Roman Catholic Inquisitional Methods of Torture

And they overcame him (Satan) because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony. And they did not love their soul until death (Rev 12:11).

And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with a great marveling (Rev 17:6) And one of the seven angels who had the seven vials came and talked with me, saying to me, Come here, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot sitting on many waters (Rev 17:1) with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and became drunk with the wine of her fornication, those inhabiting the earth… (Rev 17:2).

In the past, the Roman Church has frequently been described as, ‘a lamb in adversity, a fox when in equality, and a tiger when in the ascendency’. (All Roads Lead To Rome? – Michael de Semlyen).

Because her basic doctrinal premises remain in place, Rome can yet again rise up against her spiritual enemies at some future date when she again wields exclusive ecclesiastical control of a region. In fact, the "Holy Office" of the Inquisition still exists within the Vatican (known today as the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith), awaiting the day in which it can stamp out "heresy". Some years ago a popular Catholic weekly declared: Heresy is an awful crime against God, and those who start a heresy are more guilty than they who are traitors to the civil government. If the state has a right to punish treason with death, the principle is the same that concedes to the spiritual authority the power of life and death over the arch-traitor.

It is an historical fact that the Roman Catholic Church via the Holy Roman Empire (Papal States) supplanted all civil authority of the European Governments during the inquisition periods (1200-1500). The most common means of torture included burning, beating and suffocating, however the techniques below are some of the more excessive and depraved methods used and enforced by the Roman Catholic Church. Make no mistake, the inquisition continues to this day, in one form or another (Catholic initiated wars, Balkans, etc).

Warning! Document contains graphic content - not for the feint-hearted!
Pictures can be enlarged/reduced by clicking, and then dragging to desired size.

Torture room in the Inquisition cathedral in Nuremberg

Iron Gag or Mute's Bridle

The purpose of this device was to stifle the screams so as not to disturb the conversation of torturers. The iron "box" on the inside of the ring is forced into the victim's mouth and the collar fastened behind their neck. A small hole allows the passage of air but this can be stopped up by a touch of the executioner's fingertip, producing suffocation. Often constructed with a long spike that pierced the tongue and the floor of the mouth, protruding from underneath the chin, while the other end penetrated up through the bony palate of the mouth into the sinuses. Often those condemned to
the stake were thus gagged because their screams would interfere with the sacred pagan music played during the grandiose public festivities in which dozens of heretics were burnt at one time.

The Pendulum
A fundamental torture that was often a precursor in preparation of the more effective torture methods that usually followed. No complex equipment is needed, as the victim’s wrists are tied behind their back then a rope is attached to the wrist restraints and the sufferer is slowly hoisted up ripping the humerus from the sockets and dislocating the scapula and clavicle. The agony can be heightened by means of weights progressively attached to the feet until at last the skeleton is pulled apart – similar to the experience of the bench and ladder racks.

The Rack
The Rack was an instrument of torture often used in the Middle Ages, and a popular means of extricating confession. The victim was tied across a board by their ankles and wrists, rollers at either end of the board were turned by pulling the body in opposite directions until dislocation of every joint occurred. According to Puigblanch, quoted in Mason’s History of the Inquisition, “in this attitude he experienced eight strong contortions in his limbs, namely, two of the fleshy parts of the arms above the elbows, and two below; one on each thigh, and also on the legs.” Bound, the heretic could then be subjected to other forms of torture.

The Rack was extensively used during the Spanish Inquisition.
Other forms included the detainee being fastened in a groove upon a table on his or her back. Suspended above was a gigantic pendulum, the ball of which had a sharp edge on the lower section, and the pendulum lengthen with every stroke. The victim sees this engine of destruction swinging to and fro only a short distance from one’s eyes. Momentarily the keen edge comes nearer, and at length cuts the skin, and gradually cuts deeper and deeper, until their life has fully expired.

The Ladder Rack
Preparation for the Ladder Rack often started with the crushing of the shins with the screw-activated "Spanish Boots".

With the arms securely affixed behind the victim’s back the person was then put onto the inclined slope of the Ladder Rack. Thus load the executioner would push the 2 heels of the feet forward causing the victim to plummet downward so that the shoulders were immediately and violently wrenched out of their sockets.
The victim is literally stretched by force of the winch with various old sources testify to increases of twelve inches that comes from the dislocation and extrusion of every joint in the arms and legs, of the dismemberment of the spinal column, and of course the ripping and detachment of the muscles of limbs, thorax and abdomen.

But long before the victim is brought to the final undoing, he or she, even in the initial phases of the enquiry (in the J ‘Question of the first degree”), suffers dislocation of the shoulders because his arms are pulled up behind his back, as well as the agony of muscles ripping like any fiber subjected to excessive stress. In the Question of the second degree the knee, hip and elbow joints begin to be forced out of their sockets; with the third degree they separate, very audibly. After only the second degree the interrogatee is maimed for life; after the third he is dismembered and paralyzed, and gradually over hours and days the life functions cease one by one.

