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Doctor Constantino's *Doctrina Cristiana*: Divine Compassion and True Faith in the Work of a Sixteenth Century Converso Author

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Celebrated preacher, chaplain to Prince Philip on his journey to the Spanish Empire's northern possessions and, towards the end of his life, magisterial canon of the Seville Cathedral, Doctor Constantino de la Fuente was one of the Converso authors who did most to renew the catechesis in Spain, in the first half of the sixteenth century.¹ Around 1543, he published *Suma de doctrina cristiana*, a dialogical catechism, synthesized later in his *Catecismo Cristiano*; he also wrote *Confesión de un pecador* and *Exposición del primer psalmo de David*², followed by his impressive *Doctrina cristiana*, in 1548.³ Together, *Doctrina cristiana*, *Catecismo cristiano* and *Suma de doctrina cristiana* form a landmark in the writing of the catechism in Castilian.⁴ These works, which Doctor Constantino wrote in barely five years, were well received, as their numerous re-editions in Castile, Portugal and Flanders attest. Nevertheless, two years after his

¹ J. Ramón Guerrero, *Catecismos españoles del siglo XVI. La obra catequética del Dr. Constantino Ponce de la Fuente*, Madrid, 1969, pp. 42-48; see also Luis Resines Llorente, *La catequesis en España. Historia y textos*, Madrid, 2016.

² Constantino de la Fuente, *Suma de doctrina cristiana en que se contiene todo lo principal y necesario que el hombre christiano deue saber : y obrar*, 1543, Sevilla; *Confesión de un pecador delante de Jesucristo redemptor y juez de los hombres* [Sevilla, 1544 (?)]; *Exposición del primer psalmo de David cuyo principio es Beatus vir, expuesta en seis sermones*, Sevilla, 1545; *Catecismo christiano para instruir los niños* (Sevilla, 1547).

³ Constantino de la Fuente, *Doctrina christiana en que esta comprehendida toda la información que pertenece al hombre que quiere seruir a dios... Parte primera delos artículos dela fe*. Sevilla, 1548. The edition that will be referred to in this article, is the 1554 version (Juan Steelsio, Anverso) hereafter *DC*.

⁴⁴ J. R. Guerrero, *Catecismos españoles...*, pp. 8-15; Michel Boeglin, *Réforme et dissidence religieuse en Castille au temps de l'Empereur. L'affaire Constantino de la Fuente (1505?-1559)*, Paris, 2016, 123-130; 149-154.

disputed election as canon in the Seville Cathedral chapter, in 1556, Doctor Constantino was imprisoned by the Inquisition and tried as a Protestant heretic. He died in an Inquisition dungeon during the trial. Like Juan de Valdés in his *Diálogo de la doctrina cristiana*, Doctor Constantino de la Fuente, also known as Fontano (from the Latin form of his name: ‘Fontanus’), introduced various approaches to doctrine into his work, partly inspired by the prodigious movement for religious reform instigated by Luther⁵. Although Constantino’s doctrinal views were not, despite appearances, those of a Nicodemite—meaning a covert ‘Lutheran’ or Protestant—as some historians have recently argued, his wide knowledge of the doctrines of the principal authors of the Reformation, as well as his incorporation of many of their views in his books, make him a complex figure inside the Catholic Church.⁶

Various influences meet in De la Fuente’s work: his Converso sensibility in a Spain marked by the multiplication of *limpieza de sangre* statutes; his quietist tendencies, linking him with an illuminist movement that had been growing in the peninsula before the Reformation;⁷ and his interest in the works of the Reformed Germans and French, which made a profound impression on him and his circle in Seville. He probably first encountered these Protestant ideas in Alcalá de Henares around the second quarter of the sixteenth century, a time when it is known that Lutheran books were being circulated among the Alcalá students.⁸ Although Doctor Constantino seems not to have obtained a degree at the Complutense University, perhaps due to the introduction of a *limpieza de sangre* statute in its colegio mayor, it is known that he was present in the philological circles of the Cisnerian centre around 1524.⁹

⁵ About Valdés, see Massimo Firpo, *Juan de Valdés and the Italian Reformation*, Abingdon/New York, Routledge, 2016.

⁶ Juan de Santibáñez, S. I., *Historia de la provincia de Andalucía de la Compañía de Jesús*, mss in the UL of Granada, Part I, Book 1, Chap. 31; Gianclaudio Civale, “*Con secreto y disimulación*”: *Inquisizione ed eresia nella Siviglia del secolo XVI*, Nápoles, 2008, pp. 166 sq.

⁷ *Vid.* Stefania Pastore, *Una herejía española*, Madrid, 2010. See also Álvaro Castro “Los alumbrados del reino de Toledo. Religiosidad interior y recepción de la Reforma en Juan y María de Cazalla,” in VVAA, *Reforma y disidencia religiosa. La recepción de las doctrinas reformadas en la península ibérica en el siglo XVI*, Madrid, 2018, pp. 165-179. *Vid.* also, Miquel Beltrán, 2018, “Mística del abandono en los primeros alumbrados,” *Cahiers d’études des cultures ibériques et latino-américaines – CECIL*, n° 4, <http://cecil-univ.eu/C4_4>, URL consulted on 21 December 2018.

