

## Review: The Jesuit Order as a Synagogue of Jews

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### [The Jesuit Order as a Synagogue of Jews: Jesuits of Jewish Ancestry and Purity-of-Blood Laws in the Early Society of Jesus](#)

Robert Aleksander Maryks

Brill, 2010.

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### Part One

“Those from the circumcision subverted the entire house of the Society. As sons of this world who are shrewd in dealing with their own, and avid of new things, they easily excite disorders and destroy the unity of souls and their bond with the government.”

Lorenzo Maggio, Jesuit Curia in Rome, 1586.

One of the more interesting aspects of Jewish group behavior is the presence of subversive strategies employing crypsis, often facilitated by a combination of deception and self-deception. To date, the most forthright and convincing theoretical framework for understanding cryptic forms of Judaism is found in Kevin MacDonald's groundbreaking *Separation and Its Discontents: Toward an Evolutionary Theory of Anti-Semitism*. A substantial portion of the [fourth chapter](#) of the text (1998/2004: 121–132) is devoted to 'Reactive Racism in the Period of the Iberian Inquisitions.' Here MacDonald puts forth the view (147) that the blood purity struggles of the Spanish Inquisition during the 15th and 16th centuries should be seen as “an authoritarian, collectivist, and exclusionary movement that resulted from resource and reproductive competition with Jews, and particularly crypto-Jews posing as Christians.” The historical context lies predominantly in the forced conversion of Jews in Spain in 1391, after which these 'New Christians' or conversos assumed (or indeed retained) a dominance in the areas of law, finance, diplomacy, public administration, and a wide range of economic activities. MacDonald argues (148) that despite superficial religious conversions, the New Christians “must be considered a historical Jewish group” that acted in such a way as to continue the advance of its ethnic interests. An integral aspect of this was that Wealthy New Christians purchased and endowed ecclesiastical benefices for their children, with the result that many prelates were of Jewish descent.

Indirectly, and almost certainly unintentionally, MacDonald's arguments find much in the way of corroboration in *The Jesuit Order as a Synagogue of Jews* (2010) by Boston College's Robert

Aleksander Maryks. Examining the same geographical area during the same period, Maryks presents an account of the early years of the Society of Jesus, during which a fierce struggle took place for the soul, fate, and control of the Order; a struggle involving a highly influential crypto-Jewish bloc and a competing network of European Christians. In this unpolished but interesting book, Maryks illuminates this struggle with reference to previously undiscovered material, in the process shedding light on some of the most important recurring themes of reactive anti-Semitism: Jewish ethnocentrism, nepotism, the tendency to monopoly, and the strategic use of alliances with European elites. Perhaps most fascinating of all, Maryks makes significant reference to Jewish responses to European efforts to stifle their influence, some of which are remarkable in the close manner in which they parallel modern examples of Jewish apologetic propaganda. As such, *The Jesuit Order as a Synagogue of Jews* is highly recommended for anyone seeking to understand, via an easily-digested historical case study, the dynamics of the ethnic conflict between Jews and Europeans.

Maryks divides his text into four well-paced chapters. The first provides readers with 'The Historical Context of Purity-of-Blood Discrimination (1391–1547),' a detailed standalone introduction to the nature of the 'New Christian' problem in Iberia but which should be read in conjunction with MacDonald's work on the same theme. The second chapter concerns 'Early Jesuit Pro-Converso Policy (1540–72),' which demonstrates the intensive manner in which crypto-Jews infiltrated key positions in the Society of Jesus, adapting its ideological positions in accordance with their interests, and eventually establishing a monopoly on top positions that extended to the Vatican. The third chapter, 'Discrimination Against Jesuits of Jewish Lineage (1573–93),' concerns the establishment of a movement acting against the crypto-Jewish strategy, with an analysis of the key figures and their rationale. The fourth chapter, 'Jesuit Opposition to the Purity-of-Blood Discrimination (1576–1608),' examines the efforts of crypto-Jewish Jesuits to fight back against the European counter-strategy, often involving the employment of tactics and stances that are now familiar to us as the hallmarks of a Jewish intellectual movement.

This sequence parallels the processes that led to the Inquisition—New Christians establishing themselves in top positions in Spanish politics, business, and culture, provoking a reaction by the Old Christians aimed at regaining power, followed by Jewish counter efforts against the Inquisition and the against the Spanish government generally, the latter typically played out on the international scene.

One of the key strengths of this fascinating book is that Maryks can rely on relatively recent genealogical discoveries to prove beyond doubt that many of the individuals once merely "accused" of being crypto-Jews were undeniably of Jewish lineage. Maryks can thus cut through a clouded period in which ancestry was vital and yet fogged with accusations, denials, and counter-accusations, with tremendous clarity. In the author's words (xxix), "racial tensions played a pivotal role in early Jesuit history."

