



owners, rather than condemning the institution of slavery itself as abusive and immoral. The NT writers could hardly envision a world without slavery, and certainly had no power to change it on a societal level. So also, for example, Matthew could not conceive of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission established in South Africa to deal redemptively with colonial oppressors, or the nonviolent movements begun by Ghandi or Martin Luther King, Jr.

Warren Carter's interpretation of Matthew's vision of God's Empire is meticulously researched and powerfully presented. Though he does underplay the religious conflict between the Jesus-Jews and the Pharisees, he believes Matthew presents all the religious leaders as the elite social class who are in league with the Roman occupation.

This book can be extremely helpful to Christian feminists who care both about properly interpreting the Bible and who oppose all kinds of private and public oppression. There are many parallels between the ancient Roman Empire and the "American Empire" of the 21st century. Certainly the billions spent on military defense (now more appropriately called "offense"), the tax cuts which mostly favor the wealthy, the increasing consolidation of media corporations which further limit free speech, and the lack of funds for basic social services on state and local levels all point to a growing imperialistic, classist, hegemonic attitude within our nation. The alternative which Jesus presents in Matthew's Gospel should ground us in our struggle to bring about justice, peace, and reconciliation. ♦

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27 hours from Torture to Truth
with Patricia Davis

The Blindfold's Eyes: My Journey from Torture to Truth by Sister Dianna Ortiz with Patricia Davis (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 484 pp., hardback.

Reviewed by
Anne Eggebroten

Reading this book is like taking a terrifying journey.

It's not really about the 24 hours of torture Sr. Dianna Ortiz experienced at the hands of four men in Guatemala on November 2, 1989. It's about the attempts of this Roman Catholic nun from the United States to free herself from the guilt and shame of that torture and her gradual discovery of her own government's complicity in Guatemala's repressive military and political affairs. She tells of being shocked to find strong indication of the role of the US in the funding, approval, and cover-up of what happened to her. (One of the four torturers is a North American whom the others know and obey.)

Surprisingly, however, Sr. Dianna's story is also about abortion and about the US embassy's use of the label "lesbian nun" to discredit her and claim that she had never been abducted. When members of a religious delegation went to Guatemala in March 1990 to demand an investigation, they reported that Ambassador Tom Stroock "berated us for accusing US-embassy personnel of being involved in [her] torture" (43). His assistant, Political Affairs Officer Lew Anselem, said, "I'm tired of all these

lesbian nuns coming down to Guatemala." Former Guatemalan Defense Minister General Hector Gramajo "claimed the abduction was a staged ending to a lesbian love affair" (135).

Reading these slurs brought home to me the feminist assertion that patriarchal order is held up by the pillars of racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, and other means used to set a particular group apart as different and less deserving of respect and equality. As long as one group can be vilified or killed with impunity, no one is safe. Anyone can be accused of being a member of that despised group. In Guatemala and too many other countries, all it takes is being labeled a subversive, guerrilla, or sympathizer with the poor to lose one's civil rights and be fair game for torture and death.

One of the saddest themes of this memoir is Sr. Dianna's paralyzing guilt for having chosen to end the pregnancy that began when she was raped as part of her torture. In her convent and the two other communities where she tries to regain her mental health, she is surrounded by pro-life Catholics who speak about "baby-killers." For years she feels her "murder" is unforgivable; she is like her torturers, essentially evil. She can't take Eucharist or tell her family. Finally when the Department of Justice investigating her case discovers the abortion and uses it to control and intimidate her, she realizes that she can no longer hope to keep her choice private.

Following her pain, I could only think: *patriarchal control of women, their bodies, their souls*. How would her story have been different if women in our society had unconditional acceptance for their reproductive choices? Or if victims of rape were offered RU-486 as a matter of course?

Aesthetically, *The Blindfold's Eyes* is beautifully written. It begins in a calm, steady first-person voice that omits all the worst memories but is halted by poetic flashbacks revealing an innocent's response to the annihilation of personality. By the second half of



the book, however, we are mired in hearings and reports, classified and declassified, slowly moving through 1996 and 1997 to reveal things said and done by the US embassy and others from 1989 on. I longed for a timeline as well as a glossary to unravel the acronyms: DOJ, IOB, DEA, GHRC.

