



TORTURE IS AN INTRINSIC EVIL
A Catholic Study Guide for a One-Session Workshop

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Torture is an Intrinsic Evil

A Catholic Study Guide for a One-Session Workshop Facilitator Packet

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Getting Started

Dear Group Leader/Facilitator,

The following ninety-five minute workshop was created to focus on a critical issue of our time – torture -- and the vital need to explore this topic in the light of the teachings of the Catholic Church. The Church teaches that torture is intrinsically evil. It is universally condemned by international and human rights organizations. Through interviews of torture survivors, and discussion of Catholic social teaching, this module aims to inspire thoughtful reflection and conversation of the issue in a non-threatening environment.

This packet includes a number of difficult questions that you should pose to the group. These questions are clearly marked and should be discussed before you continue on with a section. Questions can be addressed either in small groups or in a large group. If you break into small groups, be sure ideas are shared with the large group subsequently.

Brief video clips of survivors, interrogators and experts on Catholic social teaching accompany this teaching guide. Go to Appendix I for more detailed information on how to download or order these clips, or how to effectively use transcripts of these clips if you do not have a computer with internet access or a DVD player.

Before you begin the session, please be sure to read and review the included materials. Think about adding your own questions or specific examples to the program, keeping in mind that the ultimate goal of this project is to encourage Catholics to wrestle with the morality of torture and *hopefully* come to the conclusion that it is always wrong and can never be justified.

Torture, especially U.S.-sanctioned torture, is a very difficult discussion topic. While some participants will be new to the discussion, others will already have extremely strong opinions about torture. At all times, try to frame the session in a way that invites thoughtful reflection, while minimizing inflammatory ideas that could be misconstrued as “America bashing” or as overtly partisan. Always try to keep the discussion focused on faith and torture, independent of partisan politics. This is the best way to keep the focus on the ethics of torture and not on the politics that surround it.

Finally, remember that your role is to facilitate an informative and participatory session that will allow members of your parish or community to come together and explore the morality of torture and the effects that torture has on our own lives, and the lives of those around us.

Peace



I. PRAYER/INTRODUCTIONS (10 minutes)

Take a minute to pray together as a group.

Suggested Prayer:

God of endless love,
ever caring, ever strong,
always present, always just:
You gave your only Son
to save us by the blood of his cross.

Gentle Jesus, shepherd of peace,
join to your own suffering
the pain of all who have been hurt
in body, mind, and spirit

Hear our cries as we agonize
over the harm done to our brothers and sisters.
Breathe wisdom into our prayers,
soothe restless hearts with hope,
steady shaken spirits with faith:
Show us the way to justice and wholeness,
enlightened by truth and enfolded in your mercy.

Holy Spirit, comforter of hearts,
heal your people's wounds
and transform our brokenness.
Grant us courage and wisdom, humility and grace,
so that we may act with justice
and find peace in you.

We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

(U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops)

Go around the room and invite participants to quickly introduce themselves, giving their names and why they came.

Ask the group to adopt some group ground rules or guidelines – i.e. respecting each other's opinions and thoughts, encouraging all to speak, and avoiding monopolizing the discussion. Invite group members to add other discussion guidelines.

II. WHY IS TORTURE AN ISSUE TODAY? (10 minutes)

Following the attack on September 11, 2001, the people of the United States suffered a significant identity crisis. Our nation, which once seemed so far from the face of real terror and bloodshed, suddenly found terror on its doorstep. The longstanding sense of



America's security was suddenly in jeopardy. Americans were reminded by our elected officials that there are people out there who want to hurt us, but that there are ways to stop them. It has been over 10 years since 9/11 and increased security measures to deal with potential terrorist threats are visible all around us, especially at airports.

Question: Since you are all here, why do you think torture is an issue today?

After eliciting comment, you might share the following information:

Images of Abu Ghraib shocked the world in 2004 and undoubtedly fueled anti-American sentiment in much of the Muslim world. Nonetheless, a 2009 survey done by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life found that over 50% of non-Hispanic Catholics believed that torture against suspected terrorists to gain important information can often or sometimes be justified. Only 20% said torture can never be justified while another 27% said it can rarely be justified.

