



Gary Hart: Orthodox Christianity Source of Fear and Intolerance

While Christians around the world await news regarding the fate of Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani — a convert from Islam to Christianity whom the government of Iran has sentenced to death for his “apostasy” — influential former Democrat Senator Gary Hart (left) has penned an editorial for HuffingtonPost.com claiming the Nadarkhani case is a warning of the dangers of orthodox Christianity.



Hart began his editorial (“[The Plight of Youcef Nadarkhani](#)”) by acknowledging that Christians are facing persecution around the world: “Though there are reports of persecution of Christians in many countries, China included, it usually takes the plight of a single identifiable individual to make an otherwise generalized problem — in this case religious intolerance — take concrete rather than abstract dimensions.” Some writers might view such an observation as a springboard to speak of Islam’s brutal record of systematic persecution of other religions since its founder, Mohammed, [personally set the pattern for 14 centuries of butchery](#) targeting the Christians, Jews and other religions. However, for Gary Hart, the lesson of the case of Youcef Nadarkhani is that orthodox Christians are a threat to America. In Hart’s words:

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The re-emergence of the religious right in America during this current presidential campaign, though mild by comparison to threatened executions by radical clerics, should give us cause for concern. Though well over two centuries ago, “witches” were burned in this country and a recent book documents the struggles of Roger Williams against fundamentalist intolerance. The persistent thread of intolerance springs from a narrow fundamentalist insistence on orthodoxy in an age in which strict religious doctrine in some quarters quickly emerged to fill the vacuum of failed 20th century political ideologies. And religious orthodoxy exhibits an almost demented insistence on conformity and intolerance toward political dissent.

For Hart, the danger is that anyone would take religion seriously. “Intolerance” — and not the actual



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teachings of any given religion — is the supposed threat. (In an editorial less than 450 words in length, Hart uses the word “intolerance” six times.) Although his article is ostensibly about the persecution of a Christian pastor at the hands of an Islamic government, Hart gives at least as much attention to medieval persecutions of Protestants by Roman Catholics and 17th-century witch trials as he gives to Islamic persecution of Christians *today*. While Hart is “concerned” about “the religious right,” he quickly psychoanalyzes the problem of the Iranian regime as being one of “fear”:

The radical Islamic mullahs who dictate social behavior and religious belief in Iran are afraid of Pastor Nadarkhani. They fear a man whose beliefs about redemption, love, and compassion are so deep and so powerful that he will die for them.

Of course, Muslims know a great deal about people being willing to die for their beliefs. However, unlike Christian martyrdom (which is categorized by martyrs being unwilling to take the lives of those who persecute them), Muslim ‘martyrs’ are known for committing acts of terrorism and murder as the defining characteristic of ‘martyrdom.’

“Intolerance” (a concept that Hart believes is inextricably linked to violence) is not the cause of religious violence. Religious violence has arisen within Christianity when its adherents strayed from the teachings of Jesus; religious violence becomes more pronounced in Islam the more rigorously Muslims conform their lives to the teachings of Mohammed.

Gary Hart’s shrill warning about a link between “fear” and “intolerance” is all the more interesting when one considers that his legacy is a monument to the use of fear in the service of intolerance. Although his senatorial career ended during the Reagan administration and his presidential hopes died shortly thereafter because of a sex scandal, Hart remained an influential Insider, and became a key architect of what would become the Department of Homeland Security in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks in 2001. Former Senators Warren Rudman (R-N.H.) and Hart headed the U.S. Commission on National Security/21st Century (known as the Hart-Rudman Commission). It was that Commission which presented President George W. Bush with the recommendations that would lead to the Department of Homeland Security. [As Steve Bonta wrote for *The New American* in January 2002:](#)

Shortly after the September 11th attacks, a few reports surfaced in the national press of the work of the so-called Hart-Rudman Commission. A policy study group created in 1998, this commission was charged with creating policy recommendations designed to meet the evolving security and defense requirements of the United States over the next 25 years. ...

[T]he commission devoted much of its early work to predicting future trends. These predictions, which were compiled in a report entitled *New World Coming*, include everything from anticipated changes in geopolitics to expected technological innovations. ...

Building on the predictions in *New World Coming*, the Hart-Rudman Commission issued several other reports containing recommendations for policy changes, the last of which, *Road Map for National Security*, was completed on January 31, 2001, and delivered to President George W. Bush....

More worrisome still is the central recommendation of *Road Map* that “the President should propose, and Congress should agree, to create a National Homeland Security Agency ... with responsibility for planning, coordinating, and integrating various U.S. government activities involved in homeland security. They should use the Federal Emergency Management Agency



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(FEMA) as a key building block in this effort.” The document, which was written long before September 11th, went on to suggest that the president “propose to Congress the transfer of Customs Service, the Border Patrol, and Coast Guard to the National Homeland Security Agency” to create a “stronger and more effective system.” This Homeland Security Agency would oversee state and local as well as federal law enforcement and crisis response agencies.

The culture of fear that undergirds the security state that Hart helped engineer is the legacy of a man who now assaults Christian orthodoxy at the very moment when a Christian pastor is in imminent danger of murder at the hands of a radical Islamist government. And while Hart wrings his hands over the influence of the “religious right” on American politics — insulting men and women who are simply trying to exercise their constitutionally-guaranteed rights as citizens of this Republic — at least one Iranian general is calling for further violence against this nation. While President Obama has apologized profusely over last week’s accidental burning of copies of the Koran by U.S. military personnel, [press reports](#) indicate that a highly placed Iranian military official has declared that nothing less than the destruction of the White House could ease the rage of Muslims:

Responding to Obama’s apology on Saturday, the commander of Iran’s Basij force Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Naqd claimed that the holy book was burned by U.S. forces over the heavy slap it has been given by Islam,” urging Muslims worldwide to reject the American apology.

“Nothing but burning the White House can relieve the wound of us, the Muslims, caused by the Burning of Quran in the US,” he said, adding: “Their apology can be accepted only by hanging their commanders; hanging their commanders means an apology,” he was quoted by the semi-official Fars news agency as saying.

The terrorism of Mohammed’s religion, and the security state which grows in response to that terrorism, are the meeting point of fear and intolerance.



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