

## Online Catechism Lesson 9: Corporal and capital punishment, slavery, and torture are not intrinsically evil

By Richard Joseph Michael Ibranyi

1. There are just reasons for corporal punishment, such as to punish and tame disobedient and sinful children and adults and as a deterrent to others. For example,

*“Folly is bound up in the heart of a child and the rod of correction shall drive it away.” (Prv. 22:15) “Withhold not correction from a child, for if thou strike him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod and deliver his soul from hell.” (Prv. 23:13-14) “For whom the Lord loveth, he chastiseth; and he scourgeth every son whom he receiveth... But if you be without chastisement, whereof all are made partakers, then are you bastards, and not sons.” (Heb. 12:6, 8) “A whip for a horse, and a snaffle for an ass, and a rod for the back of fools.” (Prv. 26:3) And speaking of secular authorities, St. Paul says, “For he is God’s minister to thee, for good. But if thou do that which is evil, fear, for he beareth not the sword in vain. For he is God’s minister: an avenger to execute wrath upon him that doth evil.” (Rom. 13:4)*

2. Hence it is the duty of parents to administer corporal punishment to their children when they deserve it, a husband to his wife if she deserves it, and the State or Church (if possible) or others to a husband if he deserves it. And it is the duty of the State or Church or community to justly administer corporal punishment to those under its authority.
3. Corporal punishment can range from punishments that do not cause a permanent wound or permanent disability or a permanent scar to punishments that do cause these things.
4. Corporal punishments that cause a permanent wound or permanent disability or permanent scar must only be administered after a judgment from a competent authority of the State or Church or community. For example,

Parents can administer corporal punishment do their own children that do not cause a permanent wound, disability, or scar without a judgment from a competent authority.

If the child’s sin or crime merits a greater punishment, even the death penalty and thus capital punishment, a judgment must first be made by a competent authority of the State or Church or community. For instance, under the Old Covenant if a child’s sin or crime merited the death penalty, a competent religious authority had to first make the judgment and pass the sentence and then the child would be stoned to death: *“If a man have a stubborn and unruly son who will not hear the commandments of his father or mother and being corrected slighteth obedience, they shall take him and bring him to the ancients of the city and to the gate of judgment, And shall say to them: This our son is rebellious and stubborn, he slighteth hearing our admonitions, he giveth himself to revelling and to debauchery and banquetings. The people of the city shall stone him, and he shall die that you may take away the evil out of the midst of you, and all Israel hearing it may be afraid.” (Deut. 21:18-21) “He that striketh his father or mother, shall be put to death.” (Ex. 21:15) “He that curseth his father or mother shall die the death.” (Ex. 21:17) BV##*

5. Corporal punishment must not be more severe or less severe than required by justice or else it undermines the purpose and good effect of corporal punishment. Hence corporal punishment must fit the sin or crime.
6. There are just reasons for capital punishment (the death penalty) and war. Hence the translation of the Fifth Commandment's "Thou shalt not kill" is incorrect. The true translation is "Thou shalt not murder." For example,

After God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, Moses killed 23,000 evil Israelites at the bottom of Mount Sinai: *"Then standing in the gate of the camp, he [Moses] said: If any man be on the Lord's side let him join with me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. And he said to them: Thus saith the Lord God of Israel: Put every man his sword upon his thigh. Go, and return from gate to gate through the midst of the camp and let every man kill his brother and friend and neighbour. And the sons of Levi did according to the words of Moses, and there were slain that day about three and twenty thousand men."* (Ex. 32:26-28)

Josue killed men, women, and children in a just war: *"And we took all his cities at that time, killing the inhabitants of them, men and women and children. We left nothing of them."* (Deut. 2:34) And King David killed many in just wars for the glory of God.

Jesus Christ says, *"But as for those my enemies who would not have me reign over them, bring them hither and kill them before me."* (Lk. 19:27) Hence Jesus told his followers that a time would come when they must take up the sword: *"But now he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise a scrip; and he that hath not, let him sell his coat, and buy a sword."* (Lk. 22:36)

Two saints who killed for Christ during the New Covenant era in just wars were the Holy Roman Emperors Constantine and Charlemagne.

