

Islamophobia and Disrespecting the Sanctity of Islam as A Threat to World Peace

Nazeem Goolam¹

Associated Professor at South Africa University

Abstract

Islam emanates from the word 'salaam' meaning peace. The paper will examine some of the common misunderstandings regarding Islam today and the Islamophobia flowing from such misunderstandings in many parts of the world.

The starting point is thus to understand the fundamental teachings of Islam. In this regard it will be argued, with specific reference to the work of Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, that the true jihad is founded on the concepts or ideas of peace, tolerance and non-violence. Each of these three ideas will be briefly examined. Khan argues that all the teachings of Islam are based on the principle of peace.

In the context of human rights discourse, the paper will ask why we have so much human rights, but so few right humans (or humans who are right). Perhaps a greater emphasis needs to be placed on human duties rather than human rights.

What about human dignity? With specific reference to the 2006 cartoon controversy, the paper will argue that there needs to be limitations on the right to freedom of expression in secular societies so as not to encroach on the human dignity of people of faith, whatever faith that may be. This is crucial to the maintenance of peace in societies.

Inextricably related to the question of human dignity is the question of religious dignity. It will be argued that the right to religious dignity includes the right not to be victimised, intimidated or provoked on grounds of one's religion or faith.

After some 300 years of the dominance of Western secularism and human reason, perhaps it is time for a return to the harmonization of faith and reason, to the harmonization of Revelation and reason. This call was made, in a project headed by Prof McLean, by the Catholic University in Washington in 2008. There is a need to have regard to faith-based values and the need for a human rights discourse founded on faith-based values.

The paper will also make reference to the important work and writings of a leading Turkish scholar, Fethullah Gulen, in respect of Islamic ideals, humanistic discourse and the dialogue of civilizations.

In the final analysis, if human rights are to serve to maintain world peace and human dignity it must be founded on a respect for religious values.

1. Email: goolanmi@unisa.ac.za

Introduction

Islam emanates from the root word '*silm*' meaning peace or *salaam*. Some of the commonest misunderstandings regarding Islam today revolve around its most fundamental – not fundamentalist – teachings, in particular the idea of *jihad*.

According to Maulana Wahiduddin Khan (*The True Jihad* 2002) true *jihad* is founded on the concepts of **peace, non-violence and tolerance**. He argues that nowhere in the *Qur'an* has the word '*jihad*' been used to connote war in the sense of launching an attack or offensive. Examining Islamic history, Khan states that the Prophet engaged in battle only three times during his life and that he always opted for the avoidance of conflict.

The word '*jihad*', derived from the root word '*juhd*' means 'to strive' or 'to struggle' and to exhort oneself to the utmost to achieve one's goal. The actual word for war in Arabic is '*qital*'.

Indeed, Khan argues that all the teachings of Islam are founded on the principle of peace. *Jihad* is essentially, therefore, a peaceful struggle and one form of this struggle is *da'wah* (communication of the message of Allah). The *Qur'an* states:

“*Falaa tuti'il kaafireen wa jahid hum bihi jihadan kabiraa*”

“Do not yield to (listen to) the unbelievers, but fight them strenuously (vehemently) with it [the *Qur'an*] (25:52).

In a *hadith* narrated by Imam Bukhari, Hazrat Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) stated that whenever the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was faced with two options he would always abandon the harder option in favour of the easier one.

Peace

At a symposium on 'Islam and Peace' in Washington in 1998 Maulana Khan stated that Islam and violence are contradictory to each other and that the concept of Islamic violence is so obviously unfounded that *prima facie* it stands to be rejected.

With reference to the verse of the *Qur'an* 'Kill them wherever you find them' (2:191), Khan stated that this should not give the impression that Islam is a religion of war and violence. Verses such as these should be interpreted in a narrow, restrictive manner and refer to those who have unilaterally attacked the Muslims. This verse does not convey a general command.

Khan argues that all the teachings of Islam are based on the principle of peace.

Non-violence

According to Maulana Khan, non-violence ought never to be confused with passivity or inaction. On the contrary, it is a more forceful action than that of violence.

Islam is a religion of non-violence. On numerous occasions, the *Qur'an* declares that Allah does not approve of violence or *fasad* because this is an action which results in the disruption of the social system, often causing huge losses and damage in terms of lives and property.

Inextricably linked to the idea of non-violence is the concept of patience (*sabr*). The entire spirit of the *Qur'an* is in consonance with this concept. In the context of a potentially violent situation, patience implies a peaceful response or reaction, while impatience implies a violent response.

