

HOW ONE CARTOON IGNITED A
GLOBAL DEBATE ON THE FUTURE
OF FREE SPEECH

THE
TYRANNY
OF
SILENCE

FLEMMING ROSE

CAIO
INSTITUTE
WASHINGTON, D.C.

Foreword

As a longtime proponent of free speech, however controversial, and as a senior fellow at the Cato Institute, I am delighted the Cato Institute Press is publishing *The Tyranny of Silence* by Flemming Rose. As features editor of the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*, Rose commissioned and published satirical cartoons about Muslims, some of them of Muhammad, that led to violent demonstrations in some Muslim countries as well as vehement protests elsewhere in the world, along with death threats and at least 200 actual corpses.

In this vivid book, Flemming Rose tells why he was responsible for publishing these cartoons as well as the long-term threatening impact they have had on him. *The Tyranny of Silence* documents the continuous multidimensional war elsewhere on free speech. I hope that among other effects, *The Tyranny of Silence* will lead to open discussions and debates in America and elsewhere on the growing amount of self-censorship among individuals and societies confronted by highly combative cultures that allow no criticism of their sacred beliefs.

Such a culture created the fierce and fatal demonstrations against the cartoons in the Danish newspaper.

Or, as Rose put it in a Fall 2007 *Middle East Quarterly* discussion by him and Naser Khader ("Reflections on the Danish Cartoon Controversy"):

When the twelve cartoonists and I received death threats, newspapers were closed in Russia and Malaysia, and newspaper editors were jailed in Jordan and Yemen, at that point it became an issue exclusively about free speech.

Amid the violent responses elsewhere to the publication of the Danish cartoons, in the United States reactions were so intimidating that while the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Chicago Tribune* described these bristling cartoons in words, these newspapers—in the land of the First Amendment guarantee of a free press—refused to print the cartoons themselves.

But a very few U.S. newspapers did: the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, the *New York Sun*, and the *Village Voice*. I was then a columnist at the *Voice*, and my story on the cartoons included the most controversial of the cartoons—Muhammad with a bomb in his turban.

It never occurred to me not to publish the cartoon, nor was I surprised when I too received death threats. For some weeks afterwards, walking the streets of Greenwich Village, where the *Voice* was published and where I live, I occasionally glanced quickly into passing baby carriages to see if machine guns were nestled there.

Also, as a reporter, I traced in the *Voice* and other publications—as I wrote in my February 2, 2009, *Washington Times* column—how the Organization of the Islamic Conference, which has permanent status at the United Nations, got the UN General Assembly to pass a nonbinding resolution urging nations to provide “adequate protections’ in their laws or constitutions against ‘acts of hatred, discrimination, intimidation and coercion resulting from defamation of religions and incitement to religious hatred in general.’” Only Islam and Muslims were specifically mentioned in the resolution. The vote was 83 to 53, with the United States among those in opposition.

In “Why I Published Those Cartoons” (February 19, 2006), Flemming Rose wrote:

We have a tradition of satire when dealing with the royal family and other public figures, and that was reflected in the cartoons. The cartoonists treated Islam the same way

they treat Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism and other religions. And by treating Muslims in Denmark as equals they made a point: we are integrating you into the Danish tradition of satire because you are part of our society, not strangers. The cartoons are including, rather than excluding Muslims.

Tell that to the majority of the UN General Assembly that voted against the defamation of religions. And tell it to the 57 nations that are members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference who supported that resolution to punish defamation of religion worldwide.

Further evidence of how valuable this book will be for generations to come is Flemming Rose’s stalwart account about how infectiously widespread the visceral hostility to free speech can be:

Everywhere I go, I seem to provoke controversy. At American universities, I’ve been met by placards and students protesting against my speaking. When I was scheduled to lecture at a university in Jerusalem, a demonstration called for my removal. When I talked about freedom of speech at a UNESCO conference in Doha last spring, local media branded me the “the Danish Satan,” the authorities were inundated with angry emails, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs set up a hotline for citizens who complained about my having even been allowed into the country.

Flemming Rose, welcome to the Cato Institute, where free speech is as natural as the weather. It’s a climate you will find hospitable.

You, sir, are a model to the world of unyielding individual liberty.

—Nat Hentoff