

## AGAINST THE MARKETING OF TERRORISM

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The events that have just taken place in Paris are horrible and alarming. Both our everyday behaviour and our future are under threat. Our way of life and the way in which we view what lies before us are changing and, moreover, they are changing against our will. And this is happening just when we felt and were proud to feel we could juxtapose a range of world views for the benefit of everyone. We feel powerless. We feel our confidence in that which was supposed to give us confidence in the future and in people is slipping away. It is highly tempting to despair, to give up and to seek safety behind physical and intellectual ramparts.

Nevertheless, if there's a lesson to be learnt from what is going on, it is this: we must, more than ever, take on board the need not to give up on the establishment of a society wherein respect for others and the betterment of oneself and of society are fundamental building blocks. We must acknowledge the degree to which a society of confidence and solidarity, of knowledge and diversity, is rooted in the commitment and understanding of each and every member of that society.

Consequently, rather than taking the easy way out of staring, glassy eyed, at the headline-grabbing aspects of these tragic events, let us try and take stock of the social and individual challenges with which we are faced.

First and foremost, it is crucial to understand the strategy of these fanatical, would-be-visionary tyrants, who take advantage of the blinkered, naive, young men who are in thrall to them. This strategy is to bring about a split, a fault-line within our pluralistic societies. It seeks to annihilate belief in the very possibility and legitimacy of society characterised by reflection and development on the basis of a raft of everyday issues and on the diversity of its members. Convinced, as they are, that they are endowed with absolute, certain truth, these sadistic tyrants of God send their stupid and servile warriors to intimidate those, like us, who believe in the relative nature of truth..

Not only do they seek to humiliate us, they are even more interested in making us withdraw into our cultural shells, become fearful of those who are different, give up on the rule of law, and tar all

Muslims with the same brush as scapegoats. They think that this will recruit even more marginal, stigmatised young people. This achieved, they can then proceed to exterminate all those they deem to be unbelievers.

We are not dealing with a religious war here. What we are dealing with is a war declared on a certain sort of society by a set of sectarian, would-be visionaries. The truth is that both these tyrants and their jihadists have more in common with Nazis or Stalinists. The similarity with the burning of the Reichstag in 1933 and the Moscow trials of 1936 immediately comes to mind. What they are trying to do, as in these historical events, is to impose terror and division, and to bring the practice of getting along together in a spirit of proactive collaboration to its knees. The references to a prophet and a religion must be taken with a lorry-load of salt. "Visionaries" such as these have always believed themselves to be chosen by God throughout history. It is not the issue of conviction that should worry us, but that of intolerance. And intolerance spreads like wildfire.

Similarly, we must not focus on basic virtues taken out of context. Respect, intelligence, confidence, courage, audacity are every bit as useful and relevant to fanatics as they are to pluralists. The same goes for self-interest, personal commitment and dedication. It is not appropriate to focus on human qualities or beliefs. What we need to do is to see how these qualities and individual beliefs can help humanity. And we need to do this in the light of our social and historical experience.

From 1525 to 1610 religious wars wrought havoc over much of Europe and particularly France. This led to the realisation that, were we to continue to fight in the name of some absolute truth, we would end up by totally annihilating humanity. Those who had grasped this actively contributed to bringing about a society wherein everyone had to respect everybody else and wherein no one would have the right to hurt anybody else and get others to accept their ideas by force.

Clearly, there is a resemblance with these historical religious wars. We see the same type of violence and fanaticism. We are no longer however in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Since then a different type of society has emerged, one which allows everyone to believe in whatever he or she wants to and one which bases political power precisely on this authorisation. It is, therefore, not a religious war, but rather a war between a set of people who

do not tolerate this tolerance and those who respect the whole of humanity.

These terrorists are no more representative of Islam or God than the Nazis or Stalinists were of the people, the working class or history. They have more in common with a marketing department trying to cobble together a hotchpotch of national stereotypes to denigrate the image of a competing brand and to grab market share.

It is noteworthy that they have just moved up a level in their efforts to deprive our society of dialogue, thought and confidence. The January attacks in Paris were aimed at persons or places that embodied freedom of speech and the Jewish community. Henceforth, everyone has to feel threatened if they go out for a good time. Naturally, just like the marketing campaigns to which we are now so accustomed, they have of course refined the symbolic expression of their overall communication: Germany were playing France at the *Stade de France*. It was not only because these countries are both playing an active role in the fight against the self-proclaimed "Islamic State" that this venue was of value to them. Paris is one of the best advertising vectors, notably because of the *2015 Climate Conference* that is to be held there at the end of the month. The *Bataclan* concert hall was also useful to them because an American group rejoicing in the name of *Eagles of Death Metal* was playing there. Apart from the extraordinary appositeness of their name, they, like *Charlie Hebdo*, made fun of the Devil. When the attack took place, they were singing their song "*Kiss the devil*".

We must take on board the fact that we are in a very different situation from that prevailing in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, in the 1930s or even in the gloomy years of post-1968 left-wing terrorism. We have to realise that, just like at each earlier eruption, we will have to rely on our political commitment to respect for each individual, to our wish to comprehend humanity and the world, to our skill in making good use of diversity and our own creativity. What does this mean in concrete terms? It means that everyone is involved and that all institutions must take their role seriously.

Take journalists for example. They should pay less attention to sensational and attention-grabbing stories. While I was writing this article, at the same time that I was watching French television, Danish journalists tried to use me as a go-between to find a Parisian who could tell of the horrors they had just been through. And, on French television, I also saw lots of witnesses speaking in

moving fashion and also giving rise to – thank goodness – solidarity. But why do they always give top priority to sensationalism when what we really need is to pull ourselves together? So much repetition, so many details that would be more fitting in the report of paparazzi trying to surprise some star or other sans bikini in a private swimming pool. We were also treated to tweets and facebook posts from dozens of stars of stage, screen and television. As for politicians, they too are increasingly seen carryin on like marketers, ready to snatch at anything in their lust for election. Of course they were all very much affected by this calamity, as we all were. Of course we all need to mirror ourselves somehow in our mourning, and today the media plays a crucial role for that. Impressive manifestations of solidarity were also seen: so many people who spontaneously turned out to give blood. The show of solidarity is also crucial. But it is of the utmost importance to highlight the value of education and information. It is the lifeblood of a society that is based on the training and informing of its members. And, it seems to me, therein lies the rub. During the wars of religion the holy books were the mandatory basic references. All institutions had to refer back to them: the church, the king, universities, and the army. In today's world it is, increasingly, market forces that constitute the basic frame of reference. Everyone has to conform or submit to this basic system. Political institutions, the mass media, schools and universities are in the process of forgetting their own *raison d'etre* and citizens no longer learn to take their own social system seriously. I am not only referring to the fact that too many young people can no longer plan their future in our democracies. I am also referring to the deterioration of our democratic institutions and to the transformation of citizens into consumers. As the strategy of those warriors of destruction is precisely to spark off a process of self-destruction, it is crucial that each and everyone of us bear in mind that diversity is vital, that doubts are better than certainty, that questions are always more important than answers, and that everyone has to face up to his responsibility and understand why and how to go about this. The terrorists' target is social cohesion and the decline of knowledge. Our weapon is social cohesion and knowledge.

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