

## Among Ourselves

### Reign of Faith and Reason??

In this issue of INFO, we look at two controversies that have been a source of great concern to people of all faiths, especially in the relationship between Muslims and Christians.

We begin with the controversy surrounding the speech of Pope Benedict XVI entitled 'Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections'. It may not have been strange that initial media reports and reactions drew varied responses from both Muslims and Christians alike. There are many unanswered questions that can only be found by looking at the full text of the speech bearing in mind both the context in which the ideas that were developed in this philosophical discourse, as well as the intent of the speaker.

We next look at the Danish Cartoon controversy where we have included a number of articles that would enable us to obtain a more holistic picture of the issues related to this controversy. These articles reflect a wide spectrum of views and opinions which attempt to locate the source of the differences and identify ways towards mutual respect and understanding.

This Editorial focuses on the various implications of the contents and intent of the message of the Pope Benedict VI at the University of Regensburg on the 12<sup>th</sup> of September 2006. The voices from many in the Muslim world claim that his presentation was a blatant attack on Islam. At the same time Christians have argued that it was a call for a serious introspection on the part of the West. We have included in this issue the various views and positions. However, we need to be conscious not to fall into the trap of attempting to slot these responses into the stereotypical categories of traditionalists, moderates, progressives, fundamentalists or extremists. It is therefore vital that we do not look at these different perspectives as conflicting but as differences that need to be further scrutinised. This is because we urgently need to move towards a greater mutuality in understanding the underlying paradigms and perspectives in order to work towards the greater common good of humanity.

It is significant that a quote to illustrate a philosophical argument about violence has provoked such anger from various Muslim quarters. Many have asked the question: Was he speaking as a Pope or as a Professor? Was his statement a political slogan or an attempt to understand the philosophical roots of the growing violence and wars in the world today? Those scrutinising the core of his message at Regensburg, can see that the reference to the controversial quote from the

Byzantine Christian Emperor, Manuel II Paleologus, was an integral part of this philosophical discourse which attempted to make the point that reason cannot justify violence. The argument of the Emperor was that violence is incompatible with the nature of God and the nature of the soul. The most important question that each believer has to ask is: How many Christians and Muslims today really believe that violence by its very nature is not in keeping with the plan of the Divine?

Many of us would like to believe that the Pope in quoting this text is not only condemning the use of violence by some Muslims today, but is also challenging and confronting anyone who engages in violence. This has to bring one to the realisation that one ceases being a believer, be s/he Christian, Hindu or Muslim, when one promotes violence, as this goes against Reason and God, who is the source of Reason. This position is reflected in the first Encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI, *God is Love (Deus Caritas Est)*, where the proclamation of the Christian God as Love is intimately linked to the charity (Caritas – Love) for each human person and justice for the whole human family. This is the only path to true Peace and Reconciliation in the world today. Peace flows from our faith in God; and this faith includes reason which gradually seeks to find expression as a lived faith in the world of violence, war and inequalities today.

The source that Pope Benedict used seems to be prejudicial. However does it undermine the validity and relevance of the argument for our times? Put into context, the Emperor Manuel II who, when under siege from Muslim armies, questioned the religious legitimacy of violence. The Emperor was writing around the year 1400 as he fought to keep the Turks, from overrunning his empire that finally fell into their hands in 1453. Was the Pope in repeating Manuel's claim that the demand to spread Islam by the sword was 'evil and inhuman', also guilty of condemning only the violence of Muslims? Perhaps he might not have been so 'misconstrued', as he put it, if he had also similarly referred to the violence of the Crusades.

The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church (No: 496 - 497) published in 2004, as a result of more than 100 years of study and discernment, states the official position on violence:

con't on page 2>

---

---

*“Violence is never a proper response. With the conviction of her faith in Christ and with the awareness of her mission, the Church proclaims “that violence is evil, that violence is unacceptable as a solution to problems, that violence is unworthy of man. Violence is a lie, for it goes against the truth of our faith, the truth of humanity. Violence destroys what it claims to defend: the dignity, the life, the freedom of human beings.”*

*The contemporary world too needs the witness of unarmed prophets, who are often the objects of ridicule. “Those who renounce violence and bloodshed and, in order to safeguard human rights, make use of those means of defence available to the weakest, bear witness to evangelical charity, provided they do so without harming the rights and obligations of other men and societies. They bear legitimate witness to the gravity of the physical and moral risk of recourse to violence, with all its destruction and death.”*

*The Magisterium condemns “the savagery of war” and asks that war be considered in a new way. In fact, “it is hardly possible to imagine that in an atomic era, war could be used as an instrument of justice. War is a “scourge” and is never an appropriate way to resolve problems that arises between nations, “it is never been and it will never be”, because it creates new and still more complicated conflicts. When it erupts, war becomes an “unnecessary massacre”, an “adventure without return” that compromises humanity’s present and threatens its future. “Nothing is lost by peace. Everything is lost by war. The damage caused by an armed conflict is not only material but also moral. In the end, war is “the failure of all true humanism”, it is always a defeat for humanity: never again some peoples against others, never again! ...no more way, no more war!”*

This would be the views of both the current Pope and the Universal Church on violence. What was therefore the point of this conversation between the Emperor and the scholar? The full text of the Pope can be seen not as a condemnation of violence perpetrated by some Muslims, but as an appeal to Christians to a rediscovery of their biblical faith. The Pope attempts to show that in the Hellenistic period, Christianity encountered the best of Greek thought at a deep level, resulting in a mutual enrichment of faith and reason. To be able to dialogue with the cultures of today thus requires a return to the foundations of western civilisation rooted in reason and in dialogue with faith. The statement by the Byzantine Emperor to the Persian Muslim highlights the need to bring together the Christian faith and reason as the premise for an on going dialogue with people of other faiths. This may be more and more difficult to attain in an increasingly secularising Europe and particularly in a growing, and perhaps misplaced, sense of fear generated by the increasing numbers of Muslims in Europe.

The Pope concluded that positive aspects and insights of the modern age are not to be rejected. Neither can we relegate religion to the margins of social life. We cannot run away from the fundamental issue as to whether acting unreasonably contradicts God’s nature. The challenge today is therefore to return to the historic Christian faith in

consonance with reason. It has to begin with an intra-ecclesial dialogue and critique on the essentials and the fundamentals of the Christian faith. This will prepare us to enter into dialogue with people of all faiths today. Moving us to our roots will give us new sources to enrich our genuine dialogue with all cultures and religions – a dialogue so urgently needed today.

We are all aware of the turmoil that this statement has created in the Muslim world. To make matter worse, these events must have also reinforced in the minds and hearts of those who witnessed these angry reactions in the media, their own sense of fear of retaliation and revenge. The question therefore has to be whether this ‘imprudent’ quote was a condemnation of violence in parts of the Muslim world or a challenge to end all forms of violence in the world today. To some, Manuel’s challenge of Byzantine Christianity to ‘Muslim Violence’ seems also to be the same challenge that needs to be posed to repudiate ‘Christian Violence’. In fact, Byzantine orthodoxy helped formulate the first just war theories, which argued that Christians should only engage in warfare for defensive purposes. But as we have seen today, even the notions related to just wars are being redefined in the context of ‘terrorism’ and pre-emptive attacks as a justification for global peace and security.

So the Pope’s authoritative stand seems to be also a double edged sword: it is a denunciation that applies equally to Christians and to Muslims, as well as to those who wage war in the name of God and religion. Has the real message of the Pope’s lecture been missed? Theologically, it is apparent that we need to chart a common path for all the monotheistic faiths and come to the realisation that there have been perversions in the use of war and violence. Indeed, he suggested that insofar as Islam has gone wrong, so has Christianity.

Pope Benedict argued further that the common paradigm that underpins the illegitimate justification of war by religion is the separation of faith and reason. The hallmark of fundamentalism is the claim to have direct, unmediated access to the will of God. Reason prevents this logic by stressing that knowledge of God is never direct, but is always partial, limited and mediated. The recognition of the impossibility of direct knowledge of God should prevent people from killing in his name. In fact, the Pope’s lecture has brought into focus the need for a new kind of Interreligious Dialogue. It acknowledges that a fresh engagement among faiths is an urgent necessity today. Although the Second Vatican Council and the teachings of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences have recognised the importance of dialogue, many would claim it has been a “liberal dialogue” that has had limited impact in the global arena. This may have been due to our inability to enter into a genuine dialogue with the fundamentals and essentials of our own faith and faith traditions. Side by side with this may have been the framework of various forms of “secular fundamentalism”: the tendency to make rationalism the new name for God, without the ability to lend a listening year to the voices of the Divine rooted in our revealed faiths. One form of this is the rampant and predominant economic rationalism of globalisation and its

---

accompanying political and cultural homogenisation. Are religions so divided in their inner core that they are unable to offer a new and radical solution confronting the post-modern world?

Liberal models of interfaith understanding rely on exactly the separation of faith and reason that the Pope sees in religious fundamentalism. Reason shows us that there is only one God but faiths are assumed to be private and mutually incompatible. Thus they are relegated to an interior sphere that they cannot meet and debate with each other. Secular reason, understood as being value-free and religiously neutral is thus seen as the way to promote and protect the interactions of these privatised faiths. Hence, it is to be expected that religious people have become more and more involved with their institutional self-preservation, rather than make courageous moves into the “world of the secular” (defined as the political, economic and social) in order to nurture them with the spiritual dimensions of their faith. But this seems to be only possible with the merger of faith with reason and the movement to a higher level of dialogue with people of other faiths who are also ready to be involved in a dialogue of mutuality and graduality.

The Pope in highlighting the importance of mutual dialogue may see again the resurgence of a new era of dialogue and the wish to restore the possibility of the great faiths talking to each other. It is not about going back to the Middle Ages but to be able to take the middle path, when faith and reason are not separated and where Christians could attempt to understand the unique God Experiences as a Human Person who happens to be a Muslim and Muslims to do likewise. We hope that the Church in Asia takes the cue with sensitivity and courage to enter into an authentic theological engagement among the people of all faiths in Asia and especially with our Muslim sisters and brothers.

**Our history has shown us that the path through mutual dialogue today in spite of our differences and divergent world views cannot be relegated to politicians, but has to be the responsibility of intellectuals, and religious and civil leaders to engage in genuine dialogue and to be deeply in touch with the faith sentiments of their respective believers.**

The lesson to be learned from this controversy, according to the head of the French Council for the Muslim Religion, Dalil Boubakeur, is for the Catholic Church to clarify its position so that it does not confuse Islam, which is a revealed religion, with Islamism which is not a religion but a political ideology. We, as Christians at the same time need to make a clear distinction between our fundamental beliefs as Christians and the way Christians have also resorted to violence both in our historical past and in the world today. Our history has shown us that the path through mutual dialogue today in spite of our differences and divergent world views cannot be relegated to politicians, but has to be the responsibility of intellectuals, and religious and civil leaders to engage in genuine dialogue and to be deeply in touch with the faith sentiments of their respective believers.

Those who have known Pope Benedict as an intellectual would claim that the topic of his presentation on Faith and Reason is also the central theme of his pontificate. Europe in general and his native homeland in particular, is facing a new crisis rooted in the rise of various forms of secularism. This fight against secularism has to be addressed at its very foundation as summed up in the penultimate paragraph of his speech: “The West has long been endangered by this aversion to the questions which underlie its rationality, and can only suffer great harm thereby. The courage to engage the whole breadth of reason, and not the denial of its grandeur — this is the programme with which a theology grounded in biblical faith enters in the debates of our time”. It was an urgent appeal to the university community to rediscover reason (logos) as the path to a true dialogue of cultures.

Our experiences as Church in Asia and our on-going daily encounters with millions of Muslims affirm our belief that we can be one of the key agents to heal the wounds of the past and the present. We need to seek earnestly to promote mutual understanding that can only come through a greater commitment to compassionate, humanitarian endeavours and projects that promote justice and sustainable development in countries plagued by vicious cycles of dehumanising poverty, including in countries with predominantly Muslim populations. This movement towards harmony has to begin with a reassertion of reason that “is not deaf to the divine and which relegates religion into the realm of the subcultures (is) incapable of entering into the dialogue of cultures”. We are sure that our way forward to a new harmony in the world and in Asia has to be with a greater sensitivity to the realities of people of other faiths. This can begin with a critique of our own inadequacies and failings and at the same time through a firm commitment to our fundamental beliefs that will act as our pledge to the well being of the whole of humanity.

**Br. Anthony Rogers, FSC**



---

256 reads: "There is no compulsion in religion". According to the experts, this is one of the suras of the early period, when Mohammed was still powerless and under threat. But naturally the emperor also knew the instructions, developed later and recorded in the Qur'an, concerning holy war. Without descending to details, such as the difference in treatment accorded to those who have the "Book" and the "infidels", he addresses his interlocutor with a startling brusqueness, a brusqueness which leaves us astounded, on the central question about the relationship between religion and violence in general, saying: "Show me just what Mohammed brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached". The emperor, after having expressed himself so forcefully, goes on to explain in detail the reasons why spreading the faith through violence is something unreasonable. Violence is incompatible with the nature of God and the nature of the soul. "God", he says, "is not pleased by blood - and not acting reasonably (ὁδὴ ἔυῆ) is contrary to God's nature. Faith is born of the soul, not the body. Whoever would lead someone to faith needs the ability to speak well and to reason properly, without violence and threats... To convince a reasonable soul, one does not need a strong arm, or weapons of any kind, or any other means of threatening a person with death...".

The decisive statement in this argument against violent conversion is this: not to act in accordance with reason is contrary to God's nature. The editor, Theodore Khoury, observes: For the emperor, as a Byzantine shaped by Greek philosophy, this statement is self-evident. But for Muslim teaching, God is absolutely transcendent. His will is not bound up with any of our categories, even that of rationality. Here Khoury quotes a work of the noted French Islamist R. Arnaldez, who points out that Ibn Hazm went so far as to state that God is not bound even by his own word, and that nothing would oblige him to reveal the truth to us. Were it God's will, we would even have to practise idolatry.

At this point, as far as understanding of God and thus the concrete practice of religion is concerned, we are faced with an unavoidable dilemma. Is the conviction that acting unreasonably contradicts God's nature merely a Greek idea, or is it always and intrinsically true? I believe that here we can see the profound harmony between what is Greek in the best sense of the word and the biblical understanding of faith in God. Modifying the first verse of the Book of Genesis, the first verse of the whole Bible, John began the prologue of his Gospel with the words: "In the beginning was the ἔυῆ". This is the very word used by the emperor: God acts, ὁδὴ ἔυῆ, with *logos*. *Logos* means both reason and word - a reason which is creative and capable of self-communication, precisely as reason. John thus spoke the final word on the biblical concept of God, and in this word all the often toilsome and tortuous threads of biblical faith find their culmination and synthesis. In the beginning was the *logos*, and the *logos* is God, says the Evangelist. The encounter between the Biblical message and Greek thought did not happen by chance. The vision of Saint Paul, who saw the roads to Asia barred and in a dream saw a Macedonian man plead with

him: "Come over to Macedonia and help us!" (cf. *Acts* 16:6-10) - this vision can be interpreted as a "distillation" of the intrinsic necessity of a rapprochement between Biblical faith and Greek inquiry.

In point of fact, this rapprochement had been going on for some time. The mysterious name of God, revealed from the burning bush, a name which separates this God from all other divinities with their many names and simply declares "I am", already presents a challenge to the notion of myth, to which Socrates' attempt to vanquish and transcend myth stands in close analogy. Within the Old Testament, the process which started at the burning bush came to new maturity at the time of the Exile, when the God of Israel, an Israel now deprived of its land and worship, was proclaimed as the God of heaven and earth and described in a simple formula which echoes the words uttered at the burning bush: "I am". This new understanding of God is accompanied by a kind of enlightenment, which finds stark expression in the mockery of gods who are merely the work of human hands (cf. *Ps* 115). Thus, despite the bitter conflict with those Hellenistic rulers who sought to accommodate it forcibly to the customs and idolatrous cult of the Greeks, biblical faith, in the Hellenistic period, encountered the best of Greek thought at a deep level, resulting in a mutual enrichment evident especially in the later wisdom literature. Today we know that the Greek translation of the Old Testament produced at Alexandria - the Septuagint - is more than a simple (and in that sense really less than satisfactory) translation of the Hebrew text: it is an independent textual witness and a distinct and important step in the history of revelation, one which brought about this encounter in a way that was decisive for the birth and spread of Christianity. A profound encounter of faith and reason is taking place here, an encounter between genuine enlightenment and religion. From the very heart of Christian faith and, at the same time, the heart of Greek thought now joined to faith, Manuel II was able to say: Not to act "with *logos*" is contrary to God's nature.

