

Isabel—Protector of the Jews

“...a Queen has disappeared who is bound to have no equivalent on Earth, because of the greatness of her soul, purity of heart, Christian piety, justice equally applied to all, a conservative mind on old rules and an ordered mind in new ones, for the creation of a valuable inheritance...” – Cardinal Cisneros, 1504

“Anti-Semitism...is the most horrible blow yet suffered in [the] ever-continuing Passion [of Our Lord]: it is the bloodiest and the most unforgivable because He receives it upon His Mother’s face, and at the hands of Christians.” – Léon Bloy, d.1917

“I have to say, that in our times, there has not existed a more clear example of true kindness, greatness, spirituality, prudence, religiousness, honesty, courtesy, generosity, in summary, all virtues, than that of Queen Isabel” – Count Castiglione, 1528

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Introduction

Many Catholics believe that the greatest woman who ever lived, after the Blessed Mother, is Queen Isabel of Castile. An objective measure for this considers the number of people Isabel influenced, and the period over which her influence has lasted. Isabel directly changed the face of the world and the course of history on a scale no other woman (save Mary) has matched. Throughout her life Isabel was devoted to God. The cause for her canonisation opened in 1958 and advanced steadily. But certain non-Catholics, angered by Queen Isabel's expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, made emotional protests against her canonisation. Sensitive to the protestors, the Vatican suspended the canonisation process in 1991.

The purpose of this booklet is to appeal to people of goodwill, Jewish and Christian, to accept that the canonisation of Queen Isabel is not something to be protested, nor something which Jews should fear. Isabel had a high regard for Jews, she was their friend and patron, honoured them, and as queen she made great efforts to protect Jews from harm, even in the most explosive of circumstances. She deplored and punished those who incited hatred against Jews or who robbed and exploited Jews in their vulnerability. Isabel was exceedingly reluctant to suspend their permission to remain in the Kingdom. All this is a matter of historical record.

Historical reality is impossible to grasp perfectly but on the question of Queen Isabel and the Jews there exists such an abundance of documentation, of eyewitness testimonies and impartial corroboration, that we have firm hope harmony can be found today. By calling for her canonisation, Catholics mean no offence to anybody. Rather they wish to give glory to God and to serve their neighbours by raising Queen Isabel to the altars as a woman of great justice, compassion and piety.

*Miles Jesu, Avila, Spain
May 2007*

The Case for Isabel's Canonisation

Many people hope the Servant of God Queen Isabel (1451-1504) will be canonised, believing her life is a litany of outstanding virtue and service to God bearing good fruits; and furthermore because intercessory prayers to Isabel have been answered with miracles and favours which indicate Isabel is in heaven.

a) Life of Virtue and Service to God

“Not even the most rigorous investigation would reveal one single act of her life, whether public or private, that was not inspired by piety and virtue...” – Don Modesto Lafuente, *Historian* (19th century).

An exhaustive historical investigation into the life of Queen Isabel, conducted by a series of specialists, culminated in an Historical Commission appointed by the Vatican. The examination involved over 100,000 archive documents and 150 qualified witnesses [see appendix A]. The points presented below are based on archive evidence and first-hand contemporary accounts.

Piety

In an era when it was usual for good Christians to attend Mass only a few times each year and confession annually, Isabel attended Mass every day. This had been her habit since her childhood with her mother. Isabel's education was entrusted to Rodrigo Sanchez de Arevalo, who became bishop of Plasencia. She frequently visited the Franciscan Monastery of the Trinitarians where Our Lady of Sorrows was venerated and to whom Isabel professed great devotion and later named patron saint of Granada.

The Queen prayed the Divine Office. Her Italian chaplain Lucio Marineo Siculo said she prayed the canonical hours as if she were a nun despite the many governmental matters she was obliged to attend to day and night. Isabel often recalled the saying of her time: *those monarchs who do not fear God must fear their subjects*.

Isabel's devotion to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament led her to write to the bishops, admonishing them with respect to the care they should be giving to this devotion:

“In many of the local churches of our diocese the Blessed Sacrament is not treated with the proper solemnity and reverence, nor is it kept in a silver container or replaced at the appropriate times. I wanted to write to you about this—she says to the bishops—asking you then to make a visit to these churches and give orders so that all the above-mentioned may be provided and done as it should be in the service of God our Lord.”

The queen's devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary was fervent. She co-founded the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception with her dear friend St. Beatriz of Silva in 1489, an order still thriving today. This was 365 years before the dogma of the Immaculate Conception was declared. Isabel wrote to Pope Alexander VI saying:

“I entreat your Holiness to see that no one, whatever law or government he may live under, should dare to contradict the teaching about the Immaculate Conception, since from it so much good comes for the service of the Lord.”

Queen Isabel was exceedingly generous to the Church with endowments, and giving ornaments and sacred vessels to enhance the liturgy as well as commissioning music and canticles for the same. She donated the tabernacle and altar-piece used for perpetual adoration in St. Peter's Basilica, Rome. After receiving two monks from the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, she sent them the enormous sum of 1,000 ducats annually to be used in Jerusalem for "those things necessary to Divine worship and for the upkeep of the Holy Sepulchre itself".

Aged 15, Isabel was threatened with marriage to Pedro Girón, 43, a godless, animalistic man. Her response was three days of prayer in chapel, with tears, fasting and pleas that God might spare her, asking, "Dear God, compassionate Saviour, do not let me be given to this man! Either let him die, or let me die!". Girón set out on his journey toward Isabel but fell ill and on the third day after his departure, in Villanueva de los Ojos in the province of Ciudad Real, he died blaspheming. To whatever one attributes this, Isabel forever felt her gratitude to God.

Also at this time, when Isabel was put in charge of her own household, she wrote the Pope obtaining permission for a portable altar at which to hear daily Mass and a permanent chaplain.

Aged 17, Isabel was urged by powerful nobles to seize the throne. Everything was in place, she had sweeping support, the throne was hers at a nod. Yet she desisted, refusing the crown offered to her by Archbishop Carrillo. Like David with King Saul, she refused to raise her hand 'against the Lord's anointed', regardless of the weakness of the king.¹ She would take the throne only by rightful succession as from Divine appointment. It came when she was 23.

When Spain was invaded by Portugal in 1474, Queen Isabel had no army to defend her country. But she rode from town to town and prayed in public for her country's needs; the people were so touched, so inspired by her sincerity and goodness that again and again they rallied to her and the resulting army was decisively successful in its defence of the realm.

Pope Alexander VI gave her the title Isabel the Catholic for her service to the Church. She and her husband Ferdinand became known as 'The Catholic Kings'. Queen Isabel's Last Will and Codicil shows her faith endured to the end, ordering a total of 40,000 Masses requested be said for the repose of her soul and for those who had died in her service.

And a legacy unforeseen, Queen Isabel commissioned to be built the Church of St Peter on the Golden Hill near the Spanish embassy in Rome. The Tempietto of the church includes a small dome. This was the model Michelangelo used for Christendom's most recognized landmark, the dome of St Peter's Basilica. Indeed the magnificent monstrance-altar piece used to this day in St Peter's for Eucharistic adoration was also donated by Queen Isabel.

Justice

Queen Isabel, with great prudence, justice and fortitude, unified 27 separate kingdoms into one strong nation, Spain, leading her people from a state of extreme prostration to become a world power. She was famous for her impartiality, making the weight of the law felt by all without distinction, and if necessary she herself faced those who at first refused to comply.

In one famous case Queen Isabel sent judges to investigate the disappearance of a man, following petitions from his poor wife. The judges discovered that Alvar Yañez had had a nobleman murdered then made over all the property of the victim to himself. Yañez then killed the notary who had verified the documentation. It was this notary's wife who had petitioned Queen Isabel. Yañez was condemned to death, but to spare his life he offered a bribe of 40,000 doblas in gold, which was an incredible amount of money – more than the Crown's annual rents. Some of Isabel's advisors suggested she commute his sentence and take the money (needed for the war in Granada). Isabel refused, saying that justice had to be the same for all: the powerful and the weak, the rich and the poor, the high and the low. Isabel ordered that Yañez's ill-gotten gains be used for the support of the children of the murdered man. Isabel could not be bought.

When Queen Isabel acceded to the throne in 1474 her country was in disorder and the royal court one of the more corrupt in Europe. Everywhere was dangerous: the countryside and the cities groaned with victims of violent crime and under corruption of the civil powers. But by her implacable campaign for justice the kingdoms were brought to order and peace with astonishing rapidity.

Anti-slavery and Human Rights Legislation

The Catholic Kings opposed slavery. After the Canary Islands had been discovered Isabel and Ferdinand gave orders that the Guanches, the inhabitants, should be treated like subjects of Castile. This was the practice the Queen would apply, by means of her Will and Codicil, to the many millions of Indians of Spanish America.

Queen Isabel, with vision and sacrifice, sponsored the discovery of the Americas, perhaps the single most significant historical event of the second millennium. Royal decrees from 1493 show her priority was evangelisation. When Isabel learnt that Indians were appearing on Spanish markets as slaves, she was indignant, admonishing Columbus, "*Who gave you the authority to make slaves of my subjects?*" She had the Indians freed immediately and on 29th July 1496 became Godmother to the first who were baptised.

In 1501, Queen Isabel instructed Nicholas de Ovando, Governor of Hispaniola:

"We desire that the Indians should be converted to our Catholic faith and their souls saved, since this is the greatest good one can wish for, so for this reason the Indians should be informed of everything about our Faith."

Isabel was adamant that no-one be coerced in matters of religion. Rather she exhorted missionaries and evangelists:

"Do not force anyone to become a Christian, but instruct them well in the Catholic Faith, for it is so beautiful, they will readily embrace it."

Queen Isabel sent further orders to Governor Ovando saying:

"because we have been informed that some Christians of the islands, especially those of Hispaniola, have taken Indians' women, daughters and things against their will, as soon as you arrive, you will give the order to return all that was unjustly taken, and you will enforce this on the pain of strict punishment, so that in the future, no one will dare to do such a thing."

The first stone building the Spaniards constructed in the Americas was not a fortress, a church or a residence but a hospital which on the instructions of Queen Isabel of 29th March 1503 was to be:

“where the poor will be received and cured, Christians as well as Indians.” She decreed that “each town should be obliged to have a church, chaplain and hospital: the children should be educated in Christian faith: together with the church a house should be built to where the children can go twice a day, and where the chaplain not only teaches them to read and write, but also to make the sign of the cross and learn the Our Father, Hail Mary, the Creed and the Salve.”

On her deathbed Isabel’s dictated her Last Will and Codicil, saying:

“no consent nor place is given for the mistreatment of the Indian natives and inhabitants of said Indies and Mainland, already gotten and still to gain, to their persons or their possessions, but it is so ordered that they be well and justly treated and if they receive any grievance that it be remedied, and that it be provided for”

Following this last will, in which she commanded, asked and implored pity for her new subjects, Isabel’s successors created the ‘*Leyes de Indias*’ (Laws of the Indies) an admirable corpus of legislation comprising some 6,000 laws which strongly underlined the dignity, rights and defence of American Indians.

