
Syds Wiersma
(Faculty of Catholic Theology, Tilburg University, The Netherlands)

INTRODUCTION

Marcelo Dascal and others have recently pointed out the important internal function of religious polemics. According to Dascal, polemical confrontations are a primary source for understanding doctrine. It is in ‘such confrontations that it takes shape, sharpens itself and clarifies for itself its content’ (Dascal 2004, 18). An interesting part of a polemical process of doctrinal clarification is the possible inclusion of elements of the adversary’s position in the faith system of the polemicist. When polemics bear an outspokenly missionary component, it would seem that this contaminative aspect of polemics is less significant. After all, the main goal of the missionary is to persuade his addressee of the inadequacy of his faith and to offer him the superior alternative. But the case presented in this paper shows how a missionary may become inspired by his opponent’s arguments, so that an innovative power enters the articulation of his faith. What starts as missionary strategy leads to a process of learning and inclusion, no matter how exclusive the missionary goals are. The conflict between demonstration of one’s own truth and the confrontation with ‘foreign’ truth elements causes an extraordinary dynamic which shows that missionary polemics, even if they are medieval as is the case in the following example, are a fruitful source for the study of interreligious interaction and the history of doctrine.

It is well known that the young Dominican movement showed a great willingness to study the beliefs and practices of Christian heresies and foreign religions on behalf of the missionary work. In the course of the thirteenth century, the order founded ‘language schools’ (studia linguarum) in some of their convents laying at or over the edge of Latin Christianity in Spain, North Africa, Greece, and the Holy Land. It should be noted that the term ‘language school’ is a pars pro toto here. Not only the language of the target group was studied but also its religion and beliefs, especially its holy books and tradition. The ‘errors’ of
Greeks, Saracens, and Jews were mapped and refuted in study manuals. These could have a more general apologetic character, such as the *Summa contra Gentiles* (1260s) of Thomas Aquinas, or one more specifically polemical, such as the *Pugio fidei* (ca. 1278) of Raymond Martin. Raymond was the most prolific student which the Spanish language schools brought forth.¹ He was one of the eight friars who were sent by the Spanish Provincial Chapter of 1250 to a *studium arabicum*, probably located in Tunis. Dominican chroniclers have ascribed to him several works written against Islam, not all of which are traced. He is the author of the *Explanatio simboli apostolorum* (ca. 1257) and probably also of the anonymous *De seta Machometi* (1250s).² In the 1260s and 1270s he seems to have shifted his attention to Judaism. Immediately after the famous disputation of Barcelona between the Dominican friar Paul Christian and Rabbi Moses ben Nahman (1263), a royal Aragonese committee for the censorship of Jewish literature was installed. Raymond became a member of it in 1264.³ This resulted in two study and preaching manuals directed against Judaism: the *Capistrum Iudaeorum* (ca. 1267)⁴ and the *Pugio fidei*.⁵ In 1281, the Provincial Chapter mentioned him as lecturer at the *studium hebraicum* in Barcelona.

In this paper I want to show how the missionary method employed by Raymond resulted in a process of learning and incorporating from Jews and Judaism. Though Raymond certainly was not a ‘judaizer’—on the contrary, he reproached judaizing Christians repeatedly and severely—and his approach was paradigmatic for the increasing anti-

¹ Useful, recent introductions to Raymond’s life and work can be found in e.g.: Willi-Plein (1980), Cohen (1982), Chazan (1983; 1989), Robles Sierra (1990).

² An edition of the *Explanatio* was published by March (1908), of the *De Seta* (also known as *De origine, progressu et fine Machometi et quadruplici reprobatione prophetiae eius*, or abbreviated, *Quadruplex Reprobatio*) by Hernando (1983). Hernando argues that Raymond was the author of the work.

³ For the text of the royal edicts regarding the committee, see Denifle (1887, 236–237, #5; 238–239, #7); for a commentary on the edicts, see Chazan (1992, 90–92).


⁵ The *Pugio* was published in 1651 (Paris) and 1687 (Leipzig). The edition of 1687, published and introduced by J. Carpzov, was a reprint of the edition of 1651, published, introduced, and annotated by J. de Voisin. The Carpzov edition (repr. Farnborough 1967) is the common edition to quote from. Though further study of the twelve extant manuscripts of the *Pugio* is a desideratum (see e.g. G. Hasselhoff 2004, 285–316), I have concluded after a provisional comparison of the Carpzov edition with the Sainte Genevieve manuscript (13th c.), which according to P. Fumagalli (1986, 93–98) is the oldest manuscript, that quotation from the Carpzov edition is sufficient for the purpose of this paper.