The Battle Over the Crusades

by Robert P. Lockwood

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When the Showtime premium cable channel planned to air a film version of the viciously anti-Catholic play "Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You," the director of the production, Marshall Brickman, was asked to respond to the controversy. "Any institution that has backed the Inquisition, the Crusades and the Roman position on the Holocaust deserves to be the butt of at least a couple of jokes,"[1] Brickman gave as an excuse for the bigotry. In doing so, he lumped together two traditional historical excuses for anti-Catholicism – the Inquisition and the Crusades – along with a canard that has developed only in recent years. The "Roman position on the Holocaust" is contemporary code for the alleged "silence" of Pope Pius XII in the face of the Nazism.[2]

One reason for the persistence of anti-Catholicism is the historical legacy of the post-Reformation world. Myths, legends and anti-Catholic "histories" created in the bitterness of theological, national and cultural divisions in the centuries after the Reformation have colored our understanding of the past, and are often used in the present as a club against the Church. Our understanding of the world in which we live and the events of the past that helped to shape it are often determined by this anti-Catholic legacy. The popular image of the Inquisition, for example, is rooted in the anti-Spanish polemics of the Sixteenth Century. Of course, the current conventional wisdom on Pope Pius XII is of more recent vintage, beginning with a German playwright in 1963.[3]

With the Crusades, the assumption is of a ruthless Church

driving Europe into a barbaric war of aggression and plunder against a peaceful Islamic population in the Holy Land. As the common portrait paints it, led by mad preachers and manipulating popes, the Crusades were a Church-sponsored invasion and slaughter that descended into a massacre at Jerusalem, the sack of Constantinople and the persecution of European Jews.

The Crusades are also viewed as concretizing the schism of the Orthodox churches, a division that remains today. Though that division was not caused by the Crusades, it was certainly exacerbated by the Fourth Crusade, and remains its saddest legacy. When Pope John Paul II visited Greece in the spring of 2001, he apologized for the actions of Western Catholics involved in the sack of Constantinople,[4] though that sack had not been ordered, determined or intended by the Church or the papacy itself.

The Crusades, of course, are a far more complicated series of events in history than the anti-Catholic statements of Brickman. The Crusades should be understood within the context of the times and by their reality, rather than through the myths created for purposes of propaganda. Narrowly and traditionally defined, the Crusades involved a military attempt under a vow of faith to regain the Holy Land – containing the sites of the Gospel accounts of the life of Jesus – from its Islamic conquerors. The goal as defined by the Church was to allow safe pilgrimage to these sites and to protect and maintain a Christian presence in the Holy Land.[5] This narrow papal purpose, however, would become caught up in dynastic feuds, schism and heresies, economic warfare over Mediterranean trade, the reunification and rise of an aggressive Islamic military movement, and the final destruction of the Eastern Roman Empire.

Pompey had conquered the Holy Land for the Roman Empire in 63 BC. As such, the country where Jesus lived His earthly

ministry would be under Roman hegemony. It would continue so for centuries after Him. The Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity in 313 AD and began the process of identifying the Roman Empire with the Christian faith. Christianity, which had existed throughout the Empire prior to Constantine, would soon become the dominant faith in all the old Roman territories. The Holy Land itself, as well as Egypt and North Africa, became strong and vibrant Christian communities. The first Church of the Nativity would be erected in Bethlehem in 325 AD.[6]

In 331 AD Constantine moved the seat of the Roman Empire to Constantinople. This would accelerate the decline of Rome and the inheritance of the Empire would shift east. The Holy Land would remain a faithful center of Christianity in the Near East. Yet, along with the ancient Patriarchal Sees such as Antioch, the Holy Land would look toward Imperial Constantinople as its political and, to a certain extent, religious center. As a result, the Church in the Near East would take its liturgy and characteristics from Constantinople. As relations between the Eastern Church under imperial leadership and the Western Church under papal leadership became more strained over the centuries, the future of the Holy Land would be tied directly to the politics of Constantinople than Rome.[7]

In the early Seventh Century, the Persian Empire overtook the Holy Land, sacked Jerusalem and slaughtered the Christian inhabitants. While the Eastern Empire was eventually able to recapture it, in 638 Jerusalem was taken by invading Arabian forces under the sword of the new Islam only six years after the death of the prophet Mohammed. Egypt was lost to the Moslem forces and by 700 AD Roman Africa was conquered. In 711 Spain was occupied and it was not until the victory of Charles Martel at Tours and Potier in 732 that the Moslem advance in the West ended. Constantinople was able to hold off an invasion and the remnant Eastern Roman Empire, stripped of

Syria, Palestine and North Africa, continued to exist. Over the next three centuries, the Empire would recover somewhat, though never able to reclaim the entire Holy Land itself.

The differences within the Church as it developed in the East and West became more pronounced over the centuries. Differences in language, tradition, history, theology and religious sensibilities created divisions particularly as the Church in the West began to both adjust to and convert the successive invading ethnic tribes of Europe. The Eastern Church, seeing itself as the intellectual and cultural center of the world, resented the juridical authority of Rome. While consenting to Rome as a court of last resort in doctrinal concerns, it did not accept Roman leadership over its daily affairs. Additionally, thorny theological issues would divide the Church in the East far more than the West. Schisms and heresies would breakdown the unity of the Church in the East even before the major break between East and West in the schism of 1054 that created the Orthodox churches.

Briefly, the Schism of 1054 was the result of that long history, though the specific events began in Southern Italy. Southern Italy was still ruled by the Eastern Empire, while Sicily was in the hands of Islam. Neither exercised any great authority, however, and the lands "were a paradise for landless adventurers. By the mid-eleventh century, Norman mercenaries, called in by local princelings struggling against Muslim or Byzantine overlords, had broken the Muslim power in Sicily and established themselves as a threat in their own right."[8] Pope Leo IX feared this Norman advance that was closing in on papal territory and organized an armed resistance. Expecting assistance that never came from the Eastern Empire, his forces were defeated in 1053. The Empire might loath the Normans, but they resented papal authority even more and saw the pope's advance into Southern Italy as an attempt to claim jurisdiction over part of the eastern Church. When Leo named a new bishop for Sicily and the Normans were

amenable to the establishment of the Western Church in their newly conquered lands, the Patriarch of Constantinople, Michael Cerularius responded by angrily closing the Western Latin-rite churches that existed in Constantinople. Leo answered with a bull of excommunication in July 1054 and, in turn, the patriarch pronounced the pope excommunicated, though Leo was already dead.[9]

This schism would serve as a backdrop to the Crusades. The popes were convinced that assisting the successive emperors in their battles with the Seljuk Turks and other Islamic enemies of the Empire would heal the schism. In turn, various emperors would use the bait of possible reunification to encourage papal support in their military efforts. Unfortunately, the roots of the schism were far too deep in the East that any emperor could simply negotiate it away.[10] Crusading armies would only exacerbate resentment against the West, deepening rather than healing the long-standing division in Christendom.

Unity in the Islamic world had also begun to break down in the generations after Mohammed's death. By the 11th century there were three different centers of Arab rule – in Spain, Egypt and Iran\Iraq – with the Fatmid dynasty of Egypt exercising control over Jerusalem. At the same time, there were any number of independent Islamic states with their own military forces, dynasties, feuds and battles for power. The death of any leader seemed to immediately result in endless family battles for power. The Holy Land was certainly never a part of a peaceful united Islamic empire.[11]

By 1027, the Eastern Emperor had negotiated relief for the Christians of Jerusalem after their persecution under the mad caliph Hakim and pilgrimages from Europe had resumed to the holy sites. However, the rise of the Islamic Seljuk Turks in the 11th Century would destroy this peaceful interlude and be a direct cause of the First Crusade. The Seljuk Turks had

overrun Armenia and the entire Anatolia peninsula was threatened. Imperial forces were destroyed at the battle of Manzikert in 1071, considered the greatest defeat in the history of the Eastern Empire. Ten years later, Alexius Commenus would take over the imperial throne when it appeared that the entire Empire was on the verge of collapse. Through negotiations and careful manipulation of Islamic disunity, he was able to survive and to rebuild a base of power against the Seljuks. As part of his plan, he also mended fences with the papacy and it appeared that the schism of 1054 could be healed. He developed a cordial relationship with Pope Urban II who held a council of the Church in 1095 in which representatives of the Empire were in attendance. In desperate need of soldiers, they begged for assistance from the West. In November 1095 at a Church council in Clermont, France, Pope Urban II issued the formal call for a Crusade to rescue eastern Christendom and recover the Holy Land to make it safe for pilgrimage.[12]

Why did Urban support the idea of a Crusade to the Holy Land and put the weight of the Church behind it? Clearly, the return of the Holy Land and the defense of the Christian communities in the Near East were the first objectives. But there were additional concerns. There was the clear threat of the Islamic advance into Europe that threatened the entire Christian community. If Constantinople fell, the victory at Tours could be rendered in vain and all Eastern Europe would be wide open to Islamic advance. Additionally, the pope certainly believed that allying with Constantinople and rescuing the ancient sees of Antioch and Jerusalem could heal the disunity of Christianity cause by the schism of 1054.[13]

Urban was of the line of the great reforming popes that had greeted the new millenium and would continue through the 13th Century. Freed from the control of local Roman aristocrats, a true reformation in Church life – spiritual and juridical –

was underway at the direction of the papacy. Urban had a vision of a united Christendom controlled by no petty lords, kings or emperors. Most of Europe had been converted to Christianity by the year 1000. During the 11th century a spirit of religious reform argued that the salvation of the world would be greatly increased if the world itself were reformed. Led by a strong papacy, the goal was to sanctify the world through a combination of the Church's need to reform its institutional life free from control by secular lords, and to build a Christian society.[14] The defense and unity of this goal of a new Christendom was at stake.

An additional part of this reformation of Christian life was to somehow end, or deter, the incessant warfare that plagued the European community. The incessant Christian slaughter of Christians had led to the "truce of God" movement in the 11th Century as part of the general attempt at creating this new Christendom. Warfare was banned on the Sabbath. Under the influence of the great abbey of Cluny, a driving force in the reformation of the church, the truce was extended to holy days. In various territories it expanded to Advent, Lent, Easter and Pentecost. By the middle of the 11th Century it was closely knit to the Peace of God movement, which protected Church property and the poor from war. Violation of the Peace or the Truce was considered grounds for excommunication. While it seems contradictory to encourage a Crusade in the interest of peace, there was certainly the papal hope that by turning the incessant warring fervor outward in the purpose of defending Christendom there was greater purpose than the continuing scandal of Christians slaughtering Christians.[15]

There were other forces at work in the Crusades, however, that would negatively impact both the image and the results of the Crusades. First, these were violent times and warfare was waged ruthlessly. The Frankish lords taking part in the First Crusade were among the most ruthless. These men viewed the

Crusade as a holy venture that could save their souls. But they also saw an opportunity for conquest and new lands to rule. At the same time, the Emperor Alexius in Constantinople viewed the Crusaders as a means to preserve the Empire by assisting him in destroying the Turks and recapturing the ancient lands of the Empire now dominated by Islam. These contrary expectations would increase the bad blood between East and West.[16]

In the Holy Land itself, various Islamic dynasties would see the Crusaders as much as potential allies than enemies. The "kingdoms" established after the First Crusade would be caught up in the regional power disputes of the Islamic leaders, as well as their own dynastic ambitions.[17] And finally, there was the ambition of the Italian cities to extend their rising commercial power. They saw the Crusade as an opportunity to end both Islamic domination of trade in the Eastern Mediterranean and the power of Constantinople. The commercial ambitions of Venice would lead to the devastating sack of Constantinople in the Fourth Crusade.[18]

Pope Urban had hoped that the great kings of Europe would lead the Crusades. Instead, the First Crusade began out of papal control when virtual leaderless mobs of the poor began to assemble and "march" toward Constantinople. In the Rhineland these disparate mobs of peasants and townsfolk began to launch attacks on the Jews. The bishop of Spier had managed to protect most of the Jews, but at Worms there was greater violence. The bishop opened up his home to protect the Jewish community, but the mobs broke in and slaughtered them. At Mainz, another slaughtered followed in this rag-tag armies' wake. As the army approached Cologne, Jews were hidden in Christian homes and the archbishop was able to protect most of them. At Trier, most of the Jewish community was protected in the archbishop's palace. These attacks on Jews in the Rhineland continued by these mob armies despite the constant

intervention of Church authorities on behalf of the Jews. Eventually, Christians and Turks destroyed these peasant armies and most of western Christendom viewed it as just penalty for their anti-Jewish atrocities.[19] When the Second Crusade was preached, St. Bernard of Clairvaux went to the Rhineland to stamp out anti-Jewish riots, and they effectively ceased as part of the crusading movement.[20]

The First Crusade with papal blessing was made up of four Frankish armies that assembled at Constantinople. From the beginning, relations were cool at best with Emperor Alexius who feared the size and reliability of armies he considered little more than barbarian. After extracting pledges from three of the four Frankish leaders that any land conquered would be returned to the Empire, each army was quickly dispatched to Asia Minor on its own. In 1097, the armies faced a divided Moslem power. The Fatmids of Egypt held southern Syria while their enemies, the Seljuk Turks, held most of Asia Minor and northern Syria.[21] But with collective armies of possibly 30,000 men, including an army of Emperor Alexius, the Crusaders found the heat and lack of water a greater problem than disunited Islamic forces. The Crusaders first captured Nicea, capital of the Seljuk Turks, then defeated the major Seljuk force at Dorylaeum which left a clear passage across Asia Minor. On June 3, 1098, Antioch was captured and a large Turkish contingent defeated in front of its walls. On July 15, 1099, the Crusaders took Jerusalem. The papal legate, however, had died. Without his restraint, the crusading army – now reduced to about 12,000 – stormed the walls and engaged in a horrific slaughter of the Islamic and Jewish population. Though the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem was then established, that slaughter would help to reunify Islamic resistance to the new conquerors.[22]

The Crusaders essentially held four areas – Jerusalem, Antioch, Edessa and Tripoli. After first seeing the Crusaders

as possibly useful allies in their internecine conflicts, the Islamic world in the Near East become less enamored of the invaders. The Crusaders, for the most part, were not colonizers. Most fought, then returned to their homelands. As a result, the Latin kingdoms established in the Holy Land were in incessant need of reinforcement for defense. The famous crusading orders of vowed knights would develop from this need. But it would also necessitate calls to Europe whenever the situation grew threatening.

In 1144, Edessa was retaken and the Islamic leader Nur-ur-din emerged as the principal enemy of the Crusader kingdoms. It was these events that led to a call for a Second Crusade. Emperor Conrad of Germany and King Louis VII of France led their armies into what became essentially a debacle. Convinced that the emperor had betrayed them to the Turks, the Second Crusade collapsed in a failed attempt to conquer Damascus. Nur-ur-din, meanwhile, took Damascus from a rival Islamic dynasty in 1154 and solidified his power.[23]

Amalric, now the Frankish King of Jerusalem, was lured into an attempt to conquer Egypt by the Syrian Shirkuh, whose master was Nur-ur-din and who was also the uncle of the young Saladin. Shirkuh had been betrayed after helping to restore the Egyptian chief Shawar to power. The invasion failed when the King of Jerusalem was forced to return to defend Antioch from an attack by Nur-ur-din. In a curious switch of alliances, by 1166 Amalric would decide to help Egypt from a renewed attack by Shirkuh, fearing the expanding Syrian power under Nur-ur-din. Almaric was defeated and then proceeded to Alexandria to attempt a siege. Shirkuh left his nephew Saladin with a small garrison to defend the city. A treaty was eventually concluded but the battle for Egypt was rejoined and, in 1169, Shirkuh avoided Almaric’s forces and took Cairo. Syria and Egypt were united in an aggressive two-prong front that would directly threaten the Holy Land. However, shortly after Shirkuh’s victory, he died and was succeeded by Saladin,

whom Nur-ur-din did not trust. For a brief time, Saladin preferred that a Frankish buffer state existed between Egypt and Nur-ur-din. But with the death of Nur-ur-din in 1174 and Almaric two months later, Saladin's star was rising rather than setting.[24]

Shortly thereafter, the Byzantine Empire suffered a major defeat at the hands of the Turks that effectively removed the Empire as a serious source of support. This would leave the Latin kingdoms of the Holy Land at the mercy of a more and more united Islamic force. Saladin advanced out of Egypt expecting a quick and easy march on Jerusalem. But he was surprisingly defeated. In 1180 a truce was concluded and Saladin continued to consolidate his power while the Byzantine Empire faced revolution and the dynasties in the Holy Land engaged in petty internal squabbles. In 1182 war was resumed after a Christian raid on an Islamic caravan. After failing to win any important victories, Saladin turned toward his Islamic enemies once again. By 1183 he took the vital city of Aleppo and was now the most powerful Islamic prince, controlling Syria and Egypt. He concluded a new four-year truce with the Christian enclaves to prepare to complete the conquest of the Holy Land. In 1187, after a large caravan was attacked by one of the Frankish knights, Saladin launched his war of conquest. At the Horns of Hattin, Saladin defeated the Christian armies and by October he had taken the city of Jerusalem. Only Tyre, Antioch and Tripoli remained as the Christian-held outposts.[25]

The Third Crusade was launched in response to Saladin's successes. This Crusade would create much of the romantic legends and myths that surround the battle for the Holy Land, in both the West and Islamic culture. An army under the German Emperor Frederick Barbarossa entered the fray in June 1190, but the emperor himself drowned crossing a river. Saladin considered it a miracle of faith. The emperor's dispirited army took refuge in Antioch. In the meantime, the remnants of the Frankish forces besieged Acre, a port of the Gulf of Haifa

that had been one of the wealthiest of the Frank communities. The battle was essentially a stalemate until the arrival of the Kings of England and France.

