

INTERFAITH INSIGHT

Christians and all persons of goodwill challenged during Advent



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As a Christian, I am finding this year's season of Advent, leading up to Christmas, a challenging time given the tensions of the political discourse.

At a time when I should be looking to celebrate the coming of the "Prince of Peace," I am worried about the increased incidence of hate speech and hate crimes. I am concerned about the call for rejecting refugees and the suggestions about registering all Muslims.

These issues are also of concern in other communities worried about the increasing Islamophobia.

In a recent communication from the Council of Foreign Affairs, I read an article by Omar Saif Ghobash, the United Arab Emirates ambassador to Russia. It features a series of letters he wrote to his teenage son on how to survive in an age of extremism and Islamophobia.

Ghobash had taken his infant son to New York City in the summer of 2001 just prior to the 9/11 event. Since that event, he has been challenged to "show him — and to show myself and all my fellow Muslims — that the world offers so much more than the twisted fantasies of extremists."

He writes: "I want my sons and their generation of Muslims to understand how to be faithful to Islam and its deepest values while charting a course through a complex world. I want them to discover ... that there need be no conflict between Islam and the rest of the world. ... We need to take responsibility for the Islam of peace. We need to demonstrate how it is expressed in our lives and the lives of those in our community."

I was at Cambridge University last spring during the Brexit campaign, in which many of the same fears were expressed and much of the same confusion followed the vote to leave the European Union.

Samuel Wells, vicar of St. Martin-in-the-Fields church in London, wrote in a recent

essay about the aftermath of the vote.

Wells prays that "British democracy discovers a way to vote not in fear and self-interest, but in hope and pursuit of the common good."

He adds his belief that it is "possible to build a community of humility, generosity, gratitude, grace truth and compassion."

Wells calls this the essence of the church. But I would suggest it as a goal for all persons of goodwill regardless of religious or secular commitment, and regardless of one's political vote on Brexit or on the recent election in America.

In the current issue of the *Christian Century*, publisher Peter Marty expresses his concerns about why a majority of white Christians were drawn to a candidate who expressed disdain for immigrant and Muslim peoples.

He asks, "Does racism or 'celebrated whiteness' still linger as our nation's original sin?" He concludes his column by reminding us of some basic Christian convictions

and urges us all to follow them: "Practice the beatitudes of Jesus and you will never be tempted to bully. Speak truth to power. Do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. Weak and vulnerable people need our embrace, not our mockery. Let's welcome the stranger, build bridges of hospitality and cherish grace. Remember that once you speak a word, it's impossible to unspeak it. Resist fear. Insist on extending hope to others. Never view yourself as above forgiveness."

A common theme in all of my recent reading has been this call for understanding and humility during these times of confusion and potential conflict.

These admonitions are appropriate not just for those of us celebrating Advent, but for all persons of faith and goodwill. Let us indeed follow the Hebrew prophet Micah who urged us to seek justice, kindness, and humility. (Micah 6:8)

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