

The Word of Righteousness

The Overcomers in the Seven Churches (7)

The seven epistles in Revelation 2 and 3 were written to churches existing in Asia Minor at the time of the apostle John. All were established by the work of the New Testament ministry according to the teaching of the apostles. Each was the same in their intrinsic nature as golden lampstands, the testimony of Jesus, and local expressions of the universal Body of Christ, composed of genuine, redeemed, and regenerated believers (1:12, 20, 2). However, each one manifested a particular need and, in most cases, shortcomings, as revealed by the shepherding Christ and the speaking Spirit. Moreover, because Revelation is a book of signs with a prophetic nature (v. 1; 12:1; 15:1), each church signifies a successive stage of the church in its historical development. In this principle, the church in Thyatira, prefiguring the Roman Catholic Church from the full establishment of the papal system in the latter part of the sixth century to the end of this age when the Lord returns, is the continuing focus of this article.

Thyatira Prefigured by Jezebel and the Vineyard of Naboth

Although an untold number of true believers can be found in this historical church, it was corrupted by an evil, apostate system, signified in 2:20 by the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. First Kings 16:31 tells us that Ahab, the wicked king of Israel, took as his wife Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, the king of the Sidonians. This evil woman slew the prophets of Jehovah and urged Ahab to build altars to Baal and the Asherah (18:13; 21:25). In addition, she plotted the forceful and unjust seizing of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite (vv. 1-15). Ahab coveted this vineyard, which was alongside his palace in Samaria, and when Naboth would not give up his inheritance, Ahab became sullen. Jezebel then wrote letters in the king's name and sent them to the elders and nobles, instructing them to find two worthless fellows to perjure themselves against Naboth so that he would be stoned. After Naboth was killed, Ahab took possession of the vineyard, selling himself to do what was evil in the sight of Jehovah because of Jezebel's urgings (v. 25). Such a woman, for power and greed, was willing to conspire, lie, and murder for a convenient plot of land. It is remarkable that in the estimation of the Lord, such a person, in figure, could be found

teaching and leading a church in the New Testament age. As dreadful as this is, it is clearly revealed in the Word of God (Rev. 2:20-23).

The bloodshed at the hands of Jezebel prefigures the persecution of the people of God carried out by the Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages. Two of the most respected authorities on this persecution and the coercive power of the Roman Catholic Church are the Catholic priest and abbot Elphège Vacandard and historian Henry Charles Lea. They note that in its early centuries, the treatment of heretics and dissidents was marked by a mitigating spirit of tolerance. The prevailing, enunciated principle was "*Ecclesia abhorret a sanguine* (the Church has a horror of bloodshed)" (Vacandard 7). Lea adds, however, "Hardly had orthodoxy been defined by the Council of Nicaea when Constantine brought the power of the State to bear to enforce uniformity" (166). In depending on and even directing the secular government to punish heterodoxy, the leaders of the Roman Catholic Church began wholeheartedly to neglect the words of Psalm 118:9: "It is better to take refuge in the Lord / Than to trust in princes" (NASB). Philip Schaff records, "The propriety of violent measures against heresy was thenceforth vindicated even by the best fathers of the church" (3: 143). Even Augustine, the most influential of the Latin Christian writers, advocated the role of the civil arm in coercing conformity to the word and rule of the church, establishing the policy of *compelle intrare*, "Compel them to come in" (642), twisting the Lord's words in Luke 14:23.

Thyatira's Application of the "Two Swords"

Medieval society viewed itself as an integrated "Christian commonwealth, *respublica Christiana*" (Schaff 5: 31), ruled jointly—as to spiritual matters, by the priesthood, and as to temporal matters, by the state. This duality was first expressed by Pope Gelasius I in a letter to the Eastern Roman Emperor Anastasius I: "There are indeed, most august Emperor, two powers by which this world is chiefly ruled: the sacred authority of the Popes and the royal power" (qtd. in Ehler 11). The dual roles of church and state became known as the "two swords"—a corrupted borrowing from Luke 22:38. Both swords were said to be

ordained by God for the governance of every aspect of society. One sword was the authority wielded by the church; the other was the rule enforced by the state. In practice, however, the two components—the spiritual and the civil—were not separate. The exercise of the spiritual sword by the church was beneficial to the secular order because it maintained unity in society. Likewise, the exercise of the royal sword furthered the intentions of the corrupt, apostate church by enabling it to maintain its façade of abhorring bloodshed while attaining its aims by violence. In the Middle Ages it became the prerogative of the priesthood to call upon the secular arm of the law to prosecute heterodoxy and slay its practitioners. Bernard of Clairvaux expressed this duality in his composition to Pope Eugene III in A.D. 1146. He writes,

