

5 Things Bothering Me About the Response to Trump's Executive Order on Refugees

Have you ever seen America so ablaze with controversy? Protests in the streets; hysteria in the news rooms; chaos and weeping at the airports; cries for impeachment among political leaders—all because of President Trump's executive order concerning refugees.

Some have openly called for the president's murder, drawing swift rebuke from others:



A well-educated Christian professor in Canada has dubbed Trump an antichrist:



A progressive Christian leader argues that supporting Trump and following Jesus are incompatible:



The left-wing media elite are indignant, with *The New York Times* branding Trump's order a “cowardly and dangerous” act of “unrighteousness,” with a host of others echoing similar claims.

On the flip side, right-wing conservative sites like Breitbart feature bold headlines declaring, “Terror-Tied Group CAIR [The Council on American-Islamic Relations] Causing Chaos, Promoting Protests & Lawsuits as Trump Protects Nation.”

On Twitter, I asked my followers, “Is Trump's executive order on the refugees fundamentally unChristian, or is it being

misreported by the media?"

In response, 74 percent answered "misreported by the media," 16 percent said it was "fundamentally anti-Christian," and 10 percent chose "Other."

How do we sort this out?

In response to the national (actually, international) outcry, President Trump issued a statement Sunday afternoon, restating the rationale behind his order and defending its particulars. In the statement he emphasized that "America is a proud nation of immigrants and we will continue to show compassion to those fleeing oppression, but we will do so while protecting our own citizens and border." And, he stated, "To be clear, this is not a Muslim ban, as the media is falsely reporting. This is not about religion—this is about terror and keeping our country safe."

Others, far too numerous to cite here, have disputed his words, and the din on both sides is rising in intensity by the hour. So, rather than try to sort out all the controversies surrounding the executive order, let me share five things that are bothering me about the reaction to Trump's order.

To be clear, though, we need to separate the executive order itself from the way it was executed, which led to even more chaos, including the momentary banning of green card holders returning to the States and even the alleged detention of a newborn and an 18-month old baby, both American citizens, at Chicago's O'Hare airport. One can be upset over the initial implementation of the order while still defending the order itself.

Here, then, is what is sticking in my craw.

First, I have a hard time believing that suddenly, across America, countless thousands of Americans are upset that Muslim refugees from seven countries will be temporarily

banned from entering our country while “extreme vetting” measures are put in place.

Muslims make up about one percent of our population, and many of the Muslims who live here are not from the countries on Trump’s list. Yet suddenly, all across the nation, Americans are outraged that Muslims from countries like Libya and Yemen will be temporarily prohibited from immigrating here.

In my opinion, while some of the outrage is legitimate, much of it is more of an expression of hatred towards Trump than an expression of solidarity with, say, Somali refugees. As to the degree that Islamic groups like CAIR are behind some of the protests, others can decide.

Second, this massive, loud, national expression of compassion for Muslim refugees strikes me as quite hypocritical when we remember that there have been very few words spoken about the decades-long genocide of Middle Eastern Christians at the hands of radical Muslims. As I tweeted out Saturday night, “Where were all the protests across America as millions of Christians overseas were being slaughtered or sold into slavery or exiled?”



Yet now, we Americans are in a state of frenzy because of the temporary halt on some refugees entering our country. Something is not lining up here.

Third, I don’t understand why some Christian leaders are upset with putting a priority on resettling Christian refugees. (I suggested prioritizing Christian refugees back in November 2015.) This is the right thing to do, Scripturally and legally, for at least three reasons. 1. Christians are called to do good to all people, but especially to fellow believers (see Gal. 6:10); so, we continue to help Muslim and other refugees, but as a majority Christian country, we prioritize Christian refugees.

2. Christian refugees really are “the least of these brothers of Mine” in the classic words of Jesus in Matthew 25:31-46, being trapped as a tiny, persecuted minority in the midst of Islamic civil wars and surrounded by Islamic countries, with very few making it to our shores. Sadly, as I noted in 2015, “A friend of mine who pastors a large church in Tennessee traveled to Jordan and spoke with Christian refugees there. Their perception was that American Christians had completely abandoned them.”

3. Legally, the issue is not one of Islamophobia but rather, to quote the executive order directly, a call “to prioritize refugee claims made by individuals on the basis of religious-based persecution, provided that the religion of the individual is a minority religion in the individual’s country of nationality.” This could apply to groups like the Yazidis too, and rightly so.

Fourth, I have no tolerance for the media’s hysteria and their use of inflammatory phrases like “the Muslim ban.” As David French explained on the *National Review* (note that French was a well-known Never Trumper), “you can read the entire executive order from start to finish, reread it, then read it again, and you will not find a Muslim ban. It’s not there. Nowhere. At its most draconian, it temporarily halts entry from jihadist regions. In other words, Trump’s executive order is a dramatic climb-down from his worst campaign rhetoric.”

Again, French is hardly a defender of Trump, writing that “the ban is deeply problematic as applied to legal residents of the U.S. and to interpreters and other allies seeking refuge in the United States after demonstrated (and courageous) service to the United States.” But he is quite correct in labelling much of the media’s reporting of the order as “false, false, false.”

Similarly, Dan McLaughlin, also posting on the *National Review*, penned an article titled, “Refugee Madness: Trump Is

Wrong, But His Liberal Critics Are Crazy,” stating that the anger at Trump’s new policy “is seriously misplaced.”

I would go as far as saying that some major media players are being downright irresponsible, engaging in the worst type of partisan politics, possibly even endangering lives in the process. I say that because the immigration crisis is volatile enough in itself, as is the presidency of Donald Trump, and some of the media’s irresponsible and inflammatory reporting could easily provoke acts of wanton violence.

Fifth and finally, I don’t understand why evangelicals who voted for Trump feel the need to defend everything he does and even how he does it (and I am one who voted for him and who at times has defended him). Not only does this give further fuel to the fire of those critics who claim that we are hurting our Christian witness by supporting him, but it eliminates our high calling to be the president’s “loyal opposition” at times (to borrow a phrase coined by biblical scholar Yochanan Muffs regarding Israel’s prophets). If we truly care for and support the president, we should demonstrate that by lovingly opposing him when he feels he has done wrong.

In this case, I’m not saying that he has acted wrongly (although, as is self-evident, the implementation of his order was terribly messy and unnecessarily confusing). I’m saying that we can’t simply have a gut level reaction of defending the president against all criticism, even if, in some (many?) cases, he is being unjustly accused.

Let’s put our faith before our politics, lest we make the mistake the religious right made in generations and become an appendage of the Republican Party.

With that being said, if you know how to pray, now’s a good time to put those prayers to work. We desperately need God’s gracious intervention to heal our broken land. {eoa|}