

The Medieval Papal Bull *Sicut Judeis* and its impact on Jewish life over time

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Over centuries, Church policy towards Jews formed into one of reluctant protection. During the 12th century, Pope Calixtus II issued a bull regarding the Jews that nicely encapsulated a thousand years of careful exegesis and patristic writings. This bull is addressed to “all faithful Christians” and begins “Sicut Judeis non debet esse licentia...” thereafter going on to enumerate the rights of Jews in Christendom.

Twenty different Popes issued the document, six in the 12th century, ten in the 13th, and four in the 14th. Most of these followed the exact format of the first extant bull, issued by Alexander III in 1181. Calixtus’ version is only known because his name is included internally within the list of previous Popes to issue the Sicut.

To briefly summarize the contents of the bull, it permits Jews the ability to go about their business without being forcibly baptized. They are furthermore not to be attacked or suffer from extortion, nor may they be disrupted during their festivals, nor may their graveyards be disturbed. The provision against forced baptism rests upon writings that, according to Christian tradition, go back to the Psalms. Many of the other prohibitions were created in response to a flare up of violence against during the crusades. Often Sicut was issued as a response to a petition on behalf of the Jewish communities of Europe regarding a specific problem. In the case of Gregory X’s Sicut for instance, Jews were suffering from blood libels (ritual murder charges) and so an additional clause addressing this was added. Later Popes often removed such clauses, when they ceased to be relevant.

This study shall examine the formulation of the Sicut Judeis bull; specifically, its origins in long tradition of thought dating back to Roman times and being written upon by such figures as SS. Ambrose, Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux, a number of Popes, secular rulers, and of course, chroniclers. First, this study shall treat of the bull’s form and style, then give a brief explanation of its issuance. Following upon that, the main thrust of this study concentrates on major Church thinkers. Also, in order to paint a complete picture, there will be sections addressing specific claims made against Jews addressed in the Sicut, such as blood libel and host desecration.

Form and Style:

Papal documents, since the 7th century, have followed forms designated by the *Liber Diurnus* (Book of Formats).¹ In the 11th century, the Papal court created the office of Chancellor, mimicking the office at the court of the Holy Roman Emperors. The Sicut is a *letter of privilege* type document, a later development of the Papal Chancery.² The Sicut includes an unusual first protocol, “[Pope’s name] episcopus, servus servorum Dei, dilectis in Christo filiis fidelibus Christianis presentibus videlicet et futuris salutem et apostolicam benedictionem.”³ Whereas most

Papal bullae name the addressee, the *Sicut* is a statement of general Church policy and the opening *salutem* reflects this.

The *statement* of the bull lists off a set of protections for Jews. According to Church doctrine they must be protected. Originally, the Jews are protected from forced baptism, from violence against their persons, and from the interruption of their festivals. Furthermore, their cemeteries and buildings are not to be defiled or destroyed.

At the conclusion, the *enacting clause*, beginning with “*si quis autem,*” threatens punishment for anyone who dares to contradict the Popes will. In Innocent III’s edition, an additional clause was added before the *datum*, “*Eos autem dumtaxat huius protectionis presidio volumus communiri, qui [sic] nichil machinari presumpserint in subverionem fidei Christiane.*”⁴

Issuance and purpose of *Sicut*:

The core content of the bull remains constant although bits are occasionally added. Particular insertions or omissions in the *Sicut* reflect problems on the Pope’s mind at the time of its issuance. The *Sicut* is originally intended to be a statement of Church policy towards the Jews, as opposed to a specific charter granting rights, yet it is adapted to serve as a stopgap in times of crisis.⁵ The first bull, given by Calixtus II, was issued to the Jews of Rome in return for a fee. Once it was issued, Jewish communities outside of Rome could obtain copies for a fee to present to their local magnates.⁶

It seems probable that Calixtus II issued the first *Sicut* dually as an act of appreciation towards the Jews of Rome and in response to the violence towards the Rhennish Jews during the First Crusade.

During the reign of Alexander III, several Jews were employed on the Papal staff. One of these, Yehrel, is credited with having copies of the *Sicut* sent to England and France. Evidence of the *Sicut* being sent directly to a local magnate as confirmation of Papal policy occurs with a 1278 issuance by Nicholas III. The Jews of Sicily acquired a copy of the bull in order to present to their King, Queen, and heir apparent in order to gain their protection in anti-Jewish riots. It was read aloud in their presence, following the custom of the time.⁷

Origins of Church policy: the Roman Empire and Late Antiquity

There is a sharp delineation between Roman attitudes towards Jews and the thoughts of the early Christian Church. The Roman position was, as a citizen of a multi-national empire, one ought to dress, behave, and live in a style acceptable to one’s neighbors. Due to Judaism’s strict laws governing almost every aspect of life, there was a clear difference between a normal Roman subject and the increasingly closed Jewish communities throughout the empire.⁸ Conquered

polytheists were willing to shave regularly and participate in a sort of reciprocal religious pact whereby they would make the appropriate sacrifices to the Roman gods alongside their own whereas Jews were not.

During the Roman period, there was no stereotype of the wealthy Jewish merchant or greedy banker; indeed Jews were distributed towards the lower end of the economic curve. Still, Judaism was considered a *religio licita* by the Roman State and was mostly left alone **so long as its members did not participate in a military uprising** (as they often did).²

There were however, accusations by Romans that Jews practiced ritual cannibalism and various forms of sexual depravity. Fortunately, Judaism's special status within the Empire prevented major persecutions on such charges. Christianity had no such protection and, from Nero onward, the Church produced some of its most dramatic martyrs from deaths on the same suspicions leveled against the Jews (secrecy, cannibalism, etc.).

The fledgling Christian Church could attack certain mainstream Jewish practices or behaviors, but as it was a Jewish sect itself, was mainly concerned with external pagan influences. Jewish isolationism and strict adherence to the Law were perfectly acceptable and it would have been impossible for a figure like St. Paul to hate his mainstream Judaism, although he was "disappointed" in them for not acknowledging his point of view.¹ It is not until the 4th Gospel is composed that Christianity begins to see Judaism as a separate and possibly antithetical religion. Jesus' various lifetime activities and eventual crucifixion are seen as quite in line with Isaiah and other prophets, constantly accusing Israel of internal corruption but definitely not suggesting a major doctrinal flaw that could be corrected by worshipping, say, Jupiter, or Dagon.

