

CRAWFORD
BROADCASTING
COMPANY



Executive Offices ■ P.O. Box 3003 ■ Blue Bell, PA 19422-0735 ■ (215) 628-3500

Monday, March 6, 2006
Donald B. Crawford, President

THE STAND
FREEDOM OF SPEECH
THE CARTOONS

It is a matter of belief in Islam that any Muslim suicide bomber who accomplishes the designed mission will have earned a heavenly reward which includes sex with beautiful virgins for all eternity, in fact 72 of them. Sex, then, with these heavenly virgins, however they are constituted, comprises a substantial part of the heavenly reward.

One of the inflammatory Danish cartoons played on this idea with a voice from the clouds yelling to would-be suicide bombers to stop all such action, because the supply of virgins was running low. The cartoon was obviously a farce, a parody, but as with other such cartoons, served to inflame millions of Muslims the world over. That vision, that understanding of what heaven is all about is indeed a male-dominated one, with little regard for women, but such a notion has been woven deeply into the fabric of Middle Eastern culture. The notion indicates the belief that there will be a full resurrection of the body and not just an existence of immortality for the soul. There are dozens of opinions and interpretations regarding life hereafter including sexual differences, marriage and sex itself. In the New Testament, a man asked Jesus what happens if you've been widowed and married several times. That is, which of your spouses will you be reunited with in Heaven? Jesus answered that no one will marry or be given in marriage but we will be as angels. That leaves the state of heavenly beings unclear, but it is a promise that things will indeed be different in the hereafter. One can not have sex with 72 virgins, as Muslims believe, in Heaven without the bodily and physical capability to do so. In any event, all such possibilities served as considerable motivation for suicide bombers in pursuit of terrorism. Such a prospect prompted the cartoonist to characterize the Prophet Mohammad as greeting a line of suicide bombers in Heaven with the words:

“STOP, STOP, WE HAVE RUN OUT OF VIRGINS”

That means yet another cultural clash, a collision between East and West. Muslims wish all such material and the authors who created these materials to be censored and in fact punished. That of course will not happen, and can not happen in America as a matter of law. We are, thank goodness, as Americans governed by our constitution and that magnificent First Amendment which guarantees all such freedom of speech (and press).

It is perhaps something which Muslims and Islam can not understand. Freedom of speech, expression and the press can be used in many ways, including the attack of religious icons, idols, customs and beliefs. The press, the media the world over, and certainly in America, is

aggressively liberal and highly secular. Those who speak and write for this liberal media enjoy attacking or just simply making fun of all things religious, including in America the constant attack and denigration of Christianity. Our press is far more likely to insult our own religious icons than those of Islam or any other Eastern religion. So, we Christians are subjected to the blasphemous THE LAST TEMPTATION OF CHRIST or Andres Serrano's PISS CHRIST, insulting, disgusting and utterly crass, but utterly protected by our First Amendment right. In such cases, many Christians and Jews for that matter, protest, which protest is totally legitimate. What is illegitimate in any democratic society is death threat or curbing free speech for artists or writers. It is one thing to apologize if in fact feelings have been legitimately hurt, but no one ever should apologize for the exercise of free speech.

It is interesting how the Western world practices and protects freedom of religion. Muslims worship freely, unlike in Saudi Arabia where Christians are not permitted to worship openly or carry a Bible in public. Further, Muslim cartoons continuously defame Jews with imagery far worse than the Danish cartoons, but no one protests, including and especially Muslims. Cartoons depict the horror of the Holocaust and Jews in general but again, no one protests. Jews and Christians may protest, but there is no violence, no taking of life, no looting, burning or kidnapping in protest. In spite of Muslim hostility, many other newspapers, in show of support for freedom of press, reprinted the caricatures, prompting protests in Britain, Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia and Palestinian areas. In the Sudan, some even urged Al-Qaeda terrorists to target Denmark with violence. Muslims did attack the Danish Embassy in Lebanon, and have threatened every Danish Embassy in every Arab or Muslim country which claims to be offended. Strangely, the American media has been timid, virtually ignoring the cartoons and not publishing them. Some have done so only, they say, people may see for themselves and judge for themselves. That seems to be a left handed way of publishing the cartoons without taking the offensive. But more European newspapers, and others around the world published the cartoons well after the fact only in reaction to the Muslim demand for censorship, and in support of freedom of the press. That only fanned the flame of Muslim ire but it indicated clearly that the press will stand for its rights, no matter what. And, that is a good thing. Freedom of the press is critical to a free society.

Again, the media, the press are deeply secular and liberal. There is little respect for things religious and that includes Islam. The cartoons are the mere tip of an iceberg. There are fundamental differences, deep and unchangeable, which can never be resolved. The cultural clash includes philosophy, religion, lifestyle, values and core beliefs which are as different as night and day. Such a secular press-media will never change and the only question is how aggressive the press will be in terms of asserting and implementing its freedom of speech. I for one hope that the press will be as open and honest about Islam as they are about Christianity, no holds barred. That may very well not happen for Christianity as complex and varied as it is in theory and practice, is a much easier target. The culture war has only just begun and it is certain that the 16 million Muslims living in Europe will never accept freedom of speech as practiced in the West. But, freedom of speech must prevail at any cost. No government, no religion, no individual can suppress this fundamental and wondrous right.

It seems obvious that, to paraphrase, the worst is yet to come!