St. Paul says that certain sinners are "worthy of death": *"Who, having known the justice of God, did not understand that they who do such things are worthy of death; and not only they that do them, but they also that consent to them that do them."* (Rom. 1:32)

St. John says that are some sins the merit the death penalty: *"He that knoweth his brother to sin a sin which is not to death, let him ask and life shall be given to him, who sinneth not to death. There is a sin unto death; for that I say not that any man ask. All iniquity is sin. And there is a sin unto death."* (1 Jn. 5:16-17)

And the Two Witnesses of the Apocalypse will kill for Christ and call down the wrath of God upon a multitude of people: *"And I will give unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred sixty days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees and the two candlesticks that stand before the Lord of the earth. And if any man will hurt them, fire shall come out of their mouths and shall devour their enemies. And if any man will hurt them, in this manner must he be slain. These have power to shut heaven that it rain not in the days of their prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with all plagues as often as they will."* (Apoc. 11:3-6)

7. Slavery (which includes making slaves of several generations of men, women, and children) is not intrinsically evil and hence there are just reasons for slavery. God uses either his faithful chosen people or even unbelievers to justly enslave people. For example,

God ordained that his faithful chosen people should have slaves: *“Let your bondmen and your bondwomen [slaves] be of the nations that are round about you. And of the strangers that sojourn among you or that were born of them in your land, these you shall have for slaves.”* (Lev. 25:44-45)

But God has also ordained many times that his obstinately sinful chosen people be made slaves by unbelievers for many generations, such when they were enslaved by the Egyptians, Syrians, Babylonians, and Persians.

St. Peter says, *“Slaves, be subject to your masters with all fear.”* (1 Pt. 2:2:18) St. Paul likewise says, *“Slaves, obey in all things your masters.”* (Col. 3:22)

And St. Paul even condones Catholics owning Catholic slaves: *Whosoever are slaves under the yoke, let them count their masters worthy of all honour lest the name of the Lord and his doctrine be blasphemed. But they that have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren; but serve them the rather because they are faithful and beloved who are partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort.”* (1 Tim. 6:1-2)

8. Hence slavery that is ordained by God to punish and humble the wicked or to try the righteous is good slavery, but slavery that is not ordained by God is evil and thus sinful slavery. What follows is an example of unjust cruelty in a justified war and unjust slavery:

*“And the children of Israel carried away of their brethren two hundred thousand women, boys, and girls, and an immense booty; and they brought it to Samaria. At that time there was a prophet of the Lord there whose name was Oded, and he went out to meet the army that came to Samaria and said to them: Behold the Lord the God of your fathers being angry with Juda, hath delivered them into your hands and you have butchered them cruelly so that your cruelty hath reached up to heaven. Moreover you have a mind to keep under the children of Juda and Jerusalem for your bondmen and bondwomen, which ought not to be done, for you have sinned in this against the Lord your God. But hear ye my counsel and release the captives that you have brought of your brethren because a great indignation of the Lord hangeth over you.”* (2 Par. 28:8-11)

9. The unjust treatment of slaves is sinful. Hence slaves must be punished not more or less severely than they deserve. And slaves must never be immorally abused. For example,

If a slave is not killed for a crime worthy of death, then this is unjust treatment of the slave because he deserves death. However, if a slave is put to death for a crime not worthy of death, then this is murder and unjust treatment of the slave: *“Torture and fetters are for a malicious slave... And if he be not obedient, bring him down with fetters, but be not excessive towards any one; and do no grievous thing without judgment. If thou have a faithful slave, let him be to thee as thy own soul; treat him as a brother because in the blood of thy soul thou hast gotten him.”* (Eclcus. 33:28-31)

10. Hence there are just reasons for torture, such as God torturing devils and humans in hell forever and men torturing other men for just reasons. Some just reasons for torture are to punish offenders, to deter offenders from committing future sins or crimes, to get vital information from an enemy in a just war or for a just cause, or to inflict punishment for penance due to sins.

11. However, torture used for an unjust reason is sinful, such as when the pagan Romans tortured Christians.
12. But even justified torture must not be immoral or more severe than necessary or else sin is committed.

*For the glory of God; in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Michael, St. Joseph, Ss. Joachim and Anne, St. John the Baptist, the other angels and saints; and for the salvation of men*

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