What did Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada Know About Islam?

¿Qué sabía Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada sobre el Islam?

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Abstract: This article considers into what conceptual framework Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada, archbishop of Toledo (1209-1247), placed the information he knew about Islam. Did he view Islam as a religion, a polity, a heresy, a law, or some combination of these? It answers this question first by showing the role Islam plays within the archbishop's historiography and then by exploring particular terms the archbishop uses to discuss Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, including, religion, sect, faith, perfidy, heresy, and law. It concludes that Islam, like Judaism and Christianity, was viewed as a law by Rodrigo, a term that encompasses much of what our modern term religion conveys, but eliminates the dichotomy between faith and practice, and minimizes the importance of elective assent to the community.

Keywords: Middle Ages, Islam, Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada, *Historia arabum*, religion

Resumen: Este artículo considera el marco conceptual en el que Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada, arzobispo de Toledo (1209-1247) sitúa la información sobre el Islam que conocía. ¿Consideraba el Islam como una religión, una política, una herejía, una ley, o una combinación de todo ello? La respuesta consiste primero en mostrar el papel que juega el Islam en la historiografía del arzobispo y, en un segundo paso, en examinar la terminología que utiliza al disertar sobre el Islam, el Cristianismo y el Judaísmo, incluidos los términos de secta, fe, perfidia, herejía y derecho. La conclusión es que, para Rodrigo, tanto el Islam como el Cristianismo y el Judaísmo eran una «ley», un término que abarca en gran medida lo que comporta el término religión, a la vez que elimina la dicotomía entre fe y práctica y minimiza la importancia de la adhesión electiva del individuo a la comunidad.

Palabras clave: Edad Media, Islam, Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada, *Historia arabum*, religión

Islam was a central preoccupation for Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada throughout his career as archbishop of Toledo (1209-1247). It posed an immediate, physical threat in the shape of the Almohad regime that ruled dangerously close to Toledo's southern border, as well as an intellectual and spiritual challenge to the claims of Christianity to be the sole true faith. Rodrigo's encounter with Islam consequently took many different forms. He is probably still best known for the role he played promoting, participating in, and publicizing the great battle of Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212, which broke the back of Almohad strength in the peninsula. He followed up this military victory by pushing the border of Toledo south, deep into territory long under Muslim rule. He also confronted Islam using more scholarly means, writing an account of the history of the Arabs in Spain, from their rise under Muhammad to the triumph of the Almoravids, titled the *Historia arabum*[1]. Finally, he sponsored the translation of the Qur'ān completed in 1210, two years before the victory at Las Navas, by Mark of Toledo[2].

Though his activities in these spheres have received much deserved attention in recent years, the question of what Archbishop Rodrigo knew about Islam still remains open. By this I do not mean what kind of information he had about Islam, or what might have been his sources for that information. We know much more about both of these questions than we did even ten years ago, thanks to the work of Maser, Crego Gómez, and Chairi (see note 1), all of whom focused on the information and sources found in Rodrigo's *Historia arabum*. My own concern in this article is what was it Rodrigo thought of, when he thought of Islam. Into what conceptual framework did he place the information he learned, the things that he knew and believed about Islam? Was it a religion, a political force, a social movement, an ethical system, or some combination of the above?

Answering this question is more complicated that it appears at first glance. We use the term «religion» when we speak of medieval Islam, and when we speak of medieval Christianity for that matter[3]. But asking, for instance, whether medieval

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[1] *Historia arabum*, ed. Juan FERNÁNDEZ VALVERDE, in CCCM 72C, Turnhout, 1999. Recent important studies include: María CREGO GÓMEZ, *La fuente arabe de la historia del Emirate omeya de al-Andalus en la* Historia arabum *de Jiménez de Rada*, in *e-Spania*, 2 (2006), put online February 7, 2008, accessed October 1, 2010. URL: http://e-spania.revues.org/274; Cándida FERRERO HERNÁNDEZ, *Cristianos y Musulmanes en la* Historia arabum *de Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada*, in *Journal of Medieval Latin*, 18 (2008), pp. 356-73; Matthias MASER, *Die Historia arabum des Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada. Arabische Traditionen und die Identität der Hispania im 13. Jahrhundert*, Geschichte und Kultur der Iberischen Welt 3, Münster-Berlin-New York, 2006. I regret that I was unable to consult Chakib CHAIRI, *Introducción, edición, y estudio contextualizado de* Historia arabum *de Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada* (PhD diss. Abdelmalek Essaadi University, 2006), before preparing this article for publication.

[2] See especially Thomas E. BURMAN, *Reading the Qur'ān in Latin Christendom, 1140-1560*, Philadelphia, 2007, ch. 5.

[3] John TOLAN, *Saracens*, New York, 2002, p. XV.

Christians viewed Islam as a political/military force, or as a religion, poses a question that is already over-determined[4]. As I shall discuss further below using the work of Jonathan Smith and Talal Asad, the term «religion» as we use it has a history that begins at the moment of religious conflict between Catholics and Protestants in the sixteenth century, and is deeply implicated in modern, Western, Christian, and European discourses about the world. That does not mean we cannot apply it to the Middle Ages, or to discussions of Islam, but it does mean it may not reflect how medieval thinkers would have thought about their situation themselves.

