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Today

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Our Country is the World, our Countrymen are all Mankind

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Je (also) suis Charlie? Ne craignez rien!*

*"Do not be afraid!"

And yet, how can we avoid fear if we are given no place to bring our fears?"

It was an emotionally busy week for Secretary of State John Kerry. The week began with the first day of trial for the Boston Marathon bomber in Kerry's home state. It ended with the massacre and manhunt in Paris, twelve people executed in the offices of the magazine *Charlie Hebdo*. Kerry speaks French and told the people of France that America stands in solidarity with them in the "larger confrontation, not between civilizations, no, but between civilization itself and those who are opposed to a civilized world." Meanwhile Parisians responded to their own leaders and their own spirit and poured out in the streets at night even while the gunmen were still at large. They carried signs that said "*Je suis Charlie*," I am Charlie. It was a mark of solidarity with the victims, but it was also a declarative gauntlet. Each person was essentially drawing a target on his or her chest: "You wish to kill free speech?; well, here I am. I am not afraid of you."

I, however, was afraid.

My week, like many other news watchers, began with the replayed video of the Boston Marathon bombing (April 15, 2013), and I was struck by the incongruity of it. The scene at the finish line seemed so commonplace, so typical of such civic events, but then suddenly—with apparently no way of preventing the Tsarnaev brothers of intruding on that scene—death! At the *Charlie Hebdo* offices in Paris, it was a mother and her daughter who were forced at gunpoint to punch the code pad and open the door. Was it "Bring Your Daughter to Work Day" and then suddenly—death?! *Je n'ai pas peur* literally means "I do not have fear," but the Hindi that I speak as

a second language may most accurately describe what occurred within me: *Mujhe dard lag raha hai* translates as "Fear is happening to me." If fear is an emotion, then surely not I, nor you, nor the people of Paris have any more control over it than when grief, or anger, or happiness or *ennui* happen to us. "Do not be afraid," our leaders continue to exhort us in this age of Terrorism. Not afraid?! Do we realistically have a choice in the matter?

I hope that *Je suis Charlie* as a motto takes off. I hope there are placards and loud declarations along the Champs-Élysées: "I am not afraid!" But I suspect that any such motto follows the path similar to that of the limited print run of posters that the Chamberlain government released in Great Britain in 1939 following Hitler's invasion of Poland. "Keep Calm and Carry On," they said in proper British font. You've no doubt seen the silliness to which this meme has devolved on t-shirts and dorm room walls (e.g. "Keep Calm and Eat Cupcakes.") There must be a basis for our calm. There must be a place we can go with our fear, besides to cupcakes.

When was the last time a world leader effectively spoke into global fear? Was it Kennedy who gave us a resolution to the Cuban Missile Crisis (albeit arguably giving us the crisis itself)? Some of *The Liberator Today's* readers may in fact remember the schoolhouse fear of "duck and cover" drills. Was it Roosevelt who distracted us with a Buddhist-like koan: "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself"? Japanese zeroes could drop from the Hawaiian sky without warning; Hitler seemed unstoppable. In my opinion, the last world leader who spoke effectively into a global state of fear was Pope John Paul II when at his inauguration, he declared to a world frightened and worn by oppression: "Do not be afraid. Open wide the doors for Christ. To his saving power open the boundaries of States, economic and political systems, the vast fields of culture, civilization and development." He could tell us to not be

afraid, and he could believe that we might in fact be able to heed his call, because he gave us a place to go with our fear: “Open wide the doors for Christ.”

In the end, my week didn’t end with the Boston bombing or the Paris attack, it ended with a random reading in the Psalms. I happened to be reading on Friday morning in Psalm 77 about the Israelites crossing the Red Sea. I flipped over to the actual account in Exodus 14: the Israelites are backed up against the waters of the sea and the chariots of a vengeful Pharaoh are bearing down on them. “As Pharaoh approached, the people of Israel looked up and panicked when they saw the Egyptians overtaking them” (v. 10, NLT). Of course they were afraid. But then, by what sort of psychological, political, or military right could Moses say to them, as he does in verse 13: “Don’t be afraid”? “Don’t be afraid,” Moses says, “Just stand still and watch the Lord rescue you today. The Egyptians you see today will never be seen again. The Lord himself will fight for you. Just stay calm.”