In all honesty, one must observe that in the late Middle Ages we find trends in theology which would sunder this synthesis between the Greek spirit and the Christian spirit. In contrast with the so-called intellectualism of Augustine and Thomas, there arose with Duns Scotus a voluntarism which, in its later developments, led to the claim that we can only know God's *voluntas ordinata*. Beyond this is the realm of God's freedom, in virtue of which he could have done the opposite of everything he has actually done. This gives rise to positions which clearly approach those of Ibn Hazm and might even lead to the image of a capricious God, who is not even bound to truth and goodness. God's transcendence and otherness are so exalted that our reason, our sense of the true and good, are no longer an authentic mirror of God, whose deepest possibilities remain eternally unattainable and hidden behind his actual decisions. As opposed to this, the faith of the Church has always insisted that between God and us, between his eternal Creator Spirit and our created reason there exists a real analogy, in which - as the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 stated - unlikeness remains infinitely greater than likeness, yet not to the point of abolishing analogy and its

---

language. God does not become more divine when we push him away from us in a sheer, impenetrable voluntarism; rather, the truly divine God is the God who has revealed himself as *logos* and, as *logos*, has acted and continues to act lovingly on our behalf. Certainly, love, as Saint Paul says, “transcends” knowledge and is thereby capable of perceiving more than thought alone (cf. *Eph* 3:19); nonetheless it continues to be love of the God who is *Logos*. Consequently, Christian “*εὐαγγέλιον*”, worship in harmony with the/worship is, again to quote Paul - “*ἔναντιον* eternal Word and with our reason (cf. *Rom* 12:1).

This inner rapprochement between Biblical faith and Greek philosophical inquiry was an event of decisive importance not only from the standpoint of the history of religions, but also from that of world history - it is an event which concerns us even today. Given this convergence, it is not surprising that Christianity, despite its origins and some significant developments in the East, finally took on its historically decisive character in Europe. We can also express this the other way around: this convergence, with the subsequent addition of the Roman heritage, created Europe and remains the foundation of what can rightly be called Europe.

The thesis that the critically purified Greek heritage forms an integral part of Christian faith has been countered by the call for a dehellenization of Christianity - a call which has more and more dominated theological discussions since the beginning of the modern age. Viewed more closely, three stages can be observed in the programme of dehellenization: although interconnected, they are clearly distinct from one another in their motivations and objectives.

Dehellenization first emerges in connection with the postulates of the Reformation in the sixteenth century. Looking at the tradition of scholastic theology, the Reformers thought they were confronted with a faith system totally conditioned by philosophy, that is to say an articulation of the faith based on an alien system of thought. As a result, faith no longer appeared as a living historical Word but as one element of an overarching philosophical system. The principle of *sola scriptura*, on the other hand, sought faith in its pure, primordial form, as originally found in the biblical Word. Metaphysics appeared as a premise derived from another source, from which faith had to be liberated in order to become once more fully itself. When Kant stated that he needed to set thinking aside in order to make room for faith, he carried this programme forward with a radicalism that the Reformers could never have foreseen. He thus anchored faith exclusively in practical reason, denying it access to reality as a whole.

The liberal theology of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries ushered in a second stage in the process of dehellenization, with Adolf von Harnack as its outstanding representative. When I was a student, and in the early years of my teaching, this programme was highly influential in Catholic theology too. It took as its point of departure Pascal’s distinction between the God of the philosophers and the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In my inaugural lecture at Bonn in 1959, I tried to address the issue, and I do not intend to repeat here what I said on that occasion, but I would like to

describe at least briefly what was new about this second stage of dehellenization. Harnack’s central idea was to return simply to the man Jesus and to his simple message, underneath the accretions of theology and indeed of hellenization: this simple message was seen as the culmination of the religious development of humanity. Jesus was said to have put an end to worship in favour of morality. In the end he was presented as the father of a humanitarian moral message. Fundamentally, Harnack’s goal was to bring Christianity back into harmony with modern reason, liberating it, that is to say, from seemingly philosophical and theological elements, such as faith in Christ’s divinity and the triune God. In this sense, historical-critical exegesis of the New Testament, as he saw it, restored to theology its place within the university: theology, for Harnack, is something essentially historical and therefore strictly scientific. What it is able to say critically about Jesus is, so to speak, an expression of practical reason and consequently it can take its rightful place within the university. Behind this thinking lies the modern self-limitation of reason, classically expressed in Kant’s “Critiques”, but in the meantime further radicalized by the impact of the natural sciences. This modern concept of reason is based, to put it briefly, on a synthesis between Platonism (Cartesianism) and empiricism, a synthesis confirmed by the success of technology. On the one hand it presupposes the mathematical structure of matter, its intrinsic rationality, which makes it possible to understand how matter works and use it efficiently: this basic premise is, so to speak, the Platonic element in the modern understanding of nature. On the other hand, there is nature’s capacity to be exploited for our purposes, and here only the possibility of verification or falsification through experimentation can yield ultimate certainty. The weight between the two poles can, depending on the circumstances, shift from one side to the other. As strongly positivistic a thinker as J. Monod has declared himself a convinced Platonist/Cartesian.

This gives rise to two principles which are crucial for the issue we have raised. First, only the kind of certainty resulting from the interplay of mathematical and empirical elements can be considered scientific. Anything that would claim to be science must be measured against this criterion. Hence the human sciences, such as history, psychology, sociology and philosophy, attempt to conform themselves to this canon of scientificity. A second point, which is important for our reflections, is that by its very nature this method excludes the question of God, making it appear an unscientific or pre-scientific question. Consequently, we are faced with a reduction of the radius of science and reason, one which needs to be questioned.

I will return to this problem later. In the meantime, it must be observed that from this standpoint any attempt to maintain theology’s claim to be “scientific” would end up reducing Christianity to a mere fragment of its former self. But we must say more: if science as a whole is this and this alone, then it is man himself who ends up being reduced, for the specifically human questions about our origin and destiny, the questions raised by religion and ethics, then have no place within the purview of collective reason as defined by

---

“science”, so understood, and must thus be relegated to the realm of the subjective. The subject then decides, on the basis of his experiences, what he considers tenable in matters of religion, and the subjective “conscience” becomes the sole arbiter of what is ethical. In this way, though, ethics and religion lose their power to create a community and become a completely personal matter. This is a dangerous state of affairs for humanity, as we see from the disturbing pathologies of religion and reason which necessarily erupt when reason is so reduced that questions of religion and ethics no longer concern it. Attempts to construct an ethic from the rules of evolution or from psychology and sociology, end up being simply inadequate.

Before I draw the conclusions to which all this has been leading, I must briefly refer to the third stage of dehellenization, which is now in progress. In the light of our experience with cultural pluralism, it is often said nowadays that the synthesis with Hellenism achieved in the early Church was a preliminary inculturation which ought not to be binding on other cultures. The latter are said to have the right to return to the simple message of the New Testament prior to that inculturation, in order to inculturate it anew in their own particular milieu. This thesis is not only false; it is coarse and lacking in precision. The New Testament was written in Greek and bears the imprint of the Greek spirit, which had already come to maturity as the Old Testament developed. True, there are elements in the evolution of the early Church which do not have to be integrated into all cultures. Nonetheless, the fundamental decisions made about the relationship between faith and the use of human reason are part of the faith itself; they are developments consonant with the nature of faith itself.

And so I come to my conclusion. This attempt, painted with broad strokes, at a critique of modern reason from within has nothing to do with putting the clock back to the time before the Enlightenment and rejecting the insights of the modern age. The positive aspects of modernity are to be acknowledged unreservedly: we are all grateful for the marvellous possibilities that it has opened up for mankind and for the progress in humanity that has been granted to us. The scientific ethos, moreover, is - as you yourself mentioned, Magnificent Rector - the will to be obedient to the truth, and, as such, it embodies an attitude which belongs to the essential decisions of the Christian spirit. The intention here is not one of retrenchment or negative criticism, but of broadening our concept of reason and its application. While we rejoice in the new possibilities open to humanity, we also see the dangers arising from these possibilities and we must ask ourselves how we can overcome them. We will succeed in doing so only if reason and faith come together in a new way, if we overcome the self-imposed limitation of reason to the empirically verifiable, and if we once more disclose its vast horizons. In this sense theology rightly belongs in the university and within the wide-ranging dialogue of sciences, not merely as a historical discipline and one of the human sciences, but precisely as theology, as inquiry into the rationality of faith.

Only thus do we become capable of that genuine

dialogue of cultures and religions so urgently needed today. In the Western world it is widely held that only positivistic reason and the forms of philosophy based on it are universally valid. Yet the world’s profoundly religious cultures see this exclusion of the divine from the universality of reason as an attack on their most profound convictions. A reason which is deaf to the divine and which relegates religion into the realm of subcultures is incapable of entering into the dialogue of cultures. At the same time, as I have attempted to show, modern scientific reason with its intrinsically Platonic element bears within itself a question which points beyond itself and beyond the possibilities of its methodology. Modern scientific reason quite simply has to accept the rational structure of matter and the correspondence between our spirit and the prevailing rational structures of nature as a given, on which its methodology has to be based. Yet the question why this has to be so is a real question, and one which has to be remanded by the natural sciences to other modes and planes of thought - to philosophy and theology. For philosophy and, albeit in a different way, for theology, listening to the great experiences and insights of the religious traditions of humanity, and those of the Christian faith in particular, is a source of knowledge, and to ignore it would be an unacceptable restriction of our listening and responding. Here I am reminded of something Socrates said to Phaedo. In their earlier conversations, many false philosophical opinions had been raised, and so Socrates says: “It would be easily understandable if someone became so annoyed at all these false notions that for the rest of his life he despised and mocked all talk about being - but in this way he would be deprived of the truth of existence and would suffer a great loss”. The West has long been endangered by this aversion to the questions which underlie its rationality, and can only suffer great harm thereby. The courage to engage the whole breadth of reason, and not the denial of its grandeur - this is the programme with which a theology grounded in Biblical faith enters into the debates of our time. “Not to act reasonably, not to act with *logos*, is contrary to the nature of God”, said Manuel II, according to his Christian understanding of God, in response to his Persian interlocutor. It is to this great *logos*, to this breadth of reason, that we invite our partners in the dialogue of cultures. To rediscover it constantly is the great task of the university.

\*\*\*

NOTE: *The Holy Father intends to supply a subsequent version of this text, complete with footnotes. The present text must therefore be considered provisional.*

Source: [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)

---

# Statement By Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, S.D.B. Secretary Of State

*Saturday, 16 September 2006*

Given the reaction in Muslim quarters to certain passages of the Holy Father's address at the University of Regensburg, and the clarifications and explanations already presented through the Director of the Holy See Press Office, I would like to add the following:

- The position of the Pope concerning Islam is unequivocally that expressed by the conciliar document *Nostra Aetate*: ***"The Church regards with esteem also the Muslims. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, Who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honor Mary, His virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with devotion. In addition, they await the day of judgment when God will render their deserts to all those who have been raised up from the dead. Finally, they value the moral life and worship God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting"*** (no. 3).

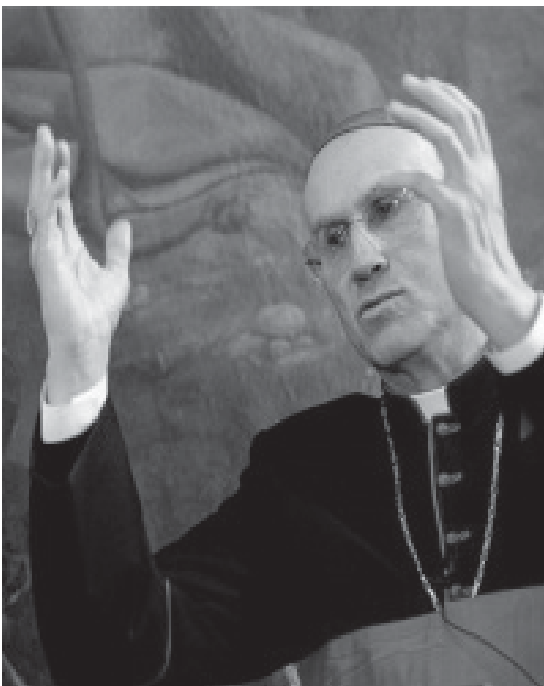
- The Pope's option in favor of inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue is equally unequivocal. In his meeting with representatives of Muslim communities in Cologne, Germany, on 20 August 2005, he said that such dialogue between

Christians and Muslims ***"cannot be reduced to an optional extra,"*** adding: ***"The lessons of the past must help us to avoid repeating the same mistakes. We must seek paths of reconciliation and learn to live with respect for each other's identity"***.

- As for the opinion of the Byzantine emperor Manuel II Paleologus which he quoted during his Regensburg talk, the Holy Father did not mean, nor does he mean, to make that opinion his own in any way. He simply used it as a means to undertake - in an academic context, and as is evident from a complete and attentive reading of the text - certain reflections on the theme of the relationship between religion and violence in general, and to conclude with a **clear and radical rejection of the religious motivation for violence, from whatever side it may come**. On this point, it is worth recalling what Benedict XVI himself recently affirmed in his commemorative Message for the 20th anniversary of the Inter-religious Meeting of Prayer for Peace, initiated by his predecessor John Paul II at Assisi in October 1986: ***"... demonstrations of violence cannot be attributed to religion as such but to the cultural limitations with which it is lived and develops in time. ... In fact, attestations of the close bond that exists between the relationship with God and the ethics of love are recorded in all great religious traditions"***.

- The Holy Father thus sincerely regrets that certain passages of his address could have sounded offensive to the sensitivities of the Muslim faithful, and should have been interpreted in a manner that in no way corresponds to his intentions. Indeed it was he who, before the religious fervor of Muslim believers, warned secularized Western culture to guard against ***"the contempt for God and the cynicism that considers mockery of the sacred to be an exercise of freedom"***.

- In reiterating his respect and esteem for those who profess Islam, he hopes they will be helped to understand the correct meaning of his words so that, quickly surmounting this present uneasy moment, witness to the ***"Creator of heaven and earth, Who has spoken to men"*** may be reinforced, and collaboration may intensify ***"to promote together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom"*** (*Nostra Aetate* no. 3).



---

# Pope's Apology

The following is the text of Pope Benedict XVI's remarks regretting causing offence to Muslims in his 12 September speech in the Bavarian city of Regensburg.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The pastoral visit which I recently made to Bavaria was a deep spiritual experience, bringing together personal memories linked to places well known to me and pastoral initiatives towards an effective proclamation of the Gospel for today.

I thank God for the interior joy which he made possible, and I am also grateful to all those who worked hard for the success of this Pastoral Visit.

As is the custom, I will speak more of this during next Wednesday's general audience.

At this time, I wish also to add that I am deeply sorry for the reactions in some countries to a few passages of my address at the University of Regensburg, which were considered offensive to the sensibility of Muslims.

These in fact were a quotation from a medieval text, which do not in any way express my personal thought.

Yesterday, the Cardinal Secretary of State published a statement in this regard in which he explained the true meaning of my words.

I hope that this serves to appease hearts and to clarify the true meaning of my address, which in its totality was and is an invitation to frank and sincere dialogue, with great mutual respect.

Source: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/europe/5353774.stm>

---

## Instances When The Vatican Admitted Errors Or Apologized

Vatican City – Following are some instances in which the papacy admitted errors or apologized for actions of the Roman Catholic Church.

- 1992:** After 13 years of study by the Vatican, Pope John Paul II declared that the Church was wrong to condemn astronomer Galileo for maintaining that the Earth was not the center of the universe. The scientist was formally rehabilitated and he pope said Galileo's condemnation had resulted from "tragic mutual incomprehension."
- 1992:** Visiting a former center of the slave trade in Senegal, John Paul begged for forgiveness for the Christians involved in the slave trade. "From this African sanctuary of black pain, we begged the pardon from above," he said.
- 1995:** John Paul issued a document saying that the Church was "truly sorry" for any discrimination or mistreatment of women.
- 1995:** During a visit to the Czech Republic, John Paul asked forgiveness for violence by Catholics against Protestants during the 16<sup>th</sup> century Counterreformation. "Today I, the pope of the Church of Rome, in the name of all Catholics, ask forgiveness for the wrongs inflicted on non-Catholics during the turbulent history of these peoples."
- 1998:** In a document on the Holocaust, John Paul expressed remorse for the cowardice of some Christians during the Nazi persecution of Jews, regretting the silence of those who "were not strong enough to raise their voices in protest."
- 1999:** John Paul denounced the persecution of Jan Hus, a 15<sup>th</sup>-century religious reformer and precursor of Protestantism who was burned at the stake.
- 2000:** On a solemn Day of Pardon during the Holy Year, John Paul asked forgiveness for the sins of Catholic through the ages, including wrongs inflicted on Jews, women and minorities. During the ceremony it was the future Benedict XVI, then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who spoke of the Inquisition, confessing "sins" committed in the service of the truth."
- 2000:** In a visit to Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem, John Paul said the Catholic Church is "deeply saddened by the hatred, acts of persecution and displays of anti-Semitism directed against the Jews by Christians at any time and in any place."
- 2001:** On a visit to Athens, John Paul issued a sweeping apology for wounds committed by Roman Catholics against Orthodox Christians.
- 2001:** Sending his official word over the Internet for the first time, John Paul apologized for missionary abuses against indigenous peoples of the South Pacific.
- 2006:** Pope Benedict XVI said Sunday he was "deeply sorry" that Muslims worldwide took offense over a speech he gave in Germany Sept. 12 about Islam and Holy War.

