84/49, 95/52, 161/82-3, 190/93, 205/98, 267/119, 319/134, 426/175, 441/180 ("reniego del puto hodido judío de Dios").

In addition, the Inquisitors were often invited by witnesses to examine those who expressed an excessive love of money and a parallel scepticism concerning belief in heaven and hell. In Buberos (Soria) in 1497 Juan de Ledesma supposedly said, “If a man doesn’t turn his back a bit on God, he can’t be rich”; while in Soria in 1502 a shoemaker who was also a tax-collector, Miguel de Gomara, said to a shoemaking colleague, while holding some coins in his hand, “there was no other glory than dealing in money”. Such views often developed into scepticism about the afterlife. A cleric, Diego Mexías, said in Aranda about 1485 “that there is nothing except being born and dying, and having a nice girl-friend (*gentil amiga*) and plenty to eat”, and that there were no such things as heaven and hell. The late Pedro Gómez el Chamorro, of Coruña del Conde, expressed similar “materialistic” views in 1500, “warming himself by the fire, annoyed and fed up with the weather there was and the cold”. His complaints about the weather led him to conclude, “I vow to God, there is no soul”. Francisco Mexías put it in another way in Aranda in about 1475. He and another man were complaining about the noble factions (*bandos*) in the area and the damage they were doing. The witness, Gonzalo Alonso, said that those who did damage and stole other people’s property would have to make amends to God, but Francisco replied, “Go on, don’t worry. In this world you won’t see me suffer, and in the other you won’t see me burn”. Even the clergy shared such views at times: in one case, Pedro Moreno, a chaplain, seems to have tired of the conversation of a group who were talking, in conventional terms, about the activities and attributes of the saints. It was said that, “St. Michael held the balance, and St. Bartholomew held the devils in chains and St. Peter had the keys of heaven”, to which the cleric replied, “Yes, in his jock-strap”, and, as the female witness solemnly recounts, “some of those who were there reproached him”.<sup>25</sup>

Women who expressed such scepticism seem to have been regarded as socially undesirable. Machín de Esparza’s wife, for instance, said in Soria in about 1460, “Go on, you won’t see me having a nasty time in this life and in the other you won’t see me suffer for it”, but she was described by the witness, the Jewish woman Bellida, as one who “has a reputation of being of a bad conscience and a money-lender”. A Jewess, too, might be shocked by such materialism and scepticism. Indeed it is especially stressed in the case of María, wife

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 287/125, 430/176, 151/79, 185/91, 207/99, 214/101 (*cinta* may roughly be translated as “jock-strap”).

of Juan Batanero of the suburb (*arrabal*) of Soria, who expressed similar views, that she was not a *conversa*, although her husband was. Whether the implied suggestion that she may have imbibed such attitudes from her husband's experience is in fact correct is another matter. No specific link can or need be made between former Jewish allegiance and this kind of doubt. Such a neo-Aristotelian view seems not to have been uncommon in this time and place, and a typical expression is that of Francisco, a *converso* from Gumiel, who said to a witness in 1500, "What makes you think that the world must end? Don't think that the world must end, or believe it. The world must end for anyone who dies, but you shouldn't believe anything like its ending: don't believe that when you die you'll go to the other world". Such an approach lies outside both Jewish and Christian teaching in the period, though Francisco may possibly have been reacting against the millenarian talk which was associated with the year 1500 in Spain, and in which *conversos* were prominent.<sup>26</sup>

Another strand of opinion which existed in the Sorian statements was what might be termed "religious universalism". Eight men and one woman expressed the view that Christianity was not, as the church taught, the sole means of salvation. The female offender was dismissed by her accuser, a university graduate called Juan de Aranda, as an Old Christian who spoke "with simplicity and ignorance". She was a peasant farmer (*labradora*) called Juana Pérez, who lived in Aranda, and who said in about 1488 that "the good Jew would be saved, and the good Moor, in his law, and why else had God made them?". As she was an Old Christian and not a *conversa*, Juana's remarks were discounted. They simply did not fit into the recognized and expected pattern. None the less, such attitudes as hers were common, and were not the preserve of the uneducated. Juan Rodríguez, parish priest of Tajahuerce (Soria), while denying the accusation that he had said that he did not know which of Christianity, Judaism and Islam was the best religion, nevertheless repeated his view that adherents of each of these faiths might achieve salvation according to their own law. A third example took a more political turn. At some time in the 1480s, during the Granada war, an argument broke out in Ausejo de la Sierra (Soria), between a miller, Diego de San Martín, and a farmer called Gil Recio. The miller said to Gil, "Gil Recio, let the water [that is, in an irrigation channel] through

