

DOES THE FORMER HOLY INQUISITOR REFUSE TO EAT WITH TORTURERS?



I have no idea whether Sara's speculation is correct—that Pope Benedict just declined the invite to the State dinner Bush and Laura are throwing for him because he doesn't want to break bread with a torturer.

Guess who's not coming to dinner? Pope Benedict XVI.

President Bush and his wife, Laura, will host a White House dinner in honor of the pontiff Wednesday evening. U.S. Catholic leaders from around the nation will attend. The menu will offer Bavarian-style food in recognition of the pope's German heritage. It's even the pope's 81st birthday. But he won't be there.

But I sure hope that the media, in the midst of its mad crush to cover the story that the President has admitted he sanctioned torture, will find out.

Consider the optics of such a dinner, after all. Pope Benedict was, until a few years ago, in charge of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith. That's the office formerly known as "the Inquisition." And the Inquisition, of course, is famous for a number of things, just about all of them unpleasant. Lately, though, the Inquisition has gotten a lot of bad press for inventing water-boarding. There's a direct tie between the reprehensible actions of the Catholic Church during one of the ugliest moments and what George Bush just admitted—almost flippantly—to have personally

approved.

Now, it's possible that, even if Benedict is blowing off dinner as a protest, that it doesn't relate to Bush's admission that he green-lighted water-boarding. The Catholic Church has been critical of a number of things Bush has done—most notably, starting an illegal war in Iraq.

But I can sure imagine that Pope Benedict—who himself gets a lot of bad press for his past as the arbiter of Catholic doctrine—would not want to be associated with a President just after he admits to approving of methods recalling the Inquisition.

Update: Here's Sara at more length:

Well, it was an interesting week. The German Chancellor, The British Prime Minister and the Secretary General of the UN, among others, found that they had schedule conflicts, and would not be able to attend the opening of the Olympics in Beijing this summer. Bush apparently still intends to attend, and all the presidential candidates are hot to offer him advice regarding formally standing up for Human Rights.

But in the same week, the Pope declines at the last minute, an invitation to a State Dinner in his honor at the White House. All during a week when the President admitted that in the Situation Room, under the Oval Office, his closest circle of Associates, with his participation and knowledge, choreographed torture sessions. Could it just be that all the historical digging and analysis that has raised the question, "What did Pius XII do when the Germans were, in 1943, rounding up the Jews of Rome right under his nose?" finally born fruit? Have these questions finally brought home something of what might be expected of a moral leader?

Could be, and the US Press just has, once again, missed the story while being all stressed out over the displacing question of whether Bush will attend the Hoopla in Beijing this summer.

Normally the planning for a State Dinner includes consultation between the Embassy of the visiting country and the Protocol Office at State on the wording of toasts. I am wondering if things fell apart as they tried to negotiate toasts. Oh to be a fly on the wall if such were the case.