

©DISSIDENCES

Hispanic Journal of Theory and Criticism

María Laura Giordano.

Apologetas de la fe.

*Élites conversas entre Inquisición y Patronazgo
en España (Siglos XV y XVI).*

Madrid: Fundación Universitaria Española,
2004.

(Beatriz Domínguez-Hermida, University of Colorado at Boulder)

The book consists of a foreword written by Ricardo Gracia Cárcel, an introduction, seven chapters and a conclusion. With this project, María Luisa Giordano responds to an historiographic tradition that pursued the myth of national unity based on religious unity. She rejects studying the case of the Jews converted to Christianity as a caste. According to her, this caste did not exist, since old Christians showed the same characteristics attributed to converts. Her main concern is the meaningful relationship between the convert subjects and a very specific situation: the anxiety of the ecclesiastical institutions and Monarchy to create a joint project and its failure to do this due to Spain's cultural diversity.

In the first chapter, “El cristianismo paulino como fenómeno de élite”, Giordano explains the relationship among the Court, the converts and the written word during the first half of the fifteenth century. The aristocrats, experts in the art of war and proud of their Roman background (such as Don Íñigo López de Mendoza, first Marquis of Santillana), created a cultural space where converts could translate the classic writers from a Christian point of view. Starting with literary, spiritual and theological sources, a complex cultural network was formed. As a result, the Court became a humanistic cultural laboratory. The author notices that *senequismo*, pauline Christianity, and Aristotelianism are three doctrines from which this cultural network was built. They promoted the same things: the inner world over the material world, pain as an instrument for moral improvement, and enhancing the human being’s responsibility or free will. Since the “new Christians” were targets of attacks from the “old Christians”, the author comments that the converts made sense of their persecution and they found a mode of tolerating it through these ethical models.

In this environment, the literary works of the converts (for instance, Defensorium Unitatis Christianae of Alonso de Cartagena, Diálogo y razonamiento en la muerte del Marqués de Santillana of Pedro Díaz Toledo and Arboleda de los enfermos of Teresa de Cartagena) are important because they were a political weapon and an expression of identity. These writers defended the unity of Christianity (so the books were a response to Sentencia-Estatuto of Padre Sarmiento where the practice of public or private ‘oficios’ was prohibited for converts) and, at the same time, they expressed a specific spiritual identity as a result of their conversion. Furthermore, they assumed the task of converting Jews, Muslims, and Moors, and indoctrinating other converts.

In the second chapter, “La corte de los Reyes Católicos: el uso político del cristianismo paulino”, Giordano analyzes the political activity of converts through their writings during

the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella. The converts became an important part of the royal staff, thanks to their legal training and their handling of money which facilitated their presence at the Court. The Bachiller Palma wrote an apology for converts in 1479, the title of which is Divina retribución. As other writers, he resorted to Pauline Christianity in order to criticize the political power. Consequently, his words were a message of liberation not only spiritual but social and political. This liberation means equality. Because of that, it is not surprising that one author, Juan de Lucena, wrote the book Libro de vida beata (1463) where he maintained the stoical idea of judging the human being by its merits, not by its lineage or social class. Fernando del Pulgar went further; he wrote a letter during the early years of the Court's operation of the Santa Inquisición. In his opinion, the "old Christians" were the ones responsible for the failure in the evangelizing process. According to Pulgar, the lack of a Christian model among the "old Christians" resulted in the confusion and misunderstanding of the religion by the converts. Using Pauline Christianity, the aim of these works was to dismantle the anti-Jewish arguments on which the statute of limpieza de sangre and the Inquisición leaned.

In the third chapter, "Generales y preladados de la orden Jerónima", Giordano explains the response of the religious orders faced with the imminent approval of the statute of Limpieza de Sangre. She pays attention to the Jerónimos Order due to the important presence of the converts. Alonso de Oropesa, Fray Rodrigo de Orenes and Hernando de Talavera resorted to Pauline Christianity as political weapon. According to them, the converts were children of the Church as well; consequently they had the same rights as the rest of the Christians. The problem for the Jews was that even if they accepted the Catholic faith, they kept seeing the promise of Salvation in the law of Moses. Hernando de Talavera wrote Católica impugnación in 1487. It appeared six years after a libel which spread at Sevilla and criticized the Christian preaching campaign by Talavera. With this text, he tried

to demonstrate the expiry of the Moses law without abolishing it. In order to do so, he established relationships between the Old Testament and the New Testament. He used this Pauline method in order to show the continuity in the history of Salvation. The author thinks that Talavera contributed a solution for the acceptance and the understanding of Catholicism by Jews although Católica impugnación was addressed to the Christian society who created the statute of limpieza de sangre and the Inquisition.

