

“Wir haben es nicht gewusst.” *The 21st century sequel*

“We didn’t know.” And indeed, how should we have known that a bloodthirsty totalitarian ideology threatened our civilization and its humanistic values? It’s true that hardly a day passes that there isn’t something to draw our attention to Islam – beheadings of journal-

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ists, hikers, and foreign workers; bombings so frequent that only major ones still make the news; destruction and desecration of non-Muslim (or Muslim from a rival sect) places of worship, community centres, cemeteries and other loci; and vandalization of antiquities because they aren’t Islamic.

Then there is the abduction, mass

murder, rape, and enslavement occurring in Nigeria, elsewhere in Africa, and especially in the nascent caliphate in Iraq and Syria, to which would-be jihadis from all nations are flocking, enticed by said caliphate’s skillful use of social media.

Nor have Europe and North America escaped murder and mayhem on their home turf. Remember the good old days? In 1989, “fatwa” was a word most of us had to look up in the dictionary

and Salman Rushdie was the only person we knew of who had to worry about one. The February, 1993, bombing of the World Trade Center and the October, 2000, bombing of USS Cole, as well as other attacks on Western interests around the world, were harbingers of the carnage that came to New York and Washington on September 11, 2001, which nevertheless took us by surprise. Almost the first thing that then President George Bush said following the attack that killed thousands of his countrymen was that the religion in whose name it was carried out was one of peace. In retrospect, we can see how the pace and variety of jihadi attacks in Europe and North America have escalated since then, especially in recent months.

The year 2004 brought a bombing in Madrid in March, with 191 deaths and over 2,000 injured, and the brutal and public murder of filmmaker Theo van Gogh in Amsterdam, who had offended Muslims with his film *Submission*, in November. There was an explosion of Muslim anger with violent and often deadly protests during the Danish cartoons episode of 2005-06. In July, 2007, 52 people were killed and some 700 injured in bombing attacks in London. A shooting rampage at a Fort Hood, Texas, military base killed 13 and injured 32 in November, 2009. In March, 2012, three soldiers, three schoolchildren and a teacher were killed and five others injured in attacks in Toulouse and Moutaban, France. The spring of 2013 brought jihadi carnage in the form of the April bombing of the Boston marathon and the brutal May slaying of Lee Rigby in Woolwich, England. In May, 2014, four people were killed at a Jewish museum in Brussels, while in September, an 82-year-old London

woman working in her garden and a female packing plant worker in Oklahoma were killed in jihadi beheadings. Two deadly terror attacks in Canada killed a soldier and reservist in October, while a mass hostage-taking in Sydney, Australia, in December resulted in two deaths. So far, 2015 has brought us 17 victims in January in the Paris attacks on *Charlie Hebdo* magazine, a Jewish grocery store, and police officers, while two died in February in attacks on a free-speech meeting and a synagogue in Copenhagen.

The above is just a small sampling of the global jihadi carnage because Westerners are not at the moment bearing the brunt of the terror attacks. The BBC World Service and King's College London reported that during the month of November, 2014, 5,000 people were killed in jihadi attacks.¹ Thirty-five percent of the death toll was in Iraq, where many of the victims were civilians. Other countries suffering a large number of attacks by jihadis were Syria, Afghanistan, Nigeria, and a lesser number in Pakistan.

Despite what comes out of the mouths of the attackers themselves ("Allahu Akbar" and various Koranic verses or hadiths justifying their behaviour), our authorities and media are reluctant to address, or in outright denial about, any connections to Islam or jihad. The US government has only recently changed the Fort Hood killings to "domestic terrorism" from "workplace violence," while British Prime Minister David Cameron insisted that the Rigby killers had betrayed Islam. The denial continues despite the vast amount of resources that governments are now having to devote to trying to prevent terror attacks and keeping tabs on would-be jihadis wanting to go to Syria or wreak havoc at home. In Canada, the RCMP is stretched thin. Nevertheless, the Canadian media are for the most part slow to connect dots about the true nature of the threat, that is jihad with the purpose of subjugating all countries under Islamic rule as required by Islamic law.

Two recent interviews on the CBC radio program *As It Happens* exemplify the tendency of the media to downplay any association of Islamic violence with Islam and to exaggerate the threat to Muslims of hate-crimes committed in retaliation for such violence. On Thursday,

February 12, AIH host Carol Off interviewed a friend of one of the three Muslim victims of the deadly shooting two days earlier in Chapel Hill, NC. The friend expressed his view that this was a hate crime, and not, as the police suggested, about a parking dispute. Off was very sympathetic and asked if the killings had created a sense of fear. He answered that "Now you have to start thinking twice before going out" and that the "basic sense of safety in our own home" was being stripped away. The victim's friend was also concerned about his own wife who wore a hijab. In reality, as tragic as the killing of the three young people is, there is no evidence of a wave of anti-Muslim hate crimes in America or anywhere else. Nor even that the killer, Craig Hicks, was motivated by anti-Muslim hate. He was thoroughly unpleasant to all neighbours in his condominium complex, gun-obsessed and mentally ill. The fact that this hard-core atheist supported the SPLC (Southern Poverty Law Center) which dismisses any criticisms of Islam as Islamophobia and called those who opposed the construction of a mosque on Ground Zero in New York "hypocrites" does not support a particular animus to Muslims. No motive beyond anger regarding the parking dispute has as yet been firmly established.