Torture seemed to surround me as I read this book. Sickened by gruesome scenes ten years ago in Guatemala and US efforts to deny that the torture ever occurred, I'd close the book and pick up a newspaper—only to see stories of survivors newly released from secret Iraqi detention centers and reports of mass gravesites being opened.

When I spoke about Sr. Dianna's ordeal to my family, my daughter Roz pointed out *Time Magazine's* report on a Baghdad woman who spent eighteen years shuffling between prison, home, torture chambers, and a mental hospital (May 5). Lahib Nouman's crime as an Iraqi lawyer was defending a man Uday Hussein wanted punished. Sr. Dianna had just given me an understanding of the horror of trying to return to normal life after *one day* of torture—in which her memory of her self and her life was erased, and her personality was redefined around herself as a forced torturer of another imprisoned woman. I had no way to understand the exponential difference eighteen years of torture would make.

Then I saw news reports that Baghdad doctors and nurses were demonstrating against a US decision to appoint a senior Baath Party member as Iraq's new minister of health. And Mr. Hussein's personal physician was being reinstated at least temporarily as president of Baghdad University. Many of these officials had informed on, jailed, tortured, and executed Iraqi citizens. To achieve a goal of stability in Iraq, the US appeared again ready to overlook torture—an eerie parallel to Sr. Dianna's book. But on May 16, hope returned: the new civil administrator issued an order banning 30,000 top Baathists from government posts and promising to screen them for past criminal conduct.

Sr. Dianna Ortiz wrote her book to keep a promise she made to speak for the others she saw being tortured and killed during her own ordeal. She was released because she was an American and because

her disappearance was in the news, but an estimated 200,000 Guatemalans have been killed and 45,000 disappeared since the CIA's covert action supporting the 1954 *coup* in Guatemala (p.350). In the last pages of her book, she reports, "The death squads are still operating, and the violence against unionists, human rights workers, campesino and youth leaders, educators, religious workers, exhumation teams, political leaders, and academics has reached levels not seen since the 1980s."

Though for many years she wanted to die and end her struggle against flashbacks and guilt, Sr. Dianna now has a new mission: working to eradicate torture. With other survivors, she founded the Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition International (TASSC). According to Amnesty International's statistics for 2001, more than 150 governments engage in torture or ill-treatment, up from 114 in 1999 (476).

Even in the US, Sr. Dianna and others continue to experience death threats and intimidation. I myself began to feel fear when a friend who had lived in Washington, D.C., and had worked for the US Army advised me not to write this review. "You don't want your name on their lists, honey. For the sake of your children. 'Homeland Security'—it's their job to gather information and then to use it if, God forbid, there is some kind of war and they decide you are 'sympathizing with the enemies.'"

Fear is like a virus, I thought. Someone passes it to you, and you are infected. It took a strong dose of common sense from Letha Scanzoni to cleanse the infection from my mind.

Reading this book I gained a new understanding of my life in the past twenty years. I realized that, just as my mother had been unaware of what was happening during the Holocaust, I had been ignorant and indifferent to "disappearances" and torture that have been occurring in my lifetime. But like Sr. Dianna Ortiz, I have now begun a journey and cannot

return to my complacency. For a start, I will do some sort of action on June 26, the UN-designated day to commemorate torture victims and survivors. ♦



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(California, Continued from page 12)

ric of Sexuality and Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narrative.

The beautiful campus of Scripps College will be our gathering place. As a women's college, Scripps has a wonderful collection of early books in American women's history, including major women in the church. Karen Kidd, co-chair of the planning committee, will give a guided tour of the collection. Karen is a scholar of Carry Nation, the hatchet-wielding WCTU leader in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

In addition to bougainvillea, fountains, palm and orange trees, Scripps has mission-style architecture and a beautiful garden enclosed by high walls with a shaded wisteria-arbor cloister and a tiny candlelit oratory in one corner. Take a virtual tour of the campus at www.scrippscol.edu Scripps also has excellent food, including various ethnic, vegetarian and vegan selections.

Another tourist attraction: Claremont lies at the foot of invisible mountains—steep, dry and 8,000 feet high. (Guess why you can't see them in the summer.)

Put Conference 2004 on your calendar now—and also plan a few days to see Universal Studios, the new Getty Museum, the Huntington Library and gardens (with the Ellesmere manuscript of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*), the Mojave Desert to the east, and the Santa Monica and Malibu beaches to the west. ♦