As Christianity spread to the highest levels of the Empire, Roman xenophobia and elitism began to merge with the growing doctrinal differences of Christianity. Jewish non-conformity to Christian norms ceased to be merely Roman xenophobia and elitism and became a moral issue. If the New Testament voided the Old, as the Church maintained by the 4th century, how could a Christian government tolerate enemies of the faith?

Also during the 4th century, the Church began to pick up strains of Zoroastrian, mainly dualism and a pessimistic worldview (i.e. the world and flesh are the source of sin). This comes into direct competition with Judaism's encouragement of marriage and large-scale celebrations (e.g. Passover and Shavout) in commemoration of major events.¹¹ The increasing exaltation of asceticism and virginity during this period would develop into a feeling that Jews were overtly lecherous and indulgent. This view fit nicely with the accusations of Isaiah and others that Israel had fallen from grace and merged later with the 4th gospel to form the idea of *eternal culpability*. Now comes a smattering of writings by the Church Fathers about Jews. The Church's policy towards the Jews begins codification in the writings of SS. Augustine, Ambrose, John Chrysostom, Julian the Apostate, and others. The first showdown between the legal mechanisms of the Empire and the will of the Church Fathers comes is AD 388. In the city of Callinicum, a mob burns down a Synagogue. The Jews of the town appeal to Emperor Theodosius, who

¹Simon, Marcel. *Verus Israel: A study of relations between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire*. Trans. McKeating. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). P. 135

decrees that the offenders must be punished and the Jews reimbursed the cost of their Synagogue. Word of this comes to bishop Ambrose of Milan (later St. Ambrose) and he demands the Emperor reverse his decision on the grounds a Christian Emperor ought not to hold Jews and Christians on equal footing. Theodosius acquiesces and Judaism loses its protected status within the Empire.¹² In 423, a law is passed forbidding Jews to build new Synagogues, limiting them to the repair of existing ones (with Imperial consent). Synagogue regulations will appear later in the Sicut texts as well as in letters from Popes to individual magnates.

The main quandary facing the early Fathers was how to explain the Jew's ardent devotion to their faith despite what men like Ambrose considered the obvious truth of Christianity. One explanation devised by St. Ambrose was that Jews had the capacity to understand but purposely chose not to adhere to Christianity, that they cling to childish and half-formed beliefs.

*Sciebat durae cervicis populum Judaeorum, lapsu mobilem, humilem, perfidiae promptiorem, qui aure audiret et non audiret, oculis videret, et non videret, lubrico quodam infantiae levem et immemorem praeceptorum; et ideo Legem tamquam paedagogum mobili plebis ingenio et menti adhibuit infirmae, ipsaque Legis praecepta moderatus, aliud legi voluit, aliud intelligi; ut insipiens saltem quod legeret, custodiret, et a praescripto litterae non recederet: sapiens intelligeret divinae mentis sententiam, quam littera non resonaret: imprudens servaret Legis imperium, prudens mysterium. Ideo Lex severitatem gladii habet tamquam paedagogus baculum; ut imperfectae plebis infirmitatem poenae saltem denuntiatione deterreat: Evangelium autem indulgentiam habet, quo peccata donantur.*¹³

Throughout the Middle Ages, on account of the belief that Jews simply did not understand the full truth of Christianity, missionary activities ran the gamut from gentle proselytizing to violent forced baptism on threat of death. The Sicut bull deals with forced baptism and like activities in detail but first it is helpful to examine the Church's official stance on Jewish conversion to discover why this was included.

Augustine, in his Tracts Against the Jews, speaks about the purpose of the Jews, and their usefulness, as they maintain observance of the old Law. Augustine considers Jews to be crucial to Christendom but points out that they do not fully understand their purpose. Since the Popes drew heavily on Augustine, it is not surprising that the language of Sicut reflects this. Christian Theology sees the prefiguring of Jesus throughout the Old Testament and Augustine believes, if the Jews would simply acknowledge mystery of the text rather than looking the letter of it, they would come to see the truth of Christianity.

*Sicut enim Lex illa, quae processit de monte Sina, quinquagesimo die post celebratum Pascha conscripta est digito Dei, quo significatur Spiritus sanctus: ita Lex ista, quae processit de Sion et Jerusalem, non in tabulis lapideis, sed in tabulis cordis sanctorum Evangelistarum scripta est per Spiritum sanctum, quinquagesimo die post verum Pascha passionis et resurrectionis Domini Christi...*¹⁴

Now compare this with the wording of the first extant Sicut:

*Sicut Judaeis non debet esse licentia, ultra quam permissum est lege in synagogis suis praesumere, ita in eis, quae concessa sunt, nullum debent praejudicium sustinere. Nos ergo, cum in sua magis velint duritia permanere, quam prophetarum verba arcana cognoscere atque Christianae fidei et salutis notitiam habere, quia tamen defensionem et auxilium nostrum postulant*¹⁵

Here is the idea, very similar to Augustine's, that Jews observe the letter of the law and refuse to acknowledge the implied Christian presages. Even down the wording, the opening of the Sicut has a strong correlation with the previous passages from Ambrose and Augustine's writings.

De Civitate Dei and the Theological underpinnings of Sicut:

The most important of Augustine's writings on the Jews appears in De Civitate Dei, wherein he explains that Jews must not be killed because the existence of Jewish books prevents the accusation that Christianity is a forgery. Furthermore, according to Augustine, Jews must be present in all nations to which the Church is dispersed in order to remind the populace of the veracity of the Christian message.