It was in the Third Crusade that Richard the Lion Heart of England would engage Saladin in a ritual of attacks and counterattacks, as well as chivalrous courtesies. The French king had come to Acre before him, but it was Richard's arrival in June 1191 after taking the island of Cyprus that energized the Christian army. In July the stalemate was broken and the port of Acre seized from Saladin. The French king soon departed for home while Richard planned to take back Jerusalem. He defeated Saladin at the battle of Arsuf and moved to secure the port of Jaffa. But this delay in approaching Jerusalem allowed Saladin to reinforce the city's defenses. Richard decided that even if he took the city, he could never hold it once the crusaders returned home. After a few more desultory campaigns, Richard saved Jaffa from Saladin's attack and a treaty was eventually negotiated between Richard and Saladin. The Christians regained the coastal cities and pilgrims would be allowed to visit the holy shrines in Jerusalem peacefully. Richard left the Holy Land in 1192, ending the Third Crusade.[26]

The Fourth Crusade began as a fundamental part of the reforming zeal of Pope Innocent III. Elected in 1198, he dedicated his pontificate to recapturing Jerusalem. He negotiated with the Eastern Emperor Alexius III, who had ascended the imperial throne in 1195 after overthrowing his brother, for a healing of the schism and a joint effort to take the Holy Land. French knights took up the mantle of the crusades under Tibauld of Champagne while in Germany, Philip of Swabia made clear his designs were bigger than the Holy Land. He was after Constantinople and the Eastern Empire itself. Innocent presumed that a Crusade without kings would lead to the same success as the First Crusade. But virtually from the start Innocent III lost control of the endeavor. The

knights decided that Egypt should be the power conquered to reclaim the Holy Land (which had been the advice of Richard the Lion Hearted). Meanwhile, Philip entered into negotiations with the son of the emperor deposed by Alexius III. This young Alexius hoped to regain the throne taken from his father and Philip was more than willing to assist, assuming that would turn the old empire into his virtual puppet.

Soon, Venice entered the picture. The Venetians would give transport and supplies for the Crusading force in return for payment and one-half of its conquests. The Venetians, however, were uninterested in supporting an attack on Egypt, having arranged a trade agreement with the Sultan of Egypt at the very time they were negotiating with the Crusaders. When the Crusaders failed to come up with the payment necessary, the Doge of Venice, Enrico Dandolo, offered to delay payment if they assisted in an attack on the city of Zara, control of which Venice hoped to wrestle from the king of Hungry. (Dandolo also held a long grudge against Constantinople.) In November 1202 the fleet sailed for Zara and the city was taken and pillaged. The Crusaders and Venetians decided to stay there for the winter.

Pope Innocent was outraged that a crusading army was used to attack a fellow Christian king. He excommunicated the entire expedition. Discovering the machinations of the Venetian Doge, he lifted the excommunication of the crusading knights, but not the Venetians. But over the winter, news reached Zara that young Alexius would pay the Crusaders what they owed the Venetians and supply them with all they needed to proceed to Egypt, if they would take Constantinople and place him on the throne. The Doge supported the plan as a means to enlarge its trade in the Mediterranean at the expense of a puppet Constantinople. Innocent called on the Crusaders to move on Palestine. He thought little of the young Alexius and warned against attacks on fellow Christians. The record is unclear if the pope had any advanced knowledge that the Crusaders would

turn on Constantinople, but in any case, he had lost any control he might have exercised to the Venetians and the friends of Philip of Swabia.

In June 1203 the Venetian and the Crusaders, along with young Alexius, arrived at the gates of Constantinople. Alexius had assured them that Constantinople would rise up in his favor. That did not happen. His uncle, Emperor Alexius III, fled and his father was restored to the throne. It was argued that therefore there was no need to continue the attack. Alexius would co-rule with his father as Alexius IV. He tried to force the city to accept the supremacy of Rome in matters of faith which the clergy rejected outright. He also found a treasury that could not pay off the Venetians. In February 1204, he was deposed and killed by the citizens of Constantinople. The Crusaders saw the revolution as a direct attack on them and any plans to continue on to the Holy Land were abandoned. The Franks and the Venetians poured into the city. The victorious Doge and the knights of the crusades then allowed the sack of the city. It was horrific. For 900 years the city had been the remnant of imperial Rome. It was virtually destroyed, it's art works stolen or destroyed, it's citizenry ruthlessly murdered. A Western empire was set up that would last a short time and Innocent, seeing in it the hope of reunification of Christendom, accepted it at first is a *fait accompli*. However, he became more enraged as stories of the savagery waged against Constantinople reached Rome. Innocent wrote angrily to the Westerners in Constantinople denouncing the sack of the city. "Then, to his disgust, he heard that his legate…had issued a decree absolving all who had taken the Cross from making the further journey to the Holy Land. The Crusade was revealed as an expedition whose only aim was to conquer Christian territory."[27]

The sack of Constantinople ended the Fourth Crusade and effectively determined that the Crusades would never succeed in its original purpose. The Empire was effectively destroyed

and would be of no assistance in future crusades. The Church was not reunified, as the Greeks would never forgive the West for the atrocities at Constantinople. The schism of 1054 would become permanent.

The end of the Fourth Crusade actually created a breathing space for the surviving Latin kingdom of Acre in the Holy Land. The unity of the Islamic peoples began to crumble after the death of Saladin in 1193. After years of internecine warfare, al-Adil became the effective Sultan and successor to Saladin's empire. He had concluded a truce with the surviving Western rulers in the Holy Land as he dealt with his Islamic enemies. The truce was scheduled to end in 1217 and appeals were made to the West for a new crusade when the peace would end.[28]

Pope Innocent III died in 1216 and was succeeded by Honorius III who was importuned by the king of Acre to move forward with a Crusade. The other Frankish rulers in the Holy Land, however, were less interested. The peaceful interlude had allowed them to expand their wealth and, since Saladin's death, had felt far less threatened. Honorius supported the Crusade and a force soon arrived in Acre. A desultory campaign followed that was essentially purposeless. However, it was soon decided that if Egypt could be captured, the entire balance of power could change. The Fifth Crusade of 1217 captured Damietta in Egypt. The sultan of Egypt and Syria offered the surrender of Jerusalem, but the crusaders refused believing that the conquering of Egypt and the Holy Land was at hand. But their moment had gone and they eventually withdrew from Egypt when promised reinforcements under Frederick II of Germany never came.[29]

Frederick II, excommunicated for his constant delays in undertaking a crusade, set out on the Sixth Crusade in 1228. Arriving in the Holy Land, he sent emissaries to the sultan and arranged a treaty that returned Jerusalem to Christian

control. But after Frederick departed, the Christian rulers of Jerusalem allied with the Muslim ruler of Damascus against the sultan. By 1244, Jerusalem would be back under the control of Islam. The Sixth Crusade under Louis IX of France once again captured Damietta but failed to take Egypt. The king was eventually captured and released for ransom. He returned to France in 1254. After his departure, a series of civil wars among the Venetians and the Genoese in the Holy Land further weakened the kingdoms there. The new sultan of Egypt marched up the coast and took one city after another, including Antioch in 1268. Louis attempted another crusade but died shortly after arriving on the African coast in 1270. In 1291, the kingdom of Acre was sacked and the Latin kingdom in the Holy Land came to an end.[30]

With the end of Acre, there was no Christian base left from which crusading forces could operate. If the popes wished to re-establish crusading fever, there were few places they could turn to after 1291. The remnant Empire, once more under Greek control, was fighting for survival and Europe itself had lost interest. King Peter of Cyprus – who claimed the kingdom of Jerusalem – launched a Crusade in 1365 with the support of Pope Urban V. Another attempt was made on Egypt as the key to regaining the Holy Land. Alexandria was sacked, but soon evacuated and peace was made with the sultan of Egypt when subjects tired of his crusading spirit overthrew King Peter.[31]

The sack of Alexandria led to a revived Islamic persecution of Christians within their territories under the Egyptian Mameluks. In 1426 Cypriot would face a devastating invasion, while, by 1375, the Christian kingdom of Armenia disappeared under combined Turkish and Mameluk forces. The rising power of the Islamic Ottoman Turks soon threatened Eastern Europe, as well as Constantinople. A crusade was assembled in Hungry but was defeated by the Turks at the battle of Nicopolis in 1396. It would only be a matter of time before Constantinople would fall. In 1439, the eastern emperor agreed to end the schism at

the Council of Florence to obtain western aid. But his own subjects rejected the union and in 1453 the Turks would capture Constantinople.

The fall of Constantinople did not come as a great shock in Europe. But Pope Pius II, elected in 1458 would labor toward one last crusade to throw back the Turks from Constantinople. The threatened king of Hungary facing the Turkish onslaught readily agreed but little other support was engendered before the ailing pontiff died in 1464. From this point on, the Crusades as a narrowly defined holy war of a united Christendom supported by the popes essentially disappeared. In Church histories, the crusade of King Louis of France in 1270 marked the last of the traditional international crusades made under vow.[32] Certainly from the 15th Century on, battles against the Islamic forces were national enterprises for limited national goals, the most well known being the *Reconquista* of Spain completed by Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492.

Yet, even from the First Crusade, it would be a mistake to see the Crusades as wars that were controlled by the Church. Supported by the papacy in an attempt to secure Christian rights in the Holy Land, the Crusades themselves were dominated by the kings and princes who took part in them. A movement that began as essentially a limited religious quest for a union of sovereigns, papacy and people to secure the right of safe pilgrimage to the Holy sites associated with the life of Christ became caught up in the wider history of the period. Additionally, however, the negative caricatures of the Crusades that are used as a contemporary club against the Church have little to do with their reality. The Crusades were far from colonizing efforts. The small kingdoms established after the first Crusade suffered chronically from a lack of population to support or defend themselves. Most crusaders served for a short period of time then returned home. The Holy Land and its environs were far from a peaceful Islamic enclave invading by vicious European knights. The Islamic peoples

spent far greater time and energy fighting among themselves than they would fighting crusading forces. The crusading kingdoms would often serve as allies of one side or the other in this warfare.

Certainly, the Church supported the ideal of the Crusade, but rarely controlled events and was often at direct odds with the Crusaders themselves. The horrors of warfare as fought at the time – and the ruthlessness of the slaughter that often followed victory – was neither caused by the Church, or was the Church capable of limiting it in any great fashion. The means used by the Franks in particular in warfare were hardly surprising for the time, or subject to control by the Church. There was no Church presence to mitigate the sack of Jerusalem in the First Crusade. In the Fourth Crusade, the responsibility for the destruction of Constantinople must be placed on the Doge of Venice and the schemes of the pretender to the imperial throne, rather than at the foot of Pope Innocent III who was horrified at the Christian slaughter of Christians that made a crusade to the Holy Land impossible. The attacks on the Jews in the Rhineland that took place on the eve of the First Crusade were in direct contradiction to Church teaching and the local hierarchy would be the only physical defenders of the Jewish population.

It is difficult to argue that the Crusades for the Holy Land had any real positive impact on Western culture and the Church. They certainly did nothing to improve relations between Islam and Christianity, though they also certainly did not cause what had already been a violent confrontation between East and West since the Islamic emergence under Mohammed centuries earlier. The persistent division of Western Christianity in the Orthodox schism was hardened by the Fourth Crusade, but the schism itself and the causes of it pre-existed the Crusades. The schism has persisted for too many long centuries not because of the Crusades, but for a host of other reasons grounded in culture, nationalism, spirituality

and theology.

Initiated at the request of the Byzantine emperors and by the dream of successive popes for a safe Holy Land and a united Christendom, the Crusades and the crusaders were never controlled by the Church. Even the First Crusade, though inspired by lofty ideals, essentially became a means for Frankish knights to recreate small feudal kingdoms in a backwater of the Islamic Empire. The negative results of the Crusades are clear. But to point to the Crusades as a symbol of a power-crazed Church engaging in slaughter to pursue its own nefarious ends is to misunderstand history and simply to look for an excuse for contemporary bigotry.

SUMMARY POINTS

One reason for the persistence of anti-Catholicism is the historical legacy of the post-Reformation world. Myths, legends and anti-Catholic "histories" created in the bitterness of theological, national and cultural divisions in the centuries after the Reformation have colored our understanding of the past, and are often used in the present as a club against the Church.

With the Crusades, the assumption is of a ruthless Church driving Europe into a barbaric war of aggression and plunder against a peaceful Islamic population in the Holy Land. As the common portrait paints it, led by mad preachers and manipulating popes, the Crusades were a Church-sponsored invasion and slaughter.

Narrowly and traditionally defined, the Crusades involved a military attempt under a vow of faith to regain the Holy Land – containing the sites of the Gospel accounts of the life of Jesus – from its Islamic conquerors. The goal as defined by the Church was to allow safe pilgrimage to these sites and to protect and maintain a Christian presence in the Holy Land.

This narrow papal purpose, however, would become caught up in

dynastic feuds, schism and heresies, economic warfare over Mediterranean trade, the reunification and rise of an aggressive Islamic military movement, and the final destruction of the Eastern Roman Empire.

The Church in the Near East would take its liturgy and characteristics from Constantinople. As relations between the Eastern Church under imperial leadership and the Western Church under papal leadership became more strained over the centuries, the future of the Holy Land would be tied directly to the politics of Constantinople than Rome.

In 638 Jerusalem was taken by invading Arabian forces under the sword of the new Islam only six years after the death of the prophet Mohammed. Egypt was lost to the Moslem forces and by 700 AD Roman Africa was conquered. In 711 Spain was occupied and it was not until the victory of Charles Martel at Tours and Potier in 732 that the Moslem advance in the West ended. Constantinople was able to hold off an invasion and the remnant Eastern Roman Empire, stripped of Syria, Palestine and North Africa, continued to exist.

The Eastern Church, seeing itself as the intellectual and cultural center of the world, resented the juridical authority of Rome. While consenting to Rome as a court of last resort in doctrinal concerns, it did not accept Roman leadership over its daily affairs. Additionally, thorny theological issues would divide the Church in the East far more than the West. Schisms and heresies would breakdown the unity of the Church in the East even before the major break between East and West in the schism of 1054 that created the Orthodox churches and provided the backdrop to the Crusades.

Unity in the Islamic world had also begun to break down in the generations after Mohammed's death. By the 11th century there were three different centers of Arab rule – in Spain, Egypt and Iran\Iraq – with the Fatmid dynasty of Egypt exercising control over Jerusalem. At the same time, there

were any number of independent Islamic states with their own military forces, dynasties, feuds and battles for power. The death of any leader seemed to immediately result in endless family battles for power. The Holy Land was certainly never a part of a peaceful united Islamic empire.

The Seljuk Turks had overrun Armenia and the entire Anatolia peninsula was threatened. Imperial forces were destroyed at the battle of Manzikert in 1071, considered the greatest defeat in the history of the Eastern Empire. Ten years later, Alexius Commenus would take over the imperial throne when it appeared that the entire Empire was on the verge of collapse.

In November 1095 at a Church council in Clermont, France, Pope Urban II issued the formal call for a Crusade to rescue eastern Christendom and recover the Holy Land to make it safe for pilgrimage.

Why did Urban support the idea of a Crusade to the Holy Land and put the weight of the Church behind it? Clearly, the return of the Holy Land and the defense of the Christian communities in the Near East were the first objectives. But there were additional concerns. There was the clear threat of the Islamic advance into Europe that threatened the entire Christian community. If Constantinople fell, the victory at Tours could be rendered in vain and all Eastern Europe would be wide open to Islamic advance. Additionally, the pope certainly believed that allying with Constantinople and rescuing the ancient sees of Antioch and Jerusalem could heal the disunity of Christianity cause by the schism of 1054.

These were violent times and warfare was waged ruthlessly. The Frankish lords taking part in the First Crusade were among the most ruthless. These men viewed the Crusade as a holy venture that could save their souls. But they also saw an opportunity for conquest and new lands to rule. At the same time, the Emperor Alexius in Constantinople viewed the Crusaders as a means to preserve the Empire by assisting him

in destroying the Turks and recapturing the ancient lands of the Empire now dominated by Islam. These contrary expectations would increase the bad blood between East and West.

In the Holy Land itself, various Islamic dynasties would see the Crusaders as much as potential allies than enemies. The "kingdoms" established after the First Crusade would be caught up in the regional power disputes of the Islamic leaders, as well as their own dynastic ambitions. There was also the ambition of the Italian cities to extend their rising commercial power. They saw the Crusade as an opportunity to end both Islamic domination of trade in the Eastern Mediterranean and the power of Constantinople. The commercial ambitions of Venice would lead to the devastating sack of Constantinople in the Fourth Crusade.

The First Crusade began out of papal control when virtual leaderless mobs of the poor began to assemble and "march" toward Constantinople. In the Rhineland these disparate mobs of peasants and townsfolk began to launch attacks on the Jews. In many cases, the Church provided the only protection for the Jews though even at Trier, where they were sheltered in the archbishop's palace, the mobs broke-in and slaughtered them. Eventually, Christians and Turks destroyed these peasant armies and most of western Christendom viewed it as just penalty for their anti-Jewish atrocities. When the Second Crusade was preached, St. Bernard of Clairvaux went to the Rhineland to stamp out anti-Jewish riots, and they effectively ceased as part of the crusading movement.

The Crusaders first captured Nicea, capital of the Seljuk Turks, then defeated the major Seljuk force at Dorylaeum which left a clear passage across Asia Minor. On June 3, 1098, Antioch was captured and a large Turkish contingent defeated in front of its walls. On July 15, 1099, the Crusaders took Jerusalem. The papal legate, however, had died. Without his restraint, the crusading army – now reduced

to about 12,000 – stormed the walls and engaged in a horrific slaughter of the Islamic and Jewish population. Though the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem was then established, that slaughter would help to reunify Islamic resistance to the new conquerors.

The Crusaders, for the most part, were not colonizers. Most fought, then returned to their homelands. As a result, the Latin kingdoms established in the Holy Land were in incessant need of reinforcement for defense. The famous crusading orders of vowed knights would develop from this need. But it would also necessitate calls to Europe whenever the situation grew threatening.

In 1144, Edessa was retaken and the Islamic leader Nur-ur-din emerged as the principal enemy of the Crusader kingdoms. It was these events that led to a call for a Second Crusade. Emperor Conrad of Germany and King Louis VII of France led their armies into what became essentially a debacle. Convinced that the emperor had betrayed them to the Turks, the Second Crusade collapsed in a failed attempt to conquer Damascus.

In 1187, after a large caravan was attacked by one of the Frankish knights, Saladin launched his war of conquest. At the Horns of Hattin, Saladin defeated the Christian armies and by October he had taken the city of Jerusalem. Only Tyre, Antioch and Tripoli remained as the Christian-held outposts. The Third Crusade was launched in response to Saladin's successes.

It was in the Third Crusade that Richard the Lion Heart of England would engage Saladin in a ritual of attacks and counterattacks, as well as chivalrous courtesies. The French king had come to Acre before him, but it was Richard's arrival in June 1191 after taking the island of Cyprus that energized the Christian army. In July the stalemate was broken and the port of Acre seized from Saladin. The French

king soon departed for home while Richard planned to take back Jerusalem. He defeated Saladin at the battle of Arsuf and moved to secure the port of Jaffa. But this delay in approaching Jerusalem allowed Saladin to reinforce the city's defenses. A treaty was eventually negotiated between Richard and Saladin. The Christians regained the coastal cities and pilgrims would be allowed to visit the holy shrines in Jerusalem peacefully. Richard left the Holy Land in 1192, ending the Third Crusade.

