

Chapters 12–16 continue to examine the schism, events surrounding the Council of Mantua in 1064 until the deaths of Alexander and Cadalus, and, finally, the election of Hildebrand as Pope Gregory VII. It is in these subsequent chapters that the moves called to question at the end of chapter 11 are explained: to mask conspiracies. Stroll posits that the schism in the Church had not been about imperial control, rather, the conflict played out thus because of the personalities involved, and because of their political associations, actions and the intrigues of those surrounding them.

It is to author's credit that she goes into detail with the documents she has chosen and extrapolates the motivations, influences and personal associations of each figure carefully, even if she might be said to rely a great deal on primary texts. Though there might be a concentration on the figure of Hildebrand and his involvement, it is presented to show events from an innovative perspective rather than to rewrite the history of the politics surrounding the reform. She thus builds for the reader a picture of conflicting relations between pope and emperor in the years before the election of Gregory VII. The volume would benefit from more direct quotes within the text with a more critical address of them, e.g. the letters of Anno are cited in chapter 14, but the Latin quotations are only found in the footnotes.

This book will be of value for political and religious studies historians as a resource for the study of this era of ecclesiastical reform, providing stimulating perspectives on the eleventh-century personalities surrounding the eleventh-century popes.

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**Szpiech, Ryan, *Conversion and Narrative: Reading and Religious Authority in Medieval Polemic***

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Szpiech asks about the role of narrative, particularly first-person stories, in the conversion accounts to Christianity, Judaism and Islam from the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, in comparison with such accounts from early Christianity, and in apologetic and polemical literature more generally. Three arguments are made: that the Christian conversion stories expressed a sense of history shared with Christian polemics, that such stories added to the *auctoritas* of the account in an age where philosophy and reason became increasingly important forms of proof, and that Jewish and Muslim conversion accounts did not have the same apologetic interest as those from Christianity.

The author looks at some methodological and hermeneutical questions in the introduction, that help to situate the volume within the history of scholarship. Of particular importance is the question of conversion itself as an event or a process, as psychological interior transformation or a sociological change of affiliation. His interest is in the texts *qua* text, not at the historicity behind them. An examination

of the narrative form is attempted in order to bridge the divide between subjective and objective understandings of conversion.

The first argument takes two fifteenth-century examples: the conversion of Juan Andrés from Islam to Christianity and of Pablo de Santa María from Judaism to Christianity. The second type, caught up in dealing with Pauline and Augustinian notions of the enduring value of Judaism in relation to Christianity, were embroiled in theological issues that the first type could ignore. What is of great interest is the way the author brings to the reader's attention the conflicts within early Christian (Gospel and Pauline) accounts where conversion is both a return to and a rupture from Judaism and the Augustinian notion of time as both proleptic and analeptic that gives a singular and circular, rather than linear meaning to Pauline conversion.

In the next chapter, the two twelfth-century stories of conversion in Herman of Cologne's *Little Work on His Conversion* and in Petrus Alfonsi we see the role of reason in providing a new source of authority alongside biblical and patristic authors and how the Jew, as a person lacking in reason, became a new part of the anti-Judaic polemic. The convert's own experience and the inclusion of non-Christian writings became an important way of healing the division between the intrinsic worth of a story and its authenticity.

The third chapter looks at the slim evidence we have of conversion stories to Judaism, as a counterpoint to stories of conversion to Christianity, which reveals conversion narrative to be somewhat *sui generis* to Christianity. Here we encounter the ninth-century story of the conversion of Bodo (who became Eleazor), written from a third-person Christian perspective, of Wecelinus from the eleventh, and of Obadiah also from the eleventh. The lack of apologetic and polemical elements in these accounts makes a striking contrast with Christian ones.

The following chapter considers conversion in the thirteenth century in terms of one's expertise in knowing foreign works in their original language in order to make oneself a figure of authority. Here the ability of polemicists to use the Talmud or Qur'an as authoritative sources to prove the validity of Christianity without granting them any semblance of truth is explored, particularly in the writings of Dominicans like Fra Pau, Ramon Martí, and Ramon Llull where there was a concentration of questions of the textual integrity of the received versions of these non-Christian texts. What is most surprising to the modern reader here is Martí's assertion that the sound of a language like Hebrew is more important than its meaning. This contrasts with Llull's sense of using language to facilitate understanding and to rely more upon the use of reason than an appeal to authoritative texts.

Another writer, Alfonso of Valladolid, a convert from Judaism in the early fourteenth century, is held over until the next chapter. This writer appeal both to the authority of texts and to his personal experience in conversion, yet in a way different from what preceded him. Szpiech argues that it worked to cross purposes and marked the culmination and collapse of disputational writing. For one, he wrote in Hebrew for a Jewish readership, using a midrashic style and avoids insults. He claimed to believe in the Talmud as the instrument of his conversion, since it supported Christianity (at least in his reading) correcting it where necessary. He

wanted his readers to be open to truth, even if found outside Jewish sources and he sought to response to real reasons why Jews would not convert to Christianity.

The final chapter looks at four conversion narratives to Islam from Judaism and Christianity over several centuries. It is noted that Christians regarded Muslims as having more in common with them than Jews and that the contrast found in Christianity between interior change of belief and exterior change of social identity was not one that an early Muslim would have used, although there are a number of intersections with Christian conversion narratives. The accounts from former Jews seem to emphasise the natural progression towards Islam and are more about what is embraced than what is rejected. The fifteenth-century account of the conversion of the Franciscan friar Anselm Turmeda to Islam, however, mirrors Christian concerns at rejecting the religion abandoned.

The focus on the narrative structure of conversion stories as stories is maintained throughout the volume, and the notion that often these served a polemical purpose, especially for Christians, helps the reader see that polemic itself has a narrative character of historical dimensions. Szpiech has done a fine job in opening up our understanding of medieval conversion stories as rival fictions of sacred history.

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