*But the Jews...were dispersed through the lands (so that indeed there is no place where they are not), and are thus by their own Scriptures a testimony to us that we have not forged the prophecies about Christ... "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant shall be saved... [for the rest] Let their eyes be darkened lest they see, and bow down their back always." Therefore, when they do not believe our Scriptures, their own, which they blindly read, are fulfilled in them, lest perchance any one should say that the Christians have forged these prophecies about Christ which are quoted under the name of the sibyl, or of others, if such there be, who do not belong to the Jewish people...they themselves are dispersed among all nations, wherever the Church of Christ is spread abroad. For a prophecy about this thing was sent before in the Psalms, which they also read, where it is written, "My God, His mercy shall prevent me. My God hath shown me concerning mine enemies, that Thou shalt not slay them, lest they should at last forget Thy law: disperse them in Thy might."...But it was not enough that he should say, "Slay them not, lest they should at last forget Thy law," unless he had also added, "Disperse them;" because if they had only been in their own land with that testimony of the Scriptures, and not every where, certainly the Church which is everywhere could not have had them as witnesses among all nations to the prophecies which were sent before concerning Christ.*¹⁶

In these few words, Augustine dictates Church policy for the coming millennia. "Slay them not," is a reference to Psalm 59 "Deus ostendit mihi in insidiatoribus meis ne occidas eos ne forte obliviscantur populi mei disperge eos in fortitudine tua et destrue eos protector noster Domine"¹⁷ Now compare this text with an excerpt from the Sicut:

Licet perfidia Iudeorum sit multipliciter improbanda, quia tamen per eos fides nostra veraciter comprobatur, non sunt a fidelibus graviter opprimendi, dicente propheta: ne occideris eos ne quando obliviscantur legis tue, ac si diceretur apperitius, ne deleveris

*omnio Iudeos, ne forte Christiani legis tue valeant oblivisci, quam ipsi non intelligentes in libris suis intelligentibus representant.*¹⁸

Gregory the Great on the Jews:

Pope Gregory the Great (AD540-604) made significant contributions to Church policy regarding the Jews, particularly in the area of forced conversion. In a letter to the Bishop of Naples (later entered into Gratian's Decretum) he writes:

Those who sincerely wish to lead people who stand outside the Christian religion into the proper faith should strive to do so by gentle means rather than by harsh means, lest adversity alienate the mind of those whom a reasonable argument would have been able to attract... Certain Jews living in Naples have beseeched us claiming that some Christians have improperly attempted to hinder them from certain observances of their festivals, so that they not be permitted to practice the observances of their festivals, as they and their ancestors have been permitted to do for a long time.... Why should we establish rules for the Jews as to how they should observe their ceremonies...? We should therefore behave in such a way that, appealed to by reason and mildness, they wish to follow us and not to flee.... Therefore you must... move them to convert by admonitions without permitting them to be disturbed again concerning their observances. Rather they must have the full right of observing and celebrating all their festivals and holidays as both they and their ancestors have had for a long time past...¹⁹

Now compare this with the text of Sicut as issued by Alexander III:

*Nullus etiam Christianus eorum quemlibet sine iudicio potestatis terrenaе vulnerare vel occidere vel suas eis pecunias auferre praesumat aut bonas, quas hactenus in ea, quam prius habitabant, regione habuerunt, consuetudines immutare. Praesertim in festivitatum suarum celebratione quisquam fustibus vel lapidibus eos nullatenus perturbet nec aliquis ab eis coacta servitia exigat, nisi ea, quae ipsi praefato tempore facere consueverunt.*²⁰

The later Popes and their advisors, rigorously trained in exegesis and familiar with the writings of Augustine, Gregory the Great, and others, have clearly patched together most of the Sicut from earlier texts, not wishing to contradict the authority of their predecessors.

Between the Fathers and the Sicut:

During the early Middle Ages, Jews assimilated into Christian society. As in Roman society, they did a variety of jobs, but unlike during the Roman period, Jews ceased to wear distinctive clothing or wear facial hair. Jews spoke in the vernacular and gave their children local Latin names (ironic because this period saw a surge in the use of Old Testament names amongst Christian children).²¹

From about the 7th century until the first issue of Sicut by Calixtus II, there are few documents directly addressing problems with Jews. Whatever the cause of this lack of attention, the few surviving letters and bulla are worth consideration in order to understand the intervening

developments between Gregory and the first Sicut.

Leo VII (AD 936-939) to Archbishop Frederic of Mainz (letter not dated):

De Judaeis ...utrum melius sit eos sacrae subjugare religioni, an de civitatibus vestris expellere...et si credere et baptizari toto corde voluerint, immensis laudibus omnipotenti Domino referimus gratias; si autem credere noluerint, de civitatibus vestris cum nostra auctoritate illos expellite, qui non debemus cum inimicis Domini societatem habere, dicente Apostolo...Per virtutem autem et sine illorum voluntate atque petitione nolite eos baptizare, quia scriptum est: Nolite sanctum dare canibus, et nolite mittere margaritas vestras ante porcos, ne forte conculcent eas pedibus suis....²²

Here Leo is taking a traditional stance but in a way that leaves the Jews little room to maneuver, convert or leave the city. This is a common position throughout the Middle Ages motivated by the great desire to convert Jews.

There was however, a great fear that Jews who were baptized too quickly would revert to Judaism. In the 12th century, Gratian, a law professor at the University of Bologna, compiled his Decretum, a corpus of edicts and Church councils meant to be a handbook to Canon Law. In this he address the problem:

Iudei, quorum perfidia frequenter ad uomitum redit, si ad leges catholicas uenire uoluerint, octo menses inter catecuminos ecclesiae limen introeant, et, si pura fide uenire noscuntur, tunc demum baptismatis gratiam mereantur. Quod si casu aliquo periculum infirmitatis intra prescriptum tempus incurrerint, et desperati fuerint, baptizentur.²³

For the sake of completeness, a quick treatment the surviving documents of other Popes. Stephen III (768-772) addressed Spanish magnates, protesting that Jews could own land near townships and their use of Christian farmhands. H/Adrian (772-795) admonished Spanish kings for dealing too closely with Jews. Nicholas I (858-939) protested that the Bulgars should not interpret the Old Testament literally, particularly that they should not observe the Sabbath on Saturday. A second letter informs them that baptisms performed by Jews are valid. John XVIII (1003-1009) and Alexander II (1061-1073) both protected Jews' life and property. Gregory VII (1073-1085) writes to Alfonso VI of Castile that Jews hold too much power over Christians.²⁴

Efforts at Proselytizing by Christians:

As seen above, it was the stated position of the Church that forced baptism of Jews was discouraged. Jews, the Church maintained, should be shown the truth of Christianity through gentle proselytizing, usually conducted through preaching or logical argument. Sometimes this would be done in the form of a conference, where both sides were able to speak, and sometimes Jews were forcibly gathered to listen to a Priest (this was often done without the official sanction of Rome). On occasion, Jewish communities were required to listen to Priests in their own Synagogues. Sicut's protection of Jews from violent forced conversion was the result of a long tradition of doing exactly that.

