

## Charlie Hebdo: Pope Francis says if you swear at my mother – or Islam – 'expect a punch'

Pope Francis has said there are limits to the freedom of expression - and that anyone who swears at his mother deserves a punch.

Francis spoke about the Paris attacks while on his way to the Philippines, where around 1,500 Muslims protested yesterday against the depictions of the Prophet in the satirical French magazine Charlie Hebdo.

Charlie Hebdo: The first edition since the Paris massacre

He said that freedom of speech and expression are fundamental human rights however he added that he believes there should be limits to offending and ridiculing the faiths and beliefs of others.

By way of example, he referred to Alberto Gasparri, who organises his trips and was standing by his side on board the papal plane.

“If my good friend Dr Gasparri says a curse word against my mother, he can expect a punch,” Francis said while pretending to throw a punch in his direction.

He added: “It’s normal. You cannot provoke. You cannot insult the faith of others. You cannot make fun of the faith of others.”

Many people around the world have defended the right of Charlie Hebdo to publish inflammatory cartoons of the Prophet Mohamed in the wake of the massacre at its Paris offices and the following attack on a kosher supermarket, in which three gunmen killed 17 people in total.



Protesters in Philippines, burn poster with face of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. But recently the Vatican and four prominent French imams issued a joint declaration that denounced the attacks but also urged the media to treat religions with respect.

Francis, who has urged Muslim leaders in particular to speak out against Islamic extremism, went a step further when asked by a French journalist about whether there were limits when freedom of expression meets freedom of religion.

Francis insisted that it was an “aberration” to kill in the name of God and said religion can never be used to justify violence. But he said there was a limit to free speech when it concerned offending someone’s religious beliefs.

In the wake of the Paris attacks, the Vatican has sought to downplay reports that it is a potential target for Islamic extremists, saying it is being vigilant but has received no specific threat.

Protesters burn Hebdo poster over 'Zionist conspiracy'

Francis said he was concerned primarily for the faithful, and said he had spoken to Vatican security officials who are taking “prudent and secure measures.”

The Pope’s comments were condemned by Dr Evan Harris, a Liberal Democrat politician and former MP. He noted on Twitter that the pontiff was speaking on the same day that funerals for some of the murdered Charlie Hebdo staff took place, questioning whether this was in accordance with the idea of turning the other cheek. “The Pope said ‘people's faith must not be insulted’. Or else what, your holiness? Burning at the stake? Astonishing outburst from Pope,” he said.