The Fourth Crusade, the dream of Pope Innocent III, collapsed in the sack of Constantinople that resulted from the manipulations of the Doge of Venice. A Western empire was set up that would last a short time and Innocent, seeing in it the hope of reunification of Christendom, accepted it at first is a fait accompli. However, he became more enraged as stories of the savagery waged against Constantinople reached Rome. Innocent wrote angrily to the Westerners in Constantinople denouncing the sack of the city.

The sack of Constantinople ended the Fourth Crusade and effectively determined that the Crusades would never succeed in its original purpose. The Empire was effectively destroyed and would be of no assistance in future crusades. The Church was not reunified, as the Greeks would never forgive the West for the atrocities at Constantinople. The schism of 1054 would become permanent.

It was decided that if Egypt could be captured the entire balance of power could change in the Holy Land. The Fifth Crusade of 1217 captured Damietta in Egypt. The sultan of Egypt and Syria offered the surrender of Jerusalem, but the crusaders refused believing that the conquering of Egypt and the Holy Land was at hand. But their moment had gone and they eventually withdrew from Egypt when promised reinforcements under Frederick II of Germany never came.

Frederick II, excommunicated for his constant delays in

undertaking a crusade, set out on the Sixth Crusade in 1228. Arriving in the Holy Land, he sent emissaries to the sultan and arranged a treaty that returned Jerusalem to Christian control. But after Frederick departed, the Christian rulers of Jerusalem allied with the Muslim ruler of Damascus against the sultan. By 1244, Jerusalem would be back under the control of Islam.

The Sixth Crusade under Louis IX of France once again captured Damietta but failed to take Egypt. The king was eventually captured and released for ransom. He returned to France in 1254. After his departure, a series of civil wars among the Venetians and the Genoese in the Holy Land further weakened the kingdoms there. The new sultan of Egypt marched up the coast and took one city after another, including Antioch in 1268.

Louis attempted another crusade but died shortly after arriving on the African coast in 1270. In 1291, the kingdom of Acre was sacked and the Latin kingdom in the Holy Land came to an end.

The rising power of the Islamic Ottoman Turks soon threatened Eastern Europe, as well as Constantinople. A crusade was assembled in Hungry but was defeated by the Turks at the battle of Nicopolis in 1396. It would only be a matter of time before Constantinople would fall. In 1439, the eastern emperor agreed to end the schism at the Council of Florence to obtain western aid. But his own subjects rejected the union and in 1453 the Turks would capture Constantinople.

The fall of Constantinople did not come as a great shock in Europe. But Pope Pius II, elected in 1458 would labor toward one last crusade to throw back the Turks from Constantinople. The threatened king of Hungary facing the Turkish onslaught readily agreed but little other support was engendered before the ailing pontiff died in 1464. From this point on, the Crusades as a narrowly defined holy war of a united

Christendom supported by the popes essentially disappeared. In Church histories, the crusade of King Louis of France in 1270 marked the last of the traditional international crusades made under vow.[32] Certainly from the 15th Century on, battles against the Islamic forces were national enterprises for limited national goals, the most well known being the Reconquista of Spain completed by Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492.

The negative caricatures of the Crusades that are used as a contemporary club against the Church have little to do with their reality. The Crusades were far from colonizing efforts. The Holy Land and its environs were also far from a peaceful Islamic enclave invading by vicious European knights. The Islamic peoples spent far greater time and energy fighting among themselves than they would fighting crusading forces.

The Church supported the ideal of the Crusade, but rarely controlled events and was often at direct odds with the Crusaders themselves. The horrors of warfare as fought at the time – and the ruthlessness of the slaughter that often followed victory – was neither caused by the Church, or was the Church capable of limiting it in any great fashion. The means used by the Franks in particular in warfare were hardly surprising for the time, or subject to control by the Church. There was no Church presence to mitigate the sack of Jerusalem in the First Crusade.

In the Fourth Crusade, the responsibility for the destruction of Constantinople must be placed on the Doge of Venice and the schemes of the pretender to the imperial throne, rather than at the foot of Pope Innocent III who was horrified at the Christian slaughter of Christians that made a crusade to the Holy Land impossible.

The attacks on the Jews in the Rhineland that took place on the eve of the First Crusade were in direct contradiction to Church teaching and the local hierarchy would be the only

physical defenders of the Jewish population.

It is difficult to argue that the Crusades for the Holy Land had any real positive impact on Western culture and the Church. They certainly did nothing to improve relations between Islam and Christianity, though they also certainly did not cause what had already been a violent confrontation between East and West since the Islamic emergence under Mohammed centuries earlier. The persistent division of Western Christianity in the Orthodox schism was hardened by the Fourth Crusade, but the schism itself and the causes of it pre-existed the Crusades.

NOTE ON SOURCES

The single most reliable narrative on the Crusades is the three-volume "A History of the Crusades" by Steven Runciman (Cambridge University Press, 1999 editions.). This was the primary source used in the narrative of the actual events of the Crusades.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Cited in Scripps Howard News Service syndicated story, by Lualne Lee, May 2001

[2] For an in depth response to the allegations against Pius and for a historical investigation of the Inquisition, see Research Papers at the website of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights at www.catholicleague.org

[3]The myth of Pius XII began in earnest in 1963 in a drama created for the stage by Rolf Hochhuth, an otherwise obscure German playwright born in 1931. In 1963's Der Stellvertreter (The Representative or The Deputy) Hochhuth charged through a fictional presentation that Pius XII maintained an icy, cynical and uncaring silence during the Holocaust. More interested in Vatican investments than human

lives, Pius was presented as a cigarette-smoking dandy with Nazi leanings. The Deputy, even to Pius' most strenuous detractors, is readily dismissed. John Cornwell in "Hitler's Pope" describes Der Stellvertreter as "historical fiction based on scant documentation…(T)he characterization of Pacelli (Pius XII) as a money-grubbing hypocrite is so wide of the mark as to be ludicrous. Importantly, however, Hocchuth's play offends the most basic criteria of documentary: that such stories and portrayals are valid only if they are demonstrably true." Yet The Deputy, despite its evident flaws, prejudices and lack of historicity, laid the foundation for the charges against Pius XII, five years after his death.

[4]See Catholic News Service coverage, March 2001

[5] *Medieval History*, Norman F. Cantor (Macmillan Company 1970) p. 320

[6]*A History of the Arab Peoples*, Albert Hourani (Harvard University Press 1991) p. 7

[7]*A History of the Crusades* (Volume I), Steven Runciman (Cambridge University Press 1999 edition) p. 5-7

[8] *Saints and Sinners*, *A History of the Popes*, Eamon Duffy (Yale University Press) p. 90

[9]bid p. 91

[10] *The Barbarian Conversion*, Richard Fletcher (Henry Holt and Company, 1997) pp. 327-329

[11] See *Hourani* pp. 83-86

[12] See *Runciman (Vol. I)* pp. 61-63; 106-108

[13] *Canton*, p.320

[14]*Inquisition*, by Edward Peters (University of California Press, 1989) p. 40

[15]*Runciman (Vol. I)* pp.83-87

[16] ibid. pp. 169-171

[17] *Hourani*, pp. 38-43

[18] The sack of Constantinople is discussed below. The Fourth Crusade had been a goal of Pope Innocent III from his election to the papacy in 1198. However, the destruction of Constantinople that resulted from the Fourth Crusade was not at Innocent's direction and had been the goal of Venice, particularly its Doge who sought both revenge for maltreatment at the hands of Constantinople and to eliminate the competition from the Eastern Empire for Mediterranean trade.

[19]*Runciman (Vol. I)* pp. 135-141

[20]*Runciman (Vol. II)* pp. 254-255

[21]*Hourani*, p. 84

[22]*Runciman (Vol. I)* pp. 279-288

[23]*Runciman (Vol. II)* pp. 288, 341

[24]ibid. pp. 381-390; 399

[25]ibid. pp. 459-462

[26]*Runciman (Vol. III)* pp. 69-74

[27] ibid. p. 129

[28] ibid. p. 146

[29] ibid. pp. 169-170

[30] ibid. pp. 421-423

[31] ibid. p. 448

[32] See entry for Crusades, *The Catholic Encyclopedia (Vol. IV)* Robert Appleton Company (1908)

The Black Legend: The Inquisition

by Robert P. Lockwood

(Catalyst 4/2001)

Most of the myths surrounding the Inquisition have come to us wrapped in the cloak of the Spanish Inquisition. It is the world of Edgar Allen Poe's*The Pit and the Pendulum*, with vivid descriptions of burning heretics, ghastly engines of torture with innocent Bible-believers martyred for their faith. In many ways, the reality of the Spanish Inquisition has its own human tragedies, but it is not the tragedy presented in the common caricatures.

It is a curiosity of history that the medieval Inquisition of the 13th and 14thcenturies was little utilized in Spain. It was only after the mid-fifteenth century that the Spanish Inquisition would develop, and its target would not be heretics in any traditional sense, but rather those whose Jewish ancestors had converted to Christianity and were accused of secretly practicing their old faith. To many contemporary historians of the Spanish Inquisition, the story unfolds not as a "religious" persecution, but rather a racial pogrom.

Spain was unique in Western Europe for the diversity of its

population. In addition to a large segment of Muslims, medieval Spain had the single largest Jewish community in the world, numbering some one hundred thousand souls in the 13th Century. For centuries Jews and Christians had lived and worked together in a more or less peaceful though generally segregated co-existence.

In the 14th Century, however, anti-Jewish attitudes were on the rise throughout Europe. In 1290, England expelled its Jews and France followed in 1306. Spain began to experience an increasing anti-Jewish sentiment. It exploded in the summer of 1391 with angry anti-Jewish riots. These riots led to major forced conversions of Jews to Christianity. These Jewish converts would be called conversos or New Christians, to distinguish them from traditional Christian families. The converso identity would remain with such families for generations.

To the converso families, such conversions were not without benefit. They were welcomed into a full participation in Spanish society and they would soon become leaders in government, science, business and the Church. Over the years the Old Christians saw these converso families as opportunists who secretly maintained the faith of their forefathers. It was a strong mixture of racial prejudice against the conversos that would stir-up the Spanish Inquisition.

Spain in the 15th century was in the process of unifying the two traditional kingdoms of Castile and Aragon, while engaging in the final defeat of the Muslim stronghold of Granada. Isabella of Castile had married Frederick of Aragon in 1469. She came to the throne in 1474. When Ferdinand became king of Aragon in 1479, the two kingdoms were effectively united. War was waged with Granada beginning in 1482, with its final defeat coming 10 years later.

In his book “The Spanish Inquisition: A Historical Revision”

(Yale University Press) Henry Kamen writes, “From the mid-Fifteenth Century on, religious anti-Semitism changed into ethnic anti-Semitism, with little difference seen between Jews and conversos except for the fact that conversos were regarded as worse than Jews because, as ostensible Christians, they had acquired privileges and positions that were denied to Jews. The result of this new ethnic anti-Semitism was the invocation of an inquisition to ferret out the false conversos who had, by becoming formal Christians, placed themselves under its authority.”

In 1478, Ferdinand and Isabella requested a papal bull establishing an inquisition, a bull granted by Pope Sixtus IV. In 1482 the size of the inquisition was expanded and included the Dominican Friar Tomas de Torquemada, though Pope Sixtus IV protested against the activities of the inquisition in Aragon and its treatment of the conversos. The next year, Ferdinand and Isabella established a state council to administer the Inquisition with Torquemada as its president. He would later assume the title of Inquisitor-General.

This allowed the inquisition to persist well beyond its initial intention. The papacy would continue to complain about the treatment of the conversos, but the unity of the Spanish Inquisition with the State would remain a distinguishing characteristic, and a primary source of post-Reformation European hatred.

The stated reason for the inquisition was to root out “false” conversos. There seems to have been an allure to the claim that many conversos secretly practiced their old Jewish faith and, as such, were undermining the Faith. For centuries, such legends would persist in Spain, though most evidence shows that there were few “secret” Judaizers and that most conversos, particularly after the first generation of forced conversions, were faithful Catholics.

In March, 1492, Isabella and Ferdinand ordered the expulsion –

or conversion – of all remaining Jews in their joint kingdoms. The purpose of the declaration was more religious than racial, as Jewish conversion rather than expulsion was certainly the intent. While many Jews fled, a large number converted, thus aggravating the popular picture of secret Judaizers within the Christian community of Spain. Up through 1530, the primary activity of the inquisition in Spain would be aimed at pursuing conversos. The same would be true from 1650 to 1720.

The Spanish Inquisition had been universally established in Spain a few years prior to the expulsion of the Jews in 1492. Records show that virtually the only "heresy" prosecuted at that time was the alleged secret practice of the Jewish faith. Through 1530, it is estimated that approximately 2,000 "heretics" were turned over to the secular authorities for execution. Many of those convicted of heresy were conversos who had already fled Spain. These were burned in effigy.

The most famous period of the Spanish Inquisition, under the legendary Torquemada, had little to do with the common caricature of simple "bible-believing" Protestants torn apart by ruthless churchmen. The true picture is unsettling enough: it was a government-controlled inquisition aimed at faithful Catholics of Jewish ancestry. The papacy, under Sixtus IV (1471-1484) and Innocent VIII (1484-1492), rather than controlling the Spanish Inquisition, protested its unfair treatment of the conversos with little result.

With the outbreak of Luther's Reformation in Europe and the spread of its ideas in the 1520s, the Inquisition was entrenched to protect Spain from Protestant "infiltration" and as a further means to buttress the royal power of Charles V, the successor to Ferdinand and Isabella.

The Reformation would have little impact in Spain. As Kamen explains: "Unlike England, France and Germany, Spain had not since the early Middle Ages experienced a single significant popular heresy. All its ideological struggles since the

Reconquest had been directed against the minority religions, Judaism and Islam. There were consequently no native heresies (like Wycliffism in England) on which German ideas could build."

The image of a Spanish Inquisition burning hundreds of thousands of Protestant heretics has no basis in historical fact. There were so few Protestants in Spain that there could be no such prosecution. During the Reformation period, the inquisition in Spain certainly searched for evidence of Protestantism, particularly among the educated classes. But before 1558 possibly less than 50 cases of alleged Lutheranism among Spaniards came to the notice of the inquisitors.

The discovery of a small cell of Protestants – about 120 – in late 1550s, however, generated concern in the highest quarters in Spain. Charles V from his monastery retirement wrote in an infamous letter to his regent daughter Juana that so "great an evil" must be "suppressed and remedied without distinction of persons from the very beginning." Though Spain braced for a tidal wave of revelations and discoveries – with finger-pointing and accusations of pseudo-Protestants everywhere – in all, just over 100 persons in Spain were found to be Protestants and turned over to the secular authorities for execution in the 1560s.

In the last decades of the century, an additional 200 Spaniards were accused of being followers of Luther. "Most of them were in no sense Protestants…Irreligious sentiments, drunken mockery, anticlerical expressions, were all captiously classified by the inquisitors (or by those who denounced the cases) as 'Lutheran.' Disrespect to church images, and eating meat on forbidden days, were taken as signs of heresy," Kamen reports.

The last major outburst in activity of the Spanish Inquisition was aimed once again at alleged Judaizing among *conversos* in the 1720s. The Inquisition was formally ended by the monarchy

in 1834, though it had effectively come to an end years prior.

Edward Peters in “Inquisition” (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, 1989) explains how the myth of the all-embracing inquisition developed in European thought. The creation of the myth of the Inquisition was tied to the creation of an image of a Catholic Spain in the consciousness of the West. “An image of Spain circulated through late sixteenth-century Europe, borne by means of political and religious propaganda that blackened the characters of Spaniards and their rulers to such an extent that Spain became the symbol of all forces of repression, brutality, religious and political intolerance, and intellectual and artistic backwardness for the next four centuries. Spaniards and Hispanophiles have termed this process and the image that resulted from it as ‘The Black Legend,’ *la leyenda negra*.” It is this post-Reformation anti-Catholic “black legend” that created the myths surrounding the Spanish Inquisition. Serious historical studies in the 20th Century have debunked these myths, but they continue to persist in popular imagination.

History and Myth: The Inquisition

by Robert P. Lockwood

(8/2000)

“Let us pray that each one of us, looking to the Lord Jesus, meek and humble of heart, will recognize that even men of the church, in the name of faith and morals, have sometimes used

methods not in keeping with the Gospel in the solemn duty of defending the truth." – Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Jubilee Request for Forgiveness, March 12, 2000

"The Inquisition resulted in the torture and murder of millions of Christians whose only crime was a rejection of Catholic heresy and a commitment to follow the Bible as their sole authority for faith and practice. John Paul II has not confessed the Inquisition; he has failed to label his fellow popes the murderers they were." – Jerry Kaifetz

Among the many difficulties in addressing the issue of anti-Catholicism are the cultural assumptions, historical canards and conventional wisdom that fuel the prejudice. Many Americans, Catholics as well as non-Catholics, have an understanding of history, as well as a way of thinking, that carries the baggage of post-Reformation propaganda or 19th century Enlightenment prejudices. Myths created in anti-Catholic passions have become part of the cultural corpus and accepted as undeniable truths.(1)We all know, for example, that the astronomer Galileo was tortured and imprisoned for years by the inquisition. He then recanted his scientific theory on the rotation of the earth around the sun, but bravely muttered aloud as he left the trial chamber, *Eppur si muove! ("And yet it does move")*. The historical reality, however, is that Galileo was never tortured, lived in comfort at the Florentine embassy during his trial, and the defiant quote was a legend created nearly 125 years after his death.(2)

Common to these myths are an invented history meant to portray Catholicism as the enemy of free thought, an alien presence in a democratic society, and as a perverse form of medieval superstition that survives on the ignorance of believers and the Church's own violent will to power. Just as these myths served a purpose in the Reformation and were perpetuated in the 18th century Enlightenment and the 19th century world of progress and scientism, they serve a purpose in today's

secularist climate. Though developed in a war of propaganda between Catholicism and the dissenting churches of the 16th century, the theological trappings of the myths have been stripped away in many cases. They are now simply historical assumptions used to undermine and dismiss Church positions, particularly in the public arena, without the necessity of analyzing or addressing those positions. They are common rhetorical tools useful because they are universally understood and accepted.

In our own time we are seeing the creation of such a myth in allegations of silence and collaboration with the Nazis of Pope Pius XII during World War II. Though the allegations contradict clear historical evidence, they are becoming conventional wisdom regurgitated by columnists and commentaries with no need for substantiation.(3) Of the many historical myths about Catholics and Catholicism, however, perhaps the most pervasive are those centered on the inquisition in general and the Spanish Inquisition in particular. From the 16th through the early 20th Century, the legend of the Inquisition grew larger than its history. This legend of the inquisition persists today in the imagination, well after its debunking by historians.

