

National Religious Campaign Against Torture

Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

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Trending:

Opinion: Fact and fiction and Zero Dark Thirty

By Rev. Frank Wulf

I have not seen Zero Dark Thirty, and I do not intend to do so.

It belongs to a genre of entertainment that glorifies torture as an effective means to bring perpetrators to justice. It does this in an untruthful way that neglects the complex moral, legal and pragmatic issues that motivated our government to implement torture to achieve its military and diplomatic goals. This film deceives the audience by alleging that inhumane torture methods coerced critical information that ultimately led to Osama bin Ladens capture. As a country that cherishes and strives to uphold individual freedoms and inherent human dignity and worth, how can we justify torture as a defense of democracy?

We must puncture these myths and dispel the false and deceptive narrative Zero Dark Thirty has disseminated. Though the film is pulse-quickening and leaves us feeling victorious and proud to represent the nation that defeated the worlds most hated terrorist, we cannot let that cloud our judgment on the use of torture. The fiction that the film conveys inevitably sacrifices the complications of truth for the higher goal of entertainment. Real work has been done to explore the effects of torture, but it is currently shrouded by the governments failure to share the information with the public.

Last December, the Senate Intelligence Committee adopted a report of more than 6,000 pages detailing the CIAs use of post-9/11 torture. This report is the result of an extensive, three-year investigation examining more than a million pages of documents detailing interrogations of detainees in CIA custody. Senator Dianne Feinstein, chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, has been an outspoken opponent of the film, which she asserts is grossly inaccurate and misleading. Other officials have reiterated her claims, including Sen. John McCain himself a survivor of torture Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, former CIA Director Michael Hayden and acting CIA Director Mike Morrell.

It is time for the Senate Intelligence Committee to release its report to the public, which will shed light on the misconceptions about torture that fester in an atmosphere of secrecy. The half-truths and outright lies advanced by works of fiction such as Zero Dark Thirty only gain traction because the truth is kept hidden, and those with little knowledge of intelligence operations will take the film at face value. People have the right to know if their government is or has tortured people on their behalf.

Intelligence experts have repeatedly stated that torture is counterproductive. It doesnt produce reliable or unique information and only serves to enrage people who are already looking for reasons to attack us. Interrogators have themselves admitted that non-coercive, traditional, rapport-based interviewing approaches provide the best possibility for obtaining accurate and complete intelligence. Torture is also illegal under the U.N. Convention Against Torture, which the United States signed in 1994. And finally, torture is immoral. It runs contrary to the teachings of every major religion, and violates our deepest sense about the dignity of every person.

As a Christian pastor, I cannot condone torture under any circumstance. Jesus, who was himself tortured, serves as my guide. With the Academy Awards approaching, we must ensure that the deception of Zero Dark Thirty is demystified. We must work for transparency on this issue, and so I join the National Religious Campaign Against Torture in calling on our government to share with us its findings of our nations dark legacy of torture activities. As the head of the Senate Intelligence Committee, Sen. Feinstein has a critical role to play in pushing for the public release of her committees report.

Though the truth may be painful, we must illuminate it. A film cannot be the final arbiter of the truth, and we must hold our government accountable for its actions.

The Rev. Frank Wulf is a United Methodist minister in the California-Pacific Annual Conference. He currently serves as the pastor of United University Church in Los Angeles, a union congregation of the United Methodist Church and Presbyterian Church (USA).

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