Source: **Philippine Daily Inquirer**, 19 September 2006

---

---

# In Quotes: Muslim Initial Reactions To Pope

**Muslim political and religious leaders around the world have been reacting to a speech by Pope Benedict XVI in which he mentioned the Prophet Muhammad.**

## **PAKISTANI PRESIDENT PERVEZ MUSHARRAF**

Our strategy must clearly oppose the sinister tendencies to associate terrorism with Islam and discrimination against Muslims, which are giving rise to an ominous alienation between the west and the world of Islam.

## **MALAYSIAN PRIME MINISTER ABDULLAH AHMAD BADAWI**

The Pope must not take lightly the spread of outrage that has been created. The Vatican must now take full responsibility over the matter and carry out the necessary steps to rectify the mistake.

## **SAUDI GRAND MUFTI SHEIKH ABDUL AZIZ AL-SHEIKH**

This is all a lie ... Islam is far from terrorism and was spread only through the conviction of peoples who saw the good and justice of Islam.

## **EGYPTIAN FOREIGN MINISTER AHMED ABOUL GHEIT**

This was a very unfortunate statement and it is a statement that shows that there is a lack of understanding of real Islam. And because of this we are hopeful that such statements and such positions would not be stated in order to not allow tension and distrust and recriminations to brew between the Muslim as well as the west.

## **PALESTINIAN PRIME MINISTER ISMAIL HANIYA**

In the name of our Palestinian people... we express our condemnation of the statements of his Excellency the Pope, against Islam as a belief, Sharia, history, and a lifestyle.

## **PAKISTANI PARLIAMENT**

The derogatory remarks of the Pope about the philosophy of jihad and Prophet Muhammad have injured sentiments across the Muslim world and pose the danger of spreading acrimony among the religions.

## **DIN SYAMSUDDIN, HEAD OF MUHAMMADIYAH, INDONESIA'S SECOND LARGEST MUSLIM ORGANISATION**

The Pope's statements reflect his lack of wisdom. It is obvious from the statements that the Pope doesn't have a correct understanding of Islam.

## **ALI BARDAKOGLU, SENIOR TURKISH MUSLIM**

I do not see any use in somebody visiting the Islamic world who thinks in this way about the holy prophet of Islam. He should first rid himself of feelings of hate.

## **SALIH KAPUSUZ, DEPUTY LEADER OF TURKEY'S RULING AK PARTY**

The owner of those unfortunate and arrogant comments, Benedict XVI, has gone down in history, but in the same category as Hitler and Mussolini.

He seems to have a mindset that comes from the darkness of the Middle Ages. He is a poor thing that has not benefited from the spirit of reform in the Christian world. It looks like an effort to revive the mentality of the Crusades.

## **ORGANISATION OF ISLAMIC CONFERENCE STATEMENT**

The OIC hopes that this sudden campaign does not reflect a new trend for the Vatican policy toward the Islamic religion ... and it expects the Vatican to express its real vision of Islam.

## **DR MUHAMMAD ABDUL BARI, MUSLIM COUNCIL OF BRITAIN**

One would expect a religious leader such as the Pope to act and speak with responsibility and repudiate the Byzantine emperor's views in the interests of truth and harmonious relations. Regrettably, the Pope did not do so and this has understandably caused a lot of dismay and hurt.

Source: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/europe/5348436.stm>

## **OTHERS**

**German Chancellor Angela Merkel** told Bild newspaper the aim of the Pope's speech had been misunderstood.

"It was an invitation to dialogue between religions ... What Benedict XVI emphasised was a decisive and uncompromising renunciation of all forms of violence in the name of religion," she was quoted as saying in an article to appear on Saturday. (Yahoo News, Reuters, **Muslims Deplore Pope Speech** By Jonathan Wright, Friday, Sep 15, 3:50 PM ET)

\*\*\*\*\*

**Cardinal George Pell**, Archbishop of Sydney has drawn a link between Islamists and violence, a strident attempt to defend the Pope just as the pontiff tries to hose down Muslim anger around the world.

Cardinal George Pell says "the violent reactions in many parts of the Islamic world" to a speech by Pope Benedict justified one of the main fears expressed by the world's Catholic leader.

"They showed the link for many Islamists between

religion and violence, their refusal to respond to criticism with rational arguments, but only with demonstrations, threats and actual violence,” Cardinal Pell said in a statement yesterday.

He also described as “unfortunately typical and unhelpful” attacks on the Pope’s comments by two prominent local Muslims, Taj al-Din al-Hilali, the Mufti of Australia, and Ameer Ali, of the Government’s Muslim advisory committee.

Security was increased around the Pope yesterday, despite his apology for the offence taken by Muslims for his using of a medieval quotation that linked Mohammad to violence.

Cardinal Pell began his statement by saying it was a sign of hope that no organised violence has flared in Australia after Pope Benedict’s recent comments.

“No one compared the Pope to Hitler or Mussolini (as in Turkey) or called for his murder, as Sheikh Malin did in Somalia,” he said.

“No group like the League of Jihadists in Iraq promised ‘that the soldiers of Mohammad will come sooner or later to shake your throne and the foundations of your state’. Our major priority must be to maintain peace and harmony within the Australian community, but no lasting achievements can be grounded in fantasies and evasions.”

## Reactions After Apology From The Vatican And The Pope

In Turkey, the most senior Muslim religious figure, Ali Bardakoglu, said the Pope’s stated respect for Islam was a civilised position.

The government said the Pope was still expected to go ahead with a visit to Turkey in November.

But State Minister Mehmet Aydin said the pontiff appeared to be saying he was sorry for the outrage but not necessarily the remarks themselves.

“You either have to say this ‘I’m sorry’ in a proper way or not say it at all - are you sorry for saying such a thing or because of its consequences?” he asked.

Source: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr//1/hi/world/europe/5354862.stm>

**Larger Islamic groups in Britain said they accepted the Pope’s apology. Inayat Bunglawala of the Muslim Council of Britain said: “The Vatican has moved quickly to deal with the hurt and we accept that.**

**“It was something that should never have happened - words of that nature were always likely to cause dismay - and we believe some of the Pope’s advisers may have been at fault over his speech.”**

“Rather than criticizing Islam, the pope is actually offering it a helping hand by suggesting that it do away with the cycle of violence,” Fr. Samir K. Samir, SJ, one of the Vatican’s leading experts on Islam, wrote in the Catholic newspaper *Asia News*.

The pope’s academic lecture “was trying to show how Western society - including the Church - has become secularized by removing from the concept of Reason, its spiritual dimension and origins which are in God,” Fr. Samir stated.

“The Holy Father chose this text because it contained a ‘key sentence’ in which the Emperor criticizes the Muslim for Islam’s violence as exemplified by the command to spread the faith by the sword,” Fr. Samir said.

However, the argument being proffered by the pope was that “anyone who engages in violence ceases being a believer; anyone, Christian or Muslim, who goes along with violence goes against Reason and God, who is the source of Reason,” he stated.

“Sadly, some people cannot avoid seeing the conflict between the West and Islam except in political terms. Since the Pope is a Westerner, it must logically follow that he is ‘against’ us. And having failed to understand what the Pope says, all that they can say is that he criticized jihad and for this reason he certainly ‘must’ be an enemy,” Fr. Samir said.

The tragedy in this controversy, Fr. Samir suggested was that “only by listening to the Pope’s suggestions, and those of a few Muslim intellectuals, can Islam’s chances for renewal become real.”

“It is high time that Islam deal with modernity; not to be swallowed up by it, but rather to take what good it has to offer and improve on it,” he said.

(Source: <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1157913641658&pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull>)

---

# Freedom Of Speech And Religious Protest

**Rudolf C. Heredia**  
*Indian Social Institute*  
*New Delhi 110003*

When the editor of a Danish newspaper published a set of cartoons caricaturing the Prophet Mohammed and Muslims, no one thought that this would precipitate what the Danish Prime Minister later called the worst international crisis for Denmark since World War II. Violent protest by Muslims spread through the Middle East all the way to South Asia and beyond. In the aftermath of the controversy what, if anything, have we, or can we learn?

The sequence of events is first briefly recalled. To expose and challenge the self-censorship which had restrained artists from illustrating a book on Mohammed for children, the editor of *Jyllands-Posten*, a provincial and culturally conservative Danish paper, commissioned and published a set of twelve cartoons on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2005 as an assertion of free speech. He was within Danish law: in response to a complaint filed by Danish Muslims on October 27<sup>th</sup>, the police report on January 6<sup>th</sup> found no criminal offence involved. The Danish imams petitioned the ambassadors of Muslim countries and eleven asked to meet the Danish Prime Minister in regard to what they perceived as a smear campaign against Muslims in public and the media. But the Prime Minister refused to meet them, or to intervene or apologise since the government was not responsible for the cartoons.

On January 30<sup>th</sup> *Jylland-Posten* did issue an apology but by then the cartoons had been republished in major newspapers throughout Europe and in fifty other countries. This was intended to demonstrate solidarity with the Danish newspaper and support free speech. However, they were not published in the United Kingdom though they were editorialised there. *The Washington Post* did not publish the cartoons but described them as a “calculated insult ... by a right-wing newspaper in a country where bigotry towards the minority Muslim population is a major, if frequently unacknowledged, problem.”

In December, the imams took their petition to the Middle East and lobbied in Saudi Arabia and Egypt. The Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) issued a condemnation of the cartoons and radical Muslim organisations took to violent protest. The Danish and Norwegian embassies in Syria were burnt on February 4<sup>th</sup>, though no one was hurt. The Danish Consulate General was set ablaze in Beirut and the embassies in Iran and Indonesia were targeted. Denmark temporarily closed down its diplomatic missions in five countries. Riots from the Middle East spread to Pakistan and India and there was considerable loss of life.

Denmark, a country of about five and a half million, is extremely homogenous and the present conservative government has passed some of the most stringent immigration laws in Europe. Though it sees itself as one of the most progressive and liberal countries in the European Union, its 170,000 Muslims feel discriminated against and marginalised. They are not at home with the permissiveness and secularism of Danish society. There had been indications of this mutual alienation and friction earlier, but with the

cartoons, this internal divide based on race and religion has burst on to the global stage. The Danish media and the government may have thought they could contain the controversy in their own country or at most within the European Union. They seem not to have reckoned that we are now living in a globalising world, of which Europe is a part.

Denmark is but a small part of the larger European context. Similar problems of assimilation are evident in most European countries. Institutional racism, as found by the Macpherson Report in the UK in 1993, is not limited to the British Isles. The controversy over headscarves and turbans in French schools reflects the insensitivity and intolerance of that state’s concept of secularism, which leave little space for other religious and cultural understandings. Differences then get consolidated into polarities around racial and religious divides, and further compounded with economic discrimination and political exclusion. The Muslim riots that began in Paris and spread to other European countries is evidence of this.

But beyond the difficulties of assimilating an immigrant population, there is the unspoken fear of demographic demise. For the birth rate of white West Europeans is now below replacement levels and the demographic compulsion of large scale immigration just to support an aging population at its accustomed standard of living becomes inescapable. This is an understandable threat to the national culture of an aging population in decline. When immigrants are ethnically different and further resist assimilation, the native population fears losing its national identity and way of life.

Such fear leads to prejudice and each feeds on the other. Thus defining an ethnic community as intolerant and violent, and then provoking them into such behaviour, leaves them trapped in a self-fulfilling prophecy. This may serve their leaders to consolidate their hold on their community, but leaves its people all the more ensnared. Further, consequent on an escalating spiral of blame and recrimination, it becomes pointless to ask who began it first. More to the point would be to wind down both the provocation and the violation from wherever it comes because both are now happening together. When the free speech advocates eschew this path of moderation and restraint, they are certainly not striking a blow for, but rather against the liberal democracy they swear by. Nor do those provoked advance their cause, however legitimate, when they adopt a reactive rather than a proactive role, especially when this turns violent.

Provocation then is not the best way to promote or protect freedom, nor is violence the most effective way to protest deliberately outraged sentiment. When made in the

**Humour may well be among the more effective 'weapons of the weak' to deflate the pomposity of the powerful, but when ridicule by the strong humiliates the weak it is cruel and humourless.**

context of racial and religious tensions, the argument for free speech as fundamental to liberal democracy must be carefully nuanced, or it easily turns into a defence of hate speech. The laws in some fourteen European countries regarding the portrayal of the Holocaust are an expression of such sensitivity to anti-Semitism. Will it take more genocides to sensitise people to other kinds of hate speech? For though the Western press does practise self-restraint and Western democracies do exercise legal censorship when it concerns national interests or certain social sensibilities, this selective self-censoring is riven with double standards that represent bad faith rather than responsible sensitivity.

Thus freedom in a society cannot simply include just any individualist expression. For when absolutized, such freedom leads on to corrosive permissiveness which all too easily degrades into violence, cruelty and other perversions. Human freedom must be ordered by restraining values of respect and sensitivity to others. For any viable understanding of free speech cannot be just legally sanctioned by a 'democratic majority'. It must also be ethically grounded on a common consensus that binds the exercise of freedom to a responsibility for its consequences that binds the exercise of freedom to a responsibility for its consequences, and extends this to a sensitivity to others. Anything less will be grossly negligent and rash, in short illiberal and undemocratic in a viable understanding of liberty and democracy in our complex multicultural and pluri-religious context.

Christian believers too have suffered ridicule and caricature in liberal democracies under the aegis of free speech, though they have not always felt politically excluded and economically disadvantaged. If Jesus is fair game for in a permissive post-Christian secular society in the West, why would any one else be excluded? However, religious and ethnic minorities that feel alienated and marginalised not surprisingly perceive the permissive secularism of the West as self-serving and hollow, especially when it deliberately violates their deepest religious sensitivities and core beliefs.

Such provocations only serve to fuel a clash of fundamentalisms, religious and ideological, rather than foster any real tolerance and pluralism across religious differences and cultural diversities. Indeed, rationalist dogmatism can be as insensitive to difference, as religious dogmatism is exclusive of 'the other'. Are we then on the verge of a new crusade? The old ones inspired by the religious battle cry "God wills it," the new one promoted by a secular slogan "liberal democracy demands this!"

However, to question free-speech fundamentalists does not mean legitimating religious fundamentalism or violence. Just as we require a contextualised and nuanced understanding of free speech, or nay civic freedom, in a pluralist society, so too must any protest, religious or otherwise, be sensitive to and respectful of the civil rights and freedoms of others. This must be the basis of a viable tolerance in a liberal democratic society.

The cartoons not only violated Muslim sentiment on the delicate issue of at all depicting their Prophet: in caricaturing and insulting him, they were outrageously provocative. To claim any measure of humour or satire for them is patently disingenuous. Humour may well be among the more effective 'weapons of the weak' to deflate the pomposity of the powerful, but when ridicule by the strong humiliates the weak it is cruel and humourless.

Most religious and ethnic minorities have suffered from prejudice and oppression by socially and politically dominant majorities. But minority violence even in self-defence often provokes a worse backlash. There are numerous examples of such reactions by minorities with unfortunate fallout. But there are other who have chosen a different path and found acceptance in the larger society without losing their distinctive religious or cultural identities. This of course demands an openness to cultural and religious pluralism founded on a common consensus that includes both the majority and the minorities, the dominant and the subalterns, as parties to the compact. Unfortunately, only when we have experienced for ourselves the injustice of discrimination and the futility of violence do we come to the wisdom of such a conclusion!

