

The Horrors of the Roman Catholic Church

Against Oneness Apostolics

And the Fruit of the Holy Trinity



**A Historical Exposé of the Inquisition and Rome's Persecution of
Apostolic Believers**

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Introduction

According to the **Catholic Encyclopedia's** own Catholic-approved documentation — the article titled **“Inquisition,”** published in 1910 and carrying both **Nihil Obstat** and **Imprimatur** approval — the Inquisition is described as a special ecclesiastical institution created for “combating or suppressing heresy.” This means the existence, purpose, procedure, punishments, and historical development of the Inquisition are not merely anti-Catholic accusations or Protestant exaggerations, but are acknowledged within Catholic historical documentation itself. Yet the Catholic record is not the only record in existence. Over the past several centuries, many books have been written documenting the atrocities of the Inquisition, often with vivid descriptions and historical imagery depicting the horrors themselves. Many of these older works were written before modern Catholic apologists attempted to rewrite, soften, minimize, or reframe the horrific nature of Rome’s activities. These books can still be found today, and this author personally owns many of them. Together, they support the record presented in this document — and in many cases reveal details even more disturbing than what is commonly admitted today.

The Doctrinal Target: Heresy, the Trinity, and Jesus Name Baptism

It must also be noted before proceeding further that one of the primary “heresies” in the eyes of the Roman Catholic Church was the rejection of the Trinity and the rejection of Rome’s sacramental authority. For Apostolic believers, this point is critical. Oneness Apostolics reject the Trinitarian formula of “Father, Son, and Holy Ghost” as the baptismal formula imposed by later tradition, and instead hold to the biblical pattern of baptism in the name of Jesus Christ. Therefore, even when the incidents of torture and persecution depicted in this pictorial do not specifically identify the victims as Oneness Apostolics by name, it is reasonable to understand that those who rejected Rome’s Trinitarian doctrine, rejected papal supremacy, and refused the Catholic baptismal formula would have been among the kinds of people Rome branded as heretics and subjected to interrogation, punishment, torture, imprisonment, and death.

This is why the issue cannot be treated merely as distant medieval history. The controversy was not only political. It was doctrinal. It concerned the authority of Rome, the identity of God, the name invoked in baptism, and whether a believer would submit to the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church or stand upon the apostolic witness of Scripture. In that sense, these images are not disconnected from Apostolic history. They represent the brutal methods used by a religious system that claimed the power to define heresy, control conscience, punish dissent, and enforce its doctrines through fear, pain, and death.

Please see our Companion Pictorial to The Horrors of the Roman Catholic Church Bible Study by Pete Wierzbicki

Chapter 1

Rome's Own Record of Religious Terror

The Inquisition was not a Protestant myth. It was not a rumor invented by enemies of Rome. It was not a vague medieval misunderstanding. It was a **real ecclesiastical institution** created to suppress heresy, backed by religious authority, organized through courts, empowered through papal authorization, and carried out through a horrifying combination of interrogation, imprisonment, torture, property confiscation, and surrender to the civil power for execution.

That is the record.

The Inquisition was a system. It had judges. It had procedures. It had inquisitors. It had prisons. It had legal formulas. It had papal bulls. It had religious courts. It had methods for extracting confessions. It had punishments. It had cooperation with secular rulers. It had the machinery to condemn men and women for religious belief and then deliver them to the state, knowing that the civil punishment could be death by fire.

The issue is not merely that abuses happened. The issue is that the entire framework was built on the idea that religious dissent could be treated as a crime. The Church claimed the authority to define heresy, prosecute it, punish it spiritually, strip men from the protection of the Church, and hand them over to temporal rulers for the final act. Rome may attempt to hide behind the technical claim that the Church did not itself light the fire, but that excuse collapses the moment one sees the whole machinery. **The Church judged. The Church condemned. The Church surrendered. The State burned.**

That is not apostolic Christianity.

The apostles preached. The Inquisition prosecuted.

The apostles reasoned from Scripture. The Inquisition interrogated.

The apostles suffered persecution. The Inquisition became a machine through which others were persecuted.

