

On 'Cinco de Mayo', Please Check Your 'Actitud'

Many Christians who defend biblical morality can sound hateful when it comes to immigration policy. What happened to loving our neighbor?

A few years ago I attended my oldest daughter's college graduation ceremony in north Georgia. The school had invited a respected state legislator to address the students—a woman known for her conservative Christian values. I enjoyed some of her remarks, until she suddenly veered onto the subject of immigration policy.

This lady launched into a blistering tirade against illegal immigrants and blamed them for bringing danger, drugs and disease into the United States. An icy chill went through the audience and students began to fidget nervously with their graduation caps. I was embarrassed.

"While U.S. government officials decide how to reform our immigration policies, let's ask the Holy Spirit to help us reform our attitudes toward these precious people we are called to love."

My daughters gasped audibly at this woman's insensitivity, and I hung my head because I realized that a Christian couple from the nation of Colombia was sitting a few chairs from me. Their son, a young man with a passion for

youth ministry, was
graduating with my daughter.

Since that day I've realized how inconsistent
our "American Christian values" often are when it comes to
loving foreigners.

Some people of faith who are experts at defending unborn life
seem ready to
pounce on immigrants and send them to the border—without
understanding the
complexities of our legal naturalization process, and without
having compassion
on families that could be ripped apart by arbitrary
enforcement of our
confusing policies.

To celebrate
Cinco de Mayo this year, I'd like to stand on a street corner
and beg everyone:

"PLEASE
LOVE YOUR HISPANIC NEIGHBOR!"

And I would put the Spanish translation on the flip-side:

"¡POR FAVOR, AMA A
TU PRÓJIMO HISPANO!" I'd also like to call a halt to all the
hateful
rhetoric by having everyone sit down for dinner. Nothing will
make you
appreciate Mexican culture more than some *enchiladas* and
chiles
rellenos.

I have fallen in
love with immigrants. In the last few years I have preached in
Russian, Indian,
Jamaican, Nigerian, Hispanic and Portuguese churches in the
United States.

Nowhere have I found such caring communities. They are models
of vibrant

biblical faith and New Testament compassion.

Their pastors often work secular jobs while trying to look after their congregations. The churches don't have big operating budgets, and they often use rented facilities. But what the people lack in finances they offer in exuberant praise and worship and evangelistic fervor.

It's true that many members of these churches don't have their green cards. (When I offer to pray for people at the altars after church, many come to me with tearful requests about documentation.) Pastors of some immigrant churches spend up to half their time trying to solve immigration problems.

As I have spent time with these people in their homes, listened to their sad stories and offered words of counsel, I have discovered that most of them are not trying to deceive us, misuse the system or get a free ride. Most came here to be closer to their families, and they have gotten lost in an endless, frustrating government paper trail. And some have learned that if they are from certain countries (i.e., poorer ones) they don't have the same access to U.S. citizenship.

Please understand. I am not in favor of opening our borders carelessly so that

terrorists can blow up our cities. But I am equally against crafting racist policies that break up families or make poorer immigrants feel as though they are going to be hunted like Jews in Nazi Germany.

My ancestors immigrated to this country in the 1700s from Ireland. Today, a new wave of immigrants is coming here from Latin America, Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Of course we must be vigilant about national security. But let's remember that most immigrants don't bring drugs, disease or danger; they bring ingenuity, creativity, jobs and, in the case of the immigrants I know, passionate zeal for Jesus Christ.

While U.S. government officials decide how to reform our immigration policies, let's ask the Holy Spirit to help us reform our attitudes toward these precious people we are called to love.

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Holy Spirit Is Not for Sale (Chosen).