In the context of war and the command of war in Islam, it should be stated there is no aggressive or offensive war in Islam. Islam allows only a defensive war and that, too, only when that is the last resort and there is no other option.

There are verses in the *Qur'an* which convey the command to launch an offensive or to engage in battle (*qital*). However, the special circumstances which justify the compliance with this command need to be carefully examined and understood. First, the *Qur'an* states:

“Fight for the sake of Allah those who fight against you,
but do not be aggressive” (2:190).

Secondly, the *Qur'an* emphasises the point that war should be undertaken in order to defend one's community and where one has been attacked first. In any event, all efforts must be made to avert war first and only when such avoidance has become impossible should battle be resorted to in self-defence.

Maulana Khan adds that only peaceful interaction will give Muslims the kind of intellectual stimulation and variety of experience which they must have if they are to tread the path of progress.

Tolerance

The United Nations has stated that the ability to be tolerant of the actions, beliefs and opinions of others is a major factor in promoting world peace. Maulana Khan states that tolerance is a foundation of sound emotional intelligence, it is not an act of compulsion. It is a positive principle of life and expresses the noble side of a human being's character. The existence of tolerant human beings in a society is just like the blooming of flowers in a garden.

Of course, the question of relevance today is to what extent should a group or religious community accept or tolerate the outright disrespect and disdain for Almighty God? To what extent can one tolerate absolute freedom of expression? What are the limits of freedom of expression? It happened with the cartoon publications in 2006 and it happened again recently in South Africa when a student magazine published inflammatory and blasphemous statements and pictures in respect of Christianity. **Just as patience is not infinite, so too is tolerance.**

There is no question that the levels of disrespect being exhibited nowadays against religions in general has become so rampant as a result of the idea of absolute freedom of expression that it amounts to intimidation and victimization. Such a situation makes it very difficult for the ordinary person to practice tolerance.

Current human rights discourse

Here I merely wish to highlight a point that has already been made by a number of scholars and intellectuals, including Amitai Etzioni. The point is that why is it that we have so much talk of human rights, yet so few right humans – or humans who are right?

Perhaps a greater emphasis needs to be placed on human duties rather than human rights. Indeed, almost all non-Western communities emphasize the idea of service and duty to community as paramount. If these duties and responsibilities are observed then, automatically, one's human rights will fall into place.

In the freedom of expression debate, so prized upon in the Western world, what is the place of human dignity and the right to human dignity?

The recent cartoon controversy: a note on freedom of expression, hate speech and blasphemy.

In the light of the 2006 publication of cartoons aimed at mocking the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) this aspect of the paper analyzes and compares the approach to the idea of freedom of expression and its limits in Western/European jurisdictions – in particular the USA, Canada, Australia and Belgium/Netherlands – and in Islam.

“And it is not right for you to insult Allah’s messenger.”

(Holy *Qur’an* 33: 53)

The publication of twelve cartoons mocking the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) (hereafter abbreviated to pbuh) in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* in 2006 deeply offended and consequently

evoked a huge outcry from the international Muslim community. The cartoons, depicting the Prophet (pbuh) as a terrorist – one of the cartoons depicted the Prophet (pbuh) with a bomb in his turban – were subsequently published in a number of other European newspapers. It was quite clear that these publications were aimed at demonizing the character and personality of the God's final Prophet (pbuh). As Mufti Zubair Bayat put it at the time, these cartoons elicited contempt for the religious beliefs of the Muslim *ummah* or community and abused and overstepped the right to freedom of speech by taking it to a dangerous and irresponsible level in its disregard for the sensitivities of Muslims.

The reasons for the outcry by the global Muslim community were threefold:

- (i) images of the Prophet (pbuh) are strictly prohibited in Islam. It is regarded as disrespectful and may lead to distortion;
- (ii) the entire value system of Islam is based on respect and reverence for one's parents, elders and teachers. And the greatest reverence is to be accorded to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and, indeed, to all of God's Prophets;
- (iii) the Prophet Muhammad is considered to be the greatest role model for all Muslims in the world and thus any mocking of the Prophet (pbuh) is seen as a mocking of all those who follow and revere him. For Allah says in the *Qur'an*: "You have indeed in the Messenger of Allah a most beautiful pattern of conduct"(33:21).