In “Los iluminismos españoles: entre continuidades y diferencias” Giordano argues that the converts initiated a process of redefinition through the illuminatism movement from Toledo. Hernando de Talavera died in 1507 and the dialogue between the ecclesiastical institutions and Jews disappeared with him. Within an environment more and more hostile to converts, the faith, especially the one preached by Saint Paul of Tarsus, became their refuge, since they shared the experience of persecution and conversion. Furthermore, Saint Paul represents doctrinally the continuity from Old Testament to New Testament; this continuity did not erase converts from the salvation history. The members of the illuminatism movement from Toledo developed their own ideas about religious practice: they preferred inner prayer, they defended free will without demanding the necessity of the religious act in order to obtain the salvation; they experienced faith as enlightenment, and men as well as women had an evangelizing role. In some cases, the Inquisition started a judicial process against the iluminados. However, during the trial, the defense became a reaffirmation of their own identity and of their own spiritual roots. According to Giordano, this social group used the Pauline teachings not only at a doctrinal level but at a political level.

Although the explanation about the relationship between the Pauline doctrine and the converts is spread all over the text, in the fifth chapter, “Algunas fuentes de la

espiritualidad española entre los siglos XV y XVI: La doctrina paulina y la filosofía natural de Raimundo Sibiuda”, the author analyzes in detail why the Pauline doctrine was so important for the converts. As well as symbolizing the union between the past (the Old Testament) and the present (the New Testament), Saint Paul represents the reconciliation between people who came from Paganism and people who came from Judaism under Christianity. Thus, the Jews were not excluded from the salvation promise; on the contrary, they participated in it through the conversion. Giordano decides to talk about Raimundo Sibiuda due to his influence over Juan de Cazalla. Sibiuda wrote Liber Creaturarum where he took up again the Aristotelian basis. According to Aristotle, the human being is responsible for his actions. Cazalla went further when he thought about free will in his book, Lumbre del alma. In this text, the human being seems to save himself without Church intervention. Another important aspect in Sibiuda is faith. He was the first one who saw faith not as discovery but as revelation. Consequently, God stopped being an object of research and became a subject who revealed Himself.

Giordano clarifies the connection between the nobility and the converts in the sixth chapter: “Élites nobiliarias y élites ‘heterodoxas’ en la España del siglo XVI”. The third Duke of the Infantado, don Diego Hurtado de Mendoza, the second Marquis of Villena, don Diego López Pacheco and the Admiral of Castile, Fadrique Enríquez, were well known by welcoming and acting as patrons to illuminated converts. Why was this alliance formed? The author realizes that the conflict of powers was developing at this moment. The Inquisition aspired to become independent from Rome and depended only on the monarchy’s central power. As a result, the monarchy fortified its power over the nobility. Both the inquisitorial actions and the systematic spoliations of the condemned people represented an impoverishment of its vassals and, therefore, a decrease of its income. That is to say the Inquisition was fighting against heresy and challenging the noble power as well.

As a result, some nobles decided not to follow the path indicated by the crown. Acting as patrons to converts' religious elites, they resisted the process of centralization. Thus, they did not renounce their religious and political prominence and reaffirmed their identity and their influence.

The importance of pious women as a connection point between convents and palaces is the last topic that Giordano studies in the final chapter: "El siglo XVI como laboratorio espiritual y cultural: entre experimentación y patronazgo". Noble women such as Brianda de Mendoza, doña Mencía de Mendoza and doña Isabel de Aragón, together with convert women, stimulated the expansion of Pauline Christianity and women's evangelizing vocation. All these women were in a temporal border and soon their ideas mixed with and found the support in the vanguard of Erasmists. According to Giordano, these lone women were a precious vehicle of social introduction and promotion for religious orders. Unlike pious women from the seventeenth century, these women had received an intellectual formation, protection and economic support.

María Laura Giordano analyzes the spiritual trajectory of the Spaniards before the generation of the mystics which appeared in the second half of the sixteenth and in the seventeenth centuries. Even though the presentation of the information is chaotic in some cases, this book is a very important contribution for the study about the heterodoxy during the fifteenth and sixteenth century in Spain.