Chapter 2

The Early Church Did Not Begin with Torture

The earliest Christian spirit was not inquisitorial. During the first three centuries, Christian teachers did not advocate killing heretics. They did not call for torture chambers. They did not build religious courts to hunt dissenters. They taught that religion could not be forced. Tertullian argued that religion must be accepted freely and not by compulsion. Origen rejected the idea that Christians were to carry over Old Testament penalties of death, burning, or stoning against religious dissenters. Cyprian understood discipline in spiritual terms. Lactantius was especially direct: religion is a matter of the will; it is better to use words than blows; truth and violence have no fellowship; religion is defended by suffering for it, not by killing others for it.

That early witness condemns the later system.

Chapter 3

From Spiritual Correction to Civil Punishment

The turning point came when Christianity became entangled with imperial power. Once emperors began to see themselves as protectors of the Church, heresy was no longer treated merely as spiritual error. It became a threat to public order. It became a crime against religious unity. It became, in the logic of empire, **something** to be punished by law.

In one period of fifty-seven years, imperial rulers issued sixty-eight enactments against heretics. These laws affected **many** different groups and included exile, confiscation of property, forced labor, imprisonment, and in **some** cases death. The record shows that **religious error was increasingly treated like civil rebellion**. That was the soil from which the Inquisition eventually grew.

Chapter 4

Early Bloodshed and the Opening of the Door

The early examples are already disturbing.

Under Diocletian in A.D. 287, the leaders of the Manichaeans were sentenced to be burned at the stake, while followers were punished either by beheading or by forced labor in the mines. The exact number is not given. **That missing number matters.**

Priscillian, Bishop of Avila in Spain, was accused of heresy and sorcery, condemned at Trier, and executed along with **some** of his followers. Again, the number of followers is not supplied. Yet even at that time major Christian voices protested. St. Martin of Tours tried to prevent the shedding of blood and argued that ecclesiastical deposition would be enough. After the execution, he blamed both the accusers and the emperor, and refused fellowship for a time with bishops connected to the death. St. Ambrose of Milan described the execution as a crime.

That means the moral issue was recognized even then. Men knew that killing religious dissenters was not the spirit of Christ.

Yet the movement toward coercion continued.

Donatism, Manichaeism, and Priscillianism became major targets in the fourth and fifth centuries. Augustine at first opposed force, seeking correction by instruction and persuasion. Later, under the pressure of the Donatist controversy and the violent behavior of the Circumcellions, he changed position and allowed for a kind of coercive severity. Even then, when writing to officials, he urged restraint and charity. He wanted heretics corrected, not killed. But the door had been opened. **Once force is admitted in matters of conscience, it rarely remains moderate.**

Optatus of Mileve marked another dark step. He defended the state's right to punish religious dissenters, even to death, by appealing to Old Testament examples such as Moses and Phinehas. This was the first time a Catholic bishop championed decisive state cooperation in religious punishment and defended the death penalty for heretics. What earlier Christian teachers rejected, later Catholic leaders began to justify.

Leo the Great later viewed the execution of Priscillian and **some** of his followers as **something** that could aid the Church indirectly by frightening others toward spiritual remedy. That is the kind of reasoning that makes the later Inquisition possible. The Church says it is content with spiritual judgment, but rejoices when the fear of corporal punishment drives men back into religious conformity.

This is how religious coercion becomes respectable.

By the end of the first five centuries, the situation was already mixed. Many leading teachers still held that the Church should not shed blood. Others believed the state could execute heretics when public welfare demanded it. The majority view had once held that death for purely religious error was inconsistent with Christianity. But over time, state power and ecclesiastical authority moved closer together, and the ground was prepared for later horrors.

Chapter 5

The Fires Before the Formal Inquisition

Around the year 1000, Manichaeian-related sects from Bulgaria, under various names, spread across Western Europe. They appeared in Italy, Spain, Gaul, and **Germany**. Popular hostility rose against them. Mobs and rulers increasingly acted with violence. The issue was not yet the fully formed Inquisition, but the spirit of religious persecution was already alive.

At Orléans in 1122, thirteen distinguished citizens, both ecclesiastical and lay, were burned alive by order of King Robert the Pious. **Thirteen people burned alive. Not excommunicated. Not corrected. Not instructed. Burned.**

At Goslar in 1051 and 1052, **several** heretics were hanged under Emperor Henry III. The record says **several**. It does not tell us how **many**.

