



Christianity starts its 1,500 years of Persecution

With many Christians in the US feeling persecuted or claiming to be the victims of religious persecution, when a coffee cup does not contain some of their religion's symbolism or when they're prevented to discriminate against people, it seems appropriate to look at what religious persecution really is and the long, systematic and brutal persecution waged by Christianity for almost 1,500 years. For this reason our Historic Moment under the spotlight is the year 385, when Christianity started its persecution of heretics, pagans, "witches", blasphemers, gays and later even scientists.

A critical pre-cursor to this Historic Moment is another one we covered earlier. In 380 Emperor Theodosius I declared Christianity the official and compulsory religion of the Roman Empire, and outlawed heresy with the Edict of Thessalonica. This provided Christianity unfettered political power, which they did not hesitate to use. See our CSF "Historic Moments" article for full details here:

<https://thecsf.xyz/christianity-becomes-the-official-religion-of-the-roman-empire/>

It is noteworthy that a mere 72 years after Christianity was legalized in the Roman Empire by Constantine with the Edict of Milan, and a mere 5 years after they became the Official Religion of the Roman Empire, Christianity started its persecution. They executed the first Christian heretics, which turned out to be the first of many, in 385 [1]. Priscillian was born circa 340 into a noble Spanish family. He was well-educated, became a devoted Christian who advocated ascetism to be closer to Christ (which included celibacy and not consuming meat or wine). He gained quite a following in Spain, Portugal and France, and became the Bishop of Avila in 380.

Emperor Maximus called the Council of Bordigala in 384 to try Priscillian. He was condemned as a heretic at this council and handed over to civil authorities for execution. In 385 Priscillian of Avila and 6 of his followers were beheaded for the criminal offense of "sorcery" [2]. "This was the first instance of the execution of Christians by the Church, an example to be followed afterwards with such terrible frequency" [2]. To this I would add that it was also the first example of a key clause in the Edict of Thessalonica of 380 being applied "They will suffer in the first place the chastisement of the divine condemnation and in the second the punishment of our authority which in accordance with the will of Heaven we shall decide to inflict" [3]. It also shows how inseparable Church and State already were so shortly after 380.

Persecution became more common with time and was later formalised into several Inquisitions, which led to a sharp increase in torture and executions [4]:

- The Medieval Inquisition formalised by Pope Lucius III in 1184
- A major development was Pope Innocent III's decree in 1199 that heresy was "high treason against God" [5]. This caused heresy to become the major reason for executions by far. It also shows how intertwined church and state was, as well as the political power of the RCC.
- The Spanish Inquisition approved by Pope Sixtus IV in 1478. It was the most notoriously brutal of all the Inquisitions and was not abolished until 1834

- The last known execution by them took place in 1826, only 196 years ago and 1,441 years after Priscillian of Avila was beheaded [6]
- A Spanish school teacher in Valencia (Cayetano Ripoll) was a member of the Roman Catholic Church who believed in their god, but not in the divinity of Christ. He essentially became a deist, much like many of the Founding Fathers of the US, a few decades earlier. The Spanish Inquisition appointed a Board of Faith in Valencia which found him guilty of heresy and convicted him to be burnt at the stake on 30 March 1826. They then handed him over to a civil court, which reviewed his case without letting him testify. They executed him by hanging on 27 July 1826, instead of burning him at the stake. The Archbishop of Spain congratulated the Board of Faith on their good work. [7]
- Cayetano Ripoll was to some extent a contemporary of some of the US Founding Fathers. He was executed in July 1826, the same month Thomas Jefferson and John Adams died.
- The Portuguese Inquisition established in 1536
- The Roman Inquisition established by Pope Paul II in 1542. It imprisoned Galileo Galilei in 1633 and still exists to this day but has been renamed "The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith"
- Church and State worked hand in glove with these persecutions, with all State officials being Christians. Although the RCC later issued some rules which tried to prevent priests from participating in torture chambers and to force them to hand over heretics convicted in ecclesiastical courts to civil courts for execution, "the hands of the medieval Church were well and truly bloodied" [8].



