



## Fray Luis de León and the Rhetoric of Self-Justification in *De los nombres de Cristo*

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### RESUMEN:

En *De los nombres de Cristo*, Fray Luis de León analiza los nombres que se le atribuyen a Jesús en la Biblia. Curiosamente, en este texto conocido, la postura retórica que el profesor salmantino adopta frente al texto bíblico es muy distinta de la que vemos en su exposición sobre el Cantar de los Cantares. Además, estas adaptaciones estilísticas tienen una relación estrecha con el proceso inquisitorial del famoso agustino. Un análisis de los vínculos entre la exposición, el proceso y *De los nombres de Cristo* sugiere que, aunque el contenido de este texto definitivamente es exegético, una meta secundaria era responder a las acusaciones de los testigos que le denunciaron a Fray Luis.

### ABSTRACT:

In *De los nombres de Cristo*, Fray Luis de León analyzes the names which are attributed to Jesus in the Bible. Curiously, in this well-known text, the rhetorical posture that the Salmantine professor adopts toward the Biblical text is very distinct from the stance we see in his exposition on the Song of Songs. In addition, these stylistic adaptations are intimately connected to the famous Augustinian's Inquisitorial trial. An analysis of the relationships between the exposition, the trial, and *De los nombres de Cristo* suggests that, while the content of the latter text is definitely exegetical, one secondary goal was to respond to the accusations of the witnesses who denounced Fray Luis.

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The Inquisitorial trial of Fray Luis de León (1572-76) has been called «one of the most famous episodes in the intellectual history of Golden Age Spain» (Girón Negrón 1197). Significantly, the imprisonment occurred early in Fray Luis' scholarly career: with the exception of his Spanish commentary on the Song of Solomon, which he penned in 1561, all his extant works were composed during or after the trial.

Fray Luis was not the only author of this period who endured a significant personal trauma. According to George Camamis, Cervantes' imprisonment in Algiers left such a mark on his subsequent works that «el tema del cautiverio sugiere inmediatamente el

nombre del autor del *Quijote*» (7). Camamis' observation leads one to wonder whether Fray Luis' Inquisitorial trial had a similar impact. The parallels are obvious: the Augustinian's imprisonment was only a few months shorter than that of Cervantes, and both authors were incarcerated before their literary endeavors had fully developed. However, while several studies have focused on the details of Fray Luis' trial,<sup>1</sup> much remains to be done in the area of its effect on his subsequent publications.

*De los nombres de Cristo* (*Nombres* hereafter)<sup>2</sup> is important to any such investigation. In the first place, the treatise was written during or shortly after Fray Luis' imprisonment.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, it was published in three editions shortly after the trial, with extensive revisions (1583, 85, and 87). For these reasons, *Nombres* must be considered of primary importance in determining whether his incarceration had an impact on his later works, as was the case with Cervantes. In fact, when we examine *Nombres* from this perspective, it is apparent that the trial affected Fray Luis' expository style in significant ways.

In order to determine how Fray Luis' exegetical technique was affected by his imprisonment, it will be necessary to begin by considering the causes for his arrest, as documented in the trial transcript.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the accusations made against him must also be compared to his pre-trial commentary on the Song of Solomon, in order to draw conclusions about how this document is related to his imprisonment. Subsequently, it will be possible to demonstrate how he altered his expository style in certain passages of *Nombres*, and how those adaptations can be seen as a reaction to his trial.

This study will demonstrate that, although Fray Luis' central purpose in composing *Nombres* was clearly devotional, the rhetorical stance he adopts in some chapters suggests that one of his secondary goals was to defend himself against his accusers. In other words, while the subject matter of *Nombres* is primarily expository, some passages can also be read as refutations of charges leveled against him during the trial. This rhetoric of self-justification has been overlooked in previous studies of *Nombres*.

First, then, in order to assess the trial's impact on *Nombres*, we must consider the reasons for Fray Luis' arrest: an understanding of the charges that were leveled against him will allow us to analyze the tactics he adopted in composing *Nombres*. However, critics are not in agreement as to why he was jailed. While some have emphasized Fray Luis' *converso* ancestry and the enmity that existed between him and certain colleagues at the University of Salamanca, most scholars have focused on his Spanish commentary on the Song of Solomon and his views on Biblical interpretation.

1.– Studies by Bell, Macrí, Pinta Llorente, and Vega continue to be important, and have been supplemented by more recent works, such as those by Cuevas, Girón Negrón, and Thompson. The collection edited by García de la Concha and San José Lera is also an essential resource.

2.– Quotations from the commentary on the Song of Solomon and from *Nombres* are taken from Fray Luis' *Obras completas castellanas*.

3.– In the *Dedicatoria*, Fray Luis states that he wants to take advantage of «este ocio, en que la injuria y mala voluntad de algunas personas me han puesto» (1: 408). Most critics take this statement to mean that Fray Luis was writing *Nombres* in prison, though Durán (106-07), Márquez (109-10), and Alcalá (*Proceso* lvii-lix) disagree. For the purposes of this study, it is not necessary to pin down exactly when Fray Luis began writing *Nombres*; it will be sufficient to note that he completed and published it after his release.

