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IN THE CLUTCHES OF THE INQUISITION

Dr. Yitzchok Levine
Posted Apr 09 2008

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Note: This essay is based on "Crypto-Jews in Mexico during the Sixteenth Century" by Arnold Wiznitzer, American Jewish Historical Quarterly, 51, 1962 (www.ajhs.org/reference/adaje.cfm). Unless otherwise indicated, all quotes are from the Wiznitzer article.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the Catholic Church did its utmost to root out any vestige of Jewish religious observance among New Christians.

New Christians, also known by the names Anusim and Marranos, were descendents of Jews who had been forced to convert to Christianity in Spain and Portugal during the final decade of the fifteenth century. Some were willing to risk everything in order to maintain as much Jewish practice as they could. Being accused of Judaizing (practicing Jewish rituals) meant undergoing torture, loss of property and social status, and, if all else failed, death by burning at the stake. Nonetheless, a not inconsiderable number of Anusim clung to their Jewish faith even though the easiest thing for them to do would have been to renounce it.

The Inquisition followed the Jews to the New World, and a number of trials of Judaizers were held in regions that were under the control of Spain and Portugal. One of the most interesting personalities to be tried by the Inquisition in Mexico during the sixteenth century was Luis de Carvajal, Jr. (1567-1596). His commitment to and the sacrifices he made for Judaism are nothing less than inspiring.

Luis was born in Benavente, Portugal, and was baptized by the bishop of Benavente. His early education consisted of reading, writing, and basic mathematics. Later, he attended a Jesuit school for three years where he was taught Latin and rhetoric. His father, Francisco Rodriguez, was a Marrano who influenced his wife and most of his nine children to live as crypto-Jews.



Suplicio de doña Mariana Niders de Carvajal. Litografía del Libro rojo, Archivo General de la Nación de México.

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In 1584 Luis and his family immigrated to Mexico with his uncle. The uncle, who became governor of the New Kingdom of Leon in Mexico, had no sympathy for Marranos despite his Jewish background, and Luis could never reveal to him his family's secret Jewish practices. His father died not long after the family arrived in Mexico, and Luis succeeded him as the head of their large family.

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Luis explored the northern territories of Mexico with his uncle. On these journeys he sought the company of fellow crypto-Jews and attempted to learn what he could of Judaism from those who knew more than he. Although well educated for his time, Luis's Jewish learning was limited and his Jewish practice was based on a Latin translation of the Tanach and a few fragments from the Jewish prayer book. Nonetheless, his memoirs clearly demonstrate his insatiable desire to acquire Jewish learning and observe as much of Judaism as he could.

His drive to become an observant Jew is clear from his description of how, after his father's passing, he circumcised himself in a ravine of the Panuco River:

*When the Lord took my father away from this life, I returned to Panuco, where a clergyman sold me a sacred Bible for six pesos. I studied it constantly and learned much while alone in the wilderness. I came to know many of the divine mysteries. One day I read chapter 17 of Genesis, in which the Lord ordered Abraham, our father, to be circumcised - especially those words which say that the soul of him who will not be circumcised will be erased from among the book of the living. I became so frightened that I immediately proceeded to carry out the divine command. Prompted by the Almighty and His good angel, I left the corridor of the house where I had been reading, leaving behind the sacred Bible, took some old worn scissors and went over to the ravine of the Panuco River. There, with longing and a vivid wish to be inscribed in the book of the living, something that could not happen without this holy sacrament, I sealed it by cutting off almost all of the prepuce and leaving very little of it. [Translated by Seymour B. Liebman in *The Enlightened, The Writings of Luis de Carvajal*, The University of Miami Press, 1967]*

Luis and some of the members of his family became the focal point of a network of crypto-Jews based in Mexico City. He and some of his siblings encouraged former Jews to return to Judaism. Through their efforts, Jews were circumcised, studied Tanach together and observed the festivals. It was only a matter of time before Luis's Judaizing would come to the attention of Catholic officials.

First Trial

On April 20, 1589, a warrant for Luis's arrest was signed by the Inquisitional judges of the public prosecutor of the Holy Office in Mexico City. It was based on testimony obtained from his uncle and brother while they were being tortured. As noted, Luis's uncle was most certainly not a Judaizer. In fact, he was strongly opposed to those who were. Nonetheless, he was brought to trial on trumped up charges and tortured. He finally "confessed" to observing some Jewish rituals and implicated members of his family for the same "offenses."

Luis, who had gone into hiding, was found in his mother's house on May 9 and immediately imprisoned. He was questioned a number of times over the next few months and urged to confess his "crimes." He consistently maintained his innocence, however, insisting he had nothing to confess.

