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COLUMN: Anti-immigration outside of most religious teaching

KARRIS GOLDEN

A writer was asked to create a children's story for a faith-based publication. The editor told her to convey biblical principles in response to social-justice issues.

This writer turned in a story about a person who wanted to feed everyone - even the poor people out on the fringes.

"Good job," said the editor.

As the story made its way through the publication process, a red flag went up.

"Why did the writer disguise a pro-immigration story within a children's tale?" asked another editor.

"Huh?" said the writer. To herself, she added, "That's preposterous!"

Then the writer re-read her story. She realized someone could indeed find "pro-immigration" sentiments in a story based on biblical directives to feed and serve the poor and strangers.

Ah, there's the rub; is there a way to write a biblically based story about justice without including service to the strangers, poor, sick and outsiders?

Open immigration erodes the conventional makeup of the United States, writes Lawrence Auster in his booklet "Erasing America: The Politics of the Borderless Nation."

Auster's thesis is that a "nation" is not based on vagaries; instead this nation grew from Western civilization with certain religious, cultural, linguistic and ethnic characters. He concedes those categories are flexible but insists the United States has "stretched them to the breaking point."

Just as open immigration may threaten someone's sense of nationhood, I find it difficult reconciling anti-immigration rhetoric to religious beliefs.

What do we do? Every faith and values writer and editor faces this particular issue. If you remain true to the texts and principles on which faiths are based, you risk the wrath of those who compartmentalize - religion over here, politics over there.

In 2006, the Hindu American Foundation joined Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities to call for fair and equitable immigration legislation that respects the "God-given dignity" of all individuals while protecting the nation's economic and national security interests. The four faiths released a statement that highlighted scriptural references from each to show how all regard charity and kindness to strangers as among the highest virtues.

To be certain, few if any faiths are anti-immigration.
Hindus believe in the transmigration of the soul - the transfer of the soul into another body at the time of death.

Through pure acts, thoughts and devotion, you can be reborn at a higher level, eventually escaping this cycle and achieving enlightenment. Hindus look gravely upon causing others harm, as it can result in being reborn at a lower level. The unequal distribution of wealth and suffering are seen as further punishments for bad deeds in this and previous lives.

Christianity's founder, Jesus, told followers to welcome and show hospitality to everyone, especially the poor, enemies and strangers, (Matthew 25 and Romans 12).

Islam encourages the same and abhors inhospitality. Muslim theology teaches humanity's chief failing is pride, according to "The Koran: A Very Short Introduction" by Michael Cook.

Judaism also places high value on good deeds - or mitzvoth - which are considered the most important part of religious life, according to "Contemporary Jewish Theology: A Reader" by Elliott Dorff. Traditionally, Jews are among the most vocal supporters of immigration.

Buddhism advises its students to strive for complete "dana" (generosity) and "ahimsa" (the belief we should not harm any living things, a belief shared by Hindus and Jainists).

Shantideva's eighth century "Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life: A Buddhist Poem for Today" uses the example of the hand and foot to explain our interconnectedness.

In chapter seven, he writes, "All sufferings are without an owner, because they are not different; they should be warded off, simply because they are suffering."