

Jewish-Christian Relations: Encounters Past and Present

Jews and Christians
during the Middle Ages

Introduction

- It was a relatively peaceful period between 600 to 1000 CE; the rights of Jews were protected.
- During 10th-16th centuries Christians present a more united front.
- Jews were 'the other group'; they were expelled from many parts of Europe (including England in 1290 CE).
- Deterioration in attitudes towards the Jews:
 - prohibition by local authorities
 - closing of synagogues
 - enforced baptism; burning of the Talmud.

Introduction

Fourth Lateran Council (1215 CE) under the leadership of Pope Innocent III:

- Jews were prohibited from appearing publicly during the feast of Passover (especially during Good Friday)
- Jews were expected to wear distinctive clothing.

‘God made Cain a wanderer and a fugitive on earth, but he placed a mark on him, which made his head shake, in order to prevent people from approaching him in order to kill him. However, even though one should not kill the Jews for shedding the blood of Jesus Christ... they must wander the earth until they are filled with shame and are prepared to call on the name of Jesus Christ the Lord’ (Innocent III).

‘The Clothing of the Jew’

Jewish
moneylenders
(France): peaked
hat and a circle of
red/yellow cloth
sown on the cloak.



Jewish Hat - Judenhüte 1493



Jewish Hat -
Regensburg
Bible, around
1300 CE



Christian Attitudes towards the Jews

- Christians preach among the Jews in order to persuade them to accept baptism.
- Popular method among the orders of the Franciscans and the Dominicans.
- The official policy of the Church in Rome for six centuries (banned by Pope Pius IX in 1848).

Christian Attitudes towards the Jews

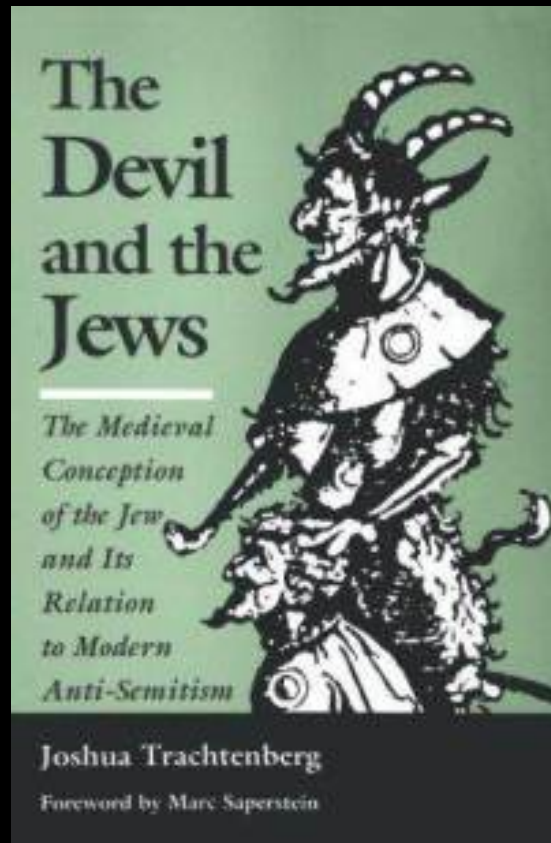
- Public disagreements between Christian theologians and Jewish rabbis.
- Paris (1240), Barcelona (1263) and Tortosa (1413-1414) – trials before priests and the aristocracy.
- Christian witnesses - Jews who had been baptized, such as Pablo Christiani (Barcelona 1263).
- Defenders of Judaism included Nahmanides (1194-1270, Barcelona 1263) and Joseph Albo (1380-1430).
- Nahmanides fled to Palestine as a result of these conflicts.
- Because of disagreements in Tortosa baptism was forced on 3000 Jews.

Accusations against the Jews

- Link to the Antichrist (cf. Book of Revelation)
- The demonic and satanic Jew
- Emphasis on the Jews as 'the children of Satan' (cf. John 8:44).
- Reference to 'the Jewish stench' (*foetor judaicus*), claiming that it made it easy to recognize Jews.

