

The French writer Michel Houellebecq once referred to Islam as “the stupidest religion”. Speaking as an equal opportunities atheist born and raised into the weird and wonderful ways of Catholicism, I can think of at least one other contender for that accolade. Islam, however, with the tragic news from Paris, confirms its status as the most toxic of all the religions which currently menace liberal, secular humanity.

Many Islamic jihadists, such as the Boston bomber now on trial in the United States, or the “fake sheikh” who wreaked havoc in Sydney’s Martin Place, are deranged, delusional, disaffected malcontents; lethal to those against whom they randomly lash out, but isolated. Christian anti-abortionists murder those whom they believe to be evil, as have extreme right fanatics such as Norway’s Anders Breivik and Oklahoma’s Timothy McVeigh. In this sense, the attack on Charlie Hebdo belongs to a category of terror which crosses sectarian and political lines. Catholic and Protestant terrorists killed 3000 people in Northern Ireland.

But extremist Islamic ideology more broadly, with its theologically mandated misogyny, homophobia, racism and authoritarian approach to freedom of thought, lifestyle and religion, has begun 2015 as it ended 2014 – raging against democracy, at war with liberalism and Enlightenment values.

Journalists, as we have seen once again in Paris, are on the front line of this war. Ritually beheaded in Islamic State (IS) snuff movies merely for being journalists (naïve enough, alas, to believe that in performing their role with as much objectivity and detachment as possible they could expect some immunity from the atrocities inflicted on thousands of civilians by IS); attacked in their newsrooms and offices for the “blasphemy” of satirising Islam; collateral damage, lest we forget, in the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq – the Fourth Estate casualties mount steadily.

The latest attack in Paris is an attempt to further intimidate and close down media critics of what its perpetrators believe to be the One True Faith.

Journalists are not the only victims of radical Islam, of course. Everyone on the planet who does not share its mindset, and submit to its dictates on lifestyle, dress, length of beard and so on is, literally, eligible for extermination. This is especially the case for other, dissenting Muslims, for whom the jihadists reserve a special hatred.

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Written by The Conversation

From the Ayatollah's fatwa against the Satanic Verses, to the indiscriminate terror of al-Qaeda and now IS, the violence has grown steadily more outrageous and misanthropic. While Islamic fundamentalism does not have the methodical efficiency and industrial capacity of Nazism, and should not therefore be regarded as an existential threat to the liberal democratic world in the manner of the Third Reich, its premises and beliefs come from the same toxic seed.

But they know the media, these religious warriors, and how to use it in the pursuit of asymmetrical warfare against a superior enemy.

To behead a journalist on video, and circulate that video around the internet, is more than an act of sadistic violence. It is a symbol, an act of political communication designed to terrorise the global community.

The internet – which they use better than many organisations with an agenda to push – is a powerful weapon of war in the digital era. Three men with Kalashnikovs invade an office in Paris, knowing that news organisations, social media and hundreds of millions of internet users will give their actions global resonance far beyond the objective scale of the crime.

The Martin Place siege captured Australian and global attention, and two innocent people lost their lives. Compare that to the coverage received by the dozens killed by a single cyclone in the Philippines. Radical Islam understands these dynamics, and how to exploit them.

Amid the anger and the revulsion we feel at the news from Paris, what can be done to fight back, not in the deserts of the Middle East but in the streets, coffee shops and public places of the liberal, secular world? How can we signal solidarity with journalists in this battle?

Well, we can write articles like this one. Or blogs, or emails and tweets and Facebook posts, expressing our support for the values of liberalism and secularism, and our total rejection of any compromise with those values in the name of religion – of any religion.

We should, each of us, if and when the publication resumes something approaching normal service, take out a subscription to Charlie Hebdo, or make a donation, to enable its journalists to

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continue their work, and to encourage similar satirical organs to persevere.

It doesn't matter if we read the thing or not. We should, to paraphrase another famous proponent of press and intellectual freedom, be prepared to pay to uphold the right of Charlie Hebdo and satirists everywhere to say and publish whatever their editors wish within the law of the territories in which they operate.

We, including the moderate Muslims who detest the jihadis as much as anyone, are billions, and even a few million donations will make a huge difference. We too can play the media politics of symbolism if we dare.

Brian McNair does not work for, consult to, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has no relevant affiliations.

Read more <http://theconversation.com/charlie-hebdo-the-fourth-estate-and-religious-extremism-36007>