

**Teresa of Avila 1515-2015**  
**Mystical Theology and Spirituality in the Carmelite Tradition**

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**Santa Teresa *la conversa*: are there Jewish influences in the writings of Teresa of Avila?**

The rediscovery of Teresa of Avila's *converso* origins after the Second World War coincided with a growing interest in the European history of the Jews and a post-Holocaust reconsideration of the treatment of Jews by church and state. One of the leading historians looking at the effect of the presence of a large Jewish population in Spain, and the effects of their mass conversion in the fifteenth century, was Américo Castro. He was one of the first to realise the connection between *converso* heritage and Spanish literature. His idea of the defining characteristic of the Spanish as '*vivir desviviéndose*', living in disagreement with one's own self, he traced to Moslem and Jewish influence. He detected other influences he attributed to *converso* authors, although this theory of a '*converso* voice' is disputed by many modern scholars. He wrote about Teresa of Avila in 1928; he revised this essay in 1972 to take account of her *conversa* status in light of his theory of the *converso* voice. This paper examines whether such an influence can be found in her writings, and then briefly examines other possible Jewish influences, including the view that she was influenced by Jewish cabala mysticism.

***Américo Castro and the 'converso' voice***

Américo Castro (1885 - 1972) was an influential, but controversial, historian of Spain. His work spanned the troubled years for Spain in the middle of the twentieth century, most of which he spent outside the country. One of his most important works is '*España en su historia: Cristianos, moros y judíos*', published in Brazil in 1948, published in English translation in 1954 in a revised and enlarged form as '*The Structure of Spanish History*'<sup>1</sup>. In this, and other works, Castro sought to debunk the then prevailing view of Spanish historians, bolstered by the views of the Franco dictatorship, that Spanish civilisation was a pure continuation of the Visigothic culture at the time of the Arab conquest in 711 CE. His view, that Spanish Christian culture and civilisation was indelibly marked by the other two religions of the peninsula, Islam and Judaism, although strongly challenged at the outset, has become the accepted norm.

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<sup>1</sup> A. Castro, *The Structure of Spanish History*, trans. E.L. King (Princeton, 1954), pp. 521-44.

It is now generally accepted that *converso* authors contributed significantly to late medieval and early modern Spanish literature. They wrote chronicles (e.g., Alvar García de Santa María), historical treatises (e.g., Pablo de Santa María), religious and theological works (e.g., Juan de Torquemada, Teresa of Avila), religious and secular poetry (e.g., Fray Íñigo de Mendoza, Antón de Montoro), novels and plays (e.g., Fernando de Rojas), humanist works (e.g., Alonso de Cartagena, Luis Vives), political advice and polemics (e.g., Diego de Valera). The development of fifteenth century Spanish humanism can be largely attributed to *converso* authors, in particular Alonso de Cartagena<sup>2</sup>.

Américo Castro was one of the first to realise this connection between *converso* heritage and Spanish literature<sup>3</sup>. His idea of the defining characteristic of the Spanish as '*vivir desviviéndose*', living in disagreement with one's own self, he traced to Moslem and Jewish influence<sup>4</sup>. He pointed out how many of the creators of important Spanish literary genres in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were *conversos* and claimed to have detected a darkness of outlook in these writers, which he attributed to a combination of their 'Hispano-Hebrew' culture and its Arabic influences with the social exclusion and persecution by the Inquisition they experienced<sup>5</sup>. He also believed that *conversos* had a strong self-consciousness and a tendency to look within<sup>6</sup>.

In *Structure*, Castro commented on Teresa of Avila that her 'strong propensity for autobiography' as well as her mysticism had led him to suspect an Islamic or Judaic connection even before her *conversa* status was uncovered<sup>7</sup>. He states that, until Teresa, there was no literary tradition in Christian Spain which examined the inner life of the self, but this was common in Islamic

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<sup>2</sup> G.B. Kaplan, *The Evolution of Converso Literature: the Writings of the Converted Jews of Medieval Spain* (Gainesville FL, 2002), pp. 49-50.

<sup>3</sup> S. Gilman, *The Spain of Fernando de Rojas: the Intellectual and Social Landscape of La Celestina* (Princeton NJ, 1972), p. 118.

