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EVERYONE EXPECTS THE SPANISH INQUISITION: THE MAKING OF SPAIN'S BLACK LEGEND

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This is the first in a series of lectures this year about atrocities and memory, and what I want to say today will fall into two parts. I will of course, as my title promises, be talking about some of the atrocities associated with Spain during the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth century: in particular those linked to the notorious Spanish Inquisition. But before I come to that, for the first part of the lecture I want to address the wider subject. Why do I want to spend six hours up here this year talking about atrocities? Exactly what do I mean by atrocities anyway? And why on earth should I, as professor of divinity, be tackling this subject?

Let's be clear what an atrocity is. It is not just an act of violence. Acts of violence are an entirely normal and everyday part of human history, I am afraid: living as we do in an unusually peaceful society and age, we can sometimes forget this basic fact. Most acts of violence are, however, not atrocities. They are crimes; or acts of self-defence; or acts of war; or acts of criminal justice. In other words, they are either seen as lawful, legitimate or acceptable in some way, given their context; or at least, as in the case of most criminal violence, seen as normal, an all-too-common fact of life. They may be terrible, but it is not surprising that they happen, even if it is surprising or shocking if they happen to you or to someone close to you. An atrocity is a violent act or series of acts that goes beyond what is normal and expected, which is shocking and eye-catching. It is a crime which goes beyond normal criminality and is sufficiently horrifying to stand out – whether because of unusual cruelty, unusual scale, an unusual innocence attributed to its victims, or an unusual depravity attributed to its perpetrators. The murder of young children, for example; and even then, there have been many hundreds of children murdered in this country in the past few decades, and only a handful of those deaths have become atrocities. Or an atrocity may be an act of war that goes beyond the laws and norms of war – typically a massacre of civilians, or of prisoners, or perhaps acts such as indiscriminate bombing carried out regardless of civilian casualties. Judicial violence may become an atrocity if it violates normal expectations, using summary procedures, dubious evidence or draconian punishments, like the French Revolution's Reign of Terror or the Stalinist purges.

As all those possibilities make clear, there is one other ingredient necessary for a violent event to be an atrocity in the sense that I mean, someone has to notice it. Atrocities are in the eye of the beholder. A dreadful crime that is successfully concealed cannot be an atrocity, and of course the perpetrators of such crimes often do try to conceal them. Think of the hidden mass graves of the Yugoslavian wars or of the Polish soldiers massacred at Katyn. For as long as they remain successfully concealed, such events are not atrocities. The same is true of atrocities which are hiding in plain sight: which may not be actively concealed but are, perhaps only for a time, not noticed. The genocide of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire during the First World War, for example, attracted remarkably little attention. When Hitler made his infamous comment in August 1939 – 'who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?' – he was not wrong. Yet nowadays the Armenian genocide has been recovered for historical memory and is a subject of live controversy, as anyone rash enough to raise the subject with the Turkish authorities knows. It has become an atrocity. You might say the same about a rather different kind of atrocity, the transatlantic slave trade: a centuries-long act of systemic violence which, as Rousseau suggested, was a kind of war waged against the people who were enslaved. For two centuries or more few Europeans noticed the fact. Of course, they knew that the trade existed, but few of them attended to it as an act of violence, and those who did tended to treat it as normal, perhaps regrettable, but not an atrocity, not an exceptional event demanding an exceptional response. The rise of abolitionism from the late eighteenth century onwards came about in large



part because of a shift in perception amongst certain sections of the British and American publics, during which they came to see the slave trade as an atrocity – a shift helped by stories and depictions of certain extreme acts of violence and abuse, such as the famous image of the packed slave ship, or the notorious episode from 1781 of the slave ship the *Zong*, whose crew deliberately drowned 131 men and women from their cargo hold in order to claim their value from their insurers. Such atrocity-stories helped awaken a wider public to the fact that a vast atrocity had been continuing under their noses for centuries. The moral shock involved is comparable to the modern anti-abortion campaigner or vegetarian who suddenly awakens to what they see as a huge, ongoing, unnoticed atrocity in which their entire society is quietly complicit.