4.– Volumes ten and eleven of the *Colección de documentos inéditos para la historia de España*, edited by Salvá and Sainz de Baranda in 1847, contain the first published version of the trial transcript. Alcalá's 1991 edition, *Proceso inquisitorial de Fray Luis de León* (*Proceso* hereafter), is the version from which quotations are taken here.

The exact relationship between these factors —which issue/s were most important and which were mere pretexts— continues to be a source of debate. A century ago, Luis G. Alonso Getino advanced the notion that personal enmities had no connection to the trial (168-82), but Dámaso Alonso flatly states the opposite, that Fray Luis was arrested «por las rencillas de un claustro universitario» (167). Alexander Habib Arkin, however, argues that the translation of the Song into Spanish was probably the central issue in the trial (193, 97); Antonio Márquez agrees, and contends that the language Fray Luis used made the sacred book seem like vulgar erotic poetry (105). In contrast, Ángel Alcalá (*Proceso*, xxix), Francisco Blanco García («Fray Luis de León» 157), Miguel de la Pinta Llorente (63), and Colin Thompson (*Strife of Tongues* 60) have written that the trial revolved around competing methods of Biblical interpretation, particularly pertaining to the Latin translation of the Bible, known as the Vulgate;<sup>5</sup> for these critics, Fray Luis' Spanish commentary on the Song of Solomon was virtually irrelevant.

In order to resolve this question of why Fray Luis was arrested, it is imperative that we consult the trial record. In the Holy Office's compilation of the testimony of witnesses, the charges that the Inquisitorial prosecutor presented, and the statements Fray Luis made in his own defense, an attentive reader can discern a few key themes.

If we approach the transcript systematically, beginning with the testimony of the eight witnesses who testified prior to Fray Luis' imprisonment,<sup>6</sup> we observe that most are concerned with how he interpreted the Bible. Several accuse him of favoring the Scriptural interpretations of Hebrew authorities over those of early church fathers, including Saint Jerome, author of the Vulgate.<sup>7</sup> Considering the suspicion in which *conversos* were held at that time, this accusation may have been a deliberate smear tactic; Thompson, in fact, concludes that some witnesses' rabid adherence to the Vulgate «can only be described as a form of anti-semitism» (*Strife of Tongues* 37). Indeed, León de Castro, one of the most hostile witnesses, vents caustic anti-Semitic sentiment throughout his testimony (*Proceso* 8, 17). Four of the eight witnesses also mention having seen Fray Luis' Spanish exposition on the Song of Solomon, and two allude to his literal interpretation thereof.<sup>8</sup> One witness, Pero Rodríguez, even makes the absurd claim that Fray Luis was teaching the Lutheran doctrine of salvation by

5.— In an effort to alleviate confusion about the reliability of the Vulgate, the Council of Trent (1545-63) had declared in 1546 that the Vulgate should be considered «authentic.» This nebulous statement only created more debate, rather than resolving it. When Fray Luis became a professor at the University of Salamanca in 1561, the issue was still contentious: he and others believed that the Council had left open the possibility that some individual manuscripts contained errors, while the opposing camp, which included Fray Luis' accusers, held that the Council's decision affirmed the divine inspiration of the Vulgate and prohibited any criticism thereof. Muñoz Iglesias documents the development of this dispute and its connection to Fray Luis' trial. Alcalá («Peculiaridad» 66-71) describes how these debates created friction between Fray Luis and the colleagues who denounced him.

6.— Bartolomé de Medina (December 17, 1571 and February 18, 1572), Francisco Cerralvo de Alarcón (December 26, 1571), León de Castro (December 26, 1571 and March 3, 1572), Pero Rodríguez (December 29, 1571), Antonio Fernández de Salazar (December 29, 1571), Alonso de Fonseca (March 13, 1572), Fray Juan Gallo (March 13, 1572), and Martín Otín (March 28, 1572) (*Proceso* 5-11, 15-22, 34-37).

7.— Medina, Castro, and Gallo emphasize this point (*Proceso* 6, 8, 16-18, 36).

8.— Medina (*Proceso* 6), Cerralvo de Alarcón (*Proceso* 7), Rodríguez (*Proceso* 9) and Fernández de Salazar (*Proceso* 11) mention the Spanish translation. Rodríguez and Fernández de Salazar add the allegation of it being interpreted as a literal love song between Solomon and his wife.

faith, apart from works (*Proceso* 10). The arrest order was issued on March 26, 1572 on the basis of these charges (*Proceso* 40-41).

The formal accusation submitted by the prosecutor reflects the diversity of these allegations. In the ten statements of accusation, dated May 5, 1572 (*Proceso* 72-74), the issue of the Vulgate and Scriptural interpretation comes up four times. The prosecutor also repeats the allegations concerning the Song of Solomon, and in a manner that offers a clue as to the importance of this accusation: he alleges that Fray Luis

ha dicho y afirmado que los Cantares de Salomon eran *carmen amatorium ad suam uxorem*, y profanando los dichos Cantares los traduxo en lengua vulgar, y están y andan en poder de muchas personas, de quien el los dio y de otras, en la dicha lengua de romançe. (*Proceso* 73)

Thus there are three points touching on the Song of Solomon that the prosecutor condemns: the literal interpretation of the Song, the translation thereof to Spanish, and the circulation of the Spanish translation. It is important not to overlook how deeply the Inquisitorial representative is offended by the act of rendering the Song in a common tongue. He refers to it as sacrilege, and repeats the point that the document in question is in Spanish —«en lengua vulgar [...] en la dicha lengua de romançe.» The prosecutor concludes the formal accusation with a handful of additional and unrelated charges against the defendant: belittling the Scriptural knowledge of Church fathers, teaching that justification is by faith alone, and «otros errores [...] de los quales generalmente le acuso» (*Proceso* 74). The prosecutor's charges suggest that, while the matter of Fray Luis' attitude toward the Vulgate was a central issue, his treatise on the Song of Solomon was important as well, and not merely for the views expressed therein, but also because of the language in which it was written.