After the Reformation, the Protestant Churches in Europe also took a strong line against protestant heretics, and were especially active in witch trials, based on Exodus 22 and their strong dogmatic focus on the Bible as the inerrant word of their god. Academic estimates put the executions of "witches" from 1450-1750 to over 50,000, with a climax reached in protestant Germany in the 17th century [9].

There are many reliable sources outlining the brutal execution methods used throughout the Middle Ages: burning people alive, boiling people alive, disembowelment, "quartering" using 4 wild horses, crucifixion, crushing people to death, decapitation, impalement, etc. [10][11]. These executions were designed to inflict as much pain, suffering and humiliation as possible, and were worse than anything we currently witness in Saudi Arabia or even from ISIS.

The torture devices and torture manuals they used for centuries were official and systematic, and every bit as gruesome and included “sawing” (hanging people upside down and sawing them in half), tearing off limbs, specialized crushers (for legs, knees, feet, thumbs, hands, heads), the Pear of Anguish to internally mutilate women (used to insert into the vagina, the anus or mouth), breast rippers, “rocking horses”, the Iron Chair, the Breaking Wheel, flesh rippers, tongue rippers, water torture, coffin torture, branding irons, the Barrel Pillory, the Heretic’s Fork, the Judas Cradle, the Brazen Bull, the Rack, the Spanish Donkey, etc. [12][13][14].

“As many historians have noted, the most vicious procedures in Medieval times were inflicted on devout Christians by even more devout Christians” [15]. They did not have a problem with non-believers or criminals burning people alive in the Middle Ages. It took the Christian Church and the Bible to achieve that. They consistently used explicit Bible commands and Biblical arguments to justify their torture and executions:

“Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live” (Ex 22:18)

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- “If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They are to be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.” (Lev 20:13)
- “If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.” (Lev 20:10)
- “If your brother, the son of your mother, or your son or your daughter or the wife you embrace or your friend who is as your own soul entices you secretly, saying, ‘Let us go and serve other gods,’ which neither you nor your fathers have known, some of the gods of the peoples who are around you, whether near you or far off from you, from the one end of the earth to the other, you shall not yield to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him, nor shall you conceal him. But you shall kill him. Your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. You shall stone him to death with stones, because he sought to draw you away from the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Deut 13: 6 - 10)

We witnessed real, violent religious persecution by Christianity, based on Biblical commands, from 385 to 1826.

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The next Historic Moments article:

The Trinity Dogma Finally Emerges (scheduled for 2 Sep 2022)

Sources:

[1] “In the name of God” by Michael Jordan (p188)

[2] “The Pilgrim Church” by E.H. Broadbent (350 - 385)

[3] [J. B. Bury: History of the Later Roman Empire • Vol. 1 Chap. XI](#)

[4] “Inquisition” (New World Encyclopedia)

Link: <https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/inquisition>

[5] “In the name of God” by Michael Jordan (p193)

[6] “Inquisition” (17 Nov 2017 on History.com)

Link: <https://www.history.com/topics/religion/inquisition>

[7] <https://historyofyesterday.com/teacher-was-last-person-executed-in-spanish-inquisition-a79e8831478>

[8] "In the name of God" by Michael Jordan (p202)

[9] "THE MEDIEVAL INQUISITION, ORGANIZED TORTURE AND TERROR AS OFFICIAL CHURCH POLICY" (on the World Future Fund website)

[10] <http://www.medieval-life-and-times.info/medieval-torture-and-punishment/execution-methods.htm>

[11] <https://infamost.com/medieval-crimes-and-punishments-list/>

[12] <https://www.medievalwarfare.info/torture.htm>

[13] "The Grand Inquisitor's Manual: A History of Terror in the Name of God" by Jonathan Kirsch

[14] Vose, Robin. "I. Inquisitorial Manuals." *Hesburgh Libraries of Notre Dame, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections*. University of Notre Dame, 2010

Link:

<https://inquisition.library.nd.edu/genre-inquisition-manuals-introduction>

[15] <https://www.medievalwarfare.info/torture.htm> (first page)