Opening his book, Maryks recalls delivering a paper on converso influence in the Jesuits, and afterwards receiving an email from a man with origins in the Iberian peninsula. The email concerned the remarkably long survival of crypto-Jewish behaviors in the sender's family:

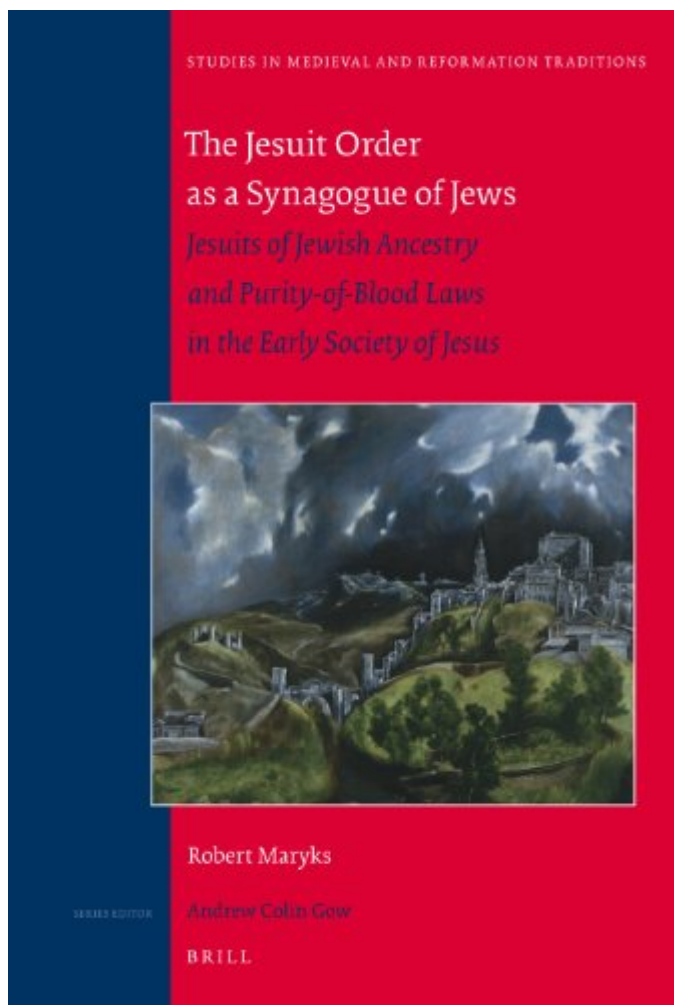
From Friday evening through Saturday evening, his grandfather would hide the image of baby Jesus from a large framed picture of St. Anthony that he kept in his home. It was, in fact, a wind-up music box. On Fridays he would wind up the mechanism and push a button, so that Jesus would disappear out of St. Anthony's arms, hidden in the upper frame of the picture. On Saturdays he would push the button, so that Jesus would come back out from

hiding into St. Anthony's arms. As eldest son in his family, my correspondent was told this story by his father, who also asked him to eat only kosher food. (xv)

The survival of such eccentric, and in this case apparently trivial, forms of crypto-Judaism into what one assumes to be the early twentieth century, might appear to be little more than a socio-historical curio. In actual fact, however, it is a small but memorable vestige of what was once a very powerful means of continuing the Jewish group evolutionary strategy in the Iberian peninsula after 1391 — an overwhelmingly hostile environment. In a political, religious, and social context devoid of the synagogue and many of the most visible aspects of Judaism, small reminders of group difference, even otherwise trivial ones like hiding images of Jesus or adhering to discreet dietary rules, became vital methods for retaining group cohesion.

For some time, these methods were largely successful in facilitating the continuance of Jewish life 'under the noses' of the Christian host society. During this successful period, conversos were able to expand nepotistic monopolies of influence in a wide range of civic and even (Christian) religious spheres. When it failed, however, the consequences could be catastrophic. Maryks points out (xxii) that from its founding in 1540 to 1593, the Society of Jesus had no discriminatory legislation against individuals of Jewish heritage, and that during this period converso Jesuits "held the highest administrative offices, and defined the Society's institutional development and spirituality." However, significant resistance to this crypto-Jewish monopoly had developed by the latter date, and from 1593 to 1608 a power struggle resulted in the defeat of the crypto-Jewish element and the introduction of laws prohibiting the admittance of members of 'impure blood.' From 1608 until 1946 this involved a review of the ancestry of any potential member of the Society of Jesus, up to the fifth generation.

