

# The Causes of Insulting Religious Sanctities Among People and Its Consequences

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## ABSTRACT

This research paper has been prepared analytically with the aim of identifying the causes of insulting religious sanctities among humanitarian societies throughout the history and the factors that go beyond the great historical events among them, which led to great upheaval. The paper starts with definition of insulting religious sanctities. Then presents a historical overview of insulting the sanctities of religion and its consequences. Next, it analyzes the causes of insulting religions and social values. Also, it presents the position of Islam against insulting and offensive reactions to social values and religious sanctities. Finally, it argues that the concept of freedom of expression has been abused by some people in most religious societies as well as in some nonreligious societies, while this freedom is subject to certain restrictions for the purpose of maintaining public order.

**Keywords-** Religious sanctities, Islam, human rights, freedom, insulting.

## I. INTRODUCTION

To maintain peaceful relations and enjoy fair rights within each society, it is necessary to respect the religious beliefs of the people and prevent the desecration of religious sanctities. The lack of respect for religious sanctities has been a major factor in inciting discord and violence among human societies throughout human history. The United Nations have embarked on many projects and taken a series of practical steps to curb conflicts and violence. However, in religious societies the root cause of most conflicts and violence is a lack of respect for religious sanctities and an insult to morality for most people in that communities. According to PEW research center, seventy-seven jurisdictions criminalize insulting the sanctities of religions to prevent violence and extremism among their nations. Outlawing the defamation of religions within these societies enhanced the spirit of tolerance and respect to religious values among them. Islamic law and its main sources including the holy Quran, and the Hadith have emphasized on

respecting religious sanctities and preventing hate speech among its followers. The United Nations also has undertaken the responsibility of maintaining worldwide peace, developing relationship among nations, and solving their economic, social, and cultural problems. Therefore, several conventions and covenants have been ratified among its state parties to guarantee some basic rights for human being. While the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Covenant on social and cultural rights guarantee the basic rights and freedoms such as freedom of expression and freedom of religions, they also require the states and the public to respect social values and public moral.

## II. DEFINITION OF INSULTING RELIGIONS SANCTITIES

Insulting religion sanctities is the act of mocking or expressing disrespect toward religious symbols, beliefs, practices, sacred places, holidays, and objects

related to a particular religion.<sup>1</sup> The act of insulting religion refers to any offensive expressions toward religious sanctities that are sacred for a group of people and the followers of a religion.<sup>2</sup> The sanctities could be beliefs, symbols, practices, places, objects, speech, holy books, messengers, saints and respected religious people. In most of the societies and legal systems, insulting religious sanctities are considered hate speech and in some countries the act of insulting is equal to blasphemy and has strong punishment for the purpose of social values protection and protection of religion. According to most of heavenly religions especially Islam, insulting is not only prohibited but also emphasized on respecting others' beliefs and religious sanctities.

### III. POSITION OF ISLAM AGAINST INSULTING RELIGIOUS SANCTITIES

Islam prohibits insulting religious sanctities and even emphasize forbidding hate speech and offensive Dialogues There are several verses of holy Quran and the Hadiths that forbid Muslims from insulting the others' beliefs and warn those people who insult religious sanctities with severe punishment. The Quran says: "do not say crude words to those who call upon other than Allah, lest they use crude words about Allah in revenge without knowledge. as such we have made the actions of each nation seem pleasing. To their lord they shall return, and he will inform them of that they were doing."<sup>3</sup> In this verse, almighty Allah forbids believers and his messenger PBUH from insulting those who worship other than Allah since, it causes to react insulting to sanctities related to Islam. The holy Quran also says: "Believers, do not let people mock other people who may be better than themselves. do not let women mock women, who may be better than themselves. do not find fault with one another, nor abuse one another with nicknames. an evil name is disobedience after belief. those who do not repent are the oppressors."<sup>4</sup> The prophet PBUH also said: "Whoever believes in Allah and the last day, should talk what is good or keep quiet, and whoever believes in Allah and the last

