

**ISLAM in the West is rarely discussed in the manner it should be. Openly. Honestly. Robustly. Rationally. Too often discussion is left to fringes of society. It's disregarded as the chatter of bigots and nutters. If Liberal MP Cory Bernardi says anything on the topic on ABC's top rating talkfest, Q & A, he's invariably met with eye rolls, raised eyebrows or smirks, usually all three. The audience will openly jeer. It's more than safe to talk about Islamophobia. You get plaudits. But talk about Islam outside this orthodox prism and you can expect to be treated in polite circles as offensive and insulting.**

After the terrorist attacks in Paris, French President Francois Hollande said terrorists "have nothing to do with the Muslim religion." Our leaders echo these words about Islam when Islamic terrorists strike. But these gentle words of assurance, said with the best of intentions, cannot mask the fact that the more we say it's not about Islam, the more we are avoiding a debate that is critical to defeat Islamic terrorists.

We are familiar with violence in the name of Islam in Muslim countries. The same day Islamic terrorists struck in Paris, a blogger in Saudi Arabia was lashed 50 times for insulting a Saudi cleric. His full punishment is 1000 lashes and a 10-year prison term. In Pakistan, laws punish blasphemy with death. Salmaan Taseer, the governor of Punjab, was murdered by a vigilante after he asked for a pardon for a Christian woman sentenced to death for insulting the prophet Mohammed.

If violence in the name of Allah was confined to Muslim countries we might avoid this conversation. But globalisation means the issue sits squarely on our doorstep. The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation wants a worldwide ban on blasphemy. And migration means more and more Islamic terrorists are striking directly at us — a kosher supermarket in the suburbs of Paris, the office of a French satirical newspaper, a Jewish day school in Toulouse, a cafe in the middle of Sydney, trains and buses in London, a marathon in Boston, a soldier on a Woolwich street in London, on Madrid trains, a Jewish museum in Brussels, policemen on a Melbourne street, soldiers in Quebec, Canada's parliament in Ottawa and much more. Last week in Belgium, authorities thwarted an attack by Islamic terrorists to murder police.

After the Paris terrorist attacks, the Grand Mufti of Australia, Ibrahim Abu Mohammed, said "we don't want to comment on the sad events .... because we don't have the need to comment or to apologise on every insane act that a criminal of Muslim background commits around the world."

The Grand Mufti need not apologise but he is wrong to refuse to comment. Precisely because he is a Muslim leader in a western country, he and other Muslim leaders must lead the way in asking why young men are killing innocent people in the name of Islam.

We cannot ignore the common thread. Responsible leaders, be they of political parties or of Muslim communities must ask why each attack was carried out, or planned, in the name of Allah.

In many Islamic countries, there is no separation of church and state. Religious laws are the apparatus of the state. Hence blasphemy laws are used to sentence to death those who insult the prophet. Where is the equivalent in the Islamic faith of "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's"? Isn't it incumbent on us to ask whether the absence of a clear separation of church and state in the Islamic faith is used by terrorists to justify their killing? If Pakistan uses the Koran to justify killing a woman for

offending the prophet, isn't it little wonder that Islamic terrorists targeted the cartoonists and journalists at Charlie Hebdo for doing the same?

Western countries can and will use security laws, intelligence operations and police forces to catch Islamic terrorists and keep us safe. In Dresden, a protest on Monday about the Islamification of the West was called off due to security concerns. But piecemeal arrests, court convictions, and calling off a protest won't resolve what is a far broader battle.

Sure, let's say bravo to the Mayor of Rotterdam in the Netherlands, Ahmed Aboutaleb who is a Muslim and told a Dutch current affairs show last week: "If you don't like freedom, for heaven's sake pack your bags and leave. If you do not like it here because some humorists you don't like are making a newspaper, may I then say you can f\*\*\* off."

But a much bigger ideological debate must also be had. If the Grand Mufti of Australia refuses to be part of it, he should relinquish his role. If those so-called leaders of the Muslim communities at the Islamic Council of Victoria keep on ducking the issue, using allegations of Islamophobia to avoid the real questions, they have zero value as leaders. They should be replaced, denounced by Muslims as not representing the Muslim community.

On the first day of this new year, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi said "I say and repeat again that we are in need of a religious revolution. You, imams, are responsible before Allah. The entire world ... is waiting for your next move ... because the Islamic world is being torn, it is being destroyed, it is being lost — and it is being lost by our own hands."

We cannot wait for imams to lead this debate. So what of our own leaders given we are feeling the deadly forces of this failure of an Islamic reformation? As David Harris, executive director of the American Jewish Committee, a global advocacy organisation, told me last year during a wide-ranging discussion about Islamic terrorism, "Every generation needs a Winston Churchill — a leader who sees events with absolute clarity and courage, who spots the seemingly disparate pieces and the links among them, and who mobilises the tools of language to awaken an often sleeping world and rouse it to resolute action."

The reason we have avoided this debate has become symbolic of where free speech in western liberal democracies has gone awry. We don't want to offend. We don't want to insult. There are laws that tell us we must not offend or insult. We shy away from the hard conversations. But only by openly debating the role of Islam in the West — even if that offends some Muslims — will we have some chance of ending decades of terrorism on our streets.