If some events are concealed or ignored, and do not become atrocities until they begin to attract attention and to provoke shock, others are carried out in a deliberate attempt to shock and seek attention: that is their purpose. An act of terrorism is an atrocity almost by definition: an act of violence perpetrated deliberately to shock and to attract attention, with the suffering of the victims almost a by-product. Those of you who remember the terrorist attacks in the United States on 11 September 2001 will recall that there was a great deal of confusion in the days immediately following about the actual death toll. We now know that a little less than 3000 people were killed, which is of course a very large number, but it was some months before that figure was finally established. In the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the twin towers, much higher figures were being aired: sober and level-headed estimates were suggesting at least ten thousand, and figures as high as 19,000 were being guessed at – estimates which thankfully turned out to be greatly exaggerated, but which were not stupid, based on the information available in the moment. In some ways the immediate guess of ten thousand deaths mattered more than the eventual reality of three thousand. A terrorist atrocity is about shock and attention: it is an act of performance, of theatre, a fact which those attackers fully understood. It was the initial shock, not the eventual facts, which determined the political, cultural and military response. Or to put it another way: what happened to the twin towers was an act of violence. It was what happened on TV that made it into an atrocity.

That raises an obvious possibility: if an atrocity is in the eye of the beholder and is chiefly about shock and attention, it need not actually have any real victims at all. Even if the event is not wholly invented, it can certainly be wildly distorted. The notion of the false or exaggerated atrocity as an act of propaganda is of course all too familiar. The atrocity-stories associated with the German occupation of Belgium during the First World War are some of the most famous: there were indeed some genuine horrors, but the way in which Allied propaganda settled on and used these stories to build support for the war, especially in Britain, did not owe a great deal to sober and balanced reporting. And since the possibility of exaggerated or invented atrocities is quite well-known, it also produces an obvious counter-plot, the attempt by contemporary or historical defenders of the supposedly guilty party to downplay or entirely deny that an alleged atrocity took place. Witness the Turkish state's ongoing resistance to using the word *genocide* about the killing of Armenians during the First World War or of course the now all-too-well-documented phenomenon of Holocaust denial. Or the massacre of Nanjing which followed the occupation of the former Chinese capital by imperial Japanese forces in December 1937: Japanese records of the event were deliberately destroyed, and the episode remains an unresolved tug of war between Japanese and Chinese accounts. The numbers involved are contested – figures range from 50,000 to 300,000, with most scholars outside Japan converging near the top end of that range; but as you will realise by now the numbers are in large part symbolic, and represent a wider disagreement about whether this was an ordinary military occupation accompanied by some regrettable abuses – and therefore normal violence, not an atrocity – or whether it was an event which can stand for the whole horror of Japan's war in China, and thus render that entire struggle an atrocity. As that still-live controversy makes plain, an atrocity exists not so much in the eye of the beholder as in the beholder's memory. It is about which acts of violence we choose to cherish and to remember, and which we choose to forget.

In talking about atrocities this way, I am absolutely not trying to reduce terrible events to a kind of relativistic, both-sides-ish mush in which everything is a hall of mirrors and no-one is ever truly guilty of anything. Many – maybe most – atrocities are real, although I worry more about our tendency to turn a blind eye to perhaps much more terrible atrocities that it does not suit our own or anyone else's purpose for us to notice. My concern is the fog of political preferences that stop us seeing them clearly, and that lead us to focus on the atrocities we want to see and not the ones we don't. For example: in 1756 the nawab of Bengal laid siege to the British East India



Company's fort in Calcutta, reduced it, and took the surviving defenders prisoner. They were imprisoned overnight in a tiny dungeon in the fort, with somewhere between 64 and 146 men held in a space intended for two or three prisoners: our accounts claim that all but 23 of them died. This event in the so-called Black Hole of Calcutta became an atrocity in my full sense of the word. Once the story reached the British it was told and re-told and became a part of the justification for Robert Clive's campaign against and conquest of Bengal. A tablet was erected to the victims; a further monument was erected in 1901, and, following protests by Indian nationalists, was moved to an Anglican churchyard in 1940. Naturally the monument gives the maximalist estimate of casualties. Meanwhile, the phrase 'the Black Hole of Calcutta' became a proverb and is, at least according to some accounts, the source of the term 'black hole' in astronomy – not only a zippier phrase than the previous term, 'gravitationally collapsed object', but an allusion to a phenomenon that you could be packed into almost ad infinitum, but with no hope of walking out.

Meanwhile, Clive's conquest of Bengal was followed by the doubling of agricultural taxes and a further ten percentage point hike in 1770: that turned what would otherwise have been a problematic drought into a full-scale famine in which something in the order of ten million people died. As you will appreciate, this story too is hotly disputed, but even those who try to defend the East India Company's role in exacerbating the famine do not attempt to argue that it made any significant moves to relieve it, and while there were a series of such catastrophic famines in various parts of India under British rule, there have been none in India since independence. My point in drawing that comparison is not chiefly to parlay numbers of deaths into a game about moral superiority. Rather it is to observe that, for the British during the Raj, the dozens of deaths in the Black Hole were an outrageous atrocity, while the millions of deaths in the famine were a regrettable tragedy; whereas for anticolonial and nationalist historians since, the Black Hole was an exaggerated myth and the famine an atrocity perpetrated by callous neglect and exacerbated by centuries of deliberate suppression.