### **The Jewish Origins of the Jesuits**



On 15 August 1534, Ignatius of Loyola (born Íñigo López de Loyola), a Spaniard from the Basque city of Loyola, and six others, all students at the [University of Paris](#), met in [Montmartre](#) outside Paris, in a crypt beneath the church of [Saint Denis](#), to pronounce the religious vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Ignatius' six companions were: Francis Xavier from Navarre (modern Spain), Alfonso Salmeron, Diego Laínez, Nicolás Bobadilla from Castile (modern Spain), Pierre Favre from Savoy, and Simão Rodrigues from Portugal. At this point they called themselves the *Compañía de Jesús*, and also *Amigos en El Señor* or "Friends in the Lord." The Spanish "company" would be translated into Latin as *societas*, deriving from *socius*, a partner or comrade. This soon evolved into the "Society of Jesus" (SJ) by which they would later be more widely known. In 1537, the seven travelled to Italy to seek papal approval for their order. Pope Paul III gave them a commendation, and permitted them to be ordained priests. The official founding of the Society of Jesus occurred in 1540.

The presence and influence of conversos in the Society of Jesus was strong from the beginning. Of the seven founding members, Maryks provides categorical evidence that four were of Jewish ancestry — Salmeron, Laínez, Bobadilla, and Rodrigues. In addition, Loyola himself has long been noted for his strong philo-Semitism, and one recent PhD thesis<sup>[1]</sup> has even advanced a convincing argument that Loyola's maternal grandparents, (his grandfather, Dr. Martín García de Licona, was a merchant and financial advisor at court), were full-blooded conversos — thus rendering the 'Basque nobleman' halachically Jewish. Jewish scholar of the Inquisition, Henry Kamen, who had earlier argued that the

Inquisition was “a weapon of social welfare” used mainly to obliterate the conversos as a distinct class capable of offering social and economic competition to ‘Old Christians,’ once voiced his own personal view that Loyola was “a deep and sincere spiritual Semite.”<sup>[2]</sup>

Straightforward assessments of the reasons for Loyola’s philo-Semitism are, as Maryks admirably elucidates, complicated by the ubiquitous presence of converso propaganda. More specifically, Loyola’s reputation as an ardent admirer of the Jews rests predominantly on a series of anecdotes and remarks attributed to him — and many of these derive from biographies penned shortly after his death by converso Jesuits aiming to promote and defend their interests. For example, the only source for the argument that Loyola had an overwhelming desire to be of Jewish origin so that he could “become a relative of Christ and his Mother” is the first official biography of Loyola — penned by the converso Pedro de Ribadeneyra. Ribadeneyra is described by Maryks as “a closet-converso” who distorted many now-established facts about Loyola’s life, including a concealment of the fact that “the Inquisition in Alcalá had accused Loyola of being a crypto-Jew.” (43) An important aspect of Ribadeneyra’s biography was thus the promotion of the idea that being Jewish was desirable and admirable — Loyola’s philo-Semitism (real or imagined) was intended to be emulated. Meanwhile the sinister aspects of crypto-Judaism, and their suppression by the Inquisition, were excised from the story altogether.

Whether Loyola was in fact a crypto-Jew, or whether he indeed was a European but possessed a strong desire to be a Jew, remains unconfirmed at time of this writing. However, it is certain that Loyola surrounded himself with many converso colleagues and that he opposed any discrimination against converso candidates within the Society of Jesus. Maryks argues that, issues of crypsis and philo-Semitism aside, Loyola was probably “motivated by the financial support that he had sought from their [converso] network in Spain.”(xx) In this reading then, Loyola was fully aware of the elite position of the conversos within Spanish society and was prepared to accept their money to establish his organization in exchange for adopting a non-racial stance in its governance.

The question of course remains as to why the crypto-Jewish elite in Spain would back, both financially and in terms of manpower, a Christian religious order. The important thing to keep in mind is that religion and politics in Early Modern Europe were intimately entwined, and that, through spiritual confraternities and their relationships with local elites, even poverty-espousing religious orders like the Franciscans could exert a strong form of socio-political influence. This was often made even more sharply evident when religious orders engaged in missionary work in foreign lands, often taking pioneering roles in colonial regimes, and even assisting with their economic enterprises. William Caferro notes that in Renaissance Italy “the Florentine political elite was closely tied to the church. Government officials often held high church office and benefice, which aided their local political power.”<sup>[3]</sup> Involvement in religious orders was thus a necessary aspect and extension of political, social, and cultural influence.

