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I'm Pro-Life, and Pro-Refugee

Scott Arbeiter

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I am an evangelical Christian, and central to that is my belief in the sanctity of all life — a belief that, like millions of other evangelicals, I have expressed through my opposition to abortion. Over the past 40 years my wife and I have joined silent prayer walks and have given to crisis pregnancy centers. We have written to our elected leaders, debated with friends and family who disagreed with us and sought to influence our culture to value life at every stage, especially those not yet born.

We have grieved for the loss of so many lives, so full of potential never realized. We have always believed that protecting life is an obligation for us, for any elected official we support and especially for judges who interpret our laws. That is why we are grateful that President Trump has said that value for those not yet born was an important criterion in choosing his first nominee to the Supreme Court.

But in recent years, I have come to realize that being pro-life requires more of me. My compassion and my advocacy must mature into giving equal care for the young mother who carries that child. I can no longer persuade myself that the birth of the child is the end of my pro-life agenda. I must be “pro” everything needed for that child not just to be born, but to flourish.

This means that I need to be pro education and pro job growth, and pro many other things I never considered as connected to my pro-life convictions. And I need to be ready to stand against every form of economic injustice, racism and individual or corporate greed that destroys the life of a family and a community.

Of course, my being pro-life never meant not caring about education or jobs, but I suspect like many people, I tended to see these as unrelated issues. Being pro-life has always been a deeply moral question; it still is. However, I now see that to be fully pro-life I must broaden my sense of morality and embrace a wider agenda.

My maturing pro-life views have also caused me to examine how I grapple with the question of war, nuclear proliferation and other causes I never used to consider pro-life. And it causes me to ask more of pro-life candidates and officials before I offer my full support.

These evolving beliefs come at a time when many pro-life Americans feel bullish. Not only has the new administration sided strongly with them, but as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports, the abortion rate in the United States has been falling steadily. The Guttmacher Institute reported last month that the rate of abortions per 1,000 women has fallen to the lowest rate since Roe v. Wade was decided in 1973. While the causes for this decrease are complex, many of us who are pro-life found this to be good news.

I hope my fellow evangelicals will join me in neither resting on the recent positive developments nor focusing solely on the traditional pro-life agenda. There is reason for hope, but there is so much yet to be done to protect the not yet born and those born into broken systems. The rate of incarceration for black males continues to be six times that of white males. Millions of lower-income Americans lack access to quality food, education and health care. We must also take up these causes, and others.

Or take another issue, right now in the news and central to my work: our country's response to the global refugee crisis. I understand the concern that many of my neighbors have about security. But how can I demand absolute security for myself (which I do not expect or demand in any other part of my life) while 65 million people are fleeing the very terrorism, war and persecution that are the antithesis of life?

The fact is, no refugees can simply choose to come to the United States. They can enter the United States only if invited by the State Department. More than that, they must generally undergo 18 to 24 months of vetting by the Department of Homeland Security, F.B.I. and other agencies.

Since 1980, three million refugees have been resettled in the United States. In that time not one has taken the life of an American in an act of terrorism. The conservative Cato Institute estimates that the likelihood of an individual American being killed in an act of terrorism committed by a refugee is one in 3.64 billion a year. Somehow it does not feel truly and fully pro-life to be unwilling to give up one-3.64 billionth of my security to make room for someone bombed out of their city, someone who is homeless, cold and unwelcomed.

I remain as concerned as ever about the well-being of children still in the womb, and I continue to advocate policies that protect them. I am pro-life — but I hope to become more so.