



WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

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Challenging the Culture of "Us-vs.-Them"

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Just when I thought the vitriolic behavior of last summer's anti-healthcare town forums couldn't get any worse, another summer rolls around and it's laced with huge doses of poisonous 'us- vs.-them' controversies.

Politicians and others who love the mayhem that the 'us-vs.-them' tactic causes, are eager to get re-elected, amass more money and convince you that their way of believing is the ONLY way, etc. If I/we can scare you enough about the 'other', the other' becomes the scapegoat for the bad things that are happening to us, our country and the world.

Using our current economic upheaval, many politicians and their puppeteers are working overtime casting out their 'fear' nets to see which ones will result in the biggest catch of the season – let's see what will make people more fearful than they already are. Of course, this isn't the first time in our history these tactics have been used, but because of the viral nature of our news, the fear mechanism can be spread with lightening speed.

It appears to me that this summer's biggest fear-spreading catch is a growing hostility towards 'outsiders' – people, who don't look, pray, speak like us. Not too long ago, there was bi-partisan support for discussing the prospects for comprehensive immigration reform. But, alas, pollsters have found that xenophobia is playing well, so let's put any sensible conversation aside and go on the attack. One of the newest tactics is to raise the level of sexism and racism to new highs by offensively labeling undocumented immigrant women and their newborn babies with terms like: "dropping a child," "invasion by birth canal", "drop and leave," "anchor babies," etc.

Rather than having a discussion of immigration reform, some have determined lobbying demeaning and hate-filled rhetoric at this challenge is the way to garner votes and separate people into heaps of "us-vs.-them." And, several congressional leaders are now joining others in calling for revision or hearings on the 14th Amendment, which grants US citizenship to any child born on its soil.

Another example of the tsunami of xenophobia is the attempt to block the construction of the Cordoba House Islamic cultural center that will include a mosque a few blocks from the site of the World Trade Center. What is easy to forget is, following the horror of 9/11, even conservatives were careful not to equate the murderous fanatics of the Trade Center horror to a broad cultural conflict with Islam. They knew that if Islam was indicted, it would lead to a strategic and moral disaster. How quickly we forget.

The National Council of Churches through its interfaith Relations Commission and Christian members of the National Muslim-Christian initiative have issued a statement that includes the following: "Christ calls us to 'love your neighbor as yourself' (Matt. 22:39). It is this commandment, more than the simple bonds of our common humanity, which is the basis for our relationship with Muslims around the world," the NCC statement said.

This scripture calls us into relationship with anyone the media and others determine as 'the other.' For further information on a faithful response to immigration and interfaith issues, go to: <http://www.ucc.org/justice/immigration/> and <http://www.ucc.org/> where an article titled: 'Anti-Muslim fear is behind resistance to NYC mosque' is posted.

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