<sup>4</sup> Castro, *Structure of Spanish History*, pp. 10-11, 54-5.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 525, 557-60, 567-70.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 571.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* p. 566.

literature. However, this conclusion is weakened by his comparison earlier in the book of Teresa's *Libro de la vida (Vida)* with Augustine's *Confessions*, a work well known in Christian Spain and which Teresa tells us in the *Vida* that she had read, saying that:

'As I began to read the *Confessions*, it seemed to me that I saw myself in them.'<sup>8</sup>

Castro also thought that the mysticism of John of the Cross and Teresa could not be explained by Christian traditions alone, and that John of the Cross in particular was influenced by Moslem mystic traditions<sup>9</sup>

Castro wrote an essay on Teresa in 1928, revised in 1972<sup>10</sup>. This mainly discussed her mysticism. He attributed the outburst of mysticism in Spain in the sixteenth century to Renaissance individualism accentuated and exacerbated by the *converso* condition, noting that the most eminent Spanish saints and mystics, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross and John of Avila, were all *conversos*<sup>11</sup>. This view can be criticised as reducing spirituality to emotional phenomena. It also treats Spanish mysticism as entirely divorced from developments elsewhere in Europe, in particular the flowering of mysticism in the Low Countries and Germany in the preceding centuries. Some of the writings of that school were known in Spain and their study had been encouraged in the first part of the sixteenth century under Archbishop Cisneros by the publication of such works in translation<sup>12</sup>.

Gilman, a follower of Castro, understood this leading role of *conversos* in creating Spanish literature not as being based on Jewish racial characteristics or culture but rather as a product of the situation of these individuals as being both inside and outside their social circumstances<sup>13</sup>. This liminal position provided the ironic distance from, yet identification with, their society that

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<sup>8</sup> *Vida*, 9:7.

<sup>9</sup> Castro, *Structure of Spanish History*, p. 84.

<sup>10</sup> A. Castro, *Teresa la Santa, Gracian y los Separatismos con otros ensayos* (Madrid, Barcelona, 1972).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23-4, 45-8.

<sup>12</sup> G.T.W Ahlgren, *Teresa of Avila and the Politics of Sanctity* (Ithica and London, 1996), pp. 9-11.

<sup>13</sup> Gilman, *The Spain of Fernando de Rojas*, pp. 144-6.

allowed them to successfully mirror their world in fiction<sup>14</sup>. Gilson saw this position as also leading to a form of 'adolescent' self-consciousness, primarily concerned with the impression made on others<sup>15</sup>. A more extreme view of *converso* literature is given by Nepaulsingh, who sees it as a deliberate provision of writing that could be read in one, harmless, way by those sharing the dominant 'monoculture' (in this case, Spanish Christianity), but containing a potentially dangerous coded message readable by those within the culture of the minority<sup>16</sup>.

More recently, scholars have criticised this '*converso* voice' theory as imposing an alluringly simple set of characteristics on the literary products of people who were themselves very different from each other and who, being upper class, educated and almost exclusively male, were not representative of *conversos* as a whole. In 1996-7 the first part of volume 25 of *La Corónica* was devoted to articles by scholars of late medieval and early modern *conversos* on the topic of the *converso* voice, and the second part of that volume contained letters from more scholars commenting on these articles. There was general agreement that there were a wide range of *converso* identities, outlooks and experiences which could not be fitted to a single, simple theory such as put forward by Castro<sup>17</sup>. There are other aspects of Castro's work which do not stand up to scrutiny, in particular his surprising conclusions that *limpieza de sangre* began with Jewish concepts of racial purity<sup>18</sup>, and that the Inquisition was inspired by Jewish courts which governed the *aljamas*<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., pp. 154-5.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 200-1.

<sup>16</sup> C.I. Nepaulsingh, *Apples of Gold in Filigrees of Silver: Jewish Writing in the Eye of the Spanish Inquisition* (New York NY, 1995).

<sup>17</sup> D. Seidenspinner-Núñez, 'Inflecting the *Converso* Voice: A Commentary on Recent Theories', *La Corónica*, 25 no. 1 (1996), 6-18, pp. 16-17; Gerli, 'Performing Nobility', pp. 32-4; J. Edwards, 'Letter', *La Corónica*, 25 no. 2 (1997), 159-63, pp. 160-1; D. Gitlitz, 'Letter', *La Corónica*, 25 no. 2 (1997), 163-6, pp. 163-6; M.D. Meyerson, 'Letter', *La Corónica*, 25 no. 2 (1997), 179-80, pp. 179-84. The same issue contained a reply to these criticisms, D. Seidenspinner-Núñez, 'Responses from the Authors: "Navigating the Minefield"', *La Corónica*, 25 no. 2 (1997), 195-201 pp. 195-201. Round also rejects a simple theory of *converso* literary characteristics, but does believe that a *converso's* identity in historical context could influence his writing, N. Round, 'La "peculiaridad literaria" de los conversos ¿unicornio o "snark"?', in A. Alcalá (ed.), *Judíos, sefarditas, conversos : la expulsión de 1492 y sus consecuencias* (Valladolid, 1995), pp. 570-1.

<sup>18</sup> Castro, *Structure of Spanish History*, pp. 525-7.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp.532-4.