Promoter of Women and of Women’s Education

Isabel promoted women’s education. She studied assiduously for her own education and ensured a good education was available to her daughters and to other women in Spain and the Americas. She appointed women as professors in universities. Beatrice Galindo (b.1475) studied Latin classics in Salamanca. Isabel named her Professor of Latin for the Royal Court.

Isabel was certain of a woman’s capability and right to rule. Before her death she gave firm instructions that if she should die before her husband, her daughter:

“the Princess has to come to take possession and governance of these kingdoms as proprietary señora, that they then will be hers, and that without her the Prince has no part, nor will he be received in any manner.”²

Loyalty and love as a wife and mother

Isabel was a devoted wife to her husband Ferdinand from their wedding in 1469 through to her death in 1504. Ferdinand himself had a fierce temper was not always faithful. Isabel carried the hurt and forgave him. Before her death Isabel ordered her body be buried in the Alhambra in Granada, but also ordered that if her husband the King were to choose a different church or monastery within Spain for his own burial place, then she wanted her body to be moved next to his. Her loyalty came long before much of the Church’s teaching on marriage was codified.

Isabel was also a devoted mother to their five children, taking great care that the children received a strong education.³ Queen Isabel’s maternal love was demonstrated dramatically in August 1476 when her five-year-old daughter fell into danger, being imprisoned by rebels in the Alcázar in Segovia. Queen Isabel rode with only three companions right into and through the hostile and threatening mob outside to secure the safety of her child. Her courage placated the mob and her openness to their grievances won them over completely.

Vision

Even those who do not accept Isabel's sanctity acknowledge her greatness as an historical figure. Peggy Liss writes that Isabel "has left an indelible imprint – on Spain, on Europe, on America, on the world."⁴ Notable here is Queen Isabel's sponsorship of the exploration of the Atlantic by Christopher Columbus, thus bringing about the discovery of the New World. Every monarch of the age had countless petitions coming to them. Columbus had been spurned elsewhere. But Isabel listened. Despite opposition from her own court she sponsored his voyage and when the discovery of the Americas was reported she immediately saw the potential for evangelisation of souls. On being informed it was too expensive to keep sending missions to the 'Indies' (for there was little return in gold or jewels in Isabel's lifetime) the Queen responded that even if there were just rocks she would still send missionaries while there were souls to save. Isabel was adamant that no one should ever attempt to force conversions, but just explain the Faith as it is so beautiful the Indians would embrace it willingly.

And so it is that today more than half the world's Catholics live in countries evangelised from Spain, the greatest evangelisation in Church history since the apostles.⁵ And the two hemispheres of the globe were united for the first time in international exchange of ideas and goods.

Steadfastness

In December 1481 Muslim leader Muley Abou'l Hassan re-ignited war in Spain by attacking the town Zahara. The Christian citizens were slaughtered or enslaved. It took Queen Isabel and King Ferdinand three years to rescue Zahara, and a further seven years to liberate all of Spain from the 780-year grip of the invaders. The war frequently involved personal danger for Isabel and a great number of tragedies and defeats. Yet the Queen persevered, rallied her people, and fought an honourable fight, showing exceptional steadfastness and fortitude.

Forgiveness

On 7th December 1493 an assassination attempt was made on Queen Isabel's beloved husband, King Ferdinand. For days he lay close to death. Physicians thought his wounds were mortal. Isabel felt a fear and pain she had never known before. The assassin was a maniac. Everyone seemed to think he should be condemned "body and soul together". But Queen Isabel forgave from the heart. This does not mean she neglected justice; her counsellors warned that to let the man go free would encourage further attempts. So the assassin was executed. But Isabel, thinking of the salvation of his soul, insisted against protests that a priest be sent to him so he could make a confession.

The King recovered. What incredible fibre can account for Isabel's spirit of forgiveness in this hour? Given the entire tapestry of this great Queen's life, there is no simpler, no more rational explanation for her behaviour in this incident than she is following the Gospel teaching of Jesus: "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." – *Matt 5:44*

Isabel was not given to being scandalised. While Cardinal Mendoza, though a priest, had had children, Isabel was loving toward them, referring to them affectionately as 'the beautiful sins of my Cardinal'.

Other Accomplishments

Queen Isabel ordered and supplied decisive and timely defence for the Holy Father and the Papal States from powerful aggressors. She established field hospitals for those injured in battle; she vigorously encouraged and sponsored use of the printing press (the first book printed in Spain was a collection of songs to the Blessed Mother); Isabel was the first sovereign to make widespread use of paper money; and she re-instituted the *Santa Hermandad*, a police force recruited and deployed locally. She established a public defender to help the poor in legal disputes. All these innovations have endured with lasting benefits and been imitated elsewhere. Isabel's legacy was a Golden Age for Spain: in the arts came Velasquez (painter), El Escorial (architecture), Cervantes (novelist); in law came the *Leyes de Indias*; and from discovery was born the first truly global empire, one which lasted over 300 years without needing great numbers of soldiers to enforce loyalty to the crown. And possibly the greatest of her accomplishments was Church reform.

Church Reform

Possibly Isabel's greatest legacy, which surely helped save millions of souls, was her initiation and support for reform of the Church. This encompassed both ecclesial reforms and reforms of religious orders. Although Isabel had sharp disagreements with successive popes, these disagreements were never on matters of dogma. Not once did she challenge papal infallibility. Isabel's response to corruption was never disloyalty to the Church but to practice and call for closer loyalty to Jesus Christ.

The ecclesial reforms Isabel successfully pursued anticipated the Council of Trent by 80 years. She insisted that bishops live in their diocese (rather than staying in Rome as many bishops from across Europe did) and that priests say Mass at least four times per year.⁶ And the subsequent record attests that at Trent itself the Spanish bishops, by the grace of the Holy Spirit 'rescued' the Catholic Church.

The religious reforms Isabel instigated weeded out the lax and corrupt so that the contemplative orders could thrive, bearing fruit for which the world can still be grateful today. Those who benefited from Isabel's reforms include St John of the Cross; St Theresa of Avila and Discalced Carmelites; St Ignatius of Loyola and the Society of Jesus; and from the evangelisation of the Americas, St. Rose of Lima, St. Peter Claver and St. Martin of Porres and countless others.

Despite very longstanding, widespread and mendacious propaganda to the contrary, Isabel's establishment of the Spanish Inquisition saved countless lives and suffering [see appendix B]. While other European countries fell to religious civil-war in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Spain was spared thanks to the defence against heresy made by the Inquisition. This defence cost lives, but widely accepted research shows that cost over the Spanish Inquisition's 350-year existence to be about 4,000 lives. This is far less than the scores of thousands who died in other European countries due to religious conflict.

During the same 350-year period the rest of Europe burnt 150,000 witches alone for heresy. The Spanish Inquisition saved women from being burnt as witches, dismissing the accusations in case after case as absurd. The Inquisition valued life far more than other contemporary tribunals. Records show cases of criminals imprisoned by the state deliberately blaspheming so they might be transferred to the jurisdiction of the Inquisition where prison conditions were much more humane.

We cannot say that if Isabel had not lived then the Church would have fallen to ruin; instead we say that God would have chosen another instrument to fulfil His Mighty works. But the fact that Isabel was chosen as His instrument, and that she acceded to His will so fully – as shown by the good fruit for the Holy Catholic Church – adds to her reputation for sanctity.

Carrying the Cross

Isabel was given some of the hardest crosses for a woman to carry; yet she embraced them. When familial crisis came to Isabel her indestructible faith grew yet deeper. In November 1495 Queen Isabel's mother, Isabel of Portugal, died; two years later death took her only son, Juan, aged 18, recently married, heir to the throne; two months after that Juan's wife miscarried. Isabel's eldest daughter, whose first husband had died a few years earlier, married Alfonso of Portugal; eight months later he died; then she, Isabel's eldest daughter, died in August 1498, aged 28, one hour after having given birth. The infant, Queen Isabel's grandson Miguel, clung to life for less than two years before he too died. With this last it might have seemed as if death had come to Queen Isabel herself. She was wounded so deeply something went out of her. But nevertheless she showed by her prayer she trusts God absolutely. She loves Him, and she is willing to carry the cross she is given. Isabel continued to meet all her queenly and personal duties. When Isabel's third child, Juana, was losing her mind, the queen cared for Juana through her sickness, and was reviled by her in return. These tragedies did not crush Isabel but increased her love for Our Lord.

Isabel had a deep devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and her Immaculate Conception. And Isabel became increasingly aware of the sacrifice of Mary. Isabel knew what it was to have her children die: Mary's only child 'died' and her child was God. Isabel knew how much she loved her own little ones, how joyous they made her: and Jesus was yet more precious to Mary. How could Isabel have endured this and even grown in faith to the end, save that she received true comfort from the Blessed Mother?

Isabel died in 1504 so she did not witness the cruel, faithless rejection of her fifth child, Catherine of Aragón, by the English King Henry VIII. But from the age of 11 to 14 Catherine – Catalina – had been at Isabel's side almost constantly during those awful years of loss and there Catalina had learnt how to carry the cross. So it was that Catherine of Aragón was to respond to Henry's cruelty with such faith, fidelity, and virtue that she has given light and life to Catholics in England ever since.

Before Queen Isabel died however, she did have the company for two years of her grandson Charles. He was to become the Holy Roman Emperor, father of Phillip II of Spain, who between them continued her great work of defence and zealous propagation of the Catholic Faith, without which Europe may have been stripped of her greatest treasure, and America might hardly have known it.

Conclusion

To have any one or two of the above virtues or accomplishments shows a rare person. To have three or four makes a towering historical figure. But to have them all is inexplicable except as an instrument of the Divine. Isabel opened herself completely to God and His glory shone forth.

b) Intercessory Prayers.

Many miracles and favours have been granted in response to intercessory prayers to Isabel. Two well-documented cases are outlined below.⁷

Priest Cured of Lethal Cerebral Haemorrhage, 1994

A priest with a great devotion to the Servant of God suffered a massive stroke which could not be operated and which left him in a deep coma without hope of recovery, according to doctors' statements. After three days in a coma, a Mass was requested and offered over the tomb of Isabel the Catholic by the canons at the Royal Chapel in Granada for his recovery. While this Mass was being celebrated, the priest began coming out of the coma, then recovered rapidly and progressively even until today overcoming impediments from the stroke.

Saved from a Dangerous Birth, 1994

A mother whose first child was delivered by Caesarean section was warned that her second child's delivery would be a 'dangerous Caesarean'. The family prayed to Queen Isabel and her son was born without any difficulty whatsoever.

Hundreds of other miracles and favours have been reported. Confidence in this – the efficacy of the Communion of Saints – is open to anyone who will pray. We recommend it. In fact we ask favours be reported.

Summary on Sanctity

Considering Queen Isabel's faith, virtue and legacy, many Catholics are perplexed that she has not yet been canonised. She won the highest praise from contemporaries at all social levels (many believed she was a saint) and her fame of sanctity continues through the ages as superlatively as ever.

