

The Myth of Multiple "Millions" Supposedly Killed in the Catholic Inquisitions, Revisited (Anti-Catholic John Bugay's Historically Groundless Claims)



Illustration of alleged widespread wicked Catholic bloodthirstiness, from an anti-Catholic web page on the Inquisition

From a discussion in a combox for the Reformed Protestant [Green Baggins website](#) (starting at comment #213, which started discussion of the ubiquitous Inquisition). John Bugay: now a regular contributor at the notoriously anti-Catholic and perpetually fact-challenged *Boors All* blog, got into it a little later. His words will be in blue. Jason J. Stellman's words will be in red. Older cited replies of mine will be indented.

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Protestants pretty much derived their own trinitarianism and Christology from us in the first place: Nicaea, Chalcedon, etc.).

No, that was *us* at Nicaea and Chalcedon. You guys were at the Inquisition, though. That was a joke.

Both [Luther](#) and [Calvin](#) approved of drowning Anabaptists. They would have sooner agreed to execute many Baptists here (and [Luther thought Zwingli was damned](#) precisely because he denied the Real Presence in the Eucharist), for espousing adult baptism, than they would have agreed to execute me, as a Catholic. Catholics were usually merely banished.

witch hunts many hundreds of victims there.

Keep your sense of proportion, though. The same famous Oxford reference work from which Catholic apologists draw your “33,000 denominations” number lists the Roman Catholic Church as among the greatest “persecutors,” nearly 5 million over the centuries, just behind Communist China and the Soviet Union.

Too, Luther and Calvin were products of their time, which was largely medieval, when “hangings and drawings and quarterings” were still very much real living memories from those inquisition days.

Please give an exact reference for the “5 million” figure. Thanks. I find it very difficult to believe. Neither Catholics nor Protestants killed anywhere near that number, as far as I know. Mao killed 60-70 million; Stalin about 30-40 million, I believe.

As for 33,000, I renounced that number years ago (about eight), having been convinced of the faulty criteria used, by Eric Svendsen. I usually say, now, “hundreds of Protestant denominations.” And [the paper about that](#) remains on my site. It matters little how many there actually are, since according to the Bible, there is only [one Church and one faith, and no denominations whatever](#). So even two supposed competing “churches” is most unbiblical and a scandal.

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Again, as a point of fact: [drawing and quartering](#) (complete with tearing out a person’s heart, like the ancient Aztecs did in their human sacrifice rituals) was an “English power play thing” — not really an “Inquisition” thing per se. For example, William Wallace (“Braveheart”) was drawn and quartered for treason against the king of

England (as was shown in that movie). That had nothing to do with the “Inquisition”: let alone Catholicism.

It was the particularly brutal mindset of English royalty, that was later employed by Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, when they wished to suppress the will of the vast majority of the English people who wished to remain Catholic. The brutality shown against the Irish (mostly Catholic) — mostly after the 16th century, and largely by the Puritans — was another instance of the same thing. That can hardly have been Catholic, since it was directed against Catholics, just as Henry VIII’s persecutions were.

Give it up. Cynical mentions of the Inquisition prove nothing. Historic Protestants are no more “clean” in this regard than Catholics are, and far more hypocritical, because Luther started out decrying the lack of tolerance. As soon as he had power, he persecuted, too, and so did Calvin and Zwingli and (most of all) the English Protestants. The only ones who didn’t do so were the Anabaptists, and even they had a small radical, violent component.

I have a whole [web page thoroughly documenting historic Protestant intolerance and persecution](#), because I grew very tired and weary of always hearing about the Inquisition and Crusades, but never about Protestant sins along the same lines. I always oppose double standards and assert historical truths as far as I can ascertain them.

Dave Armstrong — Kudos to you for having given up the 33,000 number. Maybe as a token of your good will you could persuade some of your fellow Catholics to see things your way.

Regarding the persecutions, [see here](#) [a James White article]

Scroll down to “persecutors and their victims”. You’ll see Roman Catholicism at #5 on the list, actually (kudos for you for being lower than I thought) on having created only 4,951,000 martyrs.

I did not say Protestants were “clean”. I said they were shaped by their times, which, in turn, were shaped in huge part by the Roman Catholic hierarchy.

