

Why do Catholics refuse to concede that their church became doctrinally corrupt in the Middle Ages, necessitating the Protestant Reformation?

Catholics refuse to concede such a thing out of faith in Jesus Christ. Christ solemnly pledged that the gates of Hell would never prevail against His Church (Matt. 16:18), and He solemnly promised that after His Ascension into Heaven He would send His Church ``another Paraclete . . . the spirit of truth," to dwell with it forever (John 14:16-17), and He inspired the Apostle Paul to describe His Church as ``the pillar and ground of the truth." (I Tim. 3:15). If the Catholic Church (which Protestants admit was the true Church of Jesus Christ before Luther's revolt) became doctrinally corrupt as alleged, it would mean that the gates of Hell had prevailed against it--it would mean that Christ had deceived His followers. Believing Christ to be the very essence of truth and integrity, Catholics cannot in conscience believe that He could be guilty of such deception. Another thing: Catholics cannot see how the division of Christianity into hundreds of rival camps and doctrinal variations can be called a ``reformation" of the Christian Church. In the Catholic mind, hundreds of conflicting interpretations of Christ's teachings do not add up to a true interpretation of Christ's teachings.

If the Catholic Church never fell into error, how explain the worldly Popes, the bloody Inquisitions, the selling of indulgences and the invention of new doctrines? A careful, objective investigation of Catholic history will disclose these facts: The so-called worldly popes of the Middle Ages--three in number--were certainly guilty of extravagant pomposity, nepotism and other indiscretions and sins which were not in keeping with the dignity of their high church office--but they certainly were not guilty of licentious conduct while in office, nor were they guilty of altering any part of the Church's Christ-given deposit of faith. The so-called bloody Inquisitions, which were initiated by the civil governments of France and Spain for the purpose of ferreting out Moslems and Jews who were causing social havoc by posing as faithful Catholic citizens--even as priests and bishops--were indeed approved by the Church. (Non-Catholics who admitted they were non-Catholics were left alone by the Inquisition.) And the vast majority of those questioned by the Inquisition (including St. Teresa of Avila) were completely cleared. Nevertheless, the popes roundly condemned the proceedings when they saw justice giving way to cruel abuses, and it was this insistent condemnation by the popes which finally put an end to the Inquisitions.

The so-called selling of indulgences positively did not involve any "selling"--it involved the granting of the spiritual favor of an indulgence (which is the remission of the debt of temporal punishment for already-forgiven sins) in return for the giving of alms to the Church for the building of Christendom's greatest house of prayer--St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. One must understand with regard to indulgences that there are always two acts to be fulfilled by the one gaining the indulgence: 1) doing the deed (e.g., alms-giving) and 2) saying of some prescribed prayers with proper spiritual dispositions. In the case in point, the first act for gaining the indulgence was "giving alms." If the almsgiver thereafter failed to say the requisite prayers, he would not receive the indulgence because he had failed to fulfill both required acts. The indulgences therefore were not "sold"; the very giving of money was itself the first of two requisite acts for gaining the indulgence in question.

The so-called invention of new doctrines, which refers to the Church's proclamation of new dogmas, is the most baseless and ridiculous charge of all--for those "new" dogmas of the Church were actually old doctrines dating back to the beginning of Christianity. In proclaiming them to be dogmas, the Church merely emphasized their importance to the Faith and affirmed that they are, in truth, part and parcel of divine revelation. The Catholic Church followed the same procedure when, in the fourth century, she proclaimed the New Testament to be divinely revealed. Hence it is obvious that the Catholic Church did *not* fall into error during the Middle Ages as some people allege, for if she had, she could not have produced those hundreds of medieval saints--saints the calibre of St. Francis, St. Bernard, St. Bonaventure, St. Clare, St. Anthony, St. John of the Cross, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Elizabeth and St. Vincent Ferrer (who performed an estimated 40,000 miracles).

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