

PARIS CARTOONISTS SHOT; POPE VINDICATES OUR POSITION

A week into the new year saw the horrible death of 12 people, most of whom worked at the Paris office of *Charlie Hebdo*; a police officer was among the dead. The weekly publication is known for its coarse content and vulgar cartoons. Muslim terrorists, upset with depictions of Muhammad, were responsible for the carnage.

Bill Donohue quickly became part of the story when he issued a news release saying that Muslims had a right to be angry, though they were wrong to react with violence. "Killing in response to insult, no matter how gross," he said, "must be unequivocally condemned." He made several similar statements over the course of two weeks, but many in the media focused exclusively on his comment that Muslims were justified in their anger.

Donohue called the paper's publisher, Stephane Charbonnier, a "narcissist" who "didn't understand the role he played in his tragic death." The Catholic League president drew attention to Charbonnier's comment, "Muhammad isn't sacred to me"; the French journalist dropped that line as justification for his obscene depictions. "Muhammad isn't sacred to me, either," said Donohue, "but it would never occur to me to deliberately insult Muslims by trashing him."

Non-violent offenses, Donohue stressed, must be met with a non-violent response. This was uncontroversial, but what many criticized Donohue for was his insistence that Muslims were unnecessarily provoked. He was simply asking all parties to the controversy to exercise restraint: the cartoonists should not intentionally offend Muslim sensibilities and Muslims should not overreact by taking up arms.

After being pounded by many pundits and talk-show hosts on radio and TV for his comments, Donohue found welcome relief in statements made by Pope Francis. "You cannot provoke. You cannot insult the faith of others. You cannot make fun of the faith." The Holy Father insisted that "We cannot make a toy out of the religion of others. These people provoke and then [something can happen]. In freedom of expression there are limits."

If this wasn't vindication enough, the pope, after denouncing the violence, quipped that if his friend, Dr. Alberto Gasparri, the organizer of papal trips, were "to use a curse word against my mother, he can expect a punch. It's normal." This effectively closed the debate on Donohue: the pope had taken his side.

There is much more to this story; it is recounted in the pages that follow. In his "President's Desk" piece, Donohue discusses some behind the scenes issues that are attendant to this issue. While the Catholic League emerged on top, an awful lot of shots were fired at us, and some were utterly irresponsible.