The Stocks

The victim with his or her hands and feet locked into the pertinent holes with bracket irons was then set out in the square where the mob in the mildest of cases poked him, slapped him, and besmirched him with faeces and urine or substances supplied by the ubiquitous chamber pots or open jakes. All of these were smeared into the mouth, ears, nose, and hair. Only the most innocuous transgressors could hope to get away with no more than a few black-and-blue marks and a couple of bumps.

Children’s books, cinema, and television generally portray the stock in humorous colors centered on a grumpy victim being cajoled and reviled by an always benevolent rough-and-tumble crowd. Reality was very different.

With their feet in the stocks, two pieces of timber clamped together, over and under, both across each leg above the ankles. The soles of their feet then having been greased with lard, a blazing brazier was applied to them, and they were first blistered and then fried. At intervals a board was interposed between the fire and their feet and removed once they disobeyed the command to confess themselves of guilt for which they had been charged.
Being more painful, but less fatal than racking, this was the torture most in vogue when the subject chanced to be of the female sex. It was also favored in cases where children were to be persuaded to testify against their parents. Slighter tortures consisted of binding a piece of iron to a limb and putting a twister mark to force it inwards, as was pressing the fingers with rods between them, or removing a nail from fingers or toes, which were all highly practiced upon persons of not sufficient strength to survive the pulley, rack, or fire.

The Barrel Pillory
Inflicted for the most part on chronic drunkards who were exposed to public ridicule in this fashion. The barrels could be either of two kinds: those closed on the bottom with the victim immersed in faeces and urine or merely putrid water, or open so that the victim could walk and be led about the town with the enormous and very painful weight on their shoulders.

Water Torture
The victim's nostrils were pinched shut, and eight quarts of fluid were poured down the victim's throat through a funnel. Other techniques included forcing a cloth down the throat, while pouring water, which made a swallowing reflex pushing it further down into the stomach producing all the agonies of suffocation by drowning until the victim lost consciousness. Instead of water, the torture was sometimes conducted with boiling water or vinegar.

The victim did not die quickly from the rupturing of the stomach but very slowly from Peritonitis. This happens when the unclean contents of the stomach combine with the clean organs of the abdominal cavity.

The Heretics Fork
This instrument consisted of two little forks one set against the other, with the four prongs plunged into the flesh, under the chin and above the chest, with hands secured firmly behind their backs. A small collar supported the instrument in such a manner that the victims were usually forced to hold their head erect, thus preventing any movement.

The forks did not penetrate any vital points, and thus suffering was prolonged and death was always nearly avoided. The pointed prongs on each end to crane the persons head made speech or movement near impossible. The Heretics Fork was very common during the height of the Spanish Inquisition.
The Pear
These instruments were used in oral and rectal formats, like the present specimen, and in the larger vaginal one. They are forced into the mouth, rectum or vagina of the victim and there expanded by force of the screw to the maximum aperture of the segments. The inside of the cavity in question is irretrievably mutilated, nearly always fatally so. The pointed prongs at the end of the segments serve better to rip into the throat, the intestines or the cervix.

The oral pear was often inflicted on heretical preachers, but also on lay persons guilty of unorthodox tendencies; this item became extensively applied throughout the Spanish Inquisition to force confessions from those accused of Witchcraft.

The Wheel

The wheel was one of the most popular and insidious methods of torture and execution practiced. The giant spiked wheel was able to break bodies as it rolled forward, causing the most agonizing and drawn-out death. Other forms include the "braided" wheel, where the victim would be tied to the execution dock or platform. Their limbs were spread and tied to stakes or iron rings on the ground. Slices of wood were placed under the main joints, wrists, ankles, knees, hips, and elbows. The executioner would then smash every joint with the iron-tyred edge of the wheel—however the executioner would avoid fatal blows to give the victim a painful death.

According to a German chronicler, the victim was transformed into a huge screaming puppet writhing in their own blood. It looked like a sea monster with four tentacles, and raw slimy shapeless flesh, mixed with splinters of bone. After the smashing had taken place the victim would literally be "braided" into the wheel and hung horizontally at the top of the pole.

The Breast Ripper

The name of this device speaks for itself. Cold or red-hot the four claws slowly ripped to formless masses the breasts of countless women. This device was highly put into service during the massacre of the Danes.
Hanging cages
These cages were usually hung around the outsides of town halls and ducal palaces; they were also near the town’s hall of justice and surprisingly cathedrals. The victim, naked and exposed, would slowly wither from hunger and thirst. The weather would second the victim’s death by heat stroke and sunburn in the summer and cold in the winter.

The victims and corpses were usually previously mutilated before being put in the cages to make a more edifying example of the punishment. The cadavers were left in the cages until the bones literally fell apart.

The Garotte
Originally, the garotte was simply hanging by another name. However, during Medieval times, executioners began to refine the use of rope until it became as feared and as vile as any serious punishments. Executioners first used the garotte to end the suffering of heretics broken on the wheel, but by the turn of the 18th century the seed of an idea involving slow strangulation was planted in the minds of lawmakers.