⁸ *Vid.* Manuel Serrano y Sanz, “Juan de Vergara y la Inquisición de Toledo,” *Revista de Archivos, Bibliotecas y Museos*, 5 (1901), p. 896-912, p. 909-911; Marcel Bataillon *Érasme et l’Espagne*, Geneva, 1991[1937 1ª ed.], 3 vol., I, p. 474; S. Pastore, *Una herejía...*, p. 230-231.

⁹ His name also appears in a translation of *The Argonauts*, at the end of a small piece published at the end of the work: *C. Valerii Flacci Setini Balbi Argonautica, per Laurentium Balbum liliensem recognita et accuratissime castigata*, Alcalá, 1524, 2 vol. (ejemplar de la B.N.E. R/2752): see M. Bataillon *Érasme et...*, I, p. 171.

Constantino de la Fuente's masterpiece, the 1548 *Doctrina Cristiana*, invites an analysis of the varying influences on his particular religious stance at the very moment when the Council of Trent was beginning its sessions. The work, which can be considered the first example of a biblical catechism in the Spanish language, highlights the importance of divine love in defining the relationship between God and mankind.¹⁰ In accordance with the Reformed movement, Constantino rejects the idea of charitable works as a path to salvation. Or, more precisely, without specifically rejecting works of charity, he passes over them in almost complete silence. Compassion, as it appears in this most ambitious of his catechical works, the *Doctrina cristiana*, is almost constantly invoked, in different contexts, but from a specific angle: that of a concept that distrusts human acts and their value in the economy of salvation.

A Converso at the Crossroads of the Century

According to all evidence, Constantino de la Fuente was born between 1500 and 1505 in the town of San Clemente, in the diocese of Cuenca. This town depended on the house of Villena, whose Marquis, Diego López de Pacheco, had converted his palace of Escalona into an important center for a group of Erasmians and Contemplatives. Many of these people were of Converso descent, and some, like Pedro Ruiz de Alcaraz, would end up being tried for Illuminism.¹¹ Although we have very little information about Doctor Constantino's origins, a number of sources point to his Jewish background. Thus, at the time of being elected magisterial canon of Seville, the Vicar-General Juan de Ovando tried to block his access to the prebend, claiming that the cathedral's racial purity statutes prevented a person of Jewish descent from attaining a post of such high esteem. Nevertheless, the canons declined to accept this objection, insisting that it had not been proven that Constantino was a direct descendent of those condemned by the Holy Office.¹² However, a short time later, in the spring of 1558, after dispositions were issued from the Holy Office stating that Constantino was a New Christian, or

¹⁰ J. R. Guerrero, *Catecismos...*, p. 165.

¹¹ See A. Franco Silva, *Entre la derrota y la esperanza: Don Diego López Pacheco, Marqués de Villena (mediados del siglo XV-1529)*, Cádiz, 2005, p. 15-16; M. Bataillon, *Erasme et l'Espagne...*, I, p. 196-200.

¹² Joaquín Hazañas y La Rúa, *Maese Rodrigo (1460-1504)*, Sevilla, 1909, p. 405-408. J. Antonio Ollero Pina, "Clérigos, universitarios y herejes. La universidad de Sevilla y la formación académica del cabildo eclesiástico," *Universidades hispánicas: modelos territoriales en la Edad Moderna*, Miscelánea Alfonso IX, 112 (2007), pp. 107-195, pp. 161-163.

converted Jew, the tribunal initiated an investigation and sent an investigator to San Clemente to carry out a genealogical search, which, unfortunately, has not been handed down to us.¹³

Constantino's preaching certainly appealed to the Conversos in Seville, if various witnesses are to be trusted. His repeated references to the Old Testament, when justifying his doctrine, as well as his insistence on recalling that Christ was Jewish, or his evaluation of the greatness of the Jewish culture, make it easy to see why his preaching would attract the Conversos--even more so in a period when anti-Judaism was widespread, strengthened by the redoubling of the *limpieza de sangre* statutes from the end of the fifteenth century.¹⁴ In a report on the heresy of Doctor Constantino, held in the Vatican Library, commonly known as the *Parecer de la Vaticana*, the author, a Dominican friar, confirmed the manner of his position and his preaching among the Conversos in the town of Seville:

If he says all those who have faith in the passion of Christ, either explicitly or implicitly, now or in the past, are Christians, then that is not only a serious misuse of the word, but is also a great injustice to the Christian Church, since he always considers the synagogue equal to the church, and the Jew to the Christian (and, in fact, the Conversos are very important to Constantino, and so it is not surprising that they love him and favor him so much).¹⁵

In De la Fuente's opinion, the Jewish culture had been a central influence on the culture of ancient times; for example, he wrote in the *Doctrina Cristiana*: "The Gentiles themselves confess that the Jews gave them the letters of the alphabet, and very reliable stories prove beyond doubt that all the sciences and disciplines came from the Jewish people, these having been received [from them] by the Greeks; and of this there is no doubt..."¹⁶

With reference to Doctor Constantino's Converso origins, it is noteworthy that he was unwilling to use his surname, which was one often found among those condemned by the

¹³ Lib. 575 f° 57r: letter of 22.1.1558: "In this council we understand that Licentiate Melchior de León has said that Constantino is a converso: take note of what he has said and make the necessary investigations." Shortly after this, the Inquisitor Briceño announced that he was leaving to carry out a genealogical report, and in April he announced that he had finished it: Archivo Histórico Nacional, Sección Inquisición (hereafter A.H.N. Inq.) leg. 3067, letter of 5.4.1558.

