

Crucifixion and the news

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

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Among other things, Holy Week always brings to mind the tension between thinking doctrinally about Christ and thinking historically about Jesus. The latter is particularly poignant given the news this week: Bush State Department employee Philip Zelikow apparently [wrote a memo in 2006](#) that advised against the use of torture. What's not news, of course, is that Zelikow's wise words were not heeded.

Meanwhile, Connecticut [is about to become the 17th state to get rid of the death penalty](#), and the fifth in five years. Good for them. Though not so good for the 11 men currently on the state's death row. [The new law won't apply to them](#); basically they'll be grandfathered out, victims of the demands of political compromise.

The idea of capital punishment as a deterrent for future crime has never held up to analysis, whether moral or statistical. But at least it has a certain internal logic. With the death penalty off the table for future crimes, it will be *entirely* absurd to defend any execution as a deterrent. Of course, it's not clear that any of the 11 will actually be put to death. But even one would be a massive human cost for exposing the death penalty for what it is: not a deterrent of any kind but an ugly act of vengeance.

As I remember Jesus' torture and execution this week--which were, keep in mind, entirely legal--my prayers are with other convicted criminals who, whether guilty or innocent, are subjected to the immoral violence of state-sponsored revenge.