Unsurprisingly then, it can be demonstrated that crypto-Jews straddled the interconnected networks of royal administration, the civic bureaucracy, and the Church. Citing just some examples, Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh note in their history of the Inquisition:

In 1390 the rabbi of Burgos converted to Catholicism. He ended his life as Bishop of Burgos, Papal legate and tutor to a prince of the blood. [Burgos’s son would later become an important pro-converso activist and will be discussed below]. He was not alone. In some

of the major cities, the administration was dominated by prominent converso families. At the very time the Spanish Inquisition was formed, King Ferdinand's treasurer was converso in his background. In Aragón, the five highest administrative posts in the kingdom were occupied by conversos. In Castile, there were at least four converso bishops. Three of Queen Isabella's secretaries were conversos, as was the official court chronicler.<sup>[4]</sup>

For the crypto-Jewish elite of early modern Spain, the founding of an influential religious order headed by a philo-Semite (if not a fellow crypto-Jew), staffed predominantly by a converso leadership, and constitutionally tolerant of conversoapplicants, would undoubtedly have been an attractive prospect. That a bargain of some form existed between Loyola and his crypto-Jewish sponsors is suggested, as noted above, by the nature of the early Jesuit constitution and by early correspondence concerning the admission of candidates of Jewish ancestry. The founding of the Jesuit order had coincided with the rise of a more general Spanish anti-converso atmosphere that reached its peak in 1547, "when the most authoritative expression of the purity-of- blood legislation, El Estatuto de limpieza [*de sangre*], was issued by the Inquisitor General of Spain and Archbishop of Toledo, Silíceo (xx)." Pope Paul IV and Silíceo's former pupil, King Philip II, ratified the archbishop's statutes in 1555 and 1556, respectively, but Ignatius of Loyola and his converso successor, Diego Laínez (1512–65) vigorously opposed the Inquisitor's attempts to preclude conversos from joining the Jesuits. In fact, in a letter addressed to the Jesuit Francisco de Villanueva (1509–57), Loyola wrote that "in no way would the Jesuit Constitutions accept the policy of the archbishop (xxi)."

Seeking to quell rising tensions over the issue, in February 1554 Loyola sent his plenipotentiary emissary, Jerónimo Nadal (1507–80), to visit the Inquisitor. Nadal insisted that the Jesuit Constitutions did not discriminate between candidates of the Society on the basis of lineage, and even personally admitted a number of converso candidates during his visit to Iberia. In a heated debate with the Inquisitor over the admission of one of them, Nadal replied: "We [Jesuits] take pleasure in admitting those of Jewish ancestry." In what would become a striking pattern, most of the pro-converso arguments were made by crypto-Jews claiming to be native Spaniards. Maryks notes that his historical investigations suggest that Nadal was "most probably a descendant of Majorcan Jews (77)."

Jewish attempts to alter Christian thinking about Jews, from within Christianity, were already well-established by the date of Nadal's intercession with the Inquisitor. An excellent example is the classic work of Alonso de Santa María de Cartagena (1384–1456) — *Defensorium unitatis christianae* [*In Defense of Christian Unity*] (1449–50). Alonso de Cartagena had been baptized (at the age of five or six) by his father Shlomo ha-Levi, later renamed Pablo de Santa María (c. 1351–1435), who— as chief rabbi of Burgos—converted to Christianity just before the anti-Jewish riots of 1391 and later was elected bishop of Cartagena (1402) and Burgos (1415). The fact that the wife of this Bishop of Burgos remained an unconverted Jewess does not appear to have impeded the latter's career in the Church is interesting to say the least.

Meanwhile his son, Cartagena, like many other conversos, studied civil and ecclesiastical law at Salamanca and went on to a highly influential career straddling royal, civic, and religious spheres. He served as apostolic nuncio and canon in Burgos. King Juan II appointed Cartagena as his official envoy to the Council of Basel (1434–9), where he contributed to the formulation of a decree on "the regenerative character of baptism without regard for lineage (4)." Like other examples of pro-converso propaganda, however, Cartagena's arguments always went beyond mere appeals for 'tolerance.' According to Cartagena, "the faith appears to be more splendid in the Israelite flesh," Jews naturally



possess a “civic nobility,” and it was the duty of rough and uncouth native Spaniards to unite with the “tenderness of the Israelite meekness.” (14, 17)

Conversos thus emerge in the works of the earliest crypto-Jewish activists as more special than ordinary Christians, as naturally deserving of an elite status, and, far from being the worthy objects of hostility, were in fact uniquely blameless, ‘tender,’ and ‘meek.’ One is struck by the regular use of similar arguments in our contemporary environment, a similarity that only increases when one considers Cartagena’s attribution of anti-Jewish hostility solely to “the malice of the envious.” (20)

Against this backdrop of crypto-Jewish apologetics, Maryks demonstrates, whether he intends to or not, that the early Jesuits were largely a vehicle for converso power and influence (both political and ideological). Loyola continued to be “surrounded” by conversos throughout his leadership (55). Enrique Enríques, the son of Portuguese Jews, even authored the first Jesuit manual of moral theology, *Theologiae moralis summa*, in 1591. (65) Maryks describes Loyola as having an unlimited “trust” in candidates of Jewish heritage, citing his decision to “admit in 1551 Giovanni Battista Eliano (Romano), the grandson of the famous grammarian and poet Rabbi Elijah Levita (1468–1549) .... He entered the Society at the age of twenty-one, just three months after his baptism (66).”

