



laetus in praesens

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Crowdsourcing Just Punishment for Julian Assange

In faithful Christian retribution for daring to speak truth to power

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In anticipation of the dramatic outcome of the *Trial of Julian Assange* (2019)

Introduction

In a period of so-called [just war](#), within which forms of "just torture" are increasingly evident, the concern in what follows is how best to reflect the highest democratic principles in those countries most inspired by the highest Christian values -- and most implicated in the outcome of the trial of [Julian Assange](#) for having [spoken truth to power](#). Those democratic principles now suggest that any consideration of the appropriate punishment of Assange, following his anticipated trial in the USA, should be decided by the [American people](#) as a whole -- employing the latest [crowdsourcing](#) processes and technology, now so widely available. As a country founded by Christians and primarily inspired by Christian values -- so fundamental to the [sworn testimony](#) in court proceedings -- it is especially appropriate to seek inspiration from the forms of retribution with which Christian authorities have been traditionally associated in the USA, and most notably from the time of the [Founding Fathers](#).

Legal context: The Year 2020 should see the final outcome of the legalistic proceedings to which Julian Assange has been exposed since the [sexual assault allegations](#) in Sweden in 2010 and his subsequent [asylum in the Ecuadorian Embassy](#) in London -- ending in his removal into UK custody in April 2019, pending extradition to Sweden, and in all probability to the USA. Assange had been secretly [indicted in the USA by a grand jury](#), for computer-related

crimes committed in the USA in 2012 (as publicly revealed in 2017),

These are all matters of extensive public record and widespread discussion, following the controversial [release by Wikileaks of Iraq and Afghanistan diplomatic cables and war logs](#) between 2006 and 2009, variously enabled by Julian Assange, [Chelsea Manning](#) and [Edward Snowden](#). With respect to the legal situation and imprisonment of Assange, notable events include:

- The [Inter-American Court of Human Rights](#) issued an advisory opinion in May 2018, upholding the principle of [non-refoulement](#), with respect to the Institution of Asylum and its Recognition as a Human Right in the Inter-American System, which prohibits signatories of the [American Convention on Human Rights](#) from deporting foreign individuals when such a deportation would likely lead to their persecution.
- The United Nations's [Working Group on Arbitrary Detention](#) concluded on 5 February 2016 that Assange had been subject to [arbitrary detention](#) by the UK and Swedish Governments since 7 December 2010, including his time in prison, on conditional bail and in the Ecuadorian embassy.
- U.N. Rapporteur: [Julian Assange Has Faced Psychological Torture; He Should Not Be Extradited to U.S.](#) (*Democracy Now*, 22 November 2019)
- Benn Quin: [Sweden drops Julian Assange rape investigation](#) (*The Guardian*, 19 November 2019)

Commentators tend to agree that Assange will indeed be extradited to the USA, whether directly from the UK or indirectly via Sweden -- most notably in the light of the inferred pattern of complicity between those countries and the emerging attitude to legal retribution in selected cases. This contrasts radically with the impunity ever more evident with respect to crimes against humanity:

- [U.K. Security Service Can Let Informants Commit Crimes, Court Rules](#), (*The New York Times*, 21 December 2019)
- [MI5 can lawfully tell agents to commit crimes](#) (*The Independent*, 30 December 2019)
- [Britain's Security Services Granted License to Kill](#) (*Strategic Culture*, 27 December 2019).
- [Presidential Pardons: Trump sets his seal on a record of US impunity in Afghanistan](#) (*Afghan Analysts Network*, 20 November 2019)
- [Trump's pardons erode good order and discipline and could shatter the military's reputation, veterans say](#) (*Business Insider*, 27 November 2019)
- [Trump Considers Pardoning Blackwater Mercenary Convicted of Murder](#) (*Daily Beast*, 3 January 2020)

In envisaging the options for retribution, which may inspire and engage the American people through the crowdsourcing process, consideration should naturally be given to the forms of punishment with which Christian authorities have been associated in the USA. These naturally range from the treatment of heretics, slaves, anti-Americans, and those indicted as terrorists.

Psychodrama: However, as noted in the introductory document regarding the trial of Julian Assange as a collective [psychodrama](#), there is a strong case for recognizing how that grand jury trial echoes in the strangest of ways that of the [Sanhedrin](#) of biblical times and the manner in which [Pontius Pilate](#) delegated final retribution to the Jewish people. Just as some cultures continue to celebrate that process whereby a mockingly-acclaimed "King of the Jews" was crowned for speaking truth to power -- as enacted in the [Oberammergau Passion Play](#) in Switzerland -- the trial of Assange merits similar appreciation by the American people of Christian persuasion or recognizing Christian leadership.

A degree of legitimacy to this exploration is offered by the sense in which the President of the United States frequently describes as a ["witch-hunt"](#) the nature of the legal and other attacks on himself and his office -- especially in the quest for his impeachment, in a period which is liable to coincide with the trial of Assange. Given that framing, how indeed should retribution be envisaged by the American people of Christian faith, given the history of Christian complicity in processes of radical retribution -- dating from the [Hammer of the Witches](#) (1487), the Inquisition, through the [Salem Witch Trials](#) (1693), and the [treatment of slaves in the USA](#), to the [CIA Torture Report](#) (2012) on the processing of those held at [Guantanamo Bay](#) and in ["black sites"](#) elsewhere.

The aesthetics of the psychodrama, and the poetic justice of its [enantiodromia](#), are all the greater with the increasing degree of identification of the American people with the Jewish people -- now deliberately enhanced by the recent

transfer of the US Embassy to Jerusalem and approval of the controversial declaration of [Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people](#) in 2018. This is further to the long-standing tradition of a [Jewish homeland](#) (*Jewish nation state: Israel approves controversial bill*, BBC, 19 July 2018; Joel Swanson, *Trump's Executive Order Shows Again That He Thinks American Jews Are Displaced Israelis*, *Forward*, 11 December 2019; Judith Butler, *Trump Elevates an Anti-Semitic Slur Into Law*, *Foreign Policy*, 21 December 2019; *UN: Israel's Jewish Nation-State Law contravenes international pact*, *Middle East Monitor*, 7 November 2019).

Crowdsourcing justice? Recalling the process in biblical times, the argument notes the emergence of "crowdsourcing justice", particularly through use of a participative, open-platform, Wiki process. This is proposed as specifically relevant to the post-trial punishment of Julian Assange. Such a platform offers the possibility of enabling popular familiarity with the extensive range of methods of torture actively developed by Christians of the past and present. However it is also recognized as enabling collective choice by the American people of the methods most "liked" as being applicable to the suitable punishment of Assange -- whether for the good of society or for his own good from a Christian perspective of redemption and salvation.

Perverse complicity in Christian celebration of pain?

Christianity and suffering: The narrative of Christianity is intimately, if not uniquely, associated with its response to pain and suffering:

- Nancy Guthrie: *Suffering and Submission in Gethsemane: even as Jesus struggled, he was resolute about what he wanted most of all*. (*Christianity Today*, 18 April 2019)
- Mary J. Yerkes: *When We Suffer: A Biblical Perspective on Chronic Pain and Illness* (*Focus on the Family*, 1 February 2007)
- Fredric Heidemann: *The Uniquely Christian Response to the Problem of Suffering* (*Word on Fire Blog*, 3 July 2017)
- Ben Witherington: *Pain -- a Christian Perspective* (Patheos, 15 September 2015)
- Barney Zwartz: *The Meaning of Suffering* (*Centre for Public Christianity*, 31 January 2016)
- Veronica Neffinger: *Is There Purpose to Suffering in the Christian Life?* (*Crosswalk*, 15 November 2016)
- Wayne Jackson: *The Value of Human Suffering* (*Christian Courier*)
- Kevin C. Rhoades: *The Meaning and Value of Suffering* (*Today's Catholic*, 8 November 2017)

Strangely, even to the point of being framed as the central mystery of Christian insight, the celebration of pain is embodied in the iconic symbol of [crucifixion](#) -- displayed wherever possible. Consistent with the suffering exemplified by that symbol, the path to [sanctification](#) is framed in many Christian practices by [mortification of the flesh](#). The problematic aspects of the mystery are evident in the extension of this belief through the promotion of the mortification of others, as so assiduously practiced during the Inquisition -- purportedly as a means of saving the souls of those deemed to be heretics and unbelievers (*The Horrors of the Church and Its Holy Inquisition*, *Church and State*, April 2016). This commitment, however interpreted, continues to be a Christian priority (Heidi Rolland Unruh and Ronald J. Sider, *Saving Souls, Serving Society: Understanding the Faith Factor in Church-Based Social Ministry*, 2005; Suzanne Meyer, *We Are All About Saving Souls, Quest for Meaning*, 1 January 2012; *God's Priority: Saving Souls*, Global Christian Center)

The perversity is all the more evident when the causing of pain to others is framed as being for their benefit -- for the good of their souls. The problematic dimensions of this argument are evident in controversial debate on the merits of "spanking" of children by parents -- framed as "for your own good". Parallels are evident in the kinds of harassment (bullying) considered tolerable in institutions -- schools, universities, military -- as a means of appropriately "toughening" people and ensuring their socialization. This dubious logic is extended uncritically to prisons where a wide spectrum of violence is considered appropriate to rehabilitation -- if its existence is formally acknowledged -- or a feature of justified retribution (whether or not its occurrence is acknowledged). Christians are not renowned for protesting against such violence, despite promoting the merits of suffering in other contexts.

It should be stressed that such complicity is in no way considered by Christians to be a passive form of [incitement to violence](#) -- although it may now be perceived as such within Catholic institutions variously deemed to have enabled sexual abuse of minors by authorities, irrespective of any tolerance for bullying between inmates.

Central existential mystery of cognitive dissonance: Recognition of "perversity" can however be challenged as a failure of insight into the Christian mystery. This failure can be labelled -- out of ignorance -- as a failure to comprehend how Christianity enables believers to embody [cognitive dissonance](#), potentially even to recognize that Christianity requires cultivation of cognitive dissonance and its transcendence. Such dissonance is held to occur when a person holds two or more contradictory beliefs, ideas, or values, or participates in an action that goes against one of these three, and experiences psychological stress because of that. Is Christianity a mysterious exemplification of cognitive dissonance -- as with other religious beliefs? Aspects of this understanding are the subjects of a variety of studies and commentary:

- Joel Rieves: [Cognitive Dissonance?](#) (*Progressive Christianity*, 14 December 2015)
- Nicholas H. Taylor: [Cognitive Dissonance and Early Christianity: a theory and its application reconsidered](#) (*Religion and Theology*, 5, 1998, 2)
- Rod Dreher: [Christian Cultural Cognitive Dissonance](#) (*The American Conservative*, 12 August 2019)
- Don Stork: [The Importance of Preparing Young Christians for Doubt and Dissonance](#) (*BioLogos*, 6 June 2017)
- Kimberly A. Mahaffy: [Cognitive Dissonance and Its Resolution: A Study of Lesbian Christians](#) (*Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 35, 1996, 4)
- Mike Rans: [A Christian approach to Cognitive Dissonance](#) (*Cruciformity*)
- Kris Komarnitsky: [Cognitive Dissonance and the Resurrection of Jesus](#) (*The Fourth R*, 27, 2014, 5)
- Barbara Stuart: [Cognitive Dissonance: A Spiritual Perspective](#) (*Meditate*)
- Barney Zwartz: [Donald Trump and Cognitive Dissonance](#) (*Centre for Public Christianity*, 23 October 2016)
- Matthias Forstmann and Christina Sagioglou: Religious concept activation attenuates cognitive dissonance reduction in free-choice and induced compliance paradigms (*The Journal of Social Psychology*, 160, 2020, 1)
- Fernando Bermejo-Rubio: [The Process of Jesus' Deification and Cognitive Dissonance Theory](#) (*Numen*, 64, 2017, 2-3)
- Danny Ray Bowen: [A Biblical-Theological Model of Cognitive Dissonance Theory: relevance for Christian educators](#) (*ERIC*, 2012)
- Lee D. Ross, et al: [How Christians reconcile their personal political views and the teachings of their faith: projection as a means of dissonance reduction](#) (*PNAS*, 109, 2012, 10)
- [Cognitive Dissonance Among the Clergy](#) (*Christianity Today*, 22 February 2008)
- [Introducing Cognitive Dissonance](#) (*Debunking Christianity*, 25 November 2007)
- [An Example of Cognitive Dissonance in the Church](#) (*Concretized Christianity*, 18 May 2015)
- Pete Enns: [The "evolution of the mind" and Christian cognitive dissonance](#)

The Christian Cross is profoundly symbolic of the cognitive dissonance nexus with which that is mysteriously associated. The condition is explored in more detail by Daniel Rancour-Laferriere (*The Sign of the Cross: From Golgotha to Genocide*, 2017). With respect to German soldiers of Christian faith in the Nazi period, the latter notes:

In "ordinary circumstances," of course, "ordinary Christians" do not systematically hunt, capture, and kill Jews. The situation in Nazi-controlled territories of Europe was extraordinary by any criterion. Both Christian soldiers and Christian civilians were under enormous external pressures which resulted in a variety of internal psychological processes which went beyond the usual antisemitic paranoia by proxy. Among these psychological phenomena -- to utilize labels from a wide range of disparate theoretical approaches -- were: psychic numbing, de-individuation of the perpetrator, groupthink, peer pressure, fear of rejection, identification with the aggressor, dehumanization of the victim, sadism (both sexual and nonsexual), resolution of cognitive dissonance, rationalization, obsessive-compulsive thinking, disturbed narcissism, grandiosity, dissociation, denial, and others. Some of these very concepts were developed by psychologists in the West after the Holocaust, and partly in response to the Holocaust.... In Nazi occupied Europe "good" Christians turned very evil, as their Jewish, Christian, Soviet, Gypsy, homosexual, and various other victims found out.

Christian accommodation with torture: Such considerations help to make it clear how Christianity is so

comfortable with torture -- appropriately to be characterized as "soft on torture", however much violence is otherwise so vigorously deprecated. Arguably cognitive dissonance is what Christianity "handles" best -- being central to its narrative.

Especially intriguing is the extensively documented function of [military chaplains](#). The US National Defense Act of 1920 created a Chief of Chaplains in both the army and the navy, thereby contributing to further professionalization of the chaplaincy in both services -- ensuring that chaplains in the field had a high-level advocate in the War and Navy Departments able to promote their interests. As usefully summarized by G. Kurt Piehler (*Chaplains*, In: *Encyclopedia of Military Science*, 2013), chaplains' principal responsibilities are to lead religious services and to serve the pastoral and spiritual needs of those in the service, such as visiting the sick and the wounded (Doris L. Bergen (Ed.), *Sword of the Lord: the military chaplains from the First to the Twenty-First Century*, 2004; Richard M. Budd, *Serving Two Masters: the development of American military chaplaincy, 1860-1920*, 2002; Ronit Y. Stahl, *Enlisting Faith: how the military chaplaincy shaped religion and state in Modern America*, 2017).

This role takes on added importance with respect to the sick and the wounded. It is unclear how the function is applied in the case of those engaged in "enhanced interrogation" or those suffering from such treatment, especially those on "black sites" where such interrogation is taken beyond the limits of euphemism. Some clarification is available (*A Guide for Chaplains Confronted with Torture* International Commission of Catholic Prison Pastoral Care, 2017; Oscar Rickett, *The Trials of Being the Only Imam at Guantánamo Bay, Vice*, 10 November 2014).

Many would perceive a degree of irony to their formally recognized role in the [Office of the Pentagon Chaplain](#) and indications of a CIA Chaplaincy Service originally proposed in 1987 -- readily confused with the Christ In Action (CIA) [Chaplain Commissioning Program](#) to "serve during deployments". Little is said about the ministry to prisoners of other Abrahamic religions, necessarily faced with a potentially greater spiritual challenge:

- Matthew Bell: *CIA interrogators didn't just break detainees' bodies-- they also attacked their souls* (*Public Radio International*, 19 December 2014)
- Michael Peppard: *Religion in the CIA torture report* (*Commonweal Magazine*, 9 December 2014)

Most strikingly publicized has been the pattern of daily prayer meetings in the White House (Owen Amos, *Inside the White House Bible Study group*, *BBC News*, 8 April 2018; Josh Delk, *Pence: 'There's prayer on a regular basis in this White House'*, *The Hill*, 3 May 2018; Leonardo Blair, *Mike Pence Reveals President Trump Routinely Requests Prayer at Meetings*, *Christian Post*, 4 May 2018). It can only be assumed that the final treatment accorded of Assange, as by the Trump administration, will be inspired and guided by such prayer -- as would any declaration of war involving the death of thousands or millions.

The pattern follows that of [George W. Bush](#), a person of renowned Christian faith, widely noted as having "sought guidance through prayer" prior to authorising any execution. As noted by Sister Helen Prejean (*Death in Texas*, *The New York Review of Books*, 13 January 2005):

George W. Bush during his six years as governor of Texas presided over 152 executions, more than any other governor in the recent history of the United States. Bush has said: *I take every death penalty case seriously and review each case carefully.... Each case is major because each case is life or death.*

Few would contest that Bush sought guidance in prayer in triggering the invasion of Iraq (Ewen MacAskill: *George Bush: 'God told me to end the tyranny in Iraq'*, *The Guardian*, 7 October 2005). Whilst Tony Blair may deny having prayed with him in anticipation of that action, few can imagine that has a man of avowedly deep Christian faith he would himself have prayed for guidance prior to lying about the form evidence justifying that invasion (Andrew Brown, *Tony Blair denies praying with George Bush* (*The Guardian*, 25 July 2012; *Tony Blair believed God wanted him to go to war to fight evil, claims his mentor*, *The Telegraph*, 23 May 2009). [Casualties in the Iraq War](#) are variously estimated to number up to a million fatalities, with many more wounded and displaced. For those of Christian faith, the war was framed and justified as a crusade:

- Jackson Lears: *How a War Became a Crusade* (*The New York Times*, 11 March 2003)
- Dan Harris and Barbara Walters: *Iraq War Raises Suspicion of New 'Crusade'* (*ABC News*, 6 January 2006)

- Peter Waldman and Hugh Pope: *'Crusade' Reference Reinforces Fears War on Terrorism Is Against Muslims* (*The Wall Street Journal*, 21 September 2001)

As indicated by [W. Fitzhugh Brundage](#) (*Civilizing Torture: an American tradition*, Harvard University Press, 2018):

From the Indian wars to Civil War POW prisons and early penitentiaries, from "the third degree" in police stations and racial lynchings to the War on Terror, U.S. institutions have proven to be far more amenable to torture than the nation's professed commitment to liberty would suggest. Legal and racial inequality fostered many opportunities for state agents to wield excessive power, which they justified as essential for American safety and well-being. Reconciling state violence with the aspirations of Americans for social and political justice is an enduring challenge. By tracing the historical debates about the efficacy of torture and the attempt to adapt it to democratic values, *Civilizing Torture* reveals the recurring struggle to decide what limits Americans are willing to impose on the power of the state. At a time of escalating rhetoric aimed at cleansing the nation of the undeserving, as well as ongoing military involvement in conflicts around the world, the debate over torture remains a critical and unresolved part of America's tradition.

Given the Christian deprecation of Islamic jihadists as the exemplification of evil, there is a case for exploring the difference between the grooming of Muslims for jihad and the Christian celebration of pain -- whether through the mortification of the flesh or [putting suspected unbelievers to the question](#) (*Torture or the 'question'*, *Torture and the Truth*, 13, p. 703)

Futility of highlighting denial of Christian complicity in torture

The context for discussion of appropriate punishment of Julian Assange, following trial within a country so profoundly inspired by eternal Christian principles, calls for clarification regarding Christian ambiguity with regard to painful retribution.

Christianity is the most adhered to religion in the United States, with 65% of polled American adults identifying themselves as Christian in 2019. The USA has the largest Christian population in the world, with approximately 167 million Christians adults (*Christianity in the United States*, *Wikipedia*). There is however controversy as to whether the USA is a Christian nation or ought to be. Religious Right groups and their allies insist that the USA was designed to be officially Christian and that its laws should enforce the doctrines of (their version of) Christianity (*Is America A Christian Nation?* Americans United for Separation of Church and State).

It is therefore within a context of [plausible deniability](#) that consideration can be given to the complicity of Christians in the controversial use of "torture", whether in the USA or elsewhere -- however it may be reframed as "enhanced interrogation". There is no lack of references and debate on this controversial matter.

Christianity has been complicit in the torture practiced by authorities for long periods of history:

- *Medieval Christian Torture Devices* (*YouTube*, 1 March 2010)
- Donna Patricia Ward: *Punish the Non-Believers: 6 Cruel Torture Methods of the Spanish Inquisition* (*History Collection*)
- Karen L. King: *Christianity and Torture* (*The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence*, 2013)
- David P. Gushee: *The Contemporary U.S. Torture Debate in Christian Historical Perspective* (*The Journal of Religious Ethics*, 39, 2011, 4)

Further to an earlier survey, focus has been given to such complicity by a *Washington Post-ABC News* poll which found that the majority of Americans think torture was justified after 9/11 attacks. (Adam Goldman and Petyon Craighill, *New poll finds majority of Americans think torture was justified after 9/11 attacks*, *The Washington Post*, 16 December 2014). As the latter notes:

By a margin of almost 2 to 1 -- 59 percent to 31 percent -- those interviewed said that they support the CIA's brutal methods, with the vast majority of supporters saying that they produced valuable intelligence. In

general, 58 percent say the torture of suspected terrorists can be justified "often" or "sometimes." The new poll comes on the heels of the scathing [Senate Intelligence Committee investigation](#) into the CIA's detention and interrogation program, which President Obama ended in 2009. The report last week concluded that severe interrogation techniques — including waterboarding detainees, placing them in stress positions and keeping them inside confinement boxes — were not an effective means of acquiring intelligence.

The details of the survey and the Senate report evoked further comment:

- Sarah Posner: [Christians More Supportive of Torture than Non-Religious Americans](#) (*Religion Dispatches*, 16 December 2014)
- D. C. McAllister: [Yes, Christians Can Support Torture](#) (*The Federalist*, 17 December 2014)
- W. Benjamin Boswell: [America's justification of torture: a Christian response](#) (North Carolina Commission of Inquiry on Torture, 17 June 2016).
- Steven Gertz [Torture Then and Now The abuse at Abu Ghraib and the witness of the Christian past](#) (*Christianity Today*, 1 May 2004)
- Brian Montopoli: [Churchgoers More Likely To See Torture As Justifiable](#) (*CBS News*, 4 May 2009)
- [Survey: Support for terror suspect torture differs among the faithful](#) (*CNN*, 30 May 2009)
- Valerie Tarico: [The Bible's filled with torture: 9 ways the Good Book condones the worst behavior](#) (*Salon*, 15 May 2015)

The latter noted that:

The first half of December 2014 was painful to many moderate American Christians who see their God as a God of love. A Senate inquiry revealed that the CIA tortured men, some innocent, to the point of unconsciousness and even death; evidence suggested that this torture extracted no life-saving information. A majority of Americans responded by giving torture the thumbs-up, with the strongest approval coming from Christians, both Catholic and Protestant. Faced with moral outrage, including from within their own ranks, Christian torture apologists took to the airwaves and the Internet, weaving righteous justifications for the practice of inflicting pain on incapacitated enemies.