Which brings us to the last distinguishing feature of an atrocity. I said that an atrocity is a shocking event, and so it is: certainly, atrocities can leave onlookers thunderstruck and can turn their worlds upside down. The effect of the 11 September 2001 attacks on populations and in particular on political leaderships in the United States, Britain and elsewhere was, it seems to me, genuinely transformative: it was a watershed moment. But in another sense, and this applies especially to how atrocities are remembered, and their stories burnished as they are retold, atrocities are not shocking but comforting. It is the events we want to remember which become atrocities. For an atrocity has a villain. Catastrophic events such as, for example, the sinking of the *Titanic* or the destruction of Pantglas Junior School in Aberfan in 1966, are not atrocities, or not in most people's eyes: we may blame certain individuals or institutions for the parts they played, but that is not the central theme of the story. An atrocity story, by contrast, is primarily about the wickedness of the perpetrators, and it is a story told to keep alive the memory of what they did, to stir the hearers up for the ongoing struggle against them, to warn the next generation of supposedly similar threats or villains that might rear their heads today. Whenever you hear an atrocity story told, a story told in order to shock and to horrify, the question to ask is of course: who wants me to be shocked and horrified by this, and why? Is it the perpetrator? Is it someone who wants to stir up opposition to the perpetrator? Or indeed is it someone who is trying to use my shock and horror to sell me a newspaper or make me click on a link, a phenomenon which goes back at least to the invention of popular print in the sixteenth century if not before. If an atrocity story no longer has an edge – if it is no longer capable of stirring people to anger, to righteous indignation or to fear – then it is no longer an atrocity, just a story. The mere passage of time can often do it. Even in my home in the North-East of England, the Viking raids of the ninth century do not get anyone very excited anymore and visiting Norwegians do not need to be embarrassed. The Visigothic and Vandal sackings of Rome in the fifth century, atrocities which once paralysed the civilised world with horror, do not have much potency anymore, in part because there are no longer people we can identify as Visigoths or Vandals. But politics can speed the process up. I vividly recall visiting the monument to George Washington in Washington DC and receiving a little very gentle and good-natured teasing from a park ranger about atrocities committed by British forces during the American revolution: only two and a half centuries ago, which in atrocity time is only yesterday, but recalling British atrocities no longer serves any political purpose in America and so they can be laughed about. Still, they are there and could probably be warmed up again if the need ever arose. As anyone from the Balkans could tell you, memories can be kept discreetly in the freezer for a very long time and can be reheated very quickly.



Which brings us to the last general theme I want to bring in, namely the role of religion. Most of the examples of atrocities I have mentioned so far have been nationalistic, often with a mixture of political ideology – they are stories about the wickedness of the Croats, the British or the Chinese, or about the wickedness of the communists, the fascists or the imperialists. So it would be no surprise to find religion, that other perennial tribal marker, in the mix too. But it is more than just that. Religion deals in the currency of absolutes, and absolutes, of course, lend themselves to violence. Nationalism's demands are usually limited and negotiable, such as a dispute over a particular piece of territory. Religion's demands can be unlimited: it is about eternity and absolute values and ends like that can be used to justify virtually any means. They are worth dying for and therefore also worth killing for. That may mean that religions incline towards atrocities, although since they also contain significant forces of moral restraint, it's not easy to see which side of the ledger the final account falls. What is clear is that religions are often particularly quick to detect and denounce atrocities in others. Religions deal in ethics, and atrocity is nothing if not an ethical category. A nationalist or a secular ideologue may be able to shrug off an atrocity allegation as irrelevant: the claim that Stalin said that a million deaths is a mere statistic is probably false, but that sort of utilitarian approach to human suffering was certainly consistent with Communist ideology, whereas most religious ethical systems would find it very difficult. This is especially so since religions often use ethics to diagnose truth. A false religion shows itself to be false, so the theory goes, through the immoral conduct of its followers. Religious atrocities, then, are not only shocking; they are revealing.