day, should not hurt or insult his neighbor; and whoever believes in Allah and the last day, should entertain his guest generously."<sup>5</sup> He also, said: "avoid uttering statements that could be interpreted as disrespectful or blasphemous."<sup>6</sup> In addition, the prophet PBUH said: "Whoever curses his religion or curses the religion of others will face punishment"<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the prophet PBUH said: "do not abuse anyone or call him wicked, and do not curse anyone and do not insult anyone."<sup>8</sup> The verses of holy Quran and the hadith that are narrated from prophet PBUH place emphasis on respecting everyone's beliefs and they are protection for public order from offensive speech or hate speech.

### IV. HISTORY OF INSULTING THE SANCTITIES OF RELIGIONS

History has witnessed serious conflicts such as genocides and mass murders among different nations due to insulting each other's religions and disrespecting social values.<sup>9</sup> Some of the great conflicts occurred due to misapprehension, discrimination, and political interests. These factors imposed serious damage and disaster to humanity. For example, Crusades movements is one of the greatest catastrophes among Abrahamic religions that led the Christianity against Muslims to recapture the holy land of Jerusalem. Although, Jerusalem is the holy land for all the heavenly religions (Jewish, Christian, and Muslim), there was a misapprehension that Muslims were idolatrous and disrespectful toward the holy land.<sup>10</sup> Though, the battlefields have enhanced Christians' passion for collecting more accurate information about Islam, the expeditions caused thousands of deaths and injured.

According to Muslim belief, Jerusalem is the first kiblah, which means direction of Muslim prayer, and the place where Prophet Muhammad ascended into heaven to meet almighty Allah.<sup>11</sup> Christians believe that Jerusalem is the place where Jesus was crucified, arose from the dead, and ascended to heaven.<sup>12</sup> Jews claim that this land was given to Abraham by almighty Allah.<sup>13</sup> Although, the crusades war happened for political and economic purpose, the propagandas for defamation of the

<sup>1</sup> - "Insult, V." Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford UP, June 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/4339102489>.

<sup>2</sup> - "Insult. N." Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford UP, July 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/3312553080>.

<sup>3</sup> - Al-Quran, Chapter 6: AL-An-Aam; 108.

<sup>4</sup> Al-Quran, Chapter 49: AL-HUJRAAT, 11.

<sup>5</sup> Sahih al-Bukhari, Volume 8, Book 76, Hadith 482.

<sup>6</sup> Sunan Ibn Majah, Book 20, Hadith 2541.

<sup>7</sup> Sunan Abu Dawood, general behavior (Kitab Al- Adab) 4908.

<sup>8</sup> Sunan Abu Dawood, general behavior (Kitab Al- Adab) 4905.

<sup>9</sup> Will Durant, *History of Civilization [Tarikh Tamadun]*, 2258 – 2261, (Mahmood Masaheb. eds., 6th ed. 1999).

<sup>10</sup> - Riley-Smith, Jonathan Simon Christopher, *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Crusades*, 17- 18, Oxford University Press, (2001).

<sup>11</sup> Quran Tutor.com, About the Prophet's Miracle of The Isra Night – Shab e MIRAJ, (2014). Available at: <http://www.qurantutor.com/blog/about-the-prophets-miracle-of-the-isra-night-shab-e-miraj/>.

