



...cont'd from last week. Part IV

After the decree of Pope Innocent IV in 1252, the Inquisition was allowed to use torture. Roman law allowed torture. The European tradition is principally Roman law. It allowed torture of persons who were regarded as certainly guilty. This is something our tradition doesn't permit. Or does it? In the middle ages they use to torture people because they were convicted of heresy. Now, one can say, "Well, I think you should be willing to fight for freedom," but it's not right; we are fighting so people will be free to profess whatever religion they want. What if this religion contradicts our notion of freedom? Then where are we? It's an interesting question. Shouldn't freedom of speech stop with those who would take away that freedom and would outlaw it?

The point is that Catholics have to think of what Our Lord said in the Sacred Scriptures about not fussing with the spec in your neighbor's eye and ignore the beam in your own eye. Societies can do that too! It's very easy to blame people who lived hundreds of years ago and imagine evils they committed and the wild tortures that are depicted in books. The torture was also partly a punishment. There were days in society when crimes were punished by public shame. You could be put into a stock or you could be flogged. In those days the monastic rule of St. Benedict and St. Augustine allowed the Abbot to have confreres flogged. The long version of St. Augustine's rule not the short version. It was a society in which physical integrity was not as big an issue as it is in ours. Shame is something our society doesn't have much of these days.

We need to examine the assumptions made because the real reason why people go on and on about the Inquisition is because they do not accept the fact that there are societies that hold to different standards of what constitutes the common good of their society than we do now, especially if that standard is the Christian faith. Not only that but the Protestants had their own Inquisition. They executed each other and Catholics as well. Everybody did this because everybody assumed religion was the most important aspect of civil and social life till it got to the point where it was destroying Europe, and where the reaction, the liberal reaction, was in a certain genuine sense, understandable. People wanted to stop this constant fighting over religious matters and they resolved it in various ways, not always without the view to the good of the people who were living in the countries where they were.

So, they were imprisoned and maybe tortured. They would admit their crime, "Yes, I'm a heretic and I'm sorry." What happened then? At the end of the Inquisition in the town there is a final gathering called a "general sermon" or called the "act of faith." It was mostly a liturgical thing. There was a procession, a Mass, a sermon and then the sentences were read out. What were the sentences? It could be the confiscation of goods or imprisonment or the famous handing over to the secular arm, which meant that you were executed. Yes, it happened. Yes, they did it. How many were executed? This is a very important question depending on the sources that you read. I use a very reputable Protestant source as this way no one can make the argument that I am using biased facts. They say in the case of **Tomás de Torquemada** of the Spanish Inquisition (which is a different matter from the other Inquisition) that in his whole career maybe 2,000 were executed at the most. Sometimes there are quotes of 40, 60, 80 or 100,000 people executed. Some even say a million. During the 400 years of the Spanish Inquisition they say possibly 30,000 were executed. That's a high number and I am NOT making light of that in the least! It was terrible. They say 30,000 were burned alive. But let's not forget Dresden, where 60,000 people were killed in one night during WWII. Let's not forget Hiroshima and Nagasaki where in an instant, 150,000 people were killed. For what, so that Stalin could invade Eastern Europe? So we could start another war, a cold war? And then after that come up with something else to do? Let's look at our own civilization before we evaluate others.

The Spanish Inquisition was another matter. It was founded by the Spanish state by Ferdinand and Isabella in 1479 with the Pope's approval. What was it? Today we would call it post-war reprisals. The Moors were being driven out but still there were plenty of people who were collaborators with them. The predominant numbers of collaborators were very many people who were of Muslim background and Jewish background that converted openly to Christianity but did not practice Christianity. When they were found they were taken to jail and they were not treated nicely. It was the mentality of the reconquest of Spain. They were accused, tried and that is the birth of the Spanish Inquisition which lasted till 1808.

There was a grand inquisitor appointed by the King, a counsel and this Inquisition was in constant conflict with the Holy See because the Spanish Inquisition was run by the state and its measures were harsher on the whole and they were always escaping the directives of the Holy See. Even Pope St. Pius V, who was an Inquisitor himself before he was Pope, had great reservations about the conduct of the Spanish Inquisition. This is a fact of history similar to some modern facts. Finally, in 1542, the Pope established a Roman Office to try and organize everything so things would not get out of hand, especially given the existence of the Spanish territory abroad. So this is food for thought. Many Saints are associated with the Inquisition. But it's a word you can hardly say without being slightly embarrassed because it sounds so awful. There it is. God bless you. Phillip Bellini