We see this of course in our own time. Terrorist acts committed by jihadist Islamists are, quite deliberately and self-consciously, religious atrocities, aiming not merely to kill those deemed to deserve it – as I suggested, that is almost a side-effect – but to grab the world's attention and to do what violence of any kind almost always does: to polarise, to drive people to one extreme or the other. Especially by means of provoking a violent reaction, such atrocities are designed to reduce the choices available down to jihadist violence and anti-Islamic violence, in part in the hope that the world's billions of non-jihadist Muslims will thereby be forced to embrace the cause. It is not a stupid strategy, though so far it is a very long way from succeeding. Other religious traditions are in on the atrocity act too though: whether that be Buddhists using stories of Muslim atrocities to justify atrocities of their own, as in Myanmar and Sri Lanka, or the attempts by both religious sides in Northern Ireland to use events such as the Omagh bombing or Bloody Sunday to claim the moral high ground. If the shootings in Derry on 30 January 1972 had happened on a different day of the week, we would not remember the event as Bloody Wednesday.

But I fear we are unlikely to learn very much from talking about our contemporary atrocities. We all have our views as to which atrocities matter and which don't, which reveal the true horror of a particular nation or party or religion and which are unfortunate aberrations or irresponsible exaggerations. What I want to do in this series of lectures is to think about the business of atrocity-making and how atrocities are used and abused. And for that purpose, we need to step back to an earlier age of atrocity. We're not going back to Vikings, Visigoths and Vandals, but to something a little nearer: the so-called early modern age, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which by no coincidence was the first heyday of popular print, and also a great age of religious atrocity – real, exaggerated and imagined. We may feel that most of the battles that these atrocities were used to fight are over and done, but one of the things I want to suggest in these lectures is that they linger on, and underpin prejudices, presumptions and fears that are still alive today. But I also want to use them to look at the whole phenomenon of the atrocity when it is at one remove, so we can see how the business works when we are not quite so directly involved in it. It is, for one thing, useful to look at an era of religious atrocities in which most – though not all – of the perpetrators were self-proclaimed Christians. Not – I hope I don't need to say this, but I suppose I should – that I am trying to say that 'Christian atrocities' then are as bad as, or in some way morally equivalent to, 'Muslim atrocities' now. This is not a competition, although I suppose it is worth challenging the widespread assumption in our own times that Islam is a *uniquely* violent religion. So, over the next six lectures we will be looking at a series of atrocity stories from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In each lecture I want to do two things: first, to try to lay out as soberly, clearly and matter-of-factly as I can what actually happened, insofar as modern scholarship has been able to reconstruct it; and then to look at how the events were remembered, retold, used or forgotten both in their own times and since. So next time we will be looking at the burnings of Protestants in England under the Tudors, and what came of it; in later lectures we'll go on to look at the notorious St Bartholomew's Day Massacre, at the terrible persecution of Catholics in Japan in the 1610s and thereafter, at the competing narratives of massacre which came to define seventeenth-century Ireland – I did say some of these stories still linger on –



and then, in the final lecture, to look at our modern memories of this era's atrocities, the people we now remember, the ones we exaggerate, and the ones we forget. But we begin, we have to begin, with the country whose name became a simple byword for cruelty in the early modern age: Spain.

What has given this story additional pathos in modern times is the background. In the early eighth century, the Iberian Peninsula was conquered by the Umayyad Caliphate and fell under Muslim rule. From the eleventh century onwards, the various Christian kingdoms which had hung on on the northern edge of the peninsula began to push back, and from then until 1492 the region was divided between Christian and Muslim rule; it also had a significant Jewish population, making it by far the most religiously diverse region of Europe. Its modern reputation for tolerance and peaceful coexistence includes a good deal of romantic exaggeration, but it is not entirely invented either. This coexistence or *convivencia* was never very much approved of by the religious authorities, and it was brought to a fairly abrupt end in the late fifteenth century, when, quite suddenly, Iberia went from being an embattled frontier region of Christendom to being the home of its superpower. It began with a marriage: in 1469 Isabella, heiress to the kingdom of Castile, married Ferdinand, the crown prince of Aragon. In this way two of the three Christian kingdoms on the peninsula were united, and, as it turned out, permanently – the third, Portugal, proved tougher to swallow, though not for want of trying. When they inherited their respective crowns in 1474 and 1479, these two turned out to be a formidable team, dedicated to the creation of a new, fully Catholic Spain. Pope Alexander VI, an ally to whom they owed a good deal, gave them the formal title of the Catholic Monarchs in 1494, which they passed on to their successors. But the really consequential development had already happened, in 1478. Ferdinand and Isabella found themselves ruling territories with substantial Jewish and, to a lesser extent, Muslim populations, and for the past century or more, especially following a wave of antisemitic rioting in 1391, the principal means of dealing with this Jewish problem – as they saw it – was to encourage Jews to convert to Christianity, by persuasion if possible, and, increasingly, by force if necessary. Strictly speaking, forced conversions were invalid, but quite what constitutes *force* and what constitutes *firm encouragement* was open to debate. The result was that, by Ferdinand and Isabella's time, there was a population numbering over 200,000 of so-called *conversos*, that is, baptised Christians who were themselves or who were descended from converts from Judaism, and whose conversions were widely held by the rest of the Christian population to be suspect. This division between, as they were called, old and new Christians would poison Spanish life for centuries, and would incidentally help to give rise to modern antisemitism, in which Jewishness is defined racially, as opposed to old-fashioned anti-Judaism, in which it was defined by religious affiliation and practice.