The public prosecutor, Dr. Lobo Guerrero, read a writ of accusation against Luis at a hearing held on July 27, 1589:

Luis, a baptized and confirmed Christian, is a heretic and apostate against the Catholic Church. A descendant of Jews, he has returned to Judaism and has practiced the ceremonies and rites of the Law of Moses, believing that he could obtain salvation in that way. A parent of Luis had asked him while he, the father, lay dying to wash his corpse according to the Jewish rite in order that it should not be buried unclean; Luis had studied the Old Testament and the Prophets in order to be more knowledgeable in his practice of Judaism; he quoted the Prophets habitually; and it was impossible to convince him that the Prophets had predicted that Jesus Christ would come as the Messiah; he had run away to Vera Cruz when his sister, Isabel de Andrade, was imprisoned by the Holy Office and finally that he had protected Judaizers by not denouncing them.

"Luis was again questioned about his Jewish practices and threatened with being tortured in order to make him confess the truth. Finally, on August 7, 1589, apparently seeing no way out of his predicament, he voluntarily appeared before the Inquisitors, "went down on his knees, kissed the floor, shed tears, beat his breast, and said: 'Peccavi, misericordia' ['I have sinned, mercy, mercy]."

Luis appeared before the court several times during August and September. He confessed his father had taught him that the Law of Moses is the only true law, that one is forbidden to eat pork and fish

without scales, and had also explained to him the reasons for observing the Sabbath, Passover and other Jewish holidays, rites and ceremonies. He also said his father had read the prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah and had told him the messiah had not yet arrived. He told the courts that these teachings of his father had influenced him to practice Judaism, and that he had indeed practiced Judaism for the past five years.

He followed this confession with the claim "that his heart had been entirely converted to Christianity during the last few days. After having made his depositions, Luis kneeled again and declared that he was a believing Catholic willing to live and die as a good Christian. Following the usual legal procedures of the tribunal, on February 24, 1590, Luis was permitted to be reconciled to the Catholic faith at an auto-da-fé, after public abjuration of his errors. He was condemned to wear the penitential cloak [sambenito] and to perpetual imprisonment."

The Holy Office in Mexico did not have a prison for those sentenced to lifelong imprisonment. As a result, Luis was transferred to San Hipolito Martyr, a convalescent home in Mexico City, where he was required to perform any services the hospital administrator would require of him. He spent two years at this hospital doing all sorts of menial labor, completely isolated from his family.

Luis's mother and four sisters, who had also been tried for Judaizing and been reconciled with the church in the auto-da-fé of 1590, were confined to an isolated house near the College of the Holy Cross of Tlaltelolco in Mexico City. In 1592 one of Luis's brothers-in-law petitioned the Inquisitors to allow Luis to live with his mother and sisters, so that they would not be left without a man's protection. The request was granted. Luis "found his mother and sisters completely overcome by their experiences with the Inquisition, but it was not long before he persuaded them again to practice Jewish rites."

The Carvajals developed a relationship with Father Pedro de Oroz, supervisor of the College of the Holy Cross. As a result, Father Pedro made Luis his private secretary and a Latin instructor at the college. He also gave Luis the keys to the college's library. This gave Luis access to many classical works, including Josephus Flavius's History of the Jews.

After the students left each day, Luis would spend hours studying the Bible and other works. One day he came across a book that contained the Rambam's Thirteen Principles of Jewish faith. These Ikarim were completely unknown to those living under the Inquisition. The net result was that Luis greatly increased his knowledge of Judaism.

For several years a relative of the Carvajals had been petitioning the authorities for their release. In 1594 the request was granted, and, after the payment of a fine, they were released from all of the penalties imposed upon them in 1590.

Luis remained a free man for a little more than three months. "On February 1, 1595, the Public Prosecutor of the Holy Office denounced Luis, then twenty-eight years old, as a relapsed heretic, apostate, and Judaizer, and obtained from the Inquisitors an authorization for Luis's arrest, which was executed during the night of February first and early the next morning. When he was searched by the jailer of the secret prison, a leather bag was found on his person which contained three small books in black leather and bearing the hand lettered titles Psalmodium, Prophets, and Genesis."

Second Trial

"The new prosecution of Luis was based upon the testimony of some seventeen witnesses, all of whom confirmed the fact that Luis engaged in Judaizing practices after his reconciliation to Catholicism in 1590; but as it turned out, the most damaging witness was Luis himself."

One of the witnesses testified that Luis and his family greeted him in the Jewish manner with the words "May God be with you." He also said that on Yom Kippur he saw Luis, his mother and sisters on their knees facing east, praying and weeping. A cellmate, Luis Dias, a planted informer, testified that Luis prayed in his cell for hours, kneeling with his face to the east while wearing a hat. In addition, he said that whenever Luis pronounced the name of Hashem, he would kiss the floor. He and other witnesses reported many other Jewish practices of the accused.