Understanding what place Islam held in Rodrigo's own thought-world can only be accomplished through a process of comparison, by showing Rodrigo's discussions of Islam in relationship to his consideration of other systems of belief and practice. I will explore this question in two ways, first, by showing the role Islam played within the archbishop's historiography, and then by examining a constellation of words, including «religion», «sect», «faith», and «law», that Rodrigo used to describe Islam and other belief systems in order to show how they fit together in his thought, and how they compare to our own understanding of what comprises a religion. Rodrigo is not the only or perhaps even the most representative figure to use this constellation of terms, or some variant of it, but it is my hope that this study will move other scholars to pay similar attention to the comparative use of language by other medieval figures.

I have argued elsewhere that Rodrigo's perspective on the world was global (as far as he knew the globe) and that his histories reflect an understanding of the world as ideally one and unified under God but fractured since the Fall. He opens both his *Dialogus libri uite*, a text that defends the truth of Christianity by arguing against the Jews, and his *Breuiarium historie catholice*, a paraphrase of biblical and secular pagan history, with an overarching account of the emergence of different faith systems, culminating in the rise of Christianity. In his characteristically ornate Latin, both passages begin with the world briefly one and united after creation, but then fractured and divided into variety and multiplicity, signaled by the worship of idols and sacrifice to demons, notwithstanding God's direct covenant with one people, the Jews. Only the coming of Christ could promise an eventual restoration of the originary unity[5]. In these passages, division means division into different religious groups.

The *De rebus hispanie*, his influential history of the Spanish kingdoms, begins with the world united under Noah after the Flood. Yet that unity proves necessarily

[4] John TOLAN, *Saracens*, p. 46; Kenneth Baxter WOLF, *Christian Views of Islam in Early Medieval Spain*, in *Medieval Christian Perceptions of Islam*, ed. John TOLAN, New York, 1996, p. 85.

[5] *Dialogus libri uite*, ed. Juan FERNÁNDEZ VALVERDE and Juan Antonio ESTÉVEZ SOLA, in CCCM 72C, Turnhout, 1999, prol., ll. 2-21, p. 175; *Breuiarium historie catholice*, ed. Juan FERNÁNDEZ VALVERDE, in CCCM 72A, Turnhout, 1992, prol., pp. 3-5.

short-lived because the world is soon divided between Noah's sons, and the universal language of the world is itself fractured into many tongues as a punishment for the construction of the Tower of Babel. The multiplication of languages after the collapse of the Tower of Babel has profound significance for Rodrigo, for it was this fall that created nations and ethnicities. Before this collapse, everyone lived together according to the same customs. But the emergence of new languages resulted in the emergence of different peoples who constituted distinct provinces and territories in which they could live. People speaking different languages started to hate each other and when those sharing a common language invaded other regions to seek peaceful places in which they could establish homelands, violence and warfare arose[6].

For Rodrigo, in this work, ethnicity and hence division are created by language. Warfare and conflict are an immediate consequence of different linguistic groups living side by side. But the emergence of multiple languages was itself a direct consequence of the decision by God to destroy the Tower of Babel to punish the pride of its builders. The challenge of living in a diverse world among potentially hostile groups was therefore ordained by God himself. Rodrigo reminds us that it is not possible to attain divine unity in this fallen world, and the cost of religious and linguistic disunity is an unavoidable and inevitable loss of uniformity[7]. Justification for Christian hegemony lies in the degree to which it promises greater, though never complete, unity and uniformity and thus more closely models the divine ideal. This interpretive framework provides a place for Muslims, and also for Jews, to exist so long as they live in a world ruled by Christians.

The *De rebus hispanie* and Rodrigo's remaining historical writings, all of which recount aspects of the emergence and development of Spain, are devoted to describing these inevitable conflicts between different groups, who are divided on ethnic and/or religious grounds. These texts share a common preoccupation with the origins of peoples and an interest in the triumph of Christian truth and Catholic orthodoxy, through the creation, maintenance, fracture, and final recovery of Christian hegemony. Their common narrative thread is that they recount the different invasions of Spain, from the first, by Hercules, to what Rodrigo hoped would be the last, by the Arabs. Rodrigo had announced in the *Breuiarium* his plan to write a history of the Muslims[8]. The series of historical writings on Spain ended with the long-promised *Historia arabum*, which was finished in 1245, two years before the archbishop's death[9].

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[6] *Historia de rebus hispanie siue Historia Gothica*, ed. Juan FERNÁNDEZ VALVERDE, in CCCM 72, Turnhout, 1987, I.i, p. 9-10.

[7] Lucy K PICK, *Conflict and Coexistence: Archbishop Rodrigo and the Muslims and Jews of Medieval Spain*, Ann Arbor, 2004, pp. 73-74.

[8] *Breuiarium*, II. vi, ll. 16-18, p. 64.

[9] Juan FERNÁNDEZ VALVERDE, *Introducción*, to Jiménez de Rada, *Historiae minores*, pp. 1, 28-33.