If heaven is rejoicing over Isabel, then for the good of souls and for the glory of God we on earth should rejoice over her too. Our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI wrote, "Where God's will is done, there is heaven, there earth becomes heaven."⁸

The renewal of Christendom will follow from a renewed devotion to Our Lady. Queen Isabel's devotion to Mary, the Mother of God, bore untold fruit. We believe that to praise God for the sanctity of Queen Isabel is in innumerable ways to point toward the Blessed Mother through whom Christ comes to all. Did Isabel unite, protect and care for her people? Much more so does Mary. Did Isabel defeat enemies of the Church? Mary defeats more ferocious enemies with her ceaseless intercession. Did Isabel bear the heart-breaking loss of her children with faith? Here her virtue points to Mary's perfection, and on Calvary Mary's creaturely perfection points to the infinite love of God the Father, also the sacrifice of God the Son and the joy of the Holy Spirit. Isabel's legacy covers half the world; Mary's the whole of it. Thus God gives us ways to approach Him.

Isabel – Friend of the Jews

Before the process of Isabel's canonisation began there were potential obstacles worthy of investigation: the exclusion from the throne of Juana 'la Beltraneja' and thus the legitimacy of Isabel's succession; the legitimacy of Isabel's marriage with Prince Don Ferdinand of Aragón, King of Sicily, her cousin; the establishment of the Inquisition; tensions with Rome over ecclesial reforms; the expulsion of the Jews; the conquest and subjection of other peoples. Documentation collected for the process dissipated all these doubts to the satisfaction of those involved in the research. However for other people questions still remained [see appendix C]. The most contentious concerned the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492.

Our purpose here is to show that although there were Christians, Jews and others, who were to blame for injustices suffered by Jews in fifteenth century Spain, Queen Isabel herself should be cleared of all such charges. Isabel was a friend, patron and protector of Jews on the personal level as well as being a just sovereign. She was well aware of the Jews' long history on the Iberian Peninsula and of their outstanding contribution to national life, particularly in areas of administration, trade and medicine.

Queen Isabel's trust and warmth toward Jews is demonstrated by her frequently giving them preferment. Samuel Abolfia, Yuce Abrabanel and Don Abrahan Seneor were all Jewish members of her court, the latter being treasurer of the Santa Hermandad and her extremely close confidant.⁹ Isabel's personal physician Lorenzo Badoz, her personal secretary Fernando de Pulgar, the chief royal secretary Alvarez de Toledo and almost all Isabel's privy counsellors were either Jewish or of Jewish descent. The conversos Luis de Alcalá played a prominent treasury role for 20 years of Isabel's reign. Jewish blood was no impediment to high appointment, for example Fray Diego de Deza, Archbishop of Toledo and a great Dominican theologian, became Inquisitor General. He was also a patron of Christopher Columbus, another friend of Isabel's who some say had Jewish ancestry.¹⁰

Isabel chose for her confessor (a uniquely trusted position) Hernando de Talavera, whose grandparents were Jews. He later became the first Bishop of Granada.¹¹ A second of Isabel's confessors, Fray Tomás de Torquemada, was of Jewish descent at least on one side. Beatriz de Bobodilla, Isabel's most intimate girlhood friend, married Andres de Cabrera, who was Jewish, and who became the powerful governor of Segovia and Secretary to the Queen.

In Aragón in the 1480s the five most important appointments were held by conversos, including the King's treasurer, Luis de Santangel, and Gabriel Sánchez, Sancho de Paternoy, Felipe Climent and Alfonso de la Caballería. King Ferdinand himself, Isabel's husband, had a Jewish grandmother. There are some who believe Isabel had Jewish blood on the side of her maternal grandmother.

When troubles erupted and re-erupted between Christians and Jews, Isabel was a model sovereign, defending the Jewish minority by law and by deed. However, Isabel's warmth toward the Jews and toward Jewish converts to Christianity (*conversos*) was not shared by all. To see what lay behind the expulsion of the Jews it is important to understand the background as to why huge numbers of Christians and Jews were literally at war with each other in fifteenth century Spain, and what narrow options the reigning monarch had to deal with the situation. Blame can be shared by Christians and Jews for the injustices of the times: but it is a scandalous misreading of history to blame Queen Isabel.¹²

The Chosen People

Juan de Torquemada (uncle of Tomás), made a Cardinal in 1463, argued that, “no other race was more dignified, more noble, more saintly and more religious” than that of the Jewish people. Torquemada did not believe Jews enjoyed any *biological* superiority to other people, but he understood they had a unique *spiritual* heritage which set them apart.¹³ God Himself told Moses to inform Israel:

“...the Lord has declared this day concerning you that you are a people for His own possession, as He has promised you, and that you are to keep all His commandments, that He will set you high above all nations that He has made, in praise and in fame and in honour, and that you shall be a people holy to the Lord your God, as He has spoken.” – *Deuteronomy 26:18-19*

God’s word is efficacious. This unique calling, being the Chosen People, which observant Jews can never forget and secular Jews cannot be unaware, gives the Jews as a people a unique drive and a unique burden.

Jews have endured persecution as no other people have had to, culminating in the worst atrocity a race has ever suffered—the Holocaust. But any historical narrative dominated by victimization fails because of what it overlooks, namely the unmatched achievements of the Jews. Such a narrative paints the Jews as passive. But no race has been as intellectually creative as the Jews, none as daring or successful in international finance, none as accomplished in rising to the heights of power in the free nations where they have lived. In *The Sacred Chain*, Norman Cantor, besides describing triumphs within Jewish cultural development in the past two millennia, also highlights some of the tremendous contributions Jewish people have made toward development for the whole of mankind.

Jews have made powerful arguments against accepting the narrative of their long history as one dominated by oppression because such an interpretation does not do justice to Jews as creative agents in charge of their own destiny. Cantor remarks on the striking contrast between the detail, scope and dynamism of the Jew’s record of their history up to the second century before Christ with the comparative bareness for the two millennia following. The priceless collage of chronicles, characters, commentary and hymns which record the story of the Jews from before Abraham to the Maccabees was succeeded for the two millennia following by a narrative often monotone on the theme of victimization. It was only in the 1800s that Jewish scholars began again in earnest collaboration to study and celebrate the great high points of Jewish achievement and culture in the preceding centuries.

The corollary for this high praise is acceptance that in the development of their own culture, not only have Jews been pro-active in making positive contributions for all humanity but that they have also made mistakes which alienated them from others and provoked enmity with others, for example as occurred in fifteenth century Spain.

Tensions in Spain

There was in fifteenth century Spain a general and sometimes vicious hostility between Christians and Jews. The root of this problem lies in fallen human nature, something that Christians and Jews share alike. But for some Jews the simplest explanation has been to accuse Christians of anti-Semitism. Undoubtedly bigotry had a fatal part to play, but the more substantial reason many Christians in Spain felt enmity to the Jews was not due to a blind prejudice but rather because of actual events and real encounters whereby the Jews made themselves exceedingly unpopular. Below are four illustrative examples.

Lest any Jews reading this feel they are being attacked, and lest anyone today thinks the examples below give reason for enmity toward the Jewish people, we will make our position clear. It is never right to hate a whole people: if people are despised because of who they are then hearts must break because this is an insurmountable estrangement. But if people are despised for what they have done then there is hope for reconciliation, because they can either argue their innocence or accept their guilt. Our genuine hope is to get to the facts. Where we are correct we hope Jews will see that they were not hated simply because they were Jews, but that there were sincere grievances. Where we are wrong we are open to being corrected.

a) Betrayal of Spain to Invasion

The longest war in history began in 711 with the Muslim invasion of Spain. It took 24 generations of Christians 780 years to achieve the re-conquest of their country. The initial surge of Muslim victories across Spain was not due only to Muslim aggression and Christian un-preparedness, but—as Jewish writer Norman Cantor relates—because in city after city Jewish inhabitants opened the gates to the Muslim invaders:

“[W]ith help from the persecuted Jewish minority, an army of Arabs and Berbers crossed the Strait of Gibraltar and easily eliminated the Visigoth monarchy, driving the surviving Christian nobility into the northern foothills of the Pyrenees...After opening the gates of Christian cities to the Arab armies, Jews served the newly established Muslim princes as government officials, bankers, and especially leaders in international commerce, stretching from Western Europe to India.”¹⁴

Many inhabitants felt the threatened loss of Christianity as the worst crisis their country could ever experience.¹⁵ So ever since the eighth century there was among Spaniards “the ineradicable historical memory that it was Jews who had contributed significantly to the success of the Moslem invasion” of Spain.¹⁶

b) Usury

Jews grew enormously wealthy thanks to their industry, ingenuity and the bold capital risks they undertook. They also grew wealthy from the positions they had acquired as tax collectors and from the practice of usury. In Aragón Jewish money-lenders charged twenty percent, in Castile thirty-three percent, and in the famine of 1326, in Cuenca, they refused to lend money for sowing except at forty percent interest.¹⁷ Many families were ruined. Undoubtedly money-lenders who charged these rates understood they would be hated for it. Did they care? The fact they went ahead demonstrates their contempt for the borrowers and their dependants.

During the Middle Ages certain Jews also “profited hugely from the sale of human-beings as slaves”.¹⁸ Norman Cantor writes of “...slaves brought [from across Europe]

to the markets and Arab Mediterranean cities by Jewish merchants were much in demand, especially if they were young boys or adolescent, nubile women.”¹⁹ Slaves who escaped or who were redeemed were not all quick to forgive.

c) Nation Within a Nation

The Jews themselves had been in the peninsula at least since the third century.²⁰ Most immigrant communities become assimilated in their destination country within just a few generations. Not so the Jews. They are a people chosen by God for His own purpose and under the law of Moses are covenanted to retain their identity as a people. This they do. In any given country where they live, they are as a people within a nation. This has always been so.

Of the Middle Ages Rabbi Michael Azose writes:

“In all of Europe the Jews were not faring well...Whereas, in the past, the Jews were the political pawns of the monarchs in their constant struggle against the nobility, now the new growing power was the commoner, the burgher, the city dweller. The city dweller had always considered the Jewish minority as foreigners who did not integrate into his social milieu.”²¹

Rabbi Azose blames Europeans for counting Jews apart. But Professor Yitzhak Baer goes deeper:

“We went among the nations neither to exploit them nor to help them build their civilisations. All that we did on foreign soil was a betrayal of our own spirit...Our place in the world is not to be measured by the measure of this world. Our history follows its own laws, maintaining its innermost tendencies in the face of the outward dangers of dispersal, disintegration, secularization, and moral and religious petrification.”²²

This sense of separateness—vital to retaining their identity as Jews—pertained in Spain, as did another characteristic of the Jewish people, temporal success. This was true in both Christian Spain and Muslim Spain.

Bernard Lewis, the pre-eminent Jewish historian of Princeton’s department of Near Eastern Studies in the 1970s, “rejected the overdrawn view of how good it was for the Jews under Muslim rule and how bad under Christian rule.”²³ Norman Cantour explains that before the 1200s:

“there had been a northward movement of the Jews into the expanding Christian kingdoms. The Muslims under Haghred rulers had become intolerant and their kingdoms unstable. The Christian rulers, despite contrary advice from the clergy, were highly tolerant of the Jews because they wanted their capital investment and commercial skills.”

