

Bill Rea ? Don?t let ISIS push us too far

If there has been one common message running throughout the Western world over the last week, it's that people have been called upon to take it easy, and not get too upset over the ISIS attacks last Friday in Paris.

That's a message that has brought new meaning to the expression, ?Easier said than done.?

That's been demonstrated a lot, probably all over the world, but certainly in these parts.

We have heard of at least two cases in Toronto in which Muslim women have been attacked and roughed up, evidently targeted because they were wearing hijabs. One of the women had been walking to her son's school to escort him home. That school is very close to the area I covered when I worked in the city, and there was a march in support of this woman Friday. This was one of those times when I wished I still worked there. I would have enjoyed covering that one.

The events that went on in Paris last Friday were dreadful, and I think most of us were touched by it. It hit home of a sort of personal level for me. My late father used to travel a lot on business, and 50 years ago, he would have been based in Paris for weeks at a time. Those were the days when little in the way of office work was done Sundays, so he used to kill time just walking through the city. Consequently, he got to know Paris very well, finding spots that no tour guide will ever show you. Ten years later, he showed his kids some of those spots when the family travelled overseas.

So yes, I have personal memories of Paris. And I am also mindful that a gawky Canadian kid accompanying his parents to Paris could have found himself in the line of fire last Friday.

Yet we can't blame an entire faith for the actions of a relatively few zealots, and that is precisely what we are dealing with here. And we certainly can't tolerate blaming an entire faith in a country like this one, that openly boasts about being inclusive. I have known many Muslims. I worked for a muslim family about 30 years ago, when the most prominent member of that faith in the world was Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the Iranian cleric who sanctioned the seizure of the American Embassy in 1979, resulting the hostage crisis that lasted more than a year. He was not a nice man, but the same certainly couldn't be said for the family for which I was working at the time.

I learned a lot about tolerance in those days. I like to think I have since learned more.

Just because fanatic followers of a particular faith think they have some divine right to go around killing innocent people doesn't mean that's an evil faith.

I was brought up in a Christian environment, dragged to Sunday school (usually protesting) by my mother, confirmed in the Anglican Church and married in a United Church, so I guess that makes me a Christian as opposed to anything else. Christianity is certainly not an evil faith, but go far enough back in history and you'll find some pretty shameful acts, all in the name of religion. I attended the Mayor's Prayer Breakfast a couple of weeks ago. Rev. Riscylla Shaw, of Christ Church in Bolton made reference to Papal Bulls, or decrees, that were issued in the 15th century. They apparently gave European explorers legal claims to lands that were inhabited by non-Christians, with the understanding that these people could convert. If they didn't, they could be enslaved or killed.

Things have come a long way since the 15th century. I don't think I could picture Pope Francis issuing such a decree today. Indeed, he's on the record as calling for respect of other faiths. And there's still lots of room for improvement.

Last Friday's attacks have sparked a lot of reaction, and possibly over-reaction. People have every right to be concerned, but we shouldn't go overboard. Those who attacked those women in Toronto have gone too far. I'm sure there have been similar attacks in places all over the world. They are worrisome, because they are going after the wrong people. And such panic is probably one of the things ISIS was hoping for.

For sure, we should be going after the real villains, those who masterminded and carried out these attacks. The French authorities, from what I've seen and read, have been doing a good job of cracking down, but it's not just their fight. Canada has to make sure it's engaged in this fight.

It might be easy for some to dismiss this whole episode as happening thousands of miles away. Let us not forget that it's no great trick for a terrorist, or group of terrorists, to hop on a plane and fly into Pearson International Airport. In that event, it really becomes our problem, and we're going to want other countries backing us up. So we had better show we're prepared to be at the table too.

But we also have to be prepared to go about our daily lives as much as possible, lest ISIS gets the wrong idea.

I remember I once re-adjusted my planning, making sure my acts weren't governed by people I despised.

A man named Salman Rushdie wrote a book called The Satanic Verses. Early in 1989, the aforementioned Ayatollah Khomeini called for Rushdie's death because of the book, an act that became an international media sensation. It also made The Satanic Verses an instant hit. It was one of the most sought-after books around.

I think it was the Saturday after the story broke that I strolled into a book store not far from where I was living at the time. I was planning to see if I could get a copy of the book. Copies were in abundance, as were customers. There was a long line at the check-out counter, and everyone in it had at least one copy of *The Satanic Verses* under his or her arm. And there were still plenty left on the display tables. I picked one up and got into line.

And then I started thinking.

I had never heard about this book or author until stories of the controversy hit the media. I was a little curious about what it contained, but was that the real reason for buying it, or was I just making some sort of stand against a man for whom I had very little use. I realized I was about to pay several of my hard-earned bucks in a symbolic gesture aimed at telling some uppity Ayatollah to get stuffed. It was Khomeini who was governing my actions. Was that what I wanted?

I put the book back where I found it, and left the store.

Most of us are not prepared to go to arms to fight ISIS, and since we're not trained for such things, we shouldn't. Let the pros deal with it, and let the government have them do it. And we can all stand on the sidelines and cheer for the good guys