Religious minorities and migrant communities do feel disoriented and insecure in an unfamiliar and rapidly changing world. Social insecurity leads to personal anxieties and fears. When they are not enabled to cope with this for lack of internal or external resources, or worse when they experience prejudice and marginalisation, then anxiety and fear turn to rage, which is volatile and all too readily provoked and then even more easily manipulated into violence. Community leaders are adept at evoking religious outrage and using it to serve their political purposes. But this does no good either to their community or their religion. Rather it dangerously ups the ante and puts their own people more at risk than themselves. This is the experience of Muslim minorities in the national community, and it is replicated with Muslim nations in the international one.

In the violence that followed the protest against the cartoons in the Muslim world, there is surely a large element of this manipulation. The Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who currently presides over the OIC, while urging an end to demonising Islam, called for bridge-building across the huge chasm between the West and the Muslim world. In spite of warnings by the European Union, moderate voices for peaceful and reasoned protest were drowned out in the fundamentalist noises precipitating street violence over causes that could be far more effectively served by other means, for instance, the economic boycott of Danish products by Arab countries. But in our world today, moderation in a religious cause, or on behalf of marginal minorities, does not

---

yield immediate political dividends, and democratic leaders facing periodic elections are too impatient to be willing to stay the course for the long haul.

Thus communities get further polarised and define themselves to exclusively that no common ground is left and the chasm widens. A deeper engagement in civil society is needed to ground a more responsive polity. This can be effectively done only with the involvement of different communities, whether the difference is of caste, religion, race or language. All sides must realise that freedom of speech is necessary not just to constraint religious, ideological and other kinds of oppressive and censoring fundamentalisms that willy-nilly are prone to find their way into civil life even in a liberal democratic state. It is even more necessary to protect the very religious, cultural and other freedoms that are guaranteed by this same state. But it is self-censorship that can more effectively make free speech, responsible and sensitive, rather than the state.

Further, the right to protest, whether in the columns of a newspaper, or public speech, or on the streets or elsewhere, is a precious and valuable means to protect one's human rights and to promote one's vital interests in a democratic society. But when this violates the democratic rights of others, it undermines its own legitimacy, betrays its cause and invites suppression. Before this happens, the state and its laws must contain it.

Once such polarities in a society are politicised, the underlying issues tend to remain unaddressed. The most critical one is the assertion of majority dominance, whether cultural, political or economic, here symbolically represented in the conflict over freedom of speech and the publications of the cartoons, versus the concern for the identity of a minority, marginalised and threatened by more powerful modernising forces, here the Danish Muslim community. In Denmark, this issue materialises in the clash between its conservative government, and the Muslim minority. Elsewhere the similar conflict is played out in other context with different players.

Our response at home to the cartoon controversy is an apt illustration of this. The more authentic voices urged moderation. Thus Maulana Wahiduddin Khan of Delhi called on Muslims to ignore the cartoons and quoted the example of the Prophet himself in the Quran, who when once subjected to such ridicule chose to ignore it rather than get outraged and punish it. Such moderation is more likely to win the support from the larger majority than a demonstration of violent passion, especially when violence adversely affects those in no way responsible for the provocation. But the violence that followed the street demonstrations indicates how their leaders manipulate our Muslim masses.

Thus in Uttar Pradesh a minister, Haji Yaqoob Qureshi, publicly announced a reward of fifty-one crores of rupees for the murder of the authors of the cartoons, and in Jharkhand Babbar Khan, the chairman of the central committee of the governing coalition in that state, announced a reward of 50 lakhs of rupees for the murder of the Delhi editor who reprinted them. Neither their political parties nor the Central Government has taken any action against them as yet. Such

grandstanding, only confirms stereotypes and strengthens the hold of fundamentalists on their respective communities. While leaders consolidate their vote banks, people get further trapped into a politics of passion.

The cartoon controversy and its aftermath have centre-staged religion in its role in identity politics. It would be pertinent to ask what role other religious traditions can play when such crises arise. Taking advantage of the situation to showcase one's own tradition is at best short-sighted at worst unfair. But then identity politics can be played by any community, by the majority community as passionately as by the minority ones for similar short term gains.

Secularism and permissiveness are a challenge all religious traditions must face in most contemporary societies, a challenge that is only likely to become more acute as a society modernises. And so rather than remain neutral bystanders, religiously concerned people can and should engage in a conversation with the protagonists and eventually bring about a dialogue between them. Only if they are already dialogically committed will they have the credibility to intervene. Every religious and cultural tradition needs to interrogate itself on this score.

The churches have a crucial role to play because they have a much longer experience with modern societies and their impact. Historically too, their experience of religious intolerance among themselves has been a lesson in the futility of religious war and persecution. Today the churches are in no position to impose their teaching on the larger society. But where they are still critical partners in society, they can initiate a dialogue that includes other religions and secular ideologies. At times of crisis, dialogue partners can do much to mediate the differences and even resolve the tensions. But they would be more effective and credible if the dialogue was in place before the crisis rather than be hastily put together once it irrupted.

This is a demanding endeavour. First, there is need for an internal dialogue within a community in which members participate before they engage outside partners. This will enable the participants to interpret their tradition in the context of today's challenges. Next, more difficult yet more necessary, is to premise dialogue on an equal partnership of mutual respect and enrichment. This will sensitise us to the values and sentiments of others and consequently further help to critique and revalue our own.

When we learn to respect other traditions and beliefs as much as we would expect them to respect our own, when tolerance and pluralism are as important in society as secularism and freedom, then we can begin a dialogue that can dissolve the polarities that have divided us. But we still have a long way to go on this pilgrimage. And it is best not to wait till a crisis puts us on the defensive, but set out in a faith and trust that embrace each other, especially those most in need of our support, rather than vice versa!

Source: **Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection**, April 2006

---

# Right To Freedom Of Expression Or Duty To Respect Others?

*Fr. Vimal Tirimanna, CSsR*

## Introduction

During the month of February this year, the world witnessed a series of violent protests led by Muslims across the globe against some cartoons, first published in a relatively unknown Danish newspaper, which the protestors alleged were an insult to the revered Prophet Muhammad. Asserting the right to freedom of expression, most of the Western media portrayed these protests as irrational violent outbursts by Islamic fundamentalists. In this essay, I will first give a brief history of the events that led up to this controversy and the violent protest, and then highlight some of the interpretations given to these events. I will make an evaluation of those interpretations, by situating it in the context of the right to the freedom of expression and the duty to respect others. Finally, I will show that invoking the right to the freedom of expression is no excuse for the failure to respect the religious sentiments of the Muslims. I will also point out that the response to such failures cannot be a limitless violence, either.

## 1. A Brief Record of What Happened

It all began with the decision of a relatively unknown Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* to commission, and then print, cartoons portraying the Prophet Muhammad in whatever light cartoonists chose to put him. The newspaper's culture editor, Fleming Rose, wrote to the Danish Cartoonist Society, inviting cartoonists to depict their interpretation of the prophet whose likeness devout Muslims believe should not be depicted. Some refused to comply on the grounds that the exercise was a provocation, but a dozen complied.<sup>1</sup> So, in September 2005, twelve cartoons depicting Prophet Muhammad were published in *Jyllands-Posten*. According to Rose, not all twelve cartoons would offend Muslims; one depicted a Danish anti-immigration politician in a police line up, and another lampooned Rose himself! The rest of the cartoons clearly represented Prophet Muhammad lampooning Islam's alleged intolerance and links to terrorism. The most controversial of the cartoons depicted Prophet Muhammad with a bomb for a turban, implying that the Prophet had founded a terrorist religion.

It took four months for those cartoons to get blown up into an international scandal. A delegation of ambassadors from Islamic countries met the Danish Prime Minister Anders Rasmussen in October 2005 in an effort to get the particular Danish newspaper editor to apologize for the cartoons. But when Mr. Rasmussen snubbed the delegation arguing that his government could not interfere with the right to free speech, things broke loose. It was only then that a group of Danish ultra-conservative imams undertook a tour of Saudi Arabia and Egypt to show the cartoons to their outrage co-religionists. These clerics deliberately added fuel to the violent

protests by including in their presentation three far more offensive fake cartoons which never appeared in any newspaper. They depicted Muhammad as a paedophile, a pig or engaged in bestiality. The inter-net and the re-printing of the cartoons in Europe's most reputable newspapers did the rest to flare up Muslim anger and the subsequent violent protests. The Western media retorted by re-publishing the cartoons in some of their leading publications in Norway, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Holland and Switzerland.

The protests caused the deaths of 11 people in Afghanistan during protests, of 24 people (mainly Christians, including a Catholic priest) and the setting of 11 Christian churches on fire in Nigeria, the boycott of all Danish goods, death threats to cartoonists and other journalists who re-published them, the burning of Danish Consulate in Beirut and of the Danish and Norwegian embassies in Damascus, and assaults on Danish, Norwegian, Austrian and British missions in Teheran. In the Gaza Strip, the newly elected Hamas members burnt Danish and French flags while gunmen invaded the European Union headquarters, demanding a public apology and a sanctioning of those journalists who had decided to publish the cartoons. Iran announced that it will refuse entry visas to anyone from countries that printed the cartoons.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Diverse Responses to the Controversy

### 2.1 Muslim Reactions

Almost all over the Muslim world and in many European capitals and some parts of Asia, there follows strong, angry, and at times violent waves of protest against the publication of the cartoons. The point of contention of the protestors was that the cartoons were a deliberate attempt to insult their revered Prophet Muhammad and thus desecrate their religion. The insistence by the Western, especially European, media that the publication of the cartoons was justified by the right of free expression, made the Muslims even angrier, and the protests became more intensified and violent.

In Afghanistan, Mullah Dadullah, one of Taliban's senior military commanders, announced on 9<sup>th</sup> February that his militant group had offered a reward of a hundred kilograms of gold to anyone who killed the cartoonists and five kilograms of gold would go to anyone who killed a soldier from Denmark, Germany or Norway. According to Mullah Dadullah, already more than a hundred Mujahedin (holy warriors) had enlisted to carry out suicide attacks.

Although all these violent protests were lightly interpreted by the Western media and most of their governments as clear proof that Islam is a violent religion,

---

not all protests were violent. For example, in Trafalgar Square, London, in Indonesia, in Sri Lanka and in quite a few other places, there were less publicized mass protests against the cartoons that were very peaceful.

## 2.2. *Flemming Rose*

The culture editor of Denmark's *Jyllands-Posten*, Flemming Rose, who was responsible for publishing the cartoons first had this to say, in the wake of violent Muslim protests:

In mid-September, a Danish author went on record as saying he had problems finding illustrations for a book about the life of the Prophet Muhammad. The [eventual] illustrator insisted on anonymity. Translators of a book by Ayaan Hirsi Ali, the Somali Dutch politician who has been critical of Islam, also insisted on anonymity. Then the *Tate Britain* in London removed an installation called *God is Great*, which shows the Talmud, the Koran and the Bible embedded in a piece of glass. To me, all those spoke to the problems of self-censorship and freedom of speech, and that's why I wrote to 40 Danish cartoonists asking them to depict Muhammad as they see him. Some of the cartoons turned out to be caricatures because this is just in the Danish tradition. We make fun of the Queen, we make fun of politicians, we make fun of more or less everything. Of course, we didn't expect this kind of reaction, but I am sorry if some Muslims feel insulted. This was not directed at Muslims. I wanted to put this issue of self-censorship on the agenda and have a debate about it.<sup>3</sup>

## 2.3 *European Media*

The European media in general were in "solidarity" with the controversial Danish newspaper, asserting that freedom of expression is an absolute right, and it cannot be curtailed under any circumstances. As a matter of fact, a few European newspapers decided to re-print the provocative cartoons, as an "act of solidarity" with their Danish counterpart. The vast majority of French journalists and politicians sprang to the defence of the Danish newspaper arguing that although the cartoons were provocative and in bad taste, freedom of speech and pluralism are among the essential rights of a democracy.<sup>4</sup> This made the world-wide Muslim protest become even more violent. Almost all of the Western media and a few governments were invoking what they called the "right to freedom of expression" in justifying their actions.

It is amusing to note here how some Western columnists defending their so-called right to freedom of expression, went to the extent of suggesting that Muslims in Denmark and other countries of Europe could leave if they could not approve the freedom of expression as exemplified in the cartoons and the "humour" expressed through them!<sup>5</sup>

## 2.4 *World Leaders*

As the controversy became a serious cause for violence and even deaths of innocent victims, the Danish Prime Minister Rasmussen expressed regret but ruled out legal action. Most of the world leaders condemned the republication of the cartoons as provocative, insensitive and irresponsible. The French President Jacques Chirac responding to the events surrounding the cartoon controversy condemned "all manifest provocation that might dangerously fan passions."<sup>6</sup> While France's Foreign Minister, Philippe Douste Blazy, defended the freedom of the press, he tempered his remarks by adding: "This freedom should be exercised in a spirit of tolerance."<sup>7</sup> Nicolas Sarkozy, the French Home Minister, who is also the Minister of Religious Affairs, probably expressed the majority French view when he said: "Caricature is excessive by its very nature, but I prefer excess to censorship. Our democracy is not negotiable."<sup>8</sup>

The German Chancellor Angela Merkel said that the Islamic world had to understand that the West values press freedom and freedom of religion. "These are our values and we will defend them", she said. When asked about the cartoons, she said: "There can be no grounds for this violence."<sup>9</sup>

Russia's President, Vladimir Putin slammed the cartoons as a provocation, equating them with child pornography.<sup>10</sup> The US State Department condemned the re-printing of the cartoons as "unnecessarily provocative" and "an unwarranted attack on the religious beliefs of others."<sup>11</sup> The British Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw said that "freedom of speech is no excuse for being gratuitously inflammatory." In his opinion, the republication of the cartoons was "insensitive, disrespectful and wrong."<sup>12</sup>

However, in the wake of fresh violent attacks on Danish and other European diplomatic missions in Beirut and Damascus, the United States and Europe condemned the attacks saying that the right to freedom of the press and freedom of religion belong together.<sup>13</sup>

## 2.5 *Religious Leaders*

In a carefully worded statement issued by the Vatican press office, the Holy See said:

The freedom of thought and expression, confirmed in the Declaration of Human Rights, cannot include the right to offend religious feelings of the faithful. That principle obviously applies to any religion. Coexistence calls for a climate of mutual respect to favour peace among men and nations. Moreover, these forms of exasperated criticism or derision of others manifest a lack of human sensitivity and may constitute in some cases in inadmissible provocation. A reading of history shows that wounds that exist in the life of peoples are not cured this way.<sup>14</sup>

However, the Vatican also made sure to insist that the response to such religiously insensitive acts is not violence:

---

Violent actions of protest are equally deplorable. Reaction in the face of offence cannot fail the true spirit of all religion. Real or verbal intolerance, no matter where it comes from, as action or reaction, is always a serious threat to peace.<sup>15</sup>

In the aftermath of violent protests in Nigeria, which claimed some 24 lives, Pope Benedict (in his first public comments on the violent protests against the publication of cartoons), said that intolerance and violence were never justifiable responses to a perceived religious offence. The Pope went on to say:

In the current international context, the Catholic Church remains convinced that to encourage peace and understanding between peoples and individuals it is necessary and urgent that religions and their symbols be respected, and that the faithful not be subjected to provocations injuring their outlook and religious feelings.<sup>16</sup>

One of the most significant responses came from the three main religious groups in France. The French Christian, Jewish and Muslim groups closed ranks in condemning the cartoons. The French bishops declared that the freedom of expression has limits, especially where racism and anti-Semitism are concerned. They added that the boundary between acceptable humour and the pillorying of people's deepest religious convictions had been crossed with the publication of the cartoons.<sup>17</sup> The Chief Rabbi in France, Joseph Sitruk, said that he "shared the Muslim anger" and called the drawing "insulting."<sup>18</sup> The head of the Paris mosque, Dalil Boubakeur, called it "an odious and intolerable provocation for millions of French Muslims." The French Muslim Council, of which Boubakeur is President, has decided to sue *France Soir* (the French newspaper which re-published the cartoons) for defamation.

A leading Iranian cleric, Hojatolislam Ahmad Khatami, in his Friday prayer sermon praised what he called Muslim's "holy rage" against the publication of the blasphemous cartoons. "Thank God, the Islamic nation has shown itself well. It is a holy rage," he said. However, he also called for a halt to attacks on foreign embassies that had left some missions in flames, alleging that such violent acts would be used by the West to further discredit Islam as a "violent religion."

Other Muslim religious leaders were also appealing for calm and non-violence. For example, in the wake of violent protests in Beirut, which included burning of the Danish Consulate, attacking Police officers with stones, stoning a Christian church and setting fire on fire engines, the Grand Mufti Mohammed Rashid Kabbani denounced the violence in a television appearance, saying that infiltrators among the protesters were trying to "harm the stability of Lebanon." He appealed for calm.