Furthermore, the reaction of Muslims can be properly understood by western onlookers only if the latter are aware of the approach to freedom of expression and to the concept of blasphemy in Islam. Before discussing the Islamic approach, I shall first briefly examine the rationale for the protection of freedom of expression in Western human rights law.

Freedom of expression in Western human rights law

In most European countries freedom of expression, like all other human rights, is limited. These limitations are in respect of libel, hate speech, invasion of privacy, protection of national secrets, blasphemy and anti-Semitism. In the light of the publication of these cartoons, it would seem that these limitations apply exclusively to non-Muslims.

Since South Africa's constitution is very much Western in character, it is apt to begin by looking at its section 16, which provides that everyone has the right to freedom of expression. Subsection 16(2) goes on to provide that that right does not extend to propaganda for war, incitement of imminent violence and advocacy of hatred which is based on race, ethnicity, gender or religion and that constitutes incitement to cause harm. Subsection 16(2) clearly and expressly places certain forms of expression, including hate speech based on ethnicity and religion, outside the scope of the right. According to a number of leading South African constitutional law writers, the need to restrict the scope of freedom of expression by preventing the incitement of racial hatred is recognized in a number of international human rights documents. Hate speech restrictions, they say, are also found in the laws of a number of democratic societies.

I now briefly analyze the jurisprudence on hate speech in the USA, Canada, Australia and Belgium/Netherlands.

United States of America

The First Amendment to the US Constitution states that 'Congress shall make no law abridging the freedom of the press'. It is an active freedom in that it focuses on a right to do something, to speak one's mind. On the other hand, the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments protect citizens against racial and religious discrimination. Since the US Constitution contains no limitation clause, an unresolved tension between these amendments operates in American jurisprudence.

In the USA almost all speech is constitutionally protected. Speech includes conduct with or without words. However, incitement to violence is not protected and this exception is known as the 'fighting words' exception. Where speech is so offensive or uncivil it may fall within the highly limited category of 'fighting words'. 'Fighting words' was defined in a 1942 US Supreme Court decision as words which 'by their very utterance inflict or tend to incite an immediate breach of the peace'. The court added that such words were of such slight social value that any benefit derived from them is outweighed by 'the social interest in order and morality'.

This highly limited category of 'fighting words' has been further restricted by a number of Supreme Court decisions. First, the court has refused to treat what were clearly highly offensive expressions as sufficient to provoke physical violence in retaliation. And secondly, it has required that the 'incitement of the immediate breach of the peace' test is only satisfied where the advocacy thereof is directed to inciting or producing

imminent lawless action and is likely to incite or produce such action'. And in a 1992 decision the court held that, even within this very limited category of 'fighting words', a prohibitive law may not discriminate on grounds of political or ideological content.

Canada

Section 319(2) of the Canadian Criminal Code of 1985 provides that:

Every person who, by communicating statements, other than in private conversation, wilfully promotes hatred against any identifiable group is guilty of

- (a) an indictable offence and is liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years; or
- (b) an offence punishable on summary conviction.

Anti-hate legislation is also contained in provincial legislation. One example is the very broadly worded section 14 of the Saskatchewan Human Rights Code of 1979 which provides that:

No person shall publish or display any representation...

- (a) tending or likely to tend to deprive, abridge or otherwise restrict the enjoyment by any person or class of persons of any right to which he is or they are entitled under law; or
- (b) which exposes, or tends to expose, to hatred, ridicules, belittles, or otherwise affronts the dignity of any person or class of persons or a group of persons because of his or their race, creed, religion, colour, sex, sexual orientation, family status, marital status, disability, age, nationality, ancestry or place of origin.

The leading Canadian case is the 1990 Supreme Court decision of *R v Keegstra*. James Keegstra was a high school teacher in the town of Ekiwille in Alberta. For almost ten years he taught his students about a grand conspiracy on the part of Jews to undermine Christianity and to control the world. He taught his students that the banking system, the media, Hollywood, the universities, most publishers, most churches and almost all political leaders were agents of this conspiracy. He told his students that Jews were treacherous, subversive, manipulative, deceptive, money-loving and power-hungry. Students who parroted his theories and ideas obtained good grades while those who did not adopt his views performed poorly.

When Keegstra's teaching eventually became a public issue, he was dismissed from his position. In January 1984 he was charged with the wilful promotion of hatred under section 319(2) of the Criminal Code. In

its decision the Canadian Supreme Court described the 'harm' that may result from hate speech, stating that emotional damage caused by words may result in grave social and psychological consequences. There is often a response of humiliation and degradation from the individual/s targeted by hate propaganda.