He who would deny that the sword belongs to thee, has not, as I conceive, sufficiently weighed the words of the Lord, where He said, speaking to Peter, “Put up *thy* sword into the scabbard” (John xviii. II). For it is here plainly implied that even the material sword is thine, to be drawn at thy bidding, although not by thy hand...Both swords, namely the spiritual and the material, belong to the Church, and that although only the former is to be wielded by her own hand, the two are to be employed in her service. (*Treatise* 119-120)

Drawn at thy bidding, although not by thy hand is the clear and explicit formula behind the theory of the two swords. Bernard continues,

It is for the priest to use the sword of the word, but to strike with the sword of steel belongs to the soldier, yet this must be by the authority and will (*ad nutum* [“at the nod”]) of the priest and by the direct command of the emperor. (120)

In a separate letter to Eugene he reiterates, “Both swords of Peter must be unsheathed as often as necessary, the one at his command, the other by his hand” (*Life* 750). By this he means that “Peter,” that is, the pope, wields both the priestly sword of the word (by his hand) and the secular sword of steel (by his nod).

In *Summa Theologica* Thomas Aquinas adds his own systematic genius to the theory of the two swords. He unequivocally advocates the supremacy of the spiritual power over that of the state, extending it even to the power of life and death. In his exegesis of Ezekiel 18:32 (“I take no pleasure in the death of him who dies”), he writes,

None of us desires the death of a single heretic. But remember that the house of David could not obtain peace until Absalom was killed in the war he waged against his

father. In like manner, the Catholic Church saves some of her children by the death of others, and consoles her sorrowing heart by reflecting that she is acting for the general good. (qtd. in Vacandard 172)

As to whether heretics are to be tolerated, Aquinas answers,

On the part of the Church, however, there is mercy which looks to the conversion of the wanderer, wherefore she condemns not at once, but “after the first and second admonition,” as the Apostle directs: after that, if he is yet stubborn, the Church no longer hoping for his conversion, looks to the salvation of others, by excommunicating him and separating him from the Church, and furthermore delivers him to the secular tribunal to be exterminated thereby from the world by death. (Aquinas 2755)

The extermination is to be carried out by the secular power. Aquinas says, “Ecclesiastical prelates accept the office of earthly princes, not that they may inflict capital punishment themselves, but that this may be carried into effect by others in virtue of their authority” (3329). Again, the two offices of prelates and princes are distinct but not separate. The infliction of punishment is the office not of the ecclesiastics but of the earthly rulers. It remains simply for the one office to “accept”—to depend upon and call upon—the other. The thought of Aquinas is that for the punishment of heterodoxy, it is necessary for the prelates and princes to coordinate—the latter by the sword of steel and the former at his will.

Boniface VIII draws heavily from Bernard and Aquinas in his papal bull *Unam Sanctam* (A.D. 1302). He develops the theory of the two swords by explicitly stating that both belong to the Church:

We are taught by the words of the Gospel that in this Church and in its power there are two swords, a spiritual, to wit, and a temporal. For when the Apostles said, “Behold, here are two swords”—that means in the Church, since the Apostles were speaking—the Lord did not reply that it was too many, but enough. And he who denies that the temporal sword is in the power of Peter, has wrongly understood the word of the Lord when He says: “Put up again thy sword into its place.” Wherefore both are in the power of the Church, namely the spiritual and material swords; the one, indeed, to be wielded for the Church, the other by the Church; the former by the priest, the latter by the hand of kings and knights, but at the will and sufferance of the priest. (qtd. in Ehler 91)

The theory of the two swords is summed up in the words *by the Church* and *for the Church*. The foregoing three witnesses provide a sampling of the influential voices of

this era that advocated the employment of martial force, not by the Roman Catholic Church directly but for its purposes and at its bidding.

The Hypocrisy of Religion and the Darkness of Politics

The term *two swords* derives from a misappropriation of Luke 22:35 through 38. In verses 35 and 36 Jesus told His disciples,

When I sent you without purse and bag and sandals, you did not lack anything, did you? And they said, Nothing. And He said to them, But now, let him who has a purse take it, likewise also a bag; and he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one.

In saying this, Jesus was not instructing His disciples to arm themselves against His coming arrest. Rather, He was indicating that the attitude of the Jews toward Him had changed. The items mentioned in verse 36 constituted the basic provisions for traveling in those days. Previously, as those sent by the Lord to the house of Israel, the disciples did not need to care for their material provisions. Under the Lord's authority their needs would be met by the households that received them (Matt. 10:9-12). By the time of Jesus' arrest, however, the Jews had fully rejected Him. Therefore, the disciples henceforth would have to care for their own needs, denoted by the customary travel accouterments—a purse, a bag, sandals, and a sword. When they replied that they already had two swords, Jesus gently rebuked them, saying, "It is enough" (Luke 22:38), as if to say, "It was not to this that My words referred" (Alford 646). Watchman Nee notes, "What He was saying was, 'It is enough—there is no need to say anything more. You cannot understand My word'" (1064). Later, when Peter drew his sword, Jesus said, "Return your sword to its place, for all those who take up the sword will perish by the sword" (Matt. 26:52). Nee adds, "There should be no 'Christ-soldiers' on this earth!" (1064).

