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Responses, from the Vatican to college students, to bin Laden's death

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Amid the general rejoicing over Osama bin Laden's death, there have been a handful of pundits, bloggers and Facebook-ers who are challenging the Mike Huckabee-inspired "Welcome to hell" sentiment. (An aside via a question: How does our nation's reaction to Osama's death make us any better than the folks who danced in the street during 9/11? Answer: It doesn't.) I'm proud to say many of these people questioning the celebratory behavior are Catholics -- two of them young college women with minds of their own and fires in their bellies.

These writers are not the norm: One Christian group writes that it is within approved Christian behavior to rejoice in the killing of a human who represents "evil," ignoring the fact that Jesus said "Love your neighbor as yourself," and one of the 10 Commandments is "Thou shall not kill." Theologians have for years interpreted that decree as "Thou shall not murder," arguing that one can kill in self-defense, which many Christians believe is exactly what happened Sunday night when Osama was killed by a gunshot to the head. The head? Sounds more like sniper fire than your average gun battle. Which, being murder, is just as wrong as Osama plotting and funding (and rejoicing) in 9/11.

A talented Methodist I know takes a more nuanced approach to being glad Osama is dead, pointing out the problem with the whole "God bless America"-ing that's going on. God had nothing to do with pulling the trigger on Osama, just as He had nothing to do with flying planes into the Twin Towers.

And then there are the Catholics who are taking their faith to the street so to speak -- because we all know the street is Facebook these days -- and challenging "celebrations" over death. There were some standard ones I was grateful to see, linked to below. But the most impressive came from two young college

students in my town responding to an off-campus event planned for this Friday by University of Arizona students.

The event, planned by five male students, has the cute title of "Patriot Bros & Terrorist Hoes." (How quaint. I would just LOVE to know what the president of the UA thinks about this.)

Carmen Love and Catherine Radachi expressed disgust over the event by writing Facebook notes challenging the idea of throwing a drunk free-for-all in the face of bin Laden's death. They questioned the need for the war in the first place, the racism apparent in some of the celebratory events and the tendency for their generation (men and women alike) to think it's OK to refer to women as "hoe, skank, bitch or slut."

The pieces were obviously written in moments of passion, so they aren't as professional as the Vatican's statement about how a Christian "never rejoices" in the face of a man's death, "but reflects on the serious responsibilities of each person before God and before men, and hopes and works so that every event may be the occasion for the further growth of peace and not of hatred."

Neither were they of the quality of the prolific (and therefore envy-producing for Catholic writers-on-the-side such as myself) Jesuit Father Jim Martin, who wrote that his human instinct was to rejoice in bin Laden's death, but, "As a Christian, though, I cannot rejoice at the death of a human being, no matter how monstrous he was."

But they are from-the-heart statements by young women concerned about their generation's response to the killing of bin Laden, and they are worth contemplating.

As Love wrote, "Personally, I believe that a better way to 'honor' our troops would be to pray for their safety, and to do something with the freedom that they've sacrificed so much for. Something that doesn't include degrading ourselves. Something that doesn't include insulting human beings and downgrading us to cavemen and thoughtless animals. I doubt that soldiers volunteer their lives so that you can drink yourselves into comas and continuously degrade and soil the world's idea of America."

Or, as Radachi challenged: "You want to wear a turban? You want to put on a false beard? The fact is, in the Muslim religion those things are held sacred to their faith and are not things associated with terrorism or 'terrorist hoes' as you have put it so eloquently in the title. You are not 'defeating terrorism' or whatever you would like to claim by putting on a stereotypical outfit. Instead, you might simply be offending your fellow Muslim classmates who sit next to you daily."

A spontaneous candlelight vigil held at the parish Love and Radachi attend drew 30 participants last night. The "Patriot Bros..." event has more than 1,000 signed up. It is a sad statement of where things stand in this "Christian" nation, but there is hope in the voices of Love and Radachi, crying in the wilderness that there is a better way. You can read Radachi's and Love's full piece on Facebook.

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