A good summation of that legend as it persists today was in the May 20, 2000 edition of *The Times*, a regional newspaper in Northwest Indiana and suburban Chicago. Written by Jerry Kaifetz, the owner of a chemical manufacturing company with a doctorate from Bethany Theological Seminary in Alabama, it is a response to the papal Jubilee “Request for Forgiveness” in March 2000. Kaifetz wrote: “The pope has not confessed the bloody and horrible 600-years inquisition against humble Bible-believers, which was instigated by Pope Innocent III (1198-1213). Some of the devices and inventions used to torture the “heresy” out of those rejecting the Catholic Church’s authority included “The Iron Maiden,” “Hanging Cages,” “The Judas Cradle,” “Skinning the Cat,” “The Head

Crusher," "The Heretic's Fork," "The Barrel Pillory," "The Rack," "The Knee Splitter," "The Breast Ripper," and other devices too numerous to mention or too heinous to describe in any detail. The inquisitor was commissioned directly by the pope and acted directly on his behalf. The trials were held in secret and the inquisitor acted as judge, jury and prosecutor. The accused was never represented. The Inquisition resulted in the torture and murder of millions of Christians whose only crime was a rejection of Catholic heresy and a commitment to follow the Bible as their sole authority for faith and practice. John Paul II has not confessed the Inquisition; he has failed to label his fellow popes the murderers they were."(4)

Kaifetz, writing on the cusp of the New Millennium, neatly summarizes the falsehoods, exaggerations and myths of the inquisition established in the religious wars of the 16th Century. While he approaches the inquisition from the perspective of a more traditional form of religious anti-Catholicism, the image he presents would be shared by many today, including some Catholics.

What, in fact, were inquisitions? Generally defined, inquisitions were ecclesial investigations, meaning that investigations were conducted either directly by, or under the auspices of, the Church. The investigations were undertaken at certain times in certain regions under the authority of the local bishop and his designates, or under the auspices of papal-appointed legates, or representatives from Religious Orders delegated the task from the papacy. The purpose of the investigations was peculiar to the local circumstance. They usually involved a judicial process aimed to obtain the confession and reconciliation with the Church of those who held heretical views or engaged in activities contrary to Church teaching and belief. The goal was to secure a person's repentance, and to maintain the unity of the Church. These investigations were conducted with the

cooperation and involvement of the temporal authorities. If these investigations resulted in finding serious doctrinal heresy and an unwillingness to abjure from heresy, it was the responsibility of the secular authorities to undertake punishment. The uniqueness of the inquisitions was that the Church conducted the investigations, and that the Church worked closely with civil authorities. In Protestant states after the Reformation, the distinct role of the religious congregation did not necessarily exist, and the investigation, trial and punishment of dissenters were primarily the responsibility of the state.

The common assumptions about the inquisition – the myths of the inquisition – are neatly summarized in the Kaifetz opinion piece, and could be outlined as follows:

· The inquisition was a single, unified court system directly responsible to the pope and controlled solely by the papacy.

· The inquisition existed throughout Europe for nearly 700 years, founded in the 12th century and continued to the early 19th century. Prior to the Reformation, it focused on a "secret" and "hidden" church, similar to that of the Reformation churches.

· The inquisition was primarily aimed at the early Protestant reformers of the 16th century and the Spanish Inquisition alone killed and tortured hundreds of thousands, if not millions of Protestant reformers.

· Vicious and unique tortures were routinely used, particularly in the Spanish Inquisition.

· The Spanish Inquisition existed independent of Spanish royal authority and existed solely as an arm of the Church, as did all other inquisitions.

· The inquisition was a means for the Church to exercise its authority over science.

· Persecution of religious dissent was unique to the inquisition and to the Catholic Church in Europe.

These assumptions about the inquisition and how it operated are part of the cultural baggage of Western civilization. They are far more myth than history. Yet, it would be very wrong to whitewash the inquisition, or to attempt to explain away its historicity. In the words of the papal apology, Catholics should understand that there were events in the past where "men of the church, in the name of faith and morals, have sometimes used methods not in keeping with the Gospel in the solemn duty of defending the truth." The inquisition existed and it remains an unsettling part of Catholic history. However, the caricature of the inquisition that most of us have come to know and that is often utilized in anti-Catholic polemics has little to do with the reality of the inquisition.

Prelude

In its simplest summary, the Church after the death of the Apostles had a faith that "united scattered congregations: that Christ was the Son of God, that He would return to establish his Kingdom on earth, and that all who believed in him would at the Last Judgment be rewarded with eternal bliss."(5) However, very soon the Christian community needed to give better definition to its beliefs as conflicts and disputes arose. From very early (as noted in Scripture(6)) the Christian community was forced to confront how to deal with those people who persisted in teachings contrary to the Apostolic Faith. For the most part, the early Church settled on admonishment, avoidance and, if a person persisted in error, expulsion from the community. This also led the early Church to an increased understanding of the universal authority of the See of St. Peter at Rome as the defender of the "deposit of the faith." As the Christian faith grew throughout the Roman Empire and Church authorities settled controversies over essential teachings, statements of faith were developed. These Creeds (statements of fundamental

beliefs) came in response to various teachings that were seen by Christian leaders as fundamentally erroneous.

With the victory of Constantine in the second decade of the Fourth Century, followed by the conversion of most of the Roman Empire by the end of the century, Christianity became the faith of the Empire. While this ended the age of martyrdom under intermittent Roman persecution, it created its own difficulties. Most prominent was the relationship of the Church – particularly Church authority – to the Christian emperors. It was a problem that, in certain respects, would plague Church relationships with government until the dramatic changes of the late nineteenth century and early 20th centuries. Government wanted to control the Church within its borders, seeing the faith as inextricably linked to societal stability, identity, and as foundational to royal power. At the same time, the Church wanted to be seen as separate and above this "City of Man," while also seeing in the secular arm the means to assure orthodox belief.

It was a troubled period of confusing – and at times obscure – doctrinal controversies after the legalization of Christianity and as the faith became the official religion of the Roman Empire by the end of the Fourth Century. Roman imperial power would insert itself into doctrinal controversies, at times with the support of Church leadership, at other times with the Church standing in opposition. With the disastrous effect of doctrinal heresies on both Church and social unity, however, there was a growing consensus that use of the "secular arm" was necessary, with even St. Augustine arguing in favor of it.(7) With Christian emperors occupying the imperial throne, heretical views came to be seen as not only a violation of Christian unity, but as an act of treason against the State. This is essential to an understanding of how heresy came to be viewed, particularly in Western civilization. It was not a matter of arbitrary enforcement of ecclesial discipline, or doctrinal conformity. Heresy was seen as an evil that

threatened the unity of the community, as well as threatening the salvation of souls. Heresy was not merely an individual act – it was an attack on the state itself. This would become an ingrained part of European thinking, inherited by royal authority and the Church ecclesiastical leadership, as well as by the 16th Century Protestant reformers.(8) It was during this early period that both canon and civil law were developed dealing with heresy that would become the sources for addressing religious dissent in the Second Millennium.

After the breakdown of Roman imperial authority in the Fifth Century, heresy, perhaps a luxury of wealth and leisure, lessened within the more vital concern of the evangelization of non-Roman Western Europe. While theological disputes rose from the Sixth through the 10th Century, the Church struggled to establish independence from the interference of the Eastern emperors and domination of petty local rulers while at the same time developing ecclesial structures and clerical discipline.(9) With the renewal of the papacy and the conversion of Europe accomplished, powerful reform movements began in the 11th Century that reaffirmed the need for unity of belief and the means to address doctrinal dissent that threatened both Church and society.

The Medieval Inquisition

"Through the early Middle Ages belief had been taught through the use of simple creeds, and behavior had been regulated by a series of penitential regulations and by the rich liturgy performed by trained specialists. These rules had achieved the conversion of most of northern Europe to Christianity by the year 1000. They had depicted the world as a place of temptation and the prospects of salvation in it as slender. But during the course of the eleventh century a spirit of religious reform argued that the prospect of salvation in the world would be greatly increased if the world were reformed. With the reform of the papacy itself at the end of the eleventh century the Latin Church began to devise its grand

program of sanctifying the world."(10) The reform of the papacy involved the freedom from its domination by Italian aristocrats that had taken place in the tenth century.(11) Led by a stronger papacy, the "grand program of sanctifying the world" was a combination of the Church's need to reform its institutional life, free itself from control by secular lords, and to build a Christian society. This required a clearer understanding of the essentials of the faith among believers and a more incessant demand to proper Christian behavior. There was also the growing fear that "Those who dissented from belief or behaved in a manner that was explicitly defined as un-Christian appeared no longer as erring souls in a temptation-filled world, but as subverters of the world's new course…."(12)

Christian rulers and the common people themselves shared the same perspective. The "Inquisition" as a formal process of the Church would not be codified until the 13th Century. But in the two centuries prior, there was a strong movement to forcefully address religious dissent. To be a "heretic" meant facing possible mob justice and certain trial by secular courts.

The two heresies of the 12th and early 13th centuries that gave birth to the medieval inquisition were that of the Cathars (or Albigensians) and the Waldensians. The Cathars essentially held that the "evil god" of the Old Testament created the material world and saw the Church as the instrument of that material world. The Waldensians preached against wealth, clericalism and rejected the sacramental nature of the Church. Both these movements coalesced to a certain degree, and would become somewhat popular in Southern France, Northern Italy and parts of Germany.(13) (Protestant reformers in the 16th Century would often point to these movements as part of an alleged "silent" Church that existed since the Apostolic Age, as Kaifetz suggests. In reality, the Cathars and the Waldensians had a decidedly non-Christian

“dualistic” perception of God, the source of which was essentially pagan philosophy. Their views were unique to the times and would have horrified the 16th century Protestant Reformers.)

Up to the late 12th Century, such heresies were considered the responsibility of the local bishop. It was assumed that secular rulers (as well as the mob) would take action. The Church response had remained primarily an attempt to persuade and, if necessary, excommunicate heretics. But an evolution was taking place. “The Third Lateran Council of 1179 produced several canons condemning heretics – chiefly to excommunication and denial of Christian burial – and several widely circulated condemnations of heresy, with specific descriptions of heretical beliefs and practices, as well as privileges comparable to those of crusaders for those who fight against heretics and their defenders. In 1184 Pope Lucius III issued the decretal *Ad abolendam* … called ‘the founding charter of the inquisition.’”(14) Pope Lucius’ decree called for those found by the local church to be heretical to be turned over to the secular courts. In 1199, Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) identified heresy with treason. As part of his singularly strong reform movement, including encouraging of popular devotions, increased emphasis on catechesis, and the eradication of clerical abuses, Pope Innocent III viewed heresy as a destroyer of souls. When Albigensians in Southern France killed a papal representative in 1208, Innocent called for a “crusade” against the heretical sect. The violence of the subsequent “Albigensian Crusade” was not in keeping with the reforms and plans of Innocent, who stressed education, confession, clerical reform and preaching to counteract heresy.(15) Yet, under the control of mobs, petty rulers and vindictive local bishops who cared little for Innocent’s interventionist reforms, armies from northern France swept through the heretical strongholds for over 20 years. The Albigensian heresy effectively disappeared.

The uncontrollable fanaticism of local mobs of heresy hunters, the indifference of certain ecclesiastics, the violence of secular courts and the bloodshed of the Albigensian crusade led to a determined effort by the papacy to exercise greater control over the determination and prosecution of heresy. This would allow for some measure of persuasion and conversion, rather than simply prosecution by secular courts that emphasized punishment rather than salvation. Beginning a trend started earlier in the century, papal legates from the curia, or local judges appointed by the popes began to exercise courts of inquisition. The papacy also began to use the Mendicant Religious Orders, especially the Dominicans (founded 1220) and, later the Franciscans (founded 1209) to combat heresy by serving as confessors, preachers and judges.(16) In 1231, Pope Gregory IX (1227-1241) specifically commissioned the Dominicans as papal judges of heresy.(17)

Over the next 20 years there grew up a very specific state of canonical legislation for dealing with heresy. Though not as severe as the secular courts of Europe at the time, the penalties for heresy – including confiscation of property and the formality of turning persistent heretics over to the secular courts for punishment – became codified within ecclesial courts.(18) This was, then, the formal establishment of the medieval inquisition. It consisted of a mix of local episcopal courts, as well as papal-designated judges and legates. It had close ties to the secular rulers who, in effect, enforced the judgments of ecclesial courts as heresy had become equated with treason. There was no central office in the medieval inquisition, no overarching authority. Local bishops, or members of the Mendicant orders assigned over a period to a certain area, established ecclesial courts for the investigation of heresy. They used procedures common to contemporary European legal procedures. By the late fourteenth and most of the fifteenth centuries, the work of such ecclesial courts was “intermittent and occasionally non-existent.”(19)

The medieval inquisition courts often functioned like circuit courts of the more recent past. Codes and manuals were developed that detailed how an inquisition was to function. It began with the arrival in an area of the inquisitors, possibly members of the Dominican order. They would preach a sermon to the clergy and laity of an area on the dangers of heresy. A "period of grace" would them be extended to allow for confessions of dissenting practices without subsequent trial. Trials were held for those who refused to confess under the period of grace. For those who returned to the Church, forgiveness was granted and some form of penance imposed. Those that did not reject their heresies were excommunicated and turned over to the secular authorities.

For the most part, these courts functioned similarly to their secular counterparts at that time though generally, their sentences and penances were far less harsh. The investigations were held in secret and names of witnesses were not given to the accused, generally out of fear of retaliation. (The names of witnesses were known to the inquisitors and were kept in the written records. Judges were given detailed instructions in the manuals on how to detect false witness. Those accused were also allowed to list their known enemies and witnesses appearing on such a list were often discounted.) At the conclusion, the decrees of the trial were made public.(20)

A number of questions arise concerning these medieval inquisitions. First and most important to the myth of the inquisition, concerns the use of torture in obtaining confessions. Proof was necessary in order to convict and in the absence of such, confession was necessary. As Peters explains at length:

"The tradition of Roman and medieval criminal law had made torture an element in the testimony of otherwise dubious witnesses, and a procedure could be triggered by enough partial proofs to indicate that a full proof – a confession – was likely, and no other full proofs were available. The

procedure of torture itself was guarded by a number of protocols and protections for the defendant, and the jurists rigorously defined its place in due process. A confession made after or under torture had to be freely repeated the next day without torture or it would have been considered invalid. Technically, therefore, torture was strictly a means of obtaining the only full proof available…Their tasks were not only – or even primarily – to convict the contumacious heretic, but to save his soul if possible and to preserve the unity of the Church. In this their interest often ran counter to those of lay people (who simply wanted the heretic destroyed before the whole community suffered), and of judicial officers of temporal powers, who sought only to punish."(21)

The guidelines from the manuals were extremely strict and torture was not used to punish, as was common in the secular courts. The gruesome lists such as Kaifetz' were an invention of post-Reformation propaganda in regard to the Spanish Inquisition rather than the reality of the medieval inquisitions. Such actions cannot be justified in our own age, but they can at least be understood as part of accepted judicial procedure at that time. In any case, the use of torture in inquisition courts was far less extensive, and far less violent, than the norms of secular courts.(22)

The question also arises concerning the beliefs that were prosecuted. The general accusation made by 16th Century reformers were that alleged "heretics" were simple bible-believing Christians, precursors of the Protestant revolt. As will also be seen in the Spanish Inquisition, this was usually not the case. The Albigensian heresy was the most extensive religious dissent in the period of the medieval inquisitions. Albigensianism was an essential denial of a Christian understanding of God that led to a host of strange beliefs and practices (such as the non-sinfulness of fornication). But for the most part, "heretical views" were hardly organized in a

systematic theology, particularly prior to the 16th Century. Those prosecuted were usually the ignorant, the troublemaker, the braggart and, at times surely, the drunkard in his cups professing blasphemy. Those prosecuted rarely held a deeply contrary belief system. (While those alleged to be witches would become a major concern of the Reformers, this was far less so in the inquisition trials. Sporadic trials for witchcraft by inquisition judges would take place in different areas at different times, though it was generally considered the business of the secular courts and such activities the product of a deluded mind rather than a heretic.)

Additionally, actions contrary to the faith where commonly prosecuted, rather than beliefs as such. Common fornication, refusal to attend to the Sacraments, disregard of religious practice and devotion were often prosecuted by inquisition trials. Clergy living a dissolute lifestyle or speaking out in ignorance against commonly accepted moral teachings were a major focus of the inquisitions, as well as those who spoke out against the inquisitions. The concept of a rigid thought police searching out a reformed "underground church" was the wishful thinking – and propaganda – of later centuries.

The final question concerns the extensiveness of the inquisition prior to the 16th century, as well as its uniformity and its continuity through the centuries and in different regions. After the suppression of the Albigensian heresy in Southern France in the 13th century, inquisitorial trials waxed and waned in the face of local needs. In France itself, trials were primarily in the hands of secular authorities. In some areas – such as England – heresy was a smaller problem, and ecclesial courts to judge heresy were utilized intermittently. While there were inquisitorial courts, they were under the supervision of local Church authorities and worked closely with the secular arm. The most notable example of its use in England prior to Luther's revolt in the 16th Century was aimed at the Lolled followers of John

Wycliff in the last quarter of the 14th Century and beginning of the 15th Century.

John Wycliff was a priest and instructor at Oxford where he developed his theology of predestination – that people were "predestined" to be saved or lost and the good works they do are signs of their election, not a means toward salvation. Inevitably, this theology led to the conclusion that sacraments, the priesthood and the Church were unnecessary. Wycliff's views became popular, particularly as they meant that the English Parliament – cash-strapped and preparing for war with France – need not forward a tribute to the pope. Wycliff was summoned before a council of bishops to explain his position, but the meeting ended when a fight broke out between his armed retinue and members of the audience. Wycliff's views were forwarded to Pope Gregory XI who issued a condemnation and ordered the bishops to hold an inquisition. If Wycliff still maintained those views, he was to be excommunicated and turned over to the secular authorities. As his trial by the bishops was about to begin, royal intervention – and a mob outside – convinced the bishops to call a halt to the proceedings. Pope Gregory XI then died and a resulting papal schism let Wycliff proceed in his studies. However, when he launched an attack on the Eucharist, many of his previous supporters abandoned him. A revolutionary uprising by peasants and workers was seen as a result of his work, and his royal support ebbed as well. He was summoned to appear in Rome, but died on New Year's Eve, 1384.(23) His remaining followers, called Lollards, would face local inquisitions.