The medieval principle of the two swords recalls the hypocrisy of religion and the darkness of politics exercised in the delivering of Jesus to death. When the leaders of the Jews (the spiritual government) brought Jesus to Pilate (the civil government), Pilate said to them, "You take Him and judge Him according to your law" (John 18:31). The Jews said to him, "It is not lawful for us to kill anyone" (v. 31). This reply makes it clear that the Jewish religionists had no intention of

judging Jesus according to the law, by which He was blameless. Rather, they were conspiring to kill Him. Knowing, however, that this was not lawful for them, they delivered Jesus to the Roman ruler, under whose evil authority He would be executed. Thus, the crucifixion of Jesus was the first case in the New Testament of the secular sword being wielded at the behest of a religious priesthood. This evil cooperation of religion and politics continued throughout the lifetime and martyrdom of the apostles, and in the Roman Catholic Church of the Middle Ages it became the official, sanctioned policy for dealing with the opposers of the corrupt religious establishment. This was the great apostasy of the New Testament Jezebel.

"The Rest in Thyatira"

In Revelation 2:24 the shepherding Christ addresses "the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this teaching." In the long, dark period of the church signified by the church in Thyatira, the Lord raised up a number of His faithful witnesses. Around A.D. 653 a certain Constantine in Byzantine Armenia received a rare copy of the Gospels and the Epistles of Paul. Upon reading them, his life was changed, and he endeavored to restore the church life of apostolic times. His followers, called Paulicians, separated from the Eastern Church and became strong anti-testimonies against idols, superstition, and apostasy.¹ Because of this, many were slain by Emperor Justinian II, and in the ninth century one hundred thousand were put to death at the hand of the evil Empress Theodora, who, like Jezebel, loved and patronized idols. She restored the worship of icons, for which she is called *Saint* by the Eastern Church. The Roman Pope Nicolas commended her for her show of strength, adding, "And why so, but because you followed the directions of the Apostolic See"² (qtd. in Milner 2: 498).

Regrettably, we know little of scattered, persecuted congregations such as these, who received a ray of divine light and took a stand against the degraded church. Because they left few writings of their own, almost all that is said of them comes from their enemies and oppressors, who invariably bring against them unprovable accusations of heresy. E. H. Broadbent writes,

The true histories of these have been obliterated as far as possible. Their writings, sharing the fate of the writers, have been destroyed to the full extent of the power

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allowed to their persecutors. Not only so, but histories of them have been promulgated by those in whose interest it was to disseminate the worst inventions against them in order to justify their own cruelties. (64)

Peter Allix writes, “The malice and cruelty of the enemies of these ancient Christians have robbed us of what might be most material for their justification” (xii). Schaff notes, “Where so many suffered the loss of goods, imprisonments, and death for their religious convictions, only a few lines remain in their own handwriting to depict their faith and hopes” (5: 463).

After the eleventh century more than a hundred names were used to categorize these groups. The name *Cathar*, or *Cathari*, is an encompassing term, from Greek καθαροί, “the pure ones.” These were similar to the Bogomils (“Friends of God”) of Macedonia, who were thought to have originated with the Paulicians. In the West many of these were called Albigensians, from the city of Albi in southern France. To the present day, scholarship is divided as to whether or not these various movements were actually related other than by a similarity of beliefs. Writing for *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Nicholas Weber notes that the name of Albigenses “was for a long time applied to all the heretics of the south of France...The historical connection between the new heretics and their predecessors cannot be clearly traced.” Another set of congregations were called Waldenses. These in particular were characterized by a love for the Bible and a zeal for preaching the gospel. Schaff calls them the “strictly biblical sect of the Middle Ages” (5: 493).

These gatherings of believers differed to some degree in their actual beliefs from community to community. What they shared in common was an abhorrence of the Roman ecclesiastical system, with its priesthood, rituals, idolatry, ignorance, and materialism. They rejected the sacraments, the bodily presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the baptism of infants, prayers for the dead, prayers to the saints, and worthless monasticism. In place of those things, they lived simple lives of purity and virtue without the love of goods and comfort, and they made extensive use of the Scriptures. Bernard, an avid opponent, concedes of these persons,

If you interrogate him as to his faith, nothing is more Christianlike; or as to his conduct, nothing more unblamable; and he seems to justify his discourse by his actions...As relates to character and conduct, he deceives no one, he exalts himself over no one, nor does violence to any. Furthermore, his cheeks are pale with fasts; nor does he eat the bread of idleness, but labours with his hands for his maintenance. (*Cantica* 396-397)

To be sure, there were teachers of heresy at that time.

