

Charlie Hebdo Defends Western Civilization

It is appropriate and gratifying that the Islamic terrorists who, armed with military Kalashnikov weapons in a well-planned attack, murdered 12 people, the chief editor and his staff, in the office of the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* (CH) in Paris on January 7, 2014, were killed two days later by French police. It is even more heartening that the journal, in response to the brutal murders of their colleagues, is planning a print run of a million copies of the next edition, far more than the typical run of 60,000. It is a sign that the Islamic murderers have not won.

It is clear that the massacre was a deliberate act of intimidation, an attack on freedom of expression of a journal that had satirized Islam and its founder, as well as other religions. CH has not been intimidated or has not retreated into a condition of self-censorship or fear of being possibly confronted by more death threats, bombings, and murder.

The magazine is now world famous. Few of us have the remarkable courage and bravery of the CH staff or willingness to take serious risks of injury or death. We can and should register that we share the CH values of freedom. As a minimum it behooves every reader of *NER* to applaud the courage of the CH, to show solidarity with the journal, and buy at least one copy of the forthcoming edition.

There are two essential issues relevant to the massacre that must be faced. One is the meaningfulness of freedom of speech and action. The other is the military weapons of the murderers and their connection to the religion which they claimed they were avenging.

Every rational person is aware that Charlie Hebdo (CH), if

sometimes coarse, imprudent, offensive, and indiscreet, exemplified freedom of expression, a vital part of French and any other democratic society. In the land of Voltaire CH felt free to speak in a controversial and sometimes tasteless manner. It upheld the principle that free speech was not established to protect non-controversial speech but is most meaningful when it is relevant to unorthodox utterances that cause dissent and even anger.

In his comments in Federalist Paper, 63, James Madison touched on the problem of extremism. "Liberty" he wrote, "may be endangered by the abuses of liberty, as well as by the abuses of power." In general, an argument of this kind would go that we should not tolerate the kind of intolerance that provokes a violent reaction. More than one commentator on CH in the mass media has suggested that common sense should have been exercised by the journal, which purports to strike a blow for freedom, but which deliberately provoked Muslims.

Much of the commentary on the brutal murders has been inadequate for a number of reasons. First, the mass murders of writers and cartoonists exercising their rights of free expression cannot be excused or explained away on the grounds of possible lack of "common sense." Foolish or not, freedom of expression should not be restrained except in exceptional cases of security. It does take backbone to defend free speech.

The murderers were usually correctly referred to as "terrorists," but not always was their religion mentioned. When the media did mention that the terrorists were Muslims the usual conclusion was that the criminal acts were committed by three men who were Muslims and not by the Muslim community or a result of their Muslim religion. It is, of course, valid to hold that the Muslim community cannot be charged with collective guilt. But what is crucial is that the murderers told us the crimes were committed in the name of Allah, *Allahu Akbar*, and that they were avenging the Honor of the Prophet.

The terrorist attack was Islamist, carried out in the name of radical Islam. Even if it true that the Islamic State and these particular two terrorists do not correctly represent "Islam," it is undeniable that it is only Islamic terrorism that has occurred world wide: in New York, London, Paris, Fort Hood, Glasgow, Brussels, Peshawar, Mumbai, Israel, Somalia, Nigeria, Mali, Denmark, Madrid, Iraq and Syria.

The real issue relevant to the massacre and the one confronting the world is not simply one of defending the principle of free speech, important though that is. The fundamental problem is how to deal with the Islamist threat to Western civilization and way of life. In a revealing column in *USAToday* published on January 8, 2015 an individual named Anjem Choudary, identified as a radial Muslim cleric, wrote that the murders at CH were justified under Islamic law. The strict punishment for mocking Islam and the Prophet Muhammad he asserts is capital punishment implemented by an Islamic State. "This is because the Messenger Muhammad said, "Whoever insults a Prophet kills him."

The events at CH bring up again the troubling issue of the lack of any real dialogue between Muslims and others about religion and free speech, and the clash of civilizations between Islamic countries and the democratic Western world. Even those who deny the validity of any clash cannot excuse the increasingly assertive thrust by Islamic fundamentalists and its implementation through violence and the installation of sharia government in areas they control.

The mainstream media has been unduly occupied with one possible consequence of the murders, a backlash that will strengthen those European parties calling for tougher immigration controls. It expresses concern about possible greater European hostility towards Muslims, and the increase of "Islamophobia", a disease invented by Arab clerics though not yet in the medical books.

The fear of some of the media is that European political parties and groups, the French National Front led by Marine Le Pen, the Netherlands Freedom Party led by Geert Wilders, the Italian Northern League led by Matteo Salvini, and the Danish People's Party led by Kristian Thulesen Dahl, will become stronger political forces. Those parties along with many individuals in European countries are already troubled by the rapid growth of Islam in Europe, faster than any other religion. There are now more than 45 million Muslims in Europe: the Muslim population is 10 per cent of the population of Paris, 20 per cent of Stockholm, 25 per cent of Birmingham.

Two things are of concern to Europeans. One is the fact that in many cases, particularly in France, Muslims are not integrated, and do not seem prepared to be integrated into the general community. The other is the problem created by the thousands of Muslims who have left their European countries of residence to join and fight for the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. This involvement cannot be excused as caused by factors such as high unemployment, slow European economic growth, inability to wear burqas, sense of grievance in a world they did not make, or a supposed search for identity they cannot find in France and elsewhere in Europe. Western European countries, and now the US, are aware not only of a lack of loyalty to their countries by jihadists born in European countries, such as the murderers of CH, but also of the danger of attacks on high profile targets by those jihadists who have returned from their activity in Syria and Iraq.

It is worth stating that there is a vital difference between the Muslim immigrants and those of other groups. Some of the latter, such as minority groups in the US, may not desire to be fully integrated into the national society, but they accept the general rules and abide by the thrust of national law. The sad reality is that many Muslims have not done so, and not only refuse to accept the validity of the rules of the society in which they live, but are prepared to act against them.

As a result of the massacre at CH the world is aware that the Islamist jihadists are not just a militant cult, as Secretary of State John Kerry suggested in September 2014, but a real and present danger to Western civilization.

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