

Robert Aleksander Maryks. *The Jesuit Order as a Synagogue of Jews: Jesuits of Jewish Ancestry and Purity-of-Blood Laws in the Early Society of Jesus*.

Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions 146. Leiden: Brill, 2010. xxxiv + 282 pp. index. append. illus. map. bibl. \$147. ISBN: 978-90-04-17981-3.

This tightly focused, highly erudite, fascinating book argues convincingly for one thesis: that the early Society of Jesus, from its beginnings in 1540 until 1572, maintained a consistently pro-converso policy. From the time of the suspicious election of Everard Mercurian as the Society's fourth superior general, a reactionary anti-converso policy, contrary to the will of Loyola and the founders of the society, was implemented and sustained over the protests of numerous leading Jesuit fathers. This thesis will undoubtedly ruffle some feathers because it casts aspersions on the integrity of Mercurian, his successor, Claudio Acquaviva, and, to some degree, Pope Gregory XIII, who essentially decided the election of 1572 against any Spanish or converso candidate. Maryks shows how these figures conspired to eliminate the influence, even the presence, of converso descendants in the Society, without regard to their dedication, ability, or virtue.

The book opens with a long introduction presenting the issues of converso origins in Spain, the introduction of purity-of-blood statutes there in 1449 as a way of blocking conversos' entrance to many Spanish institutions, and the historiography concerning conversos in the Society of Jesus. Chapter 1 offers a superb introduction to the Spanish purity-of-blood statutes, summarizing the major contemporary texts for and against these laws. The second chapter makes a very strong case to prove that Loyola and the Jesuit leaders of the first generation were highly supportive of conversos within the society. Indeed, not only was Loyola's successor, the society's second superior general, Diego Laínez, a converso, but so were numerous highly influential Jesuits of that period: Juan Alfonso de Polanco, Loyola's trusted secretary, who might easily have been elected superior general over Mercurian; Jerónimo Nadal, Loyola's plenipotentiary emissary and trusted advisor; Pedro de Ribadeneyra, Loyola's hagiographer; and numerous others. Chapter 3 details the plot to limit or eliminate conversos within the society between 1573 and 1593, and chapter 4 presents the powerful anti-discrimination arguments made by leading Jesuits in this period.

The argument in each chapter is supported by copious quotations from primary sources, many of them unpublished and little-known. To a nonspecialist Maryks's expertise in this huge body of Jesuit literature is dazzling, and it is hard to imagine how he could be refuted. This is about as solid a piece of historical argumentation as I have ever seen.

Despite the detail and erudition of the text, Maryks keeps the story moving from one point to the next. The occasional strange or amusing anecdote helps as well. For example, Maryks tells of Giovanni Battista Eliano, converted grandson of the great Jewish grammarian Elia Levita, who was admitted to the society by Loyola in 1551, ordained, and sent on a delicate ecumenical mission to Cairo by Laínez. In Egypt, Eliano encountered his own mother, who lived there as a Jew and expressed her disgust with her son's conversion because "he was too educated and good to let

the Christians deceive him” (67). In another case, Diego Jiménez, secretary of Father Nadal, reports that when Nadal arrived for a mission in Avignon the local Jews offered him the position of their chief rabbi because of his mastery of Hebrew. A further bizarre incident involved a young converso student who was denied entry to a Jesuit school because of his ancestry. His relatives allegedly donned masks and attacked the Jesuit fathers at night, threatening to kill them if the young man was not admitted to the school.

The book opens up a plethora of questions and issues for further consideration. It is particularly interesting as a sort of microhistory of the interaction of racial, religious, national, and social factors in the early Society of Jesus. One wonders how much of the racial thinking involved came from earlier Iberian factors and how much grew out of the converso situation. The title of the book, taken from phrases used by King Philip II and by the Jesuit Paul Hoffaeus, raises another issue of long standing: What is the real significance of converso ancestry in a Jesuit or anyone else? Anti-converso propagandists consistently refer to conversos as Jews, but their status was in fact debated by both Jews and Christians. So, aside from the question of their reception in the society, is there anything meaningful that can be said about these converso descendants as a group? It seems to me there is not: the story is about the prejudices revealed by their status, and sometimes their individual personalities, rather than anything about being a converso.

This is a book for academics, and it is specialized, but it is an excellent and important work with implications that go far beyond its immediate topic.

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