Preventing Anti-Muslim Violence

David Rand

We are still reeling from the shock of that horrible terrorist attack in Christchurch, New Zealand, on Friday, March 15th, which resulted in some 50 deaths and a similar number of wounded. Although the mourning period is far from over, it is crucial that we do same serious thinking about how to prevent such attacks in the future.

Similarities with the mosque massacre in Quebec City on January 29th, 2017, have been raised. Apart from the fact that the number of victims is much higher, there are nevertheless important differences.

The Christchurch killer obviously had ideological motives. I have not had the occasion to read his long manifesto, but apparently he expresses a desire for revenge for Islamist attacks as well as a pronounced racism of the white supremacist variety. Two observations immediately spring to mind. Firstly, he foolishly classes all Muslims together, associating them all with the most violent and extremist fringe. Secondly, he considers the category "Muslim" to be distinct from so-called "whites," as if religious affiliation were a race. Where could he have gotten such a ridiculous idea? Maybe from multiculturalists, i.e., communitarians, who are so gleefully ready to ally themselves with religions and so ferociously defend religious privileges.

But the Quebec City killer, on the other hand, did not have racist motives and was driven mainly by fear. He was not motivated by white supremacism, regardless of the specious allegations made by certain "leftists" who racialize everything and see racism everywhere. The perpetrator was a young man, psychologically unstable, who had been the target of bullying throughout his short life and who feared Islamist terrorism.

Having made those distinctions, the two attacks nevertheless have several aspects in common. Both killings were anti-Muslim. Both obliterated many lives and left many others wounded and traumatized. And each of the two attacks was, unfortunately but obviously, a huge gift for political Islam, a movement which is leading a tireless campaign against secularism, against Enlightenment values and against any criticism of the religion which that extreme-right movement exploits for its purposes. In spite of (or perhaps because of) the anti-Muslim nature of the attacks, this movement, supported by the complacency of communitarians, took full advantage of the situation to play the victim. If the Islamists themselves had secretly planned these two attacks, they could not have done a better job of furthering their campaign.

We saw this happening in 2017 when, among other events, Motion M-103 was adopted, following closely on the heels of the Quebec City attack, with the purpose of stifling any criticism of Islam by condemning so-called "Islamophobia," whereas the real problem is anti-Muslim violence. And we see it again today, in the aftermath of Christchurch. There was a campaign for New Zealand women to wear the hijab on Friday March 22nd; this foolish idea is extremely irresponsible, showing solidarity with *Islamism*, not with Muslims. The Islamists' strategy is the same: (1) conflate criticism of religion with violence against believers, and (2) sow confusion between race and religion, both with the intent to smear any opposition to their program.

Religious Anti-Religious Violence

The idea that criticizing the tenets of a religion could be the cause of violence towards the

adherents of that religion simply does not hold water.

Criticism of Christianity is not the cause of terrorist attacks against Christians and their churches such as those which have occurred in the Middle East and in Nigeria. On the contrary, these anti-Christian actions were mainly motivated by political Islam. Criticism of Judaism is not one the major causes of anti-Jewish attacks. On the contrary, the principal causes are instead classical antisemitism of the Nazi variety, largely inspired by the Christianity of Martin Luther, to which must be added the anti-Jewish dogma of Islam as well as the confusion between antisemitism and anti-Zionism which are often conflated by some on the political left.

It is obvious that a major cause of violence against religious communities, perhaps the principal cause, is religion itself, that is, religious competition. This competition does not operate at the level of beliefs, but rather of identity; that is, it is persons of a particular religious affiliation who are targeted, not their beliefs. Right-wing Christians do not like Muslims and Jews, fundamentalist Jews dislike Muslims and Christians, Islamists are hostile to Jews and Christians – and, while we are at it, all three hate non-believers who, for their part, remain silent and do nothing.

For several years now and for various reasons, most of our politicians and mainstream media have been obsessively pushing a single, exclusive opinion with respect to Islam: anyone who dares to express the tiniest anxiety concerning that religion or who dares to suggest that there might be links between Islam and its political variant Islamism is immediately the target of intimidation and a flood of slanderous accusations of racism, "Islamophobia," intolerance, xenophobia, far-right political tendencies and a plethora of other sins.

When people are forbidden from expressing their legitimate concerns openly, without violence, when all hope of any healthy debate of their concerns is stifled, then those anxieties will sooner or later flare up in an explosive manner with an increased risk of violence perpetrated by the more unstable or radical elements among

them. It is no accident that the Quebec City killer took action during the regime of the Liberal Party of Quebec, the party which so ruthlessly opposed the Charter of Secularism by vilifying all those who supported it.

One measure which is necessary in order to promote social harmony and reduce the risk of extremism is indeed secularism, that is, a clear separation between religions and the State. Firstly, it is the right thing to do in order to protect the citizenry against the political aspirations of religions. Secondly, by furthering State secularism, State authorities show the public that they take their legitimate anxieties about religious interference in State institutions seriously.

In summary, nothing justifies the thesis that anti-Muslim violence is caused by the criticism of Islam. On the contrary, it is social and legal censorship of such criticism which is to be blamed. Such violence serves the interests of the two opposing far-right political movements: the Islamist far-right and the classic far-right which is related to Christianity. These two extremes feed off each other and both are encouraged by the communitarianism which poisons society with its racialist obsessions.

Thus, here are a few suggestions of ways to reduce the risk of violence caused by that unhealthy religious competition:

- Implement gun control.
- Stop stigmatizing criticism of religion in general and criticism of Islam in particular.
- Stop racializing religions (for example, specious accusations of Islamophobia).
- Show solidarity with apostates—especially apostates of Islam, because that religion denies freedom of conscience.
- Separate religions from the State, including bans on religious symbols in public services.
- Promote universalism instead of communitarianism.•

David Rand is President of Atheist Freethinkers (www. atheology.ca). He lives in Montreal, Quebec.