¹⁴ Albert Sicroff: *Los estatutos de limpieza de sangre. Controversias entre los siglos XV y XVII*, Madrid,

¹⁵ Ignacio J García Pinilla, "Más sobre Constantino Ponce de la Fuente y el parecer de la Vaticana," *Cuadernos de investigación científica*, 17 (1999), pp. 191-225, p. 221.

¹⁶ DC, f° 335 r. Constantino's library, confiscated by the Inquisition at the time of his arrest, was one of the richest in Castile, and contained a number of works by Jewish authors. See Klaus Wagner, *El doctor Constantino Ponce de la Fuente. El hombre y su biblioteca*, Sevilla, 1979, p. 30; M. Bøeglin, *Réforme et dissidence...*, pp. 301-303.

tribunals of Cuenca and Toledo of Judaizing. It should be noted, however, that there is no record of anyone with this surname from the town of San Clemente among those tried for Judaism by the tribunal of Cuenca, despite the fact that several clandestine communities of Jews were broken up for following their rites in secret there.¹⁷ This could mean only that Constantino's family were recent arrivals to San Clemente. If an episode in Reginaldus Gonsalvius Montanus *Sanctae Inquisitionis Hispanicae Artes aliquot* is to be believed, there is a possibility that the de la Fuente family originated in Toledo. The authors hidden behind this pseudonym¹⁸ wrote that when a delegation of canons from Toledo came to Doctor Constantino to invite him to form part of the Cathedral chapter, he rejected the offer humorously, saying that he did not wish to disturb his ancestors' tranquility by accepting a position of such dignity.¹⁹ This response could imply that Constantino did not wish an investigation into racial purity to be opened in a diocese and a district where certain worrying information concerning his ancestors was known.²⁰

Historical background to the Doctrina Cristiana

In 1548, the printing presses of Juan Canalla, in Seville, produced the first part of *Doctrina cristiana*, Doctor Constantino's most ambitious work, which was to constitute the first part of a

¹⁷ Michel Bøeglin, "Le docteur Constantino et Cuenca. Notes pour une biographie d'un humaniste au temps de l'Empereur," *Lope de Barrientos. Seminario de Cultura*, 4 (2011), p. 11-25; pp. 13-16. There are several trials in San Clemente which refer to settled communities: Archivo diocesano de Cuenca (A.D.C.) Inquisición (Inq.) leg 70, exp. 1019: See for example the case against Juana Hernández de Estudillo, a neighbor of San Clemente, f^o 66v-67r: "...although she remembers well that when the Jews were in Castile, she came to stay in the house of the said Gil Sanchez Estudillo [husband of the accused] and his wife at the time when this witness lived with them on Friday nights when they were there she cleaned the candles for them with new wicks and she lit them and gave them to them".

¹⁷ *El "Reginaldo Montano": primer libro polémico contra la Inquisición española*, N. Castrillo Benito ed., Madrid, 1991, pp. 440-441.

¹⁸ Behind this pseudonym, three persons from Seville are hiding their identities; Cassiodoro de Reina (Reginaldus), Antonio González de Corro (Gonsalvius) and Juan Pérez de Pineda (Montanus, because he was born in Montilla (Cordoba) as point out the editors of a recent edition of this book in English: *Inquisitionis Hispanicae Artes: The Arts of the Spanish Inquisition. Reginaldus Gonsalvius Montanus, A Critical Edition of the Sanctae Inquisitionis Hispanicae Artes aliquot (1567) with a Modern English Translation*, Marcos J. Herráiz Pareja, Ignacio J. García Pinilla and Jonathan L. Nelson (eds.), Brill, Heterodoxia Iberica, vol. 2, London, 2018. In 1565, two years before the first edition of the book in Heidelberg, Reina, Corro and Pineda met in Périgord, on the property of the Duchess of Ferrara, Renée de France.

¹⁹ *El "Reginaldo Montano": primer libro polémico contra la Inquisición española*, N. Castrillo Benito ed., Madrid, 1991, pp. 440-441.

²⁰ The comment was a reference to the strict *limpieza de sangre* statute established by Archbishop Juan Martínez Silíceo in 1547 to prevent conversos from gaining entry to the Cathedral. There is no record of this incident in the Toledo chapter's minutes, Tomás López Muñoz points out (Tomás López Muñoz, *La Reforma en Sevilla*, Sevilla, 2011, vol. 1, p. 84) However, it is not incongruent that the comment was made in response to informal requests from Cathedral canons who, along with Constantino, formed part of Prince Philip's entourage in his 1549 tour of the Netherlands.

proposed wide ranging catechetical summary in three volumes.²¹ As he states in his preface, dedicated to Charles V: “What it deals with is information about all of life, all the thoughts and works of a Christian, taken from the truth in the Divine Scriptures, and declares in such a way that any man can easily find a message in it about his own conscience.”²² The author stated clearly in the prologue what had motivated him to write the work:

My aim is to offer to the Christian Church a general and complete doctrine taken from the Divine Scriptures, and presented with an understanding that the Church itself has always maintained, and in its beginnings was taught by great and holy ministers, and to understand through this doctrine everything that is necessary for a Christian, both for the dedication and firmness of his faith and to keep him free of all errors, and equally to cleanse his heart and works in all that pertains to a true Christian.²³