So long as you are asserting historical truths, keep in mind that the Roman Catholic Church had centuries to do its deeds before there was one Protestant. If you can keep that straight, it will go a long way toward helping the discussion along.

. . . there is and always has been “one true church”. No doubt the presbyterian arm of the body was responsible for the clear thinking in those early councils. (Heaven knows there was some unclear thinking.)

The “Roman” part was the cancerous mutation that eventually caused the inquisition, etc. Most of the really serious sins. The Reformation came along and tried to excise that cancer, and got some of it, but didn’t quite make it. Cancer can be a very persistent thing, you know.

It is an absurd, grotesquely inflated figure [4,951,000], arbitrarily pulled out of a hat. I submit that no serious historian can be found who would support this. Where do they even purport to get it from? It is doubly absurd in that it ignores all the Protestant persecutions, as if Lutherans, Calvinists, Anglicans, and Zwinglians never killed anyone or hurt a flea. Instead, we get the wicked Catholics, “quasi-Christians,” and “other Christians” (whoever in the world *they* are supposed to be: have they no *names*?). It’s completely ludicrous.

Even James White, your source, (wisely) states, “My point is not to defend this source’s claim at this point.” He knows (or seems to know) it is ridiculous. But he has to get in the sweeping prejudicial remark [against Catholic apologist Steve Ray, [about whom he has long been obsessed](#)]: “He is willing to throw his integrity under the bus in the face of overwhelming documentation and respond with laughter and mockery. It is the way of the Catholic Convert, evidently.”

I’m not interested in the “your dad’s uglier than mine” arguments, which never go anywhere or accomplish anything, but rather, in the definition of “Christian”: my initial query and discussion with the blog host (that is still in process). I have merely clarified a few basic historical facts that you seem to have mixed up.

Claiming that “millions” were killed is precisely one of the ridiculous myths that helped me to decide to no longer debate theology with anti-Catholics. It’s futile. It’s a waste of time. I’ll do little exchanges like this one, but not an entire dialogue on theology.

Well, Dave, it is the **Oxford** World Christian Encyclopedia, so your protest of ludicrousity is a bit weak.

I don’t care *what* it is. This source has the responsibility to back up its claims with

serious historiographical documentation and the latest research, just as anything else does. Having “Oxford” in its title doesn’t change that fact. Just as it is silly regarding numbers of denominations and how they are determined, so it is with regard to numbers of persons killed in historic persecutions, and who did it. You haven’t given me any reason to overthrow my understanding of the numbers, but merely fluff and rhetoric.

You can continue to argue like this if you like, but understand that anyone with even a passing knowledge of medieval history will quickly question your credibility if you do so. It’s your life and your intellectual reputation, my friend. I’m actually trying to spare you some embarrassment in the future . . .

If you were to read the article, Dr. White does not have an issue with the source; he has an issue with the lack of integrity of those who use the source.

And as far as proportionality, you’ll see, far down the list, that “other Christians” (which would include the Lutherans, etc., who you seem to be intent on mentioning, at 220,000. So that’s what, 4.5% of the total? Heck, Catholics are eager to say “that’s nothing” when talking about the sexual abuse scandal.

I have not mixed up anything. I have merely provided some proportion, backed up with some legitimate numbers, to one aspect of the “exchange” that didn’t come out quite straight the first time.

As an example of how absurdly inflated the “murdered” figures are, see, e.g., the Wikipedia article on the Spanish Inquisition ([section on “Death Tolls”](#)). Using actual records from the time (I know: what a novelty to actually document something from a primary source!), one arrives at a minimum total of 1,050 killed between 1540-1700 in Spain, Sicily, and Mexico.

The Wikipedia [article on the Roman Inquisition](#) (1542-c. 1860), cited Italian historian Andrea Del Col who estimated “that out of 62,000 cases judged by Inquisition in Italy after 1542 around 2% (ca. 1250) ended with death sentence.”

Likewise, the [article on “Medieval Inquisition”](#) states:

The inquisitors generally preferred not to hand over heretics to the secular arm for execution if they could persuade the heretic to repent: Ecclesia non

novit sanguinem. For example, Bernard Gui, a famous inquisitor working in the area of Carcassonne (in modern France), executed 42 people out of over 900 guilty verdicts in fifteen years of office. Execution was to admit defeat, that the Church was unable to save a soul from heresy, which was the goal of the inquisition.