Question: What is the “ticking time bomb” scenario? And how is it used to justify torture?

After eliciting answers, here are some suggested comments:

This question poses what has often been called the “ticking time bomb” scenario, popularized in TV series like “24,” to justify certain actions taken to obtain information.

The ticking time bomb scenario assumes that the person detained has some critical information that will prevent major attacks and possibly massive loss of life. It further assumes that the only way to get the detainee to divulge that information is to have military and intelligence personnel use “enhanced interrogation techniques” which is just another name for torture. We’ll examine the assumption underlying the ticking time bomb scenario later, but let’s look first at what constitutes torture.

III. WHAT IS TORTURE? (10 minutes)

Questions: What do you think of when you hear the terms “torture” and “enhanced interrogation”? Name some techniques that you would consider torture?

Responses may include some of the following:

- *Beatings and mutilations*
- *Threats of death to the detainee or person(s) close to him/her*
- *Water boarding, or simulated drowning*
- *Sensory deprivation or exhaustion*
- *Stress positions*
- *Nakedness*
- *Sexual humiliation*
- *Exposure to excessive heat and cold*
- *Prolonged solitary confinement*



After eliciting responses, you may wish to share the official international definition of torture:

The United Nations Convention against Torture defines torture as “any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person” to obtain information or a confession, and where such an act is allowed by a public official.

Question: In light of this definition, do the techniques that we mention earlier constitute torture?

After eliciting comments, you may wish to share the following to introduce the next section:

As horrific as the images of Abu Ghraib were, we are aware that around the globe, torture can take even more violent, mutilating and dehumanizing forms. A number of nations tolerate or practice torture. If it’s so prevalent, why is torture a moral issue?

IV. WHAT ARE MORAL ARGUMENTS AGAINST TORTURE? (25 minutes including Video Clip/Speaker)

Pope Benedict XVI, in a September 2007 address to Catholic prison ministers, said that public officials should avoid “means of punishment or correction that either undermine or debase the human dignity of prisoners.” Torture would fall in this category.

Questions: What is human dignity? Where does it come from? Why is it important?

As the group develops a definition of human dignity, guide the discussion towards the sources in the paragraph below.

Catholic Social Teaching holds that human dignity is an inalienable right of each person. This truth comes from two sources:

- First, God is our Creator; we are created in His image. This means that there is a reflection of God in every person.
- Second, the redemption of Christ touches every human being.

Church teaching asserts that “torture which uses physical or moral violence to extract confessions, punish the guilty, frighten opponents, or satisfy hatred is contrary to respect for the person and for human dignity” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2297).

As Pope John Paul II taught, “Jesus has a special relationship with every person, which enables us to see in every human face, the face of Christ (*Gospel of Life*, 81). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* notes, “Social Justice can be obtained only by respecting the transcendent dignity of man.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1929)



In short, each person's human dignity is derived from God's creation and Christ's redemption; this dignity is inseparable from human life. Human dignity makes torture a moral issue.

Introduce Video Clip Part I or Invited Speaker: (7-10 minutes)

At this time consider showing the short 7-minute video about U.S. sanctioned torture and Church teaching, or invite a speaker to give a 10-minute presentation. The video covers Catholic social teaching on the topic of torture, as well as provides firsthand accounts by torture victims. If your group opts to have a speaker, be sure that s/he can speak about both topics. Also, consider extending or adapting the session so that your invitee has adequate time to share their expertise and experiences. You may invite one of the participants to summarize the video and answer the following questions. If you don't have access to these materials online or you can't play a DVD, please refer to Appendix I at the end of this packet. There you will find helpful solutions to this problem.

Questions: How does torture violate human dignity and Church teaching? Besides the obvious effects torture has on the victim, what are the dangers it poses to the torturer? What are the risks it poses to a society that tolerates torture?