Anyway, in fifteenth-century Spain these *conversos* were widely and often correctly suspected of being crypto-Jewish, of continuing to practice Judaism in various ways and to various extents despite their formal profession of Christianity. Since they were baptised Christians, so-called Judaising of this kind was formally classed as a heresy. For monarchs keen to stamp out this heresy, there was an obvious tool to hand: since the late twelfth century, the Church had created a tribunal known as the Inquisition empowered to investigate, try and punish suspected heretics. The Inquisition had long been present in Aragon, but kings suspicious of its independent powers had marginalised it; the kings of Castile had prevented the Inquisition being established there at all. So, the system was not working the way it should, and the problem was getting worse. In 1467 two *conversos* in Llerena, in south-western Castile, were discovered to be practising Judaism and promptly burned as heretics. In 1475 there was a terrible tale circulating of a Christian child who was kidnapped and crucified on Palm Sunday by Jews – a version of one of the most perennial atrocity stories of all. Whether these and other, similar incidents actually pushed Ferdinand and Isabella into action, or merely provided them with political cover, in 1478 they extracted a remarkable bull from Pope Sixtus IV: a new inquisitorial tribunal for their two kingdoms would be created, its staff to be appointed not by the popes but by the monarchs themselves. In an age where the power of the papacy was on the wane, an exceptionally important papal power had been delegated to – or seized by – the monarchs of a rising Catholic power. Successive popes would try to recover control over the Spanish Inquisition thus created, without success.

It started slowly. The first inquisitors were not appointed until 1480 and to begin with its efforts were almost entirely confined to one region, the areas near Seville and Cordoba. The first trials took place in Seville in February 1481, when six *conversos* were burned for Judaising. But now the matter began to snowball. *Conversos* alarmed by the tribunal began to move apparently safer parts of the country. The Inquisition began to bulk up its staff to keep



track of them. Seven new inquisitors were appointed in 1482, and new tribunals were established: by 1492 there were eight of them. The executions gathered pace. One day in February 1484, thirty-four *conversos* were burned together in Ciudad Real. Stories emerged from Seville and then from Toledo of conspiracies by leading *conversos* to murder inquisitors and other leading churchmen: these led to waves of arrests and executions. In 1485, an inquisitor was actually murdered by thugs hired by local *conversos* while at prayer before the high altar in Saragossa cathedral: the executions of the murderers themselves was only the start, with the crisis used to break the city's leading *converso* families over the following decade and to silence any murmurs of disquiet about the Inquisition for a century or more. It is even possible, though there is no evidence for this, that the whole business was deliberately staged. In 1488 a new body, the *Suprema*, was created to oversee all the Inquisition's tribunals, whose head took on the new title of Inquisitor General: the first holder of this office was a Dominican friar named Tomás de Torquemada.

Establishing the scale of the Inquisition's killings is not easy: we don't have much documentation from the earliest years. The best modern historians' guesses – and they are not much more than guesses – tend arrive at a figure of between 1000 and 2000 executions during the period up to 1530, after which the pace of persecution slackened. For comparison, the total number of people executed in the United States since the restoration of the death penalty there in 1977 is 1,503. So, the Spanish Inquisition amassed a pretty hefty body count, but this was not a genocidal tribunal. Only a small number of cases that it heard ended in an execution. This is partly because there were a lot of trials, and condemnations, in absentia, as *conversos* fled before arrest – as well as posthumous condemnations, which included seizure of property. But most of all because of a key piece of inquisitorial method, the device known by the Orwellian name the 'edict of grace'. This was a declaration by an inquisitorial tribunal of a period of time during which heretics were invited to come forward and confess their errors voluntarily; those who did so could expect only gentle discipline, but anyone who did not come forward and was then arrested was liable to execution as an impenitent heretic. Naturally, then, these windows of opportunity produced surges of preventative confessions, many of them from *conversos* whose Christianity seems to have been real enough but who merely continued to avoid pork or observe some other residual Jewish-tinged custom. Penitents who wished to take advantage of the edict of grace were required, however, to demonstrate their sincerity, and a most effective means of doing this was to denounce others guilty of the same offence.