In light of this, can we be sure that there are Jewish influences in Teresa's writings in the context of Castro's '*converso* voice'? There were a number of reasons why Teresa was in a liminal position besides her Jewish blood; she was a woman asserting spiritual authority despite the teaching of her church denying all female authority, she was a reformer opposed by much of the Carmelite hierarchy as well as church and civic government, and she espoused a method of prayer regarded with deep suspicion by the established church and the Inquisition. It would appear too simplistic to attribute everything to her *conversa* status.

However, there are other possible Jewish influences to be found in her writings which have been discussed by scholars. One of the strongest candidates for showing the influence of her *conversa* status is her approach to honour and family status.

## **Honour**

A modern reader of St Teresa may be puzzled by the vehemence with which she rejects the concept of 'honour', or perhaps may even fail to notice it. In today's society honour is a somewhat vague concept, something undoubtedly admirable and connected with honesty and right living. We also speak of 'honours' in connection with awards of titles, knighthoods and the like, the new list of those to whom these awards are to be given being known as the 'honours list'. The recipients of those honours come from a wide range of occupations and social status; some of them have turned out to be distinctly less than "honourable".

Honour was a very different concept in Teresa's Spain. It was directly linked to lineage, high social status, enjoyed by royalty and powerful aristocrats down to the lowest rank of those with status, the *hidalgos*. This honour, which depended greatly on public reputation, had to be maintained by eschewing any activity, occupation, marriage or social contact which was inconsistent

with this status<sup>20</sup>. Teresa's father used the wealth her grandfather had accumulated as a merchant trading in fine fabrics (an unacceptable occupation for a *hidalgo*) to buy property and live on the rents, the usual source of *hidalgo* income<sup>21</sup>. The result, where those with the status but without the resources to maintain it lived in genteel poverty rather than endanger their honour by working, was what Cervantes was satirising in *Don Quixote*. Indeed, Teresa's father died in serious debt<sup>22</sup>, and this may be the reason why most of Teresa's brothers headed for the New World to seek their fortunes – being a conquistador was a perfectly acceptable *hidalgo* occupation. Unfortunately only one of them, Lorenzo, succeeded in this quest<sup>23</sup>.

This emphasis on lineage meant that upwardly mobile *converso* families, such as Teresa's, sought to attain *hidalgo* status in any way possible, often by marrying into noble families who needed a wealthy bride or husband for their offspring, and, until the Inquisition made it a dangerous assertion, many conversos also claimed Hebrew nobility<sup>24</sup>. The prominent fifteenth century *conversos* Pablo de Santa María and his son Alonso de Cartagena made such claims for their ancestry. The fifteenth century leading courtier, *converso* Mosén Diego de Valera, in *Espejo de verdadera nobleza* also set out a theory of nobility, socio-political as opposed to Cartagena's theological approach, but was equally intended to open the way for *conversos* of noble Jewish origin to be awarded civil nobility.<sup>25</sup> For both Cartagena and Valera, nobility was more a question of possessing noble qualities than of possessing a noble genealogy<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> Castro, *Structure of Spanish History*, pp. 628-31.

<sup>21</sup> T. Egido, 'The Historical Setting of St Teresa's Life' in *Carmelite Studies* 1, 1980, pp. 148. This is an English translation of the chapter 'Ambiente histórico' in Barrientos ed, *Introducción a la lectura de Santa Teresa* 2nd edition (Madrid, 2002).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 148-9

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 144-6.

<sup>24</sup> Gilman, *The Spain of Fernando de Rojas*, pp. 144-6.

<sup>25</sup> E.M. Gerli, 'Performing Nobility: Mosén Diego de Valera and the Poetics of *Converso* Identity,' *La Corónica*, 25 no. 1 (1996), 19-36, pp. 21-3.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 25-6.

Honour often had to be fought for, either literally in duels or, increasingly in the sixteenth century, by law suit. Crawford<sup>27</sup> charts in detail the ways that the law was used in numerous cases to gain or protect *hidalgo* status and the arguments used by those claiming such status. As we know, Teresa's own family fought and won such a case in 1520<sup>28</sup>, justifying her father's use of the title 'Don'. In her early days in the Encarnación she was known as 'Doña Teresa de Ahumada'. Of course, the freedom from municipal taxation enjoyed by all ranks of the nobility was a benefit – and the cause of so much litigation over *hidalgo* status.

