

PARIS RESPONSE

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Wise people say that what matters most in life is not what happens to us so much as how we respond. After all, many of the things that happen are out with our control but we alone can determine our reaction.

When we witness dreadful events such as those in Paris over the last days, it does not take long before shock turns to outrage. That sense of anger is understandable; what happened in France was terrible and it's at this point that we face the challenge of responding well. We can't just sit back and do nothing. But what we do is so important now.

There is the danger of lashing out at those who are different. There are Muslim communities in France and around the world who may become targets, as if they were somehow to blame – as if the so-called Islamic State were truly representing their faith. There are the refugees arriving in Scotland from Syria and some are now predicting a frosty welcome for them on the basis of news reports that one of gunmen involved in the attack comes from Syria.

And yet there is always an opportunity for good to come out of terrible situations, as the Bible assures us. Many people have spoken of these attacks as being against *all of France* or *all of civilisation* or *all of God's people*. They may be poetic words but they are true nonetheless. And they are a cause for hope. There is an opportunity to unite together and work together for the common good, and for the defence of ordinary peaceful people around the world.

One image from the news over these last days that sticks in my mind is that of Presidents Obama and Putin sitting talking in a hotel lobby, bending over a low table with their heads almost banging together. Nations putting their heads together and co-operating with one another to combat terror and promote safety is surely one good that can come from such wanton destruction of life.

Whatever our nationality, whatever our faith, we need to stand together against such destructive acts. We need to react in a way that seeks to bring criminals to justice but at the same time be mindful not to unfairly blame or scapegoat innocent people.

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