The ancient doctrine of Manichaeism—a dualistic teaching founded in third-century Persia that mixed Christian and Gnostic beliefs—was introduced to the West in the early part of the eleventh century. Like the congregations of genuine believers meeting outside of Catholicism, the Manichaean sects rejected many outward and empty rituals. Because of this, all who protested against the erroneous teachings and practices of the Roman Catholic Church were considered as a single kind, and *Manichaean* became a catchall term to describe and condemn every movement. Andrew Miller says of the groups of believers in the regions of France and Germany, “Scarcely one of them escaped the charge of Manicheism” (453). This confusion was utilized by the persecutors of the true believers for many centuries. However, as Joseph Milner notes, “It should seem, that the whole charge of that ancient odious heresy, might be nothing more than a convenient term of reproach” (3: 368). In his authoritative history of the Albigenses, Peter Allix records, “It was the fashion at that time to treat the Albigenses as Manichees, and to confound them with those heretics, whereas their faith was very opposite to that of the Manichees” (164). He goes into great detail in tracing the French Albigenses back through an unbroken line to the earliest, genuine churches in Gaul, demonstrating that they remained true to the faith of the apostles even after the invasion of Manichaeism.

The Blood of the Saints and of the Witnesses of Jesus

Mark Pegg notes, “‘Cathar’ was an obscure term that mostly meant...a schismatic of indeterminate heterodoxy...It was (and is) no more precise or worthy a designation for a heretic than any other” (23). The opposers and persecutors assumed that the unorthodox congregations had simply adopted and revived the ancient heresy. A twelfth-century Benedictine monk declares, “Heretics...do not invent new things but repeat old ones” (qtd. in Pegg 24). Pegg argues,

The heresies of the past (as revealed in the condemnations of ancient ecclesiastical councils and, especially, in the voluminous writings of Augustine of Hippo against the Manichaeans) provided templates into which the heretical ideas of the present could be fitted and, as a consequence, explained. It was a historical and analytical method that necessitated finding coherence in the beliefs of heretics, no matter when, no matter where, so that not only were all heresies continuous over the centuries but, as all heretical thoughts were perceived as similar from Toulouse to Cologne, from London to Jerusalem, deep and secretive connections must exist among all heretics throughout Christendom. (24)

It is for this reason that, even until the present time, *Cathar*, *Albigensian*, *Waldensian*, and even *Manichaean*

are confounded and erroneously used interchangeably. In the eleventh through thirteenth centuries these different congregations lived in parallel and often in proximity. However, even in the darkest of eras, “God... never left Himself without a witness” (Miller 453). Milner says likewise, “God seems to have had a people among them, who detested the Romish abominations, and who served him in the gospel of his son” (3: 361). Among all those who lived and taught outside of the established Roman Catholic Church, there was a great number of genuine believers, true sheep of the Shepherd, that—in the absence of a reliable history—only He can number.

In this period of history the Roman Catholic Church waged a prolonged crusade of terror and bloodshed against those identified as both Albigensian and Manichaean, both true believer and false. In seeking to remove the tares from the field, it uprooted many stalks of wheat, contrary to the word of the Master (Matt. 13:24-29). Revelation 17:6 says of the evil Jezebel, who is Babylon the Great, “I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus.” Witness Lee writes, “The saints are those who are separated, sanctified, unto God and who live a holy life for God, even unto death. The witnesses are those who are a living testimony of the Lord Jesus and who are faithful unto death” (Recovery Version, v. 6, note 2). The persecution of nonconformists was not merely, as it was thought, an extirpation of a dangerous heresy. Of all the blood shed in those terrible centuries, the blood of the saints and of the witnesses of the reviled and persecuted Jesus is included. It is of this blood that “Jezebel” is guilty.

The Growing Practice of Deadly Persecution

Vacandard effectively traces the development of the philosophy and practice of the persecution of Christians from the correction of schismatics in the early centuries to the Inquisition in the Middle Ages. However, his frank attempt to distance the Roman Catholic Church from the shedding of blood is unsustainable. As he concedes, already by Late Antiquity

the churchmen of the day accepted the aid of the secular arm. Nor were they content with merely accepting it. They declared that the State had not only the right to help the Church in suppressing heresy, but that she was in duty bound to do so. (30)

Vacandard claims that the first persecutions of the so-called Manichaean sects (that is, all nonconformists) were initiated by the populace, not by an official policy. Nevertheless, he admits, “The Church...to stop their bold propaganda used force herself, or permitted the State or the people to use it” (33). He states that it was King Robert II of France, called “the Pious,” who originated the punishment of burning at the stake for heretics around A.D. 1022. For the next century this form of punishment was used at Orleans, Toulouse, Milan, and elsewhere in France, Italy, and Germany alongside the penalties of hanging and beheading. By the middle of the twelfth century, however, popes and bishops began to participate more directly in the sentencing and punishment of heretics. The Third Lateran Council of 1179, presided over by Pope Alexander III, directly called for an armed uprising of princes and people against the “heretics,” offering indulgences to all who took up arms:

[Princes] and all the faithful we command in remission of their sins that they vigorously oppose such pests and

defend with arms the Christian people. Let their possessions be confiscated and let the princes be allowed to reduce to slavery men of this kind...Trusting in the mercy of God and in the authority of the Apostles Peter and Paul, we also grant to the faithful who take up arms against them and at the advice of the bishops or other prelates

undertake to conquer them, a remission of two years’ penance. (Schroeder 234-235)

In 1184 the papal bull of Pope Lucius III called for heretics to be handed over to the secular arm for “the punishment they deserved” (Vacandard 57), that is, for the emperor to do as he saw fit, which included banishment, confiscation of property, and even death.³

The Blasphemy of Innocent III and His War on Christians

The pontificate of Innocent III (r. 1198-1216) was the golden age of the medieval papacy and marks the pinnacle of papal power. Schaff tells us,

No other mortal has before or since wielded such extensive power...Monarchs throughout Europe listened to Innocent’s exposition and obeyed. His correspondence abounds with letters to the emperor, the kings of Hungary, Bohemia, Sicily, France, England, the Danes, Aragon, and to other princes, teaching them their duty and demanding their submission. (5: 152, 159)

Among those who lived and taught outside of the Roman Catholic Church, there was a great number of genuine believers, true sheep of the Shepherd, that only He can number.

Ferdinand Gregorovius, a historian of medieval Rome, calls Innocent “the true Augustus of the Papacy, . . . the creator and destroyer of emperors and kings” (101, 104). In the eyes of Innocent,

the kings and princes of the world are the proper subjects and servants of him [the pope] from whom their vicarious faculties proceed, and for the use of which they must render an account to him as stewards to their principal; and take his directions as servants from their lord. (Greenwood 364-365)

Since Innocent’s great plan was nothing short of the rule of the world, he found it expedient to usurp the place of Christ Himself. At his coronation he preached, “Of me it is written in the prophets, ‘I have set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down and to destroy and to throw down, and to build and to plant’” (369). As Christ is the Χριστός—the anointed One, the sent One of God—the pope, Innocent claims, is the anointed one of Christ, the “Christ” of the Lord (*Christus Domini*). Innocent proclaims,

Now, therefore, behold the servant who is constituted above the house, truly the vicar of Jesus Christ, the successor of Peter, the Christ of the Lord, the God of Pharaoh; placed between God and men, not so much as God but beyond men; less than God, but more than men; who judges all but is judged by no one.⁴ (*Innocentii* 4: 658)

Innocent’s presumption to usurp Christ of His unique position foreshadows the coming Antichrist, who will speak “great things” against the Most High (Dan. 7:8, 25; Rev. 13:5-6). It was this pope who declared war on the Christians in the south of France. At the beginning of the thirteenth century, southern France—Languedoc and Provence—was one of the most prosperous, thriving, and enlightened regions in all of Europe. It was also the most liberal host to the Albigenses and Waldenses. When Raymond VI, Count of Toulouse, undertook to remove them from his lands, he discovered that more than half of his subjects, including burgesses, priests, and theologians, identified with the nonconforming assemblies, who were allowed to preach, teach, and make converts in public. This represented a rare and great crisis for the Roman Church. Innocent commissioned a legation headed by the abbot Arnaud of Citeaux to “destroy, throw down, or pluck up” the heresy wherever it was found (Lea 110). One of those who contended with the separatist Christians was Dominic, who founded the Dominican Order, members of which later led the Inquisition.

Recognizing the inadequacy of preaching alone, Innocent appealed to force. He wrote to King Phillip II and the

archbishops of southern France, “Use against heretics the spiritual sword of excommunication, and if this does not prove effective, use the material sword” (qtd. in Vacandard 58). He charged the king, “Do not seem to carry in vain the sword that the Lord gave to you” (*Innocentii* 2: 527).⁵ For Philip he added the two great incentives of pardon and plunder—remission of sins and the freedom to seize and add to his dominions the possessions of all the nobles who did not assist him.

The Crusade against Christians

Raymond, who had not been cooperating with Innocent, was himself accused of being a Cathar and was excommunicated after Peter of Castelnau, the papal legate, was murdered in the process of his investigating Raymond. This murder became Innocent’s justification for a military crusade into southern France. Armies were formed from France, Flanders, and Germany. Common soldiers were joined by archbishops, bishops, abbots, dukes, and counts. The same reward of forgiveness of sins that was offered to the crusaders in the Holy Land was to be given to all those who took arms against the hated Christians of the south. Arnaud’s monks preached the cause of the crusade, “offering redemption in every church and on every marketplace in Europe” (Lea 116). Innocent himself wrote,

O most mighty soldiers of Christ, o most fervent Christian conscripts, you oppose the forerunners of antichrist and fight against the servants of the old serpent . . . We urge you to the service of God not for an arbitrary prize but for the kingdom of the heavens, which we most confidently promise you.⁶ (*Innocentii* 2: 1545-1546)