Written in the period in which the doctrinal content of Roman Catholicism was the subject of deep rethinking, and its boundaries redefined with respect to the doctrines of Protestantism, the proposal could only appear, at first sight, praiseworthy in the eyes of both orthodox churchmen and their reformist colleagues. In 1547, when De la Fuente was probably finishing the work, the Fathers of the Council of Trent agreed, not without some difficulty, on a definition of justification, a huge dividing line between Catholics and Protestants.²⁴ This was a central question in the *Doctrina Cristiana* itself, as well as in Constantino’s previous works, but as Constantino points out in his introduction to the *Doctrina*, his object was to propose to the Church certain teachings founded in the Holy Scriptures, and which “the church itself had always maintained.”²⁵

Nevertheless, Constantino did not quote the authorities on which Catholic dogma was based; nor did he highlight the profound differences or discrepancies with the Protestants, something

²¹ Other works with the same title of *Doctrina Cristiana* were published in the same years, such as that by Juan de Avila, in 1555 (see Carlos Maria Nannei, *La doctrina cristiana de San Juan de Avila., (contribución al estudio de su doctrina catequética)*, Pamplona, 1977), or that of Domingo de Valtanás, *Doctrina Christiana: en q[ue] se tracta de lo que deue cada vno creer, huyr, temer, obrar, dessear y qué cosa es Dios*, Sevilla, 1555).

²² DC f^o ij.

²³ DC f^o B1.

²⁴ Giuseppe Alberigo et al., *Les conciles œcuméniques*, Paris, 1994, vol. II-2, pp. 1367-1391; Thierry Wanegffelen, *Ni Rome ni Genève. Des fidèles entre deux chaires en France au XVIe siècle*, Paris, 1997, pp. 8-9; 27-31. See also, by the same author, "Réforme, réformation, protestantisme," in J. MILLER, *L'Europe protestante au XVI^e et XVII^e siècles*, Paris, 1997, pp. 31-53, 47-51.

²⁵ DC, f^o B1.

many of his contemporaries were to reproach him for.²⁶ The fragment quoted above is sufficient for the reader to understand both its focus and the principles that dictated its composition: the priority given to the Scriptures and, implicitly, their authority over the Church and its teachings—a Church, about which Constantino said little, apart from a single chapter (Chapter 76) out of more than a hundred the work consisted of.

This exclusive authority conferred to the Scriptures for the founding of the Church is what justifies the name of evangelism, a term Imbart de la Tour²⁷ used to refer to the movement of Meaux in France,²⁸ although it would be more correct to call it evangelical and its disciples evangelicals (*euangelicos* in Latin), according to the term used at that time,²⁹ or preachers, or defenders of the Gospel, the expression which Constantino himself used. (*DC*, f^o 331v, 333r). These are more suitable terms to describe the members of a religious movement flourishing in Seville that cannot be classified nor reduced to inquisitorial qualifications of Illuminist or Lutheran. In fact, it is clear that those condemned in the years of the inquisitorial repression of 1557 – 1563 were not affiliated to one single movement, and that, along with a trend that was developing under the leadership of Doctor Egidio and which evolved into a Calvinistic Church on his death, there were several concurrent tendencies inherited from the renewing impulse of the *devotio moderna*.³⁰ According to the Jesuit Gonzalo González, who had attended several *autos de fe* in Seville, the most striking aspect of those movements was “the diversity of opinions

²⁶ In the words of Doctor Monterde, “Constantino’s *Doctrina grande* did not please many, because he did not prove what he said by referring to authorities” (A.H.N. Inq. leg. 3570 caja 1, Méritos del proceso del rector Monterde, f^o 5r-v).

²⁷ Pierre Imbart de la Tour, *Les origines de la Réforme. III (4) : L'évangélisme*, Ginebra, 1978 [París 1914].

²⁸ The group of Meaux refers to the French evangelical movement in the 1520-1525's. Whilst not constituting a very organised movement, the theologian and humanist Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples (1450-1536) was a leading personality: he was translator and commentator on the Bible in French. His protectors were Briçonnet, bishop of Meaux (where Lefèvre's friends would gather), and Margaret of Angoulême, the sister of the king Francis I.

²⁹ Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus, *Epistola contra quosdam, qui se falso jactant euangelicos*, Friburgo, 1529. A.H.N. Inq. leg. 4444 exp. 49. See also, *DC*, f^o 247; f^o 331 v.

³⁰ The canon Juan Gil, known as *el doctor* Egidio, was one of the most prominent preachers of Seville cathedral. Once a prospective candidate to head the bishopric of Tortosa, he was accused of advancing heretic ideas in 1549 and put in jail. He was obliged to abjure, in 1552, the fact of having promoted ideas on justification by faith and of having criticised penance, devotions and questioned the authority of decisions rendered by the Holy Office. His declarations reflected many ideas of his companion, the author Constantino de la Fuente, and revealed the influence of protestant doctrines within Sevillian circles. Juan Gil was obliged to publicly revoke, on a busy day, in the cathedral of Seville and to serve a sentence of two years of confinement; it was a rather mild sentence after all as he subsequently recovered his appointment as canon of Seville cathedral. *Vid.* Robert C. Spach, “Juan Gil and Sixteenth-Century Spanish Protestantism,” *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 26 (4), 1995, pp. 857-880; Michel Boeglin, “El doctor Egidio y la Reforma en Sevilla. Redes y proselitismo religioso”, in VVAA, *Reforma y disidencia religiosa: La recepción de la Reforma en la Península ibérica en el siglo XVI*, Madrid, 2018, pp. 199-212.

among them, although surprisingly none of them agree on a single thing; they usually say that they are not obliged to follow any of the Church's commandments because they are Man's commandments and are not to be found in the Gospel, and in the same way everything else is organized and established by the Holy Councils."³¹ From these remarks, it seems clear that the impact of Doctor Constantino's preaching and that of the members of his school was profound.

