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EWTN & Torture

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NCR Today

Over at Vox-Nova.org, they have been making hay about an interview on EWTN with Bush administration official Marc Thiessen. During the interview, Thiessen criticized the Obama administration for failing to employ "enhanced interrogation techniques" against Christmas Day would-be bomber Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab. Vox-Nova correctly expresses shock that a Catholic news outfit would indulge someone who is arguing for torture.

This is not the first time. Last spring, Father Robert Sirico spent an evening with Raymond Arroyo winking at torture. Of course, apart from the fact that torture is illegal, it is also an intrinsic evil. Usually, rightwing Catholic groups argue that intrinsic evils should simply be legislated against, when in fact, finding a way to legislate such matters is often more complicated. In the case of torture, that difficult work has already been done. If you treat terror suspects under the civil code as criminals, they are immune from torture under U.S. law. If you treat them as enemy combatants, they are immune from torture under international treaty obligations.

The big picture here is not whether torture is efficacious. It is not. Nor is the central issue whether we treat suspected terrorists as criminals or enemy combatants. The key issue is that if we abandon our own standards of civilization, the terrorists have won. They have terrorized us effectively. The propaganda value alone of evidence of U.S. complicity in torture is reason enough to oppose its use as well.

Thiessen may hide behind the phrase "enhanced interrogation techniques." At least Dick Cheney had the forthrightness to say he advocated a procedure "waterboarding" that is recognized as torture. And, EWTN can call it what it wants, but no matter what you call it, it deserves no praise from anyone claiming to be Catholic. Besides, isn't catching EWTN torture enough?

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