Discussion before and after that survey has specifically cited Jesus:

- [Jesus and the torture debate: placing the burden on devout Christians above all others](#) (*The Economist*, 7 April 2009)
- Jay Michaelson: [Who Would Jesus Torture? Well, Probably Nobody](#) (*Daily Beast*, 14 April 2017)

For the latter:

Over two thirds of Christians support the torture of terrorist suspects, compared with just 41% of nonbelievers. Why? Christianity is the religion that brought us the Inquisition, the Crusades, and the burning of witches. So perhaps it makes sense that Christians are more supportive of torture than atheists, as shown in a [Washington Post poll](#) taken just after the revelations that the CIA had tortured suspected terrorists. Sixty-eight percent of white evangelicals believe "torture of suspected terrorists" can be "often" or "somewhat" justified. This is in line with mainline Protestants (63 percent) and white Catholics (68 percent). Together, these are America's three largest religious groups, comprising 26 percent, 18 percent, and 15 percent of the population, respectively.

The context has been clarified more generally:

- Lawrence Swaim: [Torture and Religious Liberty](#) (*Liberty Magazine*)
- William Schweiker: [Torture and Religious Practice](#) (*Dialog*, 47, 2008, 3)
- Jeremy Waldron: [What Can Christian Teaching Add to the Debate about Torture?](#) (*Theology Today*, 63, 2006, 3)

- John Blake: *Torture prompts soul-searching among some Christians* (CNN, 22 May 2009)
- *Christianity, Torture and Physical Abuse* (Hereticon)

The latter notes that

Up to the fifth century AD Christians seem to have an inkling that there was something morally questionable about torture and killing. Christian torturers and executioners generally delayed their own baptism until just before death. The Church assured them that any sins of which they might have been guilty were thus washed away, and no lasting harm was done to their immortal souls. For the next thousand years and more, when Christianity was at the height of its power, the Church regarded brutality and killing as perfectly acceptable, and no such precautions were thought necessary. Mutilation, branding and flogging were commonplace. The Church found it acceptable for people to be flogged for the most trivial offences, even for things that are not now considered offences at all. Amongst them were vagrancy, drunkenness, drinking on a Sunday, having an illegitimate baby, even for contracting smallpox.

However a shift in perspective is indicated by a Letter from Pope Clement V to King Edward II of England in 1310:

We hear that you forbid torture as contrary to the laws of your land; but no state can override Cannon Law, Our Law; therefore I command you at once to submit these men to torture...Withdraw your prohibition and we grant you remission of sins (*Regestum Clementis Papae V, nunc primum editum cura et studio Monachorum Ordinis S. Benedicti*, (Rome, 1885-92, year 5, no. 6670, pp 84-6).

That event predates the very extensively documented righteous use of torture by the [Holy Inquisition](#) over centuries past, specifically as supervised by what was finally renamed in 1965 as the [Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith](#) -- necessarily representative of the eternal values of Christianity.

The *Hereticon* summarizes a historical record of the application of Christian values as follows:

For more than a thousand years Christianity set the standards. During that time many suffered physical abuse. Prisoners were tortured in Bishops' torture chambers. Noses were split, ears cropped, tongues bored, backs whipped, foreheads and cheeks branded, limbs crushed or cut off. And it was not only prisoners who suffered. Slaves were thrashed to death. Uncooperative potential converts were physically coerced. The insane were tortured by monks and nuns. Christian parents beat their children. Christian Schoolmasters beat their pupils. Christian husbands beat their wives. Canon law specifically permitted wife-beating,...

Curiously the Protestants, who were so fundamental to the founding of the USA, emerged as a reaction to the repressive religious practices of the Catholic Church -- as most obviously embodied in the Inquisition. Use of torture was however continued by Protestants during the Renaissance against teachers who they viewed as heretics. Such practices by Protestants -- according to eternal Christian principles -- were a feature of colonial America, as noted by Brett Wilkins (*A Brief History of American Torture*, *CounterPunch*, 8 May 2018):

...torture has been an unspoken weapon in America's arsenal since the earliest colonial days. In a nation built on a foundation of genocide and slavery, horrific violence [*The Shocking Savagery of America's Early History*, *Smithsonian Magazine*, March 2013] including widespread torture, was a critical tool for securing and maintaining white dominance in the same way that great global violence has been crucial to perpetuating America's superpower status in modern times. The same founding fathers who constitutionally proscribed "cruel and unusual punishment" endorsed and committed the most heinous crimes against both Native Americans and black slaves — witness Thomas Jefferson calling for the "[extermination or removal](#)" of Virginia's Indians. Ever fearful of revolt and revenge, white Southerners subjected black slaves to the some of the [cruellest punishments imaginable](#) to break both their physical and psychological ability to resist.

As indicated above, the pattern has been evident from the [Salem Witch Trials](#) (1693), through the [treatment of slaves](#), to the [Senate CIA Torture Report](#) (2012) on the processing of those held at [Guantanamo Bay](#) and in "black sites" elsewhere. The problematic challenge to that report has been usefully related to the familiarity of the Founding Fathers with the use of torture by authorities (Juan Cole, [Why the Founding Fathers thought banning Torture Foundational to the US Constitution](#), *Informed Comment*, 12 September 2014). The latter argues that:

The torture deployed by the US government in the Bush-Cheney era resembles that used in what the French called the "[question préalable](#)". They were being asked to reveal accomplices and any further plots possibly being planned by those accomplices. The French crown would have argued before 1788 that for reasons of public security it was desirable to make the convicted criminal reveal his associates in crime, just as Bush-Cheney argued that the al-Qaeda murderers must be tortured into giving up confederates. But Jefferson was unpersuaded by such an argument. In fact, he felt that the king had gone on making it long past the time when rational persons were persuaded by it.

Promotion of enhanced torture on behalf of the American people

In justification, and specifically with respect to the "[ticking bomb scenario](#)", focus has been given to the question of whether torture is a fruitful means of obtaining information, especially in the light of assertions that this is indeed the case.

- Matthew Weaver and Spencer Ackerman: [Trump claims torture works but experts warn of its 'potentially existential' costs](#) (*The Guardian*, 26 January 2017)
- Bradley Klapper, et al: [Trump says torture works as his government readies a review](#) (*AP*, 26 January 2017)
- Ephrat Livni: [For better or worse, Trump is comfortable using the word "torture"](#) (*Quartz*, 3 February 2017)
- Mary Lowth [Does torture work? Donald Trump and the CIA](#) *British Journal of General Practice*, 67, 2017, 656)

For the latter:

President Trump says that 'torture works'. His office has released a draft order [[Executive Order: Detention and Interrogation of Enemy Combatants](#)] stating an intention to make 'modifications and additions' to the policies the US employs for the '*... safe, lawful, and effective interrogation of enemy combatants captured in the fight against radical Islamism*'.

This not only worries human rights groups, but it also suggests that he has taken no account of the US Senate Select Committee on Intelligence's Study of the CIA's detention and interrogation activity from 2001–2009, on which he must surely have been briefed. This report concluded (as did the CIA) that torturing prisoners was not an effective means of obtaining intelligence or cooperation. It describes Orwellian 'enhanced interrogation' techniques including slapping, walling, stress positioning, cramped confinement, sleep deprivation, confinement with insects, waterboarding, sexual humiliation, forcible high-volume IV injections, extreme temperatures, and the rectal infusion of pureed food. These methods have since been defined as torture by the European Court of Human Rights.

These have framed Trump's future commitments to its use on behalf of the American people, notably in the light of campaign commitments -- to [bring back waterboarding and "worse"](#) -- and commentary in that respect:

- John J. Farmer, Jr. and Edward M. Neafsey: [Trump and the Law on Torture](#) (*Lawfare*, 1 March 2018)
- Adam D. Jacobson: [Could the United States Reinstitute an Official Torture Policy?](#) (*Journal of Strategic Security*, 10, 2017, 2)
- Sarah Spiller: [Trump, the CIA and the future of torture](#) (*Al Jazeera*, 6 December 2018)
- Mark Tran: [CIA medics joined in Guantanamo torture sessions, says Red Cross](#) (*The Guardian*, 2 April 2009)
- Andrew Sullivan: [Trump Isn't Merely Tolerating Torture -- He's Celebrating It](#) (*Intelligencer*, 6 April 2018)
- Ludwig Boltzman Institute: [In response to President Trump: Torture is absolutely prohibited and it does not](#)

"work"!

Commentary has been evoked with regard to his proposal of torture advocates to key positions, including [Gina Haspel](#) as head of the CIA (Rob Berschinski and Benjamin Haas: *Trump Wants a Torture Proponent to Lead U.S. Human Rights Policy: the Senate should say No*, *Politico*, 17 September 2019; Ron Stief, *Haspel Nomination to Lead CIA Betrays the Message of Christ*, *Sojourners*, 28 March 2018).

There is no lack of formally articulated opposition by Christian authorities to the use of "torture", however nuanced:

- The [National Religious Campaign Against Torture](#) and the [Office of International Justice and Peace](#) of the [United States Conference of Catholic Bishops](#) elaborated a study guide (*Torture is a Moral Issue: a study guide*, 2008)
- The [National Association of Evangelicals](#) framed *An Evangelical Declaration Against Torture: Protecting Human Rights in An Age of Terror* (2007)

The difficulty at this time is that such declarations are formulated in a context in which religion is remarkably complicit in framing the justification for so-called just war -- now effectively extended to just torture (as noted above). This frames policies with regard to retributive punishment, to whatever extent this may take an unfortunately vindictive form in the case of those authorities susceptible to react vengefully in that manner.

Crowdsourcing appropriate punishment for enemies of the American people

Engaging American people of Christian persuasion: The case of Julian Assange constitutes a remarkable opportunity to engage the American people -- and especially those of the dominant Christian majority -- in the transparent administration of justice according to the highest Christian principles. Rather than justice being framed by authorities, dubiously claiming to act appropriately on behalf of the American people, there is a case for ensuring that an opportunity is given to the population to indicate the form of punishment considered most appropriate. Curiously, in psychodramatic terms, it could be argued that Assange and Trump have adopted complementary strategies in "spaking truth to power" -- as they have variously understood both.

Understood in that light, this is an exemplification of direct engagement of people in a manner consistent with the choice by the incumbent President of the United States in using Twitter to bypass the distorting role of the mass media and the associated institutions. Given the recognized appeal of Donald Trump to his power base among those of Christian persuasion, and his electoral commitment to future use of "*waterboarding and worse*", such a response to Julian Assange provides a valuable opportunity for both as a key feature of the 2020 presidential election campaign and for all that represents for the future leadership of the free world.

