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Religious profiling?

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The attempted destruction of Northwest Airlines flight from Amsterdam to Detroit on Christmas Day has raised new discussions about ?profiling? passengers who are seeking to board flights. Some commentators want to single out all Muslims, or all Arabs (or all those who look like Arabs or Middle Easterners, I guess) ? for special questioning or screening.

You know, every time I hear this, I wonder how we Catholics would feel if we were all ?profiled? when liberation theology was popular? on suspicion that we might aid Latin American rebels somewhere.

Aside from being discriminatory and just plain wrong, profiling would be counterproductive. It would further inflame the very anti-American passions which lead people to try to blow up planes to begin with. Any singling-out should be based on a person?s behavior, or strong intelligence that he or she has terrorist connections ? not on his or her religion, ethnicity or race. In the case of the Northwest flight, I am incredulous that the man in custody actually continued to hold a multiple-entry visa for the U.S. even after his own father reported his ?radicalization? to the US Embassy. His behavior too should have raised questions: he paid for the ticket in cash, and had no luggage.

Equally disturbing are commentators that want this suspect ?tortured? for further information. Pat Buchanan suggested on TV, for example, that he be denied pain medication for his severe burns, if that is necessary to extract information. I find such ideas revolting and immoral. And interrogators have often said that such tactics don?t work.

When will fear no longer be our guiding principle?

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