

Hold on a minute. Let's take these things one at a time. Reducing any history to broad condemnations risks making fatal mistakes. The social, political, biological, technological, and other context in which these and other world events happened then and happen today is much more complex. Christ's life and teachings in no sense support indiscriminate killing, torture, or genocides. Remember, Christ let humans torture and kill him, not the other way around. And Christ did so exactly to forgive humans such ingrained and perpetual violence, borne of hate.

Take the Crusades as an example. Popular opinion today clearly sees the Crusades, taking place from 1095 A.D. to 1291 A.D., as a regrettably disastrous movement, which the Crusades were, although not in the way that your question supposes, laying the full blame so easily at the faith's feet. What today is Israel, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, and Turkey, was largely Christian territory from about 200 A.D. to 900 A.D., indeed Christianity's geographic birthplace including Jerusalem. But Muslims conquered that territory from about 900 A.D. to the Crusades' beginning in 1095 A.D., enslaving, deporting, or murdering many Christians.

The first Crusade began in response to the leader of the Constantinople Church asking for protection against those Muslim invaders. Eight other Crusades followed over the next two centuries, none especially successful in regaining much territorial control, although some Crusades relieved some local populations, while others regained some access to Jerusalem or other holy sites. Indeed, the mixed goal, whether protecting populations, regaining access to and protecting holy sites, or establishing earthly kingdoms along the way, was part of the reason for their failure.

The Crusades were also serving political, social, and individual ends back home in Europe, from which they originated. Crusaders tended to be the young, outcast, rebellious, lawless, and oppressed. They had nothing to lose and everything to gain in gathering en masse for a rampaging trek. They also had no commitment to Christ's commands to love and serve others to Christ. Officials and populations back home were glad to be rid of them. The loosely organized and poorly led expeditions often pillaged as they went, sometimes in horrible slaughter. While Muslim invaders may have been their justification, Jews and Christians were also often their targets. In short, they took faith for an excuse to do its opposite. No one

of sound Christian faith defends them. People do horrific things in the name of everything and anything.

Yet Christianity's record is of overwhelming good, not evil. Witness the Christian William Wilberforce ending England's slavery, the Christian Henry Dunant founding the International Red Cross, and the Christian Dame Cicely Saunders founding hospice. Witness the thousands of Christian schools and hospitals in the places in most desperate need of them. Above all, though, witness the healing, forgiving, loving, and resurrecting life of Christ. Oh, and Christians persevere patiently and tolerantly today, while a Muslim mosque still sits defiantly atop the Holy Temple site.

The Spanish Inquisition, founded by monarchs Isabella I and Ferdinand II in 1478 A.D. following a long inquisitorial history begun by a pope more than two centuries earlier, was, like the Crusades, such a misanthropic movement as to be a rebellion from Christianity, not merely its distortion. Indeed, the Spanish Inquisition's prime targets were converts to Christianity, the very people whom the true faith would nurture in love. The Spanish Inquisition purported to identify heretics but was instead a social and political tool to increase and maintain the monarchy's power. Torture and execution removed dissenters, and their threat compelled loyalty oaths.

The Catholic Church of those Dark Ages was indeed an instrument of Inquisition not just in Spain but across Continental Europe, though often at the behest of secular authorities such as the monarchy in Spain. Close study shows that the religious officials, restrained by their faith, were often far less hard on their suspects than the parallel secular authorities, who had no mercy to show. Atrocities nonetheless occurred, although sometimes at the people's rather than the religious official's demand, and likely in far smaller numbers than reported. In this complex context, Christian faith thus likely made the Inquisition far less severe than it would have been in the hands of a different authority.

Yet how could any religious institution be so involved in such terrible abuse of power? Notably, the Dark Ages was a very different time, when sound national governments imposing fair law and order simply did not exist. Terrible disease, mass starvation, and frequent warring put a high price on any order. The Catholic Church held the only temporizing authority, the only prospect for common decency

and some semblance of social, political, and economic order. The Catholic Church was more than a religious institution. It was largely the only institution, in which it of necessity served not just faith but also military security, social constraint, and economic and political order.

Once again, in this complex context, Christian faith was very likely a significant restraint on the worst human impulses. Indeed, thank God for the life, teachings, and influence of Christ throughout the Middle Ages. Out of the monasteries and religious orders gradually grew bodies of literature, art, and thought, and enough of an educated population, to sustain a great Reformation and Renaissance. Out of the Christian chrysalis, such stable social, economic, and political order, and scientific and technological revolution, arose as to lead to enormous rises in health, security, welfare, and wealth. A foundational Christian faith makes all scientific and rational thought, and the flourishing that comes with it, not just possible but responsible and laudable, rather than undermining them or holding them back. The Crusades and Inquisitions were not Christianity's fault but its abuse and distortion.