

Mennonite World Review

Dear President Trump: Provoking God?

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Dear President Trump:

Lent is a season to reflect upon and repent of all in our lives that is out of sync.

The Daily Lectionary readings for today are about *provoking*. The people provoke God to anger because of their stubbornness and rebellion. As they prepare to cross the Jordan after 40 years in the wilderness, Moses charges, “you have been rebellious against the LORD from the day you came out of the land of Egypt until you came to this place” (Deut. 9:7). The marketers and moneychangers provoke Jesus to anger by turning the temple into a profit-making business and taking advantage of the poor (John 2:14-17).

How might our nation be provoking God today? One way, I worry, is by our treatment of refugees and immigrants. The psalmist writes that God “executes justice for the oppressed” and “watches over the strangers” (Psalm 146:7,9). Should we not do the same?

Your new travel ban order, announced Monday, suspends the nation’s refugee program for 120 days and caps at 50,000 the number of refugees the United States will accept in a year.

Of course, proper vetting for the sake of security is appropriate. But this ban paints with too broad a brush.

During the years my wife Cindy and I lived in Jordan, we had many opportunities to hear the stories of Syrian refugees who were streaming into the country. They spoke of fleeing horrible violence to protect their children.

According to the UNHCR, Jordan, a country of only 6.5 million, has received more than 656,000 Syrian refugees in the past five years. A proportional response from the United States would be to receive 32 million refugees.

Research by Alex Nowrasteh, an immigration expert at the Cato Institute, shows that “Zero Americans have been killed by Syrian refugees in a terrorist attack in the United States.” Indeed, “Over the last four decades, 20 out of 3.25 million refugees welcomed to the United States have been convicted of attempting or committing terrorism on U.S. soil, and only three Americans have been killed in attacks committed by refugees — all by Cuban refugees in the 1970s.” (*The Atlantic*, Jan. 30, 2017)

By contrast, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that there were 10,945 firearm homicides in the U.S. in 2014 alone; and 20 people every minute are victims of physical

violence by an intimate partner. If national security is the issue, wouldn't it make more sense to invest resources in stopping these epidemics?

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. has said, "The time is always right to do the right thing." My prayer is that today, this nation will do the right thing.