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 57/39-40, 297/127, 334/138. Messianic prophecy associated with this date is discussed in John Edwards, "Elijah and the Inquisition: Messianic Prophecy among *Conversos* in Spain, c. 1500", *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, xxviii (1984), pp. 79-94.

to the mill. The people are dying of hunger. O, Saint Mary! What a great drought there is, because there's no rain". Gil replied, "How do you expect it to rain, when the king is going to take the Moors' home away, when they haven't done him any harm". Diego protested, in accordance with official propaganda, that the Catholic faith was being spread by the campaign, but the farmer responded, "How does anyone know which of the three laws God loves best?". There is no indication that Gil had any connection with Judaism.<sup>27</sup>

The one other area of general, as opposed to specifically *converso*, dissidence which emerges from this material is the practice of magic. In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the Spanish Inquisition paid little attention to this subject, being mainly occupied with the suppression of "judaizing", and it is quite probable that the few cases of magic mentioned here did not lead to trials. This is certainly not because magic was condoned by the authorities, since all attempts to harness supernatural forces outside the church, ranging from love-potions to the most elaborate charges of witches' "Sabbats", were regarded as evil. Thus the witnesses in Soria and district thought it worth while to accuse some of their fellow inhabitants of dabbling in magic. The charges are, however, few in number and, unlike all other categories of accusation, they almost all involve women, and are all examples of sorcery in the cause of love. They also throw some light on the difficult and insecure lives which were led by at least some mistresses of clerics. Catalina de Violante, a stall-holder in Soria, was said to have told Catalina Sánchez, also of Soria (who is described as the former girl-friend of the parish priest of Villed de Mesa, Guadalajara), that in order to discover whether her lover Pedro Fernández de Berlanga, parish priest of St. Thomas's, Soria, who was away on a trip to Rome, was still alive, she had made an image out of stone or oak in a wire pan. The model was that of a boy holding a small rod, "and in that she saw that . . . her beloved was alive and coming along the road". The witness also retailed gossip to the effect that the accused had, presumably by the use of magic arts, escaped from a group of forty men who were engaged in arresting clergy mistresses. Unfortunately, no further details of this remarkable episode are provided.

In another case, according to various female witnesses, Marina, wife of Juan de Toledo, a doctor in Gumiel de Mercado, claimed to be able to tell the physique of guests who were due to come to the

<sup>27</sup> *Tribunal de la Inquisición*, ed. Carrete, 230/106-7, 43/36, 272/120-1.

house from the state and shape of the loaves which she took from the oven. There are strong hints in these statements of sexual innuendo, but nothing specific. Perhaps the most pathetic tale, however, is that of Juana de Cabrejas, who for many years had been housekeeper to Canon Bartolomé Martínez of Burgo de Osma. In about 1490 she was living in Santesteban de Gormaz, "and being under the power of a cleric and because of his jealousy of her, he gave her a bad life". A friend, Marina Sánchez, the widow of a skinner called Pedro González, offered to help her: she took away some of the clergyman's hair, and told the unfortunate woman to collect some bread which she had chewed, a small piece of the clergyman's cassock, which she was also supposed to chew, and a little wax. The witness, Juana, on her own admission with "little sense", followed these instructions, but told the Inquisitors that the charms had had no effect.<sup>28</sup> All this, while no doubt common in the period, is a long way from either Jewish or Christian orthodoxy.

