

"What are the types of capital punishment according to Jewish law?": The "Oracle," a Jewish publication, replied, "according to the Jewish law there are four kinds of execution, stoning, burning, the sword and strangling." (Carl Alpert, Boston. 1935, p. 77). Such capital punishments were inflicted in Jewry not only for blasphemy, but for Sabbath-breaking, witchcraft, idolatry, refusal to submit to the decrees of the priests or judge, and for a dozen other offenses, as well as murder.

The Catholic Church:

As far as the abuses of the Spanish Inquisition are concerned, the Catholic Church is not responsible for them. Those abuses were committed, with a few exceptions, by the civil power, and they were condemned by Popes Leo X, Paul III, Paul IV, and Sixtus IV who reigned during that period of history.

The extreme penalties during the days of the Spanish Inquisition were imposed by the state, as heresy was considered to be a crime in those days, and abuses took place on the part of the inquisitors. The Catholic Church, while divinely protected from error in defining matters of faith and morals, does not claim to be immune from acts of abuse of power on the part of some of her children, even in high places. Such an abuse on the part of officials of the Church caused Pope Leo X to excommunicate the Catholic tribunal at Toledo, and to have the witnesses who appeared before its inquisitorial trial arrested for perjury. This was during Spanish Inquisition days. But such an abuse of power was rare, as the spirit of charity dominated those historic inquiries regarding heresy. Persons called before the inquisitors who repented were released after promising to mend their ways and to do the penances enjoined, such as fasting, wearing a special penitential garb for a time, and imprisonment, which very often was in the houses of the penitents themselves. Torturing and burning were no part of the solemn religious ceremony called the Auto-da-Fe, where the penitents abjured their errors and made public recantation, by making an Act of Faith.

It is necessary to bear in mind the fact that extreme punishments meted out during the Middle Ages, such as burning at the stake, which you and I abhor, were common throughout the world at that time. They did not originate during the middle ages, having been the law before the Christian era. Such punishment did not

shock the people then any more than the people of our country are shocked at the present time by electrocution ... and at those times "heresy" was considered a worse crime than "murder", because murder kills the body, but heresy kills the soul for an eternity and it is a severe threat to kill the soul of the neighbors ...

However, the inquiries became a kind of religious intolerance and even persecution, with abuses and atrocities against the self-proclaimed Catholics who were actually heretics or fake Catholics ... but we have to put ourselves in those times: Spain was not alone in inflicting religious persecution at that time. Elizabeth I burned heretics, as did her successor James I, as did virtually every Protestant government in Europe until the middle of the seventeenth century, so, it was something not unusual at those times, but a real deplorable stain on Christianity as a whole.

Intolerance or persecution, or even any kind of discrimination, is totally opposed to Christianity, against all the principles of Jesus Christ ... and if any Christian practices them, he is a bad Christian, a truly fake Christian!

Jesus Christ never exercised any political power, and anytime Christian leaders have done politics it has been a disaster, a shameful stain on Christianity ... definitely, the mixture of Religion and Politics is a deadly poison ...

Jesus is always telling us what He told Peter:

*"Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized Him. And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest, and cut off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, **"Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and He will at once send Me more than twelve legions of angels?. But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?"...** "But Jesus said, **"No more of this!" And He touched his ear and healed him.**" (Mat.26:50-54, Lk.22:51)... Love and service and prayer were the only weapons of Jesus, and love and service and prayer should always be the only weapons of a Christian.*

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The Spanish Inquisition

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Separate from the Medieval Inquisition was the famed **Spanish Inquisition**. It was the most notorious, for three reasons:

- 1- It was more cruel precisely because it was administered by the secular government.
- 2- It was concerned, in large part, with the *conversos*. These were Jews who had converted either under duress or out of social convenience, and were suspected of secretly practicing the Jewish faith.
- 3- It has been the main target of Protestant and secular opponents of Catholicism who have fabricated — through pamphlets, "histories," plays, and even paintings — cruelties and excesses far beyond what actually occurred.

Many Protestants use the Inquisition as a handy stick to beat the Catholic Church, but they tend to forget the Protestant Inquisition.

How it started:

The Turks in 1480 attacked the south Italian city of Otranto. 12,000 people were killed, the rest made slaves. The Turks killed every cleric in the city and sawed the archbishop in two. So Queen Isabel sent a fleet to Italy. In September of 1480, when it was clear the Turks might do the same to any coastal city, King Ferdinand V and Queen Isabella established the Inquisition. It dealt with the special problem of those who pretended to become Christians, but were not really converted, and might open the gates of the city to the Turks.

During this period the West was in danger of following the fate of Constantinople and falling under the sword of Islam. Indeed Protestant and Catholic princes joined forces against the threat and at one point the Turkish armies were at the gates of Vienna. Otherwise, the modern nations of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, 16 miles away from Spain, formed part of a vast imperial system established by the Muslim Turks, a system as powerful and menacing to western Europe as the Soviet bloc was conceived to be in our day.

It was under this threat that Pope Sixtus IV authorized the Spanish Inquisition in 1478 if it should

be needed. The rulers of Spain, Isabella and Ferdinand, instituted it two years later. The specific threat that the Inquisition faced was the "conversos." Spain had been freed from Islamic control for only a few generations, after 800 years of oppression... and not completely, because Islam still ruled in Granada up to 1492.

The Spanish Inquisition was established by Ferdinand and Isabella with the reluctant approval of Sixtus IV. It was entirely controlled by the Spanish kings, and the pope's only hold over it was in naming the inquisitor general chosen by the kings. The popes were never reconciled to the institution, which they regarded as usurping a church prerogative.

