Nineteenth-Annual Margaret Mann Phillips Lecture:

Rules of Engagement: The Humanist Apologetics of Vives' De veritate fidei Christianae

by Edward V. George

Juan Luis Vives was Erasmus' admirer, his sometime collaborator, his correspondent for sixteen years, and about twenty-six years his junior. Born in Valencia in 1492 to conversos, or members of Jewish families that had converted to Christianity, he left Spain forever in 1509 and carved out an impressive career as an educational reformer, a political writer, a philosopher, and a composer of devotional literature. The Christian-Jew and Christian-Muslim dialogues that make up books 3 and 4 of his widely overlooked De veritate fidei Christianae, On the Truth of the Christian Faith (abbreviated as DVFC), on which Vives was still working in 1540 when he died of gout, stones, and fever, are the focus of this essay. The treatise was not published until 1543, by Oporinus in Basel. The two dialogues present a striking departure of form from the expository prose of books 1, 2, and 5 of the DVFC. Further, they differ from each other in showing a relatively contemptuous attitude toward Judaism alongside a more respectful way of dealing with Islam. In exploring Vives' use of dialogue, I will pay particular attention to this contrast and its meaning.

Scholarship on the DVFC is disproportionately thin when one considers the work's size (458 pages) and significance. Assessment of it as a professional

1 This is a revised version of the Margaret Mann Phillips Commemorative Lecture presented on 23 March 2006 at the Renaissance Society of America annual convention in San Francisco. I cite Vives' works from Gregorio Mayans y Siscar's eighteenth-century edition, Ioannis Ludovici Vivis Opera Omnia, ed. Gregorius Majansius (Valencia: Montfort, 1782-90, 8 vols.), abbreviated VOO, with volume and page numbers, and punctuation adapted. Translations are my own unless indicated otherwise. Citations from Vives' letters include the sequential numeration adopted in Gilbert Toumoy, Pour une nouvelle édition de la correspondance de J. L. Vives (Kortrijk, Belgium: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven Kortrijk Campus, Faculteit van de Letteren en de Wijsbegeerte, 1992). I acknowledge the editors of the forthcoming volume Companion to Vives, to be published by E. J. Brill, Leiden, for permission to include here excerpts from my essay, "Author, Adversary, and Reader: A View of the De veritate fidei Christianae," which will appear in that volume.

2 On the significance of the DVFC and the sparsity of scholarship discussing it see Valentín Moreno Gallego, La recepción Hispana de Juan Luis Vives (Valencia: Generalitat Valenciana, 2006), 498–99.
theological treatise has ranged over the centuries from fulsome commendation to patronizing dismissal. Karl Kohut rejects both extremes, regarding the DVFC as neither preeminent nor marginal, but as "the last chapter in the lifelong disputation with Scholasticism which had begun with In Pseudodialecticos of 1519," and an anti-model (Gegenentwurf) to scholastic theology. Carlos Noreña says, tellingly if imprecisely, that the DVFC is "the most important document left to us for appreciating the religious life of the Jewish convert when the end of his earthly existence was well in sight." Yet the only book-length study remains Paul Graf's dissertation, which appeared at a time when it was still possible to suppress any allusion to Vives' Jewish background. Calero and Sala's bibliography lists only ten items for the DVFC.

It is broadly acknowledged that the purpose of the work is spiritual encouragement of the faithful, rather than a heuristic enterprise in building on or taking issue with received theological opinions. Enrique González characterizes even the three expository books 1, 2, and 5 of the DVFC as "casi una pieza declamatoria." And Belarte Forment, who situates it in the sequence of Vives' lifelong excursions into theology, hears in the DVFC the voice of a rhetorician rather than a dialectician. Nonetheless, the rhetorical form of the treatise has drawn surprisingly little attention. Vicente Cantarino's study

---


2 Kohut, "Anmerkungen," 123.


6 Enrique González, con la colaboración de Víctor Gutiérrez Rodríguez, Una república de lectores: Difusión y recepción de la obra de Juan Luis Vives (México, UNAM, 2006), in press. I acknowledge Dr. González's generosity in sharing excerpts of his manuscript.