Around 1076 or 1077, one Catharist was condemned to the stake by the Bishop of Cambrai and his chapter.

At Soissons in 1114, **several** heretics were imprisoned by the bishop, but while he was away seeking advice from other bishops, the people stormed the prison, dragged the accused out of town, and burned them. The number is not specified.

At Liège in 1144, Adalbero II hoped to bring imprisoned Catharists back through instruction, but the people attacked them, and only with difficulty did the bishop rescue **some** from death by fire. How **many** were attacked? How **many** died? How **many** were rescued? The record does not fully say.

At Cologne around the same time, while the archbishop and priests tried to lead the accused back into the Church, the mob violently seized them from clerical custody and burned them at the stake.

Peter of Bruys died on the pyre as a victim of popular fury. Arnold of Brescia was executed by the axe as a victim of political enemies.

This reveals the atmosphere of the age: popular fury, civil punishment, religious accusation, and clerical involvement all moved together in a bloody confusion. The record often tries to excuse the Church by blaming mobs or civil rulers, but that does not remove the reality that all of this took place within a Catholic world where heresy was increasingly treated as a capital threat.

There were still voices against killing heretics. Wazo, Bishop of Liège, argued that force was contrary to the spirit of the Church and the words of Christ. He appealed to the parable of the wheat and tares: let them grow until the harvest. Peter Cantor said plainly that Catharists were not to be put to death, even if convicted of error, so long as they were not committing armed assaults. He said the apostle commanded that a heretic be avoided after admonition; he did not say, "Kill him." Bernard of Clairvaux declared that faith must be persuaded, not imposed. Heretics were to be captured by arguments, not arms.

That was still a more Christian instinct.

But the tide of coercion kept rising.

By the second half of the twelfth century, Catharism spread widely and was treated as a severe threat to Church and society. Throughout **Germany**, France, and Spain, custom increasingly visited heresy with death by fire. England was mostly spared from heresy, but in 1166 about thirty sectaries entered the country. Henry II ordered them branded on the forehead with red-hot iron, beaten with rods in the public square, and driven out. No one was allowed to shelter or assist them. They died partly from hunger and partly from the cold of winter.

About thirty people.

Branded.

Beaten.

Driven out.

Left to die.

In Flanders in 1183, Duke Philip of Flanders, assisted by William of the White Hand, Archbishop of Reims, caused **many** citizens to be burned alive. The victims included nobles, commoners, clerics, knights, peasants, unmarried women, widows, and married women. Their property was confiscated and divided. The number is not given. The absence of a number is itself disturbing. When a record is willing to admit that **many** men and women from every rank of society were burned alive, but does not tell how **many**, one is left to wonder what the full count would reveal.

Between 1183 and 1206, Bishop Hugo of Auxerre acted similarly against neo-Manichaeans. Some were stripped of their property. Others were exiled. Others were sent to the stake. Again, no total is given.

King Philip Augustus of France had eight Catharists burned at Troyes in 1200. He had one burned at Nevers in 1201. He had **several** burned at Braisne-sur-Vesle in 1204. He had **many** burned at Paris, including priests, clerics, laymen, and women. Again, "**many**" is not a number. It is a veil.

Raymund V of Toulouse issued a law punishing members of the sect and their supporters with death. In 1211, Simon de Montfort's men-at-arms boasted that they had burned **many** alive and would continue to do so. Peter II of Aragon and Count of Barcelona issued an edict in 1197 expelling Waldensians and other schismatics; whoever remained after Palm Sunday of the following year was to suffer death by fire and confiscation of goods.

This was the world immediately before the formal Inquisition.

The official Church legislation was **sometimes** less severe than the civil practice, but it still moved in the same direction. Alexander III at the Lateran Council of 1179 called on secular rulers to silence disturbers of public order, if necessary by force, including imprisonment and seizure of goods. Lucius III and Emperor Frederick Barbarossa agreed at Verona that heretics were to be sought out, brought before episcopal courts, excommunicated, and given to civil power for punishment. At first, that punishment did not necessarily mean death; it often meant civil ban, exile, property loss, infamy, and exclusion from public office. But the direction was set.

