

National Religious Campaign Against Torture

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

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By Mark Sandlin

If you care one iota about your country, there is a report that you should be chomping at the bit to see.

If you care even in the smallest way about your country being a leader in the world and living up to its own lofty standards, this report, currently in the hands of the Senate Intelligence Committee, should be something you very much want the public to get to read.

You see, another report that was put together over the course of a two-year period by a bipartisan, independent panel of experts could possibly point to what we are going to find in the Senate Intelligence Committees report. Folks, its not a pretty picture.

This bipartisan committee, The Constitution Projects Task Force on Detainee Treatment, brought in some big guns including President George W. Bushs undersecretary of the Department of Homeland Security, former Republican Rep. Asa Hutchinson of Arkansas, and President Bill Clintons ambassador to Mexico, James Jones, who served as a Democratic member of Congress from Oklahoma to lead the group. Their research into the treatment of 9/11 detainees included public records as well as eyewitness accounts. What they found sickens me both as an U.S. citizen and as a Christian.

Our great nation stooped to depths previously condemned as illegal, including waterboarding, extended sleep deprivation, prolonged solitary confinement and sexual humiliation. Worse yet, detainees were literally tortured to death.

I dont know about you, but for me, that is no light on a hill. It is certainly not the behavior of one of the worlds greatest nations. It sounds more like the behavior we expect from groups that practice guerrilla warfare or nations that sanction military dictatorships.

It certainly doesnt sound American, and as a minister, Id also point out its far removed from anything we see in the teachings and life of Jesus.

There are those who make an appeal to nationalism and the tragedy of 9/11 and are willing to toss our moral high ground aside, saying that anything is fair game if it leads to valuable information.

This is why we need access to the Senate Intelligence Committees report, which was adopted in December and has yet to see the public light of day. You see, the bipartisan committee found no firm or persuasive evidence that the (the use of torture) produced significant information of value. The task force did find that there is substantial evidence that much of the information adduced from (torture) was not useful or reliable.

Its essential for the public to have access to the information in the Senates report if we are going to keep the U.S. government accountable to the people. Otherwise, we end up with exactly what we seem to have before us, justification of illegal, immoral behavior through false manipulation of the law, all in the name of a nation that should stand above that kind of behavior.

There are those, however, who would block our access to this incredibly important information. North Carolinas Sen. Richard Burr, who sits on the committee that approved the report, opposes making it public. He claims he opposes the release because it contains inaccurate facts.

If it actually is inaccurate, there is an easy solution particularly for someone like Burr who sits on the Intelligence Committee: Fix it and release the right information to the public.

As a citizen, I join people of faith from hundreds of diverse religious and faith-based groups who have come together through the National Religious Campaign Against Torture to call on the Senate Intelligence Committee to release its report about U.S.-sponsored torture to the American people.

As a Presbyterian minister, I denounce all torture, especially state-sanctioned torture. All people of faith should have a crystal clear position against it as well. After all, it was state-sanctioned torture that killed an innocent man some 2,000 years ago on a cross. I fear we are repeating history.

Let us once again hold the leaders of our nation and our state accountable for their actions. Let us call them to be, once again, a nation of the just we have sacrificed far too many of our moral standards already. Let us once again establish the United States as a nation that values life, not destroys it.

Let us prove to the world that we do not have to stoop to the levels of the lowest forms of violence to resolve our problems. Let us, once again, establish our place on the hill, and shine the light of truth and justice for all to see.

The Rev. Mark Sandlin serves as the minister at Vandalia Presbyterian Church in Greensboro.

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