Rodrigo's depiction of the Muslims in his historical writing contains both traditional and innovative elements. In his *De rebus hispanie*, Muslims mainly play the traditional role of military threat, a political force used by God as a scourge of the Christians for their sinful ways. Although the Christians benefit from divine aid when attacking them, the religion of the Muslims is discussed little. Rodrigo follows the example of the Mozarabic Chronicle of 754, and that of other early Christian histories by ignoring the religious component of the Muslim threat[10].

The *Historia arabum*, the last of his histories, breaks from this pattern with an extensive description of Muhammad's life and the foundation of Islam. It recounts the schism and fracture first of the Christian faith, with the emergence of Islam, and then of Spain itself, when it is invaded and divided by the Muslims. In its prologue, Rodrigo explains that he is narrating the devastation perpetrated by the Muslims who are, hopefully, the last of the oppressors of Spain. He himself has tried to put an end to their depredations, and he hopes God will preserve Spain from further dissections by gladiators («a gladiatorum dissecationibus»), as he collectively describes all the previous invaders of Spain. He carries the theme of a divided Spain throughout the prologue. Spain has suffered being divided since the Muslim invasion into five kingdoms –Muslim al-Andalus and the Christian kingdoms of Leon-Castile, Portugal, Navarre, and Aragon– and of enduring Christian deserters to the Saracen side. Rodrigo credits Alfonso VIII with reviving Visigothic strength when he defeated the Almohad ruler at Las Navas de Tolosa, and he announces his project to describe Islamic history from the time of Muhammad. He concludes the prologue by stating that the aim of his outline of the origins of Islam is to help weak Christians avoid being tempted by its teachings[11].

Rodrigo's *Historia arabum* had two principal goals. The first was to show, as in the prologue, that rule by Muslims as political leaders leads away from unity towards greater division. Rodrigo demonstrates this in episodes where Muslim leaders fight against each other, as well as against Christians, and by describing rebellions against Muslim authority by local communities, as well as other internal quarrels within the Muslim community. These struggles are the constant theme of his historiography. Rodrigo's second goal is to show that Islam is not a belief system or movement that emerged independently outside the Christian world, but rather came from within it. The world, for Rodrigo, is not a binary in which the Christian West opposes the Islamic East, but one in which a Christian whole struggles to maintain as much unity as is possible in its Fallen state in the face of internal threats.

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[10] Kenneth Baxter WOLF, *Conquerors and Chroniclers of Early Medieval Spain*, Liverpool, 1990, pp. 38-43; cfr. Benjamin KEDAR, *Crusade and Mission*, Princeton, 1984, pp. 18-41 on early Christian disinterest in Islam as a religion.

[11] *Historia arabum*, prologue, p. 87.

Rodrigo accomplishes this second goal through his discussion of Muhammad and the origins of Islam. The archbishop writes that, at the time of Muhammad's birth, «Arabia and Africa were being pulled by conflicting enthusiasms, between Catholic faith, Arian heresy, Jewish faithlessness, and idolatry», while Muhammad's own father, under the influence of a certain Jewish magician friend, vacillated between Christianity and Judaism[12]. Rodrigo discusses the prophet's birth:

> When the time for Aemina's labour had come, that Jew, since he was a magician, plotted the disposition of the planets and the hour of the birth of the child. Aly had gone to holy Jerusalem to pray and, returning, he found that his child had been born, and the magician revealed everything that he had seen about the child, and he predicted that he would be marvelously exalted in dominion and law[13].

After the death of Muhammad's parents and grandparents, his uncle, Abū Tālib, took him in. Rodrigo writes, «He gave him to the aforementioned magician for instruction. He instructed him in natural sciences, and the Catholic law, and the written record of Jewish perfidy; whence he afterwards usurped something of the Catholic faith and something of the old Law for the support of his sect»[14]. Rodrigo thus describes Islam as blending some aspects of Christianity and Judaism, and blames a Jew for providing Muhammad with its building blocks[15].

In these passages, Rodrigo uses a variety of different terms to describe the different belief systems he discusses – faith, law, perfidy, and sect, but not, here, religion. What do each of these terms or categories mean for Rodrigo? Was Islam an, albeit misguided, religion in the same way that Christianity was a religion? Did Rodrigo have a concept of «religion» itself as an overarching generic category in relation to which Christianity, Judaism, and Islam were specific instances? If not, did he have some other way of seeing them as related yet different?

Modern scholars in the academic discipline of religious studies would mostly answer no. For them, religion as an unmarked category and as a discipline is a modern invention whose first stirrings began in the sixteenth-century when Europeans

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[12] «Et cum Arabia et Affrica inter fidem catholicam et heresim arrianum et perfidiam Iudaycam et ydolatriam diuersis studiis traherentur, Arabs predictus Aly... inter fidem catholicam et Iudeorum perfidiam fluctuabat», *Historia arabum*, I, ll. 6-10, p. 88.

[13] «Cum autem tempus partus Emine aduenisset, Iudeus ille ut erat genaticus captauit conistenciam planetarum et horam natiuitatis infantis. Aly autem in sanctam Iherusalem iuerat ad orandum, et rdiens inuenit filium suum natum. Et quicquid ille geneaticus de infante perceperat reuelauit et predixit eum in regno et lege mirabiliter exaltandum», *Historia arabum* I, ll. 12-18, p. 88.

