

Providing background for "The Invention of the Inquisition," Edward Peters makes the following observation about 16th-century Europe:

Every European state based its legitimacy on religious grounds, and virtually every European state persecuted religious minorities. (Inquisition, by Peter Edwards, at page 122.)

Martyrdom was associated with such persecutions:

The cult of martyrs had been nurtured by the medieval Latin Church, the ninth-century Martyrology of Usuardus becoming a standard work and the cult of the martyrs joining in the broader cult of the saints upon which much of Latin liturgical and devotional life was based. Late medieval books of saints' lives were immensely popular, often graphically illustrated with the sufferings of martyrs, and much attention was paid to the appropriately horrible fates of the persecutors of martyrs. (Edwards, at page 126.)

People who opposed religious persecution - like John Foxe - did what they could to make the subject of persecution (and the drawings supporting the stories) as horrible as possible:

In 1563 the great English martyrologist John Foxe published the first English edition of his Acts and Monuments of These Latter and Perilous Days, a work that rivaled the English Bible in popularity and familiarity in England over the next two centuries. Foxe's work, popularly known as The Book of Martyrs, professed to be a Church history with martyrdom as its central theme.

An opponent of religious persecution himself, Foxe worked especially hard to present graphic pictures of the acts of martyrdom, and he linked the persecutions of the sixteenth century not only with those of the pagan persecutions of antiquity, but with those of such more recent English victims as Wyclif and the Lollards and the Oxford martyrs [Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Ridley and Thomas Cranmer who were burned, in Oxford, "on the order of Queen Mary"]. (Edwards, page 128.)

In other words ... by making the illustrations of religious persecution and martyrdom as awful as possible, Foxe hoped that his work could do something to stop it.

Thanks to Google Books, we can peruse an online version of Edwards' book, Inquisition.

Credits:

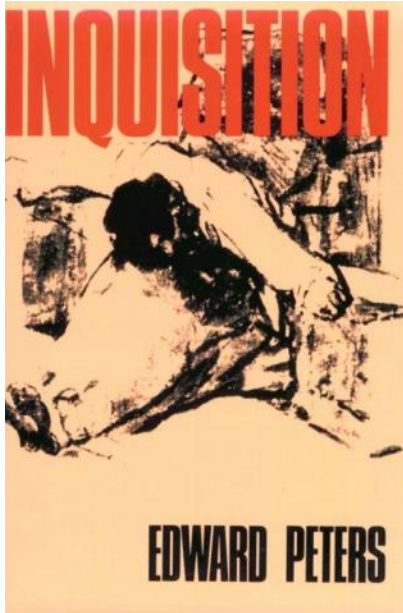
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