After eliciting responses, reinforce with comments like the following if needed:

Torture destroys our human dignity in multiple ways. An act of such violence pushes individuals and members within a society towards two different forms of dehumanization: savagery, when feelings of anger or fear overwhelm principles of ethics and human rights; and barbarism, when perceived needs for security and supremacy destroy feelings of faith, solidarity and compassion. In fact, torture compromises the human dignity of both the victim and the perpetrator, estranging the torturer from God, and debasing the integrity of the tortured.

What is more, when members of a society allow violent, dehumanizing practices to occur within their social sphere, that society's collective integrity and social fabric are greatly eroded. When a government not only allows, but sponsors, degrading, dehumanizing acts of violence, it sets a dangerous precedent that undermines the respect for everyone's human dignity and human rights.

The Catechism of the Church makes clear that torture is a grave sin which violates the Fifth Commandment. In his 1993 Encyclical, *Veritas Splendor*, Pope John Paul II included physical and mental torture in his list of social evils that are not only shameful, but "intrinsically evil."

The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church teaches us that "(i)n carrying out investigations, regulations against the use of torture, even in the case of serious crimes, must be strictly observed," adding "Christ's disciples refuse every recourse to such



methods, which nothing could justify and in which the dignity of man is as much debased as in his torturer as in the torturer's victim'¹” (Compendium, 404).

V. WHAT ARE PRACTICAL ARGUMENTS AGAINST TORTURE (15 minutes including Video Clip)

Introduce Video Clip Part II with suggested comments:

Remember in the “ticking time bomb” scenario, the interrogator assumes that the detainee has valuable information that can only be obtained through torture. This clip of a professional interrogator asserts that torturing someone to get information does not work. Let’s take a look.

Show clip (3 minutes)

Ask that participants share key points from the clip that should hopefully respond to following questions.

Question: Why doesn’t torture work?

After eliciting responses, reinforce with comments like the following.

Many professional interrogators and investigators argue that intelligence obtained through torture is generally useless or misleading. Being placed under conditions of intense physical or psychological distress elicits answers that victims think their torturers want to hear, not the truth.

Question: Why do you think torture is counter-productive?

Torture makes the fight against terrorism more difficult because it encourages more militants to take up arms against the United States. It fuels anti-American sentiment abroad, leading more and more young men and women into armed conflicts in regions like Iraq and Afghanistan. Moreover, it pushes already suffering peoples towards extremism and violence. Ironically, American torture of Al-Qaeda or other militant groups undermines progress in the effort to quell terrorist groups internationally.

Question: How does U.S.-sponsored torture undermine the credibility of the U.S. abroad?

Torture keeps the United States from living up to high ethical standards that date back to the founding of our country. During the Revolutionary War, General George Washington would not tolerate mistreatment of captured British and Hessian soldiers. It was a moral principle of war that prisoners could perform work or services, but would not be

¹ John Paul II, Address to the International Committee of the Red Cross, Geneva (15 June 1982), 5: *L’Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 26 July, 1982, p.3.



subjected to abuses. There was a clear message to uphold the dignity of all, even captured military enemies.

In 1988 and in 1994, the United States signed and ratified the *UN Convention against Torture* that condemns torture throughout the world and requires states to take measures to prevent torture in any territory under their jurisdiction. U.S. involvement in coercive “enhanced interrogation,” often another name for torture, damages not only the dignity of those involved, but also destroys the credibility of America abroad.

V. Conclusion (10 minutes)

Wrap up the session by clearly pointing out the theological, moral and practical arguments against torture. These may include:

Torture destroys human dignity and dehumanizes the victim, the perpetrator and any society that tolerates the practice.

Torture complicates counter-terrorism efforts and may encourage more people to become militants and extremists.

Torture is not effective as the information extracted is usually false or misleading.

Torture damages society as a whole by devaluing human life.

Discuss ways to counter a climate of fear that may lead to torture.

Finally urge participants to speak out against torture. Direct them to more information online by distributing copies of the following hand-out.



Appendix I

Where do I find the video clips?

Both video clips are available online and can be downloaded or streamed from nrcat.org/intrinsic-evil. Since the quality and dependability of internet connections can vary so widely, we suggest that you download the clips before you start the session. The clips are also available as a hard copy DVD, which can be ordered for \$10.00 from NRCAT at nrcat.org/intrinsic-evil.