In explaining Loyola’s lax requirements for converso applicants, and resultant acquiescence in flooding the Society with crypto-Jews, it is strange that Maryks should abandon his own prior suggestion that the founding of the Jesuits may have rested on a quid pro quo with the converso elite in favor of a less convincing theory based on a putative and ill-explained “trust” that Loyola possessed for Jews. Unfortunately this is a common theme throughout Jewish historiography, where the facts and conclusions presented in the same text are often on entirely different trajectories. In a similar vein, Maryks’s skeletal explanation that crypto-Jews flooded the Jesuits simply because Loyola had “numerous contacts with the converso spiritual and merchant network” before he founded the Society of Jesus, seems woefully inadequate and lacking in context.

Despite the best laid plans of Loyola and his colleagues, and just 32 years after its founding, the Society of Jesus would undergo a revolt from below against a rapidly expanding crypto-Jewish elite. The features of this revolt represent a fascinating case study in the reactive nature of anti-Semitism. Maryks narrative of how two competing ethnic groups struggled for the future of the Jesuit Order, outlined in his second and third chapters, is certainly the greatest strength of the text. It is to this European counter-strategy that we now turn our attention.

## Part Two

“Being children of this world, pompous, cunning, fake, self-seeking, etc., it is certain that they fit religious life very badly and that it is impossible to maintain union with them. If those of this blood are made superiors, they employ almost all their government in external things: they promote genuine mortification and solid virtues very little, and seem to be merchants, seeking first seats and being called rabbis; they are hardly eager to seek perfection that is described in the parts 5 and 6 of the Constitutions; and readily admit others of the same blood who are very unworthy.”

Manuel Rodrigues, Jesuit curia in Rome.

## The Racial Struggle for the Jesuit Order





## Everard Mercurian (1514-1580)

The complaints of native Spanish members of the Society of Jesus, regarding the crypto-Jewish Jesuit elite, are remarkably uniform. Predominant among their concerns was the Jewish tendency towards monopoly, nepotism, arrogance, aggressive ambition, and an air of insincerity in the practice of Christianity. Of particular concern was the fact that the Spanish Jesuit Order was becoming an exclusive enclave of influential Jews that stretched out even into the heart of Rome.

The epigraph above, from Manuel Rodrigues, highlights all of these themes, some of which have been empirically demonstrated. For example, the body of research compiled by Maryks and other scholars, and discussed in Part 1, more than provides sufficient evidence in support of the accusation that crypto-Jews were “readily admitting others of the same blood.” Moreover, Benedetto Palmio, an Italian assistant to two native European Jesuit Superior Generals (Francisco de Borja and Everard Mercurian), complained of the “multitude and insolence of Spanish neophytes,” whom he described as a “pestilence (133).” Stressing that “where a New Christian was found, it was impossible to live in peace,” he added that “those who governed in Rome were almost all neophytes. ... This sort of people and almost no other were being admitted in Spain (133).” King Phillip II of Spain had by the 1570s taken to describing the Jesuits as a “Synagogue of Hebrews.” (133)

The method of leadership employed by this crypto-Jewish elite was further described by Palmio as despotic. The crypto-Jewish elite in Rome was behaving “not as fathers but as masters (135).” Reflecting age-old Jewish ethnic networking, there were gross ethnic disparities in promotions to high office, with Palmio stressing that “the neophytes want to dominate everywhere and this is why the Society is agitated by the tempest of discords and acrimonies (138).” Conversos were “overly ambitious, insolent, Janus-faced, pretentious, despotic, astute, terrible, greedy for power, and infamous.” (142) Lorenzo Maggio, an Italian Jesuit curia in Rome, complained that “those from the circumcision subverted the entire house of the Society.” (117)

Regardless of the actual origins of the Jesuit Order, which were heavily Jewish and intertwined with the search for political influence from the beginning, many native European members seem to have perceived the Society of Jesus as an essentially good religious movement that had been founded on idealist and pious terms, but had been corrupted along the way by the infiltration of power-seeking crypto-Jews. It is of course essential to note that such perceptions were not unique to the Society of Jesus. Around the same time that agitation was building within the Jesuit Order, Bishop [Diego de Simancas](#) of Zamora urged his parishioners to combat the machinations of the conversos and their activities in “deceiving the pope and his ministers (31).” Simancas, like Rodrigues, Palmio, and Hoffaeus, concluded that conversos were prone to “ambition, conspiracy, and greed for power” as demonstrated by the fact they had “infiltrated the offices of importance in the Church of Toledo.” (34–5)

In order to combat crypto-Jewish nepotism and extensive ethnic networking, native European Jesuits developed very interesting counter-strategies that in many respects mirrored their Jewish counterparts. Again, the patterns seen here should be regarded as broadly supportive of Kevin MacDonald's analysis of the reactive nature of anti-Semitism in *Separation and Its Discontents*, where one of the [key chapters concerns National Socialism as a mirror image strategy](#). What non-Jewish Jesuits essentially did in the early stages of the revolt from below, was, like their crypto-Jewish opponents, to establish their own secretive networks based on racial exclusion, and the selection of their own preferred candidates based on ethnic preference.