Arnaud was the papal legate and spiritual advisor to the crusade. At Béziers in Languedoc, the crusaders asked how they should distinguish between Albigensian and Catholic. Caesarius of Heisterbach, a Cistercian prior, records that Arnaud replied, “Kill them all for the Lord knoweth them that are His.” In the barbarous butchery that ensued, almost the entire population of the city was slaughtered—“a massacre almost without parallel in European history” (Lea 121). Weber denies that Arnaud’s “monstrous words” were ever pronounced, but in any case, there can be no justification for the slaughter. If the legate did not directly order the massacre, he at least allowed it, writing back triumphantly to Innocent,

Not sparing any class, sex, or age, our men slew almost twenty thousand persons by the mouth of the sword. After the greatest carnage of the enemy, the entire city was looted and burned, divine vengeance raging marvelously against it.⁷ (*Innocentii* 3: 139)

Marvelously (mirabiliter) reveals Arnaud's assessment. The armies of the crusade were led by Simon de Montfort, a veteran of the Fourth Crusade and zealous supporter of the papacy, who did not neglect to hear mass even after a bloody massacre. Edwin Burton admits of him,

It is ever to be deplored that Simon stained his many great qualities by treachery, harshness, and bad faith. His severity became cruelty, and he delivered over many towns to fire and pillage, thus involving many innocent people in the common ruin.

The crusade savagely advanced for twenty years. Thousands of Christians were killed, martyrs were burned, prisoners mutilated, and entire populations of cities fled without their possessions.

Languedoc at the opening of the wars had been one of the most prosperous and cultured parts of Europe. At their close, its villages and vineyards were in ruins, its industries shattered, its population impoverished and decimated. (Schaff 5: 514)

Pegg concludes, "The Albigensian crusade ushered genocide into the West by linking divine salvation to mass murder, by making slaughter as loving an act as His sacrifice on the cross" (188). Schaff writes,

More blood was shed at the hand of the Church during the pontificate of Innocent, and under his immediate successors carrying out his policy, than in any other age except during the papal counter-Reformation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. (5: 159-160)

The jealousy of wealth and the lust of conquest by the French king and nobles were as strong a motivation as religious zeal. Formerly, the land and power of the Count of Toulouse rivaled that of the French king himself. As a result of the crusade, however, Raymond's conquered lands were given first to de Montfort. Then after Raymond's death his son Raymond VII surrendered two-thirds of their ancestral lands to the king, and after the son's death the remaining third was ceded. This enlarged the domains of the king all the way to the Pyrenees, forming the shape of France as we know it today. All this was done at the command of Innocent III—the vicar of Christ, the successor of Peter—in the persecuting spirit of Jezebel. "Every Naboth was robbed of his vineyard, and his blood shed, for the gratification of Jezebel's ambition, and for the establishment of her throne of iniquity" (Miller 279).

The Inquisition

The Fourth Lateran Council of A.D. 1215, convoked by Innocent III, gave formal expression to his policy toward Christians outside of the established Roman Catholic Church. The council declared all heretics excommunicated and handed them over to the secular rulers for "due punishment, *animadversione debita*" (Labbé 148). Vacandard points out that this formerly ambiguous sentence soon became defined: "At first it was a legal penalty which custom interpreted to mean banishment and confiscation; later on it meant chiefly the death penalty; and finally it meant solely the penalty of the stake" (107). Burning at the stake was further sanctioned in subsequent centuries. The Council of Constance (1414-1418) proclaimed that followers of John Huss, as relapsed heretics, were to be "punished with fire" (Lea 176), and in 1520 the papal bull of Leo X condemned the reformers for saying that the burning of heretics was "against the will of the Spirit."

The growing number and influence of pre-Protestant Christians necessitated, in the mind of the Roman Catholic Church, the institution of the Inquisition. Its methods were first laid out in the Council of Toulouse in 1229, and in 1233 Pope Gregory IX committed this growing labor to the Dominican Order, establishing the Inquisition as a distinct

institution. By the middle of the century, ecclesiastical courts based on old Roman law were active in all the countries of central and western Europe. Agents were authorized to diligently, faithfully, and frequently seek out heretics by searching the homes of suspects, who could be identified merely by popular rumor, anonymous informers, or personal enemies. Witnesses were brought against the suspects, and the cases were prosecuted with impenetrable secrecy.

Once accused, few persons were acquitted, and some form of punishment was inevitable. Those who recanted for fear of death were imprisoned for life, and their houses were destroyed. Those found guilty were handed over to the secular rulers for punishment. Innocent IV (r. 1243-1254) elaborated the process of the Inquisition in his bull *Ad Extirpanda*, which Joseph Blötzer, writing for *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, calls a "fundamental document of the Inquisition." Innocent mandates that "as actual robbers and murderers of souls and thieves of the sacraments of God and Christian faith," those accused of heresy must be "forced" to confess their errors and accuse other heretics. This is

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universally understood to have authorized torture as a measure for extorting confessions. Originally, church inquisitors were forbidden to be present when torture was applied. However, as Blötzer concedes, this ritual became inconvenient, and Pope Alexander IV authorized the inquisitors to “absolve one another of this irregularity.” Blötzer adds, “This was soon interpreted as formal licence to continue the examination in the torture chamber itself,” that is, with the cooperation of the priest or friar.