Keep calm and trust God. I returned in my reading to Psalm 77. The question in my mind from the week was, “Is there a pathway through terrorism?” The facilities manager of *Charlie Hebdo* who had first installed the code pads on the office doors, had apparently hoped so. The Boston police who provided the security detail for 2013’s marathon (a security plan no doubt tremendously and expertly beefed up since 9/11), had hoped so. All the U.S. government experts who appeared on the news programs not only hoped so, but believed so: “Keep calm and carry-and-conceal.” Fear happens to me when it seems like there is no pathway through terrorism. The Psalmist talks of the path through the Red Sea made by God: “Your road led through the sea, your pathway through the mighty waters—a pathway no one knew was there! You led your people along that road like a flock of sheep, with Moses and Aaron as their shepherds” (vs. 19-20, NLT).

Moses and Aaron might be the shepherds, just as John Kerry or French President Hollande or any other modern governmental leader might be ours, or maybe we ourselves are called up to help shepherd people in an age of terrorism—but it is God who leads us through a safe path. He is strong, but just as importantly, he sees a pathway when and where no one else does. And that is our modern predicament. Our governments, militaries, bureaus of investigation, or intelligence agencies may very well stumble on pathways to increase our kill ratios, to track down a fugitive and bring him to trial, even to prevent bombings that “might have happened, but didn’t” because they uncovered a terrorist cell. But there is no pathway that addresses my fear or gives me any assurance of avoiding the next attack. Combat veterans have been telling us for years that fear happens; it’s what you do with that fear that matters. You’ve got to bring it to some larger principle or to some higher power, like to duty, or to the brotherhood of the squad. Kerry encouraged the French to subjugate their fear to the eternal struggle for *le liberté*, and certainly, lovers of

freedom poured into the streets of Paris to declare that Charlie is not dead. The publishers of *Charlie Hebdo* have defiantly declared that the next edition of the magazine will be on the newsstands as scheduled. But in the end, bringing our fear to any principle other than God is ineffectual, and Kerry’s response to 9/11—either as a senator, a candidate, or a cabinet secretary— is all the example we need. How exactly did the Patriot Act (which he voted for) promote free speech? How does NSA spying promote *le liberté*? When President Obama orders a drone strike to kill 16-year old American citizen Abdulrahman al-Awlaki, how does that promote due process guaranteed by the Fifth Amendment? Fear happens. When it isn’t brought to God, it gravitates to anger, hatred, vengeance and repression. When the terrorists transform us into terrorists in turn, then—and only then—have they surely won.

Christ is not dead! Pope John Paul II spoke in French for a portion of his inaugural address and assured the French of his “complete affection and devotedness. . . May you advance in the faith!” But when he speaks about not being afraid, you can see by his reference to boundaries, systems, and civilizations, that he is speaking to all people, including to the governments of this world:

Brothers and sisters, do not be afraid to welcome Christ and accept his power. Help the Pope and all those who wish to serve Christ and with Christ's power to serve the human person and the whole of mankind. Do not be afraid. Open wide the doors for Christ. To his saving power open the boundaries of States, economic and political systems, the vast fields of culture, civilization and development. Do not be afraid. Christ knows "what is in man". He alone knows it.

So often today man does not know what is within him, in the depths of his mind and heart. So often he is uncertain about the meaning of his life on this earth. He is assailed by doubt, a doubt which turns into despair. We ask you therefore, we beg you with humility and trust, let Christ speak to man. He alone has words of life, yes, of eternal life.

-G.

The Liberator Today re-publishes on Thursday, with comments and extensions”

You can return to this issue of *The Liberator Today* on Thursday (1/15/15) and read an additional “Page Three” of new responses and extensions to our subject: a pathway through fear in an age of terrorism. If you would like to make a comment, please write to editor@theliberator.today.

The inaugural issue of *The Liberator Today* which explains this new publication can be accessed [here](#). Watch for us soon (but not yet) on www.theliberator.today.