A closely related aspect of 16<sup>th</sup> century Spanish society was the concept of *limpieza de sangre*, 'purity of blood'. This first emerged in the early fifteenth century in some colleges, then began to spread to towns. A major impetus to the spread of the idea was the anti-converso uprising in Toledo in 1449 which resulted from the growing resentment amongst Old Christians caused by economic success of New Christian families. The apparent immediate cause for this uprising was a loan towards the expenses of war demanded by the unpopular chief minister, Alvaro de Luna, and collected by a *converso* tax collector. A mob of townsmen, led by a disaffected official, Pedro Sarmiento, sacked the collector's property and then went on to attack a large part of the Toledo *converso* community. In control of the city, Sarmiento and his party passed the *Sentencia-Estatuto* (*Sentencia*), a law that no *converso* could hold a secular or religious official position in Toledo. This was the first *limpieza de sangre* statute<sup>29</sup>.

The belief that New Christians were all crypto-Jews and not to be trusted grew among the Old Christian population throughout Castile<sup>30</sup>, resulting in similar statutes being passed by other towns and civil bodies<sup>31</sup>. Further, despite the

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<sup>27</sup> M.J. Crawford, *The Fight for Status and Privilege in Late Medieval and Early Modern Castile 1465-1598* (University Park Pennsylvania, 2014).

<sup>28</sup> Barrientos, ed. *Introducción a la lectura de Santa Teresa*, pp. 84-89. It was the record of this law suit, published in 1946 by Alonso Cortés ('Pleitos de los Cepeda' in *Boletín de la real Academia Española*, 25 (1946) pp. 85-110) that disclosed that Teresa was from a *converso* family.

<sup>29</sup> Kaplan, *Evolution of Converso Literature*, pp. 19-22.

<sup>30</sup> J. Edwards, *Inquisition* (Stroud, 1999), p. 66.

<sup>31</sup> Kaplan, *Evolution of Converso Literature*, p. 23.

Scriptural and theological arguments against discrimination against Jewish Christians<sup>32</sup>, religious orders began to enact their own *limpieza de sangre* provisions, beginning with the Jeronimites in 1486, while cathedral chapters, universities and the influential military orders also came to ban New Christians from membership<sup>33</sup>. Teresa's own Carmelite order introduced restrictions in 1566, although she never excluded New Christians from her reformed order<sup>34</sup>.

Although *limpieza de sangre* became the norm, it was rarely enforced against noble families, many of which had some Jewish blood from marriages with wealthy Jewish families. Grants of *limpieza de sangre* were made to wealthy families with high social status who demonstrably had Jewish blood.

Teresa's attitude towards honour has to be examined in this context. A section of the 1928 version of Castro's essay commented on her views on honour and social formulas. A note added to this section in the 1971 edition stated that this seemed to be an insoluble problem in 1928, because there was no suspicion of her real background, and the discovery of her roots made necessary a new edition of the work<sup>35</sup>. One of the first detailed studies of the *converso* context in which Teresa's life and works should be viewed was by Teófanos Egido OCD<sup>36</sup>. Egido attributes what he calls 'the Teresian preoccupation with "*la negra honora*" [black honour] to the social perils associated with her family's *converso* roots and *hidalgo* status in an era when *limpieza de sangre* had become the main test for status, except for the higher nobility<sup>37</sup>. This must have made her, and her fellow *conversos* uncomfortable with the concept of honour, so it is not surprising that she did everything she could to exclude it from her Carmelite reform. Was she aware that she was a *conversa*? – Egido gives a number of reasons why she must have known of

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<sup>32</sup> The leading proponents of such arguments were the *conversos* Alonso de Cartagena and Juan de Torquemada. This theology was primarily expounded in Cartagena's *Defensorium Unitatis Christianae* (*Defensorium*) and Torquemada's *Tractatus contra Madianitas et Ismaelitas* (*Tractatus*). Both were written to counter the *Sentencia*.

<sup>33</sup> H. Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition* (New York NY, London, 1965), pp. 123-7.

<sup>34</sup> J. Bilinkoff, *The Avila of Saint Teresa: Religious Reform in a Sixteenth-Century City* (Ithica and London, 1989), pp. 146-7

<sup>35</sup> Castro, *Teresa la Santa*, pp. 19-24.

<sup>36</sup> T. Egido, 'The Historical Setting of St Teresa's Life'.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 154-8.



them, and most likely knew that her grandfather had been in trouble with the Inquisition<sup>38</sup>.

Rowan Williams shows that she does have a concept of honour, albeit one very different from that prevailing in her society<sup>39</sup>. We should show honour to God, in a world where he is not generally honoured, and honour should be given to those who honour God. She states in *Libro de las fundaciones* 15:15, in connection with her struggles to found the Toledo convent which was supported by a *converso* family and opposed, on that ground, by others, that she ignored this opposition because 'glory to God, I have always esteemed virtue more than lineage.' In this she is perhaps closer to the theories of honour put forward by Alonso de Cartagena and Diego de Valera in the fifteenth century. Teresa's descriptions of her parents are always as being virtuous and God-fearing, and she makes no reference to their *hidalgo* status<sup>40</sup>. Note that the *conversa* Teresa de Cartagena also saw lineage as a problem: in her lengthy discussion in *Arboleda de los enfermos* of the sin of pride, the first of her six roots of pride is glorification of illustrious lineage and great family<sup>41</sup>.

Another aspect of Teresa of Avila's opposition to 'honour' is shown in her views on the relationship between the contemplative and the active life. Based on Christ's statement that 'Mary has chosen the better part', the Medieval church viewed contemplation as higher than action<sup>42</sup> (although it did acknowledge that someone had to do the cooking – in Francis of Assisi's rules for hermitages, the brothers had to take it in turn to be Martha to the other group's Mary<sup>43</sup>). In *Camino de Perfección* 17:5-7 she seems to take a version of this view, that Martha is necessary and the Marthas are called to this vocation and should not complain, but everyone should aspire to

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p.153

<sup>39</sup> R. Williams, *Teresa of Avila* (London and New York, 1991), pp. 21-2.

<sup>40</sup> Egidio, 'The Historical Setting of St Teresa's Life', p. 133.

<sup>41</sup> H.E. Pearson, *Teresa de Cartagena: a Late Medieval Woman's Theological Approach to Disability* (University of Oxford D.Phil thesis, 2010), p. 112

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, the views of the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, chapters 17-23.

<sup>43</sup> R.J. Armstrong, J.A.W. Hellmann and W.J. Short, eds., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents* vol.1 (New York, 1999), p. 61.

contemplation. However, later in that work and in other works she says that Martha and Mary can coexist in the same person, and in the same way of prayer. For example, in *Vida* 17:4 she says that in the prayer of quiet the soul can rejoice “in the holy idleness of Mary” while also being Martha, “in such a way that it is as though engaged in both the active and contemplative life together”, a state she describes more fully in the seventh mansion (*Las Moradas* VII 4:6-12). Or, as she expresses it concisely, “Mary and Martha walk together” (*Camino* 31:5). This refusal to privilege contemplation over action is consistent with her rejection of *hidalgo* honour, which was regarded as inconsistent with any active work or trade.

### **Names of God**

Another area in which there may be Jewish influences is in the names Teresa uses for God. Here I am indebted to the detailed analysis of her use of divine names by Péllison<sup>44</sup>.

### ***Regal or suffering messiah***

One of the reasons that Medieval Jews rejected arguments that Jesus Christ was the expected Messiah was that they were expecting a conquering king, not a crucified and suffering saviour. There is some evidence that attempts in the fifteenth century to convert Spanish Jews to Christianity through preaching involved playing down the suffering of Christ and instead portraying a Christ who remained calm and in control of the situation; an important example is found in Eiximenès' *Life of Christ*.<sup>45</sup> There is evidence that the *conversa* Teresa de Cartagena shared this regal image of Christ. While she almost used the word God '*Dios*' when referring to the deity, she also used a significant number of names that included the word 'Sovereign', such as 'Sovereign Lord' (*soberano Señor*), 'Sovereign Virtue' (*Virtud soberana*) and 'Sovereign Truth' (*soberana Verdad*). One of the few express references to Christ was to 'the great Prelate and sovereign Pontiff, Jesus Christ our Lord' (*grand Perlado e soberano Pontífice, Jhesuchristo nuestro Señor*), which is

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<sup>44</sup> N. Péllison, 'Les noms divins dans l'oeuvre de sainte Thérèse de Jésus' in *Études sur Sainte Thérèse*, (Paris, 1968), pp. 59-197.

<sup>45</sup> C. Robinson, 'Preaching to the Converted: Valladolid's *Cristianos nuevos* and the *Retablo de don Sancho de Rojas* (1415)', *Speculum*, 83 (2008), pp. 125, 133-8.

her only use of the name Jesus<sup>46</sup>. Her uncle Alonso de Cartagena shows a similar pattern of references to God in his *Oraçional*.<sup>47</sup>

It is very noticeable that some of St Teresa's favourite names for God are *rey*, *señor* and in particular *Majestad*, a name which Pélisson points out is hardly ever used by her contemporaries<sup>48</sup>. These names would be consistent with a *converso* preference for a regal Messiah, although she clearly also identified with a suffering Christ – her "conversion" she attributes to the sight of a statue of the wounded Christ (*Vida* 9:1) and she liked to imagine herself comforting Him as he prayed in the garden of Gethsemane. She also says in that chapter that she had difficulties reflecting discursively with the intellect, but instead tried to represent Christ within herself and that

"..it did me greater good – in my opinion- to represent Him in those scenes where I saw Him more alone."