<sup>12</sup> Dr. Michael A. Milton, Where Was Jesus Crucified? Golgotha "the Place of the Skull", (2019). Available at: <https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/where-was-jesus-crucified.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Dr. Robert Jeffress, *The Islamic/Jewish Conflict Today*, (2017). Available at: <http://www.firstdallas.org/icampus/blog/the-islamicjewish-conflict-today/>.

holy land and prejudice was the main motives for these expeditions.<sup>14</sup> The conquest of divided Muslim territories by Turkish Empire and pushing their way into Christian Byzantine Empire provoked calls for holy war among Christians.<sup>15</sup>

Meanwhile, Pope Urban II was concerned about expansion of Turkish empire out of the Eurasia, so he encouraged Christendom's warriors to fight against Muslims, who were identified as pagans for Christians. He linked reconquest of Jerusalem to this expedition for more inspiration among Christendom's warriors.<sup>16</sup> That could be an example of religious abuse to gain self-interest. Although, it was a religious war for Christians, they did not know about their enemies.<sup>17</sup> For most of the Christians it was unclear that Jerusalem is a holy land for Muslims as well as for Christians and Jewish. As a result, this miscomprehension led them for such a serious conflict.

## V. DIVISION OF NATIONS AND RISE OF FANATICISM

If the leaders in the communities do not have clear goals to promote social welfare such as socio-economic and cultural behavior, it is impossible to establish public order, but rather such a nation will be struggling with different social violence.<sup>18</sup> Most of the conflicts among the nations has occurred due to their ignorance and selfish leaders who abused the social and religious values for gaining their interests. The invasion of Iraq—which was planned by President Bush and his cabinet—to enhance their control over oil market, is a great example of abusing social values.<sup>19</sup> The concept of social values such as liberty and protection of the world were abused as propaganda to support for their illegitimate war in Iraq. President Bush announced the war for freedom and protection of the world from a big danger.<sup>20</sup> Bush administration was claiming that Iraqi government was equipped with nuclear weapons, which is a big threat for world peace, while the investigation by the United Nation proved that there were no nuclear weapons.

<sup>14</sup> - Will Durant, *History of Civilization [Tarikh Tamadun]*, 2259 – 2261, (Mahmood Masaheb. eds., 6th ed. 1999).

<sup>15</sup> Merton, Nicholas, *Was the First Crusade really a war against Islam*, 12 (2017). Available at: <http://eds.b.ebscohost.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/ehost/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=60819898-67a8-4aa6-b979-b09c03bba885%40sessionmgr102&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbG12ZQ%3d%3d#AN=121659761&db=ulh>.

<sup>16</sup> *Id* 11 -13.

<sup>17</sup> *Id* 12.

<sup>18</sup> Smith, Julia, *source work*, 170 -171 (2012).

<sup>19</sup> Research Unit for Political Economy, *behind the War on Iraq*, (2003). Available at: <https://monthlyreview.org/2003/05/01/behind-the-war-on-iraq/>.

The military operations began on March 19, 2003, with the slogan by President Bush that, “we are the defender of freedom, and we bring freedom for others.”<sup>21</sup> This war imposed significant damages on civilians and military forces. According to statistics from the beginning of the war until 2018 more than 4,540 American soldiers were killed in Iraq.<sup>22</sup> There is a claim among people that invasion of Iraq was the main reason for the establishment of ISIS movement, which is the biggest threat for world peace Nowadays. This radical movement has been abusing the sanctity of sacred religion of Islam, to mobilize sensitive adherences of the religion, who does not have basic-religion knowledge, to fight against U.S. forces and terrorize against humanity. These were an overview of major consequences of insulting religions and abusing some of the social values by selfish leaders and ignorant people who blindly imitate their cultural, religious and social values.

## VI. CAUSES OF INSULTING RELIGIOUS SANCTITIES

### *Ignorance and Lack of Religious Knowledge*

The ignorance and lack of religious knowledge is one of the biggest challenges for world peace. The radical-religious movements against humanity that are contrary to religious studies exemplify the ignorance of religious adherences.<sup>23</sup> Although, most people do not have perfect knowledge about all religions and most of them even do not have basic knowledge about the religion that they are practicing, there are some people who assume that their habits and deeds are the most righteous. Meanwhile, it is not an excuse to insult other religions, if we do not believe that the beliefs of a group of people are not rational. According to manifestation of heavenly religions, mocking and insulting are condemned. The prophet Muhammad, said, “A Muslim is the one with whom people are safe physically and verbally.”<sup>24</sup> The Bible manifests that, “Do not speak evil against one another, brother...”<sup>25</sup> In other word, we have the right to express our effective idea and share rational expression. On the other hand, it is rights of others to prevent insulting, and mocking their religious values.

