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Refugees seeking safety find unforgiving reception

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Attorney General Jeff Sessions last month defended the Trump administration's policy of taking children from parents seeking refugee status at U.S. borders by paraphrasing the New Testament's Letter to the Romans. Sessions said, "I would cite you to the Apostle Paul and his clear and wise command in Romans 13, to obey the laws of the government because God has ordained the government for His purposes."

That's not exactly what it says, but one can find almost any action defensible if you read enough of the Bible. Romans also says, "Show hospitality," "Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you" and "Love does no wrong to a neighbor, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." The same Paul also wrote, in his Letter to the Hebrews, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers."

The Old Testament has similar edicts from God, who's quoted as saying, "You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt," "You shall have the same rule for the sojourner and for the native," etc.

Today there are sojourners (temporary residents) along the U.S./Mexico border, where most seek asylum – refugees seeking escape from life-threatening conflicts. The separation of families (and now the failure to reunite them) betrays our nation's past policies as well as religious faiths.

About 60 years ago, some 200,000 refugees fled dangers in Hungary, and Republican President Dwight Eisenhower ordered that 38,000 of them be welcomed in the United States; some relocated to Peoria, Galesburg and other downstate communities.

After admitting the harsh and heartless measures were intended to be a deterrent, Session added, "The previous administration wouldn't prosecute aliens who entered the country with children," which is a lie that President Trump has expanded on by accusing Democrats of seeking "open borders."

Driven by falsehoods and exaggerations, the current conversation assumes a crisis that the cruel response addresses. However, the real crisis is that response – one of Trump's own making.

True, strict treatment of immigrants didn't start with Trump. During the Obama administration, hundreds of families from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras were detained and deported. However, toddlers weren't wrested from parents' arms. President Obama deported a record 2.5 million people from 2009-2016 and increased Border Patrol staff, the Guardian newspaper has showed.

Mainstream/corporate Democrat Hillary Clinton campaigned to strengthen border security and remove visitors who overstay their visas, Politico reported. And even Democratic insurgent

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez – the socialist newcomer who upset incumbent Congressman Joe Crowley in New York’s recent primary – rejects open borders, telling reporters, “We have to have a secure border; we need to make sure the people are documented.”

The number of undocumented immigrants apprehended last year fell to 300,000, the lowest since 1971, according to U.S. Customs, but why let reality interfere with non-stop political campaigning?

Trump last month tweeted, “Democrats ... don’t care about crime and want illegal immigrants, no matter how bad they may be, to pour into and infest our country.”

Nonsense. Immigrants commit fewer crimes than U.S. citizens, according to the conservative Cato Institute; they aren’t eligible for food stamps or other public assistance but nevertheless pay taxes, says Cato’s Alex Nowrasteh; they don’t “steal jobs” but actually help U.S. workers and the economy, says the “center-right” American Action Forum and a report from the Department of Health and Human Services ordered by Trump conceded that refugees brought in \$63 billion more than they cost the government over the last 10 years.

Meanwhile, a delegation of Catholic Bishops this month visited the Brownsville, Texas, area to try to comfort those afflicted by the circumstances and conditions. Local Bishop Daniel E. Flores said the clergy wanted to deal with “the suffering of many, ... to give hope to the poorest and neediest, to tell them that the Christian people have not forgotten them.

“If we don’t say it, who will?” he asked.