

# 2nd Opinion: âHard to tell Christians from lionsâ

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## 2nd Opinion: 'Hard to tell Christians from lions'

**By James Martin**

The description of a special method of torture that U.S. soldiers inflicted on Iraqi prisoners sounded instantly familiar. As someone who has read many histories of the Christian martyrs, it didn't take long to remember where the brand of punishment had been used before.

"Other detainees were locked for as many as seven days in cells so small that they could neither stand nor lie down," Eric Schmitt recently wrote in *The New York Times* about U.S. special operations troops in Iraq.

In the 16th century, the Jesuit priests and brothers martyred in England were treated to the same deprivations. The torture used against my brother Jesuits, which had long been viewed as unnaturally cruel, is now used by my own country.

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It even had a name. In his book *Jesuit Saints and Martyrs*, historian Joseph Tylenda relates how English soldiers captured Edmund Campion and two other priests in 1581. The three Catholics, who had been pursued throughout the country by "priest-hunters," had not submitted to the Oath of Supremacy that recognized the Anglican religion, outlawed Catholicism

and demanded citizens recognize Queen Elizabeth I as the head of the church in England.

On July 22, the three priests were dragged to the Tower of London to await execution. But before his death, Campion was placed in a notorious room known as the “little ease.”

Tylenda describes it as “a cell in which a grown man could neither stand upright nor lie flat.” After enduring the rack several times, Campion was hanged in early December. His body was disemboweled and hacked apart before a cheering crowd. Though other martyrs underwent even worse cruelties (the Catholic Church itself also was guilty of torture during the Inquisition), the “little ease” represents another sign of the unwillingness to regard one’s enemy as human.

The Catholic Church, to say nothing of most other Christian churches and mainstream religious traditions, opposes torture because it offends the inherent dignity of every human person. Cardinal Theodore McCarrick noted in June in conjunction with a statement from the National Religious Campaign Against Torture: “It is because of this that we all feel that torture is a dehumanizing and terrible attack against human nature and the respect we owe for each other.”

Many otherwise religious people believe torture is justified if it can save innocent lives. But as ethicists—religious and otherwise—have pointed out, this is a dangerous calculus.

Besides the historically dubious value of information extracted with torture, how many people is it permissible to torture to save a life? Would you torture one person? Ten? Twenty?

Torture is an affront to the dignity of the individual. And belief in this dignity is supposed to be cherished by the same politicians who proclaim their support of the “culture of life,” especially during election years. But

respect for life does not end at birth; it should continue unbroken from birth to natural death.

In a nation where the name of Jesus comes too easily to the lips of political leaders, his most essential teaching is proving easy to ignore. Jesus said that we should love and even pray for our enemies—not torture them.

The degradations undergone by the Christian martyrs are now being employed by our nation against our enemies. In the new global Colosseum, it is becoming difficult to tell the Christians from the lions.

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