Doctrina Cristiana, published in 1548, was the first volume of a planned trilogy that would discuss the Christian religion. The first volume, focused on "the twelve articles which form a Christian's confession and the first part of his catechism," to which the author added some 'comments' (chapters 32 to 87). In this first volume Constantino also included 'a confirmation of our faith and religion' centered on Christ's message (poverty, love, redemption, etc.). This was linked to a reprobation of three 'sects' (Jews, gentiles, Muslims), to understand more clearly the superiority of Christianity over the other religions.

The second volume of the trilogy was to cover a central theme in Doctor Constantino's doctrine: that of the Ten Commandments. It is possible that the book which he presented to the inquisitorial authorities for their approval, in 1553, on his return from Flanders, titled *Espejo del estado del hombre en esta presente vida*, discussed this theme.³² But as a result of warnings from the inquisitors to modify certain passages, in particular those dealing with the dead faith of the sinner, the author decided not to send it to print and the manuscript was later burned, along with his other books and papers.³³ The third part of the trilogy was to discuss a combination of themes that seldom appear in his writings, such as prayer, fasting, alms, true penitence, and the use and mystery of the most important sacraments in the Church."³⁴

Only the first part of the *Doctrina Cristiana* exists today. But the inquisitorial documents do not record that the 1548 *Doctrina cristiana* was censored or seized before the magisterial canon was imprisoned, even though, after his disputed election to the canonry of Seville, three of Constantino's works had been ordered to be handed over: *Confesión de un pecador*, *Catecismo*

³¹ A.R.S.I. Hisp. f°442-443, letter from Gonzalo González: "la diversidad de opiniones que entre,ento de la Yglesia por ser mandamientos de hombres y no expresados en el Evangelio y así de todo lo demás ordenado y establecido por lo sanctos concilios."

³² A.H.N. Inq. lib. 574, f° 323r, letter of 10.5.1553.

³³ A.H.N. Inq. lib. 574, f. 331r. *Since 1540, the question of true and false faith became a line of division between Catholics and Protestants. For the Reformers, our faith to be justifying, it needs to be more than dead faith barren of works. Rather it must be living faith that works by charity. A question very close to the sola fide, the justification by faith alone, that became suspicious of Protestantism in the mid 1540's.*

³⁴ DC f° B 2v. This decision to deal with such themes, so different from the usual topics in his works, is quite surprising.

cristiano and *Beatus vir*.³⁵ Since Constantino's return from the Court in 1553, the tribunal had had in its possession reports referring to suspicions of heresy in these works. Notes were even being circulated among theologians regarding heretical passages in the *Suma de la Doctrina Cristiana*, as the *Parecer de la Vaticana* points out.³⁶ However, the *Doctrina cristiana* does not appear to have been censored until the condemnation of Doctor Constantino as a heretic, after his death. Moreover, if the administrative correspondence is to be trusted, it was not until 7 April 1559, when he had been in prison for eight months, that the Council of the Supreme Inquisition sent reports on Doctor Constantino's *Doctrina cristiana* to the judges in Seville. This would seem to indicate that they did not receive the analysis of the work until that date.

Published after the decisive Tridentine session on justification of 1547, Doctor Constantino's *Doctrina* talked of the merits of Christ and of the salvation of Christians, cautiously adapting to the most recent form of orthodoxy, in line with the decrees of the Council of Trent in the year previous to its publication. Various elements in the formal presentation of the work testify to a reordering of its contents shortly before being printed, such as the confused numbering of the chapters, the numerous repetitions, and the errors in the biblical quotations.

The Doctrina Cristiana and Divine Compassion and Justice

The *Doctrina Cristiana*, the only surviving volume of Constantino's trilogy, was designed to demonstrate God's gratuitous compassion and mercy towards sinners. After the preliminary chapters devoted to the knowledge of God and of man, the entire first part of the book concentrated on sin. Chapters 3 to 23 (*DC* 1554, ff. 26- 86) were dedicated to the fall of Man: "The origin of sin in the world and corruption in Nature" is the title of Chapter 3. The invocation of sin was the pretext for introducing the story from the Creation to Christ's resurrection. Through this biblical history, the Seville preacher wished highlight the many inferences in the Scriptures to the coming of the Messiah and of the redemption of Mankind, in this way pointing out the differences between the Old and the New Laws (Judaism and Christianity), but also the continuity between them. Here Constantino demonstrates the greatness, gentleness, magnificence

³⁵ M. Bøeglin, *Réforme et dissidence...*, pp. 260-261.

³⁶ I. J. García Pinilla, "Más sobre..." pp. 205, 209-210, for example. The fact that the said notes were circulated does not prove much about the author's heresy, since the work was written before the start of the Council of Trent, at a time when certain points of doctrine defended in this dialogical catechism had not yet been declared anathema.

and liberality of a God made flesh in order to come to free Mankind from the kingdom of evil, and to save those who showed a true and sincere repentance and followed the New Law.