The statements Fray Luis submitted in his own defense are consistent with early witness testimony and with the prosecutor's allegations. His first confession (*Proceso* 25-29), which he submitted a few weeks before his arrest, focuses primarily on the Vulgate, as do the majority of his depositions throughout the trial, but that first declaration deals extensively with his commentary on the Song of Solomon as well (*Proceso* 26-27). Most important is that he is careful here to not call the work a translation, but refers instead to «una *declaración* breve en lengua castellana sobre Los Cantares de Salomón» (*Proceso* 26, emphasis added). His characterization of the text as a treatise rather than a translation, which his accusers called it, is significant. He also stresses that he was unaware that the book was circulating and has tried to stop its dissemination «por andar en lengua vulgar» (*Proceso* 27).

Throughout the remainder of the trial, Fray Luis continues to deal with the Vulgate primarily, but also addresses the nature of his study on the Song. For example, in a later defense of his commentary, he twice refers to it as an «*exposicion*,»<sup>9</sup> and then goes on to argue that the prohibition on Biblical translation has never been clearly understood, insisting that the Holy Office has allowed other such books to circulate in Spanish (*Proceso* 331).

Two other documents emphasize the importance of the Spanish commentary on the Canticle. The first of these is a personal letter, written the summer before Fray Luis was

9.— In fact, I cannot find any instance in the trial in which he calls it a translation.

arrested, in which he asks a colleague, Francisco Sancho,<sup>10</sup> for his opinion of the commentary. After affirming his high regard for Fray Luis' expository skill, Sancho adds:

Empero para publicarse y imprimirse a mi parecer no conviene que esté en lengua vulgar, porque se pornia en descrimen de impedirse por ser sobre libros de la sagrada Scriptura; y en el cathalogo se prohiben semejantes libros, y en este ay special razon por los misterios que en el se contienen [. . .] y pienso que agora se ha de estrechar mas la licencia para imprimir libros en romance de cosas de la religion christiana. Y ansi el Chatecismo Romano despues de aromañado no se ha permitido imprimir y ansi tambien ha venido un propio motu del Summo Pontifice en el qual manda recoger muchas maneras de Horas en romance. Y ansi ternia por mas acertado que V.P. como dize en su carta scriviesse la dicha obra en Latín, y la perfeccionasse en lo que le pareciesse convenir para sabios y doctos y tener por mejor contentar a los tales que no a la turba multa. (*Proceso* 361)

Finally, we should not overlook the order for Fray Luis' release. Therein, in addition to admonishing him to avoid scandals in the future, the Supreme Council mandates «que se recoja el quaderno de los Cantares traduzido en romance y ordenado por el dicho fray Luis de Leon» (*Proceso* 698). Despite his earlier characterization of the work as an exposition, the inquisitors considered it a translation, which they felt obligated to suppress.

Viewing the above evidence, it is apparent that several factors contributed to Fray Luis' arrest. His imprisonment was precipitated by his Spanish commentary on the Song of Solomon, as well as by concerns about his attitude toward the Vulgate specifically and Biblical interpretation in general. Undoubtedly, critics will continue to debate the precise relationship between those causes. But let us not misconstrue the significance of Fray Luis' exposition on the Song; the attitude toward the Vulgate that he expresses therein was significant, as were his allusions to the text as a pastoral love poem, but the fact that his exegesis was composed in Spanish was far from insignificant.

The one aspect of the trial on which there seems to be virtually no debate is the suffering Fray Luis endured. He was imprisoned for nearly five years,<sup>11</sup> which he spent in isolation, apart from the audiences he was granted with inquisitors.<sup>12</sup> He complained during the trial that his health was in jeopardy as well (for example, *Proceso* 27, 43-44, 594, 600, 604). Furthermore, the threat of torture was always hanging over his head. When the prosecutor presented his first list of official charges, he asked for permission to use torture (*Proceso* 74), a chilling request given that Fray Luis himself was present.

Following such an ordeal, it is not unreasonable to conclude that Fray Luis would have wanted to do everything in his power to avoid repeating the experience. After nearly five years of responding to multiple lists of accusations, he surely knew quite well what sub-

10.– Sancho was an inquisitorial official and professor of theology at the University of Salamanca. In 1569, when permission was granted to publish a new version of the Vatable Bible, he was picked to chair the committee of review, on which Fray Luis and some of his future accusers served (Alcalá, *Proceso* xxiii, González Novalín 134-35).

11.– His arrest, as noted above, was ordered on March 26, 1572 (*Proceso* 40), and he was jailed the next day (*Proceso* 41). The Supreme Council in Madrid ordered his release on December 7, 1576 (*Proceso* 698).

