

Charlie Hebdo  
Megan Henderson

On Jan. 7 in Paris two masked gunmen entered the offices of Charlie Hebdo magazine, a French satirical publication. In a span of three days after entering the Charlie Hebdo office over a dozen people died. BBC is calling the attacks France's "worst security crisis in decades."

The attacks started at Charlie Hebdo but spanned over three days to include car chases and hostage situations. According to BBC a video from al-Qaeda in Yemen claimed to plan the Charlie Hebdo attacks, which arose due to the depictions of Muhammad the Prophet in the magazine.

"Chapter 42, verse 11 of the Koran does say: '[Allah is] the originator of the heavens and the earth... [there is] nothing like a likeness of Him.' This is taken by Muslims to mean that Allah cannot be captured in an image by human hand, such is his beauty and grandeur. To attempt such a thing is seen as an insult to Allah. The same is believed to apply to Muhammad," BBC reported.

While these beliefs are held by most Muslims, the Charlie Hebdo attacks are a result of Islamic extremism. The three days of terror in France starting at Charlie Hebdo spurred discussion across the globe on the freedom of speech.

"Several commentators urge France and other countries to outlaw the insulting of religions and religious figures, saying that failing to do so will only encourage Islamic extremism," BBC reported.

The arguments range in opinion and come from all different races and religions. While some are pushing for a call to action on religious figures, others are arguing the opposite.

“The Quran told early Muslims, who routinely faced the mockery of their faith by pagans: ‘God has told you in the Book that when you hear God’s revelations disbelieved in and mocked at, do not sit with them until they enter into some other discourse; surely then you would be like them.’ Just ‘do not sit with them’ — that is the response the Quran suggests for mockery. Not violence. Not even censorship,” Mustafa Akyol wrote in an op-ed piece for The New York Times.

The distress France sustained for days as the police searched for the gunman, and then later handled the standoff hostage crisis, were a result of acts carried out by an extremist sect of the Islamic faith. These acts have called attention to religious blasphemy, as it is threatening the freedom of speech.

Charlie Hebdo printed an edition after the attacks, entitled the “survivors’ issue.” The issue depicted another cartoon of Muhammad the Prophet on the cover, and many news organizations blurred the image, according to BBC.

“This cartoon is not just a little figure. It’s a symbol. It’s the symbol of freedom of speech, of freedom of religion, of democracy and secularism. When they refuse to publish this cartoon, when they blur it out, when they decline to publish it, they blur out democracy,” Charlie Hebdo’s Editor-in-Chief Gerard Biard said on “Meet the Press,” on NBC.

The Charlie Hebdo attack and days that followed may have been a tragic act of extremism, but some hope that stimulating confusion and conversation on the freedom of speech and religion may create a new opportunity for religious tolerance.