[14] «Iste tradidit eum predicto geneatico instruendum, qui instruxit in naturalibus scienciis et lege catholica et Iudayce perfidie documentis; unde et ipse postmodum aliqua de fide catholica, aliqua de lege ueteri in sue secte subsidium usurpauit», *Historia arabum* II, ll. 7-11, p. 89.

[15] Lucy K. PICK, *Conflict and Coexistence*, p. 77-79.

first encountered the peoples living in the Americas. Jonathan Z. Smith makes this clear in his seminal article, «Religion, Religions, Religious», in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*. He begins with two quotations from Europeans responding to the New World, both writing in 1553, one Catholic, one Protestant, choosing one of each to demonstrate that their new perspective is not a consequence of their different brand of faith. Richard Eden, in *Treatyse of the New India* wrote, «At Columbus first coming thither, the inhabitants went naked without shame, religion, or knowledge of God». Whatever Eden means by «religion» here, it is obviously not merely a synonym for either shame, or knowledge of God. Pedro Cieza de León, in his *Crónica de Peru* described the native north Andean population as «observing no religion at all, as we understand it, nor is there any house of worship to be found»[16].

Smith draws four conclusions about religion from these two passages. First, religion is not a native category. It doesn't belong to just one group. Its presence, absence, and nature is something that comes to the fore when one group compares itself to another. Moreover, as a category, religion has an implied universality. It is a ubiquitous human phenomenon that one expects to find in some manifestation everywhere, and one is surprised when it is missing. Third, it is a generic second-order category whose characterizations seem natural to the one articulating it. Those who speak of generic religion know exactly what they mean by it and think of its characteristics as natural, even if they might disagree about which particular characteristics constitute religion. Lastly, it is an anthropological category, which is to say, not a theological category. It is not about the metaphysics of what one group believes, or what is Truth, but rather is about what human beings do, hence Eden's distinction between religion on the one hand and shame (ethics/morals) and knowledge of God (belief) on the other. Smith dismisses uses of the term religion before the sixteenth century as «mostly irrelevant» to his discussion, but notes that when the term is used in the medieval period, it most often refers to the proper performance of monastic life[17].

Talal Asad likewise reflects on the relationship of the medieval to the modern in the formation of religion as a category of study in his article, «Religion as an Anthropological Category». For Asad, as for Smith, the emergence of an idea of «natural religion» as a universal category in the early modern period was a crucial step in the formation of the modern concept of religious belief. In contrast, he writes, «For medieval Christians, religion was not a universal phenomenon: religion was a site on which universal truth was produced, and it was clear to them that truth was not

[16] Jonathan Z. SMITH, *Religion, Religions, Religious*, in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. TAYLOR, Chicago, 1998, p. 269.

[17] Jonathan Z. SMITH, *Religion, Religions, Religious*, p. 269.

produced universally»[18]. For Asad and Smth and many others, the modern, anthropological category of religion is born when inner fragmentation between Protestants and Catholics rocks Christianity and exposure to those with very different practices and beliefs demands the creation of new universal categories[19].

If exposure to those who act and think differently from you is what creates the demand for a generic concept, «religion», it seems strange that this should be considered a phenomenon that dates only from the sixteenth century. Hegemony over truth was a Christian claim that needed to be asserted and reasserted frequently over the centuries, never a universally accepted fact, even in the smaller world Christians occupied before the age of exploration. Heretics within, Jews without, and pagans even further without posed challenges to Christian self-conceptions from Christianity's very begininings, as did, a few centuries later, the threat of Islam. As we have seen, these were central preoccupations for Archbishop Rodrigo in the thirteenth century, so it is worth investigating what understanding he may have had of what we call religion, and how Islam fit into this understanding.

Rodrigo uses the word «religion» (*religio*) in myriad ways in his writings, though it does not appear at all in the *Historia arabum*[20]. Frequently, as Smith and Asad would predict, it does refer to the correct and pious way of life of someone in holy orders. So, in his *Dialogus* against the Jews, «men of religions», where religions are plural, are monks[21]. In the *De rebus hispanie*, Bishop Taio is «outstanding in religion and letters»[22], while taking on the «habit of religion» means becoming a monk[23].

But it can refer to more than simply life lived under a religious rule. In the *Dialogus*, when he writes that the church «is a glorious society of religions», and that «a variety of religions now adorns the Church of Christ»[24], he means that a range of Christian practices are worthy to each be called a «religion». Unlike after the fall of

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[18] Talal ASAD, *Religion as an Anthropological Category*, in *Genealogies of Religion*, Baltimore, 1993, p. 45 n. 29; also, «It is part of my basic argument that socially identifiable forms, preconditions, and effects of what was regarded as religion in the medieval Christian epoch were quite different from those so considered in modern society», p. 29

[19] That this supposedly universal category is thus itself imbedded within Christian history is significant, but not part of what I want to get at in this paper.

[20] Cfr. Albert BLAISE, *Dictionnaire latin-français des auteurs chrétiens*, Paris, 1954, p. 709.

[21] «Viri religionum», *Dialogue libri uite* IV, III, p. 297, l. 70.