In the *Doctrina cristiana*, compassion and faith were closely intertwined. Following the tradition of the Old Testament, God was at the same time love and compassion, justice and vengeance; and the New Covenant, the new relationship between God and humans mediated by Jesus, pointed out the deep mercy and sheer goodness of the Lord. The various chapters on the Holy Story and on the coming of Christ underlined the deep natural goodness of God and the fact that in showing compassion He did not act against His justice but towards something above justice. What He did was demonstrate liberality and supreme love. Thus, compassion and love are the two attributes of God that appear most frequently in the work.

Following the tradition since Saint Thomas, redemption was defined as a gratuitous act, fruit of the Lord's goodness. God did not owe anything to his creatures; all that they possessed came from the Lord's generous love. To be precise, compassion was the effect or product of the Lord's liberality and generosity, (*DC* f^o 156) and the benefit of redemption, as Constantino points out on at least three occasions, "was not due to the merits of mankind," but to God's compassion (*DC*, ff. 38 r, 63 r, 154 r). The sinful man, foul, dedicated to evil, and under the power of the kingdom of sin, who had repeatedly disregarded the Lord, could not find salvation alone, as was shown in several chapters of the Scriptures. The only way for Man to find the path to his salvation was through compassion:

The worst evil that Man had and the origin of all his ills lay in dissension and enmity towards God, and in dissension with himself. The anger of God was just, and there was nothing on the part of Man that could placate the Divine Majesty, satisfy His justice, and return Man to His grace [...] The manner of the remedy was, for the Divine Mercy to find some way for Man to attain a satisfaction that was just and complete... That is why it was necessary that the same Divine Goodness should Himself provide the satisfaction, since the being and the power of Man was not enough to do that, and that He should also order this so that Man should feel satisfaction, and that this should immediately serve as his remedy. (*DC* 176 v-177 r).

In his first works, Constantino assigned to God qualities similar to those conferred on Him by Melanchthon and Calvin: the qualities of great and firm confidence in the remission of sins.³⁷

³⁷ Jean Calvin, *Institution de la religion chrétienne* (1541), ed. O. Millet, Geneva, 2008, 2 vols., I pp. 522 and 525.

According to the author of the *Parecer de la Vaticana*, in the first edition of *Catecismo Cristiano*, Constantino had written that the sinner “had to have very great confidence that there would be compassion from Him; this confidence should not be based on what he does or can do, but on the great compassion in the blood of Jesus Christ.”

That passage was removed from the 1565 re-edition of the book, at a time when such a position was seen as clearly Protestant, after being declared anathema by the Council of Trent in 1547.³⁸ In the *Doctrina* of 1548, the references to faith were less extreme, but they did not necessarily arouse less suspicion. In it Constantino declared:

The author and master of our wisdom is God, not only because He revealed it and taught it through His Word, but because He places it in our hearts and engenders in them the true knowledge that we must have in this life of what He has revealed to us, and that knowledge is the Faith; that is our wisdom. Saint Paul clearly states that faith is a gift from God, communicated to Man through Jesus Christ, our Redeemer and Savior, that we might receive His wisdom, be firm in His commandments and comply with His wishes. (Ephes. 2)³⁹

And, fruit of the Divine compassion, Christ had come to give Man the possibility of knowing God, of achieving that wisdom:

For the new evil that the Devil committed, for the fall of the human generations, produces in God a new anger against the Devil himself, and a new compassion for Man. From that compassion comes, it is true to say, one single person that is both man and God. He is truly part of the lineage of Man and He is truly from the lineage of God. And thus all those other men who, because of the same evil do not renounce this lineage, have a new privilege and a new way of being adopted as sons of God. (John 1) (*DC* f° 36r).

The Scriptures enclosed a special revelation, in which God accepted the weaknesses of Man, to show him what he needed for his salvation. Thus, the Gospel was the exclusive basis of the truth and of Christian life, a “treasure” for the believers who were prepared to consider the profound wisdom it contained. The preaching of the Gospel was the foundation of the Church,

³⁸ G. Alberigo, *Les conciles...*, II-2, p. 1383, Canon on justification : §10-11-12.

³⁹ *DC*, f° 79 r.

and the word of God clearly preached expressed God's promise: the remission of sins for those who adhered to it and put all their trust in the Christian faith.⁴⁰

In accordance with the doctrine which Doctor Constantino developed in several of his works, the sanctification of the sinner could only take place by means of a living faith, that is:

The faith which is required of Man, that he might have a true idea of being blessed in this life...must be illuminated and accompanied with love, which awakens it and leads it to charitable works, and does not let him rest if he does not comply with the Lord's will, in Whom he says he believes and Whom he is so obliged to serve and please in all things. This is the faith that leads to the Word of God being heard with great hunger and great thirst, which captures the heart of Man and awakens him and give him wings to follow such great goodness and to become one with such excellent beauty, as the Word of God teaches him. (DC, f^o 80 r-v).