It could be argued that this is consistent with one aspect of the "converso voice", identification with exclusion from society.

### ***The name of Jesus***

The special devotion to the name of Jesus, in particular its inclusion in the Western Church liturgical calendar, began in the fifteenth century and can be attributed to the extremely popular preaching of the Franciscan reformer, Bernardino of Siena. He originated the now familiar symbol of the letters 'IHS' surmounted by a cross and surrounded by rays<sup>49</sup>. His Observant Franciscan reform spread to Spain in the mid to late fifteenth century, as did the devotion to the name of Jesus<sup>50</sup>. One member of the Spanish Observant friars was Alonso de Espina, who preached on the necessity for an inquisition to investigate the *conversos* and played an important role in the introduction of

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<sup>46</sup> Pearson, *Teresa de Cartagena*, p. 267.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 267-8.

<sup>48</sup> Pélisson, *Les noms divins*, p. 119.

<sup>49</sup> J. Edwards, 'Fifteenth-Century Franciscan Reform and the Spanish *Converso*: the Case of Fray Alonso de Espina', in *Monastic Studies: the Continuity of Tradition* (Bangor, 1989), pp. 204-5.

<sup>50</sup> This devotion did not derive from Francis himself. Although the hagiographies stress his mysticism and affective devotion to the humanity of Christ, his own writings give little evidence of either and show that he regarded his personal relationship to God being as to God the Father rather than to Christ, I. Delio, *Crucified Love: Bonaventure's Mysticism of the Crucified Christ* (Quincy IL, 1998), pp. 3, 5-7.

the Spanish Inquisition. He also pushed for enforcement of the law that required Jews to wear distinguishing badges, and together with other Franciscans encouraged Old Christians to themselves wear a distinguishing badge, namely the name of Jesus, sewn onto their hats<sup>51</sup>. There were clearly reasons for even truly Christian *conversos* to have been uncomfortable with the name of Jesus and this devotion. One of the transgressions of *conversos* listed by Alonso de Espina in his  *Fortalium Fidei*  is that they avoided mentioning the names of Jesus or Mary<sup>52</sup>, an accusation that is repeated in Inquisition records<sup>53</sup>. A related accusation was that *conversos* repeated the psalms without ending with the 'Gloria'<sup>54</sup>, although this could also be an indication of a heretical rejection of the Trinity and Christ's divinity.

The *conversa* Teresa de Cartagena used the name Jesus only once in her works. Gilman points out that the *converso* author of *La Celestina* only uses the word as an expletive uttered by his characters and also does not refer to Christ by name, and suggests that this reluctance was shared by other *conversos*<sup>55</sup>. This seems to be corroborated by an examination of the poems of Fray Íñigo de Mendoza: in the total of 433 known verses of his *Vita Christi*, a topic in which use of the names 'Jesus' and 'Christ' might be expected, there are only two references to 'Jesus', one to 'Christ' and three to the composite '*Ihsuschristos*'. In the rest of his poems there is only one use of 'Jesus', in a political poem expressed as a sermon to the king, Ferdinand, and none of 'Christ'. This is particularly surprising as Fray Íñigo was an Observant Franciscan<sup>56</sup>. Similarly, as mentioned above, Alonso de Cartagena only uses the word once in his *Oracional*. Generally, when referring to the second

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<sup>51</sup> Edwards, 'Fifteenth-Century Franciscan Reform and the Spanish *Converso*', p. 204.

<sup>52</sup> H. Beinart, *Conversos on Trial: The Inquisition in Ciudad Real*, Yael Guiladi (trans.) (Jerusalem, 1981), p. 13.

<sup>53</sup> R.L. Melammed, 'Crypto-Jewish Women Facing the Spanish Inquisition: Transmitting Religious Practices, Beliefs, and Attitudes', in M.D. Myerson and E.D. English (eds.), *Christians, Muslims and Jews in Medieval and Early Modern Spain* (Notre Dame, IN, 2000), pp. 207, 217 n. 33. Beinart cites an example of a woman in Ciudad Real being accused of saying only "in the name of the Father" instead of "in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost", Beinart, *Conversos on Trial*, p.289.

<sup>54</sup> M.d.l.A. Fernández García, 'Criterios inquisitoriales para detectar al marrano: los criptojudíos en Andalucía en los siglos XVI y XVII', in A. Alcalá (ed.), *Judios, sefarditas, conversos: la expulsión de 1492 y sus consecuencias* (Valladolid, 1995), p. 485. This was the most common accusation relating to prayer in the Inquisition records, *ibid.*, p. 491.

<sup>55</sup> Gilman, *Spain of Fernando de Rojas*, p. 363.