[22] «Taionem Cesuraugustanum episcopum religione et litteratura prestantem», *De rebus hispanie*, II, xx, p. 69, ll. 20-1.

[23] «Religionis habitum postulauit et ad monasterium conuolauit», *De rebus hispanie*, III, XII, p. 92, ll. 41-42.

[24] The full passage reads, «Et licet multe particulares ecclesie sint destinte, que constant ex colegiis et prelatis, sub uno capite omnes; una uarietas, ante quam circundata est regina, est religionum societas gloriosa, quia licet diuersis signis et cultibus uarientur, sub unitate cclesie Christi degunt; et sicut interiora tabernaculi cortinarum uarietas decorabat, its et Christi ecclesiam religionum uarietas nunc decorat», *Dialogus*, IV.III, ll. 49-55, p. 296.

Babel, discussed, earlier, here variety is something positive, and includes the different monastic and secular religious orders, and also the different liturgies celebrated in the Church. Here, Rodrigo uses the word *religio* in the plural to indicate what we would call different practices, rites, or liturgical traditions. In the *De rebus hispanie*, secular leaders variously protect and neglect these «religions». Sancho III, in his one-year rule over Castile, is a «friend of religions»[25], and his brother, Fernando II of Leon was «devoted to religions and churches»[26]. But what all these uses have in common, whether they refer to monks or liturgies is that in every case, the term *religio*, even when it appears in the plural, is always positive, referring to correct and appropriate religious activities and the performance of the same.

In this respect, «religion» is much like the term «faith», *fides*, which is generally modified by *catholica* in Rodrigo's writings, to the degree that it is difficult for Rodrigo to conceive of faith that is not catholic[27]. Difficult, but not impossible – Rodrigo writes in the *Historia arabum* that after the Caliph Muawiyah's general Abd Allah subdued Egyptian Tripoli «many were received into the faith», by which he means Islam in this case[28]. It would be tempting though quite wrong I believe, however, to argue that «religion» refers simply to practice, for Rodrigo, while «faith» refers solely to belief. The sharp modern distinction between belief as opposed to practice, which Asad identifies, is not part of medieval thought[29]. «Religion» is something that involves intellectual as well as bodily effort and action, while «faith» requires external expression as well as internal assent. What Rodrigo says in his *Dialogus* about what faith teaches concerning proper penance neatly demonstrates how faith includes acts: «Catholic faith teaches that four things must be observed: contrition in the heart, confession by mouth, satisfaction by deed, and that what must be wept over, must not be committed again»[30]. «Faith» itself is the consequence of an act, the oath sworn at baptism by one's godparents that enrolls one in the community of the faithful[31], and in this sense can be considered a juridical status.

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[25] «Amicus religionum», *De rebus hispanie* VII.XII, l. 24, p. 233.

[26] «Erga religiones et ecclesias sic deuotus ut eis fere omnia regalia largiretur», *De rebus hispanie*, VII.XIX, ll. 5-6, p. 242.

[27] Eg. *Historia arabum* I, ll. 6-10, p. 88. Cfr. Jean Claude SCHMITT, *Du bon usage du «Credo»*, *Faire croire: modalités de la diffusion et de la réception des messages religieux du XIIe au XVe siècle*, Rome, 1981, p. 340, where *fides* means «bonne croyance». Cfr. BLAISE, *Dictionnaire*, p. 351.

[28] «Diuersis patriis subiugatis et multis prouinciis domitis et uastatis et cateruis plurimis in fide receptis», *Historia arabum*, VII, ll. 32-33, p. 98.

[29] Talal ASAD, *Religion as an Anthropological Category*, p. 46-47.

[30] «In prima autem quatuor docet fides catholica obseruanda: cordis contricionem, oris confessionem, operis satisfacionem et quod flenda iterum non comittat», *Dialogus* VI. VII, ll. 4-7, p. 365.

[31] John VAN ENGEN, *Faith as a Concept of Order in Medieval Christendom*, in *Belief in History: Innovative Approaches to European and American Religion*, ed. Thomas A. KSELMAN, Notre Dame, 1991, pp. 23-26.

If *religio* always has a positive valence for Rodrigo, its negative antithesis seems to be the word *secta*, «sect». It is one of the words that appears over and over again in the *Historia arabum* to describe Islam «[Muhammad] was the founder and author of their sect», Rodrigo tells us in his prologue[32]. He «made use of some things from the Catholic faith and some things from the Old Testament in support of his sect», when he confected Islam[33]. After he won his fight with the Qurayshi, who wished to keep their old ways, «Muhammad began to preach his sect publicly and to incite the people to rebellion»[34]. And following almost every successful Muslim battle during the age of Islamic expansion, Rodrigo describes Muhammad and his successors subduing wide ranges of territory to their sect[35]. It is a term that is not used by Rodrigo exclusively about Islam, but also about other disfavored communities. In his *Breuiarium*, Rodrigo speaks of people leaving the sect of idols[36], and also of the rise of the sect of the Pharisees[37].