<sup>20</sup> CBS News, *President Bush announces invasion of Iraq*, (2003). Available at: <https://youtu.be/2zT-ZHBbOzM>.

<sup>21</sup> *id*.

<sup>22</sup> Statista, *Number of U.S. soldiers killed in the Iraq war from 2003 to 2018*, (2018). available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/263798/american-soldiers-killed-in-iraq/>.

<sup>23</sup> Mahmood Monshipouri, *Human Rights in the Middle East*, 73- 80 (2011).

<sup>24</sup> - Al-Bani, Muhammad Nasir al-Din, *Mukhtasari Sahih al-Bukhari [Brief of Sahih al-Bukhari]*, Chapter of Faith 8 (1979).

<sup>25</sup> James 4:11. Available at: <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James+4%3A11-12&version=ESV>.

## VII. DISCRIMINATION AND RELIGIOUS FANATICS

Religious discrimination is the assumption of superiority and making a distinction toward other people's religious sanctities in prejudicial treatment.<sup>26</sup> This assumption is one of the major obstacles of unity and solidarity among every nation. On the other hand, Consideration of other religions' values is some sort of mutual respect and significant for expanding peaceful relationship. According to a report, which is provided by the library of Congress, insulting religious values criminalized in seventy-seven jurisdictions either by imprisonment, fine or both.<sup>27</sup> This prohibition addresses all kinds of hate speech by written materials against religions, defamation of religions or ideology of others in a manner that can disturb the public peace or hurt feeling of followers of any religion. These laws have been suggested for the purpose of preventing radicalism and safeguarding feeling of religious people. In 2012 a Finnish member of parliament insulted Islam religion and called it pedophilic religion. His insult caused to numerous protests within Finland and other Islamic countries, so the Supreme Court of Finland convicted him to calm down the protest.<sup>28</sup> Finland Penal Code, on February 26, 2015, amended its anti-blasphemy law and criminalized insulting the sanctities of religions as the following:

- (1) Publicly blasphemous against God or, for the purpose of offending, publicly defames or desecrates what is otherwise held to be sacred by a church or religious community, as referred to in the freedom of religions Act (267/1998).
- (2) By making noise, acting threateningly or otherwise, disturb worship, ecclesiastical proceedings, other similar religious proceedings, or funeral, shall be sentenced for a crime against the sanctity of religion to a monetary fine or to imprisonment not exceeding six months.<sup>29</sup>

The amendment to anti-blasphemy Act took place to address all kinds of hate speech that hurt feeling of religious people who are the citizens of Finland to

respect their sanctities. Although, for some people outlawing blasphemy Act is contrary to the right to freedom of expression, there are most public figures who justify outlawing blasphemy Act for the purpose of public order and respecting religious values. In contrast, some people argue that the right to freedom of expression has no boundary.

## VIII. ANALYSIS OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

### *Abuse of Freedom of Expression*

According to Article 19 of UDHR, everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.<sup>30</sup> The provision of Universal Declaration of Human rights upholds freedom of opinion and expression, but not freedom to insult, defame or mock others.

The right to freedom of expression is guaranteed similarly both by the article Nineteen of Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR),<sup>31</sup> and the second provision of article Nineteen of International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)<sup>32</sup> The language of the UDHR states, "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."<sup>33</sup> However, some people do not pay attention to the main purposes of Universal Declaration of Human Rights and exceed their rights to freedom of expression by mocking, insulting, and hurting feeling of other people. In fact, freedom of expression is guaranteed, within the provision of Universal Declaration of Human Rights, for all mankind to share effective idea and expand their relationship in peaceful manner.