Medieval manuscript from Germany: Jews burning in hell; on the cauldron is the word 'Juda' (Jews):





Accusations against the Jews

Medieval art

Ritual Murder - 'Blood Libel'

- Chronicles of the period include a myth claiming that Jews killed young Christian boys and used their blood in ritual preparation for Passover *matzah* (unleavened bread) in order to parody the crucifixion.
- The idea can be traced to the association between the Jew and the Antichrist.
- According to Josephus, Antiochus Epiphanes (175-164 BCE) was told that Jews sacrificed young men in the Temple.

William of Norwich

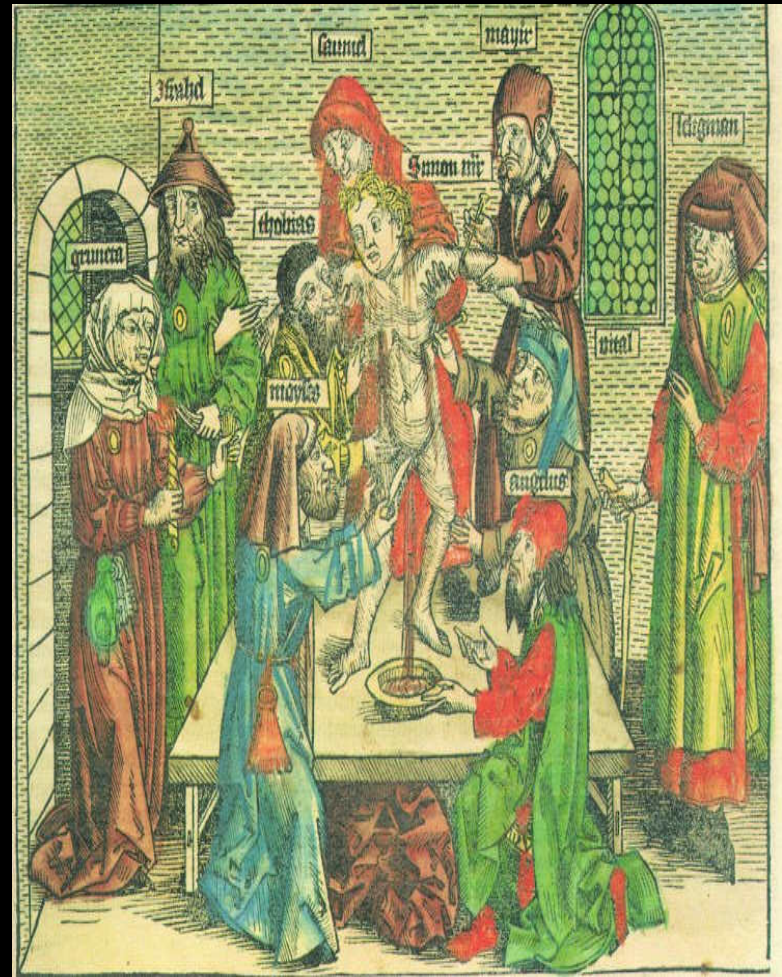
- The body of a twelve-year old boy was discovered in 1144 CE; his uncle blamed the Jews of the city of Norwich.
- Thomas of Monmouth later wrote about William (1150 CE): about his suffering and the miracles around his grave.
- William's grave became the site for pilgrimage.



Hugh of Lincoln

- A similar case in Lincoln (1255) regarding Saint Hugh the Small. It was said that he had been imprisoned, tortured, and killed by the Jews of the city.
- 18 Jews were killed as a result of the events in Lincoln.
- Jews were expelled from England in 1270 CE.





Ritual Murder
William of Norwich and Simon of Trent



Ecclesia and Synagoga

Relationship between Judaism and Christianity.

The victorious Church and the vanquished synagogue.

The pride of Ecclesia and the blindness of Synagoga (cf. the dim eyes of Leah in Gen. 29:17).

