

'Evidence indicates that torture is now routine in over thirty countries, and there is a growing involvement of doctors, behavioural psychologists, pharmacologists and technicians.'

The quotation is from an important article in *New Scientist* (July 19). So are the following :

“ . . . the most clear cut and well-documented instance of contemporary torture science is the incarceration of dissidents in Soviet psychiatric hospitals.’

‘Torture is not always a local product—it is exported through military assistance programmes and police training schools. . . . Evidence is mounting that US agencies are major torture exporters, primarily through the training of third world police in the field by AID officials and at the International Police Academy in Washington DC.’

The article speaks of ‘the attempt by Pakistan to buy torture equipment in the US . . . the defection of three Uruguayan torturers who told of the involvement of the US Agency for International Development in torture training in Latin America’ and, coming to training sessions nearer home : ‘six Belgian paratroopers were convicted of inflicting torture . . . during a NATO exercise . . . Col Pierre Crevocoeur told the court he had been present as an observer at interrogations of Belgian volunteers by British specialists’ (British army spokesmen have naturally denied this). And, while we are at home, a final quotation from Professor Robert Daly’s recent medical report on the victims of British techniques in Northern Ireland, which showed that long-term and possibly permanent mental illness had resulted : ‘Although the hooding and similar procedures have now been proscribed, it is possible to achieve the same results by using various other combinations of physical and mental stress’. (*Irish Times*, July 9.)

Amnesty International, whose horrifying report on torture in Brazil appeared last year, are holding in December a world conference aimed at the total abolition of torture. In the meantime it seems appropriate that Christians and all who are seriously concerned about morality should ask themselves exactly what is the objection to it. There seems little doubt that if I am sometimes entitled to kill people, I must also sometimes be entitled to hurt them. However revolting the occasional British practice of caning schoolboys may be, it is clearly superior to the occasional Burundi practice of shooting them.

It is possible, of course, to short-cut the question by claiming to believe that any kind of violence inflicted on anyone without their consent is always wrong but such a position is extraordinarily difficult to maintain either in theory or in practice. A simple revulsion against violence is no more rational than a simple revulsion against sex.

The real problem presents itself to those of us who believe that fighting and killing can be innocent and indeed honourable activities. If we object to armies, it is not precisely because they engage in killing but that so often they kill the poor in the pursuit of quarrels amongst the rich and, if Kitson is right, will increasingly be engaged in killing the poor in order to defend the privileges of the rich. But we believe, with, I think, the majority of Christians, that it is sometimes necessary and right to defend the helpless by using violence against their oppressors. Why then should we draw the line at torture?

It is not just a matter of degree, nor is it a matter simply of being nauseated; no one who has seen the victims of petrol-bombs, explosions or gunfire would make that distinction. The malice of torture lies not simply in the fact that we are inflicting pain, but that we are inflicting it in order to demoralize a man, to make him do what he believes to be wrong, to betray his beliefs and his companions. The torturer, in fact, plays the part of the tempter and in these he can use a whole range of sophisticated techniques that have long been known to the devil; techniques of mental confusion and hallucinations, the undermining of faith and the exploitation of hidden weaknesses, as well, of course, as hellish means of inflicting pain without 'brutality'. 'The Military Hospital in Montevideo is renowned for its special recipe of taquiflexil and sodium pentothal. The first of these, a drug derived from curare, produces terrible agony brought on by painful muscular contractions and, unless administered under strict medical supervision, is fatal. The subject is kept alive in an oxygen tent for several hours until he receives a weak dose of sodium pentothal which produces a total relaxation and semi-conscious euphoria which the interrogator capitalizes on.' (art. cit.)

The writer in *New Scientist* points to the almost total failure of the scientific liberal conscience in this matter, 'With almost no complaint from the scientific community, the practitioners of this grey science continue their search for new ways to orchestrate human pain'. It is time for those of us who believe in the devil (and all Christians do, however they may demythologize particular images of the power of evil) to take a clear and absolute stand against this diabolical business. It should be made perfectly clear for a start to soldiers, policemen, revolutionaries, scientists and all men that having anything to do with violent conflict that the practice of torture is incompatible with membership of the Christian Church. It is bad enough that we should be so often the victims of satan, without becoming his agents.

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