

# **Historical Misconceptions of the Catholic Church**

## **Catholic Truth League- 2/20/2015**

### **The Crusades:**

#### **What were the Crusades?**

A Crusade is an international military effort, supported by the Church, where soldiers promise to fight to reclaim a certain place, usually the Holy Land, from non-Catholics (usually Muslims, but occasionally pagans or heretics). When speaking of "The Crusades", one most commonly refers to the 8 crusades that took place during the 11th through 13th century, which, indeed, had the purpose of reclaiming the Holy Land.

#### **How successful were the Crusades?**

The First Crusade was extremely successful. Despite extremely long odds, the Crusaders were able to win a series of extraordinary victories, taking Jerusalem and establishing a series of kingdoms stretching from what is now the Syria-Turkey border to what is now the Egypt-Israel border. However, future Crusades in the Holy Lands were generally unsuccessful, and the Crusader kingdoms were gradually destroyed by 1291.

#### **Were the Crusades an attempt at forcing people to convert to Christianity?**

They were not. The Christian rulers of the kingdoms were never numerous to force their beliefs on the people there. The only major efforts at conversion in the Holy Land were made in the 13th century, when it was already in decline, by the Franciscans, and these were peaceful.

#### **Were there atrocities committed by the Crusaders?**

Crusader armies were often extremely brutal in taking cities, killing innocent people and destroying and looting buildings. This was most infamously done when Jerusalem was taken in 1099. While this behavior is morally inexcusable, it should be remembered that this was in keeping with the laws of war of the time, which permitted the sack of besieged cities that refused to surrender. Cruelty and unjust actions have been sadly common in wars throughout history, by soldiers fighting for causes both good and bad.

#### **Did Crusaders attack the Jews? How did the Church respond to this?**

During the first parts of each of the first few Crusades, some bands of soldiers going off to Crusade did first go and attack Jewish communities in Europe. While this behavior was usually incited by some Anti-Semitic preachers, it was consistently opposed and condemned by the Papacy and the vast majority of the Bishops at the time.

### **The Inquisitions**

#### **What were the inquisitions?**

The original inquisition was an ecclesiastical tribunal established by Pope Gregory IX *circa* 1232 for the suppression of heresy. The original Inquisition of the 12th Century concerned the Catharists who blended Gnosticism with Manichaeism and believed in two gods. The Spanish inquisition was an inquisition established by in 1478 by King Ferdinand II of Aragon and Queen Isabella I to weed-out any remaining traitor heretics due to the fact that by the middle ages, the subjects of Portugal and Spain were often Muslim or Jewish, and the re-conquering of those lands created a clash between these subjects and the Crown as well as the Church. The French Inquisition began in 1184, and the Roman Inquisition began in the second half of the 1500's.

#### **Why did the Spanish monarchs want an inquisition in the first place?**

Spain in the late 1300's was home to a very large Jewish population, and in 1391, anti-Jewish riots broke out, leading to lots of conversion to Christianity. Unfortunately, a lot of these new converts, or conversos, were still looked down on by "old" Christians, and there was jealousy because the conversos tended to have more monetary success than the original Christians. Because many of the likelihood that many of the conversions were forced, there was increased suspicion that many of the conversos were actually still-practicing Jews. Therefore, the Spanish monarchs established the inquisition to prosecute the "heresy"

of the alleged secret practice of the Jewish faith by Catholic *conversos* of Jewish heritage and, later, the Islamic faith by similar converts from Islam.

**How did the Spanish Inquisition function?** In many ways, much as inquisitions functioned elsewhere. An inquisition was announced in a community, and an "edict of grace" allowed for self-confessing offenses without serious penalties. By the sixteenth century, inquisition trials were usually not public, and evidence was collected before the trial itself. If sufficient proof existed, the person in question was arrested. Since evidence was gathered in advance, the trial was not considered a means to determine guilt or innocence. Rather, the trial was meant to solicit confession and conversion.