### 3. An Evaluation of the Responses

The above responses clearly show the main divide between the West and the Muslim world, in general,<sup>19</sup> in

perceiving this range of hostile events surrounding the cartoon controversy. James Graff expressed this point well when he wrote:

The range of reactions to the cartoons publication among Muslims and non-Muslims alike served as a reminder of the gaping divide that still exists between the West and much of the Islamic world. In a show of solidarity for their journalistic brethren in Denmark, television stations and newspapers in other European countries have shown some or all of the drawings, the most controversial of which portrays Muhammad's headdress transformed into bomb with a burning fuse. Their intention was to strike a blow for the free speech, but by publishing the cartoons, Europe's media outlets were perceived by some Muslims to be wilfully ignoring religious sensitivities, which fueled the anger even more. Yet the demands by Muslim leaders that European governments punish journalists who have run the cartoons – Middle Eastern Interior Ministers gathering in Tunis last week expressed no preference for how, although a prayer leader in Gaza urged beheading – strike the non-Muslim world as unreasonable infringements on the ideals of free speech and limited government.<sup>20</sup>

Some writers think that the recent cartoon crisis reveals "the total mutual incomprehension between the Western and Muslim mentalities." Alain Woodrow writes:

On the one hand, democracy's sacrosanct principles of freedom of opinion is summed up by Voltaire's dictum: "I don't agree with what you say but I'll defend to the death your right to say it". On the other, the theocratic tenet holds that everyone, whether a believer or not, must abide by the diktats of a given faith. The Church used to teach that "error has no rights" – a dangerous justification of witch-hunting and the Inquisition.<sup>21</sup>

The cartoon controversy revolved around (as the above-cited responses show) two main issues, i.e., the right to freedom of expression and the blasphemy against the revered Prophet. The cartoons did outrage Muslims who consider it blasphemy to print any image of Prophet Muhammad. While many Europeans have defended their publication under the right to the freedom of expression, most Western media condemned the publication of material that hurt the religious sensitivities. In many other countries, the offending cartoons were re-published and the violence unleashed was severely condemned.

According to some authors, the so-called "sense of humour" of the Western media and their "act of solidarity" in re-publishing the same cartoons in so many other Western publications, cannot be justified, especially because the re-publication took place much after it was evident that this was a very sensitive issue to the Muslim brethren. In an explanation in the aftermath of the eruption of violence over the cartoons, the Danish newspaper which first published the cartoons, gave

---

the excuse that it did not intend to incite racial hatred or any insult towards Islam. Even if one were to accept this explanation, how is one to defend the newspapers of the half-a-dozen other Western countries re-printing the cartoons (in an apparent “act of solidarity” with the Danish newspaper). Much after the violent protests had begun? As mentioned above, this deliberately provocative act fuelled even more violence on the part of some Muslims around the world. Having provoked their cherished religious sentiments, can those newspapers which re-printed the cartoons, still go on blaming Islam as a violent religion?

The general impression given by the international media (which is dominated and controlled by the Western media) was that the Muslims are religious fanatics and that they do not understand what it means to have a Western way of freedom of expression. Mustafa Hussain, a Pakistani born Danish sociologist, expressed this point well when he said: “Switch on the television and you have the impression that Muslims are all fanatics, that Muslims don’t understand Western liberal values.”<sup>22</sup>

The overall impression given was that there was a sort of a “clash of civilizations” as suggested more than a decade ago by Samuel Huntington.<sup>23</sup> But then, even if one succeeds in proving that there indeed was such a clash of civilizations in general, one could not easily dismiss that the recent cartoon controversy had mostly to do with a clash of political ideologies, at the concrete/particular level in our contemporary world. One author commented:

Excavated from the depths of intellectual critique has been Samuel Huntington’s argument of a ‘clash of civilizations’. What academics argued was too simplistic and essentialist, suddenly appears apt in explaining why Europe is steadfast on championing the freedom of expression and Muslims are stoning European state symbols. Though Huntington’s theory still holds little weight in this latest drama, the recent incidents stress some critical issues that have been haunting Europe for centuries and disgracing Muslims in recent years.<sup>24</sup>

The efforts of the Western media to pit the right to freedom of expression against respect and sensitivity for the religious feelings of others was irresponsible by any ethical standards. Still worse was the conscious effort to identify the defence of a right to express any and everything as “our” position, and the right not to be insulted in one’s religious beliefs as “their” position. The same commentator writes:

But more than the wide-scale protests, it has been the extreme views, the ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ divide that has surfaced in the debate on this issue. The discourse largely centred on the polarity of secular values of freedom of expression against religious values and respect for the sacred. Though Britain and the US have handled the issue very delicately, both in the media and in the public domain, the debate has displayed a typical sense of Western elitist critique

of Muslim reaction, as if it is incomprehensible to the rational secular modern world.<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, most of the Western leaders and media were obsessed with condemning violent protests of the Muslims rather than questioning what caused such protests in the first place.

#### 4. Is the Freedom of Expression an Absolute Right?

One writer comments about the cartoon controversy:

The debate from the European viewpoint reflects a determination to defend liberal ideals of human rights, which are portrayed in opposition to Islamic values. As a journalist and defender of human rights, I stand firm on not compromising on the freedom of information. But, protecting human rights must not be at the expense of respecting people’s values and beliefs. These are not mutually exclusive positions in the true liberal societies, they can be complimentary.<sup>26</sup>

In the recent cartoon controversy, the main ethical debate began to revolve around the two crucial issues of the right to freedom of expression and the duty to be sensitive and respectful to others’ beliefs and practices. As can be gleaned from the various reactions enumerated above, in general, one group stressed the limitless right to free expression while the others stressed sensitivity to the feelings, especially to the religious feelings, of others. A careful reflection may show that both these (i.e., the right to free expression and the duty to be sensitive to others’ feelings), are not opposed to each other, but are just two sides of the same coin. That is to say that while the right to free expression needs to be affirmed, one also needs to be sensitive and responsible towards others in society in exercising that right. In other words, the right to freedom of expression, too, has its own limits, precisely because the subject of this right lives with other subjects in a given society.

As a matter of fact, the right to the freedom of expression is guaranteed by Article 19 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*:

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

However, in Article 29 of the same UN *Declaration*, we also read:

In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.

---

Are there any human rights that are without any limits whatsoever? Human subjects who enjoy such rights in society do live with other subjects in the same society and this demands that there be limits for each and every right, so that social harmony and common good may be assured. Thus, even a fundamental human right such as the right to life is not without limits when it is a matter threatening the common good of society. The Catholic tradition has always upheld this position, as evidenced in the teachings about killing in a war (under the *just war* criteria), killing in self-defence and capital punishment. Since human beings live in society with others, limits to any right are obviously needed.

Since the celebrated encyclical *Pacem in Terris* of Pope John XXIII in 1963, the Catholic Church has not only stressed the importance of upholding human rights, but she has also been most active in defending such rights. The Church's belief in human rights is based on the human dignity of each and every human being. David Hollenbach, one of the most competent theologians in the area of human rights says:

As the Catholic rights tradition understands it, human dignity is as an indicative rather than as an imperative. Human persons *have* dignity. They *are* sacred and precious. In this sense, dignity is not granted to persons by the ethical activity of others. Dignity is not bestowed on persons by other persons, by the family or the society or the state. Rather the reality of human dignity makes claims on others that it be recognized and respected. The moral imperatives set forth as human rights express the more specific content of these claims. Human dignity, however, is more fundamental than any specific human right. It is the source of all moral principles, not a moral principle itself. Particular human rights can therefore be understood only when they are seen as rooted in this fundamental norm.<sup>27</sup>

Accordingly, from the Catholic point of view, the primary source for human rights is human dignity. It is to respect, protect and uphold human dignity that the concept of human rights emerges in the Catholic tradition. Any move or any act that jeopardizes human dignity is against the concept of human rights. Consequently, any use of a right (as the right to free expression) that damages the human dignity of another (group) is necessarily opposed to the concept of human rights. As such, from a Catholic point of view, the recent invoking of the right to free expression in order to justify the hurting of Muslim religious feelings (in and through the cartoons) is not acceptable.

Even the secular sphere where this right to freedom of expression evolved into its present form, clearly limits to it. Ever since Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press, there have been various attempts to justify an unlimited freedom of the press/expression.<sup>28</sup> In its early stages, the freedom of expression was guided by "*the free press theory*." McQuail expresses the essence of this theory as follows:

In its most basic form it merely prescribes that an individual should be free to publish what he or she

likes and is thus an extension of other rights – to hold opinions freely, to express them, to assemble and organize with others. The underlying principles and values are thus identified with those of the liberal democratic state, a belief in the supremacy of the individual, in reason, truth and progress, and, ultimately, the sovereignty of the popular will.<sup>29</sup>

As far as the freedom of expression is concerned, *the free press theory* says basically that a person is free to say or print whatever he or she wants. Here, the concept of freedom means exclusively "freedom from" any constraints whatever, as far as the communication of ideas and opinions was concerned. We also need to notice that this theory takes into account only those who communicate (the communicators) and not the audiences (the recipients of communication).<sup>30</sup>

It was only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that various views challenging *the free press theory* began to emerge. Such views germinated and continued to grow, and just after the Second World War, with the appointment of the Hutchin's Commission by the US President in 1948, those views bore fruit in the form of what is known today as "*the social responsibility theory*."<sup>31</sup> This theory, while re-affirming the importance of the freedom of the press, freedom of speech, freedom of expression, etc., also stresses that journalists are responsible and accountable to the mass media audiences. In other words, such freedoms are not something as simple as to say you may print whatever you wish. Freedom is a gift to be used responsibly, and journalists are accountable to their respective audiences. Freedom is not merely the "freedom from" of *the free press theory*, but also as "freedom for":

Under social responsibility theory, freedom of expression is grounded on the duty of the individual to his thought, to his conscience. It is a moral right... Freedom of expression is not something which one claims for selfish ends. It is so closely bound up with his mental existence that he ought to claim it. It has value for the individual and for society.<sup>32</sup>

Moreover, one has to note here that this *social responsibility theory* takes into serious consideration the rights and freedoms of the mass media audiences or recipients explicitly. It is precisely this *social responsibility theory* that has come to stay with regard to contemporary media ethics, especially in the West, where self-censorship is preferred. One finds hard to understand the fanciful justifications of the majority of the Western media invoking the right to freedom of expression during the recent cartoon controversy. Such media personnel seem to be living with the framework of the 19<sup>th</sup> century *free press theory*. They seem to be ignorant of the accepted contemporary limits to the right to the freedom of expression, such as in matters of personal privacy, national security, confidentiality, sensitivity to religious/racial feelings, professional secrecy, pornography, violence, etc. They seem to think that the right to freedom of expression is limitless, an absolute right.

---

## 5. Double-Standards of the Western Media

Does the right to free expression become absolute only when insults are hurled against Islam? Will such insults ever take place against, for example, Judaism? There are strict laws and regulations in many leading Western countries against anti-Semitism, and so when it comes to the Jewish religious, there seem to be limits to this right, but not when one deals with Islam! Regarding such double standards, one author writes:

Apparently, the same newspaper that printed the cartoons of the Prophet, rejected cartoons ridiculing Jesus, three years ago, on the grounds that they would offend their readers. In the past week an extremist cleric, Abu Hamza, lost the right to free speech when he was jailed by a British court for inciting religious hatred and violence. I have no sympathy for Hamza because little of what he preached reflected the ideals of Islam. But the double standards were evident when in the same week members of the British National Party (BNP) were acquitted of similar charges. The BNP are like to face a retrial for making several racist comments, including, reportedly, calling Islam a 'wicked, vicious faith', but the irony of the different results is stark.<sup>33</sup>

Yet another author while highlighting the same hypocrisy points out how the Western media are not free to enjoy the same right to free expression so much invoked these days:

Unfortunately for them, despite all their proud claims, the Western media are not even free to insist on freedom of speech on matters dealing with Jews and the holocaust. The iron grip of the international Jewry on Europe has been so strong that in many European countries such as Germany, France, Austria, Switzerland, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Poland and Slovakia, there are holocaust denial laws in force making it a criminal offence to deny the holocaust. So much so, that many European countries wouldn't even allow an anti-Semitic book, however accurate it may be, to be published.<sup>34</sup>

Olivier Roy writing in the NEWSWEEK magazine, has this to say:

Islam, ... is increasingly a victim of double standards. Free expression is a right, to be sure. But Europe imposes many legal and social limits on expression. Anti-Semitic cartoons would almost everywhere be liable to legal prosecution. More and more European countries have passed laws banning homophobia or protecting minorities from degrading insults. Would cartoons mocking dwarfs or blind people be published in respectable European newspapers? No. Why, then, the social acceptance for mocking Muslims, which sometimes verges on racism?<sup>35</sup>

The above authors are vindicated by a concrete even

that took place last November in Austria. The Austrian authorities refused to grant bail to the British historian David Irving who was subjected to the charge of 'denial of the holocaust'. In two of his speeches which he had given in Austria I 1989 (some 16 years ago!), he had denied the existence of gas chambers in Auschwitz. He also argued that the scale of extermination was exaggerated, an "offence" which may carry a ten-year jail term for Irving! Will the same European authorities impose similar penalties to those who insult the beliefs of adherents to Islam? These are clear double-standards in the Western media!

One commentator adds:

The trouble with the Danish cartoons that have set the Muslim world ablaze is that they are stupid, historically uninformed, and therefore in appalling taste. We all know that Islam commands jihad and that this can mean either inner spiritual struggle or actual fighting for the faith. But to assume, as these drawings seem to suggest, that Islam is therefore a faith given to terrorism is as silly as to assume that Christianity goes naturally with invasion, oppression and murder because of the Crusades, the Inquisition and the expulsion of the Jews and Moors from Spain.<sup>36</sup>

## 6. Have the Protests got to be Violent?

Last, but not least, one also needs to make a comment about the violent Muslim reaction itself. Such violent reactions were not limited to the Arab world or to those countries where Muslims are the pre-dominant majority, but they were seen also in the Western capitals where there are now migrant Muslim minorities. One needs to rejoice that when their feelings are aroused, those Muslims minorities in the West have the freedom to protest. But one wonders whether the same could be said of the countries where Muslims are in majority. In those countries, there seem to be conscious attempts not only to curb freedom of expression (leave alone the freedom to protest!), but also to impose upon the non-believers the tenets of beliefs and practices of the Muslims. In this sense, the Muslim world too needs to make a self-examination and perceive their own double-standards, and then find ways and means to overcome them.

Equally important is the issue of the form of protests: Need the protests be as violent as we saw them during the recent cartoon controversy? Should they have taken thirty human lives? By engaging in violent protests (though it was only a small Muslim minority who got involved in violent protests), the Muslims seem merely to confirm the unjust and inaccurate Western charges that Islam in itself is a violent religion; they seem thus to confirm what some of the cartoons had unjustly and inaccurately tried to communicate. In the long run, the ones who benefit from such violent protests are those very Westerners who portray all Muslims as violent and intolerant:

Are the hate-filled demonstrations truly about love of the prophet or are they just indicative of a search

for an "Islamic" identity? Surely living Islam is about "beautifying" (*Ishan*) one's relationship with God; so should Muslims be even wasting their time with an issue that does not affect this? In the end, the only winners from this controversy are the likes of Jean-Marie Le Pen and Nick Griffin, representing European political parties long calling for the removal of all Muslims from "white-Christian" Europe.<sup>37</sup>

Muslims abhor images and have hardly any rituals. It is obvious that the cartoons angered many followers of the Prophet not only because Islam detests any form of representation of religious figures, but also because the cartoons were, in themselves, purely insulting. However, one wonders whether violence is the only way to protest against such atrocities. As one Muslim follower wrote:

...Muslims must realize that stoning buildings and burning flags are not the best way to express their sentiments. Whilst the extent of provocation behind such protest marches should not be ignored, it is still increasingly clear that aggression is not the trademark mode of expression for some Muslims and is becoming universally linked to Islam by the media.<sup>38</sup>

One has also to condemn in no uncertain terms the way some of the Muslim leaders handled this sensitive situation. As responsible religious leaders, instead of quelling the rising emotions of their adherents, some of them seemed to add fuel to the fire of Muslim anger. They were playing the role of 'rabble-rousers'. Their aim seemed to be to use this opportunity to strengthen their control of the masses of Islam:

Rather than just offence at representing the prophet, in a good or a bad light, it seems that the real issues at stake are power and identity. This whole cartoon affair has given added authority to imams, clerics, so-called community leaders of the Muslim world, who have seized this opportunity to unite Muslims globally on a highly emotional issue.<sup>39</sup>

## Conclusion

Whatever the ethical lesson we may choose from the above reflection, one cannot ignore the moral obligation to respect diversity in our contemporary world. Today's world has not only become a 'global village', but it has become 'a global village of religious and cultural diversity'. Moreover, this world of ours is not only diverse in religion and culture in a general sense, but also in our very ways of perceiving the reality around us. In fact, this is to be expected as a necessary consequence of a multi-religious and multi-cultural world. While each of us needs to have that freedom to think and express our perceptions and understandings in our own way, we must do so in a responsible way. Such responsibility would necessarily include sensitivity to other ways of perceiving, understanding and expressing reality, simply because we live in this world where others (who are different from us), have their own world-views.