Luis realized that as a relapsed apostate who had abjured his heresy in 1590, he would most certainly be sentenced to death at his second trial. Further, he was now, at age twenty-eight, a very different man from when he was first tried. At that time his knowledge of Judaism was rudimentary, whereas now he knew the Bible and some of its commentaries well. And he had become an enthusiastic follower of Judaism as well as "a mystic who was given to fasting and praying, and the writing of religious poetry."

Therefore at this trial he openly declared his Jewish beliefs and practices. When asked whether in the future he desire to follow Judaism, he "responded that he wished to live and die observing the Law of Moses." In response to another question he gave nine reasons for denying the Catholic faith.

Luis was imprisoned and tortured for nearly two years. Finally, on December 8, 1596, he was burned at the stake in Mexico City with his mother, Francisca, and three of his sisters - Isabel, Leonor and Catalina. No Jewish woman had been executed in Mexico until then.

Conflicting accounts of his death have been circulated. Before his body was consumed in the flames a priest claimed that he had been garroted [strangled]. The same priest suggests that he kissed a crucifix held up to his lips. If the priest's account is correct (which is by no means certain), he almost certainly did so solely to avoid the pain of being burned alive, for such was the price of an expedited death. He was survived by his saintly sister, Anica, and a beloved disciple, Justa Mendez. His brothers, Baltazar and Miguel, escaped to Europe. [my.opera.com/Rev4u/blog/show.dml/834923]

Sadly, this marked the end of Luis Carvajal Jr.'s short life. One can only marvel at his commitment to Judaism in the face of unbelievable opposition and ruthless oppression.

The Inquisition in Mexico mercilessly hunted and persecuted crypto-Jews. Between 1577 and 1596 sixty-four "Judaizers" were tried. Of these, only one was set free. Thirty-eight of them, when they were tried for the first time, "repented" at least formally, asked for mercy from the Church, abjured their "heretic" errors, and became reconciled to Catholicism. However, they lost their possessions, were condemned to prison, and expelled from Mexico. Fifteen were burned in effigy, because they had either escaped from Mexico or died. Ten crypto-Jews were condemned to death and burned at the stake.

Crypto-Jews had hoped that by coming to the New World they would avoid the Inquisition, but they were sadly mistaken. The Catholic Church was intent on finding and punishing those who longed for nothing more than to practice the faith of their ancestors.

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Esau hates Jacob.

Date 02:04, 04-9, 08

Torquemada, y's, has been dead for a long time now, and supposedly the Vatican has a new attitude toward Jews. However, it still preaches that it's the 1 and Only True Truth. (Of course, Southern Baptists and J.'s Witnesses also preach that, i.e. John 14:6 uber alles.

For that reason, purported Jewish leaders should not bow down before Pope Benedict or kiss his ring. He heads a beit avoda zara that has caused much death and suffering for us Jews throughout the centuries.

Wednesday, 4/09/08 common era

The basic truth of the Vatican

Date 12:04, 04-10, 08

As a former christian, any dealings with the Pope and the Vatican must be tempered with the truth that the Vatican sees all Jews becoming christians at the second coming of their messiah. Until then, they believe that the Jews must become aware of the mercies of their messiah.

I am a descendant of Crypto-Jews and it breaks my heart that my people had to suffer at the hands of the inquisition (even to this day). Saved only by their Jewish souls.

Catholic Prohibition of Circumcision

Date 12:04, 04-10, 08

It wasn't during the centuries cited, but in 1442 and again in 1952, the church affirmed a policy

strictly ordering "...all who glory in the name of Christian, not to practise circumcision either before or after baptism, since whether or not they place their hope in it, it cannot possibly be observed without loss of eternal salvation."

OUR BROTHERS FAULTS

Date 10:04, 04-10, 08

CATHOLICS ALSO WORSHIP MOTHER MARY MORE SO IT SEEMS THAN JESUS OUR SAVIOR. THEY HAVE AN UNUSUAL AMOUNT OF STATUES. THERE IS ONE FATHER THAT IS GOD NOT FATHER MCDUGAL. IT DOES SAY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT OUR CHURCH LEADERS CAN MARRY UNLIKE THE CATHOLICS. AGAIN THE CATHOLICS MADE A BIG MISTAKE BY MOVING THIER MOLESTING FATHERS TO OTHER CHURCHS INSTEAD OF RIDDING THEM. MUCH OF THESE FAULTS DATE BACK TO PAGAN ROME WHO WAS CONVERTED ON THE OPTIONS TO KEEP SOME OF THEIR OLD WAYS LIKE WORSHIPING GODDESS'S REPLACED WITH MOTHER MARY . IT IS INTERESTING HOW THEY EVOLVE TO KEEP IT GOING AT ALL COST.

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