According to Doctor Constantino, the faith illuminated by the love of God was the living faith and according to the words of the Apostle James it was the opposite of the dead faith, the faith of sinners, which is mere knowledge of the Word of God, without putting it into practice.⁴¹ A similar reference to the dead faith was censored by the Inquisitors in the continuation of the *Doctrina cristiana* in 1553.⁴²

For Constantino, the believer touched by Divine grace was called to have a unique experience, expressed in terms that recalled the contemplative and quietist experiences:

The faith with which we conceive and embrace the promises of this truth is very sure and very certain, for it has as its foundation the truth of God. Therefore, if the faith is true it will give great calm, security and certainty to he who believes, in all that he expects and in all that has been promised, because it is based on firm things, such as the certainty and truth of which we have spoken, and thus it assures us of all that we expect, and of all that the Word of God has told us about. (DC 76r-v)

In terms similar to those of Calvin, in his *Institution de la religion chrétienne*, this new life promised by the Divine compassion was described by Constantino as “a new birth of spiritual

⁴⁰ DC, 3v: “If the Christian man considers what a great treasure he has in this wisdom: how much he owes to God for having given him a candle to find his way out of such dangers, and free himself from such ties he would certainly awake to special thankfulness for such a great benefit.”

⁴¹ DC ff^o 79v-80r.

⁴² A.H.N. Inq. lib. 574, f. 331r. See above.

regeneration because of the death and benefit of Man's redeemer, and of the Father's infinite goodness and infinite compassion" (*DC* f^o 255v).⁴³ This regeneration or sanctification of the believers occurred when Christ permitted participation in the new life, the result of a union with the Redeemer who died but rose again. Called by the irresistible power of grace, the penitent sinner would be aided in his perseverance to attain the kingdom of God:

That is why we say that the Church contains two types of members. The first type is all those who truly have sanctification from the Holy Spirit. If at first they were sinners, they did penance for their sins and achieved true pardon; for having received that pardon and remaining within the faith and showing obedience to the Lord, they are with Him through grace and friendship; and they are holy and clean and beautiful, and are admitted into the Kingdom of Heaven. These are true members of Jesus Christ our Redeemer, for they are healthy and living members, and they perform works that are healthy and living, and as such their virtue comes from the Lord, who works in them as in His own, and they are able to receive His great gifts and His great benefits.

By means of this regeneration, Christ accepted the man of faith and re-established in him the image of God, through participation in a new life. This impartial and therefore perfect justice excluded all justice belonging to the believer, who continued to sin and whose works still bore the stamp of sin and needed the justice of the Lord to be accepted by Him and become "works of the healthy and the living."

Constantino de la Fuente barely deals with the question of doing works of charity to gain salvation, a question that had become the dividing line between Catholics and Protestants since the beginning of 1540, and more so since the publication of the Council of Trent's decrees on justification. Rather, he limits himself to staying within the Jewish tradition, in which compassion is an attribute of God, inspiring mankind in general and the Jews in particular. The Hebrew word for "mercy" or "compassion," "rahamim," comes from the same root as the word 'rehem,' the womb, and compassion is similar to the feelings of a mother for her child.⁴⁴ From that came the reference to the heart of Divine mercy, in accordance with the etymology of the word, which the Converso humanist knew perfectly well. But in contrast to the Hebrew

⁴³ J. Calvin, *Institution*, pp. I-730-731.

⁴⁴ Santiago Palomero Plaza, "El judaísmo como modo de vida," *Judaísmo, Sefarad, Israel: actas del II Encuentro sobre Minorías*, Toledo, 2002, pp. 45-46. *Dictionnaire encyclopédique du judaïsme*, Paris, 1993, pp. 758-759.

tradition—which emphasized that the Jewish people should be “merciful, modest and do good deeds,” as one of the tractates of the Talmud states, Constantino barely broached the question of doing good deeds in order to attain salvation.⁴⁵ With an approach that is very similar to that of the Protestants, he rejected the role of any human action in salvation.

Through the central value of divine compassion and generosity, and through the benefits of Christ’s redemption, Constantino centered participation in Christ more on grace than on charitable works. Constantino seems by implication to suggest, to his more perceptive readers, that those who did not wholly accept the authority of the Church but scrupulously obeyed the commandments of God, would still form part of that ‘Holy Church.’ According to this concept, divine grace was seen in those who, moved by aversion to their sins, followed the Lord’s commandments faithfully and carefully. The message of Christ was fidelity, and the firm trust in the promises of His coming was the foundation of belonging to God’s people and of the possibility of salvation. As was the case of many irenists in the years prior to Trent, the dogmatic position of Constantino was sufficiently lax to allow for the integration of all Christians into one church.

Doctor Constantino’s Converso Evangelism

Constantino de la Fuente lived in a Spain torn by the *limpieza de sangre* polemic. Despite Pope Nicholas V’s condemnation of these statutes in his *Humani generis inimicus*, in which he stated that “all Catholics form the body of Christ in accordance with the teachings of our faith,” *limpieza* legislation had spread through all sectors of Castilian society. Constantino, it seems, was from a converso family situated in Toledo, and the comments by Gonzalez de Montes indicate that his ancestors may have been condemned and publicly ridiculed in that city.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the area around Cuenca, to which his family moved in the early sixteenth century became the center of a bloody repression against New Christians from 1520 onwards, orchestrated by the inquisitors Corro and Mexias, leading to accusations of tyranny and prejudice from converso members of the church and city councils.⁴⁷ This division in his society is reflected not only in

⁴⁵ Yevamot 79^a: see Gregg Gardner, *The Origins of Organized Charity in Rabbinic Judaism*, New York, 2015, p. 29.

