



## **The Inquisition – Part Two**

...There were groups of Christians who said that such people (those who had gone against their faith during the great persecutions) could not be accepted back into the community of the Church, especially if they were clergy. If they are clergy then their ordinations, their Sacraments were all invalid because they apostatized. They thought the clergy could not repent or if they did want to repent could only do so on their deathbed.

The Church didn't accept this practice and so a schism grew up between those who professed to be the inheritor's of the martyrs and those who are the Catholics who accepted the repentance of those fallen people even if they were clergy. This schism went on for a long time. They had the same liturgy, the same beliefs, everything the same but there was this schism.

St. Augustine engaged in all kinds of debates and many of those debates were with the Donatist bishops. Almost every city had a Donatist church and a Catholic church. They had the same Mass; the same everything. St. Augustine said that in his opinion that many of the Donatists were ordinary, good people. He said they believed the Christian faith but were misled by their leaders, and at that time in the Roman Empire the idea of religion having nothing to do with the state was completely foreign to everyone. There was no notion of no state interest in religion. It was a matter of public good and public order. So St. Augustine changes his opinion based on the Gospel story where after the invited refuse to come in to the wedding feast and finally the master says go out on the highways and byways and compel them to come in. This great Saint of the Church supported the emperor's decision to simply suppress all the Donatist churches so as to say that from now on they are Catholic. He allowed Donatist clergy to become Catholic or they could retire with a pension. There it is. What happened? After this decision the schism was over quickly because it involved masses of people who simply didn't care about the reasons and were only going to these Donatist churches out of habit. This was the sense St. Augustine and it is a historical fact.

In the high Middle Ages we get a particularly noxious heresy in southern France called the Albigensians or the Cathari. This was not your ordinary difference of religious opinion. These were people who (and they were really successful at it) taught that there were two gods, one good and one evil. One created the world of the spirit, and an evil god the material world, including the human body, which is under its control. They advocated suicide and abstaining from marriage. They also taught that matter (material things or physical things) were evil and only spirit was good. This is very similar to some New Age ideas people have today. This meant that if you took the question of marriage and family life into account or sexual morality that this type of thing was looked at as evil. They said it would be better to have no physical relationship with anyone, no sexual activity whatsoever! Why? It was to be avoided because that activity was most of all to be avoided because it would result in the propagation of more bodies, more matter and more physicality. You can imagine what effects this would have on the surrounding society. Nowadays you don't have to imagine it! So this is a matter which required (for their time) very strong measures. Let me make this crystal clear at the outset. We are not in any way suggesting that the measures adopted at that time would be appropriate now. Remember the Church's understanding, which is that the supreme law is the salvation of souls. You have to meet people where they are. You have to take into account their moral culpability and their moral formation and all of that. You cannot treat as criminal's persons who have simply been misled. However, if you were on the opening end of such a battle and it flared up all at once then all of sudden you might have a different attitude and a different approach, especially if you believed that this was going to lead people not just to earthly misery but eternal misery.

We live in very different times and the Church's interest is not to insist on a golden age when we did things a certain way and we just can't do those things any more. That would be silliness because Divine Providence arranges all things strongly and sweetly. Our age has its own positive points for the salvation of souls including more aspects which we might call liberal and their age had certain positive points; the salvation of souls. I am not evaluating the means but pointing out that in the situation as it was, the action taken was perfectly understandable. The leaders of the sect were sought out successfully and punished. As a result the heresy ended and it was a very dangerous heresy at that. Part 3 next week.