**Did the Inquisition torture people?**

Torture was used to gain information or confession but not for punishment. It was never conducted by clergy but by paid professionals representing the secular authorities.

The accused was usually given three opportunities to admit to wrongs. They were given a penance at the end of this church trial, and the crime was not usually heresy—[it was] blasphemy, adultery, etc. If they (*conversos*) were unrepentant, the guilty were turned over to the secular authorities and burned at the stake. It should be noted that after the bitter persecution of the *conversos* in the first two decades of the Spanish Inquisition, very few were actually executed.

**How many people died?**

During the 350 years of the Spanish Inquisition, between 3,000-5,000 people were sentenced to death (about 1 per month). The Church did NOT execute anyone!!!

**Did the Inquisitions go after Jews and Muslims?**

No. The original inquisitions were meant to clear up heresy from WITHIN the Church, not from outside. Often it was people who had converted to Christianity from Judaism or Islam, and were under suspicion for whether or not they had become fully committed to Christianity.

## **Galileo:**

**What was the issue between Galileo and the Catholic Church?**

Galileo attempted to claim that his view of a heliocentric universe, meaning having or representing the sun as the center of the universe, was correct, which the Church did not agree with. The main issue the Church had with his claim is that he moved further away from proposing a scientific theory and attempted to claim it as full, physical truth.

**Was Galileo tortured for his beliefs?**

No. In the end, Galileo recanted his heliocentric teachings, but it was not—as is commonly supposed—under torture nor after a harsh imprisonment. Galileo was, in fact, treated surprisingly well. Galileo's friend Nicolini, Tuscan ambassador to the Vatican, sent regular reports to the court regarding affairs in Rome. Many of his letters dealt with the ongoing controversy surrounding Galileo. Nicolini revealed the circumstances surrounding Galileo's "imprisonment" when he reported to the Tuscan king: "The pope told me that he had shown Galileo a favor never accorded to another" (letter dated Feb. 13, 1633); ". . . he has a servant and every convenience" (letter, April 16); and "[i]n regard to the person of Galileo, he ought to be imprisoned for some time because he disobeyed the orders of 1616, but the pope says that after the publication of the sentence he will consider with me as to what can be done to afflict him as little as possible" (letter, June 18)

**Does Galileo's conviction and rehabilitation reduce papal infallibility?**

No, for the pope never attempted to make an infallible ruling concerning Galileo's teaching. Three conditions must be met for a pope to exercise the charism of infallibility: (1) he must speak in his official capacity as the successor of Peter; (2) he must speak on a matter of faith or morals; and (3) he must solemnly define the doctrine as one that must be held by all the faithful.

In Galileo's case, the second and third conditions were not present, and possibly not even the first.

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### Crusades:

#### **Why was the First Crusade called?**

For centuries, there had been near-constant fighting along the borders of the Christian and Islamic worlds since the initial rise of Islam and its conquest of the Middle East. As the Turks expanded by taking over the Holy Land, the Byzantines lost land and the Turks adopted a much more intolerant policy towards Christians. The Byzantine Empire then sent several petitions to the Pope, asking for help in fighting the Turks. Rome had been looking for a way that the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church could reconcile and saw this as a key opportunity for reconciliation. As a result, in 1095, Pope Urban called a council where he announced that he wanted the people of Christendom to come together and form an army that would take the Holy Land from the Turks and several goals for the expedition were established. Those goals included protecting pilgrims to the Holy Land by establishing Christian control of the area and protecting the Byzantine Empire from Turkish expansion by defeating the Turks in the Holy Land. Other goals sought by expedition included bringing greater unity to the Christian kingdoms and fiefdoms of Western Europe and limit the constant wars between the nobles there, and improve relations with the Byzantine Empire and bring about reconciliation between the Eastern and Western Churches.