After a decisive Christian victory over the Muslims in 1212:

“a new intransigence among Muslim ruling groups, coming over to Spain from North Africa, made it much more difficult for Jews to serve in Andalusian governments, Jews crossed the line northward into steadily expanding Christian Spain and served Christian rulers, who often valued their administrative experience and capabilities.”²⁴

Not only did Jews rise to high office and great wealth in Muslim Spain as well as in Christian Spain, but could even take advantage of conflict between Christians and

Muslims. Often they did not care so much whether Spain was Muslim or Christian or split, but whatever would enable them to do best for their own people.

From the end of the fourteenth century, a whole new dimension was created in Spain by mass conversions of tens of thousands of Jews to Christianity. As Christians these conversos had many more opportunities open to them in business and government, and they grew even more in power. But they remained a group apart. Professor Netanyahu recognises the conversos own sense of a separate identity as undoubtedly contributing to the tension.²⁵ Henry Kamen writes:

“Already a powerful minority by the mid-fifteenth century, conversos were secure of their social position and proud to be both Christian and of Jewish descent. They did not, as is sometimes thought, attempt to disguise their origins. They were, as many of their own writers affirmed clearly, a *nation*. They had their own identity, and took pride in it. Andrés Bernáldez reported that ‘they entertained the arrogant claim that there was no better people in the world than they’. Alonso de Palencia reported complaints by the Old Christians that the conversos acted ‘as a nation apart, and nowhere would they agree to act together with the Old Christians; indeed, as though they were a people of totally opposed ideas, they openly and brazenly favoured whatever was contrary to the Old Christians, as could be seen by the bitter fruit sown throughout the cities of the realm’. Implicit in the converso attitude was the claim that they were even *better* than the Old Christians, because together with Christian faith they combined direct descent in the lineage (*linaje*) of Christ. It was said that Alonso de Cartagena when he recited the Hail Mary used to end with the words, ‘Holy Mary, Mother of God and my blood relative, pray for us’.”²⁶

The impressive presence of Jews and conversos in the royal court has been described above. With the conversions, they also had a strong presence in local politics. For example by the late fifteenth century, in Cuenca, converso families occupied 85 per cent of the posts on the city council.²⁷ In Segovia, according to the contemporary chronicler Alonso de Palencia, his fellow conversos: “shamelessly took over all the public posts and discharged them with extreme contempt of the nobility and with grave harm to the state.”²⁸ Jews have no need to deny their extraordinary success in rising to the top of the hierarchies of power in particular countries.

“Jewish writers, such as Cecil Roth and the influential, deeply hispanophobic Heinrich Graetz, point with pride to the unique prosperity and power of their people in the Spain of [the fifteenth century].”²⁹

But tensions grow when the administration is perceived as working not in the interests of the whole people but for a narrow section only, or worse still, for overseas interests. The first loyalty of the Jews, and then many conversos, was not to Spain but to those they counted as their own. From the Jewish perspective this may be defensible, but it is understandable that the people of Spain grew hostile to the Jewish presence, as other nations of Europe had before them. It was not that people refused share power with or even to be governed by ‘foreigners’ (they often were in Europe), but that they resented being governed, even exploited, by people who held them in contempt.

So the problem for Jews in Spain was not that they did not assimilate. People tolerate that. Nor was the problem that Jews increased in wealth and power. People may become jealous, but they tolerate that. But resentment intensifies when the strong show contempt for the weak.³⁰

d) The Cabala.

“The Jews were not entirely just the victims of Christian fervour and prejudice. They contributed to their own demise,” admits Norman Cantor.

“Detailed study of the period readily reveals this aberrative Jewish behaviour, but it is normally ignored in general history of the Jews, presumably because it does not fit into the standard model of Jews as invariably passive victims...” Cantor continues. “...after 1250, Sephardic elite were intellectually attracted to the Cabala (which is usually defined as Jewish mysticism but which more accurately can be said to comprise Gnostic dualism, astrology, magic and demonology)...” He explains the rabbinate rejected the rationalism of Maimonide’s and “drugged itself into comfort with the narcotic of the Cabala, an otherworldly withdrawal into astrology and demonology.”³¹

Walsh gives details:

“Yet the Spanish Jews...were often found busying themselves for financial profit in what the people called *hechicerias* (literally, ‘doings’) – witchcraft, black magic, astrology, alchemy, the selling of love potions, the use of charms to bless the marriage bed, or (at the instance of a vengeful rival) to render the young husband impotent – for which purpose the *genitalia* of a rooster were sometimes insinuated under the nuptial couch, or cabalistic horrors scrawled under a window.”³²

Such activities were outrageous to the law of Moses as well as to the laws of Spain.³³ Yet they were practiced widely enough for all Spain to be aware of the problem. Ordinary people hated this and it gave the Jews a grim reputation. Worse was to come.

“[O]n November 14, 1491,” writes Professor Benzion Netanyahu, “the Inquisition made public in Avila its sentence condemning five Jews and six *conversos* to the stake for desecrating the Host and crucifying a Christian child, whose heart was ripped out for the purpose of a conjuration aimed at neutralising the Inquisition and sending all Christians raving mad to their deaths...[I]n Avila, where the sentence was issued, one Jew was stoned to death by the populace, and preparations to attack the Jewish community were halted only by the timely intervention of the Kings [Isabel and Ferdinand].”³⁴

Benzion Netanyahu gives good reasons not to believe the story of crucifixion and in fact argues it is impossible that it happened.³⁵ William Thomas Walsh gives reasons to believe the crucifixion did happen, isolated though it was.³⁶ Whomever one finds most convincing, and while nothing can justify indiscriminate hatred, the fact of the story spreading across Spain readily explains the boiling tensions.

When Queen Isabel learned that an angry mob in Avila had reacted to news of the *Santa Niño* (the Holy Child) case by stoning a Jew to death, she and her husband immediately issued an edict of 16th December 1491 “forbidding any one to harm Jews or their property, under extreme penalties, ranging from a fine of 10,000 maravedis to possible death.”³⁷ Queen Isabel consistently strove to protect the Jews and to have them treated with respect.

The Conversos

These four grievances against the Jews—the betrayal of Spain to invasion; usury and financial exploitation of Spaniards; aloofness and the perception of a Jewish agenda inimical to Spain; and incidents and rumours of witchcraft—go a long way to explain why there was a general hostility toward the Jews in fifteenth century Spain. But it was the combination of these difficulties with the problem of false conversions that made it impossible for Jews and Christians to live peaceably, so much that Professor Benzion Netanyahu writes:

“In fact, in some places these relations became so tense that they could be disrupted by the slightest provocation, and mutual toleration would give way to civil war. When Isabel and Ferdinand came to power, they were well acquainted with this situation. They had seen the ravages it produced in Cordova, in Jaen, and other towns and in Andalusia, and they knew of the havoc it had caused in Toledo, Ciudad Real and elsewhere. They noticed the hatred growing and spreading, and they realized that its growth and spread must be arrested before it produced a new, powerful explosion that might rock the whole kingdom.”³⁸

On 9th July 1477, soon after coming to the throne Isabel issued a decree to say:

“All Jews in my realms are mine and are under my care and protection and it belongs to me to defend and aid them, and extend them due justice.”³⁹

Isabel did what she could to defend the Jews but there was a dynamic unfolding which was more powerful than even this queen. It involved the wars between Christians and Muslims; the Jewish drive for their own homeland; and insincere conversions to Christianity. These last, which occurred on a huge scale, led to social disintegration in a way which is difficult for a secular society to understand, then to murderous and widespread riots, and finally to well-founded fears for national security. Those eager to apportion blame can blame violent Christian mobs which frightened Jews into converting against deceitful Jews who sought to make Spain their own. But it is unhistorical to blame Queen Isabel who was not even born when the crisis erupted. Isabel inherited a state of affairs which had no painless solution.

Historical background from 1212

When King Alfonso VIII won a decisive victory (at *Las Navas de Tolosa*) against the Muslims in 1212, he did not expel their Jewish collaborators. Instead King Alfonso offered the Jews leave to remain but dependent on two conditions: that they refrain from reviling Christianity and they refrain from proselytizing among Christians. When the Jews agreed the King turned over four mosques to be converted into synagogues and gave the large Jewish population one of the most delightful parts of the city for their homes.⁴⁰ Walsh writes:

“By 1385 [the Jews] had regained their old prosperity and influence in all parts of Spain. There had always been some converts to Christianity among them, but the number was relatively small until Saint Vincent [Ferrer], by his preaching and his miracles, began to touch their hearts with pity for the sufferings of the Crucified Jew. In 1390 he...baptised the famous rabbi, Selemoh ha-Levi, who, as Señor Madariage observes, was ‘known in all Spanish Jewry for his scholarship and talent,’ was ‘equally respected for his science and for his virtue,’ and was ‘no doubt upright and honest.’...He became just as illustrious in the Catholic Church as he had been in the synagogue, and taking the name of Don Pablo de Santa Maria (he is said to have seen Our Lady in a vision), he became in time Bishop of Burgos.”⁴¹

Jewish writer Norman Cantor refers to the same rabbi:

“...many Sephardic Jewish intellectuals who, after 1390, for whatever initial motive, proceeded to cross over into Christianity, found in Latin Christian culture a much more complex and vibrant culture that they eagerly embraced...By the second quarter of the fifteenth century more than half the Jewish elite and an unknown proportion of the Jewish masses – at least one hundred thousand people – had converted to Christianity. These included great merchants, government officials, and rabbinical scholars. Some of the scholars advanced to prominent roles in the clergy. A prominent fifteenth-century bishop of Burgos in Castile was a former rabbi, and his son became a bishop... [N]ot only were the great majority of Jewish converts sincere, but from among learned and aristocratic new Christian families came some of the greatest names in early sixteenth-century Spanish ecclesiastical and cultural history.”⁴²

Cantor also notes St. Theresa of Avila was from a “New” Christian family (*conversos*). She became the reformer of the Carmelite order, the first woman Doctor of the Church and a spiritual guide of St. John of the Cross.