### *Purpose of Freedom of Expression*

The United Nations has undertaken the responsibility of maintaining worldwide peace, developing relationship among nations, and solve their economic, social, and cultural problems.<sup>34</sup> The right that was guaranteed to people to protect the truths and

<sup>26</sup> *id* at 81.

<sup>27</sup> Library of Congress, *Blasphemy and Related Laws*, (2017). Available at: <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/blasphemy/index.php>.

<sup>28</sup> **KKO 2012:58 [Finnish Supreme Court Reporter 2012 no. 58]**, <http://www.finlex.fi/fi/oikeus/kko/kko/2012/20120058> (in Finnish), archived at <https://perma.cc/8VYL-T4UJ>.

<sup>29</sup> **Ch. 10 § STRAFFLAG [FINNISH PENAL CODE] (Finsk Författningssamling [FFS] 19.12.1889/39)**, <http://www.finlex.fi/sv/laki/ajantasa/1889/18890039001?search%5Btype%5D=pika&search%5Bpika%5D=brott> (in Swedish), available at: <https://perma.cc/Q88T-88EF>.

<sup>30</sup> United Nations, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, Art 1. Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/index.html>.

<sup>31</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights, PB, G.A. Res. 217A (III), art. 19, U.N. Doc. A/810 at 71 (1948). [hereinafter UDHR].

<sup>32</sup> UN General Assembly, *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, art. 19, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 999, p. 171 (1966). [hereinafter ICCPR].

<sup>33</sup> UDHR, supra 99, art 19.

<sup>34</sup> UN General Assembly, *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 16 December

rationality, has been abusing as a denial of logical facts, insulting social and religious values or defamation of sanctities in most cases. Based on International law, Natural law, and state law of each country everyone is entitled to a series of basic rights that no one can exceed the rights or deprive someone from the rights without due process of a jurisdiction.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand everyone is required to respect social values and public moral. Restriction of hate speech or expression that hurt feeling of other people is not contrary to the purpose of freedom of expression.<sup>36</sup> In other word, any restriction for the purpose of public order and general welfare is not a violation to freedom of expression.

The second provision of article 29 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that in the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.<sup>37</sup> The restrictions assure protection of social moral and public order, which is one of the main purposes of United Nations. However, some people do not pay attention to the main purposes of Universal Declaration of Human Rights and International covenants; in other word, some people exceed their rights to freedom expression by mocking, insulting, and hurting feeling of other people. That is not only contrary to the purpose of Universal declaration of human rights, but also such a sensitive expressions are against the principles of morality as well as contrary to the principles of all heavenly religions.

## IX. CONCLUSION

- 1) The assumption that other's religious values are irrational is not sufficient justification to insult them.
- 2) Most people, who do not have basic knowledge of religions, say that religions are the cause of establishing radical movements while religions always have had a significant role in bringing unity and peace among people.
- 3) Insulting religious or social values and abusing them to gain political and economic interests has been the main cause of extremism movements.
- 4) There are some factors, which let the public to be abused by selfish leaders, such as lack of religious knowledge and fanatical belief that cause violence and profanation against other religious followers.

- 5) The misapprehension of right to freedom of expression stimulated most people to insult or criticize the sanctities of religions while the right is restricted in case of violation to public moral and social values.
- 6) As a results, the outlawing of insulting religions is increasing among both Islamic and non-Islamic countries to maintain public order and peaceful relationships.

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<sup>35</sup> Hunter and Huma Malik, *Islam and Human Rights*, (2005).

<sup>36</sup> LibertiesEU, *Here's Why Your Free Speech Is So Important*, (2017). Available at: <https://www.liberties.eu/en/news/freedom-of-speech-liberties-advocacy/12506>.

<sup>37</sup> United Nations, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, Art 29. Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/index.html>.

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