The synagogue cannot see the light of Christ.

Her crown has fallen and her rod has broken.



Ecclesia and Synagoga



Condemnation of the Jewish Talmud

- A list of accusations brought against the Talmud by the former Jew Nicholas of Donin (1240):
 - Blasphemous statements against Jesus
 - Hatred against Gentiles.
- Pope Gregory IX called for copies of the Talmud to be confiscated.
- The King of France (Louis IX, 1226-1270) burns Jewish commentaries in Paris (1242).

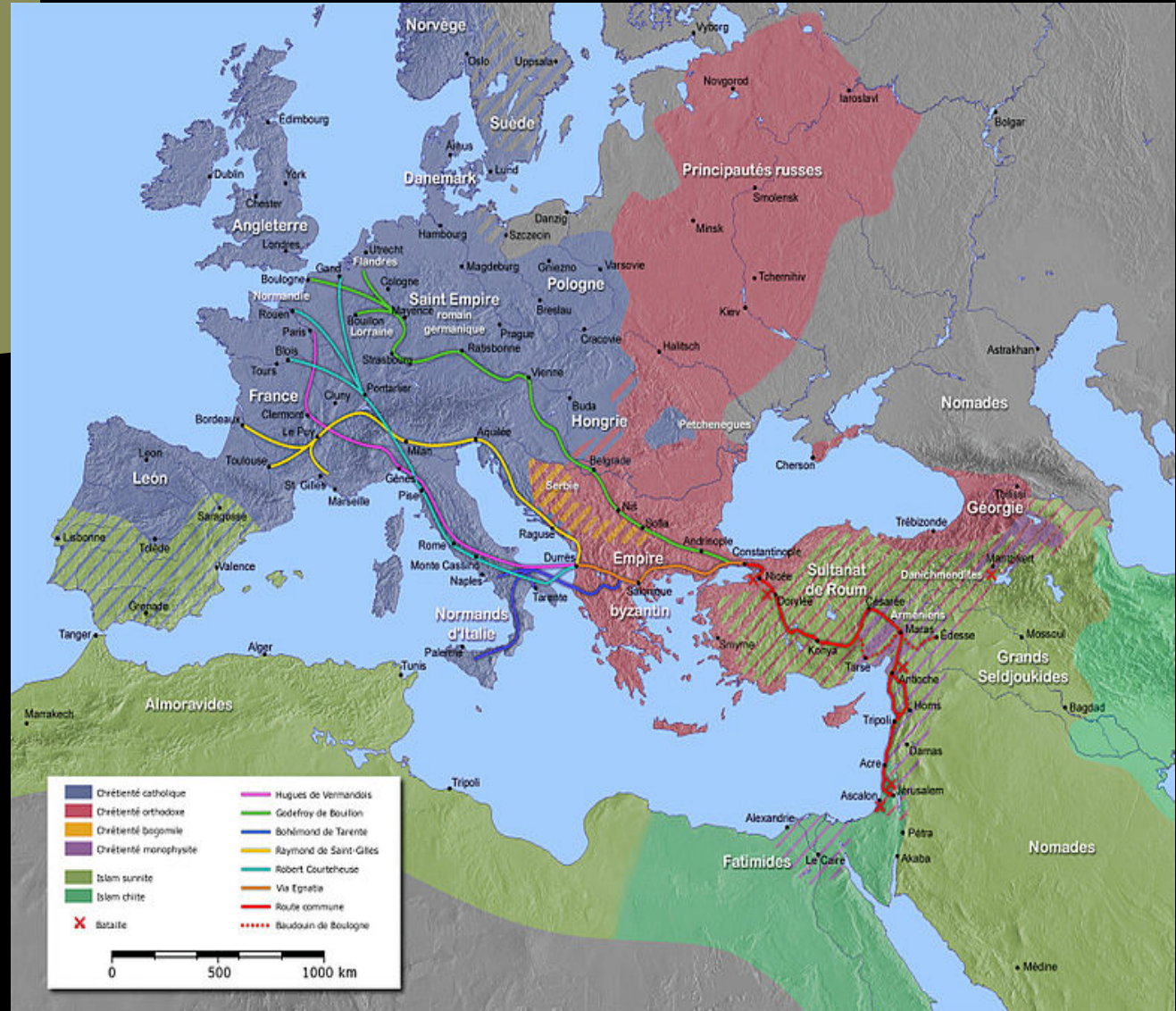


Jews and Ursury

- Claiming interest following loans.
- Third Lateran Council (1179 CE) calls for moneylenders to be expelled.
- The need for business in the commercial world and yet a way of turning the Jews into figures of hatred.



The Crusades



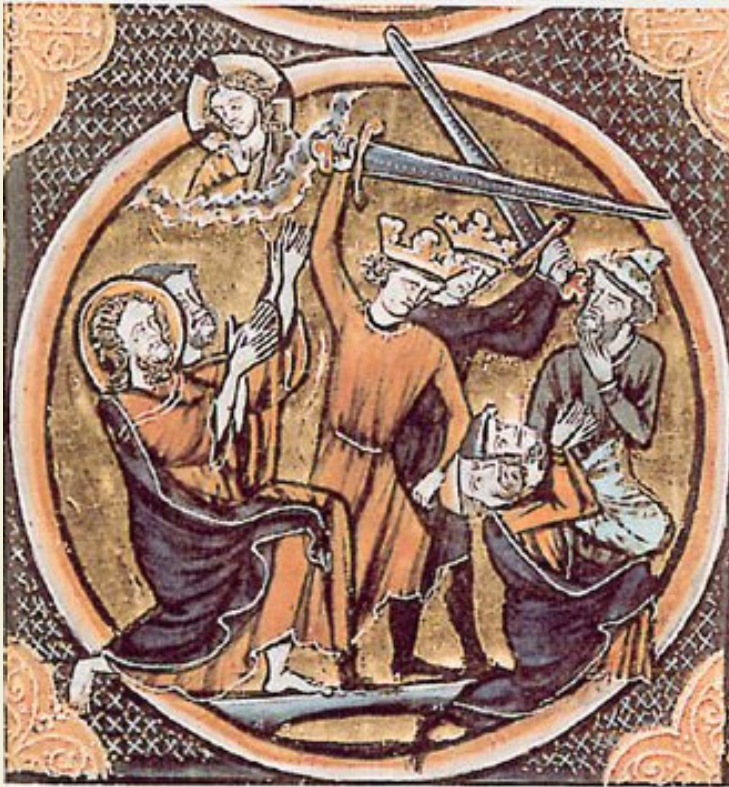
The Wars of the Cross

- Emphasis on relics and sacred places; pilgrimages to Jerusalem became increasingly important.
- Fierce conflict between the Church and Islam.
- First Crusade in 1095 CE announced by Pope Urban II – followed by an armed pilgrimage to the East to claim Jerusalem from Muslims.
- The second (1146 CE) and third (1190 CE) Crusade – an attempt to regain the successes of the first.
- Rhetorical preaching against the unbelief of the Jews: emphasis on their inability to practice reason and stubborn unbelief.

Carnage against the Jews

- Many Jews (around 10,000) are killed in Germany, in cities such as Worms and Mainz, between May and July 1096 CE.
- Others were forced to accept baptism or to die as martyrs through suicide (*kiddush ha-Shem* – sanctification of God's name).
- Many Christians (including baptized Jews) sought to give refuge to the Jews.
- During the third Crusade the Jews of York were killed (1190 CE).

Jewish Deaths during the First Crusade (1096 CE)



Why target the Jews?

- A link forged between the call to reclaim Palestine and to seek justice by persecuting those who had been responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus.
- The enemy at hand was targeted (Jews of Europe) before turning to the enemy at a distance (Moslems in Palestine).
- Economic factors: the need for military goods; a call for the Jews to help finance the Crusades?
- Targeting of those who had lent money with high interest (people in permanent debt to the Jews).



