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Catholic Courier

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Inquisition History

- 1231** Pope Gregory IX releases *Excommunicamus* recommending life in prison for repentant heretics and death to obstinate heretics.
- 1232** Church tribunals are set up to identify and impose penalties on heretics in Germany, France and Italy. Civil authorities carry out death sentences.
- 1252** Pope Innocent IV permits the use of torture in dealing with suspected heretics.
- Late 1200s** The height of the inquisition; tribunals are free from any authority, including the papacy, and abuses run rampant.
- 1311-1312** In an attempt to correct abuses and rein in the power of inquisitors, Pope Clement IV requires them to collaborate with local bishops.
- 1300-early 1500s** Europe witnesses a decay of the Inquisition. French royal leaders intervene, and the Inquisition loses its original character.
- 1478** Pope Sixtus IV grants Spain's monarchs permission to create the Spanish Inquisition. Among its victims are heretics and converted Jews and Muslims.
- 1482** Sixtus, to no avail, complains to sovereigns about the severity of Spanish inquisitors. Burnings at the stake numbered around 2,000 under the first grand inquisitor, Dominican Tomas de Torquemada.
- 1542** Pope Paul III establishes the Sacred Congregation of the Universal Inquisition to respond to the Protestant Reformation.
- 1633** Italian astronomer Galileo Galilei is condemned and silenced by the church for promoting that Earth was not the center of the universe.
- 1834** Spanish Inquisition is abolished.
- 1908** Pope Pius X changes the name of the Sacred Congregation of the Universal Inquisition to the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office.
- 1962** Pope Paul VI renames the congregation the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Source: CNS News Service



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Abuses marred heresy fight

On one of its television programs, the Monty Python comedy troupe performed a routine in which a character repeatedly cackled, "Nobody expects the Spanish Inquisition."

However, the Spanish Inquisition is what many people expect is meant when the Inquisition is mentioned, acknowledged Timothy Thibodeau, associate professor of history at Nazareth College.

"When people talk about the Inquisition, I think what most people have in mind is the Spanish Inquisition," he said. Moreover, he noted, "The impression people get is that was a super centralized papal inquisition situated in Rome."

But, he remarked, "There's no such thing as the Inquisition pure and simple."

Historians note that the "Inquisition" actually consisted of a number of separate events and activities originally intended to fight heresy, including the Spanish Inquisition, the Roman (or papal) Inquisition, and inquisitions

directed by some bishops. Still, the mental images are universal: Secret informers. The Grand Inquisitor. Summary trials. And a fiery death at the stake.

"The Inquisition quickly became synonymous with a cruel court. But was it really?" Italian historian Adriano Prosperi asks in his new book, *Tribunals of Conscience*.

"Its death sentences were rare, and its judgments were justified in a way that presented the tribunal's work as more inclined toward mildness than harshness," he wrote.

Historians generally date the Inquisition from the 12th to the 15th century — with the Spanish manifestation lasting into the 19th.

The Inquisition was preceded by investigations launched locally by bishops and princes early in the 12th century. These investigations targeted heretical groups such as the Cathars in southern France, and were carried out under decrees issued through church councils

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Story by Lee Strong