12.– As a general rule, contact with visitors or even fellow prisoners was prohibited (Kamen 186, Lea 2: 515). Although breaches of protocol did occur (Lea 2: 516, 519, 523, 526), in Fray Luis' case isolation seems to have been the norm. For example, on August 20, 1575, he complains that he has no one to care for him but «un mochachico que está ally presso que es simple» (*Proceso* 594).

jects to treat carefully and what perceptions to address in order to avoid arousing suspicion in the future. It is logical, then, that he would have made changes to his expository style when he composed *Nombres*. By avoiding the sort of comments that landed him in prison and repudiating the views he was alleged to have adopted, he could protect himself against future accusations.

If Fray Luis indeed made a conscious effort to convince readers of his orthodoxy, we should be able to document how *Nombres* diverges from the pre-trial commentary on the Song. Thus, the work on the Canticle, while not intended for publication, is nonetheless a vital example of his pre-trial attitudes and exegetical technique. Studying its relationship to Fray Luis' imprisonment will make the stylistic byproducts of the trial more apparent when we examine *Nombres*.

When we consider the commentary on the Song in light of the trial record, one thing that is immediately apparent is Fray Luis' approach to Biblical interpretation. In the first place, he makes no effort to conceal his respect for the Hebrew language. This deferential attitude is evident from the introduction, in which he places a priority on the original Hebrew manuscripts over Greek and Latin versions: «procuré conformarme cuanto pude con el original hebreo, cotejando juntamente todas las traducciones griegas y latinas que de él hay, que son muchas» (1: 74). Fray Luis manifests his knowledge of Hebrew throughout the commentary in numerous analyses of words and phrases in that language. For example, he includes fifteen such explanations in the first chapter alone (1: 76-96).

Even more importantly with regard to the trial, Fray Luis also demonstrates considerable regard for rabbinical commentators, particularly when he confronts difficult or obscure passages. His acknowledgment of Hebrew expositors typically takes the form of references to «hombres doctos en aquella lengua» (1: 83), «los doctores hebreos» (1: 93), or some variant thereof (1: 98, 102, 127, 140, 151, 182).

Equally troubling, both to hostile witnesses and the inquisitors, was the attitude toward the Vulgate that he expresses in the commentary. In one passage, he calls into question Jerome's rendering of a portion of Song 4.1 and affirms the accuracy of rabbinical experts in translating the verse differently:

*Entre tus cabellos*: en la traslación y declaración de esto hay alguna diferencia entre los intérpretes. La voz hebrea es *tzamathec*, que quiere decir cabellos o cabellera, y propiamente es la parte que cae sobre la frente y ojos, que algunas mujeres los suelen traer postizos, y en castellano se llaman *lados*. San Jerónimo, no sé por qué fin, entiende por esto la hermosura encubierta, y así traslada: *Tus ojos de paloma, demás de lo que está encubierto*. En que no solamente va diferente del común sentido de los más doctos en esta lengua, pero también en alguna manera contradice a sí mismo, que en el capítulo 47 de Isaías, donde está la misma palabra, entiende por ella *torpeza y fealdad*, y así la traduce (1: 127).<sup>13</sup>

Elsewhere, Fray Luis argues that Jerome translated Song 5.11 «atendiendo más al sentido que a la palabra» (1: 155) and that his own version of Song 8.5 «es trasladado a la letra del original hebreo, que el trasumpto latino dice de otra manera» (1: 199). As we have seen,

13.— For a more thorough explanation of why inquisitors found Fray Luis' exposition of *tzamathec* so troubling, see Girón 1212-15.

this sort of boldness in dealing with the Vulgate, along with the deference he demonstrates toward Jewish commentators, seems to have alarmed both witnesses and inquisitors.

The commentary also lends credence to the allegation that Fray Luis viewed the Canticle as a literal love poem, since he refers to the Song as such on two occasions. The first is in the prologue, where he avers that «es todo [el libro] una égloga pastoril, donde con palabras y lenguaje de pastores, hablan Salomón y su Esposa» (1: 72). Then he commences the first chapter of his exposition by reminding readers that «Ya dije que todo este Libro es una égloga pastoril» (1: 77). As already noted, some of the witnesses who testified against Fray Luis were scandalized by the mere suggestion that the Song of Solomon can be interpreted in any literal manner.

But Fray Luis did not limit himself to simply noting the connection between the book and the Israelite sovereign's love for his wife. He also is willing to deal with some of the more explicit passages on a literal level. For example, his gloss of Song 4.5 is particularly frank:

*Tus dos pechos, como dos cabritos mellizos, que están paciendo entre las azucenas*  
No se puede decir cosa más bella ni más a propósito que comparar los pechos hermosos de la Esposa a dos cabritos mellizos, los cuales, demás de la terneza que tienen por ser cabritos y de la igualdad por ser mellizos, y demás de ser cosa linda y apacible, llena de regocijo y alegría, tienen consigo un no sé qué de travesura y buen donaire, con que roban y llevan tras sí los ojos de los que los miran, poniéndolos afición de llegarse a ellos y de tratarlos entre las manos. (1: 133)

His description of the bride's delight in her beloved's kisses (Song 1.2) is equally literal. He explains that

porque [el alma] parece tener su asiento en el aliento que se coge por la boca, de aquí es el desear tanto y deleitarse los que se aman en juntar las bocas y mezclar los alientos. (1: 78)

In light of these passages, it is hardly surprising that his detractors would accuse him of taking a literal view of the Song of Solomon, or that one would even claim that Fray Luis' commentary was more erotic than divine (*Proceso* 67).

