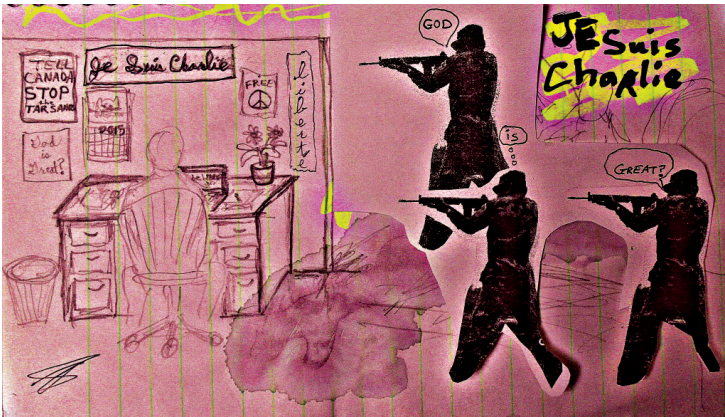


God is great?



By Nate Smelle

I WAS ENJOYING MY MORNING coffee on Wednesday, Jan. 7 while at the same time keeping an eye on the news when I saw the words '35 killed in a car bomb attack in Yemen,' scroll across the bottom of the screen.

How many more times must we horrify ourselves with such news? I had barely put the question mark on the sentence I had just mumbled to myself when the terrifying words 'BREAKING NEWS' flashed urgently on the television. Must be more on the car bombing I assumed. Wrong!

Now the television screen was filled with the repeating images of two men dressed in military attire and black masks walking swiftly through the streets of Paris with high-powered assault rifles. The video then shows one of the assailants walk up and shoot a wounded female officer at point blank range before the two sped away in a black sedan. Before I could make sense of what I had just witnessed, and what the fast-talking reporter was saying, a banner appeared on the TV with a headline proclaiming '12 SHOT DEAD AT NEWSPAPER IN PARIS.'

Comparing the statistics between the attack in Paris and the car bombing in Yemen I wondered for a moment why the lesser death toll had stolen the spotlight. Shouldn't more people killed in a blatant act of terror warrant a bigger story? As I continued to watch the chaos unfold it suddenly sunk in why this attack was getting more attention than the larger attack in Yemen. It was the last five words in the headline that made the difference, '...AT A NEWSPAPER IN PARIS.'

The new math suddenly made more sense. The main reason the story had taken over the media was not just because the three assailants were still at large, it was because they had stormed a newsroom and killed the journalists and cartoonists who had offended their religious beliefs. Unlike the carnage in Yemen, the slaughter that occurred at the office of Charlie Hebdo was not just an attack on innocent people, it was also a message meant to inspire fear throughout the media, and around the world.

Why would anyone want to stop journalists and artists from observing and expressing their perspective of the world we live in?

As smooth as the words roll off the tongue, I've always disdained the label 'God-fearing folk.' Who are these people and what are they so afraid of? Years ago when driving with a friend through Alabama en route to New Orleans I remember driving by a massive black billboard with the words 'DON'T MAKE ME COME DOWN THERE, Signed GOD' printed upon it in bold white letters.

Pretty threatening words coming from the all-loving creator of everything, I thought. Personally I do not believe that any manifestation of spirituality—be it Catholic, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish or whatever—should be followed without first asking questions. Questions such as: Would the God you believe in justify the killing of someone who believes in a different God? If so, is this God a GOOD reason to kill for? Does God hate those who do not have faith? If so, are not the faithless not a part of God's

infinite beauty? Isn't the essence of all religion unconditional love?

Why would anyone scream the words 'God is great' before going on a killing spree?

Depending where and when you ask such questions, the answers can lead to different outcomes. In the case of the journalists and cartoonists who lost their lives while inspiring such questions through their work at Charlie Hebdo, they paid the ultimate price for their freedom to share. With Paris under lockdown while authorities hunted down the killers at large fear took hold of the city and has yet to let go.

Some have accused the editorial staff at Charlie Hebdo of provoking the attacks and putting others in danger for the sake of publishing a few offensive cartoons. It may be true that the cartoons did initially spark the controversy that led to the attacks, however, I do not think it is fair to lay blame on Charlie Hebdo for instigating this violence.

Yes some of the cartoons and other content they publish may be offensive, but they are also enlightening in many instances, highlighting important and sometimes terrible realities within our modern society. Without such courageously creative individuals making us aware of the danger and corruption that lurks along life's path how could we even dream of creating a better world for future generations?