Jews and the Black Death

- A period of immense violence against the Jews.
- The Black Death (1346-61) – Jews were accused of poisoning wells and causing the death of a third of the population of Europe (25 million).
- The plague, it was claimed, was the responsibility of the children of Satan.
- The persecution of Jews in Europe, under the leadership of monks, priests and itinerant brothers.
- Pope Clement VI (1342-52) sought to defend the Jews: ‘Let no Christian harm or kill a Jew or seek to steal their possessions’.



Persecution in the region
of the Rhine (Frankfurt,
Mainz, Cologne)

Jews and the Black Death

Expulsion of the Jews

- The Jews of England were expelled in 1290 CE, even though Edward made use of them as a financial source (especially during the Crusades).
- Because they refused to convert to Christianity and the reduction in their financial contributions, they were expelled from the country.
- Some countries expelled the Jews and then allowed them to return (e.g., France in 1306).
- Other countries welcomed the Jews (Italy, Poland).

Jewish Polemic against Christianity

- *Toledot Yeshu* – a parody of the Gospels (10th century).
- *The Alphabet of Ben Sira* – the miraculous birth of Ben Sira as a parody of the life of Jesus (in order to belittle Christian belief in the virginal conception of Jesus).
- This kind of literature flourished in particular in Islamic countries.

Maimonides



- Christianity (different from Islam) was tantamount to idolatry.
- In the Mishneh Torah, Maimonides states: Christian belief in Jesus as the Messiah is pure speculation.
- However, both Christianity and Islam ensure that knowledge of God and the Scriptures extend throughout the world.

Points of Contact: Exegesis

- Four senses of Scripture in Judaism and Christianity:
 - historical (events) – *peshat* (simple)
 - ethical (instruction on behaviour) – *derash* (homiletical application)
 - allegorical (symbolic interpretation) – *remez* (philosophical allegory)
 - corresponding (mystical) – *sod* (mystical symbol)

Points of Contact: Mysticism

The development of mysticism among Jews in Germany.