*Statuimus enim, ut nullus Christianus invitios vel nolentes eos ad baptismum per violentiam venire compellat; sed si eorum quilibet sponte ad Christianos fidei causa confugerit, postquam voluntas eius fuerit patefacta, sine qualibet calumpnia efficiatur Christianus. Veram quippe Christianitatis fidem habere non creditur, qui ad Christianorum baptisma non spontaneus sed invitus cognoscitur pervenire.*²⁵

By the 8th century, the meaning of the term perfidia shifted from its old meaning of “unbelieving” closer to its current meaning, perfidious. During the following centuries, Jews were regularly subjected to forced preaching inside Synagogues and the choice between baptism and exile (cf. letter from Leo VII). In 882 for example, the priest Abogafel forcibly baptized several Jewish children.²⁶ For his actions, he was hauled before the Holy Roman Emperor, who ruled that his actions were illegal. There was a great fear of Jewish proselytizing, although it was nearly non-existent, because it was thought that a non-laborious Sabbath combined with attractive festivals and meals would lure peasants away from the Church. Furthermore, it was a great fear that Jews would abuse the power that might be afforded them in public office, and so, a series of councils removed the rights of Jews to participate in public life.

743 Rome – forbade intermarriage

845-846 Meaux and Paris – forbade Jews from converting their slaves²⁷, building new synagogues, or appearing in public at Easter (this was subsequently overturned by Charles the Bald)

850 Pavia – forbade Jews from holding public office

888 Metz – forbade Christians from sharing meals or accepting food from Jews

1050 Oviedo – forbade Christians from cohabiting with Jews

1078 Rome – forbade Jews from holding public office (again)²⁸

There are a few high profile cases of Christians converting to Judaism. In 847, Bodo, a deacon at the court of Louis the Pious, decided to convert. Not being able to do so where he was, he left on a “pilgrimage to Rome” by way of Spain. Once across the border, he announced his conversion and changed his name to Eliazar. At this point he promptly sold his fellow travelers into slavery and joined the Muslim court in Spain, which he encouraged to persecute the Christians there.²⁹ It appears his conversion was complete as he put off his clerical habit, grew his beard, and attended Synagogue daily. Unfortunately, he caused so much havoc to fall upon the Christians of the region that they appealed to the Frankish king to have him extradited. He disappears from the records in 850.³⁰ A similar event occurs in 1005 at the court of Duke Conrad of Carinthia. His clerk, Wecelin, converts and apparently this so enrages the Duke that he goes on a bout of anti-Jewish persecutions.³¹

The Church became embarrassed and somewhat annoyed when men they sent to debate with Jews often found themselves unprepared or unable to defeat their opponents. In addition to being unable to argue against the Talmud due to not being able to read it, Churchmen could not access Hebrew versions of the Old Testament at all. Alcuin of York, the famous teacher of Charlemagne, was forced to ask Jews to reconcile several varying copies of Jerome. In the 11th century, Abbot Sigo of St. Florent’s in Anjou learned Hebrew and Greek from Jewish tutors in order to correct Latin translations.³²

*...et insuper litteras hebraicas et graecas peritissimus legendi et suibendi. Hic bibliothecam nostram, psalterium, missales, textus, epistolas Paulis, actus Apostolorum ad unguem correxit et emendavit...*³³

This continual embarrassment was corrected in 1328 when the University of Paris finally established a Chair of Oriental Languages, occupied by Nicholas of Lyra. Having mastered Hebrew and read up on Rabbi Sholomo Yitzhaqi (Rashi), he promptly turned his efforts to converting Jews.³⁴ It is worth noting that Lyra's contemporary, Jacques de'Euse, studied law and theology at the University of Paris and went on to become Pope John XXII. As Pope, he issued fifty-eight documents concerning Jews, although a Sicut is not included in this collection.³⁵ Since the Church relied on the Bible and works of the early Fathers to understand Judaism, it is not unsurprising that they found certain later developments (the Talmud, for example) to be perplexing and contrary to what they believed to be the core of Judaism. When bishops encountered Jews, they treated them effectively as living relics of the time of Jesus. When mastery of Hebrew began to rise, thanks in part to the efforts of men like Lyra, the medieval texts of Judaism became accessible. As a result, large numbers of texts were burned on the authority of the Church or the University of Paris as containing errors. In 1242 for example, a complete copy of the Talmud was brought for examination to the University of Paris. It contained so many books it had to be brought in a cart and was summarily condemned to the flames as it was felt the interpretations it contained were false.³⁶

This particular situation says much for the efficacy of Sicut, as it states, "Nullus etiam Christianus sine potestatis terre iudicio personas eorum nequiter ledere vel res eorum violenter auferre presumat, aut bonas, quas hactenus in ea in qua habitant regione haberint consuetudines immutare."³⁷ Does this mean then that the University of Paris was acting contrary to the Popes orders? Indeed not. Pope Gregory IX orders the kings of France, England, Aragon, Navarre, Castile, and Portugal to confiscate the books of the Jews in three separate letters in 1239. In 1244, Innocent IV demands that king Louis IX of France confiscate and burn the Talmud along with its commentaries.³⁸

Why would the Pope, the seeming protector of the Jews, order the destruction of extraordinarily valuable books? The underlying assumption on the part of the Church is that the Jews live as representatives of the old Law, that is their usefulness. That is the reason for their existence and the need to protect them, thus the Sicut. Were they to deviate in any way from the old Law, they would cease to be useful as a living testament to the crucifixion. Peter the Venerable, the abbot of Cluny, protested that the Talmud was a Jewish version of the New Testament, and therefore a post-Biblical heresy.³⁹

The First Crusade:

Towards the end of the 10th century, advances in farming and an increase in the total population drove up land prices in Europe. As farmland became more productive, the Church became increasingly anxious that they receive tithes. Since they could not exact tithes from Jews, as they were not subject to the Church's dominion (officially), Jews were gently encouraged to move into towns. This saw the formation of a new group of 'Jewish Quarters' in towns. Living in such close proximity gave Medieval Jews a stronger sense of identity. This was coupled with the

introduction of distinctive Jewish clothing, the hat and “badge,” ordered by Popes and local magnates. Innocent III justified his command that Jews wear distinctive clothing on the grounds that the Old Testament ordered them to wear *tzitzit* (blue knotted threads at the corners of their clothing). Furthermore, the rise of the guild system slowly pushed Jews out of most types of work and into the one area Christians could not operate due to Church regulations, banking.⁴⁰ On the eve of the Crusade, the Jew in the medieval mind was thoroughly distinctive in appearance, heretical in practice, and most importantly of all, the holder of their equity.