This is one sign that the Inquisition was rather an unusual tribunal. Indeed, this was one of the main things that recommended it to the monarchs – and one reason why the creation of formal Inquisitions was contentious wherever it was mooted: they cut across existing legal process as if it were not there. Those arrested by the Inquisition were, legally, presumed guilty, and while acquittals did occasionally happen, especially in the early years, it was a general principle that they were to be avoided unless absolutely necessary, so as not to undermine the tribunal's reputation. All proceedings were secret, as indeed were the tribunal's own rules and processes. Suspects were generally not informed of the charges against them until the last possible moment, merely being asked to confess to whatever they knew themselves to be guilty of. They were never told the names of witnesses or the detail of the charges. Prisoners were kept incommunicado as far as possible. They might have a lawyer appointed by the tribunal; whose duty was not to defend them but to exhort them to confess. Naturally, all this abandonment of legal norms alarmed some people and gratified others. For Ferdinand and Isabella, and their successors, a freelance tribunal under their direct control which could help knit together their two kingdoms was rather welcome. The fact that the Inquisition treated all suspects alike, regardless of wealth, social status or even rank within the Church, was much appreciated by monarchs who sometimes struggled to cut their over-mighty subjects down to size. The fact that heretics' property was forfeit to the Crown was a lucrative side benefit.

This was a very effective method of rolling up dissident networks, but it had a side-effect: it produced what a statistician would call false positives. A conscientious inquisitor, besieged by anxious *conversos* eager to confess while they still could, would likely find himself appalled: evidently Spain's Jewish problem was much, much worse than anyone had imagined. As the inquisitors and their monarchs mulled this problem, one consistent theme began to emerge. How could *conversos* be expected to resist the insidious temptation to revert to Judaism as long as actual, unrepentant Jews continued to live and practice their religion in Spain, as shameless as the whore of Babylon? Surely this newly unmasked crisis – this long-hidden atrocity, if you like, of ubiquitous heresy – required the Catholic Monarchs to make good on their promise to make the land of *convivencia* into a truly Christian



kingdom? In 1480, the same year the Inquisition was actually set up, a new, strict set of policies requiring the segregation of Jewish populations in ghettos was enacted, both to separate them from *conversos* and also to create what we might today call a hostile environment in order to encourage conversions: but plainly this was not enough. The trigger for this was the final victory, in 1492, over the emirate of Granada, the last Muslim-ruled territory in western Europe, bringing the whole peninsula under Christian rule. Two months later, in the Alhambra Decree of 31 March 1492, drafted by Grand Inquisitor Torquemada, the remaining Jews of Castile and Aragon were given four months either to convert to Christianity – thus placing themselves under the Inquisition – or to depart.

Some Spanish Jews hoped that, like so often before, this was a negotiating ploy rather than a final demand: there is even a story, which we ought to doubt, that one Jewish scholar and financier who had lent King Ferdinand a good deal of the money he needed to fight the war in Granada offered the king thirty thousand ducats to revoke the decree, whereupon Torquemada threw a crucifix at the king's feet, saying, 'Judas sold our Lord for thirty pieces of silver; His Majesty is about to sell him again for thirty thousand'. It soon became clear that there would be no negotiation. Jews who chose to leave were permitted to sell their property and to take the proceeds, but not to take actual coin, merely bills of exchange; plainly enough, anyone who chose this route would at best be able to realise a fraction of the value of their possessions, and naturally the monarchs and their allies benefitted handsomely from this. Again, the exact figures are difficult to come by. The majority of the remaining Jews converted, perhaps 200,000 people: since they had had a choice, albeit a miserable one, these were not in the eyes of the canon lawyers *forced* conversions. Instead of solving Spain's *converso* problem, of course, this new wave of unwilling converts ensured it would fester away for centuries, to be joined soon enough by a similar group of *moriscos*, that is, coerced converts from Islam and their descendants.