Other treatments derived from serious historians, not polemicists and propagandists with an ax to grind, yield similar results, for sure: in the low thousands, not multiple millions.

Another helpful article is [“How many people died from the Inquisition?”](#) at Answers.com. It states:

The number of people who died in the various inquisitions across Europe are difficult to determine, but the number of victims can be numbered in the thousands, not the millions as a previous respondent stated. The entire populations of Europe would have been wiped out if inquisitors had killed in those numbers! Even though the Spanish Inquisition lasted for hundreds of years the Inquisition was held primarily in small areas in France, Spain and Italy.

For example, the Spanish Inquisition, assuredly the most vigorous and corrupt of the various inquisitorial bodies that existed in Europe, held 49,000 trials between 1560-1700 and executed between 3 and 5,000 people.

I suggest that the read Edward Peter's *Inquisition* for the most up to date analysis of the topic, including the myths that have arisen surrounding the inquisitions.

The Spanish Inquisition was state ministry, not papal organization. Blaming Popes for deeds of Spanish Inquisition is incorrect. However kings of Spain used Dominicans (catholic order) as judges etc. because clergy (especially mentioned monks) were generally far more educated than ordinal people. . .

As for how many deaths may be attributed to the various inquisitorial bodies, I'm not certain who the previous contributor refers to when he states that “those who thoroughly study the inquisition” agree that the death toll

was in the millions, but he or she is quite wrong on multiple levels. I am unaware of any modern historian who would accept such ridiculous numbers and it has nothing to do with whether or not they are Christian. Again, for a general treatment of the various inquisitions, read Edward Peters' *Inquisition*, and for a more specialized treatment turn to Richard Kieckhefer's *Repression of Heresy in Medieval Germany*.

[several typos corrected]

Myths abound in this area (as in Most Things Catholic), which is why I took it upon myself to collect many serious articles about the topic, on my web page, [Inquisition, Crusades, and "Catholic Scandals"](#), to correct the record:

Our church is invisible, and only appears visibly at the moments in history we approve of. So regarding the Nicene Creed, *you're welcome*. But when it comes to witch trials and Anabaptist drownings, that was a bunch of visible people, NOT members of the invisible church.

Therefore, Luther, Calvin, Farel, Beza, Melanchthon, Bucer, Bullinger, Oecolampadius, Zwingli, Cranmer, Latimer, Henry VIII, Elizabeth I, and the later English Puritans like Cromwell who butchered the Irish, were all outside of the invisible church.

Very curious reasoning indeed . . .

I'll accept your trashing of Oxford for what it's worth.

I see. So now demanding a minimum of documentation for what is an immediately questionable claim, is "trashing"? You still have given me no reason whatever to accept your claim that 5 million or so were killed by Catholics.

Dave Armstrong — you're the one who came in to a very civil discussion, and in responding to a joke, you brought up witch hunts and things like that.

I should not have to provide any further documentation when it is "Oxford" on the label. The image is a bitmap, clearly not altered, and Dr. James White is an extremely reliable source.

Let all note that John Bugay has refused to offer solid historiographical documentation for the alleged fact that Catholics killed nearly five million people. He accepts this

source merely because it was published at Oxford and has that word in its title.

And this is all the more astonishing given the fact that he writes regularly for a blog that prides itself (not always accurately, I might add) on minute historical accuracy, and constantly, relentlessly chides Catholics for actually or supposedly botching historical facts (especially regarding Martin Luther) and citing things out of context. One would hope he could achieve a minimum of historical accuracy when discussing the Inquisition(s) and not fall prey to this silliness.

Kudos to you for having given up the 33,000 number.

Note also the high irony and humor here. I immediately (in 2002) gave up a figure from a particular source when reason and the facts (produced by someone — Eric Svendsen — who was a severe critic of mine) warranted and demanded it.

But John Bugay refuses to give up his figure of “4,951,000” supposedly killed by the Inquisition, obtained from the *very same source*, merely because “Oxford” is in its title, and (as we all know), one need not “provide any further documentation” when that hallowed word is on the label (as if Oxford has always been a bastion of pro-Christian sentiment and is never guilty of any bias against any form of Christianity).