What if I don't have internet access or a DVD player?

In the event you can neither download the video clips nor play the video clips with a DVD player, transcriptions of each video are available at the end of this study guide. More information on how to order or download these materials can be found at nrcat.org/intrinsic-evil and usccb.org.

If you are using the provided transcripts, ask members of the session to read the testimonies and expertise of speakers in the video clips in advance if possible. Ask your volunteers to remember their speaking roles when the group returns to the transcripts later in the session.



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What is the next step in preventing torture? How can I help put an end to it?

This is a common question that session goers have after completing “Torture is an Intrinsic Evil” workshop. There are a number of ways for you, your parish or academic community, and your friends and family to get involved. You can learn more about torture awareness and prevention. Now that you have a basic understanding of the theological and practical arguments against “enhanced interrogation” you can put that knowledge to good use and build upon it too.

Share what you have learned in this session. As we discovered today, a great number of Catholics are not aware of the moral principles that forbid torture and falsely assume that under some circumstances, such actions are permissible. Awareness and education are the best ways to combat this misconception. You can help by sharing what you have learned today, and by encouraging others to schedule their own workshop session.

Seek out more information about enhanced interrogation and torture around the globe by checking out these resources:

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: “Torture is a Moral Issue”

The Catholic Church vehemently opposes the practice of torture, condemning it as an intrinsic evil. See what the Bishops have to say and look at the 4-chapter study guide “Torture is a Moral Issue” at <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/torture/>

Just Faith Ministries: “In the Footsteps of the Crucified: Torture is Never Justified”

This 8-session module focuses on the reality of torture and on inspiring examples of faithful and prophetic witness against torture by survivors, human rights groups, and concerned citizens. It represents the work of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT), Pax Christi USA, and the Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition (TASSC). Find out more at: http://www.justfaith.org/programs/justmatters-m_footstepsofcrucified.html

National Religious Campaign Against Torture

The National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT) is a membership body of religious organizations committed to ending torture that is sponsored or enabled by the United States. Fifty-one Catholic organizations are members. Although USCCB is not a member of NRCAT, the Conference frequently collaborates with this organization. NRCAT provides a number of print and digital resources, including clips from this workshop, which address the topic of torture around the globe. Find out more at: www.nrcat.org



Transcript of Video Clips for “Torture is an Intrinsic Evil”
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Video Clip Part 1

[Narrator] Torture is an issue that spans across a wide spectrum of problematic categories. Raising not only legal and security questions, torture poses a very serious moral imperative. As human beings and as people of faith, we can’t ignore it any longer.

[Juan Mendez, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture] “Torture is defined in international law as the severe infliction of pain by a state agent. Pain can be either physical or psychological for the purpose of interrogation or punishment.”

“I was arrested in 1975 at a time when Argentina had a very serious problem of political violence [and] also of very harsh repression. I was a lawyer defending political prisoners. Lawyers ourselves became a target.”

“I was tortured with the electric prod. In Argentina they call it the ‘picana’ and it is a very, very severe form of torture. You get a sensation of blackouts and very, very painful treatment. Generally sessions last about a half hour or so. Twice during those sessions they called doctors to see if I could take anymore. It was very, very severe, but evidently, they didn’t want to kill me; they wanted to keep me alive.”

[Narrator] In 2009, President Obama signed an Executive Order halting U.S. torture of detainees, and yet, questions about American acceptance of torture linger.

[Fekade Semanie, Ethiopian Torture Survivor] “The moral place that America has in the world is not as it was before. So literally speaking, America is sponsoring what that government is doing. It is very sad to say that America is sponsoring torture in Ethiopia, but by allowing torture, that is what America is doing. [I was tortured in Ethiopia, by the Government] ... they beat me until I was unconscious.”

