



Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

MORE LETTERS

Christians, we strive to model our lives on the life of Jesus, whose compassion for the poor and the outcast marked his entire public ministry. As Catholics, we gather around the Eucharistic table with the audacious belief that we will physically carry the presence of Jesus out into the world. How can we be less than commit-

ted to the needs of the poor and vulnerable in our midst? Join this yearlong conversation. Think about it, share your wisdom, listen with an open mind to the wisdom of others, and then take action to be a part of the solution.

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History ignored, repeats

What is it like "In the Land of Guantanamo?" writer Ted Conover wondered when he went to the prison the United States has set up in Cuba for "terrorists" captured during the war in Afghanistan. His story, reported in the New York Times magazine in late June, began with this sentence: "The juvenile enemy combatants live in a prison called Camp Iguana."

I felt saddened that my country has given itself permission to hold kids in a concentration camp, calling them "enemy combatants," setting no limit on their detention, no access to their families, lawyers or their governments.

These youths might truly be our "enemies," but shouldn't they be given some consideration for the brainwashing they received that made them hate us? Recently I was called "unpatriotic," because I criticized our country for disregarding the basic rights that prisoners of war should have, namely coming under the protection of the Geneva Convention.

As an American, I believe our laws are supposed to protect the rights of all. Yet, we have given ourselves permission to ignore our laws — and not only for prisoners of war. The USA Patriot Act, passed at Attorney General John Ashcroft's urging, allowed the Justice Department to round up more than 700 immigrants, calling them "of interest" in the terrorism investigation, holding them indefinitely, without access to lawyers or



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The Bottom Line

families.

Actually, there's nothing new here about how we have reacted when fear of people, because of their ancestry or politics, takes over, nurtured by government-sanctioned propaganda. Many older people would remember what we did to Japanese-Americans during World War II, throwing 110,000 of them into internment camps, denied their civil rights, called "enemies," simply because we were at war with the country they came from.

Most Americans would be shocked if they went back further in our history, to World War I to discover how quickly we throw civil rights out the window once we can point to enemies: President Woodrow Wilson, infected with "war fever," actually allowed what could only be called a "witch hunt" in seeking out anyone who might dissent from our politics. "Conformity," he maintained, would be "the only virtue." Every man who refused to conform "would pay the penalty."

Frederick C. Howe, commissioner of immigration at Ellis Island from 1914 to

1919, wrote about the "wartime hysteria" initiated and carried out by the U.S. government in these years. "Ellis Island was turned into a prison. During these years thousands of Germans, Austrians and Hungarians were taken from their homes and brought to Ellis Island. They were typical of the 'alien enemies' the country ... arrested under the hysteria that was organized and developed into a hate that lingers on to this day," he wrote 10 years later.

Howe did not want to believe that injustices like these, "without a scintilla of evidence," could result in our "civil liberties thrown to the wind, and the stamping out of individualism and freedom."

The Catholic bishops, who had set up a Program of Social Reconstruction, agreed. "The only safeguard of peace is social justice and a contented people," wrote the chairman, Bishop Peter J. Muldoon of Rockford, Ill.

Today, too many Americans would agree, not with the bishops but with Theodore Roosevelt, who said all must be "melted" to become "one American mold. This war is a war for the vital interests of America," wrote this former president, whose son Quentin was killed in the war.

Sadly, if we do not learn from history — witness Guantanamo and the Patriot Act — it only repeats itself!

Antoinette Bosco is a columnist for Catholic News Service.

Letters Policy

The *Catholic Courier* provides space for readers to express opinions on all sides of the issues. We welcome original, signed letters about current issues affecting church life.

Although we cannot publish every letter we receive, we seek to provide a balanced representation of expressed opinions and a variety of reflections on life in the church. We will choose letters based on likely reader interest, timeliness and a sense of fair play. Our discerning readers may determine whether to agree or disagree with the opinions expressed.

Letters must not exceed 300 words. Anonymous letters and the use of pseudonyms are unacceptable. We reserve the right to edit letters for legal and other concerns. With respect to errors in submitted text, we will correct spelling only.

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