As the rapid transformation of world politics and international law has demonstrated during the period since the election of Donald Trump, new thinking and new approaches are vital in a post-truth period of fake news and democratic deficit. Engagement in endless debate regarding theological and legal niceties is now increasingly counterproductive -- offering little indication of appropriate response to those who are recognized as "*not with us, but against us*". As frequently cited: *Not only must justice be done; it must also be seen to be done*.

The proposal here is to **move beyond the obsolete modality of futile dispute evoked by presentation of arguments and facts --- however principled**. As is only too evident, this is typically organized such as to avoid resolution, thereby preserving the vested interests of those who have little desire to ensure that justice is "seen to be done".

Crowdsourcing justice: Understood generically, [crowdsourcing](#) is a method by which individuals or organizations obtain goods and services, including ideas and finances, from a large, relatively open and often rapidly-evolving group of internet users; it divides work between participants to achieve a cumulative result. Crowdsourcing has transferred mainly to the Internet, which provides a particularly beneficial venue for crowdsourcing since individuals tend to be more open in web-based projects where they are not being physically judged or scrutinized, and thus can feel more comfortable sharing. In an online atmosphere, more attention can be given to the specific needs of a project, rather than spending as much time in communication with other individuals.

Although it has most notably been used in the **response to injustice**, as noted by the following, there is every reason to extend the approach to the **implementation of justice**:

The crowdsourced problem can be huge (epic tasks like finding alien life or mapping earthquake zones) or very small ('where can I skate safely?'). Some examples of successful crowdsourcing themes are problems that bug people, things that make people feel good about themselves, projects that tap into niche knowledge of proud experts, subjects that people find sympathetic or any form of injustice. (Henk van Ess, *Crowdsourcing: how to find a crowd*, 17 September 2010)

There is now considerable experience in the implementation and management of crowdsourcing platforms, as notably described separately (Ivo Blohm, et al, *How to Manage Crowdsourcing Platforms Effectively? California Management Review*, 60, 2018, 2). The authors note that:

To profit from crowdsourcing, organizations can engage in four different approaches: microtasking, information pooling, broadcast search, and open collaboration. This article presents 21 governance mechanisms that can help organizations manage their crowdsourcing platforms. It investigates the effectiveness of these governance mechanisms in 19 case studies and recommends specific configurations of these mechanisms for each of the four crowdsourcing approaches. Also, it offers guidance to organizations that host a crowdsourcing platform by providing recommendations for implementing governance mechanisms into their platforms and building up governance capabilities for crowdsourcing.

Examples of crowdsourcing justice: The first example of use of Internet crowdsourcing of justice was in China in 2006, as noted in a discussion of citizens as policing agents by Johnny Nhan (*Issues and Controversies in Policing Today*, 2019, p. 237). More details of its current use in China are offered by Lisheng Dong and Hanspeter Kriesi (*Urban Mobilizations and New Media in Contemporary China*, 2016. pp. 122-124). The latter notes:

Another important process that contributes to the importance of the Internet in eliciting responses to the concerns and desires of the population from authoritarian governments comes from the unique way that the Internet provides for anonymous but concerted efforts to seek justice in the case of specific grievances. It is remarkable how even small details can be enough for groups of netizens to track down the names and locations of individuals involved or to dig up important details that help to fuel general outrage. In these cases, efforts to achieve justice are crowdsourced -- they are left to the collective contribution of anyone willing to contribute to the process. Through the same logic that leads to the success of Wiki pages, various contributors provide portions of information, debate its accuracy, and come to a consensus regarding the given case. This consensus often includes the identities of those involved, the source of grievance or discontent, and a proper course of action (for example calls for response, harassment, hacking, and so on).

Early examples in the USA are evident from the following:

- Michael Hall: *Crowdsourcing Justice* (*Texas Monthly*, 23 July 2019)
- Tony Jeff: *Crowdsourcing Justice* (*Clarion Ledger*, 17 February 2016; *Mississippi College Law Review*, 35, 2016-2017)
- *Crowdsourcing Justice: The Truth Behind the Steubenville Rape* (*On the Media*, 20 March 2018)
- *Crowdsourcing Justice: Rodney Reed's Execution Stayed* (*Valdosta Today*, 10 December 2019)
- *Crowdsourcing a Better Criminal Justice System* (*Koch NewsRoom*, 22 August 2018)

As noted by the latter:

During a live-day period in February 2016, an amazing thing happened: Millions of people followed updates on Twitter and Periscope in anticipation of daily podcasts about a legal hearing. The hearing was neither televised nor about a celebrity. Instead, the hearing related to a murder that occurred seventeen years prior.

The fact that so many people followed the hearing was not even the amazing part. The truly amazing part of the story was that some of the evidence -- and even some of the theories -- presented by the prosecution were investigated, revealed, and vetted by everyday people on the Internet.

Crowdsourcing often allows participants to rank each other's contributions. One common method for ranking is "like" counting, where the contribution with the most likes ranks first. This method is simple and easy to understand, but it privileges early contributions, which have more time to accumulate likes. In recent years several crowdsourcing companies have begun to use pairwise comparisons, backed by ranking algorithms. Ranking algorithms do not penalize late contributions. They also produce results faster. Ranking algorithms have proven to be at least 10 times faster than manual stack ranking. One drawback, however, is that ranking algorithms are more difficult to understand than like counting. An application to sentencing has been envisaged (Vincent Chiao, *Predicting Proportionality: the case for algorithmic sentencing*, *Criminal Justice Ethics*, 37, 2018, 3)

Valuable research on the relevance of crowdsourcing to punishment has recently become available (Jae-Young Son, Apoorva Bhandari and Oriol FeldmanHall, *Crowdsourcing Punishment: Individuals reference group preferences to inform their own punitive decisions*, *Scientific Reports*, 9, 2019, 11625).

WikiJustice, WikiRetribution, WikiPunition, or WikiSalvation -- for Assange?

As remarked with respect to use of the Internet for the crowdsourcing of justice in China, the technical possibilities for its application with respect to Assange (and others) could involve a simple adaptation of the *Wikipedia* model.

Focus could be given to reflection on the model through consideration of a suitable name in the light of possibilities such as the following:

- **WikiJustice** ? This is clearly the most neutral and appropriate name. Specific to the case above, the term has already been used both for a Facebook page ([WikiJustice Julian Assange](#)) and in the creation of support group -- primarily French-language based ([WikiJustice Julian Assange - déclaration](#), *Le Grand Soir*, 26 May 2019). Unfortunately it has also been appropriated as the title of a novel (Jack King, *WikiJustice*, 2012).
- **WikiRetribution** ? This would be consistent with concepts of [retributive justice](#), namely a theory of punishment recognizing that when an offender breaks the law, justice requires that he or she suffer in return. It also requires that the response to a crime is proportional to the offence. Retribution is different from revenge because retributive justice is directed only at wrongs, has inherent limits, is not personal and involves no pleasure at the suffering of others and employs procedural standards
- **WikiRevenge** ? This would be consistent with [prosecutorial vindictiveness](#), namely the process in which a prosecutor retaliates against a defendant for exercising a constitutional or statutory right by increasing the number or severity of the charges against him. Such a process has been clarified in terms of judicial vindictiveness and is held to constitute a violation of a defendant's right of due process. The possibility is notably of relevance in the sentencing of Julian Assange as an additional means of discouraging other whistleblowers in the USA or elsewhere..
- **WikiPunition** ? In this case the focus is on the nature of the punishment itself. It could be especially appropriate where it notably includes the range of methods of torture -- however these may be reframed as "enhanced interrogation".
- **WikiPain** ? This obviously represents a major dimension of the process of punishment. However its use already invites various forms of confusion. [WikiPain](#) is already used as an indication of why the Wiki process is alienating for some. It is to be expected that it would feature in the strategic possibilities of the [International Association for the Study of Pain](#), as with those of the [Algosphere Alliance for the Alleviation of Suffering](#). Both necessarily refer to the archival records of the pioneering initiative with regard to panetics by R. G. H. Siu (*Panetics: the study of the infliction of suffering*, *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 28, 1988, 3; *Panetics and Dukkha: an integrated study of the infliction of suffering and the reduction of infliction*, International Society for Panetics, 1994).
- **WikiTorture** ? Whilst a potentially obvious choice, this fails to reflect adequately the complexities required

of the process and appreciation of it. Somewhat ironically the term features in commentary on a colleague of Julian Assange (*WikiTorture: State Dept.-Pentagon dispute? American Buddhist Journal Blogspot*, March 2011).

- **WikiSentencing ?** This is clearly an option -- but less appropriate in that "[sentencing](#)" might be assumed to exclude the forms of punishment characteristic of torture and the like (although this is not the case in some jurisdictions and interpretations, especially those provisions inspired by [religious law](#)).
- **WikiSalvation ?** Given the Christian religious context, and specifically the response to sin, [salvation](#) is then to be understood as the saving of the soul from [sin](#) and its consequences -- as clarified by [soteriology](#). It is as yet less evident how Assange is to be recognized as a sinner in traditional religious terms. The primary reference to that term has been metaphorical (Simon Jenkins, *Julian Assange's cyber-sins seem quaint in comparison to those of big tech*, *The Guardian*, 11 April 2019; Jennie Taer, *Tucker Carlson: Assange's Real Sin Was Preventing Hillary From Becoming President*, *Sara*, 13 April 13, 2019). From a policy perspective, Assange is framed as having "sinned" in the following terms: *This, then, is Assange's greatest sin. He acts like a tyrant, though he controls no state and no territory. Perhaps he will be found guilty in a court of law in Sweden and go to jail. Otherwise, being an unaccountable jerk is not a crime. For his sins, I'd just be happy to see Assange consigned to obscurity* (John Feffer, *The Dictator and the Nihilist*, *Foreign Policy in Focus*, 17 April 2019).

From a Christian religious perspective, "WikiSalvation" might best enable clarification of how exactly Assange is to be understood as a sinner -- if not exemplary in that respect in these times, through his problematic efforts to speak truth to power, as have other iconic figures over centuries, if not millennia.

A procedural difficulty requiring consideration is the difficulty for any array of Christian denominations to make use of a single facility -- as exemplified by the tragedy of the [Church of the Holy Sepulchre](#) (Hilda Reilly, *The Church of the Holy Sepulchre and Its Quarrelsome Custodians*). However the establishment of WikiSalvation might fruitfully correspond to the remedial initiatives urgently required by that building (Sara Toth Stub, *Repairing a Denominational Divide*, *US News*, 8 July 2019).

More problematic however is the **framing of "sin" as the public exposure of what is deemed sinful** (Gabriel Moysen, *WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange sin's are exposing war crimes and corruption*, *El Universal*, 18 April 2019; Rick Perlstein, *The War on Whistleblowers: On the Sin of Being Correct*, *The Nation*, 20 June 2013). This has been rendered evident to a greater and more problematic degree through recent documentation of the sins of the clergy where that exposure may itself be deemed sinful through the disruption of the sacred work of religious institutions and by eliciting doubt among believers:

- Frédéric Martel: *In the Closet of the Vatican: power, homosexuality, hypocrisy* (2019)
- Philip F. Lawler: *The Smoke of Satan: how corrupt and cowardly bishops betrayed Christ, His Church, and the Faithful . . . and what can be done about it* (2018)
- Lee Price: *10 Evangelist Preachers Who Fell From Grace* (*Listverse*, 16 January 2015) [[Jim Bakker](#), Kent Hovind, Robert Tilton, Billy James Hargis, Peter Popoff, George Alan Rekers, Lonnie Frisbee, Gilbert Deya, Tony Alamo, Mike Warnke)
- *5 virtuous figures caught pants down* (*CNN*, 24 June 2009) [[Aimee Semple McPherson](#), [Jim Bakker](#), [Jimmy Swaggart](#), [Amrit Desai](#), [Paul R. Shanley](#)]

In terms of the psychodrama of the legal process in which Assange has been embroiled, as a consequence of his dramatic use of WikiLeaks, employing an openly participative Wiki process could be recognized as an exemplification of poetic justice -- a case of the "chickens coming home to roost".