It is simply basic good manners to try to understand other people's sense of the sacred. A non-Muslim would have very little idea of how Muslims love and revere Prophet Muhammad while resolutely insisting that he was simply a man. However, mere ignorance of such facts about another religion is no excuse to insult their adherents and then, instead of apologizing, to justify such insults by stubbornly and erroneously invoking the right to the freedom of expression in an absolute form!

<sup>1</sup> Craig s. Smith, "Cartoons put form to immigrant debate: Extremists on both ends seize the moment," *International Herald Tribune*, 6 February 2006, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Alain Woodrow, "Sacred and Profane," *The Table*, 11 February 2006, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> As cited in Habib Driouchm "When Cultures Collide," *TIME*, 13 February 2006, p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> Woodrow, *ibid.* p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Latheef Farook, "CartoonCrisis: A Recipe for Disaster," *The Sunday Times*, 12 February 2006, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> As cited in an AFP news report entitled "No calm in sight as more die in cartoon furore," *The Island*, 9 February 2006, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Woodrow, *ibid.* p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> As reported by Katherine Zoepf & Hassan Fattah, "Danish Consulate in Beirut burns; embassies attacked in Damascus," *International Herald Tribune*, 6 February 2006, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> As reported in an AFP News report entitled, "No calm in sight as more die in cartoon furore," *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Woodrow, *ibid.* p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Zoepf & Fattah, *ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> *Zenit News Bulletin*, 5 February 2006.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Robert Mickens, "Pope abhors violent protests against cartoons," *The Tablet*, 25 February, 2006, p. 31.

<sup>17</sup> Woodrow, *ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> It is important to note that not all Western media promoted only the right of free speech ignoring its obvious limits, nor were all these who protested the cartoons exclusively Muslims.

<sup>20</sup> James Graff, "A Right to Defend?" *Time*, 13 February 2006, p. 15.

<sup>21</sup> Woodrow, *ibid.* p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> As cited by Craig S. Smith, "Cartoons put form to immigrant debate," *ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations: Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.

<sup>24</sup> Farah Mihar Ahamed, "The Offensive Cartoons: The Controversy Deepens", *Daily Mirror*, 16 February 2006, p. 9.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> David Hollenbach, *Claims in Conflict: Retrieving and Renewing the Catholic Human Rights Tradition*. New York: Paulist Press, 1979, p. 90.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. J. Herbert Altschull, *From Milton to McLuhan: The Ideas behind American Journalism*. New York: Longmann, 1990; Dennis McQuail, *Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction*. Second edition, London: SAGE Publications, 1987.

<sup>29</sup> McQuail *ibid.*, p. 113. For a detailed discussion on this theory, see, *ibid.*, pp. 112-6; and also, Robert A. White, "Communication: Meaning and Modalities," in Patrick Granfield

---

(ed.), *The Church and Communication*. Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1994, pp. 24-9.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. William Ernest Hocking, *Freedom of the Press: A Framework of Principle, A Report from the Commission on Freedom of the Press*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1972, p. 213.

<sup>31</sup> For a detailed discussion on this theory, see McQuail, pp. 116-8 and White, pp. 26-30.

<sup>32</sup> Theodore Peterson, "The Social Responsibility of the Press" in Fred Siebert et. Al.(eds), *Four Theories of the Press: The Authoritarian, Libertarian, Social Responsibility and Soviet Communist Concepts of What the Press should Be and Do*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956, pp. 96-7.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Latheef Farook, "Cartoon Crisis", loc. Cit.

<sup>35</sup> Olivier Roy, "Holy War," *Newsweek*, 13 February 2006. p. 16.

<sup>36</sup> John Casey, "Folly, not a clash of civilizations," *The Island*, 8 February 2006, p. 111.

<sup>37</sup> Ammanullah de Soudy, "Truth Behind the Images," *The Tablet*, 11 February 2006., p. 6.

<sup>38</sup> Ahamad, *loc. cit.*, p. 9

<sup>39</sup> Amanullah De Soudy, *loc. cit.*

**Fr. Vimal Tirimanna, CSsR**, [vimalred@gmail.com](mailto:vimalred@gmail.com) is a Professor of Moral Theology in the Kandy Major Seminary, Sri Lanka.

Source: **Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection**, May 2006.

---

## con't from page 24>

merely objectionable. It is profoundly immoral, because it is disrespect. What society considers profoundly immoral, it is now likely to consider criminal as well. Displaying the pictures is probably a hate crime. It might well be emotional abuse, punishable in domestic contexts.

This must all sound familiar. I cannot say whether the official Western culture of piety, enthusiastically promoted worldwide, played a role in the reaction to the cartoons. I do know that Western piety has left the West without a leg to stand on in this dispute. It is no good trumpeting rights of free expression, because these rights are now supposed to have nebulous but severe limitations. From the moment Western countries started criminalising topless posters in locker rooms, hate speech, emotional abuse and many other sins of impurity, free expression was at the mercy of Western piety. It cannot be invoked against piety of another sort.

The point here is not that the West is hypocritical. Maybe it is; maybe it is just inconsistent: who cares? Hypocrisy is among the most harmless of sins; indeed that it has become such a fetish is one more indication of a culture of piety. The point is rather than the West has put ideological weapons in the hands of those it now wants to repel, and thrown away the weapons that might have proved useful in such an effort. The most basic notions of the rule of law — that you should not be punished for what you cannot help, like the feelings you have, that no one should be expected to obey laws so vague that the criteria of obedience are mysterious — were thrown away years ago. They cannot be picked out of the trashcan and held up as shiny Western ideals just because it is now convenient to do so.

The comics dispute should show the West that it has to make a choice. It can abandon the culture of piety, and go back to defending real civil liberties. It can go back to judging real crimes by real standards of evidence. It can turn its attention to real, vulgar, observable, concrete human needs — like decent food, clothing, and shelter — rather than chase the wild elusive butterfly of respect. Or it can keep up with

its piety — but then it cannot complain when others do the same.

Finally, though many commentators have juxtaposed Islamic and Christian fundamentalism, it might be more instructive to juxtapose Islamic fundamentalism and political correctness.

Both arose from the ashes of an effective secular left: the left that was suppressed all over the Middle East in the 1950s and 1960s, and the kiddie left that imploded as the Vietnam war drew to a close. Both gave up on effecting a real change in the material conditions of their societies and gave themselves over to carping, otherwise known as a critique of prevalent life—styles and 'hypocritical' policies. Both quickly discovered that governments or ruling elites found these life—style goals and displays of sincerity much more pleasing than attempts at radical change: better to inculcate respect and piety than to worry about trying to eliminate poverty and other social atrocities. So both found that their ideologies became semi—official, adopted by governments for their convenience and gently rebuked if things 'went too far'. Now we have smug professional Islamists who preach respect, and smug baby boomers who bask in their Sixties war stories as they remember the days when they invented the idea that respect was progressive.

Islamist culture and the culture of respect now reign with complacent authority, incredibly sensitive to everything that doesn't matter, and incredibly insensitive to what does. With all the supposed concern for 'the oppressed', no one sticks their neck out for these people. There are still leftists, as there are still fundamentalists, who genuinely care about real injustice; they are an isolated lot. The ideology of respect has decreed that piety trumps justice. Changing that priority will not be easy.

**Michael Neumann** is the author of [The Case Against Israel](#). He can be reached at: [mneumann@trentu.ca](mailto:mneumann@trentu.ca)

Source:

<http://www.counterpunch.org/neumann02132006.html>

---

# Respectful Cultures & Disrespectful Cartoons

## East Meets West

Michael Neumann

The Cartoon Affair is to an unusual extent about ideas. Whatever deeper causes are involved, the dispute involves religion, speech, and thought, not oil, borders, or weaponry.

This makes the incident a very pure example of the problems caused by bad ideologies, and the ideas that lie at their core.

The lesson of the cartoon controversy is not that Islam is offended; it is not a lesson about Islam at all. Nor is it that the West is 'hypocritical', even if that's true. Rather it is that Western culture has bought into an ideology whose chickens have come home to roost. This new orthodoxy is built on inflated notions of rights and respect, skewed ideas of injury and punishment, and the reliance on 'voices' in establishing truth.

### Rights

Jeremy Bentham said that rights were nonsense, natural rights, nonsense and stilts. Rights, very carefully defined, can have their uses, but their entrance into the cartoon debate perfectly exemplifies how rights 'inflation' makes them a mere encumbrance. We are told there is a right to free speech.

Where it comes from, no one says. No one ever says, though sometimes we may hear it is 'fundamental, which I suppose means: 'don't ask', or 'I really like this one'. But two — or billions — can play this game. Suddenly other rights rise up out of the ground like the warriors Jason fought: rights to offend and rights not to be offended, rights to worship in peace and rights to disturb that peace, rights to fire employees and rights to not to be fired — you name it. And it gets to be a big joke, because everyone realizes that (a) none of these rights are absolute, (b) they must often be 'weighed' against other rights. Well, how the hell do you do that? Check your big box stores and mail—order catalogues to see if they have any Rights Scales. Because as things stand, no one has a clue how to weigh rights against one another, so all the earnest talk of rights is not even hot air — which has, at least, its uses.

### Respect

In the cartoon debates, rights generally are invoked on the side of the cartoonists. On the side of the anti—cartoonists, the equivalent is Respect.

In some cases, 'respect' just means 'respecting rights', so we are back at the same vapid nonsense as before. No doubt you should respect persons in the sense that you should not, by and large, torture or murder or rob them; we knew this before anyone spoke of Respect for Persons. We can just say that people have a right not to endure such treatment. But then there are the hard cases, when, if you do not inflict pain or kill or steal, the rights of other persons will be violated. So

we are back to 'weighing' the rights of many against few, of one sort against other sorts — in other words, we are nowhere.

In other cases, Respect for Persons means actually respecting something or someone — persons, cultures, religion. As some moral ideal, this is a non—starter, and for several reasons.

First, actually respecting someone is a matter of what you feel. People typically don't have much control over their feelings: you have little choice about whether you feel respect for, say, George Bush or Saddam Hussein, Oprah or Paris Hilton, Wayne Newton or Sinéad O'Connor. So, except in very rare situations, there can be no right or wrong about feeling respect.

Second, it really flies in the face of reality to hold that all persons or cultures or religions are worthy of respect. Is this supposed to be some absolute truth? What is inconceivable about the notion of a contemptible person, culture, or religion? Not long ago, and not only in Western culture, the great sin was pride, and self—esteem was considered quite inappropriate to so insignificant and paltry a thing as a human being. You need not go nearly so far to the surely reasonable idea that some people really haven't done or been anything of which you should stand in awe.

As for cultures, it seems as if everyone agrees that some human institutions, attitudes, and practices are pretty awful. They are not all concentrated in one place. Has someone done a balance sheet to show that, all over the world and throughout history, the good things about cultures always outweigh the bad ones? How was this accomplished? Why haven't we heard about it? If this hasn't happened, why on earth should I assume that *any* culture is worthy of respect? And, to return to the first point, how can I be expected to muster a *feeling* of respect for all these cultures?

Maybe 'respecting cultures' is just supposed to mean that you shouldn't insult them. If so, why not just say that? Would it be, perhaps, to avoid giving a *reason* for this supposedly absolute rule? Wouldn't it be nice to *have* a reason, though?

Should we respect religion, then? When something contemptible is done in the name of religion, we invariably hear something like 'this is not Christianity, or 'this is not Islam'. Is that so? Here's a way of finding out. Pick up a good dictionary or encyclopedia and look up the religion. It will tell you, in a sentence or two, what all members of that religion are taken to believe, and it will come to very little — for example, that Jesus Christ is the son of God, that he died on the Cross for our sins, or that there is one God, and Mohamed is his prophet. Any practice consistent with those few very basic beliefs can be part of that religion — all it takes is for someone who holds those beliefs to incorporate those practices into their faith. Indeed, to say that these practices 'are not Islam' or 'are not Christianity' is just the sort of

---

dogmatism that people who say these things pretend to avoid. By this reasonable measure, all religions contain much that is contemptible. Why then should any of them be ‘respected’?

Respect is not a duty; it is not even desirable in many cases. Where ‘respect’ means not beating people or putting them in jail or driving them from their homes, it is a fine idea. But you shouldn’t do those things even to people you hold in contempt. To call this sort of restraint ‘respect’ is to disguise clear moral values in gummy slush.

## **Injury**

The bogus value of respect now looms so large in North American culture that virtually every high school code of ethics refers to it. But the ideology of respect cannot itself cut much ice, because you need to know what to do when you encounter *dis*respect. If disrespect is such a big deal, shouldn’t we be able to see the damage? The question gets answered with new, expanded concepts of injury. Simply to be in the presence of ‘offensive’ material, like pinups, is not merely annoying; it is damaging to the mind. The sight of Janet Jackson’s breast is said to have caused damage to millions, and drew the largest fine, \$550,000, ever levied against a television broadcaster. The creation of ‘atmospheres’ is injurious. When someone is convicted of an offense, victim impact statements may help to determine whether or for how long someone goes to jail, where the psychological injuries won’t count and the physical ones will go unrecorded, let alone punished. Unkind words, construed as emotional abuse, can create serious legal liabilities. Murky ideals lead to previously undiscovered harms.

## **Evidence**

With the increasing importance of elusive ideals such as respect and elusive injuries to those ‘respected’, the very concept of evidence is on the ropes. That someone says they feel bad is taken to be proof that they feel bad. That some says their identity has been damaged, or outraged, is proof that this mysterious injury has afflicted them. That someone says an experience has ruined their life proves that their life is ruined, and by that experience. Courts of law have acquired unexpected abilities to determine such subtleties as when an image is degrading. Written materials are said to incite hate; no one even thinks to ask whether anyone has actually come to hate something as a result of reading those materials. The question of whether any of this supposedly incited hate actually leads to injuries, in the old—fashioned sense, never arises. ‘Communities’, whose existence is established by the mere assertion that they exist, are known to suffer injuries on the basis of mere assertions coming from someone who merely claims to be, or is claimed to be, a ‘member’ or ‘leader’.

Worse than this, degraded notions of evidence have rehabilitated dangerous ethnic myths. The 19th century notion of a ‘people’ has somehow become anthropological and historical fact. The people is the Volk, and the connection with Nazism is a matter of historical record. If a particular

Volk is in fashion, their assertions come to *determine* historical record and even scientific fact. If they say they have inhabited an area for 20,000 years, they have done so, whether or not there is any evidence that anyone living today can trace their descent back to any Paleolithic ancestor. If a spirit is said to inhabit a river or lake — anyone who listens to ‘good’ radio will hear this dozens of times a year — then, by gum, that’s the truth. If the Gods of the land said to be angry, there are such Gods, who are angry. Assertions by someone who commands Respect are known, from the fact that they are asserted, to be true. And the fact that a People really, really feels close to some land proves their right to that land. To doubt any of this would, after all, be disrespectful. Degraded standards of proof invites killing on instinct. Now there are Bad Guys and, just by looking at them, we know who they are. When it comes to fighting crime, or policing the Middle East, appearance or suspicion suffices for conviction, and conviction for punishment.

## **Punishment and Wrong**

What with cloudy moralities, rights inflation, elusive injuries and Neanderthal notions of evidence, there is no longer much sense of the difference between what is wrong and what is, or ought to be, forbidden and, in consequence, punishable. Obscenity, lechery, sacrilege blasphemy, desecration, insults, sometimes even rudeness or disrespect are considered permissible only if they are morally defensible. If I ought not to be treated a certain way, instantly I have an important Right not to be so treated, and others are not merely in the wrong for treating me so: they are also to be punished. So certainly, if I ought not to insult a Community, the presumed members of the Community must have rights not to be insulted, and I should be punished for insulting them. The punishment may be jail time or ‘merely’ dismissal from your job, but it is punishment all the same.