<sup>56</sup> *Cancionero*, pp. xi, xvi.

person of the Trinity he uses the terms *Nuestro Salvator* and *Nuestro Redemptor*. By comparison, Pedro de Luna (the anti-pope Benedict XIII), who was not a *converso*, in his *Libro de las consolaciones de la vida humana* makes frequent use of the name *Jesucristo*.

It is possible that this reluctance by *conversos* to use the name 'Jesus' may have faded as the fifteenth century hostile preaching of de Espina receded into the past. Teresa does use the name, both as *Jesús* and the combination *Jesuchristo*, though much less than she uses *Christo* on its own<sup>57</sup>. Certainly, in the *converso* Luis de Leon's work *Los nombres de Christo* the name 'Jesus' is dealt with last, as Christ's 'true and proper name'.

Luis de Leon's treatment of the name 'Jesus' seems to have been influenced by the Jewish mystical tradition called kabbala, although Thompson argues that his analysis follows Jerome, and that Fray Luis is not revealing an occult power through juggling letters in the kabbalist manner but rather expressing a Christocentric theology<sup>58</sup>. However, there was evidence that he was familiar with Christian Kabbalistic sources<sup>59</sup>. This leads to my final topic, the question whether there are influences from kabbala in Teresa of Avila's writing as proposed by some, in particular Swietlicki<sup>60</sup> and Green<sup>61</sup>.

### **Kabbala**

The problem faced by those proposing that Teresa was influenced by kabbala is that there is no evidence that she had any exposure to its teachings. She could not have read the works on the subject, either Jewish or Christian, because she read neither Hebrew or Latin and there is no evidence that any of these works were translated into Spanish, let alone that she had access to

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<sup>57</sup> Pélisson, *Les noms divins*, p. 157.

<sup>58</sup> C.P. Thompson, *The Strife of Tongues: Fray Luis de León and the Golden Age of Spain* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 161-5.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

<sup>60</sup> C. Swietlicki, *Spanish Christian Cabala: the Works of Luis de León, Santa Teresa de Jesús and San Juan de la Cruz*, (Columbia MO, 1986).

<sup>61</sup> D. Green, *Gold in the Crucible: Teresa of Avila and the Western Mystical Tradition* (Shaftesbury, 1989).

a Spanish translation. So both Swietlicki and Green have to suppose that she received kabbalistic influences from others.

Swietlicki says that Teresa's confessors would have been able to read kabbalistic sources and could have transmitted such ideas to her<sup>62</sup> – a double supposition unsupported by evidence. She also says that Teresa could have derived kabbalistic imagery from St John of the Cross<sup>63</sup> – but that depends on the disputed evidence that he knew of and was influenced by kabbalistic writings, which will not be discussed in this paper.

Both Swietlicki<sup>64</sup> and Green<sup>65</sup> also believe that Teresa could have absorbed kabbalistic ideas from her home and upbringing. This relies on assertions that converted Jews continued to incorporate aspects of their Jewish religion and custom into their new lives as Christians. This was probably true of new converts, particularly those resulting from the mass conversions under threat after 1391, but there is much less evidence that it was so several generations later, and after a century of the Inquisition. It is true that Teresa's grandfather, Juan Sánchez, was in trouble with the Toledo Inquisition in 1485, but it seems that he voluntarily confessed during the period of grace after an inquisition was announced<sup>66</sup> – often the safest thing for *conversos* to do if they had reason to think that they might have enemies who would denounce them to the inquisitors out of malice. The records do not state what these crimes were that he confessed to – they could be as trivial as putting on clean clothes on a Friday or failing to recite the 'Gloria' at the end of a psalm. Indeed, accusations to the Inquisition tended to relate to practices rather than religious beliefs, and family customs are likely to be handed down without any thought that they might compromise Christian belief.

The records do show that Juan Sánchez took part in an *auto da fe* and had his *sanbenito* hung up in the parish church. His sons were with him during

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<sup>62</sup> Swietlicki, *Spanish Christian Cabala*, p. 43.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 43-4.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 49-51.

<sup>65</sup> Green, *Gold in the Crucible*, p. 93.

<sup>66</sup> Egado, 'The Historical Setting of St Teresa's Life', p140.

this humiliation; Teresa's father would have been about five years old<sup>67</sup>. The memory of this must have had a profound effect on him, so it seems unlikely that he would have knowingly allowed Jewish learning and customs to continue in his own house. While there has to be some suspicion of the emphasis that Teresa puts on her father's piety and love of good books, there is no reason to think that the underlying facts are untrue.

