

God, Life, and Everything "Jesus and Terror"

Remember that I am a Christian. I am bound by my faith to follow the example and lead of Jesus Christ. If you are not a Christian, you can ignore this. But if you are, then you might want to seriously consider what Jesus says before jumping on any bandwagons.

I have to say this because in the wake of the Paris terrorist attack, I have seen self-proclaimed Christians abandon Jesus.

Here's an example. On Facebook someone I know put up a picture of a nuclear explosion - you know, the standard mushroom cloud. On the picture are these words: "Japan has been at peace with the USA since September 2, 1945. It's time we made peace with Islam."

This is not the way of Jesus. It is, in fact, anti-Christ.

The attack in Paris - and the reactions to it - are mind-bogglingly complex. Many have expressed their grief and sadness at the murders. This is appropriate and right to do.

Others have expressed their outrage that those Muslims are at it again. Marco Rubio, in addressing the Paris attack said, "They literally want to overthrow our society and replace it with their radical, Sunni Islamic view of the future. This is not a grievance-based conflict. This is a clash of civilizations."

As an article in The Atlantic notes, Rubio did not specify ISIS as "they." Rather he hinted that it was all Muslims - or at least all Sunnis. The absurdity of this is glaring. There are 6,000,000 Muslims in France. If even 1% of them were terrorists, that would be 60,000. That would amount to a lot of terror.

Moreover, it was a Muslim security guard who prevented one of the attackers from entering the Stade de France. He nearly lost his life when the attacker detonated a vest-bomb.

And let us not forget that the vast majority of victims of ISIS are Muslims, not Christians.

The fact is that the knee-jerk responses to these attacks - just as with every set of attacks we have experienced in recent years - a percentage of the population wants to lash out with violence. It says more about us than it does about Islam or terrorists. We are very ready to slaughter "them." Not all of us, of course, but a surprising number.

This troubles me because not only is our vengeful bloodlust unChristian, but it's blind. We are ready to lash out with no real understanding of who we want to kill. They're Muslims, they're all the same, right?

So, if we can't "get them," what do we do? We can't just sit still and let them destroy us!

Here are some suggestions.

First, calm down. These attacks weren't even in the US. We were not attacked.

Second, put it in perspective. Yes, it is horribly sad that so many people were murdered. But the total of terror victims - certainly in our country - pales to the number of plain old crime victims. Terrorists can not overthrow our society because they don't have the resources. They should be stopped, but they do not threaten the fabric of our society - only we can do that.

Third, the late French historian (just died this month) René Girard wrote that one of the most important things we can do to battle Islamic terrorism (or perhaps any terrorism) is to understand why they do it. Indiscriminately killing unarmed people does not come naturally - it has history. Islamic terrorism, he said, "exploits Islamic codes, but does not at all belong to classical Islamic theory. Today's terrorism is new, even from an Islamic point of view."

So learn what is going on in their minds. And it's no good to ask the question and then answer it for yourself. I've seen this: "Why do they hate us? Because they hate freedom." That is dishonest and has no interest in really figuring out what's going on.

Fourth, we would do well to not shy away from our own part in this. In our church, one of the sacraments is Confession (or Reconciliation). It is our belief that to pretend we have no sin, or to brush them off as of little significance is to never truly reconcile. We have to look at our complicity and address it - change our ways, seek forgiveness where necessary - but most importantly, talk openly and honestly. Don't start with what they did but what we did.

Remember, Europeans (and to a lesser degree Americans) have been militarily involved in the mideast for more than a hundred years. We have taken a lot of their resources, often without much compensation.

And remember, Al Qaida in Iraq, which would evolve into ISIS, was founded directly in response to our invasion of Iraq. When we left, they simply shifted focus. Our drone strikes - especially those which accidentally bomb wedding parties and schools - don't help people in that part of the world love us, either.

So, Christians, practice what Christ taught us in all cases, especially when we are attacked. Practice honest self-examination. Look at the beam in our eye before the mote in the other person's eye. Make restitution where required. Forgive. And in all things, love everyone - especially your enemy.

If we don't do these things, we can't truly claim to follow Christ.

Or to quote Charlie Chaplin in his classic movie, *The Great Dictator*: "Without these qualities, life will be violent, and all will be lost."