When he uses it of Islam, «sect» implies a whole host of associations. It is a community, as well as a way of worship and behaviour, rooted in the teachings of its founder, Muhammad. Like «religion», it is not universal, but particular, contingent and specific. «Sect» seems to mean the same thing as «religion», except that where «religion» is positive, «sect» is negative. We would be correct to say, I believe, that sect is false religion. While «sect» is always negative, for Rodrigo, correct participation in «sect» by Muslims can, however, have a kind of positive valence. He writes of the caliph Yazid that, «on account of the extreme conscientiousness of his sect was loved by all and held to be most holy»[38], and describes Ayub, a governor of Muslim Spain, as «the most prudent of his sect»[39].

If «sect» is the negative face of «religion», «perfidy» is the negative face of «faith». It is a term that is used traditionally applied the Jews, and Rodrigo uses it repeatedly about them, especially in his anti-Jewish *Dialogus*[40]. In the *Historia arabum*, as we saw above, he says that before the coming of Muhammad, Africa and Arabia were divided between Catholic faith, Arian heresy, Jewish perfidy, and idolatry, while Muhammad's own father vacillated between Catholic faith and Jewish

[32] «Eorum exordium a Machometi tempore inchoaui, qui eorum secte fuit conditor et inuentor», *Historia arabum*, prol., ll. 18-20, p. 87. Cfr. BLAISE, *Dictionnaire*, p. 747.

[33] «Et ipse postmodum aliqua de fide catholica, aliqua de lege ueteri in sue secte subsidium usurpauit», *Historia arabum*, II, ll. 9-11, p. 89.

[34] «Ex tunc Mahomat cepit sectam suam publice predicare et ad rebellionem populos concitare», *Historia arabum*, VI, ll. 16-17, p. 96.

[35] Eg. *Historia arabum*, VII, ll. 9-10 and 15-16, p. 97, ll. 48-49, p. 98; VIII, ll. 4-5, p. 98; XII, ll. 16-17 and 30, p. 105.

[36] *Breuiarium*, VI.lvi, l. 7, p. 358.

[37] *Breuiarium*, VIII.xciv, p. 491.

[38] «Izit ob sanctimoniam sue secte ab omnibus amabatur et sanctissimus habebatur», *Historia arabum*, X, ll. 37-39, p. 102.

[39] «Erat in secta Mahometi prudentissimus», *Historia arabum*, IX, ll. 37-38, p. 101.

[40] As when he calls them blinded by perfidy, *Dialogus* I.iii, l. 2, p. 184. Cfr. BLAISE, *Dictionnaire*, p. 611.

perfidy[41]. Rodrigo uses «perfidy» once in this work to refer to Islam: the unhappy people, drunk on a diabolical poison sweetened by lust, accepted the Qur'ān, «and they still remain obstinate in their perfidy»[42].

One term that is noteworthy by its rarity, is heresy. The Arians are heretics[43], and the Cathars in the southern France of Rodrigo's own day are also called heretics[44]. But though Rodrigo's description of the origins of Islam, in that Muhammad confected it out of Christian sources, clearly identifies Islam as a Christian heresy rather than, for instance, a pagan faith, the archbishop deliberately avoids using that term to describe Islam, and never calls Muslims heretics. Rodrigo's aim in his writings was to create the theological grounding that would allow a place for Muslims and Jews to live under Christian rule[45]. Identifying Muslims as heretics during a time of heightened concern about Cathars in southern France in the early thirteenth century, would have undermined that place. Probably for a similar reason, Rodrigo is likewise sparing with his use of forms of *infidelis*[46].

Rodrigo's use of the constellation of parallels and antonyms of «religion», that I have been discussing allows him to code for his readers as negative or positive aspects of the faith and practices of human beings of different traditions. He uses received etymology to create that coding in part. Smith notes that one of the popular etymologies for religion comes from the root which gives us the Latin, *ligo-*, which means to bind, suggesting the notion that religion is something that binds you to a certain way of life, like monastic life, or to a particular set of liturgical practices[47]. Rodrigo uses another word, *conligo-*, based on the same root, to describe the binding of people to Islam as a negative thing. In his prologue to the *Historia arabum*, Rodrigo says he is writing to warn his Christian audience about how the lying revelation of Muhammad fixed a pestiferous poison in the heart with which he bound (*colligauit*) lustful souls as if with knots. Rodrigo wants the young to learn from him to abstain from fables and being bound (*colligari*) by the bonds of Adam, which is to say, death through sin, and instead be held by the bonds of charity[48]. Both Christians and Mus-

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41 «Et cum Arabia et Affrica inter fidem catholicam et heresim arrianum et perfidiam Iudaycam et ydolatriam diuersis studiis traherentur, Arabs predictus Aly... inter fidem catholicam et Iudeorum perfidiam fluctuabat», *Historia arabum*, I, ll. 6-10, p. 88.

42 «Quas [zoharas] tamen uiru diabolico debriati et libidine dulcorati infelices populi receperunt et adhuc in sua perfidia permanent obstinati», *Historia arabum*, VI, ll. 27-29, p. 96.

43 Eg. *Historia arabum*, I, ll. 6-10, p. 88, and frequently in the *De rebus hispanie*, when their conversion to Catholicism in Spain is discussed: eg. II.XV, pp. 62-64.

44 *Eg. De rebus hispanie* VIII.II, p. 260.