The first Crusade was a disaster for European Jewry. It was worse than the periodic pogroms or expulsions that had occurred before and not to be topped until the rise of the Inquisition. Godfrey de’Bouillon was reported as saying that “he would go on the holy journey while revenging the blood of the Savior on the blood of Israel and he would not allow anyone who carries the name of Jew to escape.”⁴¹ French Jews were left mostly alone, but those living in the Rhine area suffered heavily as Crusaders moved through. There were efforts to protect the Jews but they were mostly unsuccessful and 1096 saw slaughter in Mainz, Metz, Prague, Speyer, and Worms. Solomon barSimson elaborates on efforts by Christians to protect Jews in his Chronicle. “The [Jewish] community was divided into two groups; some remained in their homes and other fled to the local bishop [Adalbert of Worms] seeking refuge...those who remained in their homes were set upon...”⁴² In another instance, the Jews of Cologne bribed King Henry of Pula [?] to send a letter to Duke Godfrey ordering him to spare the Jews.⁴³ Finance did play a major part in anti-Jewish sentiment. Since Jews held many people in debt, the Popes often issued a remission of debt for those going on crusade. This did not stop townspeople from attacking Jews however:

*Haec stages Judaeorum primum in civitate Coloniensi a civibus acta est; qui subito irruentes in modicam manum illorum, plurimos gravi vulnere detruncaverunt, domos et synagogas eorum subverterunt, plurimum pecuniae inter se dividentes. Hac ergo crudelitate visa, circiter ducenti in silentio noctis Nussiam navigio fugam inierunt, quos peregrini et cruce signati comperientes, nec unum quidem vivum reliquerunt, sed simili multatos strage rebus omnibus spolia verunt.*⁴⁴

This sort of brutality continued soon after, when Count Emico (the commander of the crusaders mentioned above) arrived at Mainz.

*Judaei...ad episcopum Rothardum spe salutis confugiunt, thesauros infinitos in custodiam et fidem illius reponentes, multumque de protectione ejus, quia civitatis ejusdem erat episcopus confidentes... [Count Emico then breaks into the Bishop’s palace]... Hac Judaeorum caede tam crudeliter peracta, paucisque elapsis, et paucis timore potius mortis quam amore Christianae professionis baptizatis.*⁴⁵

As previously mentioned, it was against the Church’s policy to encourage Jews to baptism by force. Augustine and Gregory the Great would have heartily disagreed with what was going on here. The crusaders were only acting on the Pope’s authority in as much as they were on Crusade.

Blood Libels, Poison Wells, and Host Desecration:

The Sicut was not simply meant to protect Jews from baptism-related violence or attacks due to outstanding debts, it occasionally addressed specific claims made by the Christian community about Jewish cannibalism or host desecration.

Host desecration was an especially common accusation and often resulted in anti-Jewish riots culminating in mob violence. The charge was that Jews stole consecrated communion wafers in order to torture the flesh of Jesus. Jews were reputed to have stuck the wafers with pins (resulting in bleeding) or boiled them. This charge was not terribly sensible because in order to want to inflict pain on a communion wafer as the body of Jesus, one would first have to accept that the wafer was transmuted, a view only held by Christians. To a Jewish observer, the wafer would simply be a wafer. Despite this, host desecration charges led to large-scale massacres. For example, on 18 April 1389 in Prague, 3,000 Jews were killed on this charge.⁴⁶

As for the charge of ritual murder and mixing of blood into matzo, this too is inconsistent with Jewish theology. Human sacrifice was strictly forbidden, as was any consumption of blood, animal or human, under the dietary laws. Pope Innocent IV, well acquainted with Old Testament regulations, declared in 1247 that Jews may not be tried for ritual murder unless they were caught in the act, a situation with he thought was “highly unlikely.”⁴⁷ Gregory X finally codified this in his 1272 issue of Sicut.

*Although Jews have often falsely, been accused of leading away and killing a Christian child in order to use its heart and blood for sacrifice, this is false and ought not to be believed...testament to this was given in our curia Jews who had converted to the Christian faith...their law does not permit the drinking of human blood or the sacrifice of even cloven-hoofed animals, ...frivolous charges like these ought not serve as an excuse to hold Jews in captivity, unless, although we cannot believe [it would happen], they are caught in the act.*⁴⁸

A very reasonable stance to take. The Pope has gone through the proper investigative procedure regarding ritual murder. Such statements lead one to believe that Jews petitioned the Pope regarding this issue in particular.