Under Innocent III, the procedures expanded. The record attempts to credit him with reducing arbitrary civil cruelty by establishing more formal canonical process. But this defense still leaves the terrible reality intact: men and women were being hunted, judged, and punished for matters of faith.

Chapter 6

The Machinery of the Medieval Inquisition

During the first three decades of the thirteenth century, the Inquisition as a formal institution did not yet exist. But the ground was ready. Catharism and related sects were portrayed as aggressive threats to Christianity, the Mass, the sacraments, the hierarchy, feudal government, marriage, oaths, and social order. The record argues that these sects were so dangerous that the Inquisition seemed politically necessary. It even says that more may have died through the Catharist suicide practice called Endura than through the Inquisition itself.

This is part of the excuse-making.

It says, in effect, that repression was understandable because the heretics were dangerous. **That is exactly the problem.** Once a church justifies coercion because dissent is “dangerous,” the Gospel has been replaced by institutional force.

In France, Louis VIII decreed in 1226 that persons excommunicated by a bishop should receive “meet punishment.” Louis IX in 1249 ordered barons to deal with heretics according to duty. The Council of Toulouse in 1229 suggests that death at the stake was already understood as part of that due punishment. In **Germany**, the Sachsenspiegel, compiled around 1235, embodied execution at the stake as customary law for unbelievers. In Italy, Frederick II issued legislation against heretics in 1220 and then a rescript for Lombardy in 1224 — the first imperial law in which death by fire was clearly contemplated.

The imperial laws of 1220 and 1224 were adopted into ecclesiastical criminal law in 1231. That is where the medieval Inquisition comes into being.

The pope did not create a completely separate tribunal in the modern sense. Rather, special permanent judges were appointed to act in the pope’s name. Where they sat, there was the Inquisition. Its essence was papally authorized religious judgment over offenses against the faith.

The inquisitor was not merely a local official. He was a special judge acting in the name of the pope, clothed with the duty to proceed legally against heresy. Dominicans and Franciscans became especially prominent in this work because of their theological training and reputation. The Dominican Alberic went through Lombardy as an inquisitor in 1232. Dominican houses in Friesbach, Strasburg, Würzburg, Ratisbon, and Bremen received commissions. In 1233, Gregory IX sent instructions to bishops in Southern France and Dominican priors.

The spread was wide. In 1232, Dominicans were sent as inquisitors to **Germany** along the Rhine, to the Diocese of Tarragona in Spain, and to Lombardy. In 1233, they were sent to France, including Auxerre, Bourges, Bordeaux, Narbonne, Auch, and Burgundy. In 1235, they reached the province of Sens. By about 1255, the Inquisition was active in Toulouse, Sicily, Aragon, Lombardy, France, Burgundy, Brabant, and **Germany**.

This was no small local experiment.

It was international.

It was organized.

It was ecclesiastical.

Chapter 7

Secret Witnesses, Forced Confession, and Judicial Fear

The procedure began with a so-called term of grace, usually about a month. The inhabitants of a district were summoned to come forward. Those who confessed voluntarily could receive lighter penances, such as pilgrimages. But that grace period also functioned as intelligence gathering. People's confessions, accusations, and fears helped point inquisitors toward others.

Those accused were then cited before the judges. If they confessed fully, the matter could be resolved quickly. If they denied the charge, evidence was gathered. David of Augsburg described four ways to extract acknowledgment: fear of death, suggesting the stake awaited if confession did not come; close confinement, **sometimes** with reduced food; visits from trusted men who might persuade confession; and torture.

That list alone exposes the spirit of the system.

Fear.

Confinement.

Pressure.

Torture.

Witnesses played a central role. Legally, at least two witnesses were required, though careful judges often wanted more. But the system made a dangerous change: testimony from heretics, excommunicated persons, perjurers, and others previously considered legally infamous could now be accepted in trials concerning the faith. The reason given was that heretical groups met secretly, so only insiders could provide evidence. But this meant that the rules of evidence were bent because conviction was desired.