45 Lucy K. PICK, *Conflict and Coexistence*, p. X-XI.

46 Eg. *De rebus hispanie* VII.XXVI, p. 248. Cfr. BLAISE, *Dictionnaire*, p. 441.

47 Jonathan Z. SMITH, *Religion*, p. 269.

48 «Aduertat autem lectoris studium qualiter mentita reuelatio uersuti hominis Machometi ex corde finxit uirus pestiferum, quo libidinosas animas quasi nexibus colligauit, ut discunt paruuli a fabulis abstinere et Ade funiculis colligari, et trahi uinculis caritatis», *Historia arabum*, prologue, ll. 22-26, p. 87.

lims are vulnerable to this negative binding. When outlining the life of Muhammad, Rodrigo writes that Muhammad invented Islam so that, «He might bind (*colligaret*) the damnable souls of the sinners as if in ropes»[49], and later in the same chapter Rodrigo writes that Muhammad lied to the people and told them the angel Gabriel told him, «Ridiculous and sinful things... so that the people, whom he had incited to rebellion, might be bound (*colligaret*) by the bonds of his sect of death»[50]. Isidore of Seville in his *Etymologiae*, defined *religio* as a positive kind of bond, saying that, «Through religion we bind our souls to the divine cult by a bond of service»[51]. The notion of a negative form of binding, which we can contrast with the positive, life-giving bonds of «religion», is a crucial part of Rodrigo's characterization of Islam[52].

It would seem from the above discussion of «religion» and its cognates that Asad and Smith are correct, and that for Rodrigo there is no term that means what we mean when we speak of religion as a generic and neutral category of which there are many religions, some we may like and favour while others we may not. This, I want to suggest in what follows, is an incorrect conclusion that comes from focusing too closely on the word *religio* and its various parallel terms as a possible antecedent for our own understanding of religion. It is true that in the Middle Ages *religio* did not mean what religion would come to mean in the Early Modern period and beyond, and that for Rodrigo, as for others of his contemporaries, «religion» was always a loaded term. But there was another term, widely in use in the Middle Ages, that did serve as a generic and universal category for all the concepts and ideas that we now put under the rubric of religion. That word was *lex* a word that meant, as we shall see, something more to them than what we usually mean when we speak of its English translation, «law»[53].

All human beings were bound by law, be it divine, natural, or human; Jewish, Muslim, Christian, or pagan. Law could be further qualified as good or wicked, but unlike the words «religion» and «sect», it needed qualification. Alone, it was a neutral concept. If *re-ligio* is a positive binding, and *col-ligio* is, in Rodrigo's usage, a negative bond, then *lex* is a neutral kind of bond, understood to derive like the oth-

[49] «Legem statuit inuenire, qua quasi funiculis peccatorum dampnandas animas colligaret, cepitque fabulis detestandis seducendas animas demulcere», *Historia arabum*, V, ll. 9-11, p. 92.

[50] «predicta omnia et multa alia ridicula et nefanda sibi dicta a Gabriele angelo menciebatur, ut populos quos ad rebellionem concitauerat secte sue mortis funiculis colligaret», *Historia arabum*, V, ll. 96-98, p. 95.

[51] «Religio appellata quod per eam uni Deo religamus animas nostras ad cultum divinum vinculo serviendi», ISIDORE OF SEVILLE, *Etymologiae*, ed. W.M. LINDSAY, Oxford, 1911, VIII.2

[52] For the use of the same kind of language of negative binding by a contemporary or Rodrigo, see Innocent III's sermon for Ash Wednesday, sermon XII, *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 217, coll. 367A-372A, where the pope uses it of heretics, sinners, and the damned.

[53] Cfr. BLAISE, *Dictionnaire*, 493. Tolan notes that Christians speaking about Islam called it the «law of the Saracens», but he does not explore the implications of what this might mean: *Saracens*, p. XVI.

ers from the root *ligo-*, as medieval authors from Cassiodorus to Thomas Aquinas attested. «Law (*Lex*) is so-called from binding (*ligando*)», writes Honorius Augustodunensis[54].

Lawgivers, for Rodrigo in his *Breuiarium*, are multiple, from God himself, who gave his «fiery law» to Noah; Abraham; Moses; Phroneus, who gave law to the Greeks; Minos, who gave law to the Cretans; Solon to the Athenians; and so on[55]. The whole of the paraphrase of biblical and secular history in Rodrigo's *Breuiarium* can be viewed as the story of the competition between different laws, ending with the coming of Christ. Indeed, its prologue opens with the phrase, «Noue legis salutare preconium sue cause preuenit principium» –«The origin of its cause preceded the salvific proclamation of the new law»– indicating that what follows will be the story of law[56]. The history of the relationship between God and man that follows, as discussed above, is characterized as a genealogy of law, from its origins in divine law which created the world, to its perversion by men through the worship of idols, to the coming of the new law in Christ. Everyone lives under law, though it may be good or bad law, universal or particular to a people. When Rodrigo addresses his Jewish interlocutor in his anti-Jewish *Dialogus*, he speaks most frequently of «your law» at the moment when he wishes to discuss the beliefs, practices, preconceptions, and rules of his Jewish discussant whose book is a «legis rotulum», scroll of the law[57].