1391 Conflict Erupts

These converts were drawn to the Catholic Church by their own faith and reason. But other Jews were driven into the Church by violence. Walsh describes the actions of Fr. Ferrán Martínez in Seville:

“in 1391 this Jew-baiter, defying the orders of the Archbishop, the Chapter and the King, incited a mob to slaughter the Jews and plunder their rich houses. The pogroms spread from city to city. There were thousands of baptisms as the frightened Jews sought to keep their goods and their lives.”⁴³

Perhaps more Jews had converted than not. Understandably these *conversos* resented the Church. Their first loyalty was to each other, to Jews, not to Christian Spain. The Jewish writer Cecil Roth, in his *History of the Marranos*, makes the point powerfully:

“[The *conversos*] formed in the organism of the state a vast, incongruous body which it was impossible to assimilate, and not easy to neglect...It was, however, notorious that [the *conversos*] were Christian only in name; observing, in public, a minimum of the new faith while maintaining, in private, a maximum of the old one...There was a similarly large body [of *conversos*] inside the fold [of the Christian Church], insidiously working its way into every limb of the body politic and ecclesiastic, openly condemning in many cases the doctrines of the Church and contaminating by its influence the whole mass of the faithful. Baptism had done little more than to convert a considerable portion of the Jews from infidels outside the Church to heretics inside it...It was natural, and indeed pardonable, that all the pulpits resounded to impassioned sermons calling attention to the misconduct of the New Christians and urging that steps should be taken to check them.”⁴⁴

Certain historians exaggerate the scale of converso-Jewish collaboration, but there is substance behind their strong claims. Yitzhak Baer states, “the conversos and Jews were one people, united by destiny.”⁴⁵ Haim Beinart holds, “Every converso did his best to fulfil the Mosaic precepts, and one should regard as sincere the aim they *all* set themselves: to live as Jews.”⁴⁶ If it is clear today that a large proportion of *conversos* had their own agenda, it was felt even more keenly at the time. After Rabbi ha-Levi converted to the Church, he gave a frightening warning:

“Christians had no doubt [the Spanish Jews] were planning to rule Spain, enslave the Christians, and establish a New Jerusalem in the West. The conviction, whether true or false, was a result of the widespread conversions that followed the sickening massacres of 1391. How could the Christians think otherwise, when they saw one of the most illustrious Jewish rabbis, Selemoh ha-Levi, long respected by Jews and Christians alike for his high character and profound learning, becoming a Christian, a Thomist philosopher, and a Bishop, finally publishing two dialogues in which he categorically declared that the Jews were bent upon ruling Spain?”⁴⁷

Former-Rabbi Selemoh ah-Levi was speaking out of what he knew first hand. Several erudite former-Jews made a strong impact with their polemical warnings against the Jews and conversos: Joshua Halorqui and Pedro de la Caballería for example. Because of this fear of takeover measures were taken discriminating against Jews and converts from Judaism. In 1449 (before Isabel was born) a “ground-breaking statute of the Toledo council denied public office to all converts...”⁴⁸ Nevertheless that statute was overturned.

Sacrilege

While many Spaniards feared Jews were working for their own interests against those of Spain, there is something worse than treason: it is sacrilege. And while treachery of *conversos* was alarming, sacrilege was enraging. Henry Charles Lea (who is certainly not pro-Christian) reports of insincere *conversos*:

“Andres Gomalz, parish priest of San Martin de Talavera, who, according to his own confession, celebrated Mass from 1472 to 1486 without believing in it, or having the proper intention; and heard confessions without ever granting absolution. There was Fray Garcia de Tapate, prior of the great Jeronymite monastery of Toledo, who, as he elevated the Host at Mass, used to mutter, ‘get up little Peter, and let the people look at you,’ and would turn his back on the penitents in his confessional, instead of giving them absolution.”⁴⁹

Here contempt was hidden. Elsewhere it broke into violent storms. In 1467 Jews tired of being persecuted led a small army to attack Christians gathered in the Cathedral at Toledo. The fight that followed turned into a bloody massacre when Christian reinforcements from nearby towns came and, as Walsh writes, “butchered New Christians indiscriminately”. In 1470 there was a riot in Valladolid. And:

“in Cordoba, a famous statue of the Blessed Virgin carried in solemn procession, on the second Sunday of Lent, was showered with a bucketful of foul liquid from a window in the house of a rich *Conversos*. Lea tells us, on his own authority, that it was ‘an accident’. The Jewish historian Graetz is more honest; he says that it was ‘either accident or design,’ and that a girl threw on the statue ‘what was unclean’. The Christians were not in a mood to make inquiries or distinctions. Swords were drawn, and a massacre followed...A veritable state of war ensued for four years. Massacres followed in Montoro, Adamur, La Rambla, Ubeda, Jaen and other places. At last there was a terrific pogrom in Segovia, on May 16, 1474.”⁵⁰

Cardinal Borgia (later Pope Alexander VI) intervened to stop the massacre in Segovia turning into an annihilation. Across Spain the temperature was high. Enrique IV was almost at the end of his reign as king.

“During these bloody years [Isabel] came to the conclusion that no ordinary expedient could restore civil peace and tranquillity in Spain. For the sake of the

conversos if for no other reason it was necessary to find a less savage resolution to the interminable conflict than the crude administration of mob 'justice'."⁵¹

Isabel succeeded to the Castilian throne in December 1474.

The New Jerusalem: Jews Search for a Homeland

Has any people survived so long as the Jews without a homeland? Was ever it known that a nation wandered the earth for nearly 2,000 years and yet retained their glorious heritage? This almost defies explanation. Time and again in history when people lose their land they lose their identity. Not so the Jews.

And the achievement is more than survival. Because despite all the enmities and persecutions levelled against the Jews, despite even diabolical attempts to wipe them from the face of the earth, the Jews have not only survived, not only prospered, not only flourished, but they have regained their homeland. Not just any land, but their ancestral land, Israel.

It is inconceivable for history to have unfolded this way except that the Jews have carried with them in every single generation a burning desire to be a people with a land once more. No one should underestimate the genius of the Jewish people, nor their industriousness, nor willingness to make personal sacrifices for this cause, nor the faithful observance by some of the Law. More than once in history, understandably, Jews hungering for a homeland have set their sights lower than Israel itself. Such was the case in Sephardic Spain, which many account as the Golden Age for Jews from the Diaspora. In mediaeval Spain they constituted the single largest Jewish community in the world. Here they reached the heights. Here many felt they were just a breath away from establishing a New Jerusalem. It was not only Jews who believed this but some Christians believed it too, and feared it, hence the enmity.

We could dismiss these dreams and fears as unrealistic if the Jews had not actually accomplished in our time, by regaining Israel, what appears otherwise almost beyond human capability. In any case, we are not positing that the Jews came close to taking control of Spain, only that they were so powerful they themselves believed it possible, and thus the actions of a significant group of Jews and insincere *conversos*—in conformity with their secret agenda—were absolutely inimical to Spanish interests.

From this distance of 500 years, and now that the Jews are in Israel once more, perhaps it is easier for Christians to admire the Jews, admire their fidelity to their patrimony, their sacrifice, their effort, their genius, their hoping beyond hope. In fact admiration is a weak word for what should properly be a source for giving praise to God.

Isabel – Protector of Jews

“Not surprisingly, a foreign traveller commented on Isabella that ‘her subjects say publicly that the queen is a protector of Jews’⁵²

“From 1416 onwards the Aragonese crown protected the Jews and conversos firmly, rejecting all attacks on them.”⁵³

For Queen Isabel the Jews were a people she admired and a people under her protection. In 1475 Pope Sixtus IV complained of Jews subverting Christian faithful in Spain. Nevertheless when the people of Cordova, following gruesome riots, tried to exclude *conversos* from public office, they found the newly-crowned queen opposed to them. Netanyahu writes it is possible that:

“on her own initiative, or moved by the highly placed *conversos* in her Court, the Queen instructed the authorities in Cordova to abolish their anti-*conversos* ruling, which conflicted with the laws of the kingdom and the Church.”⁵⁴

But Isabel was not an absolutist monarch. Towns, cities and nobles had the means and often the rights to govern as they saw fit. Over her lifetime Isabel united all Spain by her leadership, her virtue and her vision. But she could never simply enforce her will on the country against the wishes of the people. Thus in the clash between Christians and Jews, Isabel ultimately was not able to get her own way. Professor Netanyahu puts the blame for the conflicts and the expulsion squarely on the towns and municipalities. An example comes from the converso historian Diego de Valera concerning the city council of Córdoba where:

“there was a great enmity and rivalry, since the New Christians were very rich and kept buying public offices, which they made use of so arrogantly that the Old Christians would not put up with it.”

Isabel’s actions showed she hungered for honesty and tolerance. Newly crowned she contributed toward the restoration of the synagogue in Gerona and guaranteed the Jews the practice of their religion. When Jews in Trujillo protested that the *alcaide* Pizarro had been forcing them to do degrading work Isabel had Pizarro suspended from his post. When maltreatment continued under Caceres, Queen Isabel sent a letter of security to insist the Jews not be abused. On 6th September 1477 Isabel confirmed the law of the Cortes of Burgos (dated 1379) which forbade the levying of special taxes on Jews. Isabel decreed:

“For this is my own letter: I acquire and accept under my custody and my protection and royal safeguard the Jews themselves and their synagogues (in my kingdoms and dominions) and to everyone of them and to their individuals and goods and I preserve them from all persons...”⁵⁵

She further insisted Christians respect Jewish law:

“Do not put pressure on them on [their Sabbath]...I command you, each and everyone, not to take, or allow to be taken, by force or against their will, the said synagogues and houses of prayer, neither their burials or properties.”

As a just sovereign Isabel assiduously took on the duty of protecting all her subjects, especially those who were vulnerable. Kamen writes:

“Given the Jews were constantly on the defensive against powerful municipal interests, the interventions of the crown in local politics present an impressive picture of the monarchy protecting its Jews.”⁵⁶

Despite the tensions, reasonable and unreasonable, between Jews, *conversos* and Christians, Isabel tried to remain a friend to all people of goodwill. God Himself had commanded:

“When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” – *Leviticus* 19:33-34

In 1478 there were further riots in Seville due to tensions with *conversos* and Jews. There was a growing resentment against the attempts of some to undermine Christianity. In 1480 the Cortes of Toledo (a local parliament), in an effort to diminish Jewish influence on Christians, ordered Jewish neighbourhoods be established away from Christian neighbourhoods, giving the Jews two years to move. In 1482 the Spanish Inquisition was established to discover which *conversos* were undermining the Faith. As early as 1461 Franciscan monks had petitioned their superior for a tribunal such as existed in France to try heretics.⁵⁷ Isabel hoped the praxis of it would bring an end to the insidious attacks on the Church and thus deliver order and peace. In the 30 years of Isabel’s reign about 100,000 persons, many of them *conversos*, were questioned by the Inquisition. Of these, more than 80,000 were found innocent and usually very promptly. Another 15,000 were found guilty, but after a public declaration of faith, *auto de fe*, they were unconditionally released. About 2,000 were executed.⁵⁸ This enormous effort was carried out largely by trained lawyers and in reality the Inquisition bore no resemblance to the myth which grew up about it [see appendix B]. It had no jurisdiction over Jews as Jews, but only over those who professed to be Christian, or those who were directly attacking the Church. Isabel also battled against abuses committed by the Inquisition, which were notable in its earliest years. While over the long-term the Inquisition was outstandingly successful, nevertheless it was not able to put an end to the trouble caused by false *conversos*.

In 1482 war broke out with Muslim-held Granada which was to last ten years. Christian Spain needed stability more than ever and Isabel and Ferdinand were supremely responsible for making that happen. Where there was internal division and instability the sovereigns were duty bound to find answers. The region bordering Granada was Andalusia. Here too many Jews had interests in a Muslim victory and so in 1483 Queen Isabel rescinded their permission to remain in Andalusia. In 1484, as a measure against the continuing proselytising by Jews among Christians, Isabel, with a bull from Pope Sixtus IV, limited Christians’ communication with Jews.