In contrast, in her Tuesday, February 17, interview with Denmark's Chief Rabbi Jair Melchior following the Copenhagen killings, Off went happily along with the rabbi in downplaying the danger of Muslim fanatics to the greater community. Off was quick to blurt out "It's a fringe" when the rabbi called the Copenhagen killer and people like him "not only a minority, but a fraction of a minority." Nor did she question him when he said that people like the killer "stand against everything not only that mankind stands for, but that Islam stands for." Evidently, neither Off nor Melchior think that Islam might have anything to do with the attacks listed in the paragraphs above. It is commendable that the rabbi insisted that he would not let attacks by people like the Copenhagen killer terrorize him, but despite a bow to free speech, his answer to a question about the Danish cartoons was disappointing. People need to take responsibility for what they say, he said, and how

their work might change the way other people feel and think. That didn't mean they should stop, he continued, but that they should understand that before they decide to do it. Off then asked if that sensitivity was missing, and he replied that it was, and that was wrong. If you were expecting harsh words from either Off or the rabbi for those whose behaviour needed to be carefully considered by anyone contemplating drawing a cartoon, you will be disappointed.

The two interviews taken together would seem to indicate that Off agrees that Muslims in America, or at least in Chapel Hill, NC, have reason to live in fear due to anti-Muslim attitudes, whereas Danes should not allow the Copenhagen killings to stop them from going about their business because the Copenhagen killer represented merely a fringe, who wouldn't behave so badly if only people were more sensitive.

If only this muddled thinking were peculiar to *As It Happens* or the CBC. But it is symptom-

atic of the Western media and our leaders in general, who are more than eager to exculpate Islam and avoid making uncomfortable connections. With rapidly rising Muslim populations, these countries are seeing many changes, including self-censorship and, in Europe at least, avoidance by non-Muslims of certain parts of some of their own cities.

So what will we tell our children or grandchildren, should their lives be constrained by the strictures of Islam, either by law or simply through the fear of violence, or a combination of both. "We didn't know"? Or maybe we'll be honest and say, "We were scared, and it was easier just to pretend that we didn't see what was happening."

Reference:

1. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-30080914>

— *Madeline Weld*

Letters

I am writing to express my dismay at the article by Ms. Madeline Weld in the current issue of *Humanist Perspectives* entitled: "Israel or Islam". I found it extremely biased against Islam in a way which tarnishes all Moslems. It is also an inaccurate portrayal of Islam. The book on which much of the article is based is "Al-Yahud: Eternal Islamic Enmity and the Jews" which I would say qualifies as a hate speech suspect. I think the piece is unworthy of we humanists and casts aspersions on the integrity of our publication. If the same issue of the magazine had a companion article with a similar anti-Israeli bias I would have been less perturbed.

— *Charles Sigmund*
Victoria, BC

The answer to Madeline Weld's rhetorical question "Is there any Muslim state where minorities are treated equally, or where secularism is making advances?" (*Humanist Perspectives*, 191) is "Yes." According to the International Humanist and Ethical Union's 2014 report people living in the African country of Sierra Leone (Muslim population 92%) are free and equal. Humanists face less discrimination in that country than they do in Canada, the United States or just about every other predominantly Christian country in the world. Other predominantly Muslim countries where Humanists reportedly face less discrimination than in Canada include Burkina

Faso, Ivory Coast and Senegal.

I agree with Dr. Weld that the barbarism of Islamic State is rooted in the religious traditions of Islam. But just like the early barbarism of Christianity is no longer widely practiced (although the practices in church-run Indian Residential Schools were fairly recent) Islam is capable of evolving into less toxic forms. Indeed, the excesses of Islamic State have led to calls for a separation of church and state by young Muslims in Egypt and elsewhere in the Arab world. By essentializing Islam as inherently and forever evil we are driving moderate Muslims into the arms of their militant brethren and undermining the advances we have

gained in predominantly Muslim countries like Sierra Leone.