Blood libel charges (human sacrifice and ritual cannibalism) were quite in vogue during the 13th century. Even 100 years earlier, in March of 1144, the body of a young boy was found in Norwich. The citizenry of Norwich accused the entire Jewish community there as having orchestrated William's murder to coincide with the Passover holiday. Various local authorities attempted to try the Jews for the boy's death, until the Sheriff decided the Bishop and locals had no authority to convene a court. William subsequently became St. William of Norwich.⁴⁹ Other examples of blood libels include the vitae of Hugh of Lincon, Simon of Trent, and St. Robert of Bury. In 1190, large-scale massacres of the Jewish community of England occurred in London and York. Blood libels were so much part of popular culture that they gained mention in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales.⁵⁰

Charges of poisoning wells became fashionable during times of plague. The actions of overzealous Inquisitors resulted in Martin IV issuing an amended Sicut in 1281. Once again, the

Pope issued Sicut as a reactionary move against growing anti-Jewish violence. "...nullus inquisitor heretice pravitate nec aliquis alter cuiuscumque dignitatis existat ad petitionem alicuius non teneatur cogere predictos Iudeos..."⁵¹

Amongst various protections granted by the bull, there is a prohibition against defiling Jewish cemeteries. "Ad haec, malorum hominum pravitate et nequitiae obviantes, decernimus, ut nemo coemeterium Iudaeorum mutilare vel invadere audeat, sive obtentu pecuniae corpora humana effodere."⁵² It seems that turning up graves was regular practice during blood libel riots. "In Prauge, men of low character gathered on Isru Hag, the day after Passover, and attacked the Jews with swords and woodcutter's axes, killing them in the street and burning their houses. They even removed corpses from their graves."⁵³

Eugenius III and Bernard of Clairvaux:

Eugenius III, the second Pope to issue Sicut, very likely did so as a result of the influence of his former tutor, Bernard of Clairvaux. Bernard, well schooled at Chatillon-sur-Seine, was a strong proponent of the Second Crusade. However, he was very displeased at the violence that had occurred towards the Jews in the First Crusade and took the words of the Bible quite literally. He writes to the archbishops, bishops, and clerics of 'Francia' and 'Bavaria,'

Non sunt persequendi Iudaei, non sunt trucidandi, sed nec effugandi quidem. Interrogate eos qui divinas paginas norunt, quid in Psalmo legernit prophetatum de Iudaeis: DEUS, inquit Ecclesia, OSTENDIT MIHI SUPER INIMICOS MEOS NE OCCIDAS EOS, NEQUANDO OBLIVISCANTUR POPULI MEI...Propter hoc et in omnes dispersi sunt regiones, ut dum iustas tanti facinoris poenas luunt ubique, testes sint nostrae redemptionis. Unde et addit in eodem Psalmo loquens Ecclesia: DISPERGE ILLOS IN VIRTUTE TUA, ET DEPONE EOS, PROTECTOR MEUS DOMINE. Ita factum est: dispersi sunt, depositi sunt; duram sustinent captivitatem sub principibus christianis...[at the last judgement] tunc omnis Israel salvus erit...⁵⁴

Bernard's words are significant not only for their impact on Eugenius, but also because they demonstrate that in this period, official Church doctrine was still in conjunction with what Gregory the Great and Augustine had said earlier. The Sicut therefore, is not extraordinary, nor does it demonstrate a particular love of Jews on the part of Calixtus or Eugenius.

Bernard's actions on behalf of the Jews in the path of the Crusade are noteworthy and apparently his actions extended well beyond this particular letter. The *Book of Remembrance (Sefer Zekhirah)*, a chronicle by Rabbi Ephraim of Bonn, records the extent of his actions. During the second crusade, a preacher named Radulf wandered through France and Germany calling for the extermination of Jews. Rabbi Ephraim records

[the Lord] sent a decent priest...named Abbé Bernard of Clairvaux, to deal with [Ranulf]. Bernard...said to them: "It is good that you go against the Ishmaelites. But whosoever touches a Jew to take his life, is like one who harms Jesus himself. My disciple Radulf...has spoken in error, for in the Book of Psalms it is written of them: 'Slay them not, lest my people forget.'" All the Gentiles regarded this priest as one of their saints, and we have not inquired whether he was receiving payment for speaking on behalf of

The final statement is particularly interesting, as it indicates any pro-Jewish stance at the time was assumed to be directly related to a cash payoff. Indeed, copies of the Sicut could be attained for local communities by payments to the Papal Chancery.

Concluding remarks:

Sicut Judeis exhibits the Church's long tradition of careful exegesis paired with deep-seated confusion as to how Jews ought to be handled. In the beginning the Church Fathers wrote their works as part of an extended Jewish community, wishing that the rest of the community would simply see things their way. Within the bull is evidence that Crusader era Popes were still employing the philosophy of Ambrose and Augustine.

It came time, through the violence of the First Crusade, for the Pope to intervene on behalf of the Jews. The process of developing the wording for the Sicut involved searching back through the foundation texts of western Christendom, very much like this study. What they came up with was a text that exemplifies the confused and nearly contradictory stance of the Church. Jews were non-believers but also the kinsmen of Jesus, surely they would come around to Christianity eventually?

The wording of the Sicut hints at several things simultaneously: the Church's exegetical tradition, its response to specific complaints on behalf of the Jewish community, and a fear of Jews insincerely converting or attempting to subvert the Church. Bits were added to the text at various times to deal with contemporary problems (as has been seen with Blood Libels) but these sections were subsequently removed when no longer pertinent. The Church seemed to see Judaism as having a great allure, as they were so afraid of losing converts to it or receiving insincere converts from it.

Bernard of Clairvaux's writings suggest that problems with violence against Jews were considered at the very highest levels and that he himself was an advocate for the Jews (see *Sefer Zekhira*). This, combined with the occasional additions, would imply that the Sicut may have been issued as more than a matter of course by new Popes, that the Jews received a fair amount of discussion at the highest levels of the Church.

The progression from Roman xenophobia through the Church Fathers, Medieval Councils, and finally to the Sicut Judeis displays a Christianity grappling with how to handle the Jews. The Sicut Judeis displays only one step in a constant rethinking of this policy. Such rehashing is still going on. During the Good Friday Liturgy, one used to find the prayer "pro perfidis Judaeis." In 1959, John XXIII ordered the phrase "pro perfidis Judaeis" removed from use, this prayer has undergone an additional revision then (this one by the Second Vatican Council, in response to a request on behalf of a council of Rabbis).⁵⁶

The Sicut Judeis then, embodies the mutability of Church documents over time, in response to external requests or pressures. It demonstrates a carefully thought out position on behalf of the Papal Court, based on preexisting writings.

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1 Compiled between 685 and 751.

2 Poole, Reginald. *Lectures on the History of the Papal Chancery*. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1915). P. 101.

3 “[Pope’s name], bishop...to all faithful Christians, present and future...”