As resentments between the two groups increased, so did the number of decrees Isabel and Ferdinand issued to stabilise the situation. Luís Suárez Ferandez has indexed 266 such documents.⁵⁹ For example, in 1485 the Kings gave protection to Castilian Jews from lawsuits. In 1486 they again annulled discriminatory laws made in Burgos, in this case laws attempting to expel all Jews who had married in the past three years and to cap the number of resident Jews. In 1488 the Kings lessened Segovia’s restrictions on trading, and scratched completely an ordinance in Medina del Campo which prohibited the sale of firewood and bread in the Jewish quarter. The following year in the same place the Kings again ruled in favour of the Jews. When certain cities in Aragón, such as Saragossa, attempted to enclose the Jews, both Isabel and Ferdinand came out firmly against such measures.⁶⁰ From Jews in

Plasencia came complaints that an official sent to help them was making things worse; the official was replaced by a royal edict of 18th May 1491.⁶¹ When Jews of Medina de Pomar in Bilbao complained of harassment Isabel and Ferdinand gave an order that:

“By canon law and in accord with the laws of our kingdoms, the Jews are tolerated and suffered, and we command you to tolerate and suffer them, that they may live in our kingdoms as our native-born subjects.”⁶²

Henry Kamen shows:

“the crown actively favoured Jews and former Jews...Ferdinand and Isabel intervened repeatedly to protect their Jews from excesses (as late as 1490 they began an enquiry into Median del Campo’s ban on Jews setting up shops in the main square)”⁶³.

But there was no coming together of Jews and Christians. Powerful people close to the throne were counselling Isabel to expel the Jews altogether. Unity for Spain, won at enormous cost, finally seemed within grasp as the 780-year war with the Moors approached an end. Threats to unity took on their full significance. Isabel gave the proposition of expulsion increasing consideration.

“When the local expulsions had failed, after ten long years, to stem the alleged heresies of the conversos, the crown decided on the most drastic measure of all—a total expulsion of the Jews.”⁶⁴

The Expulsion

“The expulsion of the Jews from Spain was brought about by essentially the same factors that caused their expulsion from England and France and other places in Europe. It was caused by the completion of a historical development that began with the Kings’ support of the Jews against a popular opposition, which was originally minor, and ended with the withdrawal of the royal support when that opposition became intense and widespread, and assumed a revolutionary character. In Spain the kings’ support of the Jews lasted longer than anywhere else...” – B. Netanyahu

So writes Professor Benzion Netanyahu in his 1,400-page study *Origins of the Inquisition in Fifteenth Century Spain*.⁶⁵ Netanyahu is one of many scholars, several of them Jews, who find little or no fault in Queen Isabel regarding the expulsion of the Jews. The Queen’s priority had to be public order, the defence of innocent life and the integrity of Spain.

The Jews were expelled from England in 1290, from France in 1306 and from the Italian duchies of Parma and Milan in 1488 and 1490. Monarchs of various European countries, citing threats to Christianity were urging Spain to act likewise. In Castile there were nine million Christians and perhaps 1-200,000 Jews. They were killing each other. This blood-letting began long before Isabel was born and by the time she came to the throne, despite all her efforts to stop the killing and the measures she took to protect the Jews, the killing continued. Christians and Jews would not desist from attacking each other and it is fanciful to think the queen could do anything more than she did. It was obvious to the royal court that the newly-united state was vulnerable to internal disintegration or to re-conquest by Muslims. Both of these would carry an enormous cost in life. The Christians and the Jews had

to be separated. Isabel saw no other choice but to rescind the permission of the Jews to stay in Spain.

The Jews were not citizens of Spain. By royal indult they had been granted leave to remain on the dual conditions that they not revile the Christian religion and that they not proselytise. Both conditions had been persistently broken opening a legal course for the Kings to suspend the permission of the Jews to remain. Thus the “expulsion” of 1492 was more correctly the withdrawal of the Kings’ protection. Among the strongest advocates for this were many former Jews. Tomas de Torquemada and Hernando de Talavera, both of Jewish descent and intimate confidants of Queen Isabel, pressed for expulsion. King Ferdinand became in favour of the action but he had not the power to rule on it without Isabel. Finally she acted by giving the Jews three months notice to leave the country.

The decree was published on March 31st in the year of Discovery, 1492. It established that:

“the Holy Catholic and evangelical faith should be preached to all the Jews in Castile, and that it was necessary to allow them time until the end of July to be baptized or to leave the country forever.”

This decision caused grievous distress to Jewish families.⁶⁶ Tens of thousands converted to avoid expulsion.⁶⁷ At most about 30,000 households preferred to leave. Kamen’s research puts the figure at less than 40,000 individuals. When it became clear that the Jews needed more than three months to prepare, the deadline for leaving was postponed. An edict of 14th May allowed the Jews to sell their land. All debts owed to them were ordered to be paid. When the expulsion came many properties went for very low prices. But Isabel ordered that anyone who stole from the Jews at this time would suffer a penalty of death. The law was enforced. Royal escorts were also appointed to guard those departing—though some of these robbed their charges at the end. Those who were caught were punished.

The expulsion itself was heart-breaking and pained Queen Isabel. The royal chronicler Bernáldez described what happened. The Jews:

“confiding in their vain blind hopes left the lands of their birth, children and adults, old and young, on foot and in wagons, and the caballeros on asses and other beasts, and each journeyed to a port of embarkation. They went through roads and fields with many travails and [mixed] fortunes, some falling, others rising, others dying, others being born, others falling sick, so that there was no Christian who did not feel sorry for them and always invite them to be baptized. And some sorrowfully converted, but very few. And on the way the rabbis heartened them, and had the women and youths sing and play tambourines to cheer the people, and so they went through Castile and arrived at the ports...When those who went to embark arrived at Cádiz or Puerto de Santa María and saw the sea, they shouted loudly and cried out, men and women, great and small, in their prayers demanding mercy of God, and they expected to see some marvel of God and that he would open a path through the sea for them...”⁶⁸

In Genoa a diplomat who saw refugees arriving commented:

“no one could witness the sufferings of the Jews without being moved...They could have been mistaken for wraiths, so haggard and emaciated did they look, undistinguishable from dead men.”⁶⁹

While at sea some of the Jews were robbed by pirates off the Moroccan coast, and others who landed in North Africa received from the Muslims gruesome treatment, being savaged and raped “in the sight of their fathers and husbands”.

Many thousands returned to Spain to be baptised. The expulsion was a grievous tragedy. It is very important to seek out the causes. To blame Isabel is not only an injustice to her, but worse it blocks the way to the truth, thus allowing evil to recur.⁷⁰ Kamen writes, “[Ferdinand] and Isabella may have been zealous Catholics, but they were by no means anti-Jewish or even anti-converso.”⁷¹

Why the Expulsion Happened

It is worth establishing that the reason for the expulsion was not economic. As in other European countries of the time (and in keeping with derivative customs laws today) there was a general law against removing gold or silver from the country. However Jews were permitted to make transfer money abroad before leaving. Although there was robbery and gross defrauding of the leaving Jews, it is untenable to say the expulsion was done for financial gain. Kamen cites Maurice Kriegel:

“The decision to expel, however, was the crown’s alone, and it appears to have been taken for exclusively religious reasons: there are no grounds for maintaining that the government stood to profit, and Ferdinand himself admitted that the measure hurt his finances.”⁷²

A more credible contributing factor to the expulsion was concern for national security. The victory over the Muslims in 1492 was tenuous, as future uprisings proved. Muslims were on the advance in this period across vast swathes of Christendom. A generation earlier all Christendom had been shaken when the Muslims took Constantinople. Also of pressing concern were:

“the ruthless victories of the Grand Turk, Mohammed II, who, angered by his failure to storm Rhodes, sent his fleet westward, ravaged the coast of Apulia, and on August 11, 1480, took the city of Otranto in the Kingdom of Naples. Nearly half the civil population of about 22,000 were butchered in cold blood, while the Archbishop and priests were slaughtered after the most brutal tortures.”⁷³ [A bishop was sawn in half.]

Before and after 1492 Jews served as spies for Muslim raids on Spain.⁷⁴ If the Jews on behalf of Jewish interests harboured spies, then they all became liable. Many modern states enjoy such stability and resources that it appals us to think of collective punishments. But in the Middle Ages people shared the fate (the favour or punishment) of the lords and leaders to whom they were loyal.

Even without the Muslim dimension, the core problem was a powerful body of people said to be one thing—loyal Christians—but inextricably mixed with another—Judaizers who harboured an ambitious agenda for political domination. The Judaizing movement was not an innocuous attempt to spread a particular faith.⁷⁵ But it combined pervasive undermining of the Catholic Church with aspirations for a New Jerusalem. There may never have had a chance for this to succeed, but the attempt and the popular reaction against it, was causing uncontrollable bloodshed and instability across Spain. Thus “Ferdinand and Isabella did not cease to protect their Jews while simultaneously trying to eliminate Judaizing among the conversos.”⁷⁶

It is difficult for us today to understand how closely political and religious law were interwoven in the Middle Ages.⁷⁷ The State was built upon Catholic foundations. The monarch’s authority was God-given. An enemy of the Church was an enemy of the

State. Powerful groups of conversos and Jews sought to weaken the Church in Spain. Isabel first sought to minimise the damage they could cause. She further sought, through the Inquisition, to identify those who were guilty so that the innocent need not be punished with them. But Spain lacked the apparatus to succeed in this.⁷⁸ As a Catholic sovereign, Isabel opposed all attacks on the Church and on Spain. Faced with escalating riots, bloodshed and potentially catastrophic disunity, even the disintegration of Spain, Isabel resorted to ordering the Jews to leave.⁷⁹

Norman Cantour concludes that the expulsion of the Jews happened, ostensibly at least, due to fear of Jewish influence on the loyalty and religious orthodoxy of many powerful *conversos*:

“The demand for expulsion of the Jews in the 1490s was justified on the grounds that as long as there were observant Jews in Spain, the converts would be tempted to return secretly to their religion, would be corrupted in their faith to betray Christ.”⁸⁰

This is supported by the expulsion edict itself, which gives as the principle cause:

“the great harm suffered by Christians from the contact, intercourse and communication which they have with the Jews, who always attempt in various ways to seduce faithful Christians from our Holy Catholic Faith...The only solution to all these ills is to separate the said Jews completely from contact with the Christians, and expel them all from our realms.”⁸¹

In an explanatory letter sent the same day as the edict was promulgated, the Catholic Kings made their ultimate motive very clear, saying of the expulsion: “we do so despite the great harm to ourselves, seeking and preferring the salvation of souls above our own profit and that of individuals.”⁸² An examination of Isabel’s life reveals the salvation of souls was indisputably her deepest pre-occupation.

Isabel was no fool. She never attempted to force the conversion of individuals and nor did she attempt to enforce religious unification of the state. But she was dealing with a crisis. So intense did the conflict become that, having tried everything else, Isabel’s only remaining answer was separation.

Conclusion

History offers not one example of Queen Isabel acting from malice. Consistently she desired, prayed and worked for justice, order and peace. She recognised the dignity of *all* human beings and throughout her life protected the weak at cost to herself. But despite her efforts she could not force people to live together. Ultimately her answer was, “If we cannot live together, then we must live apart.” This was far better than those others through history who unwilling to live together have opted to kill.