The inquisitors who handed over heretics for punishment hypocritically adjured the civic officers to exercise mercy and avoid bloodshed, knowing full well that the victim would be killed. Vacandard admits,

Some Inquisitors, realizing the emptiness of this formula, dispensed with it altogether, and boldly assumed the full responsibility for their sentences. They deemed the role of the State so unimportant in the execution of heretics, that they did not even mention it. (180)

Such was the falsehood of the ritual. The obligation of the two swords was inviolable. “The state well understood its duty, and its failure to punish with death heretics convicted by the spiritual court was punishable with excommunication” (Schaff 6: 551).

Any hesitation [from the monarch] was visited with excommunication, and if this proved inefficacious, his dominions were thrown open to the first hardy adventurer whom the Church would supply with an army for his overthrow. (Lea 174)

Vindicating Atrocity

The twisting of history to distance the medieval Roman Catholic Church from bloodshed does no more than place a veil of deceit over atrocity. Vacandard tries in vain to absolve it of guilt. He claims, “The church used vigorous measures only against obdurate heretics, who were also disturbers of the public peace” (67). However, he goes to great lengths in an attempt to demonstrate that all who kept the faith of Christ apart from the established church, called Cathari as a whole, were a threat to society: “Catharism...was a serious menace to the church, to the state, and to society” (101). Eventually, he concedes that to free the Roman Catholic Church from responsibility for inflicting suffering and death is “truly an extremely difficult undertaking” (177). The twelfth-century theologian Peter Cantor says of the persecuted ones, “The priest is responsible for their death, for he by whose authority a thing is done is responsible therefor” (qtd. in Vacandard 48).

Blötzer’s vindication of the Inquisition is more strained than Vacandard’s. He claims, “No blame attaches to the Church” but goes on to state that death at the stake

could not take place “without the episcopal consent.” Clearly, this puts the blame on the bishops of the church. He goes on to report that some victims of the Inquisition freely received visitors in their prison cells, “playing games, or dining with their jailors,” yet he concedes, quoting J. B. Vidal,

In some cells the unfortunates were bound in stocks or chains, unable to move about, and forced to sleep on the ground....There was little regard for cleanliness. In some cases there was no light or ventilation, and the food was meagre and very poor.

The recklessness of such contradictions demonstrates the futility of vindication. Blötzer says further, “Far from being inhuman, [the inquisitors] were, as a rule, men of spotless character and sometimes of truly admirable sanctity, and not a few of them have been canonized by the Church.” However, Innocent IV forbade humanity in the proceedings of the Inquisition. “Ad Extirpanda” states, “None of these sentences or punishments imposed on account of heresy, shall, either by the motion of any public gathering, the advice of counselors, or any kind of popular outcry, or the innate humanity⁸ of those in authority, be in any way waived or pardoned.”

Schaff concludes plainly, “The Inquisition was a thoroughly papal institution” (5: 517), and the popes were its chief promoters. The notorious inquisitor Bernard Guy proclaimed, “[The] office of the Inquisition has its dignity from its origin for it is derived, commissioned, and known to have been instituted by the Apostolic see itself” (qtd. in Schaff 5: 517). Far from being a secular procedure, the Inquisition was called the Holy Office, the place of tribunal was called the Holy House, and the burning of heretics was considered an Act of Faith (*auto de fé*). Historian Leopold von Ranke calls the Inquisition “a royal institution fitted out with spiritual weapons” (qtd. in Schaff 6: 539). The Catholic philosopher Juan Manuel Orti y Lara states, “The Inquisition fused into one weapon the papal sword and the temporal power of kings” (qtd. in Schaff 6: 539). That the ecclesiastical power turned the heretic over to the secular power for burning at the stake was the rule and paradigm of the Inquisition. “All authorities unite in this, and the annals of the Inquisition can vainly be searched for an exception” (Lea 402). The state—the temporal sword of civil power—fulfilled its duty according to the judgment and demand of the Roman Catholic Church. The punishment by the state was simply the obedience of Ahab, “because Jezebel his wife urged him on” (1 Kings 21:25).

The Destruction of the Harlot

Blötzer concludes in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* that “on the whole, the Inquisition was humanely conducted” and

that it marks “a substantial advance in the contemporary administration of justice, and therefore in the general civilization of mankind.” Revelation 17:6 says, “I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus.” *Drunk* denotes a satiation resulting in stupefied reasoning and confused speech. Vindicating claims such as those of Blötzer truly lack sobermindedness and merely expose the dark rationale and remorseless attitude of Roman Catholicism in the light of the Scriptures and of every reasonable interpretation of history.