4 “We desire, however, that only those be fortified by the guard of this protection who shall have presumed no plotting for the subversion of the Christian faith.” See appendix A

5 Grayzel. *Sicut*. P. 231

6 Ibid. p. 236

7 Grayzel. *Church and Jews*. Pp. 139-140

8 Simon, Marcel. *Verus Israel: A study of relations between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire*. Trans. McKeating. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). P. 134 [page numbers are according to Cohen]

9 Simon, 135

10 Simon, 137

11 Simon, 142

12 Simon, 158

13 Patrologia Latina: St. Ambrosii Opera Omnia, Epistola LXXIV (to Irenaeus). See bibliography for full citation. “He knew that the Jewish people were stiff-necked, had a tendency to lapse, were low, were readily availed to false faith, who heard with their ears but did not [truly] hear, who saw with their eyes but did not [truly] see, in the precarious situation of infancy and unmindful of precepts; and therefore, just as a teacher applies a law to the wanton and unstable mind of [lesser people/students] and moderating indeed even the precepts of the law, He willed a certain thing should be read, a different thing understood, in order that the unwise could at least take care of what they were reading [i.e. meant to do under the Law], not rescind from the exact letter [of the Law], and those who think can understand the mind of the Divine, which the letters did not mutate, so that the incautious might serve the commands of the Law, and the prudent might [understand] the mystery. And so the Law has the severity of a sword just as a teacher [has] the stick, in order that it might deter the errors of imperfect people through punishment. The Evangelists however, have indulgence, through which sin is forgiven.”

14 Patrologia Latina: S. Aurelii Augustini Hipponensis Episcopi, Tractatus Adversus Judaeos, Chapter VII. “Just as their law, which was brought down from Mount Sinai, forty days after the celebration of Passover [c.f. Exodus 34:28], written with the Finger of God, which signified the Holy Spirit. Such is the law, which proceeded through Zion and Jerusalem, not on tablets of stone but it was written into the hearts of the Evangelists by the Holy Spirit, forty days after the true Passover Passion and resurrection of the Lord Christ”

15 See Appendix under Alexander III for translation.

16 Schaff, Philip. *St. Augustine's City of God and Christian Doctorine*. New York: The Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890. Available at

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf102.iv.XVIII.46.html>. Liber 48:46. See Appendix B for full

text.

[17](#) The Latin Vulgate (see bibliography), Ps 59:12. “God shows my enemies to me, do not kill them lest they become oblivious [i.e. forget], disperse them with your strength and cast them down, Lord, our protector.” This psalm, also extant in a Jewish version, refers to a conflict between David and Saul. This is a good example Christian exegesis.

[18](#) See appendix A. Although in many ways the disbelief of the Jews must be reproved, since nevertheless through them our own faith is truly proved, they must not be oppressed grievously by the faithful, as the prophet says: “Do not slay them, lest these be forgetful of Thy Law,” as if he were saying more openly: “Do not wipe out the Jews completely, lest perhaps Christians might be able to forget Thy Law, which the former, although not understanding it, present in their books to those who do understand it.”

[19](#) *Church State and Jew in the Middle Ages*. Ed. Robert Chazan. (Orange: Behrman House, 1980). P. 20. Original Latin may be found in Decretum Part I: Distinctio XLV

[20](#) See appendix A. Further, no one of the Christian [faith] ought to attack or wound them, to appropriate their money, or to do away with the civility traditionally kept in the areas they inhabit. Moreover, they are not to be bothered during their festivals any which way, with clubs or stones, nor should any duty be coerced from them unless it is a custom from the old times [before this bull].

[21](#) Litter, Lester. *Jews in Christian Europe*. in *Religious poverty and the profit economy*. (Ithica: Cornell Univ. Press, 1978). P. 271

[22](#) Patrologia Latina: Leonis Papae VII Epistolae et Privilegia XIV. “Regarding the Jews, either they [may become] subjects of the Sacred Religion [i.e. convert to Christianity], it would be quite good [if this were to happen], or you [ought] to expel them from your city...and if it is believed that they are baptized totally by the desire of their hearts, then we shall give immense praise and thanks to the omnipotent Lord; if however, it is believed they did this unwillingly, you must expel them from the city under Our authority, because we ought not have in our society [i.e. living amongst us] the enemies of the Lord, as the Apostle says...through virtue and not without their will and at their request ought we to baptize them, [for] as it says in the Scriptures: do not give that which is holy to dogs, do not cast your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them with their feet [c.f. Matthew 7:6].”

[23](#) Gratian. Decretum. C. XCIII. Quot mensibus Iudei inter catecuminos habeantur, Item ex Concilio Agatensi. Available at <
http://mdz.bib-bvb.de/digbib/gratian/text/@Generic__BookView;cs=default;ts=default>. Jews, whose faithlessness/perfidy frequently leads them to return to their vomit, if they should wish to come to the Catholic Law [i.e. faith], they shall enter for eight months in the catechumens of the church and, if they are known to be of pure faith, then they shall undergo baptism. Because sometimes, in the case of danger, etc...

[24](#) Blumenkranz, B. *The Dark Ages: Jews in Christian Europe*. (Jerusalem: Massada Press, 1966). P. 197 and Simonsohn, Shlomo. *The Apostolic See and the Jews*. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1988). Pp. 25-43

[25](#) See appendix A. For “We make the law that no Christian compel them, unwillingly or refusing, by violence to come to baptism. But, if any one of them should spontaneously, and for the sake of the faith, fly to the Christians, once his choice has become evident, let him be made a Christian without any calumny. Indeed, he is not considered to possess the true faith of Christianity who is recognized to have come to Christian baptism, not spontaneously, but

unwillingly.”

[26](#) Blumenkranz. 208.

[27](#) Jewish law commands that all (male) slaves be circumcised (cf. Gen. 17:27, Ex. 12:44). It was additionally advantageous to have circumcised slaves for the purposes of observing dietary regulations.

[28](#) Ibid. 198.

[29](#) Ibid. 213.

[30](#) Cabaniss, Allen. *Bodo-Eleazar: A Famous Jewish Convert*. The Jewish Quarterly Review, New Series, Vol. 43, No. 4 (Apr., 1953), pp. 313-328

[31](#) Malkiel, D. *Jewish-Christian relations in Europe, 840–1096*. Journal of Medieval History, Volume 29, Issue 1, March 2003, Pages 55-83.

[32](#) Grabois, Aryeh. *The Hebrew Veritas and Jewish Christian Intellectual Relations in the 12th Century*. Speculum, Journal #5. (Cambridge: The Medieval Academy of America, 1975). P. 615

[33](#) *Historia Sancti Florentii Salmurensis in Chroniques des eglises d'Anjou*, ed. Paul Marchegay and Emile Mabille (Paris, 1869) as it appears in Grabois. “and in addition, that we might be skillful in the reading and understanding of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures. In this, our library, the psalters, missals, texts, Letters of Paul, and Acts of the Apostles have been amended and corrected of their errors.”

[34](#) Catholic Encyclopedia. “Nicholas of Lyra.” <
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11063a.htm>> [17 April, 2008]

[35](#) cf. Simonsohn. Pp. 299-367

[36](#) Cohen, Jeremy. *Scholarship and Intolerance in the Medieval Academy: The Study and Evolution of Judaism in European Christendom*. In: The American Historical Review #91, 1986. P. 592-613

[37](#) See appendix A. “Too, no Christian ought presume, apart from the juridical sentence of the territorial power, wickedly to injure their persons, or with violence to take away their property, or to change the good customs which they have had until now in whatever region they inhabit.”

[38](#) Simonsohn. Pp. 171-174, 180

[39](#) Funkenstein, Amos. *Basic Types of Christian Anti-Jewish Polemics in the Latter Middle Ages*. Viator #2, 1971. P. 380

[40](#) It is an interesting irony that Jewish practice forbids the loaning of money on interest between Jews; it says nothing however, about loaning money to non-Jews. This has caused numerous legal problems in modern Israeli banking.

[41](#) Liebeschütz, H. *The Crusading Movement and Its bearing on the Christian attitude towards Jewry*. Journal of Jewish Studies #10, 1951. P. 264

[42](#) barSimson, Solomon. *The Chronicle of Solomon barSimson*. In *The Jews and the Crusaders. The Hebrew Chronicles of the First and Second Crusade*. Trans. Sholomo Eidelberg. (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1977). P. 22

[43](#) Ibid., p. 25

[44](#) Albert of Aix [Aachen]. *Hierosolymitanae Expeditionis*, Liber I Cap. XXVII <
<http://thelatinlibrary.com/albertofaix.html> > [28 April, 2008] “The massacre of the Jews was first enacted by the city-dwellers of the city of Cologne, who quickly fell upon a few of them, they gravely wounded and slew [these Jews], [and] they razed their houses and synagogues and [the townspeople] divided amongst themselves a large amount of money. Then [the Jews], seeing this utmost cruelty, somewhere around 200 [of them] stole away in the silence of night and sailed

towards Nussia. The pilgrims and crusaders discovered them and left not one alive, inflicting on them a similar massacre, and [the pilgrims and crusaders] divided all [the Jews'] possessions.”

[45](#) Ibid. Liber I Cap. XXVIII-XXIX. “The Jews [of Mainz] fled to the Bishop Rothard hoping for safety. They put huge amounts of treasure in his custody and under his supervision, because they had confidence in him as Bishop of the city [of Mainz]...[Emico breaks into the Bishop's Palace]...a few Jews got away from the terrible massacre, and a few, on account of fear of death rather than love of Christianity, were baptized.”

[46](#) *A Hebrew Chronicle From Prague*. Ed. Abraham David, Trans. Leon Weiburger and Dena Ordan. (Tuscalosa: Univ. of Alabama Press, 1993). P. 22

[47](#) Grayzel, Solomon. *The Papal Bull Sicut Judeis*. in *Studies and Essays in Honor of Abraham A. Newman*. Ed. Ben-Horin, Weinryb, and Zeitlin. (Leiden: E.J. Brill and Co., 1962). P. 239 [Page numbers are according to Cohen and is henceforth abbreviated *Sicut*]

[48](#) Grayzel, Solomon. *Church and the Jews in the 13th Century*. (Detroit, Wayne State Univ. Press, 1989). P.. 116-118 [henceforth abbreviated as *Church and Jews*]. For Latin text, see Appendix C

[49](#) Roth, Cecil. *The Medieval Conception of the Jew*. In *Essays and Studies in memory of Linda R. Miller*. Ed. Israel Davidson. (NY: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1938). P. 303

[50](#) see Prioress' Tale

[51](#) Grayzel. *Church and Jews*. P. 147 “no inquisitor nor anyone else regardless of their dignity [i.e. official duties] shall use compulsion upon Jews at the request of anyone else.”

[52](#) See Appendix A. “To curb the depravity and wickedness of mankind, [*moved for clarity*] we add to [our previous decrees] that no one dare to invade or mutilate a Jewish cemetery nor unearth a human body in order to get money”

[53](#) *A Hebrew Chronicle From Prague*. P. 87

[54](#) *Sancti Bernardi Opera. Vol. III* Ed. Leclerq (O.S.B.) and Rochais. (Rome: Editiones Cisterciensis, 1977). Epistolae 181-310 and Epistolae Extra Corpus 311-547. Pp. 311-317. They ought not to persecute the Jews, they ought not to massacre them, but neither flee them.

Cross-examine them, not as pagan worshipers, but as it is written in the Psalms of the prophets of the Jews: said the Church, God shows my enemies to me, do not kill them lest they become oblivious [i.e. forget] [cf. Ps. 59:12]. Because of this also, they are dispersed to all regions, in order that they received punishment for their great crime, and are a testament to our redemption. Upon this additionally, the Psalm speaks: disperse them with your strength and cast them down, Lord, our protector. So it is the case that they are dispersed, they are cast down, yet they remain and endure as captives under Christian princes. For at the last judgement Israel will be saved...

[55](#) *Sefer Zekhira*. In: *The Jews and the Crusaders. The Hebrew Chronicles of the First and Second Crusade*. Trans. & Ed. Sholomo Eidelberg. (Madison: Univ. Wisconsin Press, 1977). P. 122

[56](#) Lapidé, Pinchas. *The Last Three Popes and the Jews*. (London: Souvenir Press, 1967) p. 320