Throughout her reign Isabel demonstrated incisive judgement of people (for example Columbus) and of politics (from chaos she built an empire). She would not be misled by empty conspiracy stories. Nor at the time of the expulsion of following it were there from any quarter the allegations made against Isabel today of anti-Semitism or bigotry.⁸³ Henry Kamen is adamant that Isabel and Ferdinand:

“were neither personally nor in their politics anti-Jewish. They had always protected and favoured the Jews and conversos. They might be accused of many things, but not of anti-Semitism. Nor were they anti-Muslim”.⁸⁴

Kamen cites Domínguez Ortiz as making the same point in the 1970s, as has the Jewish scholar Norman Roth.⁸⁵ Before her accession to the throne, Isabel worked to assist Jews, making a series of personal interventions to stop acts of violence against them, sometimes losing the support of wealthy and influential partisans. As queen Isabel legislated again and again to protect Jews and severely punished those who molested them, including during their final departure.

Having worked hard for just settlements between Jews and Christians so both could live peacefully in Spain, and finding this ultimately impossible, Isabel gave the Jews a protected exit. The expulsion was not an act she rejoiced in but the painful and reluctant decision of a saintly woman who had run out of options. It was less than perfect, but a last resort to a complex problem in an imperfect world. Whatever the wrongs involved, Isabel cannot be convicted of cruelty.

The expulsion caused incalculable distress to tens of thousands of Jews. This was not Isabel’s aim. The expulsion also saved countless lives: the rioting and blood-letting ceased; the Muslims lost key allies for a renewed invasion of Spain; and Catholic unity, protected from invidious heresy, meant Spain was saved from the sacrilegious wars which tore the rest of Europe apart over the following two hundred years. Isabel acted according to her power as sovereign, determined to serve and protect her people as best she could and knowing she would be judged before God for every decision she took.

Ultimately our purpose here is to calm Jewish fears over the possible canonisation of Queen Isabel. Isabel was not anti-Semitic. Moreover it is admissible to believe Isabel is a saint while disagreeing with her political decisions. We dearly hope that Jews hostile to Isabel will examine the historical record and thus become convinced that Isabel held no malice toward Jews. She could find no way less painful to deal with the brewing civil conflicts. As Norman Cantor writes:

“...this is not the voice of the Nazi Holocaust, we are required to remember, because the Nazis would give the Jews no escape from their doom, but the Catholic Church always left the door open to Jewish conversion and escape.”⁸⁶

Opportunity for Understanding and Peace

Catholic-Jewish relations

In recent decades Catholic-Jewish relations have improved dramatically. This is a great blessing from God working through Jews and Christians of goodwill. Theologians, historians and leaders, Jewish and Christian, have in their sincere search for God, for truth, brought greater understanding and mutual respect between the two groups. This is the fruit of great faith.

This is not to deny that theological differences exist between Judaism and Christianity, differences that cannot be negotiated away. But according to Pope Benedict XVI, peaceful co-existence among religions can proceed from a dialogue of culture and civilization. Jews and Christians already agree on certain foundations for such a dialogue, for example the inviolable dignity of man created in the image of God. Another foundation is the voice of conscience. Conscience is a reality common to us all. And a third foundation is historical fact as this also is something upon which, with effort, agreement can be found. We have tried to base this booklet on all three of these foundations. This is our part in dialogue, and we hope we will receive a positive response.

Most sincerely we hope that any Jews who hold conscience to be the arbiter of values will not condemn Isabel. Whatever differences of understanding remain, it is clear Isabel acted throughout her life according to her conscience, and further she exerted herself to acquire a well-formed conscience.

And we hope that Jews in Israel will have sympathy for Isabel as they know all too well the impossibility of a nation split between people. There are Palestinian people who hate and do violence against the Jewish state, and for their crimes all Palestinian people suffer, even losing the land which belonged for centuries to their fathers. Israel cannot find a painless solution in our day; nor could Isabel find a painless solution in hers.

And we hope orthodox Jews will understand Isabel took Faith to the core of her being. She understood her first duty to her people as upholding that Faith and she would tolerate no blasphemy. Catholics as well as orthodox Jews believe in Moses. As Asher Ginsberg observed in 1889:

“All the laws and ordinances, all the blessings and curses of the Law of Moses have but one unvarying object: the well-being of the nation as a whole in the law of inheritance.”

Isabel understood that an essential duty of her government must be to defend the Faith which Spain had freely adopted.

As sovereign of Spain Queen Isabel wished all her subjects would believe in and honour God. But no matter how strong Isabel's desire for this, there is no evidence whatsoever that she ever used deception or coercion to force people to become Catholic. Always her choice was to invite, to teach, to persuade; never to force. When ultimately she came to believe that Jews and Christians could not live in peace side by side, her solution was not to exterminate the other, but to give them notice to leave, to protect them in their leaving, so that they might practice their religion wherever they finally made their home.

We love our brothers and sisters the Jews. We hope you will understand we want to see Queen Isabel canonised because we believe she is in Heaven, not because she expelled the Jews, but because she led a life of exemplary virtue and devotion to God. We mean no harm to anybody, but we believe Isabel is in Heaven and we believe great good will come when that is recognised on earth.

Finally, we close by quoting William Thomas Walsh who around 1940 wrote:

“...there is a quality about the Jews which does not exist in any other race. Some Jewish writers, almost in despair to account for the determined animosity of other races, have had recourse to the term ‘their Jewishness,’ a characteristic under which many a Jew has squirmed, and grown either defiant or servile, as men must, and suffered in the depths of his soul. Yet, if Jews are different from other races, it is in such intangible and indefinable ways that no Jew-baiter has been able to put his finger on the precise point of difference. No one who has noticed the generosity of Jews, their love of family, of music, of art; their gratitude to those who have befriended them, their pity for the unfortunate and the oppressed, and better still, their willingness to show their compassion in costly acts of mercy which ought to put many a Christian to shame—no one who looks at this unique and gifted people critically, realistically, without hatred on the one hand or sentimentality on the other, can accept the vulgar calumny that they are in any human sense inferior to any other group of Adam’s progeny. Is it not possible, is it not indeed obvious, that the elusive difference is spiritual? A people set apart by the Creator for a lofty destiny...”

God chose the Jews to witness to the coming of the Messiah. From our understanding, the challenge for Jews is to use their spiritual privilege not to lord it over other peoples but to serve them. And the challenge for Gentiles is not to be jealous and resentful of the special place of the Jews, but to give glory to God for His marvellous works.

“While the passage of time slowly dims and erases the veneration of other figures, clamorous in their day, yet the veneration of the posterity of our princess [Isabel] grows and spreads; and the glory that the grateful remembrance of her virtues pours over her name, widens like a river, the further away it gets from its source.” – Diego Clemencín, 19th Century

Appendix

Appendix A: Exhaustive historical investigation and the beginning of the canonisation process.

In 1958 investigators based in the Diocese of Valladolid began a comprehensive historical study of the life of Queen Isabel. Of particular concern were questions regarding Isabel's right to succession of the throne; the legitimacy of her marriage; tension with Rome concerning ecclesial reformation; the expulsion of the Jews; the conquest and subjection of other people. The commission examined over 100,000 documents from archives in Spain, the Vatican etc., selected and critically analyzed about 3,500 and compiled a 27-volume corpus of their findings. Their scrupulous investigation did not uncover one single act, public or private, of Queen Isabel that was not inspired by Christian and evangelical criteria.

When this work was completed the Archbishop formed a Tribunal which convened for 80 sessions in 1971-72 in which 39 witnesses were examined, as well as further witnesses overseas. The acts of the Tribunal form two thick volumes of 750 and 284 legal-size pages.

All of the above work was submitted to the Vatican Congregation for the Causes of the Saints and on 18th November 1972 the Apostolic Process was opened. Following 18 more years of exhaustive critical analysis a final report (the "Positio") was produced, supported by 150 qualified witnesses (university professors, historical biographers, politicians, Churchmen etc) and quoting 472 authors. The index of names alone refers to 2,490 people related in some way to Queen Isabel.

In all canonisation processes, the study of the "Historical Positio" is carried out by three successive bodies: the Historical Commission; the Theological Commission; and the Congregation of Prelates and Cardinals. For the first of these, under the direction of the Relator General of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, six consultors discussed, and finally on 6th November 1990 approved, the historical aspects of the Positio as authentic, complete and a good foundation to judge the virtues and fame of sanctity of Servant of God Queen Isabel. The Positio was then due to be examined by the Theological Commission, but it was at this stage, in 1991, that the process was halted. This interruption was not for any internal reason in the process or any discovery about Queen Isabel but on account of sensitivity to well-organised and expressive protests of those hostile to Queen Isabel.

Appendix B: The Spanish Inquisition

Academic research carried out since the 1970s has overturned the myth of the Spanish Inquisition as cruel and bloodthirsty. Norman Cantor writes, "The Courts of the inquisition used the characteristic features of Roman criminal law...the inquisitions were not eager to use capital punishment but rather to persuade and frighten suspected deviants back into the Church. The defendant had to be recalcitrant or a triple recidivist to end up being 'turned over to the secular arm,' that is, the state."⁸⁷

According to Raphael Molisend, a Protestant historian, Henry VIII executed tens of thousands of his subjects. His daughter Elizabeth I in very few years, also in the name of a 'reformed' Christianity, caused more victims than the Spanish and Roman Inquisitions together in three centuries.⁸⁸ Norman Cantor again writes, "[H]istorians estimate that between two thousand and four thousand crypto-Jews were executed by the Spanish Inquisition between 1480-1520 [or an annual rate of 50-100], and very few thereafter. As these figures indicate, most of the New Christians were sincere converts or at least behaved as conventional Christians and both the paranoid claims of some inquisitors and the myths propagated by modern Jewish historians that most Jewish converts were actually crypto-Jews were fanciful...Indeed not only were the great majority of Jewish converts sincere, but from among learned and aristocratic new Christian families came some of the greatest names in early sixteenth-century Spanish ecclesiastical and cultural history."⁸⁹

Appendix C: Objections to Queen Isabel's Canonisation

- Questions related to Isabel's succession, her marriage etc. have been cleared by historical commission.
- Those who ask how a saint can be involved in war could note the canonizations of: St. Ferdinand; St. Catherine of Sienna (who campaigned ardently for a holy crusade); St. Joan of Arc who led an army; St. Louis IX who led a crusade to the Holy Land (incidentally, he expelled the Jews from France); the Popes who called for crusades, for example Popes Eugene IV, Pius II, Sixtus IV and Innocent VIII. Isabel justly defended her people's land.
- To condemn the Queen for allowing capital punishment is to reveal our own lack of tolerance for we would thus write off almost all of her contemporaries. Even today capital punishment is still accepted as a valid measure for national security, although it is becoming less so.
- Only Jesus and the Blessed Mother have lived lives of total perfection. Isabel might have made mistakes as all people do. She also made political judgements which other Christians can disagree with. But to be a saint does not mean to have had an immaculate life.

“But the hand of God is with her, she who comes with the burning desire of establishing order with the most equitable justice, without favouring persons or dignitaries, starting with those around her and being inexorable with everyone.” – Discalced Carmelite, 20th Century

Endnotes

1 See 1 Samuel 24 for David's powerful example.

2 Peggy K. Liss, Isabel the Queen: Life and Times, Revised Edition (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004) p.403 quoting Fuensalida.