To summarize, then, the treatise on the Song of Solomon has several stylistic elements that correspond with and doubtless contributed to the accusations that witnesses made against Fray Luis. His obvious respect for the Hebrew language and rabbinical commentators, his criticisms of the Vulgate, his description of the Song as a pastoral love poem, and his literal exposition of certain erotic passages correspond to what we have examined of the trial record.

When we compare these characteristics of Fray Luis' exegesis on the Song to the stance he adopts in *Nombres*, it becomes apparent that in the latter work he made systematic changes to his expository style. We might be tempted to attribute these differences to intellectual maturation or to the fact that he had a public audience in mind when he wrote *Nombres*. Alternatively, it would be natural to think that a devotional work like *Nombres* would differ in some ways from a verse-by-verse exposition such as Fray Luis' study of the Song. However, such explanations cannot account for the fact that the stylistic differences between these two works, which we are about to document, correspond so closely with the accusations lodged against the author during his trial.

The disparity is evident from the first lines of the *dedicatoria* to *Nombres*, wherein Fray Luis launches into an attack on translations of the Bible into common languages. Since Biblical translation was an important aspect of his trial, as well as a practice that Luther and other Protestants had embraced, it seems that Fray Luis wanted to make a good first impression on readers with a resounding denunciation of unorthodoxy. The *dedicatoria* begins, «De las calamidades de nuestros tiempos, que, como vemos, son muchas y muy graves, una es, y no la menor de todas, muy ilustre señor, el haber venido los hombres a disposición que les sea ponzoña lo que les solía ser medicina y remedio» (1: 403). Fray Luis explains that the medicine to which he refers is the Scripture itself: though originally written in common languages, vulgar translations of the Bible have produced all manner of errant doctrine through the machinations of heretics, he argues (1: 404). He continues, «Y así, los que gobiernan la Iglesia, con maduro consejo y como forzados de la misma necesidad, han puesto una cierta y debida tasa en este negocio, ordenando que los libros de la Sagrada Escritura no anden en lenguas vulgares» (1: 404). This prohibition was wholly justified, he contends, since «leer las Escrituras el vulgo le era ocasión de concebir muchos y muy perniciosos errores, que brotaban y se iban descubriendo por horas» (1: 405). It is important to underline that, while *Nombres* is essentially devotional in nature, Fray Luis strikes a polemic tone from the outset. From the first lines of the text, he presents himself as a defender of Catholic doctrine.

In the passage analyzed above, Fray Luis refutes an allegation made during the trial that, if true, would have implied sympathy with Luther's insistence on making the Bible accessible to the masses.<sup>14</sup> This may explain why Fray Luis is not content to condemn this one Protestant practice, but instead continues heaping abuse on Luther and his followers throughout *Nombres*, as if to leave no doubt concerning his attitude toward the German dissenter. For example, in four separate passages he laments the conflicts that divide the Church. In his description of Christ as a *Pastor*, he cites Jesus' characterization of false teachers as «ladrones y mercenarios, que entraron a dividir y desollar y dar muerte al rebaño» (1: 480). They are later described as «ovejas en las apariencias buenas que tienen, y dentro robadores lobos» (1: 786). In another passage, he describes how division and strife make war more likely (1: 590), and he later juxtaposes the peace that Christ gives with «los llorosos males que nacen de las contiendas y de las diferencias y de las guerras» (1: 617).

In addition to these general comments against division, *Nombres* also addresses specific points of doctrine. For example, Fray Luis attacks the Lutheran belief that salvation is based on faith alone, apart from works. On first glance, this may seem a bit tangential both to his trial and to the theme of *Nombres*, but one witness, after all, claimed that Fray Luis had said that «sola la fe justificava [...] o otro error» (*Proceso* 10). We might be tempted to dismiss such a vague allegation, especially given the fact that only one witness mentions this charge. However, it is included in the formal accusation (*Proceso* 73) and in the *Publicación de testigos* (*Proceso* 206), and Fray Luis does address it in his defense (*Proceso* 226, 274). In *Nombres*, the issue is first raised in the second chapter of the first book, entitled *Faces de Dios*. Here, he makes the first of several oblique references to how God is «inducido de nuestro amor,» and on that basis blesses His followers (1: 452). The

14.— Luther's German New Testament was published in 1522, and his translation of the entire Bible into German appeared in 1534.



notion of believers' acts of righteousness triggering God's benevolence—which is directly opposed to Luther's argument that salvation is an unmerited gift—occupies the majority of the chapter on *Padre del Siglo Futuro* (1: 501-35), in which the author explains the interworking of faith and grace. Fray Luis argues that a correct understanding of how the two are related «basta a dar luz en muchos de los errores que hacen en este miserable tiempo guerra a la Iglesia, y basta desterrar sus tinieblas de ellos» and also «destruye las principales fuentes del error luterano y hace su falsedad manifiesta» (1: 512). He also twice refers to those who believe in faith alone as «los que desatinan ahora» (1: 512, 523).