## **Piety**

Taken together, and despite the secular, even left—wing contribution to these developments, official Western culture has become a culture of piety. It traffics first and foremost in the Unseen, in respect, in rights, in mysterious injuries, communities and offences, whose existence is founded in faith — faith in That Which is to Be Respected — rather than even the most elementary, the most minimally rational forms of reason. Respect, the foremost value of this culture, translates into behavior as reverence. Disrespect, its foremost sin, becomes punishable.

Suppose, for example, someone displays pictures which insult your life—style, way or life, or cherished beliefs. Suppose these pictures make you *feel* you are hated, whether or not anyone can trace some causal link between those pictures and hate, whether or not the hate does you any but mysteriously internal harm — perhaps you *feel* your *identity* is under assault. Displaying the pictures is now not

con’t on page 22>

---

## Cartoons Tap Into Deep-Seated Grievances

The furore in the Middle East caused by the publication of cartoons insulting the Prophet Mohammed seems now to be abating. Governments in the Middle East have been caught off guard over what has sometimes been portrayed as a clash of civilizations. However, the feelings stirred up may not affect only the external relations of the Middle East regimes, but also relations between these regimes and their populations.

The issue has revealed some of the deep resentment in the Muslim countries of the Middle East of the way that they feel the West has treated the region and Islam over the last 200-300 years. At the same time, there has been a revival of Islam in most of the Arab states over the last 20 years.

There are major differences in the way that governments and people have reacted and groups have exploited the issue. The big Arab republics have powerful (and secular) regimes running often weak states. They have left the way open for Islamic movements that can exploit this weakness. Some of these regimes initially saw the cartoons as an opportunity to enhance their Islamic credentials or divert public attention away from other issues. However, they became alarmed when they saw Islamist extremists exploiting the demonstrations for their own purposes:

—There are reports in Syria, for example, that an Islamic group infiltrated an organized official demonstration by rapidly setting up a spontaneous network in which each recipient of message passed it on to five others.

—There were serious riots in Benghazi in Libya on Feb. 17 and 18. It appears that elements from the underground Muslim Brotherhood infiltrated the demonstration and tried to turn it into anti-regime riot. Benghazi is still tense, and there is a heavy security presence in the city.

—In Iraq, it appears that various groupings, notably one led by Muqtada al-Sadr, are seeking to use the issue to bolster their own position within Shia politics.

Egypt and the Maghreb countries have been more circumspect. There have been strongly-worded diplomatic protests and statements. There were demonstrations in Egypt. President Hosni Mubarak and the Grand Mufti have been seeking to calm the

situation and foster dialog within Egypt and between Egypt and Europe as the best way to contain it.

Saudi Arabia was the first Arab state to make a formal protest in October. There has been a clear attempt within the kingdom to cool the temperature of protest. There was a rapid boycott of Danish consumer goods. King Abdallah is now calling for dialog and respect for all religions. Others in the kingdom have spoken of the need to devote more resources to educating Europe on the true nature of Islam.

Other Gulf states have allowed small demonstrations and permitted imams in mosques to condemn, often in extreme language, the cartoons. However, they have also spoken of the need to show restraint and supported the Saudi call for greater dialog.

The Arab press has given more space in recent days to articles criticizing the overreaction in parts of the Middle East. Some of these have suggested that this can do more damage to European-Muslim relations than the publication of the cartoons themselves.

There are signs too that most regimes now want to use dialog to defuse the crisis. Governments may thus give fewer opportunities to those who want to exploit the issue for other motives. However, as the riots in Benghazi showed, there are also people in Europe who may provoke further unrest.

The problem should start gradually to fade away, although there may be further incidents as it does so. However, for many in the region, it will remain in the background, as one more example of how the West treats Islam and add to the general sense of grievance. The situation is unlikely to improve unless Arab regimes act on their calls for dialog, understanding and education, and Europe reciprocates. In some cases, the regimes will need to start the dialog with their own citizens.

Source: [http://www.forbes.com/business/2006/02/27/middle-east-cartoons\\_cx\\_0227oxford.html](http://www.forbes.com/business/2006/02/27/middle-east-cartoons_cx_0227oxford.html)

---

## Islam And Globalisation

Until late last month, when Salman Rushdie added his name to those of a few other like-minded souls and signed a statement attacking Muslims for having been outraged by a set of Danish cartoons depicting their prophet with satirical ridicule, something seemed amiss in that whole global uproar, writes **Hamid Dabashi**.

With Salman Rushdie's signature at the bottom of a statement declaring a global proclamation against "Islamic totalitarianism", in the aftermath of the Danish cartoon row, we have entered a new phase in what might be termed "Islam and globalisation" — a twilight zone of uncertainty where we are all at the mercy of fastidious knowledge produced about bugbears of nightmarish proportions, in this particular case what Rushdie and his associates curiously call "Islam".

"After having overcome fascism, Nazism, and Stalinism", Salman Rushdie and his colleagues have declared, "the world now faces a new global threat: Islamism." How so, and by what authority? One looks in vain in the list of the statement's twelve signatories allied with Rushdie for someone with the remotest sense of demonstrable knowledge about this goblin of their perturbed imagination that they keep calling "Islam" — and yet they do declare and designate this "Islam" as a global threat, next and akin to "fascism, Nazism, and Stalinism". The world is now at the mercy of such proclamations — and Rushdie's name does carry, what Kent detected and declared in *Lear* and called, "authority". By what authority, how, when, what, and "who gave thee this authority" to declare such things — no one dares to ask.

"We, writers, journalists, intellectuals", announce Salman Rushdie and his associates, "call for resistance to religious totalitarianism." They can of course call for whatever they wish — but we are also entitled to ask "writers, journalists, intellectuals" of what particular and combined learning and erudition, knowledge and audacity, about the ghostly apparition that has disturbed their slumber. And why should the world attend and heed such proclamations? Is this thing they call "Islam" the faith of millions of people around the globe, or the bugbear of a band of neocon artists? It's hard to tell.

The case of the Danish cartoon row, in the furious rapidity of world events already an old issue, might be considered as perhaps the best example of how a boisterous banality now governs the principal mode producing public knowledge and thus perceiving Islam and its contemporary historical whereabouts. The row has a history, and the domain of its import implicates Europe in its entirety. It is not just the Danish paper *Jyllands-Posten* that initially commissioned and published these cartoons. Editors of newspapers and magazines throughout Europe, in print and on the Internet, jubilantly joined their Danish counterparts in massively distributing these cartoons and thus registering their European solidarity in the matter. One such incident after another adds fury and momentum to the way an increasingly globalised

audience, Muslim and non-Muslim, conceives and disposes of "Islam".

Selected scenes from scattered Muslim reactions to the publication of these cartoons, pictorially staged and carefully choreographed by the leading European press to sustain their historical record of showing Muslims in the worst possible angle ever seen through a camera have been systematically characterised as yet another sign of a fundamental discrepancy between (this the most enduring binary opposition manufactured by Orientalists in the course of their prolonged services to colonial modernity) "Islam and the West": clean-shaven, civilised white men properly attired in business suits posited against poor, enraged, and furious Muslims.

That some Muslims around the world are outraged and multitudes of them have gone out on a rampage is yet another example of how they misread the domestic affairs of Europeans and Americans and take them for a global assault on themselves. The primary and principal target of these cartoons, with the denigration of Muslims they entail, is in fact labour immigrants of Muslim descent suffering the racism of their host country in one shade, shape, and form or another. A similar misreading was exactly the case when Samuel Huntington issued his own proclamation a few years ago, positing Muslims and Islam as the principal threat to what he still insists on calling, "Western Civilization." On that occasion too, Muslims around the world took Huntington's prognostication to heart and thought he was talking to them, while he, along with a band of like-minded neocon artists like Francis Fukuyama and Alan Bloom, was in fact deeply troubled by massive demographic changes within the United States. By proposing that "Islam" posited a civilisational threat to "the West," Huntington and Co sought to silence massive bodies of old and new, Arab and Muslim, immigrants to the United States demanding a pride of place in terms domestic to their cultural heritage and moral authority.

That the immediate target of the Danish cartoonists was not a remote abstraction called "Islam", but an immediate leviathan appearing in the shape of immigrant communities of Muslim background in their own midst there is no doubt. What remains a puzzle is why leading European opinion-makers, led by a group of yuppie racist journalists, continue to be in a dire need of reminding themselves that they are God's gift to humanity and that Jews and Muslims, the flipped sides of the same coin, or by extension Africans, Asians, or Latin Americans, have no place among them. It is here, and in the immediate vicinity of that question, that lapsed Muslims like Salman Rushdie become handy.

The leading European press (but by no means all) is

---

now having an all-out orgy with its journalistic ethnic cleansing — and the bravura cannot be entirely explained by the fact that certain kinds of Europeans, carrying their Christianity up their sleeves or else brandishing their “Laïcité” like a saber of unmerciful certainty, do not wish to see any Jews or Muslims, Africans, Asians, or Latinos, among them. With some bizarre sense of irony, the colonial history of Europe, having plundered the globe many times over, has now brought millions of Muslims from Asia and Africa home to roost — and it would seem that some white Christian Europeans are frightened out of their wits. Oriana Fallaci is now chief among European soothsayers demanding the ethnic cleansing of her Europe. Between Fallaci and Berlusconi, the legacy of Mussolini’s fascism is no history — and Rushdie’s “Islam” no substitution.

In the midst of this row — militant Muslims and racist Europeans at each other’s throat — one cannot but wonder, with a modicum of reason, what is behind the quarrel. What we are dealing with here is the intersection of medieval signs and modern sensitivities, both brought to bear on a brutalised malignancy that resembles two belligerent and silly school children going at each other. To put things in perspective, one can of course begin with the inhibition of figurative representation in Islamic doctrinal disposition — a fact very much compromised by the range of Persian, Indian and Turkish miniature paintings, and by the effervescence of figurative royal paintings in the 18th and 19th centuries throughout much of the Muslim world.

Against the doctrinal inhibition of figurative painting, such paintings do in fact abound in Islamic art. This inhibition assumes a particularly curious turn when it comes to the figural representation of Prophet Muhammad that it might be quite instructive to know at this point. When the late Syrian filmmaker Moustapha Akkad, tragically killed in the course of a suicidal violence in Amman late last year, made a feature film on the career of Prophet Muhammad, *The Message* (1976), he opted, out of respect for Muslim sensitivity, not to show the face or figure of the Prophet and simply suggested his presence.

The evident presence of this doctrinal inhibition does not mean that pious Muslims the world over do not look for and produce pictorial representations of their holy men, including their Prophet. The Shias, in particular, have absolutely no qualms whatsoever having the images of Prophet Muhammad and their Imams depicted — painted on a canvas or woven into a decorative carpet — and sold in the markets of Najaf, Mashhad, Qom, or Beirut. Pious and believing Muslims buy these pictures and hang them proudly and reverentially in their homes or in public without any hesitation.

The question then is why when a Danish newspaper depicts Prophet Muhammad in a ludicrous manner, or previously when a Pakistani author goes on a fictive rampage denigrating the sacrosanct moments of a people’s history, some Muslims, particularly those suffering the terror of tyrannical rulers at home or else the indignities of labour migration abroad, are outraged. Career opportunist novelists or talent-less cartoonists, trying to make up for their lack of

creative talent with scandalous marketing ruses, are of course entirely, unconditionally, and ipso facto entitled to make any fool out of themselves, for such acts of juvenile superciliousness are entirely within their civil and human rights, and no one is even in a position to grant or deny them such inalienable rights. But whence the anger, and whereby the fury?

This obviously is a clear case of the context and not just the text — when you have a representation of a prophet with headgear that looks like a bomb and a nose straight out of the old European racist apothecary boxes, and lay him out thick against the background of a systematic record of white supremacist, masculinist, and European racism against Jews and Muslims, then you have a different story on your hand.

The current anti-Muslim plague, running loose throughout Europe and the United States, banks on the white Christian repertoire of anti-Semitism that has now shifted its focal attention away from the Jews and re-directed itself towards Muslims. Under the guise of the freedom of expression, and posing their racist prejudices in colourful colonial Enlightenment shades, prominent European opinion-makers, as fully evident in their leading newspapers and magazines, are letting loose their racist bigotry in ways unprecedented since the horrid records of European pogroms that ultimately led to the Jewish Holocaust, as is exemplified in the Prophet Muhammed cartoon row or the front covers of *The Economist* and most other right-wing papers and magazines up in arms against “gypsies” swamping “their lands”, loudly declaring that “9 out of 10 asylum seekers are comen,” and that they ought to be “kicked out”.

With a combination of mental laziness and a jaundiced visual imagination, these European newspapers are in fact regurgitating the selfsame anti-Jewish insignia definitive to their history and applying them to Muslims all over again. Contorted faces, prominent noses, frightful dispositions, angry demeanours, and grotesque postures have been and continue to be definitive to the way old-fashioned European racism sees Jews and Muslims alike. The self-inflicted surgical bodily mutilation of middle class Muslims — ranging from plastic surgery of the most grotesque sorts to removal of bodily hair to colouring their hair blonde and wearing colorful contact lenses — is the mirror image of the very same aesthetic hegemony of white Europeans.

What we are witnessing over the cartoons that the Danish *Jyllands-Posten* has commissioned and published, however, is not limited to a mere recycling of European anti-Semitism. There is a contemporary anxiety that feeds that pathological knee jerk. Placing headgear in the form of a bomb (a ticking bomb as Alan Dershowitz and Michael Ignatieff would say in the United States) on the head of Prophet Muhammad is the functional equivalent of placing a sign of a German concentration camp (the phrase “Arbeit Macht Frei,” for example), or a sign of the massacre of Native Americans, or a reference to the My Lai massacre of 1968 in Vietnam, or a picture of Lynndie England in Abu Ghraib, over the head of Christ in a Crucifix. It is a matter of combining medieval icons and modern barbarities, fusing the two in order to implicate the sacrosanct icons of a people in their entirety in

those acts of barbarity. Using the figure of Prophet Muhammad with a suggestion of terrorism, as it is defined by the US and its European allies (while they are systematically going around the world and torturing, maiming and murdering people on the assumption that they might be Dershowitz-Ignatieff ticking bombs), effectively implicates some 1.5 billion people of Muslim background around the world in such acts of degenerate violence — itself the continued reverberation of an entire history of European (and now American) colonial plundering of the globe.

Marking this event, two diametrically opposed reactions to the cartoon row now mirror and complement each other: first is the inexcusable anti-Semitic response of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, president of the Islamic Republic of Iran, either denying the Jewish Holocaust, and thus belittling the unending suffering it has caused Jewish people the world over, or else encouraging anti-Semitic tirades in his homeland; and second a band of neocon artists, led by the functional equivalent of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Salman Rushdie, branding a figment of their own turgid imagination “Islamism” and calling it “totalitarianism.” While in Iran, the legitimate and absolutely necessary criticism of the apartheid state of Israel has now degenerated into anti-Semitism, in Europe and the United States, a band of equally ignoramus career opportunists are denouncing what they call “Islamism”, a pathologically nervous hiding, and thus all the more revealing, of their own collective hatred of a people and their received notions of sanctity.

Initially published in *Charlie Hebdo*, a French weekly and one of the European papers to reprint the caricatures, the Rushdie and Co declaration warns that “after having overcome fascism, Nazism, and Stalinism, the world now faces a new global threat: Islamism.” Thus in the esteemed estimation of these signatories, the imminent threat to humanity is not the environmental catastrophe posed by the gargantuan waste and abuse of natural resources by the US and the entire industrial calamity it represents; not the manifestations of obscene wealth, on the one hand, and unfathomable poverty, on the other, in the heart of Europe and the United States (remember hurricane Katrina); not the fact that according to the UN some 870 million people go to sleep hungry every night around the globe while the military budget of the United States between the year 2000 and 2008 is estimated at 32 and eleven zeroes in front of that figure; not the unconscionable destitution of innocent people in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, all created and conditioned by the globalised capitalism over which presides the US and Western Europe; not the prevalent racism, sexism, and a whole gamut of transcultural manifestations of endemic patriarchy, economic inequality, social injustice, and gender apartheid; not the systematic eradication of civil liberties in the heartlands of their cherished “West”; not the widespread network of torture chambers in Abu Ghraib, Bagram Air Base, Guantánamo Bay, and a whole subterranean labyrinth of CIA-run dungeons in Europe — no, none of these frightful facts, in the opinion of Salman Rushdie and his comrades, poses any threat to the globe, when compared to a handful of pitiful, scattered, and pathetic Muslim reactions, all out of fear,

frustration, and despair, to the Danish caricature of their prophet.