In the German states, inquisition trials were few and far between. Additionally, those that were conducted fell under the authority of the local bishops who were often identified with the secular authority. As in many cases, the secular authorities often conducted trials as well. A notable exception was the case of John Hus in Bohemia. Hus had

absorbed elements of Wycliff's teachings, as well as a rising Bohemian nationalism. Attacking a host of Church teaching – and the pope as the Anti-Christ – Hus was ordered to appear at the Council of Constance in 1414, where the Church was attempting to resolve disputed claims to the papacy and enact ecclesiastical reform. Hus was condemned by the Council and turned over to the civil authorities who executed him in 1415.(24) Pope John Paul II would state that the execution of Hus was a mistake.

By the mid to late 14th century, papal commissioned inquisitors had disappeared from many parts of Europe. Inquisitorial courts, such as they were, were conducted under local episcopacies working closely with local temporal authorities and dealing with local circumstances. Regional control of the inquisition process – and regional concerns – would become dominant.(25) A vast, papal-controlled, grand and singular inquisition never really existed in Europe. The closest approximation of that was in the mid to late 13th century, but did not last very long.(26)

The Spanish Inquisition

Most of the myths surrounding the inquisition have come to us wrapped in the cloak of the Spanish Inquisition. Traditional anti-Catholic presentations will discuss the papal decretal of 1184, Pope Innocent III and the Albigensian crusade beginning in 1208, then leap ahead to the Spanish Inquisition in the mid 16th Century. It is with the Spanish Inquisition that the lurid myth of the inquisition truly developed. It is the world of Edgar Allen Poe's *The Pit and the Pendulum*, with vivid descriptions of burning heretics in *auto-de-fes*, ghastly engines of torture, innocent Bible-believers martyred for their faith, and a once vibrant economic and social power hurled back into a papal-dominated "dark ages" from which it has yet to truly emerge. In many ways, the reality of the Spanish Inquisition has its own human tragedies, but it is not the tragedy presented in the common caricatures.

It is a curiosity of history that the medieval inquisition of the 13th and 14th centuries was little utilized in Spain or Portugal. It was only after the mid-fifteenth century that the Spanish Inquisition would develop, and its target would not be heretics in the traditional sense, but rather Jews who had converted to Christianity and were accused of secretly practicing their old faith. To many contemporary historians of the Spanish Inquisition, the story unfolds not as a "religious" persecution, but rather a racial pogrom. Additionally, the Spanish Inquisition had very little involvement with trials and punishments of Protestants, even with centuries of propaganda to the contrary.

Spain was unique in Western Europe for the diversity of its population. In addition to a large segment of Muslims, medieval Spain had the single largest Jewish community in the world, numbering some one hundred thousand souls in the 13th Century(27) For centuries Jews and Christians had lived and worked together in a rather peaceful though generally segregated co-existence. In the 14th Century, anti-Jewish attitudes were on the rise throughout Europe. In 1290, England expelled its Jews and France followed in 1306. Spain began to experience an increasing anti-Jewish sentiment. It exploded in the summer of 1391 with angry anti-Jewish riots. More religious than racial – though this has been disputed(28) – these riots led to major forced conversions of Jews to Christianity. These Jewish converts would be called *conversos* or New Chistians, to distinguish them from traditional Christian families. The*converso* (or the more scornful term, *marrano*) identity would remain with such families for generations.

To the *converso* families, such conversions were not without benefit (not including the benefit of saving their lives in the 1391 riots). They were welcomed into a full participation in Spanish society not available to Jews and they would soon become leaders in government, science, business and the

Church. Though it was legislated in certain areas that those forced to convert could return to their own religion, many did not. These*converso* families obviously faced the scorn of those who remained Jews. At the same time, however, over the years the Old Christians saw them as opportunists who secretly maintained the faith of their forefathers. It was a strong mixture of racial and religious prejudice against the*conversos* that would stir-up the Spanish Inquisition.

Spain in the 15th century was in the process of unifying the two traditional kingdoms of Castile and Aragon, while engaging in the final defeat of the Muslim stronghold of Granada. Isabella of Castile had married Frederick of Aragon in 1469. She came to the throne in 1474. When Ferdinand became king of Aragon in 1479, the two kingdoms were effectively united. War was waged with Granada beginning in 1482, with its final defeat coming 10 years later.

Isabella succeeded to the Castilian throne upon the death of her stepbrother, Henry IV. Henry had long protected both the Jews and the*conversos*. Upon his death, there was a widespread outbreak of anti-Jewish and anti-*converso* protest and violence. “From the mid-Fifteenth Century on, religious anti-Semitism changed into ethnic anti-Semitism, with little difference seen between Jews and *conversos* except for the fact that *conversos* were regarded as worse than Jews because, as ostensible Christians, they had acquired privileges and positions that were denied to Jews. The result of this new ethnic anti-Semitism was the invocation of an inquisition to ferret out the false *conversos* who had, by becoming formal Christians, placed themselves under its authority.”(29) In 1478, Ferdinand and Isabella requested a papal bull establishing an inquisition, a bull granted by Pope Sixtus IV. In 1482 the size of the inquisition was expanded and included the Dominican Friar Tomas de Torquemada, though Pope Sixtus IV protested against the activities of the inquisition in Aragon and its treatment of the *conversos*. The next year, Ferdinand

and Isabella established a state council to administer the inquisition with Torquemada as its president. He would later assume the title of Inquisitor-General. This was a major development as it would allow the inquisition to persist well beyond its initial intention, and to be extended to wherever Spanish power existed, including the New World.(30) The papacy would continue to complain about the treatment of the *conversos*, but the unity of the Spanish Inquisition with the State would remain a distinguishing characteristic, and a primary source of post-Reformation European hatred.

Why did Ferdinand and Isabella establish the Inquisition in Spain? Ostensibly, the reason was to investigate the allegations of Judaizing among the *conversos*. Historians have pointed to other reasons: as a means to consolidate power, as a source of revenue from the confiscation of *converso* wealth, as a means to eliminate the *conversos* from public life, and as part of the *Reconquista* of a united Spain to the faith. The stated reason for the inquisition was to root out "false" *conversos*. There seems to have been an allure to the claim that many *conversos* secretly practiced their old Jewish faith and, as such, were undermining the Faith. For centuries, such legends would persist in Spain, though most evidence shows that there were few "secret" Judaizers and that most *conversos*, particularly after the first generation of forced conversions, were faithful Catholics. This is why many historians have concluded that at the center of the inquisitorial storm was a racial, rather than a religious prejudice at work.

In March, 1492, Isabella and Ferdinand ordered the expulsion – or conversion – of all remaining Jews in their joint kingdoms. The intent of the declaration was more religious than racial, as Jewish conversion rather than expulsion was certainly the intent. While many Jews fled, a large number converted, thus aggravating the popular picture of secret Judaizers within the Christian community of Spain. Up through 1530, the primary

activity of the inquisition in Spain would be aimed at pursuing*conversos*. The same would be true from 1650 to 1720. While its activities declined thereafter, the inquisition continued to exist until its final abolition in 1824.

The Spanish Inquisition had been universally established in Spain a few years prior to the expulsion of the Jews in 1492. Records show that virtually the only “heresy” prosecuted at that time was the alleged secret practice of the Jewish faith. In all, between the establishment of the Inquisition in Spain through 1530, it is estimated that approximately 2,000 “heretics” were turned over to the secular authorities for execution.(31) Many of those convicted of heresy were *conversos* who had fled. These were burned in effigy.

The most famous period of the Spanish Inquisition, under the legendary Torquemada, had little to do with the common caricature of simple “bible-believing” Protestants torn apart by ruthless churchmen. The true picture is unsettling enough: it was a government-controlled inquisition aimed at faithful Catholics of Jewish ancestry. The motivations seemed far more racial than religious, if not in Ferdinand and Isabella, then certainly among those who carried it out. The papacy, under Sixtus IV (1471-1484) and Innocent VIII (1484-1492), rather than controlling the Spanish Inquisition, protested its unfair treatment of the conversos with little result.

Reformation Response

Under Charles V, successor to Ferdinand and Isabella, the Inquisition became an established part of Spanish justice. With the outbreak of Luther’s Reformation in Europe and the spread of its ideas in the 1520s, it was entrenched as a means to both protect the faith in Spain from infiltration of this new heresy, and as a further means to buttress royal power.

The Reformation would have little impact in Spain. One on the one hand, the existence of an active State-sponsored

inquisition can be viewed as one reason it never took hold. On the other hand, however, Spain's traditional Catholicism so identified with the *Reconquista* of the late 15th Century surely played a strong role. "Unlike England, France and Germany, Spain had not since the early Middle Ages experienced a single significant popular heresy. All its ideological struggles since the Reconquest had been directed against the minority religions, Judaism and Islam. There were consequently no native heresies (like Wycliffism in England) on which German ideas could build."(32) Humanism itself also had a rather weak impact in Spain. Scholars and essayists such as Erasmus had only a minimal following.(33) The small number of humanists with an understanding of Erasmus were viewed suspiciously, however, and Erasmus would eventually become equated with Luther in Spain.

The image of a Spanish Inquisition burning hundreds of thousands of Protestant heretics has no basis in historical fact. There were so few Protestants in Spain that there could be no such prosecution, no matter how strong the inquisition and no matter how much anti-Catholic propagandists tried to create such an image in the 16th Century and thereafter. During the Reformation period, the inquisition in Spain certainly searched for evidence of Protestantism, particularly among the educated classes. Contemporary trends were viewed suspiciously, even though those involved were clearly Catholic in practice. Mystical spiritual movements were investigated, leading to persecution of a small group of illuminists, or *alumbrados*. This was an interior spiritual movement based on a passive union of the soul with God. While its condemnation in Spain affected only a few, it did impact on a generation of spiritual writers, including St. Theresa of Avila who would be questioned for alleged illuminist leanings.(34) "The Lutheran threat, however, took a long time to develop. In 1520, Luther had probably not been heard of in Spain…However, a full generation went by and Lutheranism failed to take root in Spain. There was, in those years, no

atmosphere of restriction or repression. Before 1558 possibly less than 50 cases of alleged Lutheranism among Spaniards came to the notice of the inquisitors."(35)

The discovery of a small cell of Protestants in Seville and Valladolid in the late 1550s, however, generated concern in the highest quarters in Spain. The Seville group "totaled around one hundred and twenty persons, including the prior and members of the Jeronimite convent of Santa Paula. The group managed to exist in security until the 1550s, when some monks from San Isidro opportunely fled. The exiles…played little part in Spanish history but were glories of the European Reformation."(36) The Seville Protestants were discovered in 1557, which led to the arrest of the Valladoid group as well in 1558. Spain reacted in horror to the discovery, and Charles V from his monastery retirement wrote in an infamous letter to his regent daughter Juana in Spain that so "great an evil" must be "suppressed and remedied without distinction of persons from the very beginning."(37) Though Spain braced for a tidal wave of revelations and discoveries – with finger-pointing and accusations of pseudo-Protestants everywhere – in all, just over 100 persons in Spain were found to be Protestants and turned over to the secular authorities for execution in the 1560s. In the last decades of the century, an additional 200 Spaniards were accused of being followers of Luther. "Most of them were in no sense Protestants…Irreligious sentiments, drunken mockery, anticlerical expressions, were all captiously classified by the inquisitors (or by those who denounced the cases) as 'Lutheran.' Disrespect to church images, and eating meat on forbidden days, were taken as signs of heresy."(38)

One aspect of the Spanish Inquisition that played into the hands of the Reformation propagandists was when it claimed jurisdiction over foreigners on its soil. Sailors and traders from foreign countries made up the bulk of the accusations of "Lutheranism" in Spain, leading to clashes with these

governments. (Well into the 20th Century, all nations outside of Spain were referred to as *tierras de herejes*, or the "heretical countries.") Tales from these people who had faced the Spanish Inquisition were a favorite form of anti-Catholic literature and provided an unreliable source for the whole "black legend" that surrounded it.

In many ways, the inquisition in Spain mirrored the structures of the medieval inquisitions. An inquisition began with the arrival in a community of its officers who would announce it at a Mass with all the community assembled. As in the medieval inquisition, an "edict of grace" was usually given to self-confess offenses without serious penalty. An "edict of faith," was often read that listed the heresies under investigation. By the 16th Century, inquisition trials were not public. The names of accusers were kept secret from the accused. Evidence was collected and presented to theologians for assessment. If proof were deemed sufficient, an arrest would take place (a rule often violated, as some arrests seemed to take place before any proof was established). Arrest was followed by immediate seizure of the property of the accused, which would be held until the case was settled.

As in the medieval Inquisition, torture was used to elicit confessions when there was insufficient proof. Torture was common throughout Europe in judicial actions and Spain was no exception. Torture could only be used in cases of heresy, which meant that it was not used for the minor offenses that made up the majority on inquisitorial activity. After 1530, however, torture appeared more frequently when the inquisition was specifically investigating alleged Judaizers and Protestants. However, the "scenes of sadism conjured up by popular writers on the inquisition have little basis in reality, though the whole procedure was unpleasant enough to arouse periodic protests from Spaniards."(39) Those conducting the tortures were not clergy, as often portrayed in artistic representations, but were professionals normally used in the

secular courts. The torture could not cause bloodletting or result in loss of life or mutilation. The purpose of the torture, unlike in secular tribunals, was to gain either information or confession, not punishment. It was used only in a minority of cases, and normally as a last resort.(40)

Since evidence and witnesses were gathered before the arrest, the inquisition did not see its function as a trial to determine guilt or innocence. The accused was arrested with the goal of gaining a confession. The accused was usually given three opportunities to admit to the wrongs after which, the prosecutor would read the charges and the accused had to respond immediately. Unlike the medieval inquisition, the accused was allowed legal counsel, though these counselors were officers of the inquisition and not terribly helpful or trusted. The accused could then muster a defense based on witness testimony, or pleas of extenuating circumstances, such as drunkenness. A body called the*consulta de fe*, made up of inquisitors, a representative of the local bishop and theological consultors would then issue a ruling.

Those found guilty were sentenced to varying degrees of penances that could go from donning the *sanbenito*, a yellow penitential garb to be worn at all times in public, to servitude on a Spanish galley. As in the medieval inquisition, most cases did not involve heresy. Charges such as bigamy, adultery, lewd living and blasphemy were the majority of cases. Only unrepentant heretics or relapsed heretics could be "relaxed" – turned over – to the secular authorities to be burned at the stake. After the bitter persecution of the *conversos* in the first 20 years of the inquisition, in the 17th and 18th centuries fewer than three people a year were executed throughout Spain.(41) In fact, most condemned were burnt only in effigy, having previously died or fled the country.

The *auto de fe* that followed trials is the most infamous, and misunderstood, part of the Spanish Inquisition. An *auto de*

fe was a unique aspect of the Spanish Inquisition, a public, liturgical "act of faith." Usually held in a public square, an *auto de fe* involved prayer, a Mass, public procession of those found guilty and a reading of their sentences. The event could certainly take the entire day and the public was encouraged to witness it. Artistic representations of the *auto de fe* by propagandists usually involved images of torture and the burning of the accused. As such, they became a major source for creating the image in the popular mind of the Spanish Inquisition. However, no such activities took place during what was essential a religious act stressing the "reconciliation" of those accused with the Church. There was no torture as trials had been concluded, and if executions were to take place, they were separate from the *auto de fe* and conducted less publicly after the fact.(42)

The Spanish Inquisition was unique. Wrestled early from the papacy, it was controlled by the Spanish monarchy. Its aim, certainly, was to maintain a Catholic Spain, but its use was primarily centered on Catholic*conversos* of Jewish and, later, Muslim ancestry. It was certainly a force that kept Protestant – and, to a degree, Enlightenment – thought out of Spain, though the number of those actually prosecuted for such activity was very small. It would persist with various flare-ups in activities through the 17th and 18th centuries, though the *auto de fe* became less frequent. The last major outburst in activity was aimed once again at alleged Judaizing among *conversos* in the 1720s. It was formally ended by the monarchy in 1834, though it had effectively come to an end years prior.(43)

The Inquisition in Italy

Unlike the inquisition in Spain, the inquisition in the Papal States and in various Italian cities had no *conversos* to be targeted. (Many Spanish*conversos* would find refuge in Rome and other Italian cities where they were never bothered.) By the mid-sixteenth century and the publishing of the reforms of the

Council of Trent (1563), the inquisition in Rome focused on keeping out Protestant thought. “Like the Spanish Inquisition, the Roman Inquisition and its subordinate tribunals appear to have been generally successful in keeping any substantial Protestant influence from spreading widely in the peninsula…once the immediate problem of Protestantism was reduced, (the inquisition) turned the bulk of its operation to the question of internal ecclesiastical discipline and to offenses other than Protestantism.”(44)

The early inquisition in Rome also focused on the so-called “popular religion,” the superstitious practices, including witchcraft, that were survived in the fifteenth and 16th centuries. The Spanish Inquisition would also flirt at times with these practices. Unlike the Protestant reformers, however, the inquisitions in both Italy and Spain eventually began to see these difficulties as the result of poor catechesis, rather than active heresy and took less interest in its prosecution. After early rather intense prosecution, the inquisitions generally turned skeptical toward accusations of witchcraft and sorcery and established rigorous rules of prosecution and evidence. In most cases in Catholic countries in the 17th century and beyond, the inquisitions had less and less to do with prosecution of superstition.(45)

The inquisitions as they existed in the Papal States and the cities and kingdoms throughout Italy were never viewed with the same approbation as the Spanish Inquisition. For the most part, these inquisitions focused on clerical abuses and, outside the Papal States, had a strong mix of political intrigue. However, three famous cases that contributed to the myth of the Inquisition took place in Italy. They were the trials of Savonarola (1498), Giordano Bruno (1593-1599) and Galileo (1633).

“Savonarola was the Middle Ages surviving into the Renaissance, and the Renaissance destroyed him.”(46) A Dominican friar, Girolamo Savonarola was a firebrand speaker

who denounced the immorality of his time, and did not spare Pope Alexander VI (1492-1503). Preaching in Florence, he formed his own renewed monastic order, as well as becoming an influential leader in the new Florentine Republic proclaimed in June 1495. Poor statesmanship – as well as a populace that grew tired of his puritanical reformation as seen in the "bonfire of the vanities" where worldly items were burned – led to his downfall. Pope Alexander VI was little concerned about Savonarola's personal criticism. But when his friends proclaimed him a prophet from God, and he attempted to convince the French king to call a general council and depose the pope as "an infidel and a heretic," he was summoned to Rome to explain himself. Savonarola claimed ill health and Alexander ordered an investigation of his sermons. A Dominican reviewed them favorably and convinced the pope that not only should he not be tried, but that he should be named a cardinal. The offer was made and was rejected in a thunderous series of Lenten sermons denouncing the Church and the papacy. He issued letters to the kings of Europe demanding a council to overthrow what he saw as a corrupt papacy.