The stage for this clash was set following the death of the third Superior General, Francisco de Borja, in 1572. Until this date, non-Jewish Jesuits had endured the philo-Semitic leadership of Loyola and the rampant ethnic nepotism of the converso Diego Laínez. Borja was himself described as a "protector of conversos" during periods of rising tension (115). After Borja's death, it was readily apparent that the crypto-Jewish Jesuit elite had already contrived to select the converso Juan Alphonse de Polanco as his successor. (xxv) Polanco had already been appointed Society secretary by Loyola in 1547, before becoming senior administrator in the general curia in Rome. Incredibly influential, and "the most prominent figure in the Society of Jesus," his selection should have been "open and shut." However, as Maryks discusses, by this date "a close-knit anti-converso party [composed mainly of the Jesuit representatives from outside Spain] gained ground within the society." (xxv)

In spite of the significant pro-converso presence at General Congregation 3 [General Congregations are "the [supreme legislative body](#) of the Society of Jesus consisting of major ('provincial') superiors and locally elected representatives"], the close-knit Italo-Portuguese lobby gained ground in the assembly and was crafty enough to successfully conspire against Polanco's election and his pro-converso supporters. (120)

As well as forming a close-knit group based on ethnicity, the counter-strategy mirrored Jewish tactics by appealing for support from elites. The Portuguese delegation led by Leão Henriques "secretly carried to Rome a letter that Henriques's penitent, Cardinal Infant Henry of Portugal (1512–80), had written to Pope Gregory XIII on 22 January 1573. In it, the Grand Inquisitor of Portugal and future king (1578–80) demanded that neither a converso nor a pro-converso candidate be elected superior general of the Society of Jesus, and he warned that if no measure against the converso evil is taken, the Society would risk destruction." (121)

Pope Gregory XIII soon disclosed his support for a non-Spanish alternative to Polanco, who, in turn, indicated that he would step aside but refused to prohibit other “Spanish” candidates from being elected superior general. After the congregation opened, Gregory XIII inquired about the procedures of the congregation, about the number of Spaniards among the voters, and about the national background of the previous superiors general. Gregory “remarked that somebody should be chosen from a nation other than Spain, and, in spite of Polanco’s protest against limiting freedom of conscience of the electors, the pope specifically suggested the name of the Walloon Everard Mercurian, then dismissed the delegation with his blessing (122).” Consequently, while the converso Antonio Possevino was “addressing the congregation with an opening discourse, Cardinal Gallio of Como arrived and informed the congregation that he was representing the pope’s will to prevent the election of any Spanish candidate.” (122) The next day the assembly chose Everard Mercurian as the next superior general on the first ballot by a majority of 27 votes.

From the very first years of his office Mercurian proceeded, in his own words, to “cleanse the house.” He “removed from Rome (and possibly from Italy or even Europe) many converso Jesuits.” (123) Polanco, after almost three decades in office, “was moved away from Rome and sent to Sicily, a measure that seemed too harsh even to his major enemy, Benedetto Palmio.” (123)

However, in the aftermath of the removal of crypto-Jews from influence throughout the upper echelons of the Society of Jesus, a new movement emerged within the Spanish Jesuits called the memorialistas or memorialists. The group got its name from ‘memorial,’ which was a literary genre consisting of a written statement of facts presented in conjunction with a petition to a royal or religious authority. The memorialistas gained their name by sending “secret memorials to the Spanish Court and Inquisition, and the Holy See, asking for the reform of the Jesuit Institute, and, especially, for the autonomy of the Spanish Jesuit provinces.” (125–6) These memorials were highly divisive and destructive, seeking essentially to fracture the Society and to allow the conversos to recoup their power base in Spain.

