

## Sermonette – Karen Ann Olsen

I had many great experiences at the "Dream On, Sisters!" conference, but the ideas from one particular workshop have remained in my mind since I returned. This workshop was called "Moral Values, Political Choices and Christian Faith: A New Conversation." The following are some thoughts and ideas which I took home from the workshop.

Proverbs 29:18 says that "Where there is no vision, the people cast off restraint." Various translations say "the people run wild" or "the people do not control themselves."

A clear vision is provided for us in Philippians 2:3-5 (NRSV): "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others."

I believe we should be concerned with such basic things as poverty, hunger, and health care. What sort of water and air will we leave for our future generations? What is a crime, and how should criminals be punished, rehabbed, and/or re-integrated, or even better, prevented from committing a crime in the first place? How are we raising our children? How are we meeting the needs of all the people?

Louis Brandeis, the former Supreme Court Justice, once said that "We can have democracy in this country, or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can't have both." It seems as though we have a situation where, in the minds of many people, religion has become synonymous with the right wing, where much power and wealth currently reside. Many religious spokespeople in the public eye assert that "God IS on our side!" This can be dangerous because it can result in religion and religious values being held hostage by a political party, when we know that God does not identify as either a Republican or a Democrat. I think it is far safer to ask "Are we on God's side?" Religion must not become stuck as either a loveless critic or an uncritical lover of any political party.

I say this because I get frustrated when I see religious people who are unable to take part in honest, civil, and spiritually sensitive political discourse. When I see religious spokespeople use religion as a tool to marginalize people, a part of me feels marginalized also. I believe that our religious values should give us a vision which encourages us to work together and build solutions. The "Mix in '06" conference gave me even more reasons and even more courage to stand up and take part in this discussion. Since the beginning of the conference, I have written several letters to my legislators and I have begun to look for even more

ways that I can make a difference. Especially after attending the conference, I cannot actively practice my faith and think that it is ok to ignore these things.

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