

The Confessional Differences in Perception of the Factors Insulting the Religious Feelings

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Abstract: The current study is concerned with the actual for modern Russia problem of law enforcement practice under Article 148 of the Criminal Code, which provides for liability for actions committed with the purpose of offending religious feelings. At the same time, until now, there is no uniform understanding of what the religious sentiments of believers are and what are the actions that can insult them. The article describes the results from the survey organized to study confessional differences in the perception of factors of offending the feelings of the believers. The study involved 220 representatives of the main confessions of Russia: Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism. The respondents were asked to choose those actions from the proposed list that could wound their religious feelings or to suggest their own variant (all questions were composed with reference to doctrinal characteristics of confessions, but were of similar nature). The results obtained indicate that insult to the feelings of believers is subjective and has confessional characteristics determined by the content of the religious teachings. The results of the study are of unconditional novelty