Florence was being torn apart by the controversial friar. He was soon abandoned by Florentine leadership and arrested along with two others from his order. The pope asked that they be sent to Rome for an ecclesial trial, but Florentine authorities, tired of the meddlesome friar, wanted him killed. He was tried under the local inquisition on charges of schism, heresy, revealing confessional secrets, false prophecies and visions, as well as causing civil disorder. He was found guilty and executed on May 23, 1498. Though seen by some as a pre-Reformation martyr, his meddling in Florentine politics, rather than his call for moral reforms and his attacks on Pope Alexander VI caused Savonarola's downfall. Though certainly tried with the approbation of the pope, his death was more a civil act than an inquisitorial judgment.(47)

Giordano Bruno was born near Naples in 1548. He was ordained a

Dominican in 1572, but he quickly came to doubt most fundamental Christian belief. Unlike the Protestant reformers, Bruno saw himself as a philosopher. He left the monastery, ending up for a time in Geneva where he was tried for citing heresy by a Calvinist theologian. He apologized and was freed. Bruno wandered Europe, where he was recognized in various courts as a masterful philosopher as well as a common nuisance. Vain, arrogant and a misogynist, he would be denounced a heretic by the reformed churches as well as the inquisition. His philosophy, as disorganized as it was, identified God with an infinite universe.(48) After 16 years of wandering, Bruno decided to return to Italy thinking "should be questioned by the Inquisition, he could (as well he might) quote enough orthodox passages from his works to deceive the Church into thinking him her loving son."(49) In 1592, the Venetian inquisition had him arrested. He was arrested not only for his heretical views, but also as a priest who had abandoned his vocation. In 1593, he was sent to Rome. After years of imprisonment and questioning, he was condemned in 1599 for his writings on the Trinity and the Incarnation. He was ordered to recant. He appealed to the pope who judged the propositions heretical. Bruno refused to recant and he was turned over to the secular authorities. He was burned on February 19, 1600.(50) Bruno was an excessive character – and a bit of a charlatan – who rejected fundamental beliefs of Catholicism and was condemned by the reformers as well. A man who abandoned the priesthood, in the difficult days of the Reformation and the Counter Reformation, he was certain to be prosecuted and seemed to court his own martyrdom.

The Galileo affair entered the mythological corpus of Western secularism as symbolizing the Church as anti-science. Galileo was tried by the papal inquisition in 1633 for publishing in defiance of a mandate he was allegedly given in 1616. Galileo taught as fact that the earth rotated on its axis and orbited the sun. Both views appeared to violate Scripture. His

1633 trial is most often portrayed as Galileo the scientist arguing the supremacy of reason and the tribunal judges demanding that reason abjure to faith. The trial was neither. Galileo, a firm and orthodox Catholic, and the tribunal judges shared a common view that science and the Bible could not stand in contradiction. If there appeared to be a contradiction, such a contradiction resulted from either weak science, or poor interpretation of Scripture. In context, the trial exhibited both faults. Galileo's technology was far too limited at the time to scientifically prove his assertion of the earth's double rotation. At the same time, the tribunal judges were at fault for a literal interpretation of biblical passages and making scientific judgments never intended by the Scriptural authors. Galileo was sentenced to a comfortable house arrest after he recanted his views. He died in 1642.(51)

In each of the above cases, a myth grew that became useful to anti-Catholic propagandists. Savonarola symbolized the "debasement" of the papacy and the Catholic world prior to the Reformation. He was seen as a symbol of moral reform in the alleged moral squalor of the world of the Renaissance popes. Bruno became the martyr to "free thought"; Galileo to science versus religious superstition. All were seen as the victims of an inquisition that came to be seen as the driving force of papal power, the creator of "millions" of Protestant martyrs, and the enemy of Enlightenment and Progress. It was this myth that persists today.

The creation of the myth of the Inquisition

"*The Inquisition* was an image assembled from a body of legends and myths which, between the sixteenth and the twentieth centuries, established the perceived character of inquisitorial tribunals and influenced all ensuing efforts to recover their historical reality. That body took shape in the context of intensified religious persecution as a consequence of the Reformation of the sixteenth century and of the central role of Spain, the greatest power in Europe, in assuming the

role of defender of Roman Catholicism." (52)

Edward Peters in *Inquisition* explains how the myth of the all-embracing inquisition developed in European thought. Protestant reformers used the inquisition – which they presented as a unified, papal-dominated event from the 13th century through the 17th century – as a source for creating centuries of alleged Christian martyrs and a hidden, Bible-believing Church that they claimed had always existed. It also served as a means to generate anti-Catholic sentiment, particularly during the Revolt of the Netherlands against Spain. The creation of the myth of the Inquisition was tied to the creation of an image of Spain in the consciousness of the West. "An image of Spain circulated through late sixteenth-century Europe, borne by means of political and religious propaganda that blackened the characters of Spaniards and their ruler to such an extent that Spain became the symbol of all forces of repression, brutality, religious and political intolerance, and intellectual and artistic backwardness for the next four centuries. Spaniards and Hispanophiles have termed this process and the image that resulted from it as 'The Black Legend,' *la leyenda negra*."(53)

The building of the myth of the Inquisition, particularly the Spanish Inquisition, had nothing to do with the actual racial persecution of the*conversos*. That critical aspect of the Inquisition would not be rediscovered until historical studies of the actual documents of the Spanish Inquisition late in the 19th Century, study that continues today. The crucial element in the 16th Century was the inquisition in Spain of a small number of Protestants from 1559 to 1562. In Germany in 1567, two Spanish Protestants under the pseudonym Reginaldus Gonzalvus Montanus published *Sanctae Inquisitionis Hispanicae Artes*. Though a basic propaganda tract, it would be reprinted throughout Europe and be considered the definitive source on the inquisition for over 200 years. Most inquisition "histories" written thereafter, virtually until the late 19th

Century, would rely on Montanus, which became a primary source, though written by anything but an unbiased eye.

Curiously, another source for the myth of the inquisition was Catholic Italy. Italian Catholics – the papal representatives included – had a dislike for the Spanish whom they considered rural racist bumpkins. The attacks in Spain on the *conversos* were viewed as despicable in Rome. Italians "felt that Spanish hypocrisy in religion, together with the existence of the Inquisition, proved that the tribunal was created not for religious purity, but simply to rob the Jews. Similar views were certainly held by the prelates of the Holy See whenever they intervened in favor of the conversos. Moreover, the racialism of the Spanish authorities was scorned in Italy, where the Jewish community led a comparatively tranquil existence."(54) Another Catholic source was Bartolome de las Casas. Las Casas was writing to condemn Spanish governmental policies in the New World and the use of slavery. His work was used by anti-Spanish propagandists to paint a portrait of evil Spain despoiling innocent natives, as they would surely do in any land over which they ruled, Old World or New.

The true explosion in inquisition rhetoric was in the period just prior to and through the revolt in the Netherlands from Spanish control. That revolt involved a fragile alliance of Catholic and Calvinist leaders against Catholic Spain. Beginning in 1548, the "printing press and propaganda turned to the service of political reform, with the inquisition as a major focus, on such a wide scale and with comparatively devastating effects."(55) Though the Dutch themselves were trying heretics with their own state-run inquisition, it was argued that King Philip II of Spain (who succeeded Charles V) would introduce specifically a Spanish Inquisition in the Netherlands, not only crushing Protestants but denying Catholics their own freedoms as well. Popular literature created a horrific picture of an all-encompassing Spanish

Inquisition that dominated the king and controlled every aspect of Spanish life. The inquisition became the fundamental instrument of Catholic oppression, not only of Protestants, but also of free thought and free men of any faith.

As the Calvinist element began to dominate in the Dutch revolt, one of the most famous documents in the creation of the myth of the inquisition was published in 1581, the *Apologie* of William of Orange. Written by a French Huguenot, the *Apologie* detailed a horrific inquisition, generated by Spaniards who "are of the blood of the Moors and Jews."(56) "With the*Apologie*, all of the anti-Inquisition propaganda of the past 40 years was enshrined in a political document that validated the Dutch revolt."(57) When the English under Elizabeth I prepared to defend themselves against the Spanish armada, and the pope called for an English crusade, nationalistic fervor was fueled in England by anti-Catholic propaganda. Central to the propaganda campaign are a series of books and pamphlets detailing the horror of the Spanish Inquisition. The inquisition would become a hallmark of English anti-Catholic literature for 200 years, and be passed on to the popular anti-Catholic mythology in the United States.

Relying on these histories, fantastic accounts of alleged survivors and pure propaganda, an image of the inquisition was created that persists today. Fueled as well by the 18th Century Enlightenment and 19th Century Age of Scientism, the myth was created of "the universal oppressor of those who sought political liberty as well as true religion. In a series of specific circumstances and the articulation of local experience, the instruments of the Roman Church and the Spanish Empire merged into a single awesome institution: *The Inquisition*. Serving the diverse purposes of many sixteenth-century thinkers well, *the Inquisition* became a common object of reference in the debates over the problem of religious and civil toleration. Many people who found it difficult to agree

with each other on many issues found it easy to agree upon *The Inquisition*." (58)

Conclusion

Historical studies of the archives of the inquisitions in the 20th Century have created a different picture beyond the steamy rhetoric of Reformation polemics. At the beginning, a number of common assumptions concerning the inquisition were outlined. In conclusion, they should be briefly revisited:

· ***The inquisition as a singly, unified court system directly responsible to the pope and controlled solely by the papacy.*** Even within the Papal States in the 16th century, the papacy had difficulty maintaining effective control over local inquisitions. Inquisitorial courts were usually controlled by the local church in alliance with local secular authority. Though it began in the 13th century as a papal-designated juridical system to remove "heresy-hunting" from control of the mob or secular authorities, it evolved rather quickly as a device of the local church and secular authorities to address local, and later national or dynastic goals. There were many inquisitions, rather than a singular "Inquisition."

· ***The inquisition existed throughout Europe for nearly 700 years and focused its efforts on a "secret" and "hidden" church, similar to that of the Reformation churches.*** The many inquisitions that took place existed sporadically in different regions, at different times, and to meet different local needs. The medieval inquisition barely existed, for example, in Spain and Portugal. For hundreds of years, the inquisition in many places existed only sporadically, if at all. In the 16th century, it existed primarily in Spain, Portugal, the Papal States and other Italian cities. It existed – dominated by the State – in France and, early in the century, in England. It did not exist as a single continuous entity, nor did it prosecute a "secret" church that was a precursor of Protestantism. Early heresies – such as the Albigensians –

held doctrinal positions that were essentially unchristian that would have horrified the Protestant reformers.

· ***It was primarily aimed at the early Protestant reformers of the 16th century and the Spanish Inquisition alone killed and tortured hundreds of thousands of Protestant reformers.*** The Spanish Inquisition was aimed primarily at Catholics of Jewish ancestry. In total, it is unlikely that even a thousand, let alone hundreds of thousands, Protestants suffered at the hands of the Spanish Inquisition. While those alleged to be Protestants were inquisitorial victims in England and Europe, there numbers were small and most were protected by Protestant or sympathetic rulers. Much of the focus of the various inquisitions were clerical abuses and what was considered scandalous behavior. Most cases in the inquisitions involved adultery, drunkenness, failure to attend to religious devotions, sacrilege, verbal abuse of clergy, etc.

· ***Vicious tortures were routinely used.*** Torture was utilized, but under rules far stricter than the norm in secular courts of the time. Torture was never used for punishment. Exotic torture mechanisms were the creation of propagandists. Torture could only be used in cases involving a charge of heresy or a relapsed heretic. As the far majority of inquisitorial cases did not involve such issues, torture was a rare occurrence and a last resort.

· ***The Spanish Inquisition existed independent of Spanish secular authority and existed solely as an arm of the church, as did other inquisitions.*** Though established with papal mandate, the Spanish Inquisition was an office of the Spanish government and existed so long because of that support. The crown and the Church in Spain, not the papacy that often took issue with its activities, controlled it. For the most part, inquisitions in Spain and elsewhere were under the control of the local church working with local secular authorities.

· ***The inquisition was a means for the Church to exercise its***

authority over science. Inquisitions rarely involved themselves in the area of science, despite the well-known case of Galileo. Even in the Galileo case, the concern of Church authorities was not in the discussion of the theory of the orbit of the earth around the sun – a theory that appeared to contradict Scripture – but teaching what was then scientifically unverifiable as scientific fact.

· ***Persecution of religious dissent was unique to the inquisitions and to the Catholic Church in Europe.*** Religious dissent was punished in all Protestant lands throughout the Reformation period, whether of Catholics or Protestants dissenting from the majority Protestant viewpoint. The difference was that this was considered solely a judicial activity of the state, rather than involving an ecclesial court.

In popular culture – particularly in the United States – the legend of the Inquisition thrives. Utilized as an image in political debates and the cultural wars, the inquisition remains an effective club. While the Church has acknowledged the errors in the past associated with the inquisition, no apology is necessary for the false and unhistorical caricature that remains part of the popular consciousness.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Two books cited extensively within this paper provide excellent overviews of the inquisition based on modern historical studies. Edward Peters,*Inquisition* (1988) is available in paperback from University of California Press, Berkeley, CA 94720. Peters book is a fascinating account of the development of the myth of the inquisition and how polemics, art and literature enhanced this myth. Peters is the Henry Charles Lea Professor of Medieval History at the University of Pennsylvania. *The Spanish Inquisition: A Historical Revision* (Yale University Press) by Henry Kamen is the best available study on the origins, methods and history

of the Spanish Inquisition. Kamen is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society and a professor of the Higher Council for Scientific Research in Barcelona, Spain.

SUMMARY POINTS

· Of the many historical myths about Catholics and Catholicism perhaps the most pervasive are those centered on the inquisition in general and the Spanish Inquisition in particular. From the 16th through the early 20th Century, the legend of the Inquisition grew larger than its history. This legend of the inquisition persists today in the imagination, well after its debunking by historians.

· Inquisitions were ecclesial investigations, meaning that investigations were conducted either directly by, or under the auspices of, the Church. The investigations were undertaken at certain times in certain regions under the authority of the local bishop and his designates, or under the auspices of papal-appointed legates, or representatives from Religious Orders delegated the task from the papacy.

· The inquisition existed and it remains an unsettling part of Catholic history. However, the caricature of the inquisition that most of us have come to know and that is often utilized in anti-Catholic polemics has little to do with the reality of the inquisition.

· From very early (as noted in Scripture) the Christian community was forced to confront how to deal with those people who persisted in teachings contrary to the Apostolic Faith. For the most part, the early Church settled on admonishment, avoidance and, if a person persisted in error, expulsion from the community.

· With the disastrous effect of doctrinal heresies on both Church and social unity there was a growing consensus that use of the “secular arm” was necessary, with even St. Augustine arguing in favor of it. With Christian emperors occupying the

imperial throne, heretical views came to be seen as not only a violation of Christian unity, but as an act of treason against the State.

· With the renewal of the papacy and the conversion of Europe accomplished, powerful reform movements began in the 11th Century that reaffirmed the need for unity of belief and the means to address doctrinal dissent that threatened both Church and society.

· The "Inquisition" as a formal process of the Church would not be codified until the 13th Century. But in the two centuries prior, there was a strong movement to forcefully address religious dissent. To be a "heretic" meant facing possible mob justice and certain trial by secular courts.

· The two heresies of the 12th and early 13th centuries that gave birth to the medieval inquisition were that of the Cathars (or Albigensians) and the Waldensians. They had a decidedly non-Christian "dualistic" perception of God, the source of which was essentially pagan philosophy. Their views were unique to the times and would have horrified the 16th century Protestant Reformers.

· The uncontrollable fanaticism of local mobs of heresy hunters, the indifference of certain ecclesiastics, the violence of secular courts and the bloodshed of the Albigensian crusade led to a determined effort by the papacy to exercise greater control over the determination and prosecution of heresy in the 13th century.

· In 1231, Pope Gregory IX (1227-1241) specifically commissioned the Dominicans as papal judges of heresy. Over the next 20 years there grew up a very specific state of canonical legislation for dealing with heresy. Though not as severe as the secular courts of Europe at the time, the penalties for heresy – including confiscation of property and the formality of turning persistent heretics over to the

secular courts for punishment – became codified within ecclesial courts. This was the formal establishment of the medieval inquisition.

· By the late fourteenth and most of the fifteenth centuries, the work of such ecclesial courts was intermittent and occasionally non-existent.

· Torture was not used to punish, as was common in the secular courts. The gruesome lists of instruments of torture were an invention of post-Reformation propaganda in regard to the Spanish Inquisition rather than the reality of the medieval inquisitions. Such actions cannot be justified in our own age, but they can at least be understood as part of accepted judicial procedure at that time. In any case, the use of torture in inquisition courts was far less extensive, and far less violent, than the norms of secular courts.

· For the most part, those prosecuted for "heretical views" in the medieval inquisition were hardly organized in a systematic theology, or could be considered a "hidden church." Those prosecuted were usually the ignorant, the troublemaker, the braggart and, at times surely, the drunkard in his cups professing blasphemy. Those prosecuted rarely held a deeply contrary belief system.

· By the mid to late 14th century, papal commissioned inquisitors had disappeared from many parts of Europe. Inquisitorial courts, such as they were, were conducted under local episcopacies working closely with local temporal authorities and dealing with local circumstances. Regional control of the inquisition process – and regional concerns – would become dominant. A vast, papal-controlled, grand and singular inquisition never really existed in Europe.

· It was only after the mid-fifteenth century that the Spanish Inquisition would develop, and its target would not be heretics in the traditional sense, but rather Jews who had

converted to Christianity and were accused of secretly practicing their old faith. To many contemporary historians of the Spanish Inquisition, the story unfolds not as a "religious" persecution, but rather a racial pogrom.

· There seems to have been an allure to the claim that many *conversos*secretly practiced their old Jewish faith. For centuries, such legends would persist in Spain, though most evidence shows that there were few "secret" Judaizers and that most *conversos* were faithful Catholics. Up through 1530, the primary activity of the inquisition in Spain would be aimed at pursuing *conversos*. The same would be true from 1650 to 1720. While its activities declined thereafter, the inquisition continued to exist in Spain until its final abolition in 1824.