Types of torture variously used by Christians and applicable to Assange

To enable the crowdsourcing of justice for the treatment of Julian Assange, a comprehensive array of modes of punishment need to be incorporated into "WikiSalvation" -- if that is the preferred name of the Wiki facility. The principal sources of methods of torture as used by people of Christian faith, under guidance by Christians, or with the

the tacit approval of Christian authorities, include:

- *Wikipedia: List of methods of torture*
- CIA interrogation methods (notably including seven controversial [US Army and CIA interrogation manuals](#) declassified by the Pentagon in 1996):
 - *KUBARK Counterintelligence Interrogation*
 - *CIA manuals used in Latin America* (Latin America Working Group, 1997).
 - *CIA Interrogation Training Manual (Human Resource Exploitation Training Manual, 1983)*
 - *Senate report on CIA torture*: committee study of the Central Intelligence Agency's detention and interrogation program (Skyhorse Publishing, 2015)
- Syrian Network for Human Rights: *Documentation of 72 Methods the Syrian Regime continues to practice in its Detention Centers and Military Hospitals* (SNHR, 2019)
- *Malleus Maleficarum: The Hammer of Witches* (1487)

Wikipedia introduces its comprehensive listing with a section on [Psychological torture methods](#). This includes

- [Ego-Fragmentation](#)
- [Learned Helplessness](#)
- [Severe Stress to the point an ordinary person would experience psychotic symptoms](#)
- [Chinese water torture](#)
- [Welcome parade \(torture\)](#)

Commentators note the extent to which Assange has already been subjected to psychological torture:

- *Julian Assange shows psychological torture symptoms, says UN expert* (*The Guardian*, 31 May 2019)
- *Julian Assange subjected to psychological torture, UN expert says* (*BBC News*, 31 May 2019)
- *Julian Assange Is Suffering Psychological Torture, U.N. Expert Says* (*The New York Times*, 31 May 2019)
- *UN expert on torture sounds alarm again that Julian Assange's life may be at risk* (*UN OHCHR*, 1 November 2019)

Of particular relevance in this respect has been the controversial role of the [American Psychological Association](#), as detailed by *Wikipedia* in a description of its complicity in *Warfare and the use of torture*. This took the form of a Report to the Special Committee of the Board of Directors of the American Psychological Association (*Independent Review of Relating to AP Ethics Guidelines, National Security Interrogations and Torture*, 2 July 2015). The potential degree of ambiguity and complicity is evident in the discussion of psychologists of Christian persuasion (Randolph K. Sanders, *Christian Counseling Ethics: A Handbook for Therapists, Pastors and Counselors*, 1997). Beyond their involvement in any form of torture itself, such ambiguity is especially highlighted by the role of chaplains in righteously counselling those scheduled for capital punishment.

As helpfully detailed by *Wikipedia*, but calling additional entries from other sources, the following could be presented to the American people for consideration in the process of crowdsourcing justice in relation to Assange. A WikiSalvation platform would also enable clarification as to which of these methods had been used by Christian authorities, with their tacit approval, or by their proxies (or allies) -- and when.

Physical torture methods			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blinding with light • Boiling • Bone breaking • Branding • Castor oil • Castration • Chinese water torture • Cold cell torture • Cock and ball torture • Combing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flagellation • Flaying • Foot roasting • Foot whipping (aka bastinado) • Force-feeding • Garotte/strangling • Genital mutilation/forced circumcision • Hamstringing • Hypothermia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pliers • Pressure points • Rape • Rat torture • Riding the Rail • Sam • Sawing • Scalping • Scaphism • Shrimp tie / ebi-zeme • Sensory overload 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Starvation • Stoning • Strappado/squassation (aka "reerse hanging" or "Palestinian hanging") • Stress positions • Ta'liq hanging from a metal bar • Tarring and feathering • Thumbscrew • Tickle torture

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crushing • Cutting • Dehydration • Denailing • Disfigurement • Drowning • Dry-boarding • Dunking • Enemas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impalement • Jetliner position • Keelhauling • Kneecapping • Menial • Mutilation • Noise (see Sound entry) • Oxygen deprivation • Palestinian Chair • Parrilla (torture) • Pitchcapping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexual assault • Shinbone crusher • Sleep deprivation • Sound (extremely high volumes, dynamic range, low frequency, high pitched noise, intended to interfere with rest, cognition and concentration) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tooth extraction • Walling • Water cure • Waterboarding • Welcome parade (torture)
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In noting a variety of torture devices, the *Wikipedia* entry indicates that the distinction between "torture method" and "torture device" is often blurred, particularly when a specifically named implement is but one component of a method. Also, many devices that can be used for torture have mainstream uses, completely unrelated to torture.

Instruments of torture			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boot • Brazen bull • Breaking wheel • Breast ripper • Catapelta • Choke pear • Cattle prod • Cold air and water • Instep borer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iron chair • Iron Maiden • Kia quen / Tean zu • Mancuerda • Electroshock weapon • Ice water showers and baths • Parrilla • Pau de Arara • Pendulum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Picana • Pillory • Rack • Rope • Scavenger's daughter • Scold's bridle • Stocks • Tablilla 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thumbscrew • Tongue tearer • Tramp chair • Tucker telephone • Whip • Wooden horse

Also included by *Wikipedia* are the following:

Medieval and early modern instruments of torture			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chair of Torture • The Rack • Brazen Bull 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chinese Iron Maiden • Pear of Anguish • Dunking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boiling • Freezing to death • Burning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Live Burial • Restraint • Brown Rats

The title of the above table from *Wikipedia* is unfortunately misleading since there are records of the continuing use in the USA of several of the devices indicated, most notably restraints in the form of [stocks](#) and caging. The phrase "early modern" fails to highlight the extent to which some featured in the treatment of heretics and those suspected of witchcraft, notably dunking. Continuing use of caging may be variously recognized (Leonardo Blair, *69 people rescued from chains, cages and torture at Christian ministry in Trinidad*, *The Christian Post*, 10 October 2019; Amethyst Craft, *How to Make Torture Cages*, *YouTube*, 16 March 2018).

The United States has the largest prison population in the world, and the highest per-capita incarceration rate. It is of course the case that a significant number of those incarcerated there are held in "cages" (Adam Gopnik, *The Caging of America: why do we lock up so many people?* *The New Yorker*, 22 January 2012). Use of burning has featured notoriously in the actions of the [Klu Klux Klan](#) -- whose members swear to uphold Christian morality and make extensive use of the symbol of the Cross, especially in [cross-burning](#),

Hanging, drawing and quartering as symbolic of Christian retribution?

It is appropriate to recognize how recently Christianity has been associated to any degree with extremely violent

treatment of those questioning it in any way -- or challenging the authorities claiming Christian values as primary. [Capital punishment](#) remains a matter of controversy and continues to be practiced in parts of the USA. Given the considerable symbolic significance of the Christian Cross, and the manner and extent of its display, it is intriguing to explore how this may be related to the practice of [hanging, drawing and quartering](#) (HDQ) so characteristic of centuries of punishment with which Christianity has been intimately associated. Such an exploration is justified by any argument that Christian values are in a fundamental sense eternal -- rendering suspect any reference to the humanity which has become so recently apparent.

Use of HDQ was long typical of the treatment of those considered to be traitorous and convicted of [treason](#) -- the probable outcome of the trial of Julian Assange. He has already been labelled as such by various authorities. The matter is discussed in response to an editorial by Seth Lipsky: [Wikileaks and the War: what would Lincoln have done about Julian Assange?](#) (*The New York Sun*, 28 October 2010). The argument is characterized by Jeff Goldberg, another editor as *Seth Lipsky argues that Lincoln, and FDR as well, would have pretty much tried to hang the Wikileaks founder for treason* ([What Would Lincoln Have Done About Julian Assange?](#) *The Atlantic*, 29 October 2010). This was nuanced by a colleague (James Fallow, [On 'Treason' and Julian Assange](#), *The Atlantic*, 29 October 2010).

The discussion is now complicated by reference to the treason of others (including Assange) by President Trump and reference to his own treason by some of his critics -- notably as a feature of his impeachment trial (in which other whistleblowers have been labelled traitors):

- A.G. Sulzberger: [Accusing the New York Times of 'Treason,' Trump Crosses a Line The Founders considered it the gravest of crimes.](#) (*World Street Journal*, 19 June 2019)
- James Risen: [Is Donald Trump a Traitor?](#) (*The Intercept*, 16 February 2018)
- Jerome R. Corsi: [Coup d'État: Exposing Deep State Treason and the Plan to Re-Elect President Trump](#) (Post Hill Press, 2020)
- Anderson Cooper: [Serving The Country Or The President?; Accusation Of Treason; Assange Evicted; Exclusive Interview With VP Pence](#) (*Apple Podcast*)
- Nick O'Malley: [From traitor to patriot: how the US right fell for Julian Assange](#) (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 January 2017)
- Anthony Glees: [Gullible liberals adored him - but traitor Assange risked the lives of countless secret agents who worked to defeat the Taliban](#) (*The Daily Mail*, 12 April 2019)
- [Assange Is Indicted for Exposing War Crimes While Trump Considers Pardons for War Criminals](#) (*Democracy Now*, 24 May 2019)

In the past century, those convicted of treason have been subject to capital punishment -- essentially a watered down version of the Christian provision for the complete process of hanging, drawing and quartering. Given the controversy in regard to hanging alone, it is unclear what retribution might be sought, possibly subsequent to any torture (aka enhanced interrogation") whilst in US custody -- and despite a "verbal commitment" not to seek retribution in this manner (Tara Palmeri and Aicha El Hammar Castano, [US gave verbal pledge of no death penalty for Assange](#), *ABC News*, 15 April 2019).

The point to be stressed is that for some, "hanging is not good enough". Any such discussion merits consideration of the question as to whether Jesus was appropriately considered a traitor -- and even a "terrorist" according to current clarity in that regard

- Jerry Bowyer: [Jesus Of Nazareth, Enemy Of The State, Executed For Treason](#) (*Forbes*, 18 April 2014)
- Peter Cresswell: [Jesus the Terrorist](#) (Paperback Book, 2010)
- Giles Fraser: [Under this government, Jesus would have been done for extremism](#) (*The Guardian*, 22 October 2015)
- Jeremy Bouma: [Did You Know Jesus Died a Terrorist's Death?](#) (*Bible Gateway Blog*, 18 September 2017).

Confusion in that regard has been recently highlighted by the comparison of the impeachment trial of Trump to that of Jesus (Tom Kertscher, [The False claim comparing Jesus before Pontius Pilate and Trump's impeachment](#), *Politifact*, 19 December 2019; Spencer Neale, ['Jesus was falsely accused of treason': Republican compares Trump to](#)

Son of God, *Washington Examiner*, 18 December 2019).

