

No Doubt, It Was Torture!

Film Transcript

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The Very Rev. Gary R. Hall [*Dean, Washington National Cathedral*]: In the wake of the terrorist attacks that took place in New York and Washington, DC over a decade ago, U.S. government leaders scrambled to obtain information that would stop future attacks. Unfortunately, rather than taking the advice of experienced interrogators who knew how to obtain reliable information in humane ways, they decided to “take the gloves off” by ordering the use of torture.

Virginia Farris [*Foreign Policy Advisor, US Conference of Catholic Bishops*]: Since torture is illegal, they used euphemisms like “enhanced interrogation techniques” to hide what they were really doing. These so-called “enhanced interrogation techniques” included things like waterboarding and placement in confinement boxes. These are forms of torture and they are illegal.

Sr. Patricia Chappell, SNDdeN [*Executive Director, Pax Christi USA*]: Popular culture has made torture seem like a common and acceptable practice. Television programs like “24” made torture seem normal, and movies like “Zero Dark Thirty” falsely make it appear that torture led directly to Bin Laden’s capture.

Diane Randall [*Executive Secretary, Friends Committee on National Legislation*]: The fact is, torture is not a normal, moral, or legal behavior and it is counterproductive.

The Very Rev. Gary R. Hall [*Dean, Washington National Cathedral*]: Two recent investigations promise to shine a light on this horrific history of torture. After a three year investigation, the Senate Intelligence Committee produced a 6,000 page long comprehensive report.

Diane Randall [*Executive Secretary, Friends Committee on National Legislation*]: The report describe acts of torture that are more shocking than those we already know about and details how torture was authorized. Further, it shows that the long-term consequences of torture were negative for U.S. national security.

Virginia Farris [*Foreign Policy Advisor, US Conference of Catholic Bishops*]: The second investigation is a bi-partisan, privately funded review carried out by The Constitution Project’s Task Force on Detainee Treatment. This bi-partisan task force included some of the most respected names in government, law, ethics, and security. It investigated U.S. interrogation practices since 9/11.

On screen: Sleep deprivation, waterboarding, sensory deprivation, stress positions, extremes of hot and cold, sexual humiliation and assault as interrogation techniques.

Asa Hutchinson [*Task Force Co-Chair; Former Republican Congressman from Arkansas*]: Why is this report important? It's important because we as a nation have to get this right. There's some key questions we wanted to address this morning. One – did the treatment of suspected terrorists in US custody rise to the level of torture? Secondly, if so, how did this happen and then what can we learn from this to make better decisions in the future?

Sr. Patricia Chappell, SNDdeN [*Executive Director, Pax Christi USA*]: Among the Task Force panelists were people like Co-Chair Asa Hutchinson, a former Republican congressman who served as a top official in the Department of Homeland Security under President Bush.

Diane Randall [*Executive Secretary, Friends Committee on National Legislation*]: Ambassador Thomas Pickering, one of our most decorated diplomats. And Reverend David Gushee, a respected Professor of Christian Ethics at Mercer University.

Dr. David Gushee [*Task Force Member; Professor of Christian Ethics, Mercer University*]: Our bipartisan group was able to conclude that sadly, but unmistakably, the United States tortured people. This was not a foreordained conclusion. I am confident that there were people in the panel who went into the process convinced that it was otherwise or hoping that it was otherwise.

The Very Rev. Gary R. Hall [*Dean, Washington National Cathedral*]: The Task Force's findings were unequivocal. No doubt, it was torture.

David Irvine [*Task Force Member; Retired Army Brigadier General*]: You cannot read that report without quickly coming to the conclusion that the United States was involved torturing people.

Diane Randall [*Executive Secretary, Friends Committee on National Legislation*]: This bipartisan Task Force unanimously concluded that the United States used torture. But why is torture a moral and religious issue? Why should people of faith care about this report, issued by The Constitution Project?

Dr. Stephen Colecchi [*Director, Office of International Justice and Peace, US Conference of Catholic Bishops*]: Christians oppose torture because we believe every person is created in the image and likeness of God. Because of that fact, we have to respect the dignity of each and every human being. And torture, in a very violent way, violates that dignity. And for that reason we oppose it in every case. It violates the dignity of the person being tortured, that's obvious. It also violates the dignity of the perpetrator of torture. And finally it really does damage to the human dignity of all the people in a society that would tolerate torture in its name. It's simply, fundamentally incompatible with the dignity of the human person and with Christian belief.

Rabbi Rachel Gartner [*Director of Jewish Chaplaincy, Georgetown University*]: The Jewish objection to torture is multiply determined. We have texts that teach us that another person's dignity should be as dear to us as our very own. There are texts that warn us against excessively harsh treatment, even to those who are guilty, lest their humanity be degraded in our eyes. And then of course there's the fact that in Jewish court self-incriminating confessions are inadmissible, which suggests an age old and strong distaste for aggressive fishing expeditions that could lead to violence in the effort to get a confession. But I think the most salient and

profound reason for our objections comes from the most basic place in Jewish thought, which is we believe every human being was made in the image of God. And therefore God is implicated in our human relationships.

Dr. Sayyid Syeed [*National Director for Interfaith and Community Alliances, Islamic Society of North America*]: So there is a clear saying of the Prophet, may God honor him, don't torture living beings. You can imagine that from early childhood, we are taught sayings of the prophet and the text of the Qur'an. And repeatedly we are told, as children, not to torture small birds or not to burn even ants. So that's the kind of religious approach we have towards living beings and how we are prohibited from the very beginning. So then the second thing is that Qur'an tells us that God has invested human beings with dignity. Torture robs both the perpetrators of torture and the victims of the torture of that dignity.

The Very Rev. Gary R. Hall [*Dean, Washington National Cathedral*]: So what were the findings of this landmark report? The panel unanimously agreed, without question or qualification, that the United States tortured people.

Dr. Azizah Al-Hibri [*Task Force Member; Professor Emeritus, T.C. Williams School of Law, University of Richmond*]: I have read in the past about other countries doing this. Countries that we called fascist, countries that we thought violated every rule in the book but that is not America. And to find out that we've actually learned from what these other despicable countries, or regimes I should say, were doing was very shocking to me.

Virginia Farris [*Foreign Policy Advisor, US Conference of Catholic Bishops*]: The panel also found that responsibility for torture went to the highest level of government.

James R. Jones [*Task Force Co-Chair; Former Democratic Congressman from Oklahoma*]: It was the first time, I believe, that the President of the United States and his top advisors actually talked about torture and decided specific types of torture or specific types of treatment which amounted to torture in the White House. So I think there was, and then there were memos from different advisors to the President that clearly showed that the President knew of these discussions, knew the kinds of things that were being talked about and administered. So I think it does go to the top.

Dr. David Gushee [*Task Force Member; Professor of Christian Ethics, Mercer University*]: Congress has essentially abdicated its role of providing the check on the executive branch. So the balance needs to shift back to greater transparency, greater oversight, greater accountability, and the actual capacity of some branch of the federal government to tell the executive branch no.

The Very Rev. Gary R. Hall [*Dean, Washington National Cathedral*]: How can people of faith work together to ensure that torture never happens again?

Dr. Stephen Colecchi [*International Justice and Peace, US Conference of Catholic Bishops*]: Many Christians work very hard on the issue of torture because, as a Church, we have some experience on the issue of torture. There have been martyrs throughout the centuries that have experienced torture. Our own Lord and Savior was tortured on the cross. And so, torture is an important issue for Christians.

Rabbi Rachel Gartner [*Director of Jewish Chaplaincy, Georgetown University*]: Every time we shame, humiliate, harm or violate a human being, we shame, humiliate, and harm and violate God. So for us, torture is unambiguously immoral.

Dr. Sayyid Syeed [*National Director for Interfaith and Community Alliances, Islamic Society of North America*]: The tragedy is that in many Muslim countries, torture is used by the tyrants, by the dictators, to maintain their grip over their people. But for American Muslims, it becomes even more awkward, more painful that these wholesale perpetrators of torture in the Muslim world were used by U.S. to perpetrate torture on some of the prisoners who were sent from here to those countries.

Dr. David Gushee [*Task Force Member; Professor of Christian Ethics, Mercer University*]: I think that people of faith need to continue, however unpopular it may seem, to say “we did torture, it was wrong, we must never do it again”. To keep the issue in the public conversation and among their friends and at churches. To love their country enough to blow the whistle when it’s time to blow the whistle and say we can do better than this. To love God enough to say that we will be faithful to a God who loves people and who cares about human dignity and who is in fact the author of human dignity. Even when our national security is at stake.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Diane Randall [*Executive Secretary, Friends Committee on National Legislation*]: The voice of the religious community needs to continue to be heard. Go to N R C A T dot org to find ways that you can be involved in ensuring that torture never happens again.

Rev. Richard L. Killmer [*Executive Director, National Religious Campaign Against Torture*]: Join the National Religious Campaign Against Torture in our work to grow the number of people who believe that torture is always wrong, without exception, in order to end torture forever. Share this film with your congregation, friends, and family. Let’s work together to end torture forever.