Further, the main influence on Teresa as a child seems to have been her mother – she expressly talks about her mother's love of reading romances which she emulated<sup>68</sup>. The general view is that her mother was not a *conversa*, coming from the lesser nobility, an old Christian family who had won renown in the Reconquest<sup>69</sup>. Green, however, says that her mother came from a "wealthy Jewish rural background". The only authority she cites for this statement is a paper given in a 1981 conference by Gareth Davies<sup>70</sup>. This paper, which seems to be directed to challenging hagiographic views of Teresa by showing that she concealed her Jewish ancestry, argues that her mother's family must have adopted the Ahumada name because their coat of arms was different from other heraldic representations of the family<sup>71</sup>. For this he cites the biographical essay by Efrén de la Madre de Dios and Otilio del Niño Jesús.<sup>72</sup> This discusses the coat of arms over on the façade of Teresa's father's Avila house, which does not show any quartering associated with the Ahumada family<sup>73</sup>. However, the same introduction gives evidence that the house was bought shortly after his first marriage, so it is possible that these arms date from that time and relate to those of his first wife<sup>74</sup>. Davies also suggests that Teresa's father would have felt more comfortable with a *conversa* wife<sup>75</sup>: this seems both to misunderstand the dynastic and financial

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<sup>67</sup> Bilinkoff, *The Avila of Saint Teresa*, pp. 109.

<sup>68</sup> *Vida*, 2:1.

<sup>69</sup> Bilinkoff, *The Avila of Saint Teresa*, p.110; S. Clissold, *St Teresa of Avila* (London, 1979), p. 7; E. de la Madre de Dios and O. Steggink, *Tiempo y vida de Santa Teresa* (Madrid, 1968), pp. 12-3.

<sup>70</sup> G. A. Davies, 'St Teresa and the Jewish Question' in M.A. Rees ed. *Teresa de Jesús and her world* (Leeds, 1981), pp. 51-73.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>72</sup> E. de la Madre de Dios and O. del Niño Jesús, eds. *Santa Teresa de Jesús Obras Completas: Nuevas revision del texto original con notas criticas Vol I* (Madrid, 1951), pp. 131-556.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 164-6.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 175-6.

<sup>75</sup> Davies, 'St Teresa and the Jewish Question', p. 54.

basis for marriage in 16th century Spain and to ignore the evidence that wealthy *conversos* often successfully sought to marry their children into established *hidalgo* families.

In the absence of clear evidence that Teresa had access to kabbala ideas, it would seem that there would have to be evidence from her writings that they contain matter which could not have come from any source other than kabbala. This short paper is not able to fully cover the arguments put forward by Swietlicki and Green, so will concentrate on the one that they seem to consider the strongest, the imagery of the castle in *Las Moradas*.

First, the use of the image of a castle. One does not have to travel very far in Castille to see that it is well named, there seems to be a castle on almost every hill top. By the time she wrote this book Teresa had made 12 reformed houses over most of Spain and had demonstrably travelled widely, so her experience could easily be the source of the idea of using a castle as the image of the soul. Swietlicki dismissed the possibility of an actual architectural prototype because none of them have seven rooms<sup>76</sup>. However, Swietlicki seems to think that Teresa's interior castle has only seven rooms, whereas the very beginning of the work refers to it having "many rooms" (*adonde hay muchos aposentos*) and directly relating to this to Christ's saying that in heaven "there are many dwelling places" (*así como en el cielo hay muchas moradas*)<sup>77</sup>. Green attributes Teresa's use of the term "*moradas*" to kabbala, ignoring this clear New Testament reference<sup>78</sup>. Teresa also refers to them as having various locations in three dimensions, not one leading off the other, with the main dwelling place in the centre. She seems to be talking about seven levels in which there are multiple rooms, except for the final level which seems to have only one room (this makes sense as it is where the divine presence dwells). Seven is, of course, a number that appears often with spiritual significance, not just in kabbalistic writings. It appears repeatedly in the Bible, from the seven days of creation at the beginning of the

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<sup>76</sup> Swietlicki, *Spanish Christian Cabala*, p. 52.

<sup>77</sup> *Las Moradas*, 1:1.

<sup>78</sup> Green, *Gold in the Crucible*, p. 97



first book, Genesis to the seven angels with the seven last plagues near the end of the last book, Revelation, so this seems a more probable source for Teresa's selection of this number.

Swietlicki also relies on Teresa's imagery of the castle made of diamond or very clear crystal as coming from the kabbala<sup>79</sup>; it seems much more likely that this comes from the vision of the heavenly city in Revelation 21:11 'It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal'.

An examination of the other elements of Teresa's work alleged to derive from the kabbala is still required, but at present the verdict has to be "not proven", and it seems on the balance of probabilities that the case for kabbalistic influences on St Teresa is not persuasive.

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<sup>79</sup> Swietlicki, *Spanish Christian Cabala*, p. 55.