In a country of Christian persuasion, this confusion is made only too evident by the nature of retribution exacted in popular media portrayals where the level of violence and retribution can only be described as extreme -- of the same order as HDQ, if not more brutal (*The 30 most violent movies ever made, from Braindead to Battle Royale*, 2018; *Rambo Last Blood*, 2019; etc). In a discussion of the psychological engagement with crucifixion, Michael Patrick Shiels notes that:

A faith-based religious film was one of the most violent, gruesome movies of all time, and the highest grossing R-rated film... in American history. When Mel Gibson produced *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) with a bloodied to the point of being unrecognizable Jim Caviezel as Jesus during his last 12 hours before the crucifixion, moviegoers had to put down their popcorn and critics said the story was lost in the snuffing of the Savior. Respected film critic Roger Ebert described *The Passion of the Christ* as the *most violent film he'd ever seen*. (*The Truth of What It Is Like to Be Crucified*, *Forbes*, 26 March 2016)

Clearly there is a strangely perverse enthusiasm for such treatment -- readily framed as poetic justice, however that is conflated with justice in traditional Christian religious terms. Frequent use is made of "crucified" to relish triumphantly the crushing defeat of an opponent -- without the slightest regret. The term could even be seen as evoking no criticism or reservations in terms of the hypersensitivity of political correctness. The language with which defeat is relished in discourse in boardroom or bar, for example, could be fruitfully explored in terms of its appropriation of forms of torture. Vigorous denial (especially by people of faith) that it is only metaphorical and not "meant" to encompass physical violence is suspect -- given the track record of violent proclivities of Christians when circumstances are deemed appropriate.

It could also be argued that the forms of torture justified in both movies and language serve as a means for security services to frame the acceptability of torture (aka enhanced interrogation) -- and by extension the treatment of such as Assange.

Before considering the symbolic significance of HDQ, it is appropriate to note its use in centuries past -- irrespective of how admissible aspects of it continue to be, if only as so highly valued in entertainment. A well-documented summary is offered on the history of *Capital Punishment* (*Bad News about Christianity*), although the presentation would tend to invite a presentation of alternative facts from a Christian perspective. There it is noted that:

Capital punishment was accepted as part of God's great design, and no attempt was made to ban it by any right-thinking Christian. In the Middle Ages capital punishment was inflicted for religious offences... Churchmen advocated not only the death penalty but also a range of accompanying horrors. Criminals were hanged in chains. Sometimes bodies were gibbeted, i.e. they were coated in tar to preserve them, then hung high up on a post, often in sight of their family home, where the birds and the weather would destroy them only after months or years. Some victims were hanged, drawn, and quartered, after which their heart would be held up to the crowd, and their severed head would be stuck on a spike and left in some prominent place for everyone to see....

On God's behalf, English churchmen confirmed in the early nineteenth century that it was perfectly acceptable to tear out the heart and bowels of condemned but still living men. Some clergymen advocated hanging whether the accused was guilty or not. One argument was that capital punishment was a deterrent for the criminally inclined, so the guilt or innocence of the individual on trial was irrelevant. Another was that all sins are equally damnable in the eyes of God, so the extreme penalty was appropriate for all...

The death penalty was not merely *permitted by God*: for certain crimes it was *required by God*. Other authorities surpassed him in their zeal. Martin Luther criticised the practice of the executioner asking forgiveness of his victim, since the executioner, like the magistrate, was an instrument of God.

The summary also notes that in the American colonies, Christians passed capital laws based on biblical injunctions,

as indicated in *The General Laws and Liberties of the Massachusetts Colony* (1641). The summary comments on the details presented to the effect that the Christians who framed these laws clearly had no concept of the Old Testament having been abrogated by the New, although some mitigating factors had been added.

More generally the summary notes:

The Roman Church carried out countless thousands of executions and continued to sanction its own secret executions well into the nineteenth century. Other denominations also approved of capital punishment. Methodist ministers took children to watch public executions, such scenes being considered "improving". Wesley himself had been keen on gibbeting and had wanted to extend the practice to suicides. Calvinists concurred. A leading nineteenth century minister styled the "Champion of the Sacred Cause of Hanging", was critical of the exercise of mercy in capital cases. As he pointed out, God himself had tried mercy with Cain, and everyone knew how badly that had turned out.

From any such summary, however qualified by apologists, it is clear that there is a predisposition framed by eternal Christian values in favour of extreme forms of punishment -- of a nature which would appeal to those in quest of appropriate retribution for Julian Assange. The summary quotes one formula from a variety documented by George Ryley Scott (*A History of Torture*, 1994):

You shall be drawn upon a hurdle through the open streets to the place of execution, there to be hanged and cut down while yet alive, and your body shall be opened, and your heart and bowels plucked out, and your privy members cut off, and thrown into the fire before your eyes; then your head to be struck off, and your body divided into four quarters, to be disposed of at the King's pleasure.... (pp 214-6)

Should Assange's head be impaled on a stake -- in reality or through enthusiastic depiction -- as with the heads of the traitorous [Gunpowder Plotters](#)? Should such displays be staged around the USA for all to see -- and as a discouragement to others, as was the traditional purpose?

Of relevance to the argument here is the sense in which the elements of the HDQ process -- as metaphors -- continue to feature in popular discourse including such extremes as "ripping off a person's balls", "tearing the heart out", and the like. The metaphors help to frame the predisposition -- reinforced by their depiction in violent movies and the threats articulated there.

It is appropriate to note that instances of such behaviour are a typical feature of the barbarity of Islamic terrorists -- as perceived, framed and deplored by Christians. For those of Islamic faith, such behaviours are held to be a contradiction of their fundamental values -- just as Christians would vigorously claim that any seeming proclivity for torture on their own part is an aberration totally uncharacteristic of eternal Christian values. Exceptions are of course foreseen -- engendering conflation and confusion, notably with respect to:

- torture to extract information from those claimed to be traitors, as required by any "ticking bomb scenario"
- torture in retribution for treacherous action, irrespective of how such claims of treachery may be understood to be misleading

Christian complicity in distortion of the truth symbolized by Cross

Misinterpretations of the Cross? Few would deny the mystery symbolized the Christian Cross although many offer explanations as to its nature. The multiplicity of denominations is an indication of the fragmentation of belief to which that gives rise. The sacrifice which it celebrates implies the embodiment of insight of a higher order thereby communicated to a world characterized by pain and suffering. How did Christianity get from such insight to the celebration of forms of torture which the Cross so vividly illustrates -- most obviously in the centuries of hanging, drawing and quartering condoned and enabled by those of Christian faith?

Whilst the Cross may indeed signify a higher insight for those most attuned to the mystery it represents, there is a case for exploring how the Cross can be misinterpreted -- whether casually, inadvertently or deliberately. The

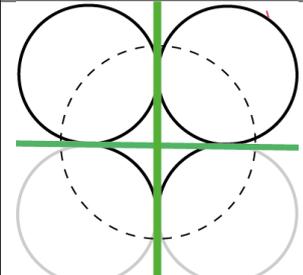
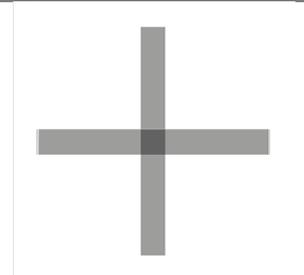
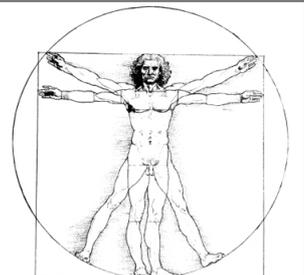
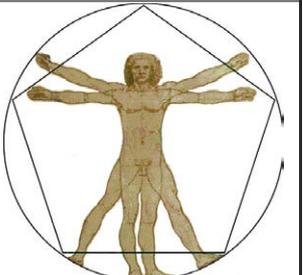
excesses of Satanism are one extreme; those of the Klu Klux Klan are another. The misinterpretations giving rise to the multiplicity of denominations are clearly another. More subtle and pervasive however is the complicity in the inequality by which society is so obviously characterized. The Cross can be recognized as symbolizing that inequality and the manner in which it is so systematically condoned. Ironically it could be argued that the very geometry of the Cross is intimately related both to the process of hanging, drawing and quartering and to their metaphorical analogues through which inequality and fragmentation is enabled.

Illustrating distortion in relation to proportion: The following endeavour to frame ways of envisaging alternative interpretations. The animation on the left uses a configuration of circles to indicate how the Cross, distinctively proportioned, might be understood as related to the heart and the diamond. This follows from more complex animations presented separately (*Meta-pattern: petal-bird-heart dynamics as a metaphorical nexus?* 2010). Possible distortions of the geometry of the Cross are indicated in the second animation where distinctions could be interpreted in terms of the vertical dimension, with the lowest position suggestive of suffering on the ground and the highest that of an exclusive perspective. As a central "stake" -- usefully recalling the Christian practice of [burning at the stake](#) -- it frames the inequality systematically neglected in the arguments for "stakeholder capitalism" by the World Economic Forum (Addisu Lashitew, *Stakeholder capitalism arrives at Davos*, *Brookings*, 21 January 2020; *World's billionaires have more wealth than 4.6 billion people*, Oxfam, 20 January 2020).

There is a case for recognizing that "distortion" is implied by "**drawing down**" the lower vertical arm of any ideal cross of four equal arms -- thereby constituting a cross of unequal arms. This could be understood as an exemplary symbol of inequality -- adjustable according to the circumstances to be described. What distortion of belief and understanding is implied and celebrated by that geometrical operation -- so dramatically configured when hanging a person on a cross?

Can the subtlest truths be understood as subject to a process comparable with the operation of the [rack](#) -- as a traditional instrument of Christian torture intimately related to the quest for truth through enhanced interrogation. Its insightful use, as a critical metaphor by [Gottfried Leibniz](#) with respect to science, is explored by Peter Pesic (*Nature on the Rack: Leibniz's attitude towards judicial torture and the 'torture' of nature*, *Studia Leibnitiana*, 29, 1997, 2) and nuanced with respect to emergence of the investigative role of science by [Francis Bacon](#) (Carolyn Merchant, *"The Violence of Impediments": Francis Bacon and the Origins of Experimentation*, *Isis*, 99, 2008).

It is acknowledged that there is no particular rule for the proportions of the Christian Cross, especially given its many variants. The question has been raised as to whether the proportions of the [golden ratio](#) might feature in its design -- given its aesthetic role. Curiously it has been argued that, given its originally Roman design to fit the proportions of the human body, this proportion would be evident to a degree in the light of the "divine proportions" with which these were associated in Leonardo da Vinci's [Vitruvian Man](#). -- with its cruciform alternative. The widely noted image can also be explored as a bridge between a fourfold pattern and the fivefold curiously fundamental to the dynamics currently engendering violence (*Middle East Peace Potential through Dynamics in Spherical Geometry: engendering connectivity from incommensurable 5-fold and 6-fold conceptual frameworks*, 2012).