#### **Why did the Fourth Crusade attack Constantinople, if it was a Christian city?**

The Fourth Crusade started as another attempt to retake the Holy Land from the Turks. However, it got caught in a web of political maneuvers and machinations, resulting in one history's greatest tragedies. The Crusade was called by Pope Innocent III in 1198 and a large number of French knights responded by 1201. However, the Crusade began to go wrong as the Pope lost control of it. The French knights decided to attack through Egypt rather than the crusader kingdoms, and signed a deal with the Venetians for ships. However, they discovered they had less soldiers than initially anticipated, so they had rented too many ships for them to pay for. The Venetians agreed to forgive the debt only if the Crusaders would capture the city of Zarna, a political rival, for them, which they did in 1202. When he heard they had attacked a Christian city, the Pope excommunicated the entire crusade. After this, the Crusaders were asked to restore the imprisoned Byzantine emperor Isaac II and his son Alexius IV to power over the usurper Alexius III, in return for a huge pile of money (and an obviously unfulfillable claim to return the Eastern Church to Rome). Despite the objection of the Pope, they agreed to this plan and besieged the city. Alexius III fled, and Alexius IV and Isaac II took power as co-emperors. However, they were unable to pay the full ransom, and the Crusaders were stuck hanging around town waiting for it, with escalating tensions between them and the locals breaking into fights. This led Alexius IV to be deposed by his chamberlain, Alexius V (there are far too many Emperor Alexius's in this story), who had Alexius IV and Isaac murdered and refused to pay the Crusaders. Frustrated by all of this, the Crusaders attacked the city and sacked it, destroying many beautiful and historical buildings and looting relics from many churches. The Venetians used this opportunity to seize territory from the Byzantines, and a temporary government was put in place in Constantinople, but the remnants of the old imperial government came together and quickly overthrew it. By this point, the Pope had entirely given up on the crusaders and was working to organize a new Crusade in their place.

Because the crusaders listened to political leaders intent on using them for gain rather than the exhortations of the Pope to do their duty, the Fourth Crusade ended in one of the greatest tragedies in the history of Christendom. The damage done by the sack of Constantinople and the political instability greatly weakened the Empire, which never really recovered. In addition, bitterness over the sack greatly increased Eastern hatred and mistrust of the Catholic Church up until today, sabotaging the efforts at reconciliation that were one of the initial reasons for the Crusades.

#### Inquisitions:

##### **What was “auto-da-fe”?**

This is the term for the public act of faith performed by those who were determined to be guilty following the inquisition trial. Mass, readings, prayer and procession were involved, usually in the public square with the intention of reconciling the guilty with the Church.

##### **What were the other Inquisitions?**

There was a Roman Inquisition and a Portuguese Inquisition.

##### **What was the Roman Inquisition?**

Like other iterations of the Inquisition, the Roman Inquisition was responsible for prosecuting individuals accused of committing offences *relating to heresy, including Protestantism, sorcery, immorality, blasphemy, Judaizing and witchcraft, as well as for censorship of printed literature.*

The tribunals of the Roman Inquisition covered most of the Italian peninsula as well as Malta and also existed in isolated pockets of papal jurisdiction in other parts of Europe, including Avignon in France. The Roman Inquisition, though, was considerably more bureaucratic and focussed on pre-emptive control in addition to the reactive judicial prosecution experienced under other iterations.

While the Roman Inquisition was originally designed to combat the spread of Protestantism in Italy, the institution outlived that original purpose and the system of tribunals lasted until the mid 18th century, when pre-unification Italian states began to suppress the local inquisitions, effectively eliminating the power of the church to prosecute heretical crimes.

The Roman Inquisition's most notable subject was Galileo.

##### **What was the Portuguese Inquisition?**

The major target of the Portuguese Inquisition were those who had converted from Judaism to Catholicism, the Conversos, also known as New Christians or Marranos, who were suspected of secretly practising Judaism. Many of these were originally Spanish Jews, who had left Spain for Portugal.