The names of witnesses could be withheld from the accused. This was later challenged, and Boniface VIII eventually required witnesses to be named, but the broader problem remained: there was no normal face-to-face confrontation, no cross-examination, and defense witnesses rarely appeared because they themselves risked suspicion of heresy. Legal advisers were also difficult to secure. Innocent III had forbidden lawyers and notaries from helping heretics or their supporters. Later custom relaxed **somewhat**, but the defense still had to be handled by **someone** beyond suspicion and zealous for the faith.

In other words, the accused was placed in a system where witnesses could be hidden, defense was dangerous, evidence rules were altered, and suspicion could spread to anyone who helped.

The record tries to soften this by pointing to safeguards. The accused could name personal enemies; if an accusation came from a known enemy, it could be dismissed. False witnesses could be punished severely. Inquisitors were supposed to work with bishops. Documents could be reviewed by respected advisers called *boni viri*. Thirty, fifty, eighty, or more such men could be called. They were asked to judge guilt and punishment, often without being told the name of the accused, in order to avoid personal bias.

But procedural safeguards do not redeem a persecution system. **A machine that prosecutes conscience is still a machine of tyranny**, even if it has forms, advisers, and records.

Appeals to Rome were possible, and **some** accused hoped for milder sentences. But appeal does not erase the injustice of the system itself. A man should not have to appeal to Rome to escape being tortured or burned for religious belief.

Punishments varied. The accused was often allowed to remain free until the final public sentence if he swore to appear and accept judgment. Bail or bondsmen could be required. Sometimes bondsmen swore to deliver the accused “dead or alive.” The final sentence was pronounced at the *sermo generalis*, later called the *auto-da-fé*. The charges were read, secular officials swore obedience to the inquisitor in suppressing heresy, minor punishments were announced first, and then the harshest punishments followed: perpetual imprisonment or surrender to the civil power.

Chapter 8

Torture, Prisons, and the Living Tomb

Torture deserves special attention.

Torture was not originally permitted in ecclesiastical courts. It was not authorized for inquisitorial use until twenty years after the Inquisition began. Innocent IV authorized it in the bull *Ad extirpanda* on May 15, 1252. Alexander IV confirmed it in 1259. Clement IV confirmed it in 1265. The rule supposedly limited torture so that it would not cause death, loss of limb, or danger to life. It was supposedly to be used only once, and only when the accused already seemed virtually convicted by serious evidence.

These limits were not enough, and they were not consistently honored.

Torture came to be treated as a means of extracting truth, not as punishment. But this distinction is morally obscene. A man whose body is broken to force words from his mouth is being punished, no matter what the legal category says. Eymeric himself admitted that torture was deceptive and ineffective. Yet it continued.

At first, clerics were forbidden to be present during torture. Later, inquisitors received permission to absolve one another from irregularity connected to involvement in torture. This quickly became a practical license to conduct examination in the torture chamber itself. Though torture was technically to be used only once, the rule was evaded by calling later sessions “continuations” rather than repetitions. New evidence could be used to justify fresh torture. Witnesses could be tortured. The convicted could be tortured to implicate others.

The record admits the difficulty of trusting statements that confessions were “free” when the same records **sometimes** show that confession followed the rack. It admits that torture appears rarely in trial records, but that this does not prove it was rarely used, because torture was often performed outside the courtroom by lay officials, and only the later confession appeared before the judges.

This means the record itself may conceal the scale of torture.

That is critical.

If torture was commonly omitted from the trial record because of procedural practice, then the official statistics are not a full record of suffering. **The silence is not proof of mercy.** It may be evidence of how the system hid its own violence.

The consuls of Carcassonne complained in 1286 that the inquisitor Jean Garland inflicted torture in an absolutely inhuman manner. Savonarola’s case involved torture by strappado; the official report says he endured three and a half *tratti da fune*, while another source says he was tortured seven times. Frederick II abused the rack and the Inquisition to eliminate personal enemies. The Templars were ruined through torture under Philip the Fair. At Paris, thirty-six Templars died from torture. At Sens, twenty-five died from torture. That is **sixty-one Templars dead from torture** in those two places alone.

Joan of Arc could not have been sent to the stake as a heretic and recalcitrant if her judges had not been tools of English policy. The excesses of the Spanish Inquisition were largely intensified because civil purposes overshadowed ecclesiastical ones. The horrors of witchcraft trials are likewise connected to these broader coercive systems.