The Inquisition remained in existence until 1834, but after 1530 never operated on the mass scale of its first decades. It remained a live threat: it famously arrested Bartolomé Carranza, the archbishop of Toledo and primate of Spain, in 1558, held him on suspicion of heresy for eighteen years, finally declared him not to have been a heretic but required him to renounce a series of errors, and sentenced him to house arrest in a Dominican friary, where he died a week later. As late as 1826, the Inquisition put a schoolteacher to death for his anti-Christian views. Still, it is worth emphasising that after its initial, blood-soaked years it was more an ever present, latent threat than a religious Gestapo. The Inquisition did use torture, but much less than most other legal systems of the age, chiefly because its procedures emphasised that torture often produced false or misleading evidence; probably fewer than ten percent of trials made use of it. Or again, if you were to be accused of witchcraft in sixteenth-century Europe and you could choose where to be tried, you would be well-advised to have your case heard by the Spanish Inquisition: the tribunal was generally highly sceptical of such accusations, seeing them as superstitious, and you could reasonably expect the case to be dismissed. The best estimate is that, from around 1540 onwards, the Inquisition executed a little less than a thousand people, most of them before 1750, and the largest number of them being *conversos* from Portugal, which was under Spanish rule between 1580 and 1640. This is obviously bad. By modern standards of mass killing, it hardly registers.

So how does the Spanish Inquisition come to have such a terrible reputation? It is no surprise that 19th-century Spanish liberals like Goya should have chosen it as a symbol of the old order they were trying to overthrow – nor, indeed, that General Franco should have at least toyed with the idea of restoring it. But the Spanish Inquisition's reputation is international. In Voltaire's *Candide*, it became what it has remained ever since: a handy symbol of faceless tyranny, arbitrary justice and bureaucratic malice from which escape is impossible, and for whom law and even guilt or innocence have no meaning. If you dig into what we mean by words like Kafkaesque or Orwellian, pretty soon you find an image of the Spanish Inquisition. When Dostoevsky wanted a symbolic figure of religious cruelty for the parable, he told in *The Brothers Karamazov*, he chose to set his story in sixteenth-century Seville and to make his villain the Grand Inquisitor. His American contemporary Edgar Allan Poe's 1842 short story *The Pit and the Pendulum*, which, to put it politely, makes little attempt at historical accuracy, is nevertheless firmly located in the Inquisition's dungeons in Toledo in 1808. The 1961 horror film loosely based on Poe's story relocated the story to sixteenth-century Spain, in virtually its only concession to plausibility. Mel Brooks' Torquemada sketch in his 1981 film *The History of the World Part I* plays with the story as only a Jewish comedian unfettered by constraints like good taste could. To say nothing of Monty Python, whose Spanish Inquisition sketch has become so famous



that it has produced that ultimate marker of modern cultural significance: a Lego set. I think the scroll is rather ingenious.