⁴⁶ See above, pp. 3-4.

⁴⁷ Jiménez Monteserín, Miguel, "La familia Valdés de Cuenca. Nuevos datos., M. A. Pérez-Priego, *Actas del Seminario : Los Valdés. Pensamiento y literatura*, Cuenca, 1997, pp ; 43-90, p. 62-64; S. Pastore, *Una herejía española*, p. 245-247.

Constantino's filosemitism, but also in his insistence on the profound connection between Judaism and Christianity through Jesus Christ, who had brought forth spiritual regeneration, an observation made by other converso authors, among whom were Alonso y Teresa de Cartagena, Hernando de Talavera, Juan de Avila, and Lope Barrientos.⁴⁸

In focusing on the terms *limpieza*, lineage, blood, and regeneration, which appear constantly in his work, Constantino promoted the image of a nation purified and united in one cause, beyond the social divisions, hierarchies and interpretations of human and divine laws⁴⁹. In his view, only through the strict compliance with the divine commandments and the practice of Christian virtues would one belong to the new and true Church. More than the rites and rituals which defined the Jewish religion before the arrival of the Redeemer, more than ecclesiastical and papal decrees, was the fidelity to God through Christ and the confidence in his mercy, which was the key to salvation:

In Christ our Lord everything is joined because he is God in that the payment is for God. He is man so that the payment is on the part of men; and he is new man, so that he has no part in man's defects... This is how Saint Paul referred to him, new man and heavenly man, sent to the world to renovate and restore humankind. He was conceived through the virtue of the Holy Ghost and born from Mary. In these words, it is jointly stated that he is true man and new man. The mother gave him true humanity from her own line and the same nature of all other men (*DC*, 183v)

However, like those Christians who remained outside the true Church and whose faith was deemed dead, those converts who practiced in secret the religion of their ancestors were condemned by Doctor Constantino, who conformed to the norms of an age that rigorously judged those who publicly embraced one faith while secretly defending another. And even

⁴⁸ *Vid.* for example M. Laura Giordano (2010), "La ciudad de nuestra conciencia.: los conversos y la construcción de la identidad judeocristiana (1449-1556)," *Hispania Sacra* LXII, 125, pp. 43-9; J. I. Pulido Serrano, "Juan de Ávila: su crítica a la limpieza de sangre y su condición conversa," *Sefarad* 73.2 (2013), pp. 339-369; J. I. Pulido Serrano, "Experiencia vital y elaboración de una fórmula conciliadora en la obra de Juan de Ávila," in M. D. Rincón González y R. Manchón Gómez eds., *El Maestro Juan de Ávila (1500?-1569). Un exponente del humanismo reformista*, Madrid, 2014, pp. 191-213; F. Márquez Villanueva, "Estudio preliminar," in Fr. H. de Talavera, *Católica impugnación del herético libelo maldito y descomulgado que fue divulgado, que en el año pasado del nacimiento de nuestro Señor Jesucristo de mil y cuatrocientos y ochenta años fue divulgado en la ciudad de Sevilla*, pp. xlix-xcv., Cordoba, 2012.

⁴⁹ *Vid.* Kevin Ingram, *Converso Non-Conformism in Early Modern Spain: Bad Blood and Faith from Alonso de Cartagena to Diego Velázquez*, London, 2018, pp. 80-82.

though the preacher alluded to their error with the benevolence of a shepherd who understood the frailties of his flock, his condemnation was unequivocal.

Also residing amongst us with the title of Christian are those recently converted from the error of the Jews, and many others from the trickery and lies of Mohammed. Among these you will find some who through not entering truly and with determined heart into the Church, or through being influenced by the bad company and opinions of lost souls who the Devil uses as an instrument for his ends, find their consciences tricked. So that even though they are called Christians and find themselves in the company of real Christians, and are so close to the light that leads to heaven, these miserable people are lost. And this is a greater pain for us than it is for them, as we were near enough to them to instruct them and lead them from ruin (*DC*, 327r)

And this was also the case of the Jews, who “still remained firm in their persistence against Christianity,” demonstrating their “inventions and evils with their new writings,” provoking the anger of God with their “blind obstinacy.” (*DC* f. 328r-v) However, all those who had experienced and embraced baptism, which joined everyone together “spiritually and made them members of the same body,” shared “the same love and allegiance” (*DC* f. 262r). The vigor of the faith was based more on the confidence in the promise of Christ than in works and rites, a position similar to that taken by Luther and Calvin. The brilliant preacher from Seville demonstrated that the only path for the Christian was through faith in God’s mercy, the reflected light of human kindness, and the regeneration of the blood and the divine word through the sacrifice of Christ:

As there is only one God, so there is only one faith; and as there is only one faith, so there is only one baptism; and as there is only one baptism, so there is only one Holy Church with one purity (*limpieza*) dedicated to the service of God for the one Catholic and universal end, which bound together all those who followed its doctrine and that possessed its spirit even if they found themselves divided in this world. (*DC*, f. 262v)

According to Constantino de la Fuente, the law of God was a consolation for those aggrieved, and his promises “a great happiness for the sad, a great honor for the affronted, [and] eternal life and wellbeing for those who were subject to perpetual misery” (*DC*, f. 368r). And thus the Church, founded on the word of Christ, was where everyone would discover a common dignity

and equality at a moment when so many advocates of religious renewal found themselves under threat from the Inquisition.