

# Christian-Muslim Relations A Bibliographical History

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# Hernando de Talavera

DATE OF BIRTH	Between 1428 and 1430
PLACE OF BIRTH	Talavera de la Reina
DATE OF DEATH	14 May 1507
PLACE OF DEATH	Granada

## BIOGRAPHY

Hernando de Talavera was born in Talavera de la Reina between 1428 and 1430. Very little is known of his early years. He was probably the illegitimate son of one of the Álvarez de Toledo, lords of Oropesa, and his mother may have come from a family of converts. The Álvarez de Toledo family partially financed the studies of the young Talavera, who is first heard of in 1442, when he was in Barcelona studying calligraphy. Later he joined the University of Salamanca, where, in around 1444, he was studying a course in arts and later in theology.

In 1460, he was ordained priest, and between 1463 and 1466 he taught moral theology at Salamanca. In 1466, he entered the Order of St Jerome, and in 1470 became prior of the monastery of Nuestra Señora de Prado de Valladolid, where he drew up extensive reforms for the order. These were very productive years for him as a priest and pastor, as it was here that he developed and defined his cultural and religious function and his pastoral role amongst the upper classes as well as the lower classes. His writings and work among many at court resulted in the growth of his fame to the point where, at the beginning of the 1470s, he became confessor and counsellor to Isabella of Castile and, for a time, to Ferdinand of Aragón, which made him an active participant in the most important events affecting the crown.

Together with Pedro González de Mendoza and a new ruling class, which was predominantly university educated – many from the University of Salamanca – Talavera succeeded in laying the foundations for the development of Ferdinand and Isabella's monarchy as a new power, including at international level. This was an ambitious project that envisaged in Christianity an element that could fundamentally bring together and create a new era, the age of the future Catholic Monarchs. Pauline teachings had a profound effect on Talavera, particularly the messianic sense of the arrival of a new kingdom, from which in the fullness of time

new laws, finally matured, would be given to humanity by the renewed and saving monarchy of Ferdinand and Isabella. His later formidable work in catechising and making converts should be considered in the light of this messianic vision, which resulted in his becoming one of the protagonists in the preaching campaign aimed at the newly converted Jews in Seville in 1478.

In order to defend these converts from the accusation of being crypto-Jews, he wrote *Católica impugnación*, a key work and a true Talavera manifesto on the methods for evangelising and acculturating converts. Talavera advocated strong collaboration between political and religious power. The ecclesiastical structure must catechise and have control over people, which would allow, should it be necessary, the anticipation and eradication of possible deviation. For him, the Inquisition was a pastoral instrument rather than a political one. He takes a politico-religious line that believes in a strong and active episcopacy not absent from their dioceses. Ideologically, Talavera was opposed to a discriminatory and exclusive doctrine of the Church because he perceived it as a denial of the evangelising mission of Christianity and as a disruptive element in the 're-conquering' and unifying mission of the renewed monarchy that he was trying to establish.

As Bishop of Ávila from 1486, he was head of an area with prominent Jewish and Mudéjar minorities. He was conscious of the complex social and cultural implications of the changes that could be brought about by conversion. His experience in Ávila certainly influenced his work after 1492 as the first archbishop of Granada and a man trusted by Isabella and Ferdinand, at least until the arrival in 1499 of Archbishop Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros in Granada, who brought with him his campaign of forced conversions.

Talavera's years in Granada were very intense and, although they ended with the destruction of the gradual Christianisation strategy he had implemented, the period was a valuable experience that greatly influenced Spanish religiosity. Granada was a 'laboratory' for new methods of Christianising the new faithful, and transforming and acculturating them into subjects within a population where Christians were in the minority. Talavera asked his priests to learn Arabic, and he translated short catechisms into Arabic so that the people could understand them. In 1506, he had to go before the Inquisition on accusations of Judaising, though papal intervention quashed the charges. His absolution arrived at

the end of April 1507, shortly before he died on 14 May, probably unaware of the news that had been sent from Rome.

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## WORKS ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

### *Instrucción del Arzobispo de Granada*, 'Instruction from the Archbishop of Granada'

DATE About 1500

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Castilian

#### DESCRIPTION

*Instrucción del Arzobispo de Granada en respuesta a cierta petición que hicieron los vecinos del Albaicín sobre lo que debían hacer y las prácticas cristianas que debían observar* was written around 1500, shortly after the Albaicín revolt of 1499 and the forced conversion of the Moriscos driven by Cisneros, Archbishop of Toledo. It is also known by the title *Memorial y tabla de ordenaciones dirigadas por Talavera para la comunidad morisca de Granada. Se les reglamenta taxativamente la vida religiosa que debían llevar y se les adelantan diversas exigencias para la buena convivencia con los cristianos*, a phrase found in the *incipit*. It is a very brief work, occupying a single folio. It brings together the provisions set out by Talavera, when he was archbishop of Granada, to manage the life of the newly converted Morisco community.