#### IV

The examples of blasphemy, materialistic attitudes, scepticism, anti-clericalism directed in particular at the Inquisition and, finally, magic which have been examined here will undoubtedly have suggested many parallels with other periods and regions, and it is now necessary to set the Sorian evidence in a more general European context. Monsalvo Antón himself, despite his overall view that these accusations were predominantly directed at converts from Judaism, did admit that the statements demonstrate, in general, "the fragility of the religious beliefs of some". He is inclined towards the explanation of all facets of religious belief and practice in terms of social and economic factors, but none the less recognizes that, for example, not all the "blasphemers" in these documents were *conversos* being persecuted on social and economic grounds. Rather, in these and other cases, the sources reveal "the traces of a popular culture — though one which crosses the barriers between classes — irreverent, one which rejects solemnity in religion, sceptical in the face of grandiose words, morally destructive and spectacularly self-satisfied and even proud of swimming in the waters of marginality". Similarly, in the case of scepticism he stresses the Christian, rather than Jewish,

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 8/20-2, 10/23, 171/86, 172/86-7, 175/87-8, 242/110-11. For other cases of the use of charms and sorcery, see S. Cirac Estopañán, *Los procesos de hechicerías en la Inquisición de Castilla la Nueva: tribunales de Toledo y Cuenca* (Madrid, 1942).

form which many such statements take, despite the predominantly *converso* character of the sample interrogated. Although Monsalvo describes the statement “everything is birth and death”, which appears on so many occasions in various forms, as the *converso* phrase *par excellence*, he has to admit that it can equally well be a general “lament, parallel to that of God’s lack of power to remedy blows and injustices beyond this life”, which is not exclusive to this group. Similarly, the belief that heaven and hell are to be found on earth is not “a simple cryptojudaism” but rather “the real corrosive force of heresy, of any heresy”. In sum, despite his general inclination to ascribe the Sorian evidence to *converso* misdemeanours, Monsalvo finally has to admit that, “Despite everything, these beliefs do not conform to a homogeneous body of doctrine, which is why no attempt has been made to classify them into a systematic philosophy. The document confirms the ambiguity, variety and, at times, the indeterminate nature of these beliefs”.<sup>29</sup>

Such unwillingness to classify too rigidly the religious ideas and assumptions of individuals, from whatever social stratum, is entirely proper. Indeed how else is it possible to approach a source which contains such delightful and untheological cases as that of the acolyte Juan Lagarto who, serving at the parish mass one Sunday in Valdecuendes, after the singing of the gospel words “Dixit Jesus discipulis suis, ‘Pax vobis’ [Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Peace to you’]”, piped up, “As the ass said to the cabbages”, words which have been traced to a popular refrain of the time? It would be equally hard to place in any Jewish or Christian heretical context the view expressed in Aranda, in about 1495, by Gabriel de Aranda, a *converso* weaver, that when, according to the gospels, Jesus threatened the Galilean towns of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum with a destruction worse than that of Sodom, this was because “some Jews from those towns were chasing after him, in order to have relations with him and commit sodomy with him”. Thus many episodes and statements in these documents support Monsalvo’s view.<sup>30</sup> Generalized scepticism, incredulity, and irreverence and hostility towards the clergy undoubtedly survived the departure of the Jews and the assimilation of

<sup>29</sup> Francisco Cantera Burgos, “Conversos y judaizantes en la provincia de Soria”, in *Homenaje a Vicente García de Diego* (Madrid, 1976), pp. 87-102; José María Monsalvo Antón, “Antisemitismo en Castilla durante la Baja Edad Media: aproximación histórico-metodológica a un conflicto social”, *El Olivo*, xvii (1983), pp. 49-99; Monsalvo, “Herejía conversa y contestación religiosa”, pp. 111-34.