The punishments considered properly inquisitorial included forced good works, building churches, visiting churches, pilgrimages, offering candles or chalices, participation in crusades, fines, whipping during religious service, the pillory, wearing colored crosses, imprisonment, excommunication, and surrender to civil power. Some punishments were later reduced or commuted because of age, sickness, poverty, or petitions for mercy. Imprisonment could become a fine; a costly pilgrimage could become a visit to a nearby shrine.

These mitigations do not erase the system. They only show that mercy **sometimes** interrupted machinery that should never have existed.

Imprisonment was called immuration. It could be temporary or lifelong. The strictest form involved close solitary confinement, **sometimes** with fasting or chains. Some prisoners were chained to walls. Members of religious orders condemned for life were imprisoned in their own convents and forbidden to speak with their brethren. The cell was **sometimes** called “In Pace.” **The phrase sounds peaceful, but the reality was horrifying.** It was the tomb of a man buried alive.

In 1330, it was considered a remarkable favor when the French king permitted a dignitary to visit imprisoned brethren twice a month to comfort them. That fact alone tells us how severe the isolation could be.

Some prison conditions were dreadful. Prisoners could be bound in stocks or chains, unable to move, forced to sleep on the ground. There was little cleanliness. Some cells had no light or ventilation. Food could be meager and poor. After inspecting the prisons at Carcassonne and Albi in 1306, papal legates dismissed the warden, removed chains from prisoners, and rescued **some** from underground dungeons. Again, the number is not given. How **many** were buried below ground? How **many** were chained? How long had they been there? How **many** died before inspection?

The missing numbers are not a minor matter.

The official language often says “some,” “several,” “many,” or “about.” Those words avoid full accounting. They leave bodies unnumbered. They leave families unnamed. If these are the admissions preserved in a Catholic-approved source, one can only imagine what remains uncounted, lost, minimized, or deliberately omitted.

Chapter 9

The Numbers They Admit and the Numbers They Hide

The mechanism of surrender to the civil power was central. Officially, the Church did not sentence the impenitent heretic to death. The formula was that the Church had no more it could do, so it left the condemned to the secular arm. But that is moral wordplay. Once the Church declared a man a heretic and handed him over under laws that required civil punishment, it knew what would follow.

Frederick II's Constitution of 1224 declared that heretics convicted by an ecclesiastical court would suffer death by fire on imperial authority. In 1233, he again decreed death. Gregory IX may be defended as not directly ordering executions, but the later system removes that excuse. Innocent IV's Ad extirpanda in 1252 instructed that those judged guilty of heresy and handed to the civil power by the bishop or Inquisition were to be taken at once by the civil magistrate, who was to execute the laws against them within five days. The same bull and Frederick's laws were to be inserted into municipal statutes under pain of excommunication.

That means civil authorities were commanded under spiritual penalty to carry out the death-bearing legal machinery.

This is not innocence.

This is organized responsibility.

The number of victims cannot be stated with approximate accuracy. That admission is itself devastating. After all the trials, sentences, prisons, confiscations, burnings, and records, the number cannot be calculated. Yet **some** statistics survive.

At Pamiers, from 1318 to 1324, twenty-four persons were convicted, and five were delivered to the civil power.

At Toulouse, from 1308 to 1323, forty-two out of nine hundred thirty were handed over to the secular arm.

The record tries to present these numbers as relatively moderate. But **five people handed over to be burned is not moderation. Forty-two people handed over to the civil arm is not mercy.** The percentage does not sanctify the principle.

At Toulouse in 1249, Count Raymund VII caused eighty confessed heretics to be burned in his presence without allowing them to recant. **Eighty people burned.**

At Montwimer in Champagne on May 29, 1239, Robert le Bougre sent about one hundred eighty persons to the flames at one time after trials that began and ended within one week. **One hundred eighty people. One week. Flames.**

Rome later found the complaints against Robert justified. He was deposed and imprisoned for life. But deposition after mass death does not erase the mass death. It proves that the inquisitorial system could produce monstrous results under its own authority.

Confiscation extended the damage beyond the accused. Once heresy was treated like treason, property could be seized. Wives, children, and families suffered. Even dead people could be tried and condemned. In Bernard Gui's six hundred thirty-six cases, eighty-eight involved dead persons. The dead could be judged, their memory condemned, and their property affected. That is not spiritual correction. That is institutional domination reaching into graves and households.