This movement was little more than a damage-limitation exercise by the crypto-Jewish elite. Ousted from Rome, and suspected by the Portuguese, the goal was to consolidate their power in Spain and prevent further anti-converso measures from encroaching on their long-held power positions. As Maryks points out, “it must be admitted that many of its members, if not the majority, were of converso background.” (125) The memorialist movement was certainly widely perceived by contemporaries as a Jewish revenge movement, and Maryks clearly agrees with this perception. One of their key leaders was the converso Dionisio Vázquez, and Maryks remarks that “one could argue that Vázquez’s active role in the memorialistas movement was a sort of revenge for the discriminatory policy of Mercurian.” (126).” The anti-converso Benedetto Palmio “never doubted that conversos were behind the vindictive memorialistas movement.” (128)

As the struggle began to intensify, in 1581 another Italian anti-converso, Claudio Acquaviva, was elected as Mercurian’s successor. Acquaviva appointed a number of leading anti-converso Jesuits (including Manuel Rodrigues, Lorenzo Maggio, and the Rhinelander Paul Hoffaeus) to key positions in Rome, tasked with extending the anti-converso measures employed by Mercurian beyond the Roman power structure and into the wider Jesuit network. Maryks writes that the decade-long activities of Hoffaeus, Maggio, and Rodrigues, “effectively led to gradual restrictions in the admission into the Society of candidates of Jewish ancestry.” (146)

It is particularly interesting that much of this activity was carried out in a cryptic and secretive manner in

which the ethnic aspect of the struggle was always kept just out of view — again mirroring the nature of the converso strategies to gain and extend influence. For example, in 1590 Acquaviva sent “secret instructions” to Spanish provincials operated by native Spanish, or ‘Old Christian,’ Jesuits in which he made clear the necessity of secrecy:

In regards to the offices of government, we should be careful not to give them to these people [conversos] in certain key places.... In what regards the admission of this people in order not to give occasion of bitterness to many in the Society, we have judged to be inappropriate to prohibit universally the admission of those who somehow have this defect. It is necessary to use more selectivity and diligence in the admission.... At any rate, [genealogical investigations] should be done quietly and when somebody has to be excluded, it would be convenient to give some other apparent causes and reasons for his dismissal, so that it could not be understood or affirmed with certainty that a person is barred from admission because of his lineage (147).

Faced with bitter responses from within the Spanish Jesuit Order, a few years later Acquaviva’s stance had hardened further, prompting him to issue a decree that those

who are descendants from parents who are recent Christians, routinely and habitually inflicted a great deal of hindrance and harm on the Society (as has become clear from our daily experience)...The entire congregation then decided to decree, as is affirmed by this present decree, that in no case may anyone of this sort, that is to say, one of Hebrew or Saracen stock, be admitted to the Society in the future. And if by error any such person is admitted, he should be dismissed as soon as the impediment is revealed, at whatever time before profession this occurs, after first notifying the superior general and awaiting his reply. (149)

Maryks states that at this point “the lineage-hunting season began,” and the removal of all persons of Jewish ancestry from the Society of Jesus commenced in earnest.

### **Early Modern Jewish Apologetics**

Defeated and marginalized, the crypto-Jewish elite turned to issuing a long series of memorials that in many respects resemble prototypes of modern Jewish apologetics/propaganda of the kind issued by the ADL. For example, in a previous [essay](#) I noted the importance of the modern tactic of rhetorically displacing ‘foreignness’ away from Jews and onto the hostile movement itself:

Jews have regularly relied upon a fall-back tactic of presenting the troublesome movement as a foreign import...An excellent example of this, of course, would be Hillary Clinton’s ludicrous claim that the Alt Right has somehow been spawned by Putin’s Russia. Since most of her speech originated with the SPLC, we may assume that this particular accusation may be traced to a Hebraic hand. Another bizarre theory of the Alt Right’s foreign origins originating with the SPLC: Mark Potok has weighed in with the strange [contention](#) that the Alt Right “began as an anti-Muslim movement in Europe and has been



spreading in this country since about 2008.”

And the list goes on. UK-based Jewish journalist Jonathan Freedland, who has a [long history](#) of activism against Whites, has penned an [article](#) titled “Donald Trump’s achilles heel is that he is truly un-American.” Freedland argues that America’s founding principle is “the belief that national identity did not reside in blood or soil, but in loyalty to the nation’s constitution and its bill of rights”—a clear indication that he has little acquaintance with [American history](#). He continues that, “these moves by Trump are not just reactionary or bigoted or dangerous. They contradict the ideals that all Americans are meant to regard as sacred. Perhaps this is the way to attack Trump: as truly un-American. He says he wants to make America great again. The truth is, he would stop America being America.”