I agree that, by and large, stuff out of Oxford is fairly good scholarship (I use, for example, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* from my own library all the time), but to make this a principle in order to avoid the obvious responsibility of backing up one’s (highly dubious) numerical claims with solid, reputable historiographical research, is beyond absurd.

I told you guys, it wasn’t the reference work itself, it was how it was being used. It was the integrity of those using it.

Oxford [stands behind its work](#).

By the way, telling your readers [in the combox for this post] that “Bugay has refused to back up his ridiculous claims. He has been nailed on this, and I think he knows it, so he is avoiding, rather than retracting or admitting he doesn’t know what he is talking about...” is not a good way to win friends.

Telling the truth sometimes makes it hard to be friends with some folks. I continue to have no reason to believe otherwise, unless you inform me of one.

This latest URL of yours proves nothing; it merely begs the question at hand: whether mere association with Oxford is sufficient to prove that a particular claim made in a book published by said university is true or not [this is essentially a form of the genetic fallacy]. I am demanding (quite reasonably so) documentation from scholars (all non-Catholic ones if you wish) directly familiar with the Inquisition and the Middle Ages, for the absurd nearly five million figure of casualties from the Inquisition that you wish to stand by.

Imagine what your buddy at the blog you are now writing for would say if I claimed that some claim about Martin Luther were true *simply* because it was published in a book put out by Oxford University. I would be laughed and mocked to scorn over there (I have, anyway, for speaking “controversial” historical *truths*, on many occasions). But you can do it when it comes to Catholicism.

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Here are a few examples of ridiculous anti-Catholic inflation of the execution numbers of the various Inquisitions (not posted in the thread above):

Since history books have been largely rewritten, few people know specific details of this murderous campaign that lasted over 1,200 years, killing 75 million people. . . . the very beast that slaughtered up to 75 million Protestants, . . . We will quote Catholic documents just as they were printed, so you can see the true face of this beast that slaughtered 75-100 million people over 1,200 years; . . .

("The True Face of the Roman Catholic Inquisition")

Prior to 1960, libraries in America were filled with books on the Inquisition. Today however, very few can be found. . . . Why has the Inquisition been covered up? Because the total number of victims of this atrocity reached about 68 million people.

They were Bible-believing Christians, Jews and even Roman Catholics like

Joan of Arc, Savonarola, Giordano Bruno and Galileo etc., who were destroyed by the Inquisition carried out by the "Holy Office." The victims were always found guilty. They never knew who accused them. They never had lawyers, and no one would dare lift a finger to help.

("The Last Great Inquisition!!")

Victor Hugo estimated the number of the victims of the Inquisition at five million, it is said, and certainly the number was much greater than that if we take into account, as we should, the wives and husbands, the parents and children, the brothers and sisters, and other relatives of those tortured and slaughtered by the priestly institution. To these millions should properly be added the others killed in the wars precipitated in the attempt to fasten the Inquisition upon the people of various countries, as the Netherlands and Germany.

("The Horrors of the Church and its Holy Inquisition")

Dr. Peter Ruckman [a KJV-Only goofball], in his two-volume book set on Church history, states that 50 million people were murdered during this period. Roman Catholic writer, John Cornwell also writes how 1-10 million were murdered during the Inquisition period alone, with 10,000 females (many under the age of ten) perishing in Germany (Sunday Times, 23/8/98.)

("The Inquisition: A Medieval Holocaust!")

Before someone stands up so freely for the RCC I think they should watch this video to understand how they killed and tortured over 50 million bible believing Christians during the Catholic Inquisition whose only heresy was that they would not pay homage to the Pope and place him on equal ground with Jesus Christ and owned a Bible which was strictly forbidden by the RCC so that they know not the truth.... remember Protestant in this regards was deemed as someone who "protested" such blasphemy [sic].

This posted from Richard Bennet who was a former RC priest for 22 years!!
There is a small song in the beginning of it...so give it a couple minutes to
get going. It is quite an eyeopener.

("Rapture Forums")

Just a small sample of the nonsense that can easily be found with a good Google
search