The Spanish Inquisition had no authority over practicing Muslims and Jews, only over professed Christians suspected of being fakes and a threat to the country ... it remained operative in Spain into the nineteenth century. Originally called into being against secret Islam and secret Judaism, it served also to repel Protestantism in the sixteenth century, but was unable to expel French Rationalism and immorality of the eighteenth century.

It was a state institution used to identify *conversos*, mainly Muslims (Moors, Moros), and Jews (Marranos), who falsely "converted" to Christianity and secretly practiced their former religion. Its job was also, and more importantly, to clear the good name of many people who were falsely accused.

The judges were to be at least forty years old, of unimpeachable reputation, distinguished for virtue and wisdom, masters of theology, or doctors or licentiates of canon law, and they must follow the usual ecclesiastical rules and regulations.

On 17 September, 1480, Ferdinand and Isabella appointed, at first for Seville, two Dominicans as inquisitors, with two of the secular clergy assistants. Fray Tomás Torquemada was the true organizer of the Spanish Inquisition. The institution speedily ramified from Seville to Cordova, Jaen, Valladolid, Villareal, and Toledo. About 1538 there were nineteen courts, to which three were afterwards added in Spanish America (Mexico, Lima, and Cartagena). The Spanish government tried to establish the Inquisition in all its dominions; but in the Spanish Netherlands the local officials did not cooperate, and the inquisitors were chased (1510) out of Naples, apparently with the pope's connivance.

King Joseph Bonaparte abrogated it in 1808, but it was reintroduced by Ferdinand VII in 1814 and

approved by Pius VII on certain conditions, among others the abolition of torture. It was definitely abolished in 1820.

The Spanish Inquisition was much harsher, more highly organized, and far freer with the death penalty than the Medieval Inquisition ... soon no Spaniard could feel safe from it; thus, St. Ignatius of Loyola and St. Theresa of Ávila were investigated for heresy, and they were absolved!

A most important point made by the Spanish scholars is that the inquisitorial courts of the Church were both more just and more lenient than civil courts and religious courts elsewhere in Europe at the time. Prisoners in Spanish secular courts, knowing this, would sometimes blaspheme in order to be sent to the courts of the Inquisition where conditions were better.

Jews and Moors Expelled from Spain in 1492:

After Granada and the last remnant of Spanish Islam fell to the armies of Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492, policy-makers had to decide how to treat the Moors and the relatively small but influential Jewish community which had flourished in Spain. Fearful of Muslim and Jewish sympathizers in their midst, offered no compromise: Moors and Jews were expelled from Spain by the Government in 1492... and it was precisely the inability of the inquisitorial courts to check Jewish and Moors influence on the conversos that served as a decisive argument for the Monarchs in banishing Moors and Jews from Spain... a total of about 160,000 Jews were deported, including many who were not guilty of any offenses.

A main modern objection about the Spanish Inquisition is that *it brought about "a reign of terror throughout Europe" which was responsible for the impoverishment, exile, and death of countless Jews, Muslims, and "heretical" Christians. Jews were singled out for persecution because of their identity as Jews...*" however, the Spanish Inquisition exercised its authority only in Spanish Dominions, not throughout Europe, and had no authority over practicing Muslims and Jews, only over professed Christians suspected of being fakes.

The Jews and the Popes:

To properly understand this question, it is necessary to bear in mind the fact that Spain was at war for more than a half dozen centuries against the Mohammedans with whom the Jews were lined up against the Spaniards. It was a battle of the Cross against the

Crescent. This is vouched for by Graetz's "History of the Jews," the "Jewish Encyclopedia," the "Encyclopedia of Jewish Knowledge," "Vallentine's Jewish Encyclopedia," and other authorities of foremost standing in Jewry.

To understand this question, it is necessary to bear in mind the fact that the popes were the protectors of the Jews, and not their enemies. Rome was a haven of refuge for the persecuted Jews when the Eternal City was ruled by the popes, to which many of the Jews driven out of Spain migrated. You need not take my word regarding the friendliness of the popes, as it is confirmed by Dr. Cecil Roth of London, Jewry's leading present-day historian on the middle ages. He said a few years ago, while addressing the Zionist Forum in Buffalo, NY:

"Only in Rome has the colony of Jews continued its existence since before the beginning of the Christian era, because of all the dynasties of Europe, the Papacy not only refused to persecute the Jews of Rome and Italy, but throughout the ages, popes were protectors of the Jews.

"Some Jews have the feeling that the Papacy has a policy of persecuting Jews. But you must remember that English history is definitely anti-Catholic and your views of Catholicism may have been colored by English history. We Jews who have suffered so much from prejudices, should rid our minds of prejudices and learn the facts. The truth is that the popes and the Catholic Church from the earliest days of the Church were never responsible for physical persecution of Jews and only Rome, among the capitals of the world, is free from having been a place of Jewish tragedy. For this we Jews must have gratitude" (Feb. 25th, 1927).

Otherwise, it is necessary to bear in mind the fact that Jewry inflicted the same sort of severe punishments long before the Christian era:

In the Book of Judges, this was the attitude against the heretics of that time: *"They took the city. Then they utterly destroyed all in the city, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and asses, with the edge of the sword."* (Joshua 6:21-22, 24, 10:28, 30, 32, 35, 37, 39).

Blasphemy was rightly considered to be a major offense, being directed against Almighty God. It is for that offense, falsely charged, that the Sanhedrin, under the direction of the high priests, declared Jesus to be worthy of death, for claiming to be the Messiah (Mt.26:63-67).