We can trace this back to the age of the Inquisition itself – but perhaps not quite to its heyday. In Robert Bolt's play and film *A Man for All Seasons*, set in England in the years around 1530, first the naive duke of Norfolk and then the sinister Thomas Cromwell say, 'This isn't Spain; this is England' – by which they mean, this is a country of laws and not of arbitrary arrest and execution. No-one in 1530s England was actually using Spain as a symbol of such things. The first real glimpse that the outside world had of the Spanish Inquisition came in 1567, with the publication of this book, written by that rare thing, a Spanish Protestant, using the name Reginaldo de Montes: first published in Heidelberg and then swiftly translated into French, Dutch and English. Two things in particular to notice about this book. One, the vivid illustration that accompanied it, laying out the cruelties of the Inquisition for all to see: notice the depictions of torture in each of the four corners of the image, and then in the centre, the public element as well as the private, the victims brought to be condemned, and then burned – with the prince's chair overseeing it all, though he himself is too bored by such a routine event to bother turning up in person. And two, the focus of its narrative. Montes' book gives us a great deal about inquisitorial procedures and their desperate injustice, but it does not have very much to say about the *conversos* or the Inquisition's thousands of Jewish victims. Instead it concentrates on a more recent episode: the Inquisition's sudden discovery of what it took to be a nest of Protestants in Seville in 1557-8, a discovery which alarmed Spanish officials – including the recently abdicated King and Emperor Charles V, who was horrified to see that the heresies which had torn his German realms apart were now appearing in Spain. Fearing that this was the beginning of something, the Inquisition was let loose on this phenomenon, resulting in a series of *autos da fe* in 1559: first in Valladolid, where one unrepentant and thirteen penitent heretics were executed, and sixteen more escaped with lesser penalties; a second round in the same city saw twelve executions, four of them nuns, and two of them defiant. There followed two rounds of burnings in Seville, one in 1559 and one in 1560, with eighteen and fourteen executions respectively. A final set of eighteen executions followed in 1562: so, a total of seventy-six executions in total. That was a hefty body count for what had been a rather minor outbreak of heresy, and certainly demonstrated both the ferocity of the Inquisition's methods and the determination with which it would stamp out any whisper of dissidence: the Inquisitors would argue, though, that this decisive action spared Spain the catastrophic religious civil wars that convulsed much of the rest of the continent, and you don't need to approve of the Inquisition to accept that they might have had a point. If there could ever have been a Spanish Reformation, this surge of persecution swept it away. Still, for the rest of Europe and especially for the Protestant half of the continent, these dozens of killings put the Spanish Inquisition on the map in the way that thousands of dead Jews had not. Mass burnings of Jews were not an atrocity, in the sense that no-one found them particularly useful as propaganda. Much smaller-scale killings of Protestants definitely were. It helped, naturally, that among the victims executed in Seville in 1560 were two English sailors who had become involved in heretical groups there. Montes' account was not all that inaccurate, and in particular its description of the Inquisition's implacable legal procedures was reasonably straight: sometimes atrocities need no embellishment. But there were certainly distortions and exaggerations. There were stories woven in which are, let's say, unsupported by independent sources and which don't seem to have lost anything in the telling, such as the claim that at one of the executions in Valladolid, one victim cried out to King Philip II, who was there in person, for mercy. Philip, who we'll be hearing more about in the next lecture, supposedly told the man that if his own son had fallen into such heresies, he himself would carry the wood with which to burn him. More substantially, Montes and the other accounts that followed him made a great deal out of the Inquisition's use of torture, seeing it as universal rather than exceptional: some of the writing about this is prurient to the point of sadism. Another theme that was much emphasised was the supposed corruption of the Inquisitors, who were accused of exploiting their powers for financial gain. There were tales of English merchants having their goods seized on flimsy religious pretexts, including one story – believe it if you want, it comes from Sir Walter Raleigh, which isn't the most rock-solid pedigree – of a Flemish merchant suspected of heresy: he protested that he was a good Catholic, and the Inquisitors could find no evidence to the contrary, so they admitted that while he himself was a faithful son of the Church, his goods were heretical and so had to be confiscated. And that is only one of a wider vein of merry tales of entrapment and cunning webs woven around innocents by inquisitors, such as the maker of religious statues who refuses to sell one to an undercover inquisitor at a knock-down price, saying he would rather smash it than undervalue his work like that, only to find himself accused of iconoclasm.



And so, as these stories were told and retold, republished and embellished, a myth was born: the story known to modern scholars as the *Leyenda Negra*, the Black Legend of the Spanish as a uniquely cruel, subtle and tyrannical people. This is how, during the invasion scare of the Spanish Armada in 1588, so many English people became convinced that every Spanish ship carried inquisitors armed with portable instruments of torture; and how, by the 1650s, this had grown into a fact, so widely known as to be indisputable, that if the Spanish Armada had landed they would have killed every English person over the age of seven and sentenced the children to perpetual slavery. That is, the atrocity stories of the Inquisition did what a really good atrocity story always does: they made anything believable, by almost literally demonising their subjects. And while I think we, in this country, no longer regard the Spanish as a uniquely cruel and inhuman nation, the Black Legend is not dead, and the Spanish Inquisition is not merely a metaphor. The wave of international romantic support for Spanish republicans in the civil war of the 1930s was buoyed by a residual sense of what Spanish tyranny might mean. And in the United States, the war fought against Spain in the 1890s, and the continued deep reluctance to accept Hispanic populations as properly American – and, indeed, the distinction generally made between ‘white’ and ‘Hispanic’ Americans as different categories, which looks very peculiar from the outside – continues to reflect a deep, residual sense of the Hispanics as a people ill-suited to freedom and given to cruelty, a sense that they are inhuman and perhaps even a little subhuman. That partly reflects another deep seam of atrocity stories, those related to the Spanish conquest and colonisation of South and Central America, which is too big a theme to touch on today, though we’ll be noticing it in future lectures. But it also reflects another, deeper theme: that the Spanish did and do these things because they are Catholics, and because Catholicism was, and therefore deep down still is, a religion of cruelty and tyranny. In the next lecture, we’ll return to that theme and see how it came to be woven into the English-speaking world.

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