· Under Charles V, successor to Ferdinand and Isabella, the Inquisition became an established part of Spanish justice. With the outbreak of Luther's Reformation in Europe and the spread of its ideas in the 1520s, it was entrenched as a means to both protect the faith in Spain from infiltration of this new heresy, and as a further means to buttress royal power.

· The image of a Spanish Inquisition burning hundreds of thousands of Protestant heretics has no basis in historical fact. There were so few Protestants in Spain that there could be no such prosecution, no matter how strong the inquisition and no matter how much anti-Catholic propagandists tried to create such an image in the 16th Century and thereafter.

· As in the medieval Inquisition, torture was used to elicit confessions when there was insufficient proof. Torture was common throughout Europe in judicial actions and Spain was no exception. Torture could only be used in cases of heresy, which meant that it was not used for the minor offenses that made up the majority on inquisitorial activity. The scenes of sadism conjured up by popular writers on the inquisition have little basis in reality.

· In all, just over 100 persons in Spain were found to be Protestants and turned over to the secular authorities for execution in the 1560s. In the last decades of the century, an additional 200 Spaniards were accused of being followers of Luther. Most of them were not actually Protestants. Any anti-religious sentiments, drunken mockery, anticlerical expressions were all classified by the inquisitors as "Lutheran." Disrespect to church images, and eating meat on forbidden days, were taken as signs of heresy.

· Only unrepentant heretics or relapsed heretics could be "relaxed" – turned over – to the secular authorities to be burned at the stake. After the bitter persecution of the *conversos* in the first 20 years of the inquisition, in the 17th and 18th centuries fewer than three people a year were executed throughout Spain. In fact, most condemned were burnt only in effigy, having previously died or fled the country.

· The Spanish Inquisition was unique. Wrestled early from the papacy, it was controlled by the Spanish monarchy. Its aim, certainly, was to maintain a Catholic Spain, but its use was primarily centered on Catholic*conversos* of Jewish and, later, Muslim ancestry. It was certainly a force that kept Protestant – and, to a degree, Enlightenment – thought out of Spain, though the number of those actually prosecuted for such activity was very small.

· Like the Spanish Inquisition, the Roman Inquisition and its subordinate tribunals appear to have been generally successful in keeping any substantial Protestant influence from spreading widely in the peninsula. Once the immediate problem of Protestantism was reduced, (the inquisition) turned the bulk of its operation to the question of internal ecclesiastical discipline and to offenses other than Protestantism.

· Though seen by some as a pre-Reformation martyr, his meddling in Florentine politics, rather than his call for moral reforms and his attacks on Pope Alexander VI caused

Savonarola's downfall. Though certainly tried with the approbation of the pope, his death in 1498 was more a civil act than an inquisitorial judgment.

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· The true explosion in inquisition rhetoric was in the period just prior to and through the revolt in the Netherlands from Spanish control. That revolt involved a fragile alliance of Catholic and Calvinist leaders against Catholic Spain. Beginning in 1548, the printing press and propaganda turned to the service of political reform, with the inquisition as a major focus, on such a wide scale and with comparatively devastating effects.

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in the United States.

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· While the Church has acknowledged the errors in the past associated with the inquisition, no apology is necessary for the false and unhistorical caricature that remains part of the popular consciousness.

ENDNOTES

1) See *Anti-Catholicism in American Culture* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2000) pp. 15-53.
2) For the best contemporary research on the trial of Galileo see *Galileo's Daughter*, by Dava Sobel (Walker & Co., NY, 1999).
3) "Is It Enough to be Sorry?" Lance Morrow, *Time* , March 27, 2000.
4) Dr. Jerry Kaifetz, "Pope John Paul II's apology falls way short by Catholic standards, *The Times* newspaper (May 20, 2000).
5) Caesar and Christ, Will Durant (Simon & Schuster, 1972) p. 603.
6) See 2 Cor 11: 3-4; Titus 3: 10-11
7) St. Augustine, "Letter to Boniface."
8) See *Medieval History*, by Norman Cantor (Macmillan, 1970 Second Edition) pp. 45-57
9) For a brief outline of the difficulties of the papacy in Rome in the 10th century see *The Age of Faith*, by Will Durant (Simon & Schuster, 1978) pp. 537-540.
10) *Inquisition*, by Edward Peters (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, 1989) p. 40.
11) *Saints and Sinners*, by Eamon Duffy (Yale University Press,

1997) pp. 82-83.
12) Peters, p. 40.
13) *Encyclopedia of Catholic History*, by Matthew Bunson (Our Sunday Visitor, 1995) p. 43.
14) Peters, p. 47.
15) ibid, p. 51.
16) ibid, p. 54.
17) *Ille humani generis*, Pope Gregory IX.
18) Peters, 53.
19) ibid, 70.
20) The best known manual for inquisitorial judges was *Directorium Inquisitorum* by Nicolau Eymeric, collected in the late 14th century. The manual would be a fundamental resource in the 16th and 17th centuries.
21) Peters, p. 65.
22) ibid, p. 65.
23) *Age of Faith*, Durant pp. 33-37.
24) ibid, pp. 164-166.
25) Peters, 74.
26) However, as noted in the case of Wycliff, the papacy was often called on to review the theological positions involved. Particularly in such high profile cases such as Wycliff and Hus, bishops would request papal review of the positions being espoused.
27) *The Spanish Inquisition: A Historical Revision*, by Henry Kamen (Yale University Press, 1997) p. 8.
28) See *The Origins of the Inquisition in Fifteenth Century Spain*, B. Netanyahu (Random House, 1995).
29) Peters, p. 84.
30) ibid, p. 89.
31) Kamen, p. 74.
32) ibid, p. 92.
33) Erasmus (1466-1536), who served for a short time as counselor to Charles V, was a Dutch humanist and scholar. Though a harsh critic of the Church he would not join the Reformation and was friendly with St. Thomas More and St. John Fisher, both martyrs to the Reformation in England. Though he

was offered a cardinal's hat in 1535, his writings were eventually condemned in the Catholic Counter Reformation.
34) Peters, p. 89.
35) Kamen, p. 91.
36) ibid, p. 93.
37) ibid, p. 95.
38) ibid, p. 98.
39) ibid, p. 189
40) For a full outline of the Spanish Inquisition and the use of torture see Kamen, pp. 174-192.
41) Kamen, p. 203.
42) See Kamen, pp. 192-213.
43) Kamen, p. 304.
44) Peters, p. 111.
45) ibid.
46) *The Renaissance*, by Will Durant (Simon & Schuster, 1981) p.161.
47) ibid, pp. 143-162.
48) *The Age of Reason Begins*, by Will and Ariel Durant (Simon & Schuster, 1989) pp. 620-621.
49) ibid, p. 621.
50) In the late 19th century funds were raised internationally to place a "spike" commemorative at the site where Bruno was burned. Demonstrations – usually anti-Catholic – are held there annually on the anniversary of his death.
51) See Catholic League research paper on Galileowww.catholicleague.org
52) Peters, p. 122
53) ibid, p. 131.
54) Kamen, p. 309.
55) Peters, p. 144.
56) Kamen, p. 310.
57) Peters, p. 153.
58) ibid, p. 154

Galileo and the Catholic Church

by Robert P. Lockwood

(3/2000)

In October, 1992 Cardinal Paul Poupard presented to Pope John Paul II the results of the papal-requested Pontifical Academy study of the famous 1633 trial of Galileo.1 He reported the study's conclusion that at the time of the trial, "theologians…. failed to grasp the profound non-literal meaning of the Scriptures when they describe the physical structure of the universe. This led them unduly to transpose a question of factual observation into the realm of faith…(and) to a disciplinary measure from which Galileo 'had much to suffer.'"2 The headlines that followed screamed that the Church had reversed itself on the seventeenth century astronomer and commentators wondered about the impact of the study on papal infallibility. *The New York Times* snickered that the Church had finally admitted that Galileo was right and the earth did revolve around the sun. Others proclaimed that the Church had surrendered in the alleged war between faith and science.

For over three and a half centuries, the trial of Galileo has been an anti-Catholic bludgeon aimed at the Church. In the 18th, 19th and early 20th century, it was wielded to show the Church as the enemy of enlightenment, freedom of thought and scientific advancement, part of a caricature of an institution dedicated to keeping mankind in a theocratic vice. In the cultural wars of our own day, Galileo is resurrected as a martyr of an oppressive Church, a Church that is the enemy of

so-called reproductive advances that would prove as right as Galileo's science and the Church as backwards in opposing them. Galileo has become an all-encompassing trump card, played whether the discussion is over science, abortion, gay rights, legalized pornography, or simply as a legitimate reason for anti-Catholicism itself.3

The story of Galileo and the Church is re-told in *Galileo's Daughter*4 by Dava Sobel. Throughout the account of Galileo's life, scientific studies, and his difficulties with the Church, Sobel weaves surviving letters to him from his illegitimate daughter, Sister Maria Celeste, a Poor Clare nun. The breathless jacket copy describes the book as the story of "a mythic figure whose seventeenth-century clash with Catholic doctrine continues to define the schism between science and religion." The book itself, however, is a straightforward account of the life of Galileo Galilei that gains poignancy through his daughter's descriptive and loving correspondence. It provides a balanced presentation of the conflict that evolved between Galileo and Church authorities, as well as Galileo's own deep Catholic faith. The austere and devout life of Sister Maria Celeste's small and nearly indigent Poor Clare convent in the seventeenth century, as well as the depth of her piety and intelligence, stand in marked contrast to the bleak portrait often painted by prejudiced observers of the Church on the eve of the so-called European Enlightenment. Readers who expected an anti-Catholic, ultra-feminist manifesto from Galileo's Daughter will be disheartened, or pleased.

If Galileo had never lived, the anti-Catholic culture would have had to invent him. The myth of Galileo is more important than the actual events that surrounded him, much as the famous quote attributed to him was never spoken. After recanting his view of the earth orbiting the sun, he was said to have defiantly muttered aloud as he left the trial chamber, Eppur si muove! ("And yet it does move"). It was a quote known by

every school child in Protestant America in the nineteenth century, though it was a legend created nearly 125 years after his death.5 As the jacket cover for *Galileo's Daughter* confirms, the legend of Galileo became part of the anti-Catholic baggage of Western, particularly English-speaking culture. Galileo represents the myth of the Church at war with science and enlightened thought.

The World of Galileo

Galileo Galilei was born in Pisa on February 18, 1564,6 the same day that Michelangelo died. If Michelangelo represented the last of the Renaissance, Galileo was born to the world of the Reformation. The Council of Trent, which confirmed the Church's formal response to Martin Luther's revolt of 1517, had ended the year prior to his birth. In England, Elizabeth I had assumed the throne six years before his birth to radicalize – and formalize – Henry VIII's schism with Rome. It was a world where the Bible had become a source for a thousand different theologies that would be the pretext for the Thirty Years War in Galileo's lifetime, a universal European conflagration seen by its greatest historian as the first war of modern nationalism, fought under the guise of religion.7 It was a Europe where witches were burned, the deadly plague still erupted, and the glories of the Renaissance had succumbed to an "unhappy desolation"8 brought on by the breakdown in the unity of Christian culture through Luther's Reformation. Even the flowering of learning that was the Renaissance had been reduced to a rigid slavery to all things ancient.

In the midst of this "unhappy desolation," the era would see the beginnings of modern science, developed from those very same Greek and Roman studies encouraged and supported by the Church in the Renaissance. Contrary to the assorted black legends that have come down to us, most of the early scientific progress in astronomy was rooted in the Church. Galileo would not so much discover that the earth revolved

around the sun. Rather, he would attempt to prove with his studies and propagate through his writings the theories of a Catholic priest who had died 20 years before Galileo was born, Nicholas Copernicus.

It was also the Church, under the aegis of Pope Gregory XIII, that introduced the "major achievement of modern astronomy"9 when Galileo was in his teens. The Western world still marked time by the Julian calendar created in 46 B.C. By Galileo's day, the calendar was 12 days off, leaving Church feasts woefully behind the seasons for which they were intended. A number of pontiffs had attempted to correct the problem, but it was Pope Gregory XIII who was able to present a more accurate calendar in 1582. Though Protestant Europe fumed at the imposition of "popish time," the accuracy of Gregory's calendar led to its acceptance throughout the West and, essentially, throughout the world by the 20th century.

Copernicus was born in 1473. Ordained to the priesthood, he studied in Italy where he became fascinated with astronomy. The world generally accepted what the senses told and had been taught since Ptolemy (2nd century A.D.), that the earth is fixed and the suns, stars and planets revolve around it. Through mathematical examination Copernicus came to believe that the sun is the center of the universe and the planets, earth included, revolve around it. He never published his studies in his lifetime, though excerpts of his manuscript would circulate in scholarly circles. (His book – *De revolutionibus* – appeared as he was on his deathbed in 1543.) Pope Leo X (1513-1521) was intrigued by his theories and expressed an interest in hearing them advanced. Martin Luther, calling Copernicus a fool, savaged his theory, as did John Calvin.10

Copernicus died in 1543 and for the most part the Church raised no objections to his revolutionary hypothesis, as long as it was represented as theory, not undisputed fact. The difficulty that both the Church – and the Protestant reformers

– had with the theory is that it was perceived as not only contradicting common sense, but Scripture as well where it was taught that Joshua had made the sun stand still and the Psalmist praised the earth "set firmly in place."11 The theory also could not be proven by current scientific technology. This is where Galileo would falter, and would "have much to suffer" as a result, "treading a dangerous path between the Heaven he revered as a good Catholic and the heavens he revealed through his telescope."12

Galileo and Copernican Theory

The myth we have of Galileo is that of a "renegade who scoffed at the Bible and drew fire from a Church blind to reason."13 In fact, "he remained a good Catholic who believed in the power of prayer and endeavored always to conform his duty as a scientist with the destiny of his soul."14 Galileo Galilei was raised in Pisa where his father dabbled in business and taught music out of his home. The young Galileo hoped to become a monk but instead studied medicine at the University of Pisa at his father's direction, where he became enthralled with mathematics. He would return to Pisa as a teacher of mathematics and moved on to the University of Padua in the Republic of Venice, where he would eventually secure a high post with the ruling Medici family.

While at Venice, Galileo heard of the invention of a spyglass that allowed one to see objects that were far away. From this spyglass, Galileo would develop the telescope and turn his eyes toward the exploration of the heavens. He produced his first book – *The Starry Messenger* – detailing his observations in 1610, describing the moons of Jupiter, the location of stars, and that the moon was not a perfect sphere. Galileo had overthrown contemporary astronomy and, while being carved up by fellow scientists, became a controversial celebrity. In 1611 he was celebrated in Rome for his work, receiving a favorable audience with Pope Paul V, and became friends with Cardinal Maffeo Barberini, the future Pope Urban VIII, who

would honor the astronomer with a poem.

Galileo had begun his teaching career expounding the earth-centered universe, but his observations through his telescope quickly moved him toward support of the Copernican theory. In the *Sunspot Letters* (1613) Galileo forcefully argued for a Copernican understanding of the universe and, by his bombast, alienated much of the scientific community that upheld the Ptolemaic principles, particularly many within the Church. Tact and diplomacy were never Galileo's strong points, and his acerbic personality, particularly in scientific debate, made him few friends. His personality would be of little help when his views came under question.

There were many who believed that embracing the Copernican theory was tantamount to heresy and charges of such began to swirl around Galileo. Galileo considered heresy "more abhorrent than death itself"15 and was quick to defend himself. Unfortunately, Galileo would not bow to the temper of his times. Instead of keeping the debate on a theoretical plane involving mathematics, astronomy and observation, Galileo would enter the uncharted waters of theology and Scriptural interpretation. He attempted to explain to a student of his, in response to Christina d' Medici, the grand duchess of the Medici family, how the Copernican theory would not contradict the evidence of Scripture. In a long letter he delved into the relationship of science and Scripture. His essential theory – clear to Catholic understanding today – is that while Scripture cannot err, we can err in our understanding of it. Nature cannot contradict the Bible, and if it appears to do so, it is because we do not adequately understand the deeper Biblical interpretation. Reading astronomical interpretations into Bible passages is a fundamental misuse of the Bible. Scripture serves a more important purpose. As it has been said, the Bible teaches one how to go to Heaven, not how the heavens go.

Essentially, Galileo was slipping into trouble on three

accounts. First, despite feeble objections to the contrary, he was teaching Copernican theory as fact rather than hypothesis. Second, the popularity of his writings brought an essentially "philosophical discussion" into the public arena, requiring some sort of Church response. Third, by elevating scientific conjecture to a theological level, he was raising the stakes enormously. Instead of merely philosophical disputation that many in the Church viewed more as an intellectual game, Galileo – an untrained layman – was now lecturing on Scriptural interpretation.

On December 21, 1614, a young Dominican priest denounced Galileo from a Florence pulpit as an enemy of true religion. Though the Dominican was forced to apologize, the issue was out in the open and began to be discussed in the highest circles in Rome. Pope Paul V, uninterested in scientific debates, passed the matter on to the Holy Office to determine if there were doctrinal issues involved. In 1616, Galileo traveled to Rome to defend himself and continued to forcefully write and argue both on the truth of the Copernican hypothesis, and on proper Scriptural interpretation in the light of scientific developments.

Pope Paul V's theologian was the Jesuit Cardinal Robert Bellarmine. Cardinal Bellarmine was a leading figure in the Catholic Counter Reformation. Though he had the sobriquet "hammer of heretics," Cardinal Bellarmine was a calm, educated, reasonable and saintly prelate. (He would be canonized a saint of the Church.) In 1615, Cardinal Bellarmine had addressed the Copernican debate in a nuanced fashion. He stated his personal belief that the Copernican theory was not viable as it defied human reason. However, he found no reason for it not to be treated as a hypothesis. More important, he noted that if the Copernican theory was ever proven – which he doubted could ever be accomplished – then it would be necessary to re-think the interpretation of certain Scriptural passages. It was a vital point that would be forgotten in 1616

and in the trial of Galileo in 1633.16

In February 1616, a council of theological advisors to the pope ruled that it was bad science and quite likely heresy to teach as fact that the sun was at the center of the universe, that the earth is not at the center of the world, and that it moves. Galileo was not personally condemned, but Cardinal Bellarmine was asked to convey the news to him. Cardinal Bellarmine knew and respected Galileo. He met with Galileo, advised him of the panel's ruling, and ordered him to cease defending his theories as fact. He also asked him to avoid any further inroads into discussion of Scriptural interpretation. Galileo agreed.