At first, garottes were nothing more than an upright post with a hole bored through. The victim would stand or sit on a seat in front of the post and chanting crowd, and a rope was looped around his or her neck. The ends of the cords were fed through the hole in the post. The executioner would then pull on both ends of the cord, or twist them tourniquet-styled, slowly strangling the victim. Later modifications included a spike fixed into the wood frame at the back of the victim’s neck, parting the vertebrae as the rope tightens.

The Head Crusher
With the victim’s chin placed on the lower bar, a screw then forces the cap down on the victim’s cranium. The recipient’s teeth are crushed and forced into the sockets to smash the surrounding bone. The eyes are compressed from their sockets and brain from the fractured skull.

This device, although not a form of capital punishment, is still used for interrogational purposes. It was to inflict extreme agony and shock and leave the victim in its grasp for hours. Other methods included the head screw which was placed around the forehead and tighten. The accused became so frantic by the extreme panic of having their head crushed that they confessed to anything.
Burnt at the Stake
If the Inquisitor wanted to be sure no relics were left behind by an accused and convicted heretic, he would select death by burning at the stake as the preferred method of execution. With few exceptions, death came from being burned alive. Frequently, burning a victim at the stake was cause for a crowd. Not content to merely learn about the spectacle after it was over, the masses wanted to be entertained.

Reflecting on those facts, and understanding such events occurred "under the law," one can clearly understand how Thomas Hobbes (this is a contemporary biography) came to the conclusions he did about man in a state of nature. If man is capable of such violence and inhumanity in a state of civilization, of what is he capable when there are no laws and there is no society? (Carole D. Bos).

The Iron Maiden
The Iron Maiden or Virgin of Nuremberg was a tomb-sized container with folding doors. The object was to inflict punishment, then death. Upon the inside of the door were vicious spikes. As the prisoner was shut inside he or she would be pierced along the length of their body. The talons were not designed to kill outright.

The pinioned prisoner was left to slowly perish in the utmost pain. Some models included two spikes that were driven into the eyes causing blindness. One of these diabolical machines was exhibited in 1892.

The Strappado
One of the most common torture techniques. All one needed to set up a strappado was a sturdy rafter and a rope. The victim's wrists were bound behind their back, and the rope would be tossed over the beam. The victim was repeatedly dropped from a height, so that their arms and shoulders would dislocate. This was a punishment of the Secret Tribunal until 1820.
**The Boots**

Also known as the *bootikens*. The legs of the patient were usually placed between two planks of wood, which they binded with cords and wedges. The torturer used a large, heavy hammer to pound the wedges, driving them closer together. Forceful blows were used to squeeze the legs to jelly, lacerating flesh, protruding the shins, and crushing the bones; sometimes so that marrow gushed out. Once unloosed the bones fall to pieces, rendering the legs useless. This torture was most overwhelming, as one can imagine.

**Judas Cradle**

The victim was stripped, hoisted and hung over this pointed pyramid with iron belts. Their legs were stretched out frontwards, or their ankles pulled down by weights.

The tormentor would then drop the accused onto the pyramid penetrating both orifices. With their muscles contracted, they were usually unable to relax and fall asleep.

**The Guillotine**

It was the French physician Joseph-Ignace Guillotin, born in Saintes in 1738 and elected to the National Assembly in 1789 who first promoted a law that required that all executions even those of commoners, be carried out by means of a "machine that beheads painlessly". An easy death was no longer to be the prerogative of nobles. Consciousness survives long enough for the victim to perceive the beheading even when removed by the swift slash of an axe or guillotine.

After the execution of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette on 21 January 1793, the I 'machine' " called only thus until these two events became known also as "lila louisette" or "le loui son", only after 1800 did the term "la guillotine" become established. As such it remained in use in many countries, including the Papal States and the kingdoms of Piedmont and Bourbon Naples until 1860.
Fiery Metal Chair
The accused was placed in a metal chair and secured in position, shortly afterwards a fire was lit under the chair. And since the chair was inlaid with hundreds and hundreds of spikes - it was not long before the heat generated was transferred over the entire structure and it became red-hot! And in the process, it became virtually impossible for the individual to remain seated. Understandably they inevitably suffered various degrees of burns and trauma.

Burning the Souls of the Feet
Some form of lard was usually applied to the souls of the heretic prior to commencement of this barbaric form of torture - in order to inflict the maximum amount of pain! This form of torture was excruciating to say the very least!

It was not uncommon for those undergoing the various types of torture exhibited in this article to ‘recant’ (to change their mind) under pressure from the inquisitor/s priest/s. Many times an individual could no longer stand the excruciating pain and would cry out to the priest/s for mercy. They would then admit the error of their ways and ask for forgiveness – hoping for release! Only to discover in many instances that they would be given a short respite and then taken to a more severe torturing device. Thus, they would eventually succumb to their trauma. Because of the advent of electricity, today there are numerous sophisticated devices used to inflict horrendous pain and suffering! However, we notice that during the great tribulation period the guillotine will be brought into service, and will be the preferred instrument of torture. It is going to be used throughout Satan/Apollyon’s kingdom.

And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the witness of Jesus and for the Word of God, and who had not worshiped the beast nor his image, nor had received his mark on their foreheads, nor in their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years (Rev 20:4). John the apostle said he saw countless numbers of saints who had been beheaded…

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