Geometry of divine proportions variously framed and distorted			
Geometrical context of Christian Cross		Divine proportions as framed by Leonardo da Vinci	
Circular context for cross, heart, diamond	Proportions of the Cross (animation)	Vitruvian man (original form)	Vitruvian man/woman (animation) (multi-coloured variant)
			

"Nailing down" the truth? From that perspective, why the questionable use of "nailing down" with respect to the

factual nature of truth? The potential for confusion is explored by Cecil Maranville (*What Was Nailed to the Cross in Colossians 2:14? Life Hope and Truth*) Specifically the question relates to the misleading consequences of framed by the biblical reference to nailing: *And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross (Colossians 2:14; What does Colossians 2:14 mean? BibleRef).*

Is there an extreme irony to the sense in which psychosocial inequality can be mapped onto such a cross -- effectively "hung" on it, and necessarily "nailed" to it -- the upper portion signifying the elites and the lower portion those variously subject to inequality in society to ever higher degree? The Christian Cross can then be construed as reinforcing this pattern of inequality and the associated suffering. Ambiguously, the Cross then embodies this understanding, as Christians would vigorously claim it to be associated with the message of salvation, together with the implication that this inequality can be legitimately accommodated. Greed is indeed good? Suffering of the many is acceptable, if not a necessity in a Christian society? Conventional truth, as articulated by science, is potentially subject to distortion?

Speaking truth to power from the lower levels of the Cross is then indeed a highly problematic challenge to those authoritatively identified with its upper level.

"Quartering"? Of interest is then any pattern exemplifying the equality of the branches of the Cross and the potential for a necessary balance between them. One example is the 4-quadrant AQAL pattern of the [integral philosophy](#) promoted by Ken Wilber -- as an exercise in placing a wide diversity of theories and thinkers into one single framework. Understood as branches, the four quadrants are associated with: Interior Individual (intentionality), Exterior Individual (behavioural), Interior Collective (cultural) and Exterior Collective (social). Disciplines are variously preoccupied with each.

There is then a curious challenge to an integrative global perspective as may be associated with "quartering" the truth into contrasting and unrelated preoccupations -- a fragmentation of the whole body deliberately undertaken (as noted above) as the final stage in hanging, drawing and quartering. This is the primary feature of the engagement with the world through the variety of disciplines -- incapable of reconstituting the whole they claim to address, whilst vigorously pretending to do so, or denying the relevance of doing so.

Religious enactment of the suffering and torture of Assange

There is a very long tradition of enactment by Christians of suffering on the Cross. This can range from flagellation, and other forms of mortification of the flesh, to emulation of carrying a Cross along the Stations of the Cross. The mysterious nature of that enactment is especially evident in the [Mass](#) as the main [eucharistic](#) liturgical service in many forms of Western Christianity in which reference is made to sacrificial significance of body and blood. As noted above, dramatic enactment of the final sacrifice is evident in the [Oberammergau Passion Play](#) in Switzerland. The Mass is frequently celebrated in the presence of thousands of believers.

The American people, on whose behalf the forthcoming trial of Assange is so explicitly undertaken, could be offered the possibility of choice of subsequent punishment. Beyond any choice of torture of Julian Assange by the American people, as an outcome of his trial, considerable thought can be given to the dramatic possibilities of its subsequent enactment thereafter (whether by Christians or those of other persuasions).

This could indeed be enabled and enhanced through a creative conclusion by the Grand Jury to follow the procedure of the Sanhedrin and Pontius Pilate -- as suggested in the [introductory paper](#). The frustration of Pontius Pilate with legal process is curiously consistent with that currently experienced by Donald Trump and Boris Johnson. In anticipation of his electoral challenge, might Trump consider the crowd appeal of relegating Assange's retribution to his Christian followers -- in strange imitation of the dramatic ploy of Pilate?

Irrespective of whether the Grand Jury follows that procedure, the simultaneous or subsequent enactment might take any of the following forms -- consistent with forms of suffering variously cultivated by those of Christian persuasion:

- **flagellation**: perhaps to be undertaken by volunteers as a process in front of the headquarters of the primary institutions of the United States -- the Supreme Court, etc. The activities of the [Black Sash](#) movement in South Africa during the apartheid period come to mind.

- **stocks and caging:** as variously employed by authorities and communities of Christian persuasion, volunteers could choose to be caged in public places in celebration of the consequences of speaking truth to power. Further inspiration could be derived from the suspension of such cages above public spaces in order to heighten the dramatic effects of such visibility. Such possibilities could be instituted outside places of Christian worship or in public spaces as has been the practice in countries of Christian faith, notably during the Holy Roman Empire.
- **exploration of methods of torture:** given the variety of methods, many unfamiliar, there is a case for enabling groups to experiment with them on public occasions (fairs, etc) in a spirit of public education. This could be understood as a replication of the famous [Milgram experiment](#) measuring the willingness of participants, from a diverse range of occupations with varying levels of education, to obey an authority figure who instructed them to perform acts conflicting with their personal conscience -- most notably the infliction of pain. Animals could be employed as surrogates.
- **trials:** as with passion plays, there is a case for future emulation of the trial of Assange -- even competitively. Obvious models are to be found in the widespread use of [mock trials](#) (especially given any conflation with [show trials](#)). Of particular interest is the past operation of so-called [Russell Tribunals](#)
- **incorporation into theme parks:** both the demonstration of methods of torture, especially the use of stocks and caging, suggest possibilities for theme parks -- even [Disneyland](#) -- in which visitors might engage with the experience, whether as torturers or victims. This would enhance the sense in which torture is fun -- as is curiously a characteristic of the entertainment value of a high proportion of [media violence](#).

Given the sense in which the Christian Cross is so mysteriously symbolic of the cognitive dissonance, now so characteristic of the global hypocrisy of the times, there is a strong case for seeking creative ways to render comprehensible the engagement with it. In a period in which academia frames so many in sociopolitical processes as "[actors](#)", there is indeed a case for celebrating the subtlety of this insight through the psychodramatic possibility of enactment.

Whistleblowing as a "crime of passion" -- for the truth?

"**Passion play**"? As noted above, the [passion play](#) has developed in some contexts as a means of celebrating the central mystery of Christianity and how it is communicated, typically in the form of an Easter pageant. Given the controversial connotations of "passion", this frames the question of the nature of that passion. Clarification is offered by Sam Schechner (*Why Is It Called The Passion? How Jesus' suffering got its name*. *Slate*, 24 February 2004):

The simple answer is that the English word passion referred to Jesus' suffering long before it evolved other, more sultry meanings... But the Christian meaning and its modern, carnal cousins are not entirely unrelated. In fact, the more common meanings of the word passion -- strong emotion, zeal, and sexual desire -- grew organically from the Christian sense over the course of several centuries.... The English word has its roots in the Latin *passio*, which means, simply, "suffering." Its first recorded use is in early Latin translations of the Bible that appeared in the 2nd century A.D. and that describe the death of Jesus... The first sexual usage is attributed to William Shakespeare, who wrote, in *Titus Andronicus*, *My sword ... shall ... plead my passions for Lavinia's love*.

The difficulty is the degree to which the Christian understanding of the mystery can be distinguished by many from the "sultry meanings" and the only too obvious "sexual usage" -- which can be mysterious in their own way, given the complex associations to love.

Passion for the truth: Especially intriguing is the manner in which the meaning of "passion" has been extended to encompass the experience of many human preoccupations. Of obvious relevance to this argument is the passion for truth -- shared mysteriously by both religion and science. Of value is the articulation of the Catholic activist [Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira](#) (*Letter to a Friend: A Passion for the Truth*, *Crusade Magazine*, November/December 2000):

Philosophers and writers abound, yet there is only one factor that justifies the existence of one and the other: a passion for the truth. Without this passion, philosophies and books are mere vanities, perilous vanities that

enkindle fire on earth and add fuel to the fire of hell. Because of our fallen nature, we find it difficult to surrender our worldly desires for the sake of the transcendent truth. Yet the man whose sole desire is to seek the truth renounces his own ideas without the slightest reservation. He willingly abandons the most intimate intuitions, the most intriguing contemplations, the most seductive theories, and the most ingenious systems, for the sake of upholding the truth. He will sacrifice the most exquisite aesthetic creations and the most uplifting intellectual conclusions and, ultimately, the most persuasive formulations in order to pursue the truth, unadorned and unadulterated. In sum, he prefers truth to career, fortune, fame, and even reputation.

Journalists readily claim to have a passion for truth, especially investigative journalists (Jan Boesman and Irene Costera Meijer, *Nothing but the Facts? Exploring the discursive space for storytelling and truth-seeking in journalism*, *Journalism Practice*, 12, 2018, 8). The theme has proven to be central to Catholic journalism (*A Passion for Truth*, *The Tablet*, 8 August 2019). The remarkable number of tragic deaths of journalists in many countries increasingly calls into question the price of that truth, as can be variously argued (*The Price Of Truth: why honest journalism shouldn't be life-threatening*, *Elite Daily*, 10 September 2014). *Wikipedia* offers a recent checklist of 71 (*List of journalists killed in 2017*; The Committee to Protect Journalists presented a later figure (Verena Dobnik, *Report: 53 journalist deaths tied to work so far in 2018*, *AP News*, 20 December 2018). It records that a total of 1365 journalists were killed between 1992 and 2020.

It is therefore relevant to explore how this somewhat distinctive understanding of passion has been otherwise highlighted by the Catholic Church. The theme has been highlighted as a central preoccupation through appreciation of [John Newman](#), first an Anglican priest and later a Roman Catholic priest -- canonised as a saint in 2019. His inspiration to recent Popes is described by Raymond de Souza (*How Benedict XVI and Leo XIII were inspired by Newman*, *Catholic Herald*, 10 October, 2019):

For Benedict, whose theological work has focused on different subjects from Newman's, there are two areas of great continuity. First, Newman's passion for truth. His epitaph – *Ex umbris et imaginibus in veritatem* ("From shadows and images into truth") -- and the Ratzinger/Benedict motto -- *Cooperatores veritatis* ("Co-operators of the truth") -- are in perfect harmony. At the prayer vigil for Newman's beatification in Hyde Park, Benedict explicitly spoke of the splendour of truth, *veritatis splendor*.

There is however a degree of irony to such an understanding of passion by Leo XIII, given that the validity of the passion of the Anglican orders had been declared by him to be "absolutely null and utterly void" in 1896 -- a major stumbling block to any comprehension transcending their divisions, now called into question by a lower authority (Christopher Lamb, *Anglican orders not 'invalid' says Cardinal, opening way for revision of current Catholic position*, *The Tablet*, 9 May 2017).

That passion has been described as the theme of Newman's life (Juan R. Velez, *Passion for Truth: the life of John Henry Newman*, 2019). As indicated by Pope Benedict XVI, at the commencement of the canonisation process:

Newman's life also teaches us that passion for the truth, intellectual honesty and genuine conversion are costly. The truth that sets us free cannot be kept to ourselves; it calls for testimony, it begs to be heard, and in the end its convincing power comes from itself and not from the human eloquence or arguments in which it may be couched. (*Address*, London, 18 September 2010)

On the occasion of the canonisation process, that theme featured in an address by Archbishop Anthony Fisher (*Conscience, Relativism and Truth: The Witness of Newman*, Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney)

Tomorrow the Church will canonise a man whose life and work has been described by Pope Benedict XVI as 'one great commentary on the question of conscience', who was praised by St John Paul II for his "deep intellectual honesty [and] fidelity to conscience and grace", and who is celebrated by many as one worthy of the title of Doctor of the Church and specifically 'doctor of conscience'. That such a high authority on

conscience is being celebrated in this way could not be more timely: for rights of conscience are regularly flouted today and the very idea of conscience much contested. Some treat it as mere sincerity or subjective intuition; others as personal rivalry with authority; others again dismiss it altogether. Oxford don Julian Savile sounds like Newman's nineteenth-century critics as he writes off appeals to conscience as "idiosyncratic, bigoted, and discriminatory". (Address on the occasion of a [Conference on Newman the Prophet: A Saint for Our Times](#), 12 October 2019)

The theme has been highlighted in relation to other Catholic authors (Pope Benedict XVI, [Passion for Truth, the Key to St. Augustine's Life](#), *Catholic Culture*, 22 April 2007; Mary O'Driscoll (Ed.), *Catherine of Siena: Passion for the Truth -- Compassion for Humanity*, 2005). The wider importance of that passion has been promoted ([Pope exhorts universities to encourage a passion for the truth](#), *Catholic News Agency*, 23 May 2008). Curiously the theme has been evoked in relation to Mel Gibson's above-mentioned gory glorification of *The Passion of the Christ* (Steven Hite and Stuart Hite, *The Passion For The Truth*, 2004), namely a scene by scene, verse by verse comparison of the Bible with the movie.

