

## INTERFAITH INSIGHT

# Can America move beyond our divisions to a new vision?

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Yes, it has been a difficult time in American politics, but now is the time to remember and affirm our basic values. It is time to come together and realize the strength that comes from our diversity.

Political campaigns, by their very nature, pit people and ideas against each other. Democracy — as opposed to dictatorships — require citizens to take a stand, express their preferences and vote to determine who will lead us, who will make the laws and, in some cases, who will become judges or serve on school boards and various commissions.

It is by nature a competitive process and it inevitably leads to division.

Our media can exacerbate the divisions by polling based on

other divisions. We continually hear how women vs. men are voting, minorities vs. whites, educated vs. less educated, etc. We are even told how various religious groups are voting: the evangelical Christian vote in contrast to members of more liberal or mainline churches; how Catholics, Protestants, Jews and Muslims might vote.

The religious issue has been more apparent this year because of the fear of terrorism and the tendency of some to identify such atrocities with all members of a certain religion.

## TENDENCY TO FORM TRIBES

All of this division builds on the human tendency to form tribes of people “just like us.” It is a part of our biology. We cannot survive as isolated people. Babies and young children require families, and we soon identify with our larger kin group as well. This continues as we group together with those who have similar national, racial or religious heri-

tage. This group identity easily becomes a tribal identity that can lead to demonizing people or groups that are not a part of “our tribe.”

The preamble to the U.S. Constitution states: “We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”

Our recent tribalism has challenged whether we can recover the “we the people” spirit, let alone the domestic tranquility and general welfare.

The campaign rhetoric also has been disheartening with respect to another cherished American value, namely, the freedom of and respect for religion in all of its diversity.

Article VI of the Constitution

states; “No religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States.”

When those running for the highest office state that no Muslim should ever be president of the United States, or that Muslims should be banned from entering our country as refugees or immigrants, one wonders if our constitution is understood or respected.

## DIVERSITY MAKES US STRONG

From an interfaith perspective, we should be vigilant in opposing the demeaning of other religious groups. Our diversity is what makes us strong and the alienation of religious or racial groups makes us weak and unsafe.

Our faith communities and our scriptures have made clear our responsibilities to the “stranger.”

“When a stranger lives with you in your land, do not ill-treat him. The stranger who lives with you shall be treated like the native-born. Love him as your-

self, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” (Leviticus 19:33)

“Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in.” (Matthew 25:34-35)

“Be kind to parents, and the near kinsman, and to orphans, and to the needy, and to the neighbor who is of kin, and to the neighbor who is a stranger.” (Quran 4:36)

Let us all trust and pray that the divisiveness of this election campaign will not continue as we move past Election Day. The fear, distrust and hatred must not continue as we seek to build our “more perfect union.”

Let us all look to our founding documents and scriptures to rediscover what can indeed be a new vision for our country.

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