The Inquisition

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The primary author is the individual who drafted the first version of this section; a section that could have been modified since it was originally published.

Ties between Church and State

In the 12th century faith was a determining factor of conduct. It was believed that a Christian could not hope for salvation unless they were an obedient son of the Church, including the ability to readily take up arms in its defense (Lea, 1). This placed a significant amount of power behind the Inquisition. The Pope being absolute authority in this time (with Bishops being almost as equally powerful) handing down decrees for the ministers to enforce among the people.

During the 12th Century, Kings had a very influential power as well through The Divine Right of Kings. This asserts that Kings derive their authority from God, and could not be held accountable for their actions by any earthly authority. Because kings were put into their positions by God, to go against the King would also be to go against God. With both church and state working for God, the Pope and monarchies became very interrelated with everyday life.

The Problem of Heresy

The purpose of the Inquisition was to suppress heresy, and keep the people close with the church. Heresy was considered to be any opinion or faith not in line with, or questioning, the Roman Catholic Church. Another goal of the Inquisition was to seek out these heretics and either convert them back to the church, or to repress them of their rights. This meant confiscating property and assets to be given to the Catholic Treasury.

Lea describes the real danger to the church as being the obscure man, laboring among the poor and oppressed, who in their misery had felt that the church had failed in its mission. It was among these poor and oppressed men that ready and eager listeners were found, and heresy could easily spread. Among the poor and oppressed were two types of men; One holding fast to all beliefs and teachings of Christianity, and the other being Manichaean. (Lea, 61) The main concert were the men who were Manichaean, and could easily be lead astray from the Roman Catholic Church.
Heretics: Manichaean, Albegensians (Cathars), and Waldensians

Manichaeism was a dualistic religious movement that taught life in this world was painful and radically evil. It also taught that the soul has fallen into the "evil world of matter and must be saved by means of the spirit or intelligence." In Manichaeism, knowledge is the only way to salvation, to truly know yourself was the goal. In this belief all forms of indulgence were frowned upon and avoided.

The Cathari (Cathars), formed their religion based off of Manichaeism, sharing a lot of the same traditions such as the sacred thread and garment worn by the "perfect" (Lea, 92). Another name for the Cathari was Albegensians, coming from the town of Albi in a region of Southern France known as the Languedoc. The Cathari and Albegensians were considered to be heretics because of their many opposing views and beliefs with the Catholic Church. The Sacraments, sacrifices of the altar, the suffrages and interposition of the Virgin and saints, purgatory, relics, images, crosses, holy water, indulgences, and other devices by which the priest procured salvation for the faithful were rejected, as well as the tithes for the Catholic Church (Lea, 93). This made them a very big target for the Inquisition, as their religion entirely rejected the machinery of the Catholic Church. According to Cathari and Albegensian beliefs salvation was essentially impossible in the Catholic Church.

The Waldensians were founded by Peter Waldo a wealthy merchant of Lyons. He was a model Christian who gave everything he had away and dedicated his life to preaching the bible. He and his followers were referred to as the "Poor Men of Lyons". These men were considered to be heretics because they taught and would preach the bible outside the control of the clergy, and were accused of teaching errors. The Catholic Church did not want the people to be reading and teaching the Bible to prevent it from being misinterpreted.

The Papal Inquisition 1233 (Southern France and Northern Italy)

In 1209 Pope Innocent III launched a crusade against the heretics in Southern France, the Waldenses and Albegensians (Smithsonian, 141). Once this crusade against heretics was over, the church still wanted to seek out any heresy that could remain among the people. It was the bishops responsibility to seek out and investigate any heresy. In 1231 Pope Gregory IX established the Papal Inquisition, putting special inquisitors in charge. In 1233 the Dominicans were charged with bringing the Inquisition to the Languedoc where Cathar heresy was still present (Smithsonian, 142). At this time the inquisition was an especially powerful institution, those who would disagree with the trials would then themselves be put on trial. Kings were no exception, and would lead crusades to help gain holy land and fight against heresy. All resources of the state were to be placed at the disposal of the Inquisition, with an oath of obedience. Refusal to take this oath would be punishable by excommunication, leading to prosecution of heresy, and humiliating penance on submission (Lea, 385). The state would bring in heretics for questioning, the Inquisitors would run the trials and determine if they were guilty, then it was the states job to punish the guilty heretics.
The trials would begin by a person being brought to attention for rumors of heresy. Vague rumors were all it took for a man, woman, or child to be put on trial. Once on trial you were not allowed to have a defense lawyer, or to even know who it was that brought your name to trial. One would only need two witnesses to testify against a defendant to find them guilty of heresy. Torture was also used to try and get the defendant to confess to their crimes against the church. People were persuaded to confess all they knew of other heretics to lessen their own punishment. In fear, defendants would point the finger at their loved ones including other family members and friends. Although the most popular form of punishment was to burn heretics at the stake, other punishment would include fines to the church, imprisonment, confiscated property, and exile. Photo Credit: © 2012, Spanish Wars

**Spanish Inquisition (1478-1834)**

In 1478 The Spanish Inquisition was put into place by Pope Sixtus IV. This Inquisition is considered more driven by crown than driven by the Pope in the sense that one of the main goals of this Inquisition was to unify Spain, both politically and religiously (Vidmar 84). In the 13th Century, Spain was divided into Aragon, Castile (Castilla), and Grenada. To start the unification, Ferdinand of Aragon married Isabella of Castile to bring their lands together in 1469. In 1479 Ferdinand became king, and Isabella queen. A year later the Pope granted the King and Queen to appoint an inquisitorial board, officially starting the Spanish Inquisition.

Two main differences between the Spanish Inquisition and Papal Inquisition is that the Pope did not chose the inquisitors, the King and Queen did. Also with the Spanish Inquisition, the government funded it instead of the Pope, and the government received the wealth from what was confiscated of heretics.

Ferdinand and Isabella turned their attention towards Granada next, where most of the Muslim and Jewish population had settled in Spain (although Protestants and Lutherans were also targeted later on). After Granada Fell to Christians in 1492, Isabella and Ferdinand decreed that Muslims and Jewish inhabitants had to convert to Christianity or leave (Vidmar 84). The Inquisitors were to seek out any Jewish and Muslim converts who were secretly continuing Jewish and Muslim practice and rituals.

In the Beginning years of this inquisition there were many deaths, but as the inquisition became more organized the number of victims fell dramatically. After 1540 the Inquisition executed very few people (Vidmar 89). The Spanish Inquisition became one of the most highly organized agencies on record, and remained intact for 356 years, when Queen Mother Cristina announced it was over in 1834.
For Further Reading


