

## God, Life, and Everything “#Bring Back Our Girls”

One of the most heart-wrenching news items these days is the kidnapping of more than 200 girls from school in Nigeria by the rebel group known as Boko Haram. There is nothing good that can be said about it, and aside from Boko Haram itself, I have not heard one word of support for this kidnapping.

If you don't know, the name of this terrorist organization means, "Western education is a sin," and they have been on a campaign of terror against western-style schools, especially schools that educate girls, for years. The group has killed thousands in the last five years, mostly in the northeast corner of the country. It has been a regional anti-government group, however, since 1995.

One reason we haven't really heard about Boko Haram before this kidnapping is that we generally don't pay attention to Africa. Many Americans still believe it is a country rather than the second most populous continent in the world composed of sixty-one countries. So to take notice of a relatively small terrorist group that's only been active in one corner of one country in Africa might be more than one could expect.

With the kidnapping of the girls, however, we have sat up and taken notice. The worldwide phenomenon known as #BringBackOurGirls has swept social media. From the president and first lady to school kids around the world, people are not only praying for these girls - who will likely be sold into forced marriages or worse - but demanding action from the Nigerian government and offering resources to help in the search.

Why? Why do we care? Why should we care? After all, it's not as if hundreds of people aren't killed every day by violence. It's not as if there aren't other insurgencies.

In fact, commentator George Will recently condemned the #BringBackOurGirls campaign as "cheap hashtag activism," an "exercise in self-esteem." Others have said the campaign is meaningless since Boko Haram likely does not pay attention to social media and couldn't care less about what people think.

But this mass-kidnapping has struck a nerve, and the social media campaign may serve a purpose beyond self-esteem. What might it do?

First, focusing on one specific case of injustice and evil may help us remember all who suffer similarly. We are called to pray for - and

physically aid - all who suffer, but sometimes one example helps make it real.

Second, the campaign is focused more on the Nigerian Government than on Boko Haram. The government has been slow to act, but with world-wide pressure mounting it has been more involved.

Third, the #BringBackOurGirls movement has gotten other governments involved, offering resources and support.

Fourth, this horrible incident and the social media campaign it incited has finally gotten westerners to pay attention to the vast, complex, and growing African continent. (For what it's worth, China has known for some time that many African countries are primed for explosive growth and has been investing widely there. Our short-term oriented companies have not seen it. Yet.)

Fifth, this kidnapping is not just an act of terror. It is an attack on women everywhere. The terrorists targeted a girls school in part because their warped brand of Islam does not allow girls to be educated. This is the time for the world to stand up and say education is a right. For everyone.

Sixth, #BringBackOurGirls is thus far a non-violent response to a violent action. I have no real hope that it will remain non-violent, but it has to be our starting point. For people of many religions (and let us remember that the girls are both Christian and Muslim), violence cannot be our first option.

Why have these girls affects so many around the world? Maybe because of the mass scale. Maybe because they're girls facing such a gruesome future. Maybe because of a Twitter campaign. Whatever the reason, now we DO know about them and, having hearts, we care. I encourage you to pray (or send positive energy if that's your expression), and keep informed. It's not much right now, but it's a start.