

Vigil Against Torture at the Isaiah Wall March 30, 2007

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God has given each of us the holy gift of life – life which is marked indelibly with the image of God. The life of each human being is, therefore, sacred – and deserves, as a birthright, to be treated with respect.

From this core affirmation – shared generally by Christianity and other Faiths – we view with alarm and outrage the savage, brutal and calculated acts of our government in pursuing the crime of torture against any human being.

We are here today to demand the end to outrageous acts of torture committed in our name by those who have betrayed their trusted positions of leadership.

We are here, as well, to call for significant, real and urgent acts of atonement to restore health and wholeness to relationships which have been shattered by deliberate and reckless acts in abject disrespect for the rule of law and its moral underpinning.

We do this because of our faithful obedience to God in whose holy image every human being is created.

Torture destroys its victim and defiles its perpetrator. In the face of such egregious sin of brother against brother, we must repent before we can even dare to ask forgiveness from those tortured – or from God under whose judgment each stands.

Matthew records the words of Jesus: You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

Especially since 9-11, we have been busy as a nation labeling many as our enemies. “Terrorist” is the term of convenience and has served the Administration well as a proxy for a rancid, racial and religious bigotry – and as an effective means of domestic intimidation through the manipulation of fear.

We must repent as a nation and hold our leadership accountably to the highest standards of law and morality. We can no longer tolerate the renegade, lawless action of a criminal regime.

Make no mistake about it. There is a guilty-mind in George Bush and his fellow conspirators in torture. Why else would they have taken great pain in 2002 to prepare a secret, pre-emptive legal defense against accusations of criminal conduct that they knew would inevitably flow from their foul deeds against humanity?

The memoranda of law exchanged between Jay Bybee of the DOJ’s Office of Legal Counsel and White House Counsel Alberto Gonzales are a roadmap full of hairpin turns intended to weave their way around the law against torture, both domestic and international. The Administration’s full approval of these then-secret memos is evident in the rewards to their writers: A position on the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals for Mr. Bybee, and the position of Attorney General for Mr. Gonzales.

At every stage of the so-called “War on Terror,” fear was manufactured and manipulated to frighten a free people to resign their freedom and be held subservient to invasive and illegal surveillance and restrictions on movement. There was no hesitation in trumpeting an untruthful predicate for the war against Iraq.

To frustrate dissent, all of these illegal acts were stamped “Top Secret.” But from whom were they intended to be kept secret? Certainly not from the victims of torture, extraordinary rendition, ghost prisons, and the Guantanamo Concentration Camp. There was no hiding truth from these victims who endured these evils on their bodies and minds. The audience from whom they were intended to be kept secret is, of course, comprised of law abiding citizens of the United States of America in whose name Mr. Bush conducts his criminal enterprise.

Jesus reminds us that there is nothing hidden which will not be shouted from the housetops!
And the truth which is coming out will, in time, work to make us free.

This is beyond a partisan political debate. Indeed, members of both Parties have willingly conspired in the prosecution of the illegal war against Iraq and its wanton, inhumane acts. Congressional sycophants authorized not only the invasion of Iraq, but the shredding of Constitutional liberty itself. As recently as last Fall in the Military Commissions Act, Congress authorized the annihilation of due process rights to conceal the torture of individuals held captive for five years – five years without any opportunity to defend themselves against charges which have, even now, not even been alleged.

Some of these torture victims were capture in their early teens by bounth hunters. The response last year of officials to charges of having detained young teenagers: There is no one in Guantanamo under 18. Of course not, in five years – if they survived – the 13 year old are not 18.

There is no doubt in my mind that the promiscuous use of secrecy is not of the most pernicious threats to democracy and freedom in the world today. Even recent U.S. history has shown that the cover-up is the offense that will bring down a government.

Until 5 years ago, the United States was well regarded as a champion for Human Rights around the world. We are no longer. Malevolent regimes are now emboldened to increase various acts of religious and political persecution and can claim they are merely following the human rights example of the United States.

The Abu Ghraib photos, dismissed as animal house on the night shift, provided a keyhole through which the whole world had a lurid view of the family values of this American government.

It is past time that we deal forthrightly with the crimes and the criminals.

Impeachments and aggressive prosecutions for war crimes are absolutely essential acts of national atonement for such horrendous evil done in our name. It is the only way that we can, as a nation, restore international creditability to a United States’ commitment to human rights and international law.

“We the People” – in whose name this nation is constituted – must act while we still have any Constitutional processes remaining with which to deal with such usurpation peacefully.