

**Inquisition—The Reign of Fear by Toby Green.
Macmillan 2007.**

The Inquisition is already the subject of many books, and one is tempted to ask whether yet another is really necessary. Yet within a few pages of starting Toby Green's magnificent review any doubts are dispelled in the face of his obvious scholarship, meticulous research, superb literary style and original extrapolations.

Inquisition is divided into fourteen chapters which consider the Inquisition from its genesis to its demise, the reasons behind its creation, the psychosis that it engendered, its extraordinary longevity and the fundamental damage it did to the Church it was ostensibly established to protect.

Toby Green's many hours in the archives of the Vatican, and in the libraries in Lima, Lisbon and Madrid have yielded material that is not just rich in religious drama at an institutional level, but also in human drama as the lives of men and women were torn apart by a process that fed upon itself and as often as not punished the innocent together with the 'guilty'. It seems extraordinary that the Inquisition should have lasted as long as it did, and while its origins in a papal bull issued in 1478 may come as no surprise, the fact that it was not abolished in Spain until 1834, close to four hundred years later, certainly does.

There are many aspects of this book that are fascinating, not least the material on the work of the Inquisition in Spanish and Portuguese colonial territories – which may be less well-known than its work in Spain itself – but Green also concentrates on the impact of the Inquisition on individuals, *conversos* (Christians of Jewish origin) and *moriscos* (Christians of Muslim origin) who were persecuted whether or not they were sincere converts. What is even more intriguing is the detail Green unearthed about resistance to the Inquisition by those who had nothing to fear from it, almost from the very beginning, and the harm that was done to Spain and its colonies by the eradication of those of Jewish or Muslim origin who made such an important contribution to the society of their day.

Green also advances the theory that the damage done by the Inquisition, and the attitudes it entrenched in Spanish society, paved the way for the dictatorship of Franco in the 20th century and the civil war that preceded it.

This is the best kind of history book: eminently readable, well-researched, beautifully written, and challenging to both preconceptions and acquired historical inaccuracies. It should be essential reading for members of all three Abrahamic faiths, and a potent reminder of the evils that can be visited upon society when dogma overwhelms reason.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh