

A new Cato book examines the war on expression

A Passionate Defense of Free Speech

In September 2005, the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* printed a dozen cartoons—prompted by recent examples of self-censorship by the European media—related to Islam, one of which depicted the Muslim prophet Muhammad with a bomb wrapped in his turban. Their publication quickly spiraled into a violent international uproar, as Muslims around the world erupted in protest. The Danish embassies were attacked. More than 200 deaths worldwide resulted. And the paper's culture editor, thereafter branded by some as "the Danish Satan," found himself at the center of one of the defining issues of an era.

Now, in *The Tyranny of Silence*, Flemming Rose grapples with the difficult issues surrounding his decision to run those cartoons. Published by the Cato Institute, the book is a deeply personal account of his experience. "What do you say to people who ask how you can sleep at night when hundreds of people have died because of what you have done?" Rose asks at the outset. The subsequent pages are, in many ways, his attempt to answer that question. In the process, he seeks to reconcile the tension between respect for cultural diversity and the protection of democratic freedom.

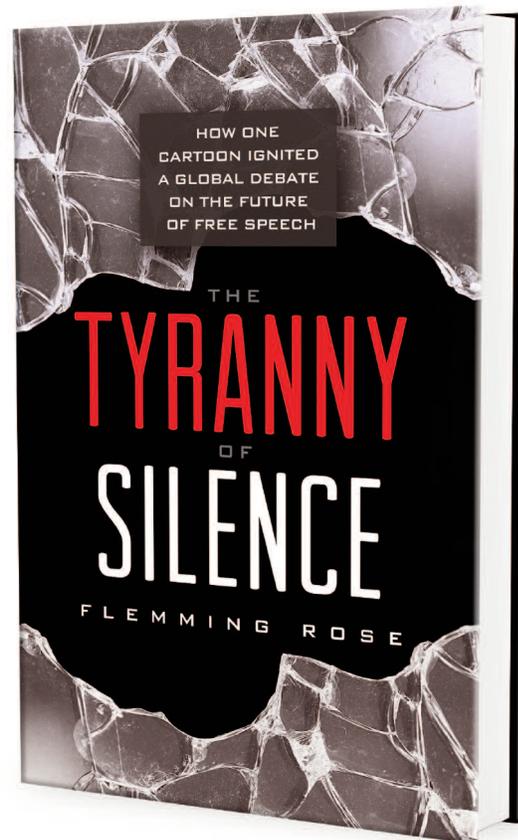
Rose begins the narrative recounting a series of interviews he conducted with individuals who, in one way or another, were intertwined in the "Cartoon Crisis." He speaks with Maria Gomez, a Spanish woman whose husband was killed in the Madrid terrorist attack and who later wore a T-shirt with the controversial Muhammad cartoon to the per-

petrator's trial. He talks to Kurt Westergaard, the artist behind the infamous drawing, delving into the upbringing, background, and work of a man, Rose notes, whose "image would change my life." He meets with Karim Sørensen, a young Tunisian who was apprehended in February 2008 on suspicion of planning to assassinate Westergaard.

With each of these vignettes, a picture begins to emerge through which Rose reflects on the principles underpinning freedom of speech. He notes that the tendency in Europe is to deal with increasing diversity by constraining free expression. "They feel they will further social harmony by maintaining a delicate balance between tolerance and freedom of speech—as though the two were opposites," Rose writes. "But tolerance and freedom of speech reinforce each other." They are, in short, two sides of the same coin—and both are under pressure.

Rose continues his investigation with a sweeping look at some of the constraints that have historically been placed on dissidents—from the heretic Michael Servetus, who was burned at the stake in Geneva in 1553 for his religious views, to Rose's own encounters with Russian dissidents in the Soviet Union.

Throughout the book, he demonstrates a persistent ability to weigh difficult issues—to "ponder at length and lose myself in layers of meaning"—a quality that he ascribes to his



natural skepticism. "I don't see that as a trait flaw: it is a condition of modern man and indeed the core strength of secular democracies, which are founded on the idea that there is no monopoly on truth," Rose concludes. "Doubt is the germ of curiosity and critical questioning, and its prerequisite is a strong sense of self, a courage that leaves room for debate." ■

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