Besides the doctrine of faith and works, which had been mentioned specifically during the trial, Fray Luis repudiates certain other tenets of Lutheranism. In two passages he affirms the doctrine of transubstantiation (1: 652, 724), which Luther had denied. Moreover, he criticizes as heretics those who deny the usefulness of fasting and other physical discomforts (1: 788). While these issues were not directly connected to the trial, Fray Luis may have felt it prudent to address them in *Nombres* in order to emphasize his adherence to Catholic teaching. These anti-Lutheran comments—both the general criticisms of division in the Church and the specific doctrinal issues that are addressed—are more conspicuous in *Nombres* because of the total absence of such allusions in his pre-trial exposition.

When we examine how *Nombres* deals with an issue that was more central to the trial—the Song of Solomon—we find that the author makes even more frequent efforts to alleviate any concerns about his exegetical approach. As we will see, both in general comments about the Song and in analyses of specific passages, Fray Luis goes to great lengths in *Nombres* to underscore the spiritual significance of the Song and downplay any literal or sensual interpretation.

Fray Luis first takes up the matter of the Song of Solomon in the second chapter of the first book, entitled *Faces de Dios*. Meditating on Christ's physical appearance, he stops himself in mid-sentence, and exclaims, «Mas ¿para qué voy menoscabando este bien con mis pobres palabras, pues tengo las del mismo Espíritu que le formó [...] que nos le pintan en el libro de los Cantares por la boca de la enamorada pastora» (1: 448). He continues by expounding at length on Song 5.10-16, the Bride's description of the Bridegroom (1: 449-50). Significantly, he is not merely giving preference to the allegorical interpretation, but is ignoring the literal level entirely.

*Pastor*, the fourth chapter of the first book, is another example of this approach. It is logical that León would allegorize this name, since his accusers had charged him with treating the Canticle as merely a pastoral love song. Near the beginning of this chapter, then, we read that «el mismo Espíritu Santo, en el libro de los Cantares, tomó dos personas de pastores para por sus figuras de ellos y por su boca hacer representación del increíble amor que nos tiene» (1: 467). Two other times in the chapter on *Pastor*, he returns to the notion of the Song as a symbolic representation of Christ's love for the Church. In discussing the Bridegroom's invitation to the Bride to come out to the country with him (Song 2. 10-13), Fray Luis does not even mention the two characters from the Song, but instead relates the conversation as taking place between Christ and his Bride (1: 470). Here the literal interlocutors are entirely supplanted by their allegorical counterparts. He repeats this substitution in an analysis of Song 5. 2: «[Cristo] no duerme ni reposa, sino, asido siempre al aldaba de nuestro corazón, de continuo y a todas horas le hiere y le dice, como en los Cantares se

escribe: *Abreme, hermana mía, Amigo mía [sic], Esposa mía, ábreme*» (1: 471). Once again, Fray Luis overwrites the Song's context with an allegorical reading.

This tactic is even more evident in the chapter on *Esposo*, in which allegorical interpretations overwhelm the literal. The most significant passages in relation to the trial may be two analyses of the kiss (Song 1.2) that the author undertakes in this chapter. If we recall that his analysis of this passage in the commentary on the Canticle had included a literal discussion of the pleasures of a kiss, it is significant to note that here in *Nombres*, he focuses exclusively on the spiritual plane. In one place, he connects Song 1.2 to the figurative «kiss» that takes place between Christ and a believer who receives communion (1: 652). Later in *Esposo* he refers again to the same verse from the Song, and explains that «debajo de este nombre de *besos* le pide ya su palabra» (1: 672). The kiss that had been discussed in an erotic sense in the pre-trial commentary is presented in strictly mystic or spiritual terms in *Nombres*.

Equally significant is how the chapter on *Esposo* deals with the Canticle's references to the Bride's breasts. As with the kiss, in *Nombres* Fray Luis casts an allegorical light on passages that he had treated literally in the commentary. In the first case, discussing the Song's use of imagery to convey spiritual concepts (Song 4.5), he remarks, «Porque no son los pechos tan dulces ni tan sabrosos al niño, como los deleites de Dios son deleitables a aquel que los gusta» (1: 667). This analysis is notable because, in addition to being obviously symbolic, the literal meaning that undergirds the allegory has been substituted. In dealing with references to the Bride's breasts in the pre-trial commentary, Fray Luis described their sensual allure —how they fill the Bridegroom's eyes and make him want to approach and caress them (1: 133, quoted above). Yet when he writes here in *Nombres* about the same imagery, he treats the maternal function of the breasts as the literal meaning implied in the Song. He has not only allegorized the Song's wording, but has also divested it of any sexual content.

Later in the chapter on *Esposo*, Fray Luis again considers the Song's description of the Bride's breasts, and in a manner that parallels the approach described above. He argues that in the description of the Bride's beauty in Song 4.1-15, the Bridegroom is deliberately evoking the image of the nation of Israel wandering in the desert: her eyes are the pillar of fire and cloud, her hair represents the first tribes in the procession —Judah, Issachar and Zebulon— and her teeth are the tribes of Gad and Ruben, for example (1: 676). Her breasts are Moses and Aaron, he states, and all that their leadership meant to the wandering nation (1: 676). As in the passage described above, Fray Luis attempts to erase any erotic undertones. He does not simply claim that the Song's sensual language has a spiritual application, but rather insists that the Bridegroom's meaning was spiritual from the outset. In so doing, he takes the Song's most provocative language, the sensual nature of which he had declared explicitly in the pre-trial commentary, and in *Nombres* transforms it into pure allegory.