<sup>30</sup> *Tribunal de la Inquisición*, ed. Carrete, 220-3/103-4, 302/128-9 (see Matt. xi.20-4 and Luke x.12-15). Gabriel seems to have conflated two incidents.

most *conversos* into the Old Christian population. The *Topographical Relations*, a document which consists of answers to a questionnaire sent to the local authorities throughout Spain by the government of Philip II, contains a considerable amount of material which was submitted by the towns and villages of the Toledo region on the subject of local religious practices. Although the investigation never took place in most of the kingdom, this evidence, which has been studied by William A. Christian, Jr., clearly shows the durability, in Spain, of the ideas and views which are to be found in the Sorian register.<sup>31</sup>

However, similar beliefs were discernible well beyond Spain and long before the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. One such example is that of the Toulouse Inquisition records of the 1270s, which have been studied by Walter Wakefield. Despite the fact that these Inquisitors were aiming to identify and trap Cathars, and to a lesser extent Waldensians, they also found a relatively small number of cases which revealed other kinds of unorthodox attitudes. These witnesses, many of them probably illiterate:

had shown disrespect for sacred things by dirty jokes, defilement of cemeteries, disparagement of the reputed holiness of saints and shrines, scepticism about the sign of the cross, quarrels with priests over burial practices, restlessness at sermons, and disparagement of current attitudes towards Jews and usury. It was surely encouraged by Cathars and Waldenses. It could also easily be generated by peasant scepticism and the frictions of village life.

In the Spanish context small and predominantly agricultural towns, such as those in the Sorian region, might be placed in the same category and, in both cases, it is true that “these words and acts were also accompanied by more serious divergences from contemporary orthodoxy, statements often tinged with rationalism, scepticism, and revealing something of a materialistic attitude”. It seems clear that such views, in Toulouse in the 1270s or Soria in the late fifteenth century, cannot be ascribed to the currently prevailing systematic heresies, such as Catharism and Waldensianism, or religions, such as Judaism. Wakefield sees strong evidence in his documents for “a certain independence of mind and native scepticism, not necessarily dependent on dualist ideas, in the longing to know that children were assured of salvation, in the crude scepticism about the host, and other holy things, in the materialistic concept of the soul, in the explanation of natural phenomena without divine action”. He suggests that “the

<sup>31</sup> William A. Christian, Jr., *Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Princeton, 1981), esp. pp. 147-8, 167.

unorthodox opinions which the inquisitors discovered in 1273-1276, which had existed earlier and would persist thereafter, may well have arisen spontaneously from the cogitations of men and women searching for explanations that accorded with the realities of the life in which they were enmeshed".<sup>32</sup> It is equally clear from other sources that, well before the thirteenth century, certain attitudes such as anticlericalism, blasphemy, scepticism and mockery were common, if never officially accepted, features of European religion.<sup>33</sup> The registers of Bishop Fournier too, apart from furnishing material for the study of practical and theoretical Catharism, also include accusations of scepticism towards Christianity in general, materialism and disbelief in the afterlife, the notion, in the case of one small group, of the equal validity of Christianity, Judaism and Islam, and blasphemy. Thus while sixty-nine of Fournier's cases seem clearly to have involved Cathars, and five of them fairly obvious Waldensians, there were also seventeen cases which appear not to have fitted into these recognized heresies, but which none the less correspond to categories which are to be found in the Sorian register.<sup>34</sup>

Medieval evidence thus seems to support the general principle that religious doubt is an intrinsic part of faith. Therefore, even if Febvre was right to argue that "atheism", in any modern sense, was not an option in the sixteenth century or earlier, it does appear none the less that there was indeed genuine religious scepticism in late medieval and early modern Europe. The question which remains, though, is where and how such an attitude originated. The striking similarity of material from such widely differing regions and periods raises important issues concerning the interpretation of "popular" religion and its relationship to the religion of "élites". Grado Merlo, for instance, in the context of late fourteenth-century Piedmont, suggests the notion of a "*humus* of religious nonconformity". Certainly, the Turin Inquisition heard statements from individuals in the 1370s and 1380s who, although influenced by both Catharism and Waldensianism, also admitted to views very similar to those held by people in late fifteenth-century Soria. They believed that Jesus was the natural son of Mary and Joseph, that there was to be no punishment after death, that transubstantiation was a false doctrine, as was devotion

<sup>32</sup> Walter L. Wakefield, "Some Unorthodox Popular Ideas of the Thirteenth Century", *Medievalia et Humanistica*, iv (1973), pp. 25-35, esp. pp. 26-30, 33.

<sup>33</sup> Brooke, *Popular Religion in the Middle Ages*, pp. 94-102.