This has of course been a long season of migration to the lucrative right, and not just sanity but sheer literacy has lost to self-promotion, conducted on the broken backs of poverty-stricken people. For while the varied forms of totalitarianism, fascism, Nazism, and Stalinism (all vintage European inventions) were state-sponsored ideologies that wreaked havoc first and foremost on citizens caught in the snare of their lunacy, what they call “Islamism” (out of sheer historical illiteracy of what has happened in and to Islam over the last 200 years) is a US-sponsored propaganda gadget manufactured to generate and sustain an illusory enemy to justify warmongering and global domination.

A band of supercilious journalists publish a number of cartoons in Denmark and scores of Muslims are killed while protesting in the US-occupied Afghanistan, its neighbouring Pakistan, a client-state of the selfsame US, and then in other parts of the Muslim world. Where, and at what level of a rudimentary political literacy, does Islamic “totalitarianism” enter this scene? The only country in the world that carries the epithet of an “Islamic Republic” — mirroring in its religious disposition the Jewish State, the US Christian Empire that supports it, and the Hindu Fundamentalism that aspires to its apartheid racism — is Iran, where the theocratic tyranny of a band of useless

*The principal target of these cartoons was (and is) an Afghan woman teacher in Denmark, a Pakistani child on her way to school in Norway, an Algerian busboy hiding from the police in France, a Moroccan street sweeper on his way to work in Italy, an Iranian cab driver negotiating his way in a city in Holland, a Turkish illegal immigrant scared to open her mouth in Germany, an Egyptian student fearing for her future in Spain, a Syrian restaurant-owner wondering if he will have a customer somewhere in Sweden, and then millions of others like them suffering the indignities of desperate labour migrations into Europe and weathering the monumental manifestations of European racism on a daily and regular basis.*

---

medieval jurists is systematically and valiantly contested by its own citizens. Whence and where did Islam become a “totalitarian” state apparatus like fascism, Stalinism, and Nazism? There is not a single so-called “Muslim country” the inhabitants of which are not actively engaging and challenging the most sacrosanct principles of their faith. Just in their modern history, and over the last two hundred years, Muslims themselves have turned their collective faith upside down questioning the most definitive aspects of their faith. In facing and opposing the unfathomable barbarity of European colonialism, Muslims have left not a single stone unturned in their own religious doctrines and dogmas — they did not and have no need to wait for a band of illiterate opportunists to tell them what is wrong with their faith and what they need to do. Nothing of that noble and continued history — of a people launched against themselves — is now a matter of global public knowledge, and yet the premise of everything said and conceived of Islam is precisely what illiterate prognosticators like Salman Rushdie and Co have deigned to tell their European and American clientele.

The overwhelming majority of Muslims the world over swallow their pride, turn their face from this ghastly European racism and go about their daily lives. Small bands of militant Muslims, angered by insults they think targeted against people they hold holy, go on a rampage and scores of them are beaten and even killed by the police in their respective countries. The very same press that started this horrid row takes pictures of these mobs and juxtaposes them against clean-shaven white European statesmen in their business suits and soft-spoken newspeak — thus triggering the hurried reaction of these “writers, journalists, intellectuals”, as they call themselves, self-promoting career opportunists as they are. Where did “totalitarianism” come into play? “Totalitarianism”, let it be remembered, is a state ideology, presiding over a massive military machinery, the way Hitler, Stalin and Mussolini did — all of them European, all of them white, all of them male, and yes, all of them Christian by birth and breeding.

To the everlasting shame of not just the signatories of this logically flawed and categorically racist document, signed and sealed by Salman Rushdie, but of every European who has remained silent or compliant in the course of the cartoon row, the principal target of this horrid act of racism remains not a stilted abstraction called “Islam”, nor indeed millions of Muslims living outside the European racist imaginary. The principal target of these cartoons was (and is) an Afghan woman teacher in Denmark, a Pakistani child on her way to school in Norway, an Algerian busboy hiding from the police in France, a Moroccan street sweeper on his way to work in Italy, an Iranian cab driver negotiating his way in a city in Holland, a Turkish illegal immigrant scared to open her mouth in Germany, an Egyptian student fearing for her future in Spain, a Syrian restaurant-owner wondering if he will have a customer somewhere in Sweden, and then millions of others like them suffering the indignities of desperate labour migrations into Europe and weathering the monumental manifestations of European racism on a daily and regular basis. Now enter Salman Rushdie and Co, putting their ignoble names to a document that seals their approval of global

injustice and racism towards 1.5 billion people, imagining themselves the beneficiaries of a European Enlightenment that in its very philosophical inception denied them and their homelands and cultures entry even into the category of “human” and considered their entire pedigree beneath contempt.

Today signs of a horrid collective racism are becoming evident in post-war European cities and towns dangerously and conveniently forgetting the horrors of the Jewish Holocaust — when white European racist Christians sought systematically to eradicate an entire people on the single premise that they were Jews. Leading European newspapers have reprinted the cartoons of Prophet Muhammad not out of a ludicrous sign of solidarity with their yuppie and illiterate Danish colleagues, but to frighten millions of European Muslims into submission, shame, fear, and intimidation. Millions of Muslim children across Europe now go to school frightened, ashamed, feeling a false sense of guilt, and thus petrified out of their collective consciousness. What these newspapers are effectively doing is to make it impossible for Muslims to oppose violence and barbarity of all sorts, particularly those done in their name, in any way other than denouncing their collective faith, dying their hair blonde, bleaching their faces white, and thus metamorphosing into a walking denigration of themselves. Those children are the principal targets of every ghastly newspaper in Europe that reprinted those cartoons — to make sure that they are bullied in their schools and neighbourhoods, discriminated against in their future job markets, growing up ashamed of their culture and character, and obedient to a globalised and whitewashed Eurocentricity with which the classical European anti-Semitism now wishes to mark its history.

“Islam and globalisation”, or giving European and American space to Muslim names to denounce their own Islamic phantasms, is a new phase in the social manufacturing of domination — using nominal Muslims against Islamic abstractions. This — pitting lapsed Muslims against Islamic sensibilities — is ultimately an exercise in futility. The fate of the globe, Europe included, is written elsewhere, somewhere between the lines of massive labour migration, on one side, and the global reconfiguration of the capital that systematically seeks to abuse it, on the other. The culture war this has occasioned in the meantime is a murderous nightmare for many, a lucrative pastime for some, a headache for others, and yet at the end an entirely negligible footnote to history.

**Hamid Dabashi** is the Hagop Kevorkian professor of Iranian studies and comparative literature at Columbia University in New York. He is the author of *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran (Second Edition, Transactions, 2006)*, and *Close Up: Iranian Cinema, Past, Present, Future (Verso, 2001)*, the founder of “*Dreams of a Nation: A Palestinian Film Project*”, and the editor of *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema (Verso, 2006)*. His forthcoming book, *Iran: A People Interrupted*, is scheduled for publication this year by the New Press.

Source: <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2006/787/cu4.htm>

---

# Economic And Human Costs Of The Jyllands-Posten Muhammad Cartoons Controversy

## *Human costs*

- Andrea Santoro, an Italian Catholic priest, was killed on February 5, 2006 in Trabzon, Turkey. A 16 year-old high school student was arrested two days later carrying a 9mm pistol. The student told police he had been influenced by the cartoons.<sup>[1]</sup>
- At least four protestors were killed in Afghanistan, in Mihtarlam and an US air base in Bagram. One boy was trampled to death in Bossaso, Somalia when the crowd stampeded as police fired in the air to disperse them. On February 5th, 2006 one protestor died at the blazing Danish Embassy in Beirut, Lebanon.<sup>[2]</sup>
- On February 6, 2006 one demonstrator involved in the torching of the Danish consulate in Beirut, Lebanon was found dead on a staircase. One protestor was shot to death in Laghman Province Afghanistan.<sup>[3]</sup>
- Four people were killed and 22 injured on February 7, 2006 in an attack on a NATO base in Maymana, Afghanistan.<sup>[4]</sup>
- On February 13, 2006, two people were killed in Lahore, Pakistan. The next day two were killed in Peshawar, Pakistan; and another in Lahore.
- On February 15, 2006, three people were killed by local police forces in the city of Peshawar, Pakistan during widespread demonstrations in the city.
- On February 17, 2006, eleven people died during protests in Libya <sup>[5]</sup>
- On February 18, 2006, sixteen people were killed in northern Nigeria as demonstrators protested the cartoons by storming and burning Christian churches and businesses.<sup>[6]</sup> The majority of the casualties were believed to be Christians, a minority group in Northern Nigeria.
- As of March 22, 2006, 139 people have died, and at least 823 people have been injured as a result of the cartoons (those figures do not count riots in Nigeria).<sup>[7]</sup>
- As of April 14, 2006, a 67 year old coptic christian was knifed to death by a 25 year old muslim in an attack on faithful in a coptic church in Alexandria, Egypt. At the same time others attacked two other

coptic churches and injured more than ten christians.<sup>[8]</sup> According to press reports, referring to the department of the Interior of Egypt, the killer acted in revenge to the publication of the Muhammad cartoons.<sup>[9]</sup>

- On May 3, 2006, 28 year old Pakistani Amir Abdur Rehman Cheema hung himself in prison in Berlin, Germany while awaiting trial for an unsuccessful attempt to enter the building of the German newspaper Die Welt, armed with a knife, and attack the chief editor. At his autopsy, two high-ranking pakistani police officials were present.<sup>[10]</sup>

## *Economic costs*

While many Muslims and supporters took part in protests throughout the world, many more took part in one of the single biggest consumer led boycotts of all time. Consumers, especially Arab nations, began a process of boycotting all Danish goods. This was then followed by the governments of Iran and Saudi Arabia issuing boycotts and restrictions on Consumer products imported from Denmark. Denmark is concerned about the potential loss of 11,000 jobs resulting from boycotts against Danish products in the Islamic world.<sup>[11]</sup>

The biggest single loser of the Boycott was a Swedish-Danish company called Arla. Arla, Denmark's biggest exporter to the Middle East, has been losing 10 million kroner (1.6 million dollars, 1.3 million euros) per day since its products were taken off the shelves in several, and has had to temporarily lay off 125 workers. In response, Arla began to sell its product without its brand name being present and in large containers. Other companies have replaced their "Made in Denmark" label with a "Made in the EU" label. Others still have used foreign subsidiaries to camouflage the origin of Danish production, according to the Confederation of Danish Industries' (DI).

The Boycott continued, despite hopes that it was a temporary dispute which would quickly blow over. The pharmaceutical company Novo Nordisk said that it had lost a 200-million-kroner insulin contract in Turkey blaming the ongoing controversy. Jyske Bank has estimated that the cost of the boycott to the Danish economy could total 7.5 billion kroner which is in the area of 0.5 percent of the Danish GDP.<sup>[12]</sup>

Another study has shown that Danish export losses due to the boycott were more than compensated by gains in other markets. The Danish export to the Arab world is less than 2% of GDP.<sup>[13]</sup>

---

## Consumer Boycotts of Danish Products

- People in Saudi Arabia called for a boycott on Danish products on January 20 and carried it out starting January 26. The boycott primarily targeted dairy products produced by Arla Foods, but has also hit other products such as Bang & Olufsen and Lego.
- Arla has halted production in the Saudi capital Riyadh and sent home 170 employees.<sup>[14]</sup> Arla exports account for almost 380 million Euros a year.<sup>[15][16]</sup>
- The boycott has spread to Kuwait where the country's largest retail chain, the state-owned *Coop*, has taken all Danish products off the shelves. This has led to the Confederation of Danish Industries sending an open letter to *Jyllands-Posten* in which they state that the paper should comment on these events because they feel their members are caught in a "battle" between religious movements and the paper.<sup>[17]</sup> The newspaper has reacted to the letter by saying that "*Dictatorships should not dictate what Danish newspapers are to draw and write*".<sup>[18]</sup>
- The Danish product now seem to be on a rebound. Sales for April 2006 are virtually as high as April 2005, and for medical products the export is even up.

## Property Damage

- On February 4, 2006, the buildings containing the Danish and Norwegian embassies in Syria were set ablaze, although no one was hurt.
- On February 12 - February 15, 2006, during three days of riots in the city of Peshawar, Pakistan people demonstrated against symbols of Western culture. Fast food restaurants, banks and two offices of Telenor (a Norwegian telecom company) were vandalized.
- On February 18, 2006, eleven Christian churches were torched in riots in the state of Borno, Nigeria. A number of hotels, stores and vehicles were torched in Maiduguri, the state capital, after the local police force used tear gas to disperse rioters.

## Other calls for boycott

- In February, the French international supermarket chain Carrefour takes all Danish products off the shelves in Muslim countries. Posters with the Carrefour logo proclaiming a boycott of Denmark, resulted in a boycott of Carrefour in Brussels.<sup>[19]</sup>
- On March 05, 2006 Ayman al-Zawahiri of Al Qaeda urged all Muslims to boycott, not only Denmark but also Norway, France, Germany and all others that have "insulted the Prophet Mohammed" by printing cartoons depicting him.<sup>[20]</sup>

- Iran has announced that it will cease all trade with "countries that have published the cartoons". A high level committee involving the Foreign Minister, the Deputy Foreign Minister, the Deputy Trade Minister and the Deputy Oil Minister has been set up.

## References

1. "Murder of priest 'religious revenge'", *Independent Online*, February 8, 2006.
2. "First deaths in Muhammad cartoon protests", *Times*, February 6, 2006.
3. "Protestors killed as global furor over cartoons escalates", *Middle East Times*, February 6, 2006.
4. "Death toll mounts in rioting over cartoons", *International Herald Tribune*, February 8, 2006.
5. "In Libya, 11 reportedly die in cartoon protests", *CNN*, February 17, 2006.
6. "16 die in cartoon protests in Nigeria", *CNN*, 2006-02-18.
7. "Cartoon Body Count", *Web*, 2006-03-02.
8. **(German)**"Fanatiker greifen Christen an", *N-TV*, April 14, 2006.
9. **(German)**"Straßenschlacht in Alexandria", *N-TV*, April 15, 2006.
10. **(German)**"Obduktion bestätigt Selbstmord eines Pakistaners", *N24.de*, May 10, 2006.
11. Broder, Henryk M., "Threaten One, Intimidate a Million", *Der Spiegel*, 2005-02-01.
12. Allagui, Slim, "Danish business feels the pain of cartoon boycotts", *Middle East Online*, 2006-02-20.
13. "Muhammed-affæren er en handelsfordel", *Denmark Radio*, 2005-06-12.
14. "Firms feel pain of people power", *BBC*, 2006-02-03.
15. "Arla stages ad offensive in Saudi row", *Jyllands-Posten*, 2006-01-27.
16. "Arla dairy sales crippled by Middle East boycott", *Dairy Reporter.com*, 2006-01-31.
17. "Jyllands-Posten needs to explain itself", *Dansk Industri*, 2006-01-27.
18. **(Danish)**"Chefredaktør undrer sig over DI's udmelding", *Politiken*, 2006-01-27.
19. "Cartoon War Leads to Role Reversal", *The Brussels Journal*, 2006-02-04.
20. "Al Qaeda tape urges boycotts over cartoons", *ABC*, 2006-03-05.

Source: **Wikipedia**, the free encyclopedia

**Br. Anthony Rogers, FSC**  
*Editor*

*Editorial Consultants:*

**Manolita Gonzales**  
**Teresita M. Aparente**

**Ma. Celeste S.C. Gimena**  
**Aurelio Joaquin**

*Info is the newsletter of the Office for Human Development of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. News and articles may be freely reproduced with acknowledgement except those reproduced "with permission."*

**Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences**  
**OFFICE FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**  
1451 P. Guevarra St., Sta. Cruz, Manila 1014, Philippines  
P.O. Box 180, Manila 1099, Philippines

*The views published in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position and views of the FABC, the Office for Human Development or the Catholic Church.*

**PRINTED MATTER**  
**AIR MAIL**

## **C O N T E N T S**

Faith, Reason And The University: Memories And Reflections .....	4	Right To Freedom Of Expresion Or Duty To Respect Others?.....	15
Statement By Card. Tarcisio Bertone.....	8	Respectful Cultures And Disrespectful Cartoons .....	23
Pope's Apology .....	9	Cartoons Tap Into Deep- Seated Grievances .....	25
Instances When The Vatican Admitted Errors Or Apologized .....	9	Islam and Globalisation.....	26
In Quotes: Muslim Initial Reactions To Pope .....	10	Economic And Human Costs Of The Jyllands-Posten Muhammad Cartoons Controversy.....	30
Freedom Of Speech And Religious Protest .....	12		