In this regard one should bear in mind that a person's sense of dignity and belonging to a community at large is closely connected to the concern and respect accorded the group to which he or she belongs. The derision, hostility and abuse encouraged by hate propaganda thus have a severely negative impact on an individual's sense of self-worth and acceptance. These are undesirable consequences in any country which prides itself on tolerance and the fostering of human dignity through, *inter alia*, respect for the many racial, religious and cultural groups in society.

In a dissenting judgment in the *Keegstra* case, Judge McLachlin commented on the need for the enhancement and preservation of multiculturalism in Canada.

Australia

The absence of an express constitutional recognition of the right to freedom of expression in Australia marks a significant difference with Canadian jurisprudence. In this context Australian racial vilification legislation should be viewed in relation to two issues. First, the freedom of political communication and, secondly, general principles of free speech.

As regards the first issue, the question to be asked is whether racial vilification or racist speech constitutes political communication. This, in turn, depends on whether a broad or narrow interpretation is given to 'political communication'. If the former is the case, racial vilification would constitute a form of political communication while, if the latter is the case, racist speech would not be constitutionally protected. As regards the compatibility of racist speech with the general principles of free speech, racial vilification is not seen as an infringement of or threat to public order. Nor is it regarded as a violation of equality.

Belgium and the Netherlands

In the Netherlands it is a criminal offence, in terms of article 137 of the Criminal Code, to deliberately give public expression to views which are insulting to a group of persons on account of their race or religion. While in Belgium the 1981 anti-racism law prohibits the incitement of hatred on grounds of race, religion, gender or nationality. Articles 1 and 3 of this

law makes the following types of racist conduct punishable: the incitement of hatred, racial segregation or discrimination; giving publicity to such conduct; membership of or cooperation with any organization which promotes such conduct.

Summary of freedom of expression in Western human rights law

It is quite clear that, even by Western secular standards, the right to free expression and freedom of speech is of fundamental importance, but it is certainly not absolute. It is equally clear that the limits of such freedom were overstepped by the publication of the cartoons. For the right to freedom of expression goes hand in hand with the responsibility not to use it to harm others unnecessarily.

It is thus abundantly manifest that, even by Western secular standards, the right to free expression and freedom of speech is of fundamental importance, but is certainly not absolute. It is equally manifest that the limits of such freedom were overstepped by the publication of the cartoons. There can be little doubt that the right to free expression goes hand in hand with the responsibility not to use it to harm others unnecessarily. The right to free expression must be limited by the duty not to engage in hate speech and the duty to respect and protect the dignity of others.

The Islamic approach to freedom of expression

Islam affirms the right to freedom of expression. At the same time it imposes limitations, both moral and legal, on the exercise of this freedom. MH Kamali, in his book *Freedom of Expression in Islam* (1997), states that there are two objectives served by the right to free speech, namely the discovery of truth and the upholding of human dignity. He adds that freedom of expression has often been characterized as a yardstick by which to measure the democratic quality of a government and its commitment to the rights and liberties of its citizens.

The concept of free expression in Islam can only be fully understood in the context of the *Qur'anic* principle of *hisbah*. The principle of *hisbah* entails commanding the good and forbidding evil and is a cardinal *Qur'anic* principle which lies at the root of many Islamic laws. It represents the supreme objective of the *Shari'ah*. The right to free speech and expression is the *sine qua non* of the concept of *hisbah*. Over and above the principle of *hisbah*, affirmative evidence of the right to freedom

of expression in Islam includes the following: the giving of sincere advice (*nasihah*), consultation (*shura*), personal reasoning (*ijtihad*), freedom to criticize and freedom to express an opinion.

As stated above, in Islam both moral and legal limitations are imposed on the exercise of this freedom. The moral violations of freedom of speech include reprehensible acts such as telling lies, backbiting, ridiculing others and exposing the weaknesses of others. The underlying reason for this is Islam's emphasis on upholding the honour and dignity of the individual. As regards the legal limitations which Islam imposes on freedom of expression, the most important limitation is the avoidance of harm to others and the fact that free speech should not be hurtful to others nor encroach on their rights or dignity. In terms of the *Shari'ah*, violations of freedom of speech may take the form of the following offences: public utterance of hurtful speech, slanderous accusation, blasphemy, sedition, insult, cursing and the attribution of lies.

In the context of this article, the public utterance of hurtful speech and blasphemy are of particular importance and will now be briefly examined.

Public utterance of hurtful speech

“God loves not the public utterance of evil speech except by one who has been wronged.” (*Qur'an*, chapter 4, verse 148)

Public utterance includes broadcasting and publication, while hurtful/evil speech comprises that which is addressed to an individual, to more than one person or to a community at large. According to Kamali, the commentators (*mufasssirun*) of the *Qur'an* have indicated that this verse denounces, in absolute terms, the utterance of offensive speech, regardless of the end it may serve or the context in which it may occur. The publication and display of obscene literature is therefore forbidden. The only exception, in terms of Islamic law, would be where the publication aims at enhancing the quest for justice.

Blasphemy

The etymology of the word 'blasphemy' is to be found in two Greek words, 'blapto' (to harm) and 'pheme' (speech) and means to defame or insult. The essence of blasphemy is the contemptuous and hostile attack on the fundamentals of religion or a religion, which offends the sensibilities of its adherents. According to the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* blasphemy comprises 'all utterances expressive of contempt of God, His Names, Attributes, Laws, Commands and Prohibitions.' (p 214).

The principal offence of blasphemy in Islam is the reviling of Allah and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Reviling includes any insult to God most High or to the Prophet (pbuh), any irreverent or contemptuous act or statement which outrages the sensibilities of believers (such as the 2004 Guantanamo Bay incident of flushing the Holy *Qur'an* down a toilet) and giving a lie to the fundamentals of Islam. Insult of the Prophet may take either an explicit or implicit form. An example of an explicit insult would be a statement attacking his personal integrity while an example of an implicit insult would be in the form of mockery or disrespect. The scholars of Islam have drawn a distinction between reviling God (*sabb Allah*) and insulting the Prophet (*sabb al-Rasul*). This distinction is connected to the division of rights in Islam into the rights of God (*haqq Allah*) and the rights of man (*haqq al-abd*). *Sabb Allah* consists of the violation of the right of Allah while insult of the Prophet is a violation of the right of man, namely the personal right, honour and dignity of the Prophet.

The publication of cartoons in the Danish newspaper, *Jyllands-Posten*, in 2006 aimed at mocking the personality of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The publication brought to mind Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, which was published in 1988 and which evoked global Muslim denunciation. The book reviled and defamed the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), his wives and companions. It also contained contemptuous passages regarding the Holy *Qur'an* and the core values and principles of Islam. In February 1989 Ayatollah Khomeini issued a *fatwa* calling for the death of Rushdie. In March 1989 the Organisation of Islamic Conference issued a statement denouncing the book as a flagrant violation of the right to freedom of expression. The statement emphasized that the right should not be exercised at the expense of the rights of others, nor should Islam be the target of sacrilege in the name of freedom of expression.

It is abundantly clear that, both in Western and Islamic human rights thinking, the right to freedom of expression is permitted as long as it does not encroach on or violate the self-worth and dignity of the human being. In terms of Islamic law, these encroachments or violations include the public utterance of hurtful speech and blasphemy.

The status and personality of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)

It is impossible, particularly to the non-Muslim reader, to comprehend the global reaction of Muslims to those cartoons without a sound understanding of the status and personality of the Prophet.

Concerning the Prophet, Allah declares in the Holy *Qur'an*: 'Indeed you possess the most sublime character' (chapter 68, verse 4) and 'You have indeed in the Messenger of Allah a most beautiful pattern of conduct' (chapter 33, verse 21). The *Qur'an* admonishes believers to honour, respect and love the personality of the Prophet (pbuh) . The Prophet has himself stated that 'none of you can be a true believer unless and until he loves me more than his parents, his children and all other human beings.'

Therefore the love, honour and respect of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) permeates all of Islamic thinking and, in fact, forms the *fons et origo* (foundation and origin) of Islamic teaching. Therefore, if the personality or status of the Prophet is in any way challenged, let alone ridiculed and vilified, those who love, respect and revere him will not tolerate it. Such vilification, in turn, encroaches upon the human dignity of all those who love and revere him. In fact, God has given to each of His Prophets a title. The Prophet Jesus

(Arabic Eesa) (peace be upon him) is called the 'Spirit of God' (*Ruhullah*) while the Prophet Muhammad is known as the 'Love of Allah' (*Habibullah*).

In Islam, all of God's Prophets are revered and held in the highest esteem. The disrespect of any of them, let alone the greatest of them all, represents not only an affront to the human dignity of those who love and respect them, but also the most vile form of blasphemy.

Double standards and blasphemy in the West

In 2003 the same Danish newspaper which published the cartoons rejected a series of cartoons of Jesus on the grounds that they may be offensive to readers and were not funny. While in Europe, holocaust denial is a very serious issue. This is evidenced by the fact that, by 1994, Switzerland, France, Austria and Germany passed legislation prohibiting holocaust denial.

The 1937 Swiss Penal Code criminalizes any utterances, writings, gestures or assaults on the honour of a person or group of persons on the grounds of race, ethnicity or religion. In Germany, denial of the holocaust is punishable by a maximum of five years in prison while Austria's maximum sentence is ten years. Had the cartoon of the Prophet instead shown a rabbi with a bomb-shaped hat, cries of anti-Semitism would no doubt have been heard.

While the publication of the cartoons is regarded as simple exercise in free speech, two recent occurrences serve to amply prove the double standards applied in the West. *First*, German federal prosecutors have received a criminal complaint against Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in which he is being charged with the crime of holocaust denial. Ahmadinejad has repeatedly expressed doubts that six million Jews were killed by the Nazis during World War II. The Israeli lawyer who filed the indictment, Ervin Eran Shahar, stated that the defendant should be investigated for inciting racial hatred, defiling the dead and denying the holocaust, as well as for violating the rights of Jews to security of life and freedom.

Secondly, in 2006 the British historian David Irving (best known for his book *Hitler's War*) was jailed for three years by a Viennese court on a charge of denying the Holocaust. The day after the sentence Austria's state prosecutor filed an appeal against the sentence, stating that it should be lengthened.

However, when Muslims in the UK tried to invoke UK blasphemy law against the blasphemy perpetrated by the writer (who would later be awarded a knighthood!) of the *Satanic Verses* in 1989, they were informed that the law protected Christianity only, not Islam.

Concluding remarks

The publication of the cartoons ridiculing the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) represents contempt for the most fundamental beliefs of Muslims and has abused and overstepped the right to freedom of speech by taking it to a dangerous and irresponsible level in its disregard for the sensitivities, self-worth and dignity of the Muslim community. The fundamental individual rights and freedoms enshrined in European constitutions and in our very own must be exercised with due care in ensuring that these freedoms are not used to hurt the feelings of others and do not disrespect the human dignity of others.

The media, of course, has a very important role to play in ensuring that their right to free speech does not incite racial or religious hatred. And it is apt to mention a few words on the February 2006 decision of the Johannesburg High Court to interdict the *Sunday Times* from publishing the cartoons. The court declared that the cartoons were characterized by insult and innuendo intended to ridicule Islam and that therefore the limitation on the newspaper's right to free speech was justifiable in the

interest of human dignity. The court added that the caricatures of the Prophet (pbuh) as a terrorist showed a lack of human sensibility and advocated hatred and stereotyping of Muslims.

In the final analysis, perhaps God's admonition should simply be followed:

“And it is not right for you to insult Allah's Messenger.”

(Holy Qur'an, chapter 33, verse 53).

There can be no doubt that imitations on the right to freedom of expression in secular societies must be put in place so as not to encroach on the human dignity of people of faith, whatever that faith may be. This is crucial to the maintenance of peace in the world today.

Inextricably related to the question of human dignity is the question of religious dignity. The right to religious dignity includes the right not to be victimized, intimidated or provoked. Perhaps it should be enacted in the following manner:

Every person has the right to religious dignity which includes the right not to be victimized against on grounds of faith or religion.

Advocacy of hatred based on religion and which constitutes incitement to violence or cause harm is not permitted.

I believe that, after more than 300 years of the dominance of Western secularism and the primacy of human reason, perhaps the time has come for a return to the idea of the harmonization of faith and reason, the harmonization of Divine Revelation and human reason. In this regard, an important project headed by Prof McLean is currently in place at the Catholic University of Washington.

Fethullah Gulen is a Turkish scholar who has advocated and written much on the Islamic ideals of harmony and tolerance in his humanistic discourse and his work on the dialogue of civilizations. I hope to make further reference to his work and ideas in a future paper.

In the final analysis, if human rights are to serve to maintain world peace and human dignity it must be founded on a respect for religious values, principles and beliefs.