<sup>34</sup> *Le registre d'Inquisition de Jacques Fournier, évêque de Pamiers, 1318-1325*, ed. Jean Duvernoy, 3 vols. (Toulouse, 1965), i, pp. 40-122, 123-7, 177-322, 331-3, 350-69, ii, pp. 235-40, 255-63.

to Mary, and likewise the cult of the saints and the use of images in worship. They believed that priests in a state of mortal sin could not absolve the sins of others; they rejected the belief in, and the practice of, indulgences and, in one case, found repugnant the notion that God could have humbled himself by allowing his son to become a human being.<sup>35</sup>

Both Italy and Spain itself, in the sixteenth century, produced cases in which individuals appear to have devised their own answers to the basic questions of life and religion, such as those noted by Wakefield in the case of Toulouse. Thus the "cosmos" of the Friulian miller Domenico Scandella, as elucidated by Franciscan Inquisitors in the later sixteenth century, contained, apart from its individualistic and idiosyncratic elements, many of the features which have become familiar in the Sorian register, such as hostility towards the sacrament of penance, about which he said, "You might as well go and confess to a tree as to priests and monks"; or, as the Sorian "alchemist" Manuel Rodríguez put it, a stable would do as well. There is, as Ginzburg states, "religious materialism" in "Menocchio's" answers. He expressed forcefully the view that "the majesty of God has given the Holy Spirit to all, to Christians, to heretics, to Turks, and to Jews; and he considers them all dear, and they are all saved in the same manner". He regarded blasphemy as a relatively minor offence, because it did no material harm to another human being and, in this as in so many other respects, he would have had many allies in Soria and district, about a century before.<sup>36</sup> Indeed in Spain the files of the Cuenca Inquisition provide a parallel to the case of the Friulian miller. In 1553-4 Bartolomé Sánchez of Cardanete was tried by the Cuenca Inquisitors. Like Menocchio, his downfall, in the eyes of the Holy Office, was caused by ill-understood reading, in his case a confession-manual in Spanish which he read before going to confession himself in Lent 1553. The book seems to have turned him into an anticlerical militant, who rejected the whole idea of sacramental confession, declaring that all priests were cursed and excommunicate and that confession should be made to God alone, and also the mass, which he described as "no more than some flour and water mixed together, and Christ never formed part of it". He described the cross as "just a post, and he was not going to worship an idol". He held

<sup>35</sup> Grado G. Merlo, *Eretici e inquisitori nella società piemontese del trecento* (Turin, 1977), pp. 8, 20-41.

<sup>36</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (London, 1980), pp. 4-11, 20-2, 28, 39, 43, 49-51, 62, 68, 101-2, 106, 125.

that the pope was a villain, that “papal indulgences did nothing to get souls out of purgatory” and that the Christian faith was the worst of the three “religions of the Book”, into which he would not allow his children to be baptized. The prevailing impression of Bartolomé is that, for some reason, he was very strongly anticlerical, yet all his views have been found not only in the Soria register but also elsewhere.<sup>37</sup>

On the face of it, such evidence, coming from religious dissidents in many and varied regions in late medieval and early modern Europe, seems to support the notion proposed by many scholars that there existed some kind of “popular” or “peasant” religion, which somehow managed to survive underground, only coming to the surface during times of official persecution or reform, such as the investigations of the Inquisition or the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. The assumption underlying this view is that, at least until “modern” times, for example the “rechristianization” after the French Revolution, the church hierarchy largely failed to evangelize the laity, and in particular the rural population and urban lower classes. Thus, for example, the historian of the Spanish Inquisition, Henry Kamen, dismisses the late medieval Spanish church, in his most recent work on the subject, with the damning statement that “over much of Spain Christianity was still only a veneer. The religion of the people remained backward, despite gestures of reform by Cisneros and other prelates”.<sup>38</sup> Such observations have to be handled with great care. First, despite their unorthodoxy, the statements which have been presented here, both from Soria and from elsewhere, are in many cases the very opposite of “backward” in terms of religious grasp and sophistication, and represent ideas which today are often advanced by professional theologians and philosophers. Secondly, even examples of crude and unsubtle attacks on church teaching or the behaviour of Christian leaders often seem to arise not out of indifference but out of a deep commitment to the Christian or, in some cases, the Jewish faith. It thus seems clear that any attempt at bland and intellectualized generalization cannot do justice to the richness and variety of a source such as the Soria register, and the same can no doubt be said about the rest of Europe. In reality, the dissident views of those accused before the Spanish Inquisition in