Psychodramatics of passion? It is in this context, and in this very period, that it is appropriate to consider the dimensions of the psychodrama associated with the following complex of connotations of passion:

- that of Julian Assange, both as an investigative journalist and as indicted by Swedish authorities for sexual assault -- a "crime of passion" (?)
- that of Assange's collaborator, [Chelsea Manning](#), as articulated by Chase Madar (*The Passion of Bradley Manning: the story behind the Wikileaks whistleblower*, 2013) -- and notably [reviewed](#) in the *Journal of Military Ethics* (12, 2013, 2)
- the accumulation of evidence of the degree of cover-up by the Catholic Church of the [engagement of significant numbers of clergy in the abuse of minors](#) -- readily to be understood as both "passionate" and as a perverse misinterpretation of the passion for truth on Pope Benedict's own "watch"
- the dramatic revelation, through the so-called [Vatican leaks scandal](#), of a degree of implication of Pope Benedict in that cover-up -- readily understood to have been a major factor in the [Pope's historically unprecedented resignation](#) on 28 February 2013. A notable feature of the drama was the arrest in 2012 of the whistleblower Paolo Gabriele, Benedict's butler since 2007 ([Paolo Gabriele: Pope's Butler Convicted; Sentenced to 18 Months in Prison](#). *ABC News*, 6 October 2012; [Pope's butler Paolo Gabriele: whistleblower or traitor?](#) *Reuters*, 13 August 2012). As an investigative journalist, the dimensions of the scandal have been the focus of an extensively documented study by [Frédéric Martel](#) (*In the Closet of the Vatican: power, homosexuality, hypocrisy*, 2019).
- the conviction for child sexual abuse of [George Pell](#), the most senior official of the Catholic Church. A former Archbishop of Melbourne and of Sydney, and as such responsible for [handling of child sexual abuse cases by clergy](#) in Australia, Pell was appointed in February 2014 by Pope Francis to be the first prefect of the newly created [Secretariat for the Economy](#). In this role, Pell has been responsible for the annual budget of the Holy See and the Vatican. On 11 December 2018, Pell was convicted on five counts of child sexual abuse of two boys in the 1990s. An appeal has been lodged against his conviction, but he was taken into custody after his bail was revoked on 27 February 2019.
- the strange coincidence of timing of the arrest and imprisonment of Pell and that of Assange -- both Australians -- the latter taken into high security custody on 11 April 2019 (awaiting trial for extradition to the USA), with the former held under more comfortable conditions.
- as a former colleague, the Archbishop of Sydney declared during Mass that: *The George Pell I know is a man of integrity in his dealings with others, a man of faith and high ideals, a thoroughly decent man* (Damien

Murphy, *Sydney Archbishop Anthony Fisher backs George Pell, but won't pay legal bills*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 July 2017). After he was charged with historical sexual offences, other colleagues also declared support (*Catholic leaders rally behind Cardinal George Pell, call him 'a man of absolute integrity'*, *FirstPost*, 30 June 2017). Subsequent to the appeal by Pell, the Archbishop of Sydney seized on the divisive history of the case, declaring:

Today's split decision amongst the judges is consistent with the differing views of the juries in the first and second trials, as well as the divided opinion amongst legal commentators and the general public... Reasonable people have taken different views when presented with the same evidence and I urge everyone to maintain calm and civility. (*George Pell's appeal judges had a differing opinion on his convictions*, *ABC News*, 22 August 2019)

- the plea addressed to the leading Archbishop of the Anglican community, and the nature of the response (Diana Johnstone *Plea for the Liberation of Julian Assange. Response from the Archbishop of Canterbury*, *Global Research*, 16 December 2019)
- the demand made to the Australian government for an appropriate defence of Assange, as a recipient of the [Sydney Peace Prize Medal](#) in 2011 (Oscar Grenfell, *Sydney Peace Prize recipients demand Australian government defend Assange*, *World Socialist Website*, 3 June 2019)
- the failure of either the Archbishop of Sydney (preoccupied with the case of his predecessor), or of a succession of Australian prime ministers, to provide any support for Assange since he sought asylum in the Ecuadorian embassy in 2012. Noteworthy in the latter case is the extent to which these are all recognized as men of strong Christian faith: [Scott Morrison](#), 2018- (Pentecostalist); [Malcolm Turnbull](#), 2015-2018 (Roman Catholic); [Tony Abbott](#), 2013-2015 (Roman Catholic)
- only been the pleas of fellow prisoners in the Belmarsh facility have ensured the transfer of Assange from isolation to slightly more congenial conditions -- ironic in dramatic terms given the special relation between Jesus on the Cross and the criminals hung beside him, as appreciated in the biblical tales of the [penitent thief](#) and the [impenitent thief](#) (Caitlin Johnstone, *Belmarsh Prison Inmates Prove More Ethical Than Entire Western Empire*, 25 January 2020; *Assange's Solitary Confinement Ends Following Pressure From Lawyers And Fellow Prisoners*, *Sputnik News*, 24 January 2020).
- the passionate quest for truth in the unprecedented impeachment trial of President Donald Trump, as instigated by the Democrats -- with their understanding of truth deprecated and disparaged by the Republicans

Missing in any emphasis on "passion for truth" is the question of whose truth, given the very particular framings offered by (competing) religious persuasion, those of scientific persuasion (deprecating the methodologies of alternative disciplines), and those preoccupied with institutional cover-up and manipulative presentation of the truth by which particular agendas are framed. Any challenge to the truth of authorities can be readily seen as that of "speaking truth to power".

As a psychodrama, also of great interest is the contrasting understanding of "passion", in the various contexts cited. Clearly this has proved to be especially problematic for the Catholic hierarchy in dealing overtly with the mysteries of the "passion play" whilst confronted by the challenges of the clergy "playing with passion". How to distinguish between the purity of that Christian understanding and that of scientists and investigative journalists with their respective "passion for truth"? (Tricia L. Nadolny *She is a whistle-blower with a passion for the truth* *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 19 July 2014).

Crime of passion: Much is indeed made by Christians of the [Passion of Jesus](#). Less evident is whether he committed a "crime of passion" (Peter Meadows and Joseph Steinbeurg, *Crime of Passion: If Jesus Was So Good Why Was He Executed?* 2004). For Jake Owensby:

You could say that Jesus committed a crime of passion. He broke no civil or moral law. But the authorities perceived a threat in the passion that motivated him and still animates the movement he started. Had Jesus restricted himself to feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless and clothing the ragged, he might have gone unnoticed. The Empire could perhaps have even welcomed his work as a way of unintentionally mollifying the poor and the oppressed with temporary relief. But a larger, bolder dream inspired Jesus: the Kingdom of Heaven. God's reign on earth as it is in heaven. God sent Jesus not only to console and comfort humans in our misery, but also to pursue a world that no longer creates hunger or homelessness, mass incarceration or terrified refugees. (*Palm Sunday: A Crime of Passion*, Episcopal Relief and Development, 18 March 2016)

Should the activities of investigative journalists be reframed as crimes of passion? However in law, as noted by *Wikipedia*, the "crime of passion" defense challenges the *mens rea* element by suggesting that there was no malice aforethought, and instead the crime was committed in the "heat of passion." In some jurisdictions, a successful "crime of passion" defense may result in a conviction for manslaughter or second degree murder instead of first degree murder, because a defendant cannot ordinarily be convicted of first degree murder unless the crime was premeditated.

Of value in this respect is the study by Kate Kenny, et al, (*Whistleblower Subjectivities: Organization and Passionate Attachment*, *Organization Studies*, December 2018), raising the question:

What is the nature of whistleblower subjectivity? In this article, we depart from current scholarly depictions of this figure as a fearless truth-teller who is fully independent of the organization. We argue for a new framing that sees the self-construction of the whistleblower as infused with passionate attachments to organizational and professional norms, even after one experiences severe reprisals.

Is whistleblowing a crime of passion? Should Assange's crime be understood in that light? Exploring the dynamics otherwise, **can Jesus be usefully recognized as a whistleblower:**

- Joseph P. Gillespie: *Jesus was a whistleblower* (*The Church of St Albert the Great*, 28 January 2016): With a certain amount of poetic license, the metaphor "whistleblower" can be added to Jesus' job description of Savior and Redeemer.
- Howard Bess: *Jesus as Whistleblower* (*Consortium News*, 21 January 2015)
- Margaret Kannaday: *Jesus: The Whistleblower* (*Faith Writers*, 7 May 2014)
- Joe Carter: *Can Whistleblowing Be Biblically Justified?* (*Acton Institute*, 10 June 2013)
- Peter Kavanagh: *Judas: snitch or whistleblower?* (*CBC*, 15 July 2016)
- Nigel Loreihe: *The Whistleblower of Religion, Jesus, Apostle Paul, Trump, and the Last Days* (Lulu, 2019)
- Barry Loudermilk: *Republican lawmaker says Jesus had 'more rights' before crucifixion than Trump in impeachment inquiry* (*Fox2Now*, 18 December 2019)
- Sean O'Conaill: *Was Jesus a whistleblower too?* (*Lumen Gentium 37*, 23 February 2017)

The latter asks:

Jesus the abused whistleblower: That religious system that Jesus opposed was also abusive of power. It excluded the poorest from a sense of God's compassion, by imposing money barriers to divine mercy. It shut the Temple door on all of the 'unclean', including lepers and menstruating women. What if we were to see Jesus in Gethsemane as an exemplary whistleblower – awaiting the most excruciating humiliation for his rejection of that oppressive religious system? What if we were to see him as standing in solidarity with all who were and still are excluded and oppressed – including the church's own victims?

Religion as a crime of passion? The question in relation to Julian Assange might then be usefully reframed with respect to any challenging belief system -- of which all religions are examples, but of which science and investigative journalism are other variants. Given the role that a religion arrogates to itself as an inspiration to its adherents, **is the primary function of religion to be understood as whistleblowing -- a reminder of a more fundamental framing**

of reality?

If whistleblowing is then to be recognized as a crime of passion, it is appropriate to be reminded of the fatalities engendered by that passion -- in any comparison with those engendered by Assange:

- fatalities engendered by religion: Crusades? Holy Inquisition? Mesoamerican human sacrifice? Missionary programs?
- fatalities engendered by science and technology: Hiroshima? Extinction of species?
- fatalities engendered by investigative journalism: Despite unsubstantiated claims, notably in the case of Julian Assange, there is little indication of the number of deaths resulting from such reporting -- other than with respect to the journalists themselves

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