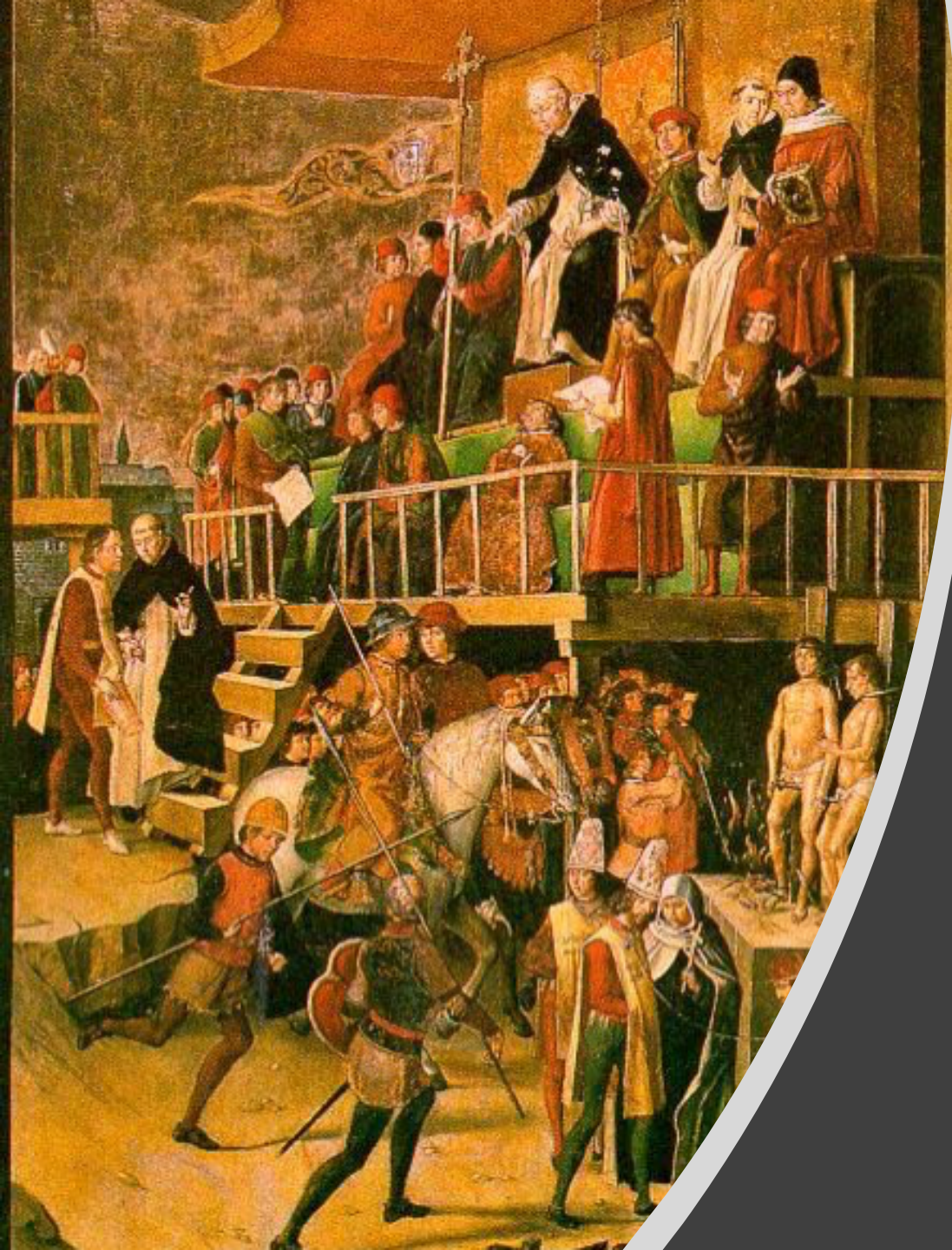
Growth of Kabbalah in France and Spain.

Christian influence?

Shekhinah and Mary (the feminine dimension of God).

The Zohar: portrayal of the Messiah as the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53)





The Inquisition

The Inquisition in Spain

- A period of *convivencia* ('living in accord') between Jews, Christians and Moslems in Spain between the tenth and twelfth centuries.
- Spain was regarded as the 'Second Judaea' of the Jews.
- The situation deteriorates when the Berberim of Morocco begin to rule Spain (12th century).
- Jews were forced to listen to preachers tasked to convert them to Christianity.
- Accusations of stealing the bread on the altar, slaughter of children, poisoning of wells.
- Persecution in 1391 (thousands of Jews killed in Spain, 4000 in Seville alone).

The Inquisition

- Origins: targeting of heretical groups in France. Shift of focus/interest to the Jews.
- Jews were called *conversos* (under compulsion) to be separated from 'the old Christians' (believers of Christian descent).
- The Inquisition sought out false believers.

Appeal to the Royal Court

- Nahmanides is summoned before James 1 (1263) to defend Judaism against the argument that the Messiah had already come. Nahmanides is forced to leave Spain.
- Hasdai Crescas (1340-1410) appears, as the representative of the Jews, before the court of the kings of Aragon.
- Crescas sought to restore the rights of the Jews in Catalonia after 1391.

Expulsion of the Jews from Spain

Ferdinand the Catholic (1452-1516) and his cousin Isabella expel all Jews from their lands (Aragon and Castile) in 1492 CE, in an attempt to restore Christian identity for Spain.

The Jews do their utmost to lead new Christians and their children astray by giving them Jewish prayer books, teaching them about Jewish festivals, giving them unleavened bread for Passover, instructing them about forbidden foods, and compelling them to follow the Law of Moses. As a result, our Catholic faith is being degraded. The only solution is to breach all links between Jews and Christians once and for all (Law of 1492)





Expulsion of the Jews