Further Jewish participants in the effort to portray Trump as un-American include but are not limited to: the [editorial board](#) of the Washington Post led by the Jewish Martin Baron; the Jewish journalist [Franklin Foer](#); and Jewish talk show host [Jerry Springer](#). Jewish businessman [Josh Tetrick](#) also [purchased a number of expensive full-page ad spaces](#) in the New York Times aimed at pushing the ‘Trump as un-American’ meme...In all cases, both Trumpism and the Alt Right are portrayed by Jews as a foreign incursion into American political life. As with other tactics, these have a long lineage. Kevin MacDonald writes that “Jewish organizations in Germany in the period 1870–1914 argued that anti-Semitism was a threat to all of Germany because it was fundamentally ‘un-German.’”<sup>[5]</sup> In nineteenth-century Germany, anti-Semitism was often described by Jews as a French import. Conversely, Paula Hyman writes that, faced with a rise in anti-Jewish feeling in nineteenth-century France, Jews spread the message that anti-Semitism was “un-French” and a “German import.”<sup>[6]</sup> Thorsten Wagner reports that it was a common refrain among Jews in Denmark that anti-Semitism there was “a German import — without autochthonous roots and traditions.”<sup>[7]</sup>

There are countless more examples from countless other countries. The tactic therefore relies on convincing the population that Jews are not the foreign threat but rather that it is the growing volkisch movement that is the foreign entity threatening the nation. Although it’s an absurdly perverse claim, and hard to imagine as being successful, Jews are able to spread the message because of their superior media and political power (as seen with Tetrick’s efforts). This power has ensured that portrayals of nationalist movements as ‘foreign’ have been tactically effective in the past.

Crypto-Jewish Jesuit responses to the European counter-strategy are strikingly similar to these modern instances in that they also heavily relied on attempts to displace the sense of foreign threat away from themselves and onto the movement hostile to their interests. For example, the most ferocious and prolific written responses to the ousting of the conversos were penned by the converso and high-ranking Italian diplomat Antonio Possevino, who had been removed from office by Mercurian and sent to remote Sweden. Isolated and powerless in the cold north, Possevino declared that it was figures like Benedetto Palmio who were truly ‘un-Christian’ and in fact little more than “pagans (164–5).” Remarkably, and with much chutzpah, Possevino attributed all of the disruption within the Society of Jesus to the “overweening ambition of the Portuguese Jesuits (171–2).” Possevino blatantly lied in his propaganda about the nature of the memorialistas, suggesting the movement was part of a “Portuguese conspiracy” to undermine Jesuit unity (171–2). Maryks comments bluntly on Possevino’s

text that the majority of memorialists were in fact “undeniably conversos.” (172) Finally, Possevino’s apologetics also contain another aspect that prefigures modern propaganda — the idea that Jews are a natural and moral elite, typically combined with contempt for the rural masses. Possevino blamed “envious and talentless men from poor, rural backgrounds” (168) for the agitation against the conversos, while asserting that “in terms of their virtue and dedication, [conversos] represent an elite within the Society.” (172)

## Conclusion

The Jesuit Order as a Synagogue of Jews is an important contribution to the study of religion and ethnic conflict in early modern Spain. Although not suited for beginners to any of the themes under discussion, the book is concise, and its four chapters are filled with new information sure to fascinate the reader with some prior knowledge of the Jesuits, Spanish history, or the Jewish Question in Europe.

My only real criticisms rest on matters of style and structure. Maryks’ writing style is often mechanical, and one sometimes feels that, while the material lends itself to a dramatic narrative, that potential is lost amid bland observations and repetitive recourse to lamenting the “bias” and “discrimination” of the “Old Christians.” Certainly this is a book in which the facts, rather than the author’s analysis, lead the way. As regards structure, the text has an irritating habit of repetition, particularly in terms of persistently re-introducing characters we would already be familiar with. I found this especially disappointing because of a normally high quality of editing from Brill.

These minor irritations aside, The Jesuit Order as a Synagogue of Jews was a page-turner. Perhaps best of all, it’s now been made available to [download](#) for free as part of Brill’s open source initiative. Enjoy.

## References

- [1] See Kevin Ingram, Secret lives, public lies: The conversos and socio-religious non-conformism in the Spanish Golden Age. Ph.D. Thesis (San Diego: University of California, 2006), pp. 87–8.
  - [2] Quoted in Maryks, The Jesuit Order as a Synagogue of Jews, p.xx.
  - [3] W. Caferro, Contesting the Renaissance (Oxford:Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p.158.
  - [4] M. Baigent & R. Leigh, The Inquisition (London: Viking Press, 1999), pp.75-6.
  - [5] K. MacDonald, Separation and Its Discontents: Toward and Evolutionary Theory of Anti-Semitism (1st Books, 2004), 232.
  - [6] A. Lindemann & R. Levy (eds.), Antisemitism: A History (Oxford University Press, 2010), 136.
  - [7] T. Wagner, ‘Belated Heroism: The Danish Lutheran Church and the Jews, 1918-1945,’ in K. Spicer (ed), Antisemitism, Christian Ambivalence, and the Holocaust (Indiana University Press, 2007), 7.
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