[Dr. Stephen Colecchi, Director, Office of International Justice and Peace, USCCB] “In Catholic teaching, something that is intrinsically evil is something that can never be done under any circumstances and the very action of doing it violates a fundamental moral reality within which we need to live. In Catholic teaching, killing innocent human beings is always intrinsically evil; so [like] abortion, euthanasia, murder, torture is intrinsically evil, because under no circumstances can it be justified. Torture violates the life and dignity of the human person.

In fact, torture not only violates the dignity of the victim, the immediate victim, it also violates the dignity of the perpetrator, and it violates the integrity of the society within which we live. Any society that tolerates an action such as torture is a society that’s toying with something intrinsically evil that will be corrosive to the society as a whole. It



will break down trust between people; it will make the world a less safe place for all of us.

So intrinsic evil...it's a moral category in Catholic teaching that is very clear; it can never be done under any circumstances. In general, Catholic teaching believes that the human person is both sacred and social. The human person is sacred because they are created in the image and likeness of God. And in Christ every person has been offered salvation; so the human person has a value that doesn't come because of their position in life. It doesn't come from how much money they have or how much prestige they can command. It comes from the very fact that they are a child of God that they are created in the image of God, and because of that, we value human life from its very first beginnings until its natural end.

When you see images of torture, it's just...you are revulsed by it. You are concerned. You're concerned first for the victim of torture and second, for people who are placed in positions of being perpetrators of torture because that degrades their humanity as well, and then you're concerned for the effect this is going to have on the whole society if this were to be accepted. The Church is very clear on this; there are no exceptions to torture. Accepting torture, tolerating torture, is a risk that is far too great to take. If we accept torture it will become part of who we all are - we will be less than fully human.

The fact that Americans engaged in the activity of torturing others was a jolt I think to our society. But what I have been encouraged by is how much questioning and soul searching that caused. I believe in the fundamental goodness of the American people. I think as Americans sort through the issue of torture (and perhaps not everyone has given it a lot of deep thought), I think that they will absolutely see the incompatibility of torture with what it means to be American, what it means to be Christian, what it means to be Catholic; because people do support the life and dignity of the human person.

People want a future without fear. They want a society that values human life, that values other people. They themselves want to be valued. For me the most important issue regarding torture is about who we are. Are we a people that value the life, the dignity of the human person? Are we a people who believe that each person is created in the image of God? For me, that's the fundamental issue around torture, about who we are as a people, as Americans, as Christians, as Catholics.

The fact that our nation, for a period, tolerated the practice of torture has so damaged our moral standing in the world in ways that are incalculable. We need to recover the high moral ground because the struggle with terrorism will only be won if we have willing allies, people who want to work with us. And they are only going to want to work with us if they see us treating human beings like human beings. That's the kind of world we want to work for and we have to employ means that are consistent with that goal.



Video Clip Part 2

[Narrator] “The basic assumption of people who would say that torture can sometimes be justified is that subjecting another human being to such degrading and dehumanizing treatment can yield information that might save lives. But in fact professional interrogators, military and civilian, say that people who are tortured don’t give good information. Those being tortured say what they think you want to hear, what they hope will make the pain stop, not the truth.”

[Matthew Alexander, former U.S. military interrogator] “If we use torture and abuse to get information to stop and save lives, Al Qaeda will turn around and use that to recruit new fighters and it would be counterproductive in the long run. And we know that because every day in our prison, there were foreign fighters telling us that the number one reason they decided to come to Iraq and join the Jihad and fight against us was because of torture and abuse at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay.”

[Dr. Stephen Colecchi, USCCB] “The experts we consult with are rather unanimous; they agree that torture does not generate reliable information. Torture does not in fact save lives.”

[Matthew Alexander] “You can have an interrogation that’s intense emotionally for a detainee but it can be ethical. Our biggest catch to date in the war on terror is Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and we caught him using non-coercive techniques, using relationship-building techniques, using our intellect, using compassion and sometimes offering deals to people to work with us. But they had nothing to do with the techniques that are shown on [television] shows like 24. I want people to know that the reality of those of us who have been on the ground and have had to interrogate high-level members of Al Qaeda who are committed to their cause; that we have achieved success by using relationship-building approaches, not by using brutality.”