

**SCRIPTURAL RULINGS ON BLASPHEMY: THE SHARI'AH PERSPECTIVES**

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**Abstract**

*Shari'ah refers to a set of Islamic religious law that governs aspects of day-to-day life of a muslim in addition to religious rituals. Therefore, Shari'ah is the recourse of Muslims in every case. Blasphemy is one of the categories that usually bring about religious misunderstanding which in turn affect peaceful cohesion. This paper at hand reviews religious take on blasphemy as well as factors that determine individual's reaction whenever it occurs. It gives instance of the one that occur without any fatality and the nature of the people involved compared to the one that ends with causality. The writer was of the opinion that islamicaly, the case of blasphemy has always been left for Allah to decide since the lifetime of the holy Prophet Muhammad. Some cases of how the Prophet himself pardoned those that insulted and even attempted his murder were cited. Recommendations were proffered on how to handle different cases of blasphemy. The paper concluded with its position on some recent cases of blasphemy in Nigeria and the anti-ethical Islamic approaches which is a disrespect to constituted authority. Recommendations are proffered in line with Shar'ah perspectives, which includes improved regulation of religious activities and religious preachings, need for peaceful coexistence among citizens of any nation amongst others.*

**Keywords:** *Blasphemy, scriptural rulings, shariah perspectives*

**Introduction**

Generally blasphemy is an insult, or abuse against any object of worship. In Islam, blasphemy is regarded as any ridiculous assertion, imperfection, uncomplimentary remark or aspersion cast against Allah, any of His prophets, Holy Books, their households, their companions and other divine apostles of Allah. The prophet Muhammad was reported to have warned thus 'Do not vilify my companions'. Allah in the glorious Quran instructs Muslims to prevent their God (Allah) from abuse of others by not abusing whatever people revere aside from Allah (Holy Qur'an Q6 v 108). Biblical verses like Leviticus 24 v 10 – 16 where the son of an Egyptian whose mother was an Israelite was commanded by God to be stoned to death publicly by the community and strangers for his sin of blasphemy against God and Moses will also be considered. If everyone will try to understand the core of his own religion and adhere to it, and will not allow false teachers to dictate to him there will be no room left for quarrelling. Ghandi in Faapa (2015). The implication of this philosophy is that ignorance is the major cause of religious crises. When the purpose of a thing is unknown, the abuse is inevitable. The world today has witnessed series of atrocities being perpetrated in the name of religion. Whereas, no religion teaches intolerance. Hypocrisy and distortion are passing current under the name of religion. As no religion taught man to kill fellow man because he held different opinion or was of another religion Gandhi in Faapa (2015).

It is always disheartening to the religious scholars when irreligious acts are claimed by ignorant to be religious. They are even hardly listened to. And religions are not meant to separate men but to bind them together. The irony of religion as said by Weneka (2018) is that it is a field where everybody claims to be a professional. Whereas, being a religious adherent

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does not make one a religious scholar. That is why Allah says ‘Ask people with knowledge if you know not Q16v43.’ It is also contain in biblical verse Horsea 4 v 6 that : ‘for my people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.’

### **Blasphemy and its implications**

Blasphemy is an irreverence toward something considered sacred or inviolable (Webster English Dictionary, 2022). Every worshiper cherishes and ,venerates and holds sacred what they believed in. Some even prefer to die in protecting their belief. That is why we have martyrs in all the world religions. We heard of patriots, nationalists like Dr Nyarko of Ghana and Narendra Modi of India, Faapa (2015) who sacrifice their lives in defense of their countries. The emphasis here is that whatever people anoint they always want it to remain anointed. Some husbands can even go to any length about a suspected boy or man friend of their wive(s). Therefore, disrespecting or violating what is respectable and inviolable to others is tantamount to peace violation. This justifies the public saying that, believe and let believe. Q30v32 made it clear that each people is contented and satisfied with their lots. The victims of blasphemies will always respond to prove their existence and to defend their faith. Although the responses is usually not peaceful. Hence; blasphemy has nothing to beget but internecine and crisis.

Scriptures are believed holy and sacred books revealed for the guidance of mankind. Hardly will one see anything that can cause destruction to humanity not treated by any scriptures. Allah commands Muslims to believe in all the revealed scripture and not to discriminate among those prophet with whom they were sent. Q2v285. These scriptures contain among other warning, injunction and prescriptions of deterrents on some misconducts or evil acts. Blasphemy is one of such acts which scriptures warn against and even prescribe punishment for the culprit. Taking for instance Psalms 105 verse 15 which reads this ‘And do not touch my anointed ones, and do not harm (or curse) any of my prophets. God commanded two ferocious bears to consume 42 boys who abused and cursed Prophet Elisha, book of kings 2 verse 23-25. Another man in First King 21 verse 10 – 13 was commanded by God to be stoned to death for blasphemy against God and a divine king. This was demonstrated by God to show the graveness of blasphemy. However, the above biblical arguments quoted by the writer is not to support the jungle justice meted on Deborah Samuel in the present day. As a Muslims, the writer strongly believes in Islamic concept of recognition of constituted authority. Prophet Muhammad and his companions respected the Makkan polytheists leadership (Islamic Education Trust, 2018). Ibn Taymiyah said Allah Himself is the one that avenges on behalf of His messengers and protects His religion (Islamweb, 1998). An example is that of those consumed by ferocious animals for committing blasphemy Book of Kings Verse 23-25. And if at all, such a punishment is to be meted out, it should be pronounced by the court of law, anything outside this is totally a disrespect to the Nigerian constitution and government which also made it Islamically condemnable.

### **Factors Influencing Religious Dispositions**

Human reactions to a same situations are always different. The perspectives from which we view things is as a result of some factors. These factors determine the positiveness and negativeness of individual’s response to every happening. These factors are numerous but the following three among others are adopted for the purpose of this paper:

#### **i. Individual or personal instinct (Human Erratism)**

There are inherent impulses in every human being. So no matter how religious, civilized or educated one is, the influence of such impulse will loom. Take for instance greediness, no amount of wealth or riches can quench the covetousness of a greedy person. So, also is our personal behaviour influences our social, political, religious and other endeavors. The prophet

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(peace be upon him) said ‘The best of you in the Jahiliyah (ignorant era) is also the best of you while embracing Islam’ (Sahih Bukhari, 846 AD). The message from this is that some people are naturally good. People like Abubakr the Khalif of the prophet (SAW) proved his nobility even before the advent of Islam. Rahim (2021) gives the following comment on Abubakr

“Though born in an age of misbelief, superstitions, corruptions and other vices of the Arab life. Abubakr was well known for his purity, simplicity, incorruptibility, sincerity, truthfulness, kindness, generosity and wisdom. By virtue of his qualities, he won the respect of his fellow citizen and was honoured with the position of magistracy of makkah”.

The above qualities with just belief in oneness of Allah are what qualify him to be a good Muslim. Therefore, a killer is a killer, a prostitute is a prostitute and a bad person is a bad person not because he is a Muslim, Christian or traditional worshipper. Nigerians can still remember the news of P astor Udoka Ukachukwu in Benin Edo State. The pastor after impregnating the wife of Mr. Victor Gabriel Isonguyu killed him and even burnt the body beyond recognition (Vanguard 10<sup>th</sup> May, 2019). What is clear is that the pastor can never ascribe the act to any biblical instruction. The same circumstance is also applicable to Bokoharam who kill innocent victims in the name of Islamic religion. According to Mahatma Gandhi for concluding this part with one of his philosophies where he said that “As soon as we lose the moral basis, we cease to be religious”. There is no such thing as religion overriding morality. Man, for instance, cannot be untruthful, cruel or incontinent and claim to have God on his side (Faapa, 2015).

#### ii. **Understanding and Civility**

The role of knowledge in whatever engagement can never be over-emphasized. Imam Shaffi, a great scholar of Islam likened knowledge to eyes with which we see light. Therefore, without eyes (knowledge) one remains in darkness while amidst light. Knowledge plays a vital role in changing people’s orientation. Allah says “Are they equal, those who know and those who do not know?” It is those who are endowed with understanding that receive admonition”. Q39v9.

It will be amazing that some religious adherents are not aware nor do they understand their religions’ messages. That is why the scholars say “A knowledgeable scholar is more difficult for Shaytan (Devil) to confuse than thousands of worshippers” (Ibn Uthaemeen, 2017). Hence, all the atrocities committed in the name of religion are religiously baseless, deadpan, unfounded and ungrounded. Religion without knowledge is unguided and cannot bear the expected fruits. Emphasizing the importance of religious understanding.( Gandhi, nd) submit that “If everyone will try to understand the core of his own religion and adhere to it and will not allow false teachers to dictate to him there will be no room left for quarrelling. The same idea could also be found in Horsea 4 verse 6 which reads thus “For my people are destroyed for lack of knowledge”. Therefore, ignorance is not only a disease but also a terrible and destructive disaster and misfortune (Quran). Q2v269) also reads thus “He (Allah) grants wisdom (knowledge) to who He pleases and he to whom wisdom is granted receives indeed a benefit overflowing”.

#### iii. **Cultural and Environmental Factor**

The culture and the environment at which one is brought up have influence on him (Laudato, 2017). That is why the psychologists say that man is a baby of his environment (Rahim, 2011) gave account of one of the factors that was responsible for the fast growing of Islam in Madinah as follow; “compared to the Makkans, the Madinites were a cultured, enlightened and refined people endowed with receptive mind. As they had contacts with the Jew and Christians of their city, they had been already acquainted and enlightened with the idea of revelation and divine monotheism. So, the prospect of the new religion looked bright at Madinah (Rahim, 2001). It

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does not mean that the entire Madinites embraced Islam, but there was no religious struggle like that of Makkah. They believed in what they believed and let believe.

Nigeria as a country has witnessed such situation during the ‘End SARS’ protest. The protest took place in all three major regions of the country but in different dimensions. In a region the protest was seen as an opportunity to persecute other tribes living in the region. It is nothing but to tell us the tribalistic nature of the people of such region. Other region took the advantage to tyrannize their religious counterpart. A situation worse than that of Deborah occurred at University of Ibadan in 2010, yet no casualty was recorded. A female Christian student called Seun Bunmi Adegunsoye from the university faculty of Law intruded the university Jumat service. The lady on 13<sup>th</sup> August 2010 entered the university mosque during the jumat service and started shouting “Allah is not God, Only Jesus is God, you are all going to hellfire save you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior these and many other blasphemous utterances. Everybody in the mosque was confused. Nevertheless, the student was apprehended and presented before the university committee. The committee invited her parents and decided to suspend her. Having heard the decision of the university committee, Muslim community of the university demonstrated the beauty of Islam by pleading and insisting that she should be allowed to continue her education. Although this is the preaching of Islam, nevertheless the nature of the people involved also played a vital role in averting the tragedy that might have occurred. This is totally a different scenario to what happened to Deborah Samuel who was killed without trial nor fair hearing.

#### iv. Shariah Perspectives on Blasphemy

Shariah is a machinery prescribed by Allah the absolute law giver for the guidance of human race. Shariah has two primary sources: the Quran and the Sunnah. It is from these two sources that the remaining sources tap. However, the ability to deduce law from the two primary sources is not for everybody. There are expected qualities of an Islamic jurist. But today due to unregulated religious system especially in Africa every individual gives religious verdict according to his desire. Hardly will one see a new religious issue without precedent or the like in Islamic history. There are many blasphemous cases reported by the Quran and authentic hadiths non of which was fatal. Ibn Taymiyyah in Islamweb (1998) was quoted to have said thus

”إِنَّ اللَّهَ مُنْتَقِمٌ لِرَسُولِهِ وَمُطَهِّرٌ لِدِينِهِ“

Meaning “Allah is the One that avenges for His prophet and purifies His religion”. At the battle of Uhud the incisor of the prophet (SAW) was broken, and His forehead was slashed. The prophet was about to rain curse on them, then Allah reveals “Not for you (but for Allah) is the decision; whether he turn in mercy to them or punish them, for they are indeed wrong doers. To Allah belongs all that is in heavens and on earth. He forgives whom He pleases and punishes whom He pleases, but Allah is oft-Forgiving, most merciful”. Q3v128-129.

Commenting on the above verses Yusuf Ali said”

“Allah’s mercy is always open to us. But it is also open to our enemies, and those seem to us His enemies. His plan may be to bring sinners to repentance, and teach us righteousness and wisdom through those who seem in our eyes to be rebellious or even defiant. There may be good in them that He sees and we do not a humbling thought that must lead to our own self examination and self-improvement. If such mercy is granted by Allah to erring sinners, how much more is it incumbent on us, poor sinners”(Ali,1998).

In Shariah the Jews and Christians are known as “Ahl dhimah” (people of pact) or (people of agreement}. Nigerians, Muslims, Christians and even traditional worshippers are bound to live

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together in peace and harmony . The Shariah ruling on this type of society is that, it is incumbent on all to collectively protect one another against external aggression even if it is their fellow brethren. Ibn Hazim (nd). Therefore, if within such a community rift ensue it should be referred to the constituted authority. Peace they say, is not the absence of conflict but the ability to manage it. The prophet of Islam was reported to have said:

“whoever cheats the contracted one, or denies him of a right or burdens him more than his capacity or snatch something from him without his consent, I will stand against him on the day of resurrection” Abu Daud in (Qoradawi,nd)

Shariah stressed the protection of non-muslims even in an exclusive Islamic state. It was unanimously agreed by the scholars of Islam that the blood and the lives of the people of contract are sacred (Qoradawi,nd). The prophet (SAW) said “whoever kills a contracted person will never smell the fragrance of paradise” (Bukhari, 846 AD). This means that Islam commands Muslims to be just even to the non-Muslims. If after this they reciprocate it with betrayal or evil then leave them for Allah to judge. Allah says:“for sufficient are we unto you against those who scoff”. There was an occasion when someone asked the prophet to curse the polytheists, the prophet replied “I have not been sent as an invoker of curse; I have only been sent as a mercy of glad tidings ”(Muslim, 849 AD). In another hadith the prophet said to his companions “Do you know what is better than charity and fasting and prayer? It is keeping peace and good relations between people, as quarrels and bad feelings destroy mankind” (Al-Trimidh, 864 AD). This is a clear message of Islam for whoever wants to practise Islam in its pristine form. Even the law of equality prescribed in cases of murder, Allah says if the family of the murdered can pardon, it is better Q2v178.

### **Some Cases of Prophet Muhammad’s Magnanimity**

**Case I:** It was reported that at Khaybar, a Jewish lady called Zaynab bint al-Harith through a piece of roasted sheep which she had poisoned for him. He ate it, and then realized that it was poisoned. The prophet (SAW) called for her, on her arrival the companions asked “shall we kill her” He said “No”, he pardoned her. (Bukhari, :846 AD)

**Case II:** The prophet forgave the eighty people who intended to harm him when he overpowered them, he set them free, whereas he has power to revenge on them (Ibn Kathir, 1999).

**Case III:** He forgave Ghawrath bin Al-Harith who wanted to kill him, while sleeping. The prophet woke up to find him pointing the sword at him. He reproached him angrily and the sword slipped off. Then, the Prophet picked up the sword and called his companions. He told them what had happened, and forgave the man (Ibn Kathir ,1999). Here the prophet called his companions to witness and emulate his behaviour. However, Muslims are enjoined to let the below verses and the likes be their guiding principle;

“The recompense for an injury is an injury equal there to (in degree): but if a person forgives and make reconciliation, his reward is due from Allah; for (Allah) loves not those who do wrong”. (Quran 42:40)

“...and the Hour is surely coming, so overlook Oh Muhammad (SAW) their faults with gracious forgiveness Quran 15:85.

**Case IV:** The polytheists of Makkah were the bitterest enemies of the holy prophet. They killed many of His companions. They even attempted His assassination but Allah protected Him. So, on the Prophet’s conquest of Makkah He asked the polytheists “what do you expect I will do with you?” They replied “(you will do) good! O generous brother, then the Prophet of Allah said “Go you are all set free”. Islamic education trust (2019).

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### Conclusion

It is clear from Prophet's forgiveness of a woman who attempted his murder, the level of his tolerance for an offence done to him personally as grave as an attempt on his life by a non-Muslim. Where the pursuit of justice or retribution may be the most sensible and appropriate course of action, the Quran makes it clear that such retribution or punishment must be proportionate to the wrong done. It is thus prohibited for a Muslim to exact a punishment in the name of justice that is worse or more severe than the offence committed( Ibn Kathir , 1999). Therefore, It is unfounded in Islam for a Muslim to be vengeful and intolerant.

### Recommendations

Nigerian government needs to take religious issues with every sense of seriousness. The government should regulate religious activities and religious preaches as done in countries like America, Saudi etc. Only knowledgeable and qualified scholars should be allowed to give religious verdicts, and those verdicts should also be subjected to vetting. During the orientation at different higher institutions of learning the need for peaceful co-existence should be stressed and the implication of its violation.

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