— *Lloyd Hawkeye Robertson, La Ronge, Sask.*

When I subscribed to *Humanist Perspectives*, I thought I was going to be reading a thoughtful, sane publication. However, I've been

very disturbed by the extremist opinions presented by Madeline Weld. Her position seems to be that Islam is the most evil religion ever devised by humankind, and that all of its adherents are potentially evil to an extent not attainable by any other human being on this earth (in short, the only good moslem

is a dead moslem). This is the kind of thinking that leads to expulsion, forced conversions or concentration camps. I can not support that. The other good and thoughtful articles in your magazine notwithstanding, I will not be renewing my subscription.

— *Bruce Adie Nanton, Alberta*

Madeline Weld replies:

It is interesting that Bruce Adie's email to *HP* was sent on January 8, the day after 12 people at *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris were massacred for publishing cartoons offensive to Muslims (and these were followed by additional killings). As it happens, I am writing my response to these letters within days of another killing, this time in Denmark at a meeting on free speech, and again the intended target (apparently Lars Vils, who was not the victim) was a cartoonist who had lampooned the prophet of Islam. Could I suggest to Mr. Adie that in the view of a not insignificant number of Muslims, the only good cartoonist is a dead cartoonist? Is it my opinions that are "extremist" or the opinions of the Islamic shooters and beheaders who now dominate our news? You say *my* thinking leads to expulsions, forced conversions, and concentration camps! So perhaps if only I didn't think that way, Islamic State, Boko Haram, and all the other violent Islamic groups would play nice?

As for Mr. Sigmund's letter, I point out that after both the Charlie Hebdo and Copenhagen killings, the Muslim shooters went out and targeted what? Oh, Jews. A kosher grocery in the case of Paris, where four Jewish shoppers were killed, and a synagogue in the case of Copenhagen, where a Jewish guard was killed. (Why would there even need to be a guard at a synagogue?) In 2012, a Muslim gunman attacked a Jewish school in Tou-

louse, France, and killed three children and a teacher. In 2014, a Muslim attacked a Jewish museum in Brussels, Belgium, and killed four people. Muslim rioters targeted several synagogues in Paris last summer, and the Don Isaac Abravanel Synagogue was surrounded by assailants, some of whom had knives, axes or iron bars. On February 15 of this year, a Jewish cemetery was desecrated in Sarre-Union, France; about 300 of the 400 tombs were vandalized by Muslim youths.

So my question to Mr. Sigmund is: do you really think that all these Muslim attackers chose Jews and their institutions purely by coincidence? Or do the targets more likely reflect the Jew-hatred that is analyzed in the book you suspect of hate speech, "Al-Yahud: Eternal Islamic Enmity and the Jews," one of whose authors (Sam Solomon) is a former Muslim and expert on sharia law. I suggest that you are projecting the hatred that Al Maqdisi and Solomon analyze back onto them. On what basis do you say that their book is an inaccurate portrayal of Islam?

It seems to me that Mr. Adie and Mr. Sigmund are shooting the messenger.

Mr. Robertson never fails to bring up Christianity in response to rational criticism of Islam, although it has been centuries since Christianity has engaged in such barbarities as are now being carried out in Islam's name. It is wonderful that some people in

Islamic countries are calling for a separation of mosque and state (not church and state, as he writes). They do so at grave risk to themselves, as evidenced by the imprisonment, flogging, and now possible death sentence for Saudi blogger Raif Badawi. Christianity was at its worst when church and state were united, and furthermore there is no theological basis for that union in Christianity. Nor did Jesus present a violent model for Christians. In Islam, on the other hand, religion, state, and personal life are intertwined under sharia law, jihad is an obligation upon the Muslim community, and Mohammad, the model of the perfect human for Muslims to emulate, was a violent warlord who killed or subjugated those who wouldn't submit to Islam, took a child as one of his many brides, engaged in slavery, and took sex slaves.

It is wonderful that Muslim-majority Sierra Leone (population 6.2 million) is so tolerant, but it, and the other countries mentioned in Mr. Robertson's letter (whose total populations are under 60 million) are hardly typical of what is going on in the Islamic

world. (Nor, I suspect, entirely idyllic in reality.) We can only hope that they will resist the "Islamism" that is afflicting most Muslim-majority countries, including previously liberal ones such as Indonesia and Malaysia. His argument that "essentializing Islam as inherently and forever evil" will drive the moderate Muslims into the arms of their militant brethren leaves me nearly speechless. If rational criticism of texts turns someone violent, they weren't all that moderate to begin with. Just as Christians have had to accept criticism of their holy texts and face up to the violence committed in the name of their religion, so will Muslims. But so far they have entirely refused to do either. They predictably respond with violence to any criticism or satirization of their scriptures and prophet, and do not acknowledge any historical wrongdoing despite the atrocities committed by Muslim conquerors. The religion that threatens all civilizations today is not Christianity, it is Islam. And I fail to understand why Messieurs Adie, Sigmund, and Robertson are so eager to carry water for it.

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