The chief areas affected by the medieval Inquisition were Central and Southern Europe. Scandinavia was spared. England saw it only in connection with the Templars. Castile and Portugal did not know it until Ferdinand and Isabella. It entered the Netherlands with Spanish domination. Northern France saw relatively little of it. But it weighed heavily on Italy, especially Lombardy; Southern France, especially Toulouse and Languedoc; Aragon; and **Germany**. Honorius IV introduced it into Sardinia. In the fifteenth century, it showed excessive zeal in Flanders and Bohemia.

Chapter 10

Spain, Rome, and the Inquisition's Continuing Shadow

The Spanish Inquisition proper began under Ferdinand and Isabella. On November 1, 1478, Sixtus IV empowered the Catholic sovereigns to establish it. On September 17, 1480, the first inquisitors were appointed for Seville: Miguel de Morillo and Juan de San Martin, both Dominicans, assisted by two secular clergy.

Abuses appeared quickly. A papal brief of January 29, 1482 blamed the inquisitors for unjustly imprisoning **many** people, subjecting them to cruel tortures, declaring them false believers, and seizing the property of the executed. Once again, "**many**" is used where a number should be.

How **many** were unjustly imprisoned?

How **many** were tortured?

How **many** were falsely condemned?

How **many** were executed?

How much property was stolen from the dead and their families?

The record does not fully say.

That silence should trouble every honest reader.

Tomás de Torquemada became the true organizer of the Spanish Inquisition. He was made grand inquisitor, and the system expanded rapidly. It spread from Seville to Cordova, Jaén, Villareal, and Toledo. By about 1538, there were nineteen courts. Later, three more were added in Spanish America: Mexico, Lima, and Cartagena.

This was not a local tribunal. It was a religious empire's enforcement network.

The Spanish Inquisition remained active into the nineteenth century. Joseph Bonaparte abolished it in 1808. Ferdinand VII restored it in 1814. Pius VII approved the restoration under certain conditions, including the abolition of torture. It was finally abolished by the Revolution of 1820.

The fact that abolition of torture had to be named as a condition tells its own story.

The Spanish Inquisition was highly centralized. At its head stood the grand inquisitor, nominated by the king and confirmed by the pope. He had authority to delegate powers, receive appeals, appoint officials, transfer inquisitors, remove them, inspect lower courts, and call them to account. A high council assisted him. Without approval of the supreme tribunal, certain major actions could not proceed. Everyone was subject to it, not excluding priests, bishops, or even the sovereign. It was more centralized than the medieval Inquisition and more influenced by the crown.

Its procedure included a term of grace of thirty to forty days. Imprisonment came when guilt had been proved or agreed upon. The accused was examined in the presence of two disinterested priests. The protocol had to be read to the accused. A lawyer handled the defense. Witnesses were sworn, though unknown to the accused. False witnesses could face severe punishment, even death. Torture, however, was used too frequently and too cruelly.

The Spanish system cannot be dismissed as purely civil. The Holy See sanctioned it. The grand inquisitor received canonical installation and religious jurisdiction. Appeals could go to Rome. Popes intervened, called cases to themselves, exempted classes of people, deposed grand inquisitors, and shaped the system. Its civil entanglement was real, but its ecclesiastical nature cannot honestly be denied.

Then came the Roman Holy Office. In response to the spread of Protestant teaching and other heterodox doctrines, Paul III established the Roman and universal Inquisition by the constitution *Licet ab initio* on July 21, 1542. This tribunal consisted at first of six cardinals. Pius IV later raised the number to eight, and Sixtus V to thirteen. It functioned as a final court of appeal in matters of faith and as a court of first instance for cases reserved to the pope. The pope presided in person when major decisions were announced. The Holy Office stood first among the Roman congregations.

Thus the inquisitorial idea did not simply vanish after the Middle Ages. It was reorganized and continued in Roman form.