3 For example Isabel's daughter Catalina was "proficient on clavichord and harp; moreover, she was learned in philosophy, literature, and religion, and had Latin, Castilian, French, English, and German. During her years as England's queen, between 1509 and 1527, Catherine of Aragón attracted to court the learned and the wise, among them Luis Vives and Erasmus, scholars who praised her piety and erudition." Liss, p.286

4 Liss, p. 410

5 The Spanish evangelisation reached almost all of South America, Central America, Mexico, the Southwest USA and later the Philippines. Religious orders born from Isabel's reforms included the Jesuits, who reached, notably, China, India, Japan, Canada and more.

6 Following discussions with Queen Isabel, Archbishop Carrillo issued an edict that priests "must say Mass at least four times per year, and bishops at least three." William Thomas Walsh, reprinted, Isabella of Spain, (Tan, 1930, reprinted Rockford 1987) p.88

7 These three accounts are abridged as full details cannot be released publicly until the canonisation process is complete.

8 Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, The Spirit of the Liturgy, (Ignatius, 2000) p.176

9 "Don Yitzhak [of Portugal] had sought an audience with their majesties, the King and Queen of Spain. These two autocratic monarchs, who were among the most active in Europe, would not grant an audience with just anyone. There must have been two factors which prompted Ferdinand and Isabella to accede to Don Yitzhak's request. One assumption is that Don Yitzhak had friends in the Spanish court among whom was the Rab de Corte, Rabbi Avraham Senior [sic], the influential matchmaker of the royal couple. Another assumption is that Don Yitzhak's acumen and genius for achieving economic 'miracles' was well known to the financial advisers of the king and queen." Rabbi Michael Azose, "A Brief History of the Jews in Spain", (Sephardic Congregation, Evanston, Illinois, USA) p.77

10 There is a myth that says that Queen Isabel sent Christopher Columbus to the New World because she knew him to be a Jew and she wanted him to sail off the edge of the world. Of course this is completely false since Isabel was instructed as a child, as were most people of her time, that the earth was round. Yet some Jewish people in the USA have mentioned that they were taught this tale as children. These tales help foster animosity against Queen Isabel.

11 The Bishop of Segovia when Isabel came to the throne was Don Juan Arias Davila, of a famous Jewish-Catholic family.

12 Drawing on research from distinguished Jewish scholars, Henry Kamen repeats that Isabel and Ferdinand "were never personally anti-Semitic..." See Henry Kamen, The Spanish Inquisition (Yale, 1997) p.16

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- 13 For an excellent and brief exposition of this, see Professor Benzion Netanyahu, *The Origins of the Inquisition*, (Random House, 1995) pp.1110-1112 . Professor Benzion Netanyahu is father of the former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.
- 14 Norman Cantor, *The Sacred Chain: a History of the Jews*, (Fontana Press, 1996) p.123, p.162
- 15 The gospel had come to the Iberian peninsula [Spain] from St James the Apostle and was freely adopted. Jesus Christ chose Peter, James and John to witness his Transfiguration on Mount Tabor and Jesus chose these three men to remain closest to Him in the garden of Gethsemane on the night before His Passion. He had exceptional missions for each of them, with St James being commissioned to evangelise Spain. The Spanish hold the Faith dear.
- 16 Philip Wayne Powell, *Tree of Hate*, (Ross House Books, 1985) p. 53
- 17 Citing Henry Charles Lea, William Thomas Walsh, *Characters of the Inquisition*, (Tan, 1940) p.142
- 18 *Ibid.* p.142
- 19 Cantor, pp.163-164
- 20 Kamen, p.8
- 21 Azose, *Brief History*, pp.78-80
- 22 Yitshak Baer, *Galut*, (1947 version). As a professor in Jerusalem Baer wrote the standard work on Jews in medieval Christian Spain.
- 23 Cantor pp.127
- 24 *Ibid.* p.136
- 25 Netanyahu, pp.995-6
- 26 Kamen, p.42
- 27 P.L. Lorenzo Cadarso, *Oligarquías conversas de Cuenca y Guadalajara (siglos XV y XVI)*, *Hispania*, 186, 1994, 59.
- 28 F. Márquez Villanueva, *Conversos y cargos concejiles en el siglo XV*, *Revista de Archivos, Bibliotecas y Museos*, 63, ii, 1957
- 29 Powell, p.52
- 30 Many powers exploit the people under them, but often rebellion is forestalled if people have hope of rising to the dominant class themselves. But while Jews could rise in Gentile circles, Gentiles could not rise in Jewish ones.
- 31 Cantor, p.178 et seq.
- 32 See Menedez y Pelayo, *op. cit.*, III, p. 348 et seq. referenced by Walsh . *Characters*, p.142
- 33 See Exodus 22:18; Leviticus 19:26-31; 20:27; Deuteronomy 18:10-12. All nations are tempted to and have fallen to witchcraft.
- 34 Netanyahu, p. 1090
- 35 *Ibid.* p. 1090 et seq.
- 36 Walsh, *Isabella*, Chapter XXV
- 37 *Boletin de la real academia*, Vol. XI, p.420
- 38 Netanyahu, p.1006
- 39 See Anastasio Gutierrez, *Expulsion de los Judios de Espana*, (1993)
- 40 Walsh, *Characters*, p. 141
- 41 *Ibid.* p. 120
- 42 Cantor p.187, 193
- 43 Walsh, *Characters*, 120
- 44 Cecil Roth, *History of the Marranos*, pp.27, 30-31
- 45 Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christendom*, 2 vols (Philadelphia, 1966) II, p.424
- 46 Haim Beinhardt, *Conversos on Trial. The Inquisition in Cuidad Real* (Jerusalem, 1981), p.242
- 47 Walsh, *Characters*, p.144. Jewish writers have noted the very presence of unbelieving Jews in various parts of Christendom made for a dissenting minority, intelligent and irreconcilable, a kind of nucleus around which dissident elements in the Christian ranks could be assembled. See Abrahams, *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages*; Rabbi Newman, *Jewish Influence on Christian Reform Movements*; Browne, *Stranger than Fiction* p.222; Heinrich Graetz, *History of the Jews*, III, ch.15
- 48 Liss, p.17
- 49 Walsh, *Characters*, p.145. These and other examples are given by Henry Charles Lea in *Conversos: The Inquisition of Spain*. See also Bernáldez, *Historia*, cap. 43
- 50 *Ibid.* p.147 cites Graetz, *History of the Jews*, Vol IV, p. 304
- 51 Walsh, *Characters*, 147
- 52 Kamen, p.12
- 53 Jaume Riera Sans, *Judíos y conversos en la reinos de la Corona de Aragón durante el siglo XV* (Toledo, 1993)
- 54 Netanyahu, p. 917. Half of Avila's population of 7,000 was Jewish.
- 55 For the original Castilian see Anastasio Gutierrez, *Expulsion de los Judios de Espana*, p. 154
- 56 Kamen, p.16
- 57 C. Carrete Parrondo, *Los conversos jerónimos*, p.101
- 58 In 1794 during the French Revolution more men and women were executed in twenty days than the Inquisition under Queen Isabel gave over to execution in twenty years.
- 59 Luís Suárez Fernandez, *Documentos acerca de la expulsión de los judios*, (Valladolid, 1964)
- 60 Motis Dolader, *Minorités et marginaux en Espagne et dans le Midi de la France (VIIe-XVIIIe siècles)* (Paris, 1986)

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- 61 Warren H. Carroll refers to this long list of letters and decrees in *Isabel of Spain*, (Christendom Press, 1991), noting that no less than ten are specifically cited in a single paragraph in Romón Menéndez Pidal, director, *Historia de España*, Volume XVII: "España de los Reyes Católicos," ed. Luis Suárez Fernández and Manuel Fernández Álvarez (Madrid, 1969), Part 2, pp.251, 262-3.
- 62 Liss, p.304-5.
- 63 Kamen, p.15, 19
- 64 Ibid. p.19
- 65 Netanyahu p.1091.
- 66 For the number of Jews who left Spain Norman Cantor refers to Henry Kamen's studies of "...around 1990 on the reality of the Spanish expulsion of 1492, placing this famous event in the context of Iberian culture and society and also greatly reducing the numbers of Jews putatively departing in that tumultuous year, from the traditional 300,000 to the much more conceivable 40,000..."
- 67 Joseph Ha Cohen and Rabbi Capsali in David Raphael, *The Expulsion 1492 Chronicles*, (Hollywood, 199) p.17, 106
- 68 Andrés Bernáldez, *Memorias del reinado de los Reyes Católicos*
- 69 Angél Alcalá, ed., *Judíos, serfarditas, conversos* (Valladolid, 1995)
- 70 To fully understand the conflict between Jews and Christians in Spain we should account for supernatural evil. It bodes ill to blame just the Jews and inane to blame only Christians. Furthermore, it is wearisome to blame Queen Isabel who by all evidence was such a virtuous woman. What made the situation intractable? What made every attempt at an agreeable accommodation fail? What drove the two sides together to clash so murderously? Part of the answer is Satan. Satan is the explanation for anti-Semitism, and Satan is the explanation as to why a certain number of Jews—in every generation for 2,000 years—has hated Jesus Christ. Besides all the Jews who desire peaceful co-existence, besides all the Jews who love God so ardently they have no moment for cruelty, there are nevertheless those who give vent and expression to their hatred of Christ no matter what trouble this causes. Satan would have the two peoples destroy each other.
- 71 Kamen, p.45
- 72 Ibid p.20, cf. Maurice Kriegel, *La prise d'une décision: l'expulsion des juifs d'Espagne en 1492*, RH, 260, 1978
- 73 Walsh, *Characters*, p.151
- 74 Powell, p.55
- 75 Judaism does not seek to propagate itself through evangelisation; it is an inheritance.
- 76 Kamen, p.61
- 77 Even in the eighteenth century the 'liberal' Jean Jacques Rousseau held in his *Contrat Social*: "there is a profession of purely civic faith the articles whereof it is for the Sovereign to determine. He can force no one to believe in them, but can exile all those who do not. And should any one, after publicly acknowledging these dogmas, behave as if he did not believe in them, let him be punished by death; he has committed the worst of crimes; he has lied before the laws." Quoted by Madariaga, *Essays*, p.153
- 78 Police forces as we know them today, capable of investigating each individual member of a group, did not even exist.
- 79 It is worth recalling that Spain had only just been united. Before Isabel's reign the peninsula comprised several large and separate kingdoms, and these were largely in a state of chaos.
- 80 Cantor, p.189
- 81 Patronato Real, leg. 28, fol. 6, CIC, IX, 716, pp.392-295
- 82 Pilar León Tello, *Judíos de Toledo*, I, p.347
- 83 Isabel never deceived or coerced in order to evangelise. She never invaded conscience, never launched wars of aggression. She was ready herself to suffer and die for her faith.
- 84 Kamen, p.26
- 85 Norman Roth, *Conversos, Inquisition and the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain*, (Madison, 1995)
- 86 Cantor, p.171
- 87 Ibid. p.177
- 88 See "Why Apologise for the Spanish Inquisition" by Very Rev. Fr. Alphonsus M. Duran and Fr. Paul M. Vota (2000)
- 89 Cantor p.189