The tendency to spiritualize the Song is, indeed, present throughout a whole section of this chapter on *Esposo* (1: 671-78). For example, he argues that the whole of the book naturally breaks down into three sections, which correspond to the three Biblical epochs of Nature, Law, and Grace (1: 672). He also offers spiritual interpretations of several prominent passages in the Song —the Bride's delight in her beloved (1: 669); her departure

from the city in search of the Bridegroom (1: 674); Solomon's litter (1: 675); the lovers' retreat to the nuptial chambers (1: 675); and the Bridegroom's appearance at the Bride's window in the middle of the night (1: 677). Throughout this section, as elsewhere, Fray Luis presents exclusively allegorical readings of the Song.

He also employs this strategy in his analysis of *Amado*, the second chapter of the fourth book. In the chapter's initial lines, it is taken for granted that the Beloved to whom the Bride refers throughout the Song is Christ (1: 745). Later in the chapter, Fray Luis again spiritualizes the Song's reference to Solomon's litter, this time equating it with the universe, in which Christ reigns as king (1: 753). A few pages later the three speakers of *Nombres* consider the Bride's declaration that «Many waters cannot quench love, nor will rivers overflow it» (Song 8.7), presenting this statement as illustrative of Christ's love for believers (1: 759). *Amado* also reiterates the spiritual meaning of the Song's references to kisses and breasts, as the interlocutors reflect on the passion believers feel toward Christ (1: 765-66).

Two subsequent chapters contain other examples of Fray Luis' tendency to treat the Canticle as symbolic. In the chapter on *Jesus*, he quotes San Bernardo's assertion that the Bride's exclamation, «Your name is like purified oil» (Song 1.3), is a reference to Christ (1: 778). Later, he interprets the reference to the henna plant in Song 1.14 as a metaphor for divine pardon (1: 794). In his study of *Cordero*, the Bride's description of the Bridegroom in Song 5.16 is treated as referring to Christ's meekness: «[Cristo] reprendió sin pasión, y castigó sin enojo, y fue aun en el reñir un ejemplo de amor. ¿Qué dice la Esposa? *Su garganta suavísima, y amable todo Él, y todas sus cosas*» (1: 808).

It is clear that the Song is an important leitmotiv in *Nombres*; García de la Concha even goes so far as to argue that *Nombres* is essentially an exposition of the Canticle. Therefore, it is significant that in *Nombres* Fray Luis' analysis of the Song focuses on figurative, spiritual meanings, to the exclusion of the literal level. Of course, *Nombres* is by no means novel in its symbolic treatment of the Song.<sup>15</sup> However, there is something unusual in the way he performs an exegetical about-face in *Nombres*. In the examples we have examined, *Nombres* revisits several images from the Song that the pre-trial exposition had dealt with literally; in each case, in *Nombres* Fray Luis shuns the literal level entirely. It is difficult to avoid concluding that the accusations of treating the Song too literally prompted this radically different approach in *Nombres*.

Another stylistic contrast is evident when we consider how *Nombres* deals with the Vulgate. While Fray Luis' commentary on the Song contained numerous analyses of Hebrew words, and also called into question the Vulgate translation, there is only one such passage in *Nombres*. It occurs in the first chapter, where he asserts that the original Hebrew in one phrase is slightly less obscure than the Latin (1: 439-40). Thereafter, he does not consider Saint Jerome's translation.

In fact, in *Nombres* Fray Luis goes further than simply avoiding any criticism of the Vulgate—he also excoriates the Jews. This may seem a *non sequitur* at first glance, but the connection is apparent in the trial documents. As previously noted, several witnesses alleged that he showed more respect for the interpretations of Hebrew expositors than for

15.—The earliest recorded Jewish commentaries on the Song tend toward allegorical interpretations, according to Longman (20-24). Early Church writers, such as Origen and Hippolytus, followed this tradition, a trend which continued until the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Longman 28-35; Matter 4, 10, 20).

the Vulgate and the early Church Fathers.<sup>16</sup> This is not surprising, since to many scholars at that time, the mere act of consulting Hebrew sources smacked of heresy (Bataillon 740-42, Fernández Marcos 268, Medina Domínguez 483). In *Nombres*, Fray Luis seems bent on removing all doubt as to his opinion of rabbinical commentaries.

This is evident from the first chapter, *Pimpollo*, in which he discusses the «ignorancia,» the «ceguedad,» and the «enormes pecados» of «aquel pueblo ingrato» (1: 438). Elsewhere in the same chapter he reiterates this theme: while excoriating heretics who misinterpret a passage from Zechariah, he comments derisively that even the Jews understand the prophet correctly (1: 429).

This leitmotiv of the blindness and sinfulness of the Jewish people recurs throughout the remainder of *Nombres*. The chapter on the name *Jesus* contains one of the briefest examples, a passing allusion to «los judíos ciegos» who rejected Christ (1: 794). The *dedicatoria* to the second book of *Nombres* dwells on the theme at greater length. As Fray Luis develops the idea of original sin and the principal of one sin leading to another, he comments that through the years the Jews have gone on «amontonando a pecados pecados,» ultimately becoming «un ejemplo común de la ira de Dios» (1: 541). Throughout this passage he underscores the notion that the Jews deserved to not recognize their Messiah, owing to generations of accumulated guilt and to their «ceguedad y maldad» (1: 542).