*Instrucción* is one of the catechetical works that Talavera wrote throughout his life, as instructions for the assimilation of newly converted

Jews and Muslims into Christianity. This work requires a priest to be prepared and able to evangelise, and to bring together newly converted and old Christians. Baptism alone did not suffice for this; rather, a strategy had to be set out that would enable the newly converted to fit into Christian society, and to live as far as possible like 'old' Christians (*Cristianos viejos*). The strategy had a dual purpose: on the one hand, it would make the former Muslims give up their old ways and integrate sooner into the new social fabric, and, on the other, it would help the 'old' Christians to accept the newly converted, facilitated by an attitude towards them as brothers rather than as foreign elements in society.

This was the original line of action taken by Talavera and which he had already expressed at length in his early writings about the problems of conversion, in particular in his *Católica impugnación*, written in 1479, about the presence of crypto-Jews among the newly converted in Seville. In this *Instrucción* the same attitude is present, though here he is even more adamantly eager for 'integration' in order to respond to the 'acceleration' that Cisneros had caused by the forced conversions of 1499. These had shattered the fragile equilibrium that Talavera's measures had established, and had provoked a revolt in the Albaicín area of the town.

In this *Instrucción*, Talavera shows the people of the Albaicín what they must do to live as good Christians. Significantly, he underlines the necessity of abandoning Morisco customs, particularly rites of passage. The Christian tradition must be followed through the outward signs of crossing oneself and going to church to pray and to attend services. The demonstration of faith is an important first step in assimilating new customs, at the same time ensuring that the wider community accepts the newly converted. It is so important that Talavera asks the Moriscos to participate in fraternities 'such as those the Christians have, to help you in life and death'.

The importance of education, and Talavera's call for the newly converted actively to cooperate and participate in furthering it, can be seen in his advice to those who can read, that they should 'have all the books in Arabic of the prayers and psalms that will be given you and also of this memorial'. The believer, in Talavera's religious instruction, is an active promoter of Christian teaching, rather than just a passive receiver.

Talavera attaches great importance to Christian symbols. He requires all Morisco families to have sacred images in their homes, 'of our Lord, or the Holy Cross or of our Lady the Virgin Mary or of a saint...'. Outward signs are necessary to register belonging to a group, both within

the home and when socialising; thus, the Moriscos must have 'good and honest Christian conversation', and be Christian in their dress and eating habits.

It is striking to see that, at the end of the *Instrucción*, after acknowledging the existence and circulation of small books or primers of prayers in Arabic for the initial acculturation and teaching of these new Christians, Talavera asks that they should also 'forget' their language as soon as possible, above all when at home, in order to become Castilian. This is a particular catechising strategy, with a partial acceptance of the Morisco past, though its specific purpose is to carry out the Christianisation process in the best way possible, which in the second phase means cancelling out the interior and exterior manifestations of the Morisco past, and modifying the way of praying, walking, eating and above all talking.

#### SIGNIFICANCE

*Instrucción* offers insight into Talavera's particular conversion strategy following the revolt in the Albaicín in 1499 caused by Cisneros' violent evangelising campaign, though it is very much in line with Talavera's previous ideas. Talavera perceived the importance of the everyday as a normalising factor for both the newly converted and the host community. This is the great novelty of his approach. Only by carefully preparing the clergy in Christian teachings and in the culture of those who are to be converted is effective evangelisation possible. Thus, he was eager for his priests in Granada to learn Arabic, and before 1499 he set Pedro de la Vega of the Order of St Jerome to write an Arabic grammar, together with an abbreviated Christian catechism and an Arabic vocabulary. This work was completed in 1501.

In the cultural *milieu* of the University of Salamanca, Talavera had absorbed the ideas of Juan de Segovia and Nicolás de Cusa about the conversion of Muslims by addressing cultural differences as well as differences of belief. This explains why he possessed in his personal library two copies of the Qur'an, one in Latin and the other in the vernacular, and that it was probably thanks to him that in 1501 a Castilian version of Riccoldo de Monte di Croce's *Improbatio Alcorán* was printed.

Talavera recognised the importance of sanctions in this process, and his concluding words in the *Instrucción* are striking in this respect: 'For some to keep the things aforementioned some constraint would be necessary, and because the excommunication that we are able to set is very dangerous and not feared by them it is necessary that we and you and you and we beg the King and Queen our masters to order penalties



against those who do not keep it and executors to execute it.' He is conscious that in this first phase only royal authority has any power, and that any sanctions used by the church will be ineffective. This is faith in realistic and practical implementation. He knew that conversion would be a lengthy process, and it could only be successful by educating and accustoming the newly converted to accept Christian values in the least traumatic way possible.

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