Conclusion

The Faith Does Not Need Fire

The most horrifying part of this whole history is the justification. The system was repeatedly explained in terms of preserving orthodoxy, protecting society, defending religious unity, and guarding the purity of the faith. **That is an abomination.** Any institution that can justify imprisonment, torture, confiscation, and death as necessary for the purity of faith has already betrayed the faith it claims to defend.

Truth does not need the rack.

The Gospel does not need a dungeon.

Jesus Christ never commanded His disciples to torture dissenters.

Peter did not build an inquisitorial court.

Paul did not deliver heretics to be burned.

John did not teach the Church to preserve doctrine through chains and fire.

The apostles preached, warned, reasoned, rebuked, separated, and suffered.

They did not persecute.

That is the great contrast.

The Inquisition was not apostolic Christianity. It was ecclesiastical power joined to civil violence. It was the fruit of a religious institution that claimed authority over conscience and then used the machinery of state power to punish dissent.

Where the record gives numbers, the record is horrific: thirteen burned at Orléans; about thirty branded, beaten, and left to die in England; eight burned at Troyes; one burned at Nevers; **several** burned at Braisne-sur-Vesle; **many** burned at Paris; eighty burned at Toulouse; about one hundred eighty burned at Montwimer; thirty-six Templars dead from torture at Paris; twenty-five dead from torture at Sens; five handed to civil power at Pamiers; forty-two handed over at Toulouse; eighty-eight dead persons tried in Bernard Gui's records.

Where the record withholds numbers, the language is even more chilling: “many,” “some,” “several,” “a multitude.”

Those vague words hide people.

They hide names.

They hide families.

They hide cries.

They hide graves.

If the admitted numbers are this bad, what of the numbers never preserved, never counted, never confessed, or deliberately softened?

This is the question that cannot be avoided.

The Inquisition was a system of religious persecution. It was defended as necessary. It was explained as discipline. It was justified as protection of the faith. But no explanation can make torture holy. No ecclesiastical formula can make burning men righteous. No appeal to unity can justify the violation of conscience. No Church can claim to follow Christ while operating a system that contradicts the spirit of Christ.

The Inquisition stands as a permanent warning.

When a church leaves the apostolic pattern, joins itself to political power, and claims the right to enforce doctrine by coercion, it becomes capable of calling cruelty justice, calling terror discipline, and calling persecution the defense of truth.

But truth does not need terror.

And the Church of Jesus Christ was never commissioned to preserve doctrine by fire.

Epilogue

Rome's Narrative and the Blood of the Persecuted

It must also be remembered that the Catholic Church largely controlled the surviving narrative concerning **many** groups it condemned as heretical. The writings of these groups were often destroyed, suppressed, or preserved only through the accusations of their persecutors. Therefore, when Rome labels a group “Manichaean,” “Cathar,” “heretical,” or “dualistic,” that description must be weighed carefully. It may contain elements of truth, but it may also reflect polemic, exaggeration, and deliberate misrepresentation. In **many** cases, the accused were not allowed to preserve their own testimony, defend their own doctrine, or pass down their own writings. Their books were burned, their leaders were executed, their communities were scattered, and their beliefs were filtered through the pens of those who hated them. This does not prove that every persecuted group was Apostolic or Oneness, but it does prove that **Rome's record cannot be treated as an impartial account of what these people truly believed.**

The Albigensians, commonly associated with the Cathars of Southern France, were violently suppressed in the Albigensian Crusade and later by the Inquisition. Catholic sources describe them as neo-Manichaean or dualistic, but because much of what survives about them comes from hostile Catholic and inquisitorial sources, their beliefs must be examined with caution. The destruction of their writings and communities means that **Rome's version of their doctrine should not be treated as the final word without scrutiny.**

The massacre at Béziers in 1209 stands as one of the most infamous atrocities of the Albigensian Crusade. Catholic crusaders stormed the city and, according to the papal legate's own report to Pope Innocent III, spared no one, killing **nearly 20,000 people** without regard to rank, sex, or age. This was not a battle against armed soldiers only; it was the slaughter of a city. Later estimates for the broader Albigensian Crusade range dramatically, with **some** sources placing the total dead across the entire campaign **as high as one million**, though that number should be treated as a total-crusade estimate rather than a single-city figure.

The New Advent Official Online Catholic Encyclopedia article can be found here:

Full article: [Inquisition](#)