The idea of the Jews being deserving of God's wrath is, indeed, almost another category of anti-Jewish criticism in *Nombres*, paralleling the concept of their blindness and guilt. For example, in the chapter on *Faces de Dios*, Fray Luis writes that the Jews «merez[ieron] por su ceguedad e ingratitud ser por Él consumidos» (1: 447). Similarly, the chapter entitled *Camino* refers again to the Jews' rejection of the Messiah, alleging, «se salieron de [el Camino], y no lo quisieron conocer cuando lo vieron» (1: 463). Fray Luis goes on to discuss God's mercy toward the nation of Israel, and remarks, «es cosa que admira el extremo de regalo y de amor con que trató Dios a aquel pueblo, desmereciéndolo él» (1: 463). He continues by holding up God's ongoing patience with the Hebrew nation as an example of divine mercy (1: 464).

The anti-Semitic rhetoric is most apparent in the chapter dealing with the name *Brazo de Dios*. Here, every vituperation at Fray Luis' disposal is brought to bear in an uninterrupted diatribe against the perceived evils of the Jewish nation. The density of these comments is such that in the 28 pages of the chapter it is difficult to find a page which does not hold up the Jews for condemnation in some new light. As one might expect from other chapters, the theme of their spiritual myopia is abundantly present— there are twenty references to the Jews' blindness and self-deception in this chapter alone. He also repeats the refrain of their deserving God's wrath in several places—for example, he insists that they are guilty of «pecados grandes contra Él [...], feos, ingratos, enormes pecados (1: 557), and alludes to «los pecados y mala disposición de aquella gente» (1: 558). In addition, the verb «merecer» is employed six times in two pages of this chapter to emphasize that the Jews' hardships and struggles are justly deserved (1: 558-59).

But *Brazo de Dios* does not merely repeat insults that occur in other chapters. Instead, Fray Luis applies the full vigor of his intellectual and rhetorical skills in demonstrating

16.— Bartolomé de Medina (*Proceso* 16) and Juan Gallo (*Proceso* 36) mentioned this point, but León de Castro was obsessed with it (*Proceso* 7-8, 16-18).

contempt for the Hebrew people. He charges them with being «apartados de [Dios], y fuera de su servicio» (1: 546), and refers to «[e]l error vano de aquestos mezquinos» (552). Moreover, he alludes to the «ojos tan flacos como los de aquel pueblo» and «corazones tan aficionados al bien de la carne, como son los de aquéllos,» shortcomings which, he argues, explain how the Hebrews «se cegaron, y se enredaron de su voluntad» (1: 554). He even addresses the Jewish nation directly in a few places, calling them «gente ciega y miserable» (1: 550), and demanding, in reference to the Biblical prophecies of the Messiah's triumphs, «Dígannos si responde mejor con las promesas divinas, y si las hinche más este vencimiento, y si es más digno de Dios que las armas que fantasea su desatino» (1: 570).

Viewed as a whole, this anti-Semitic language in *Nombres* is notable both for its abundance and its vehemence, especially in contrast with the respectful attitude Fray Luis expressed toward «los doctos de aquella lengua» in his pre-trial commentary on the Canticle. In order to understand the different tack he takes in *Nombres*, we must keep in mind that during his trial he had been formally charged, as a *converso*, of favoring «Judios y Rabinos» over New Testament writers and Church fathers («Acusación oficial del fiscal,» *Proceso* 72-3). This may explain why he would resort to such strident attacks on a group whose leading figures he had treated so respectfully before his arrest. It seems clear that these insults serve the same rhetorical purpose as Fray Luis' remarks about common language translations of the Bible, his condemnation of heresy, and his allegorization of the Song of Solomon. These topoi constitute a self-defense posture, adopted to deter future accusations.

We have seen that there are significant stylistic differences between the pre-trial commentary on the Song of Solomon and the post-trial *De los nombres de Cristo*, differences which align with the charges brought before the Inquisition and also with Fray Luis' defense before that body. In *Nombres*, he writes directly and pointedly against common-language translations of Biblical texts, denounces heresy in general and Luther specifically, advances a much more symbolic view of the Song of Solomon, and strives to erase the impression that he favored Jewish expositors over Saint Jerome's Vulgate.

These observations lead to two conclusions. First, they suggest that, while the central thrust of *Nombres* was indisputably devotional, one of Fray Luis' secondary goals in writing and publishing this text may have been to prove his innocence in what we now call the court of public opinion, and to insulate himself against future accusations. As Medina Domínguez has observed, «La misma actitud defensiva exigida por los textos legales contagia sus páginas teológicas» (483). Indeed, the fact that he was denounced to the Inquisition and tried a second time in 1582,<sup>17</sup> though not arrested, may have prompted León to hasten the completion of his manuscript: the first edition of *Nombres* was published the very next year.

In addition, the evidence indicates that the relationship between the Song of Solomon and the trial is more complex than some critics have maintained. While Fray Luis' exegetical approach and his attitude toward the Vulgate seem to have been the main concerns with the commentary, the fact that it was written in Spanish was an issue as well.

17.— The record of this second brush with the Inquisition was originally published by Blanco García (*Segundo proceso*). See also Bell, *Luis de León* 175-80.

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