

Is Praying for the President Heresy?

A photograph of evangelical Christian faith leaders laying hands on President Donald Trump and praying for him in the Oval Office that went viral on the internet last week enraged a prominent African-American pastor, who spoke about it in a recent interview.

During Saturday morning's episode of "AM Joy," hostess Joy Reid asked the Rev. Dr. William Barber II, a member of the board of directors of the NAACP and president of the organization's North Carolina chapter, to give his thoughts on the photo. Needless to say, he didn't have anything nice to say about it.

"It is a form of theological malpractice that borders on heresy when you can p-r-a-y for a president and others when they are p-r-e-y preying on the most vulnerable, you're violating the most sacred principles of religion," he said, before railing into a talking-points rant about Republican efforts to repeal and replace Obamacare.

"[W]e have this extremist Trump-Republican agenda that takes health care, transfers wealth to the greedy," he said. "That's hypocrisy and sin. Seven-hundred billion dollars, Joy—you haven't seen that kind of transfer of wealth on the backs of the bodies of people since the days of slavery. Claiming to care about life but passing a bill when you know thousands will die, 22 million people, poor working people, will be hurt—that is hypocrisy and sin.

"Passing bills, trying to pass, when you know it will hurt children, the disabled and veterans—that is sin. That is hypocrisy. And what leaders ought to be doing is challenging the president, challenging [Senate Majority Mitch] McConnell

and challenging [Speaker of the House Paul] Ryan and challenging these senators and others, and not trying to appease them. Instead, they're acting like priests of the empire rather than prophets of God."

The Republican Party in Barber's home state didn't take too kindly to his comments, saying it was "shocked and outraged" by them. In a statement released after the broadcast, NCGOP Chairman Robin Hayes said:

In the strongest possible terms, the NCGOP condemns the hateful actions of Dr. Rev. Barber, who cast tens of millions of people, of all faiths, who pray for the president, as sinners in a nationally broadcasted interview. As a pastor in North Carolina, Rev. Dr. Barber has crossed the line this time. Using his role as a supposed faith-based leader to falsely drive citizens away from praying for the good of our nation and our nation's president is absolutely grotesque. The idea that it is a sin to pray for any individual, much less the commander in chief of our country, goes against any religious teaching that I have ever heard of. Rev. Dr. Barber is spreading a repulsive lie, and he should apologize immediately. {eo}