<sup>37</sup> Sara Nalle, “Popular Religion in Cuenca on the Eve of the Catholic Reformation”, in Haliczzer (ed.), *Inquisition and Society*, pp. 71-3.

<sup>38</sup> Henry Kamen, *Inquisition and Society in Spain in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (London and Bloomington, 1985), p. 199.

this region do not amount either to systematic Christian heresy or Judaism, and still less to some kind of semi-pagan syncretism. Equally clearly, the concept of “marranism” as a specific and systematic mixture of Judaism and Christianity practised by Spanish *conversos* seems, on this as on other evidence, to be the misleading fabrication of later scholars.<sup>39</sup>

It is important to realize that, in attempting to understand evidence of the religion of individuals, generalized concepts such as “the church”, “the clergy”, “the people”, “the Jews” and “the *conversos*” should be treated with a scepticism comparable to that of the most radical speakers in the Sorian statements.<sup>40</sup> Supposed distinctions between the official hierarchies and educated élites of religions on the one hand, and their congregations and faithful on the other, will then seem less realistic and helpful. Instead greater attention should be paid to people’s individual, family and community circumstances. Of course, these will in every case be profoundly influenced by the teachings of organized religious hierarchies, with their supporting theologians, philosophers and political authorities, but they will not be determined by these largely external forces. Equally, social and economic forces will restrict or otherwise frame people’s lives, but these must also be regarded as generalized concepts which need to be treated with caution. If this approach is adopted, religious radicalism will be revealed as the preserve of no one social class or sex or level of formal education. The Sorian evidence clearly shows that virtually every theological and philosophical option which has so far become available to humankind was espoused by someone in this region of Spain in the late fifteenth century. It seems quite obvious, therefore, that traffic between learned and uneducated people went in both directions, so that while Judaism or Christianity, as officially taught, played an important, indeed indispensable, role in shaping the religious lives of this population, nothing ever seems to have remained unquestioned for long.

One final example will illustrate the conclusions which have been drawn here from the case of Soria. In the village of Peroniel (Soria)

<sup>39</sup> The view of “marranism” as a “systematic” blend of Christianity and Judaism is advanced, most notably, by Cecil Roth, in *A History of the Marranos*, first published in 1932 and republished in New York, 1974; see esp. pp. 168-94 of the 1974 edn. None the less, P. C. Ioly Zorattini was right to avoid reducing “such a rich and complex religious reality” as “marranism” to “a single matrix”: *Processi del Santo Uffizio di Venezia contro ebrei e giudaizzanti, 1548-1560* (Florence, 1980), p. 16.

<sup>40</sup> Francis Rapp, “Réflexions sur la religion populaire au moyen âge”, in *La religion populaire dans l’Occident chrétien: approches historiques* (Paris, 1976), pp. 51-4.

in 1494 Diego de Barrionuevo was accused of saying, “I swear to God that this hell and paradise is nothing more than a way of frightening us, like people saying to children, ‘Avati coco’ [‘The bogeyman will get you’]”. In about 1550 John Calvin launched an attack on some of the intellectuals of his day, including the mighty Rabelais himself, for their religious scepticism. Among other things, he accused them of publicly asserting that “all religions have been formed in the brains of men; that we think there is a God because we like to believe it; that hope of life eternal is something to amuse idiots with; that everything said about hell is done to frighten little children”.<sup>41</sup> What price the distinction between “popular” and “learned” religion?

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<sup>41</sup> *Tribunal de la Inquisición*, ed. Carrete, 288/125 (“avati coco” or “guarda el coco” [“watch out for the bogeyman”] were often said to frighten children and make them behave); Febvre, *Problem of Unbelief*, p. 130.