God said, “I will avenge the blood of My servants the prophets and the blood of all the servants of Jehovah at the hand of Jezebel” (2 Kings 9:7). In dealing with the church in Thyatira, the Lord has eyes like a flame of fire and feet like shining bronze (Rev. 2:18), manifest signs of His judging attitude. Concerning Jezebel, the personification of the principle of the papal church, He said, “I gave her time that she might repent, and she is not willing to repent of her “And. Behold, I cast her into a bed, and those who commit adultery with her, into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works” (vv. 21-22). In chapter 17 the harlot, who is Jezebel, sits upon a beast having seven heads and ten horns, signifying the seven Caesars of the historical Roman Empire and the ten kings of the revived Roman Empire at the end of the age (vv. 3, 9-12).

Verses 16 and 17 say, “The ten horns which you saw and the beast, these will hate the harlot and will make her desolate and naked and will eat her flesh and burn her utterly with fire. For God has put it into their hearts to perform His mind.” Near the beginning of the great tribulation at the end of this age, Antichrist and his empire will turn against the apostate Roman Church. The kings of the earth will no longer tolerate the woman who for over a thousand years sat upon them, mounting them and steering them at her will. They will remember Henry IV’s humiliation at Canossa, the overthrow of the royal houses of Germany and France, the dictates of Gregory VII, who asserted his right to depose princes, and the arrogance of Innocent III, the “majestic priest” who lorded over “trembling kings” (Gregorovius 104). Witness Lee writes,

[Antichrist and the ten kings] will make the Roman Church “desolate and naked,” meaning that they will destroy her, rob her of her riches, and expose her; they will “eat her flesh,” meaning that they will kill her members; and they will “burn her utterly with fire,” meaning that they will annihilate her altogether. (Recovery Version, v. 16, note 1)

Moreover, it is God who puts this fearful judgment into the hearts of the kings, indicating that “this kind of destruction should not be considered martyrdom but the avenging judgment of God” (v. 17, note 1).

The Overcomers in Thyatira

In the epistle to the church in Thyatira, the Lord consistently distinguishes between “you,” the messenger of the church representing the genuine believers, and “her,” the woman representing the apostate church. It is “her,” Jezebel, that He casts into a bed of incurable sickness, along with those who commit adultery with her, and it is “her” works that must be repented of (2:22). Moreover, it is “you”—the particular believer—whom the Lord called to overcome, promising, “I will give to each one of you according to your works” (v. 23). He added, “But I say to you—the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this teaching...I put no other burden upon you; nevertheless what you have hold fast until I come” (vv. 24-25). In His great grace the saving Christ offers the overcomer’s crown to those who do

not hold the teaching of the apostate church. Throughout the centuries there have always been “the rest,” even in Thyatira, who stood apart, even at the cost of their lives, to pursue the Lord in a pure way, practice the church life according to the revelation that they received, and maintain the testimony of Jesus.

These are the overcomers in the present age before the Lord’s coming.

by John Campbell

Notes

¹The Paulicians are incorrectly associated with a heresy of the third century. Adrian Fortescue says that their name “seems to have been used only by their opponents, who held that they were followers of Paul of Samosata...The birthplace of their founder evidently suggested this; but there is no connection between their doctrine and his.”

²Or, “followed the instructions,” “followed the teachings” (*dogmata sequebaris*).

³“The punishment they deserved,” or “due punishment” (*animadversio debita*; Vacandard 57) was open to interpretation. This became the usual expression in legal documents as a justification for extreme measures, often death, against nonconforming Christians.

⁴“*Vicarius Jesu Christi, successor Petri, Christus Domini, Deus Pharaonis.*”

Throughout the centuries there have always been “the rest,” even in Thyatira, who stood apart, even at the cost of their lives, to pursue the Lord in a pure way.

⁵“Ut igitur gladium, quem Dominus tibi tradidit...non videaris sine causa portare.” Innocent III commands the authorities to “severely punish” (*gravius animadvertant*) the heretics, “as befits Christian princes” (qtd. in Vacandard 59). Vacandard admits that these words “seem to imply the death penalty.”

⁶“Eia igitur, potentissimi Christi milites...sed pro regno coelesti, quod ob hoc confidentissime pollicemur.”

⁷“Nostrique non parcentes...ultione divina in eam mirabiliter saeviente.”

⁸*Ingenium*, “humanity,” “natural character.”

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Footnote from the Recovery Version of the Bible

“...the great harlot...with whom the kings of the earth have committed **fornication**” (Rev. 17:1-2).

fornication: What the apostate church commits is not adultery, the sin of an unfaithful spouse, but fornication, the sin of a harlot. This is more sinful than adultery. The fornication of the apostate church consists of her having sinful relationships with the kings of the earth for her profit, just as a harlot commits sin for gain. Hers is spiritual fornication. The kings of the earth commit fornication with her directly.