

Defamation of Muslim Community Part 1

by Skip Conover

In my opinion, the terms “Islamic terrorist”, “Islamic extremist”, “Islamist Party” and “ethnic Pakistani” as it relates to one of the London bombers, are all defamation against practically everyone in the Muslim World.

I suddenly became conscious of these terms in the summer of 2005, when the London bombings occurred on July 7th, 2005. During the following two weeks, I became more and more upset with the coverage of the mainstream media. My reason was that as a businessman, I look at time on television as free P.R. My objection was that these major media outlets were giving so much free P.R. to terrorists. In their coverage, they repeatedly used the terms “Islamic terrorist” and “Islamic extremist”. Those terms would not be defamation in respect to the terrorists themselves, as long as they pursue the Islamic faith, the reason being that they are both Islamic and terrorists. Unfortunately, these terms did not relate only to terrorists. They create an equivalency in the mind of the listener, and when they are repeated in a steady drum beat, time after time after time, they now created an environment that is extremely dangerous in the United States and Western Europe, and it is because of that environment and that concern that I am speaking to you today.

Last week at the University of California Berkeley and at Irvine there were major confrontations between students of the Islamic faith and other students. Another confrontation occurred at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where a Muslim student attacked several other university students with an SUV, explaining that his reason for doing that was the treatment of Muslims in the United States.

Obviously, the reaction to the recent cartoon controversy, and other reactions around the world, including the French riots last November, shows us that there are deep underlying problems in our societies. I believe these problems are inflamed by the words that media outlets use to describe the situation. Too often, these terms combine Islam with some very negative fact, and yet Islam as a religion has no place in that report.

Another example was when the European Wall Street Journal used the term “ethnic Pakistani” to describe one of the London bombers. As I understand it, that bomber was a British subject, so the descriptor “Ethnic Pakistani” is untrue for several reasons. First, there is no ethnic group that is *per se* Pakistani, there are many ethnic groups in Pakistan, and so there is no such thing as an “ethnic Pakistani.” Secondly, when the term “Pakistani” is used in that case, and it’s describing a British subject, the term smears the entire population of Pakistan, something like 130 million people. This, to me, is defamation.

My reasons for bringing this to your attention are many. First of all, I’ve traveled extensively in the Muslim world; I have been in ten Muslim countries, and I know Muslims of every stripe, but I don’t know a single one of them that believes anything like the terrorist actions we have seen in the last few years represent them, or represent their religion of Islam, and I’ve never seen anything in any of these countries that would lead me to believe that those countries would foster terrorism *per se*. In my view, the terrorists themselves are simply using Islam as a way to recruit people, and what is happening is that the mainstream media is helping them do it because they keep repeating these terms over and over again. I’ve been complaining about this fact publicly since last summer. I did so in a major speech at my business school in November.

Gradually, I think some members of the press have heard of my comments and have tried to change. But more recently, instead of using the terms “Islamic terrorist” or “Islamic extremist,” last week I heard a report that “Islamist” parties in Pakistan were protesting President Bush’s visit to

Pakistan. We need to dissect the term "Islamist Party" in order to understand the defamation. First of all, a party is a political organization; it has a political agenda, and obviously these parties do have a political agenda which is contrary to President Bush's agenda. That does not make them Islamic *per se*. The fact that they use the term "Islamic" in the name of the party also does not make them Islamic. "Islamic" refers to a religion. Using the name "Islamic" in the name seems to be incorrect unless that party's only objective is to promote the religion of Islam, which I do not believe is the case here because obviously there was a political agenda, and Islam itself does not promote one political agenda over another so far as I know. When the term "Islamist" is used in this context, "Islamist Party" suggests that the party is informed by the Islamic religion. I do not believe that is the case. I don't believe that any reporter who uses these terms has looked into the bylaws of such parties to know whether they have anything whatsoever to do with Islam, but none the less, because of lazy reporting habits, they pick up this term from one another without looking in to the meaning of the words. That is very dangerous. And so I've shown that we've met the first element of the cause for action in defamation, which is an untrue statement.