

National Religious Campaign Against Torture

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

https://www.al.com/opinion/2013/09/opinion_from_rev_rg_wilson-lyo.html

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

9/11 changed the world and it has changed our country. Children born after 2001 have never known a time when we were not at war. And for the first time, the American government on a large scale used and defended torture as a legitimate method for obtaining information from suspected terrorists, even as our leaders publicly denied doing so.

In April, the bipartisan Task Force on Detainee Treatment sponsored by The Constitution Project issued its 500-page report on the interrogation and treatment of 9/11 detainees. The Task Force concluded that the United States indisputably engaged in torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment of 9/11 detainees -- in violation of U.S. and international law. The Task Force also concluded that the decision to use torture came from our top political leaders, including President Bush, Vice President Cheney, and Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld.

As comprehensive a report as the Task Forces is, much of the truth remains secret. The Senate Intelligence Committee has conducted its own investigation into the use of torture, but so far, has decided to keep the report classified and, therefore, unavailable to the American people.

There is no question that 9/11 has changed the world. But as a Christian and a United Methodist minister, I believe there was another day that even more ultimately changed the world. That day was also a day of great evil. It was the day that Jesus of Nazareth, the one I and Christians all over the world look to as our Lord, was beaten, tortured and crucified. And yet, he chose to respond to that hatred and violence with love and mercy, even forgiving those who crucified him. As Christians, we believe that Jesus overcame all of the worlds sin, all of the worlds violence, and all of the worlds hate using only the power of love. In fact, if we believe that Jesus is the Son of God, then we have no choice but to believe that love is the greatest power in the universe. We have no choice but to believe that whatever else may happen, the day that has changed the world and our individual and communal lives the most was the day when Jesus responded with love and forgiveness to the hate that crucified him. This is the event that must dictate how Christians respond to all other events.

There is no question that the horrors committed on 9/11 were unspeakable evil. There is no question that many of us saw the world as a more fearful place. And sadly, there is no question that we as a nation have responded to that evil more like those who killed Christ than like Christ. We have forgotten that the most determinative day for us was the day that Jesus chose love over violence. We have forgotten that if we are going to follow the one who commanded us to love our enemies, the one who commanded us to turn the other cheek, the one who loved so much that he forgave those who killed him, then we can never support torture regardless of how evil the forces or how great the threat may seem.

I join members of hundreds of diverse, faith-based and religious groups through the National Religious Campaign Against Torture in calling our nation to be clear on our history and repent for the use of torture. As repentance always begins with confession, and confession always begins with transparency, I urge you to contact our senators and express your support for the release of the Senate Intelligence Committees report on our countrys use of torture. Finally, I invite all those who follow Jesus to remember that no matter what happens, love has already overcome all of the worlds evil both the evil of our enemies and our own. May we have the strength of faith to dispel the fear that overcomes us and remember that it is Jesus Christs ultimate response to evil that defines our true identities.

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