Smith's four criteria for the term «religion» help us understand what Rodrigo means when he uses the term, «law». For Rodrigo, «law» is not a native category; everyone, even pagans is expected to have it; «law» is thus universal; and its characteristics are those that appear natural to the other: Rodrigo does not feel it necessary to define or qualify Solon's law, for instance, beyond stating its author. By calling it «law» his audience is expected to know something about it. I will have more to say about Smith's fourth criterion, that it is an anthropological category, below.

In the *Historia arabum*, Muhammad likewise brings a new law. The Jewish soothsayer who teaches him about Christian and Jewish law, by which Rodrigo means rabbinic law, predicts that Muhammad «will be wonderfully exalted in dominion and law»[58]. After his conquest of Damascus, Muhammad «invents» his new law to prevent the Christians he has conquered from obeying their pope and attempting the restoration of the Roman Empire[59]. After Muhammad's flight to Jeru-

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[54] *Expositio in Psalmis*, in *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 172, col. 280B.

[55] *Breuiarium*, prologue, l. 20, p. 3; I.XXI, l. 6, p. 43; II.II, ll. 40-44, p. 61; II.XXII, p. 74; III.XI-XIII, pp. 123-125; III.XXXII, ll. 20-21, p. 220; VII.XIV, l. 3, p. 381.

[56] *Breuiarium*, prologue, l. 1, p. 3.

[57] Eg. *Dialogus*, I.II, ll. 2, p. 182; I.X ll. 108-109, p. 198; II.VIII, l. 43, p. 221; «legis rotulo», I.III, l. 4, p. 184.

[58] «Predixit eum in regno et lege mirabiliter exaltandum», *Historia arabum*, I, ll. 17-18, p. 88.

[59] «Quo adepto uerens Mahomat ne de populis sibi subiectis, qui christianis legibus subiacebant, Romano Pontifici obedirent et reconciliati imperio adhererent, legem statuit inuenire», *Historia arabum*, V, ll. 6-9, p. 92.

salem and vision of Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, Gabriel tells him, «Now you are put straight, and all those who believe in your law»[60]. In his struggle with the members of his tribe over their idolatry and his new faith, he is accused of wanting to abolish their laws and the gods of their fathers. They hope that Muhammad, «may remain in his law, while we might observe the rites of our fathers»[61]. But Muhammad urges them, «Speak the word that I have preached and convert to my law»[62]. The possessive pronouns that modify «law» in these three examples indicate that Muhammad's law is particular to his community, not universally applicable. Law is something that binds together Muhammad's community, as it does other communities with their own laws, and it creates communal norms of ethical behaviour long after the prophet's own death. Rodrigo has Sancho Garcia, fighting alongside the Caliph Sulaiman II, chiding the caliph for selling «wives and sons and men of his own law», into slavery[63].

Smith's fourth characteristic of religion as a universal category is that it is an anthropological category. He makes a distinction between religion as theology a matter of belief and an internal, native, category, in the sense that no one can really judge Christian theology except a Christian –and religion as anthropology–, the study of an aspect of human culture by outsiders. This distinction inserts the very study of religion itself into the perceived dichotomy between belief and ritual practice that has been a persistent feature of discussions of religion since the sixteenth century, for instance in Protestant criticisms of Catholicism as being about outward forms and empty rituals rather than inner dispositions. However, «law», as medieval writers used it, means something more than «religion», as we use it, and Rodrigo was neither the first nor the last nor the most important figure to use «law» in this way. «Law» encompasses not only theology and anthropology, but other notions as well, such as the idea of being bound to a community, and as a community. It is much more than a set of rules and sanctions; it is a system of interwoven beliefs, ethics, liturgical and extra-liturgical practice. It is impossible to separate the idea of belief from the idea of practice in the medieval notion of «law», as we do in our contemporary understanding of what constitutes «religion». Law erases that dichotomy. Likewise, the notion of being member of a «law» minimizes the importance of assent and consent, something that is also part of modern conceptions of «religion». For medieval people, «law» was very much something you were born into.

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[60] «Nunc es directus tu et omnes qui crediderint legi tue», *Historia arabum* V, ll. 23-24, p. 93.

[61] «'Iste homo a proposito non cessabit; set maneat in sua lege et nos ritus patrios obseruemus'», *Historia arabum*, VI, ll. 9-10, p. 96.

[62] «'Dic,' inquit, 'uerbum quod predicaui et conuertere ad legem meam'», *Historia arabum*, VI, ll. 12-13.

[63] «In Deum grauiter peccauistis, cum uxores uestras et filios et homines legis uestre, quos gladio cepimus, in seruos emere uoluistis», *Historia arabum*, XXXIV, ll. 35-37, p. 132.

Islam was thus for Rodrigo both a law, like Judaism, and Christianity, and another instance of the, for him, inevitable diversity and disunity of this fallen world. As a law, it was at once religion, political force, social movement, and ethical system. Rodrigo's political goal as archbishop of Toledo was to submit Muslims, and also Jews, to the rule of his king. His theological challenge was to make this palatable to a Christendom that increasingly demanded uniformity of worship and practice from all those living within it. His theological and historical writings walked a delicate balance that made this possible, for a time.