When the edict was formally announced, however, Galileo's name or his works were never mentioned, nor was the word "heresy" ever employed. This, along with Cardinal Bellarmine's statement to him, led Galileo to believe that he could still consider the theory as a hypothesis, and to hope that the edict might eventually be reversed. In March, he had a private audience with the pope in which, Galileo reported, he was assured of the pontiff's high esteem and protection. The stain of heresy continued to plague Galileo, however, and he requested and received from Cardinal Bellarmine a letter stating that he had not been made to perform penance for his views, nor forced to recant. He was simply informed that the teachings of Copernicus were found to be contrary to Scripture and should not be defended as truth. With that letter in hand, Galileo moved on to other studies.

In 1623, Cardinal Barberini was elected Pope Urban VIII. With the election of his friend and supporter, Galileo assumed that the atmosphere could be ripe for a reversal of the 1616 edict. In 1624 he headed off to Rome again to meet the new pope. Pope Urban had intimated that the 1616 edict would not have been published had he been pope at the time, and took credit for the word "heresy" not appearing in the formal edict.17 Yet, Urban also believed that the Copernican doctrine could never

be proven and he was only willing to allow Galileo the right to discuss it as hypothesis, but not as fact. Galileo was encouraged and would proceed over the next six years to write a “dialogue” on the Copernican theory. It would be that book which resulted in Galileo’s famous trial.

The Trial of Galileo

On Christmas Eve, 1629, Galileo finished his manuscript and proceeded to secure permission to publish and review by Church censors. An outbreak of bubonic plague, printing set backs and reviews by the censors delayed final publication of the *Dialogue* until February 1632. The book was received with massive protest. Galileo had so weighted his argument in favor of Copernican theory as truth – and managed to insult the pope’s own expressed view that complex matters observed in Nature were to be simply attributed to the mysterious power of God – that a firestorm was inevitable. His scientific enemies were infuriated with Galileo’s often snide and ridiculing dismissal of their views. The *Dialogue*could also certainly be read as a direct challenge to the 1616 edict.

It is important to understand the mindset of Galileo’s tribunal judges, most scientists of the day, and theologians. In its simplest terms, the Ptolemaic construct of a motionless earth at the center of the world made perfect sense. It was the cosmology of the times. First, it was logical to the senses. The sun appeared to rise in the east and set in the west. Mankind could not “feel” the motion of the earth, nor could any experiments known prove such a motion so contrary to the senses. Second, the Ptolemaic system was the teaching of the ancients, and confirmed by the greatest minds of the past, including Aristotle, and the present. A learned man knew the ancients, and the ancients remained the fountainhead of scientific knowledge. Finally, and most important, they read certain passages in Scripture that seemed, by their interpretation, to affirm this science. Unlike Cardinal Bellarmine, they never went deeper into the question of the

possibility that Galileo's theory could be proven, and that their interpretation of the Scriptural passages – not Scripture itself – could be wrong.

The difficulty that Galileo encountered with Church authorities, then, was that he appeared to attack the veracity of Scripture by teaching Copernican theory as truth, rather than hypothesis. He had no acceptable proof for his belief that the earth revolved around the sun. He had attempted to make such proofs through an argument based on the earth's tides (a scientifically incorrect one) but 17th century science simply was incapable of establishing that the earth did, in fact, orbit the sun.18 And, finally, he appeared to be openly challenging a Church edict to which he had earlier agreed.

Galileo was told to come to Rome to explain himself and publication of his book was suspended. Due to ill health – Galileo was by now 66 years old – he did not arrive in Rome until February 1633. He was allowed to stay in the comforts of the Florentine embassy. It was at this point that a fearful document emerged from the files of Galileo's dossier in 1616. It purported to prove "that Galileo had been officially warned not to discuss Copernicus, ever, in any way at all. And so, when Galileo had come to Urban in 1624, testing the feasibility of treating Copernican theory as hypothetical in a new book, he had in fact been flouting this ruling. Worse, it now appeared he had intentionally duped the trusting Urban by not having had the decency to tell him such a ruling existed. No wonder the pope was furious."19 Galileo's understanding, based on his conversation with Cardinal Bellarmine, was that the topic could be treated hypothetically and he approached Urban in that spirit.

Galileo's trial did not take place before 10 cardinals as it is often pictured. Participants were Galileo, two officials, and a secretary. Galileo's defense was his letter from Cardinal Bellarmine, and the claim that the *Dialogue*did not,

in fact, support the Copernican theory. His first defense was probable. He was certainly not aware of the more restrictive notice in his file and in all likelihood an enemy had placed it there. It is doubtful that Galileo was being duplicitous in his understanding that he could discuss the Copernican theory as hypothesis, or that he had purposely misled the pope. Either would have been out of character for a man who was essentially a loyal son of the Church. His second defense, however, does not stand much scrutiny. The *Dialogue* was clearly a presentation and defense of the Copernican hypothesis as truth, though Galileo would certainly respond that he thought of it as scientific truth, not theological truth. In his subsequent meetings with the tribunal, he confessed that ambition and poor writing might have conveyed an intent he did not mean and promised that he would make any correction to the book that was deemed necessary.

Seven of the 10 tribunal cardinals signed a condemnation of Galileo. The condemnation found Galileo "vehemently suspected of heresy" in teaching as truth that the Earth moves and is not the center of the world. He was found guilty in persisting in such teaching when he had been formally warned not to do so in 1616. His book was prohibited, he was ordered confined to formal imprisonment, to publicly renounce his beliefs, and to perform proper penance. Two additional articles – claiming he had fallen away from Catholic practice and that he had obtained an imprimatur for the *Dialogue* deceitfully – Galileo refused to admit and they were withdrawn. Galileo signed a handwritten confession.

The finding against Galileo was hardly infallible. Though certainly an irate pope had been consulted in the condemnation, the document had little to do with defining doctrine. It was the finding of one canonical office, not a determination by the Church that set out a clear doctrinal interpretation. Rene Descartes, the French philosopher and friend of Galileo, noted the censure was not confirmed by a

Council or the pope but “proceeds solely from a committee of cardinals.”20 This was disciplinary action, not doctrinal definition in intent. Three of the cardinals avoided signing it altogether. Galileo would continue to have friends and supporters within the Church, including the archbishop of Sienna who would provide him with his residence for part of his “house arrest.” At the same time, however, the condemnation was also unjust. Clearly, the Church tribunal had handled a bad situation badly, and the personal umbrage of Pope Urban VIII over being “duped” by Galileo had its impact as well. Galileo’s subsequent imprisonment was little more than house arrest at the Florentine embassy and later at the residence of the Archbishop of Sienna and finally at a house in Acetri. While Galileo would continue to conduct important scientific studies – and publish books on those studies – the fact remains that his condemnation was unjust. And even a comfortable imprisonment is still imprisonment. Most of all, Galileo personally suffered by the condemnation that seemed to mean that his faith was lacking and his reputation ruined because of it. The theologians who interrogated him acted outside their competence and confused the literary nature of Scripture with its theological intent.21

Galileo died in 1642 and Pope Urban VIII two years later. In 1741, Pope Benedict XIV granted an imprimatur to the first edition of the complete works of Galileo. In 1757, a new edition of the Index of Forbidden Books allowed works that supported the Copernican theory.

The Myth of Galileo

“There was only one trial of Galileo, although legends – even experts and encyclopedias – often speak of two, erroneously counting Galileo’s 1616 encounter with Cardinal Bellarmine as a preliminary trial, leading up to the second, more sustained interrogation of 1633 that left Galileo kneeling before his inquisitors, or in a dungeon by some accounts, or even in chains…There was only one trial of Galileo, and yet it seems

there were a thousand – the suppression of science by religion, the defense of individualism against authority, the clash between revolutionary and establishment, the challenge of radical new discoveries to ancient beliefs, the struggle against intolerance for freedom of thought and freedom of speech. No other process in the annals of canon or common law has ricocheted through history with more meanings, more consequences, more conjecture, more regrets."22

Galileo's trial came to mean far more than it did when it actually took place. As his contemporary Descartes realized, it could even be argued that it was a small victory for science. Despite the ire with Galileo, the earth as the unmoving center of the universe was not set forth as Catholic doctrine infallibly defined, "either by Council or pope." While there is no doubt that Galileo suffered personally, the Church continued to support scientific studies. Prior to and during Galileo's time, as well as after, the Church remained in the forefront of the new sciences. (Part of the reason for Galileo's fall was the animosity his style and beliefs engendered among competitive scientists within the Church, particularly among the Jesuits. While Galileo had been feted by Jesuit scientists early in his career, he had soon locked horns with any number of them, which made him a target for competitive jealousies.)

The Galileo affair soon entered the mythological corpus of Western Protestantism and secularism as symbolizing the Church as anti-intellectual, anti-science and anti-freedom. By the 18th century enlightenment, Galileo provided "unequivocal evidence of the conflict between truth and superstition."23 In the 19th century, "scientism" had become its own religion, much as it lingers today. In an era where intellectuals viewed science and scientific method as the only means to attain truth, Galileo was resurrected and canonized a martyr. "By the second half of the 19th century the condemnation of Galileo had come to be seen in messianic terms. The figure of Galileo

took on an almost divine role in the redemption of mankind from the dogmatism of the past….The legend of Galileo came to be considered a central chapter in a long history of warfare between science and religion. Increasingly, this metaphor of warfare served as an important tool for the modern world's understanding of its own history."24

The trial of Galileo is most often portrayed in terms that it clearly was not: Galileo the scientist arguing the supremacy of reason and science over faith; the tribunal judges demanding that reason abjure to faith. The trial was neither. Galileo and the tribunal judges shared a common view that science and the Bible could not stand in contradiction. If there appeared to be a contradiction, such a contradiction resulted from either weak science, or poor interpretation of Scripture. This was clearly understood by Cardinal Bellarmine. The mistakes that were made came from Galileo's own personality and acerbic style, the personal umbrage of the Holy Father, jealous competitive scientists, and tribunal judges who erroneously believed that the universe revolved around a motionless earth and that the Bible confirmed such a belief.

Conclusion

The Galileo case had, of course, been long settled when in 1981 Pope John Paul II asked that a pontifical commission study the Ptolemaic-Copernican controversy of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. What was the purpose of revisiting the controversy? As Cardinal Poupard explained in the commission's report to the Holy Father, "It was not a question of conducting a retrial but of undertaking a calm, objective reflection, taking into account the historical and cultural context."25

In his report, Cardinal Poupard briefly summarized the findings. Referring to Cardinal Bellarmine's letter of 1615, if the "orbiting of the Earth around the sun were ever to be

demonstrated to be certain, then theologians…would have to review biblical passages apparently opposed to the Copernican theories so as to avoid asserting the error of opinions proven to be true." The difficulty in 1616 – and 1633 – was that "Galileo had not succeeded in proving irrefutably the double motion of the Earth…. More than 150 years still had to pass before" such proofs were scientifically established.26

"The philosophical and theological qualifications," Cardinal Poupard concluded, "wrongly granted to the then new theories about the centrality of the sun and the movement of the earth were the result of a transitional situation in the field of astronomical knowledge and of an exegetical confusing regarding cosmology…(T)heologians…failed to grasp the profound, non-literal meaning of the Scriptures when they describe the physical structure of the created universe. This led them unduly to transpose a question of factual observation into the realm of faith."27

In his response to these conclusions, Pope John Paul II reminded the audience that in the relationship of science and religion "the distinction between the two realms of knowledge ought not to be understood as opposition…. Humanity has before it two modes of development. The first involves culture, scientific research and technology, that is to say, whatever falls within the horizontal aspect of man and creation, which is growing at an impressive rate. In order that this progress should not remain completely external to man, it presupposes a simultaneous raising of conscience as well as its actuation. The second mode of development involves what is deepest in the human being when, transcending the world and transcending himself, man turns toward the One who is the Creator of all. It is only this vertical direction that can give full meaning to man's being and action because it situates him in relation to his origin and end…The scientist who is conscious of this twofold development and takes it into account contributes to the restoration of harmony."28

If there is a war between science and religion, it is not a battle based on any denial from the Church of the need for scientific progress. Rather, it is a philosophy of science that has adopted “scientism,” a “religion of science” that scornfully disregards faith. It is far more common today for science to declare war on faith, than faith to object in any way to true science and its search for truth. “I am in favor of a dialogue between science and religion, but not a constructive dialogue. One of the great achievements of science has been, if not to make it impossible for intelligent people to be religious, then at least to make it possible for them not to be religious…(G)ood people can behave well and bad people can do evil; but for good people to do evil – that takes religion.”29 Thus spoke Steven Weinberg, Nobel Prize winner for his work on the theory of particles and fields. His sentiments would have horrified Galileo.

SUMMARY POINTS

*The trial of Galileo in 1633 has been an anti-Catholic bludgeon aimed at the Church. Galileo has become an all-encompassing trump card, played whether the discussion is over science, abortion, gay rights, legalized pornography, or simply as a legitimate reason for anti-Catholicism itself.

*The myth of Galileo is more important than the actual events that surrounded him. Galileo represents the myth of the Church at war with science and enlightened thought.

*Most of the early scientific progress in astronomy was rooted in the Church. Galileo would attempt to prove the theories of a Catholic priest who had died 20 years before Galileo was born, Nicholas Copernicus. Copernicus argued for an earth that orbited the sun, rather than a fixed earth at the center of the cosmos.

*Copernicus died in 1543 and the Church raised no objections to his revolutionary hypothesis as long as it was presented as

theory. The difficulty that both the Church – and the leading Protestant reformers – had with the theory is that it was perceived as not only contradicting common sense, but Scripture as well.

*The myth we have of Galileo is that of a renegade who scoffed at the Bible and drew fire from a Church blind to reason. In fact, he remained a good Catholic who believed in the power of prayer and endeavored always to conform his duty as a scientist with the destiny of his soul.

*In 1615, Cardinal Robert Bellarmine noted that if the Copernican theory was ever proven then it would be necessary to re-think the interpretation of certain Scriptural passages.

*In February 1616, a council of theological advisors to the pope ruled that it was bad science and quite likely contrary to faith to teach as fact that the sun was at the center of the universe, that the earth is not at the center of the world, and that it moves. *Galileo's name or his works were never mentioned in the edict, nor was the word "heresy" ever employed. This led Galileo to believe that he could still consider the Copernican theory as hypothesis.

*Galileo met with Pope Urban VIII and believed he had permission to re-visit the Copernican debate.

*In 1632, Galileo published the *Dialogue*. The *Dialogue* could be read as a direct challenge to the 1616 edict, as it forcefully argued the truth of the Copernican system. It was greeted with skepticism from the Church and the scientific community of the day.

*In his trial in 1633, Galileo was found "vehemently suspected of heresy" in teaching as truth that the earth moves and is not the center of the world. He was found guilty in persisting in such teaching when he had been formally warned not to do so in 1616. His book was prohibited, he was ordered confined to formal imprisonment, to publicly renounce his beliefs, and to

perform proper penance.

*The finding against Galileo was hardly infallible. The condemnation had little to do with defining doctrine. It was the finding of one canonical office, not a determination by the Church, that set out a clear doctrinal interpretation.

*While Galileo would continue to conduct important scientific studies – and publish books on those studies – the fact remains that his condemnation was unjust. The theologians who interrogated him acted outside their competence and confused the literary nature of Scripture with its theological intent.

*Galileo died in 1642. In the 19th century, “scientism” became its own religion. In an era where intellectuals viewed science and scientific method as the only means to attain truth, Galileo was resurrected and canonized a martyr.

*The trial of Galileo is most often portrayed in terms that it clearly was not: Galileo the scientist arguing the supremacy of reason and science over faith; the tribunal judges demanding that reason abjure to faith. The trial was neither. Galileo and the tribunal judges shared the view that science and the Bible could not stand in contradiction.

*The mistakes that were made in the trial came from Galileo’s own personality and acerbic style, the personal umbrage of Pope Urban VIII who believed Galileo had duped him, jealous competitive scientists, and tribunal judges who erroneously believed that the universe revolved around a motionless earth and that the Bible confirmed such a belief.

*Galileo had not succeeded in proving the double motion of the Earth. More than 150 years still had to pass before such proofs were scientifically established.

*”Theologians…failed to grasp the profound, non-literal meaning of the Scriptures when they describe the physical structure of the created universe. This led them unduly to

transpose a question of factual observation into the realm of faith." (Cardinal Paul Poupard in his presentation to Pope John Paul II on the results of the papal-requested Pontifical Academy study of the Galileo trial.)

*If there is a war between science and religion, it is not a battle based on any denial from the Church of the need for scientific progress. Rather, it is from certain segments of the scientific community that have adopted a religion of science that scornfully disregards religious faith. It is far more common today for certain scientists to declare war on faith, than faith to object to science and its search for truth.

FOOTNOTES

1*Origins* v.22, n 22, 374-375 Galileo: Report on Papal Commission Findings, Cardinal Poupard

2(Ibid. No. 5)

3Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, *Annual Report* (1999). Citation of letter published in the *New York Daily News*, October 15, 1999: "Frankly, the Catholic Church needs to be bashed! Lest we forget, these are the folks who brought you the Crusades, the Inquisition, the trial of Galileo…."

4*Galileo's Daughter*, Dava Sobel (Walker & Company, New York, NY, 1999)

5 This famous declaration of Galileo first was attributed to him a little over a century after his trial by a French writer.

6For biographical information on Galileo, the best current resource is Sobel's *Galileo's Daughter*. See above.

7*The Thirty Years War*, C.V. Wedgwood (Random House, 1938; Book

of the Month Club edition, 1995)

8*The Renaissance*, Will Durant (Simon & Schuster, 1953; Easton Press edition, 1992) p. 728

9*The Age of Reason Begins*, Will and Ariel Durant (Simon & Schuster, 1961; Easton Press Edition, 1992) p. 594

10Sobel, p. 5

11Joshua 10: 12-13; Psalm 93: 1

12Sobel, p. 5

13Ibid, p. 11

14Ibid, p. 12

15Ibid, p. 60

16*Origins*, Cardinal Poupard, No. 2

17Sobel, p. 137

18It would not be until 1851, over 200 years later, that the rotation of the earth was scientifically verified.

19Sobel, p. 235

20Cited in Sobel, p. 286

21Lessons of the Galileo Case, Pope John Paul II Address to the Pontifical Academy of Science, October 31, 1992. No. 2

22Sobel, pp. 231-232

23Catholic Dossier, July-August, 1995. “The Legend of Galileo: The Warfare Between Science and Religion,” William A. Carroll, p. 16. (It is one of the ironies of our own time that the Church is now portrayed as “unenlightened” because it teaches that there are universal truths that can be known.)

24Ibid. p. 16

25*Origins*, Cardinal Poupard, No. 1

26Ibid, No. 3

27Ibid, No. 5

28Pope John Paul II, No. 14

29Cited in *First Things*, February 2000, p. 92