



Resolutions To Action

LCWR Global Concerns Committee

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TORTURE

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*Socrates: There are these two evils, the doing of injustice and the suffering of injustice —
and we affirm that to do injustice is a greater, and to suffer injustice a lesser evil. -- Gorgias, 509c, Plato*

EXPERIENCE

The Mayan man said, "We did not want to be like them." That is what he said about why he did not fight back when the army came to get him. The Mayan people of Guatemala suffered greatly during the 36-year civil war ending in 1996. Many were tortured, disappeared, or killed. This reality exists in many countries where there is war or where other forms of domination squelch human rights. The torture that happened in Guatemala still happens in the world today.

Torture, however, did not get much attention in the United States press until April 28, 2004 when horrible photographs of torture at Abu Ghraib were put in front of us. It caused confusion and horror, not only because of its inhumanity, but because we were the torturers. We had often heard of the terrible things done by totalitarian regimes such as those of Hitler, Stalin, and Saddam Hussein. After April 28, 2004, it became harder to deny that what we hated in others was also in

us. What did you think when you saw those pictures of naked bodies piled together or humans connected to electrical wires? What feelings went through you?

Is it okay to torture or is it not okay to torture? How did we get to a point where we even had to ask the question? Some might say there is no reason to think about it. Isn't it absolutely wrong? What does God think? Torture is wrong and against the Gospel message. Why then does it happen and happen again at the hands of Christians? April 28, 2004 put in front of us the horrible photographs of what was happening in Abu Ghraib. If it's wrong, what are we doing about it?

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SOCIAL ANALYSIS

Through the Geneva Convention, adopted on August 12, 1949 and implemented on October 21, 1950, the world community stated that all people were to be treated humanely, even in war.

Article 87: Collective punishment for individual acts, corporal punishments, imprisonment in premises without daylight and, in general, any form of torture or cruelty, are forbidden.

(continued on page 2)

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The United Nations also clearly stated the world community's position on torture:

No State may permit or tolerate torture... Exceptional circumstances such as a state of war ...or any other public emergency may not be invoked as a justification of torture or other cruel inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment." -- UN Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1975)

These statements do not reflect the reality reported by Amnesty International at the turn of the millennium which estimated that 125 countries practiced torture and other forms of severe ill treatment. How many countries officially use torture is unclear since countries that oppose torture at one level deport people to countries known to torture.

REFLECTION

There are also contradictions between beliefs and practice in Christianity. Torture is assumed to be against Christian morality, but the history of the Catholic church shows the Inquisition using torture to purify the faith. It shows the Catholic church coming with the mighty, and at times cruel, Spanish to bring the Christian faith to the peoples in the Western hemisphere. People believed that God was with them in their actions. Perhaps their perception of God was skewed. Perhaps our perception of God is skewed.

An unidentified man in the audience at a panel discussion where torture was one of the topics for theological reflection asked about the worship of a God who sends or allows people to go to hell, a place of eternal torture. What kind of people worship that kind of God? If we believe in a God who

tortures, what are our real beliefs about torture?

A contrasting image of God is the God who after his captors whipped him and nailed him to a tree said, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34) The Christian faith revolves around the death and resurrection of Jesus, God Among Us. We talk about the example that Jesus gave to us through his actions. What is Jesus' stance on torture teaching us today? How should I confront torture today?

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ACTION

- Visit one of the following websites and investigate options to help end torture:
 - National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT), of which LCWR is an endorsing member, and sign the statement "Torture is a Moral Issue" www.nrcat.org
 - Amnesty International's Denounce Torture Campaign www.amnestyusa.org
 - Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition International (TASSC) www.tassc.org
 - Take the Torture Test at www.amnestyusa.org/stoptorture/torturetest to test your knowledge about the who, what, where, and
- why of torture. Watch the *Connect the Dots* video on the site to see how the US is connected to torture.
 - Choose a person believed to be tortured from the Amnesty International website. Put his/her picture where you can pray for him/her daily. Write letters to support the person and to call for his/her release.
 - Reflect on the "ticking bomb" scenario: Authorities have a person who they know has information that could prevent the death of thousands of people, but all methods of extracting information short of torture have failed. Is it acceptable to use torture to attempt to save the lives of thousands?
 - Read about the findings of social psychology in the Stanford study at www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanford_Prison_Experiment and the experiment of Stanley Milgram at www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milgram_Experiment where obedience led people to harm others. The studies show the power of environment to affect human behavior and increase the chances of the abuse of humans. Reflect on the question: What moral obligation do we have to prevent the creation of these environments?
 - Read *The Blindfold's Eyes: My Journey from Torture to Truth* by Dianna Ortiz, OSU to learn of the suffering torture brings to individuals, families, and communities. The author tells of her personal torture in Guatemala and her struggle to regain her life.
 - Read *Unspeakable Acts, Ordinary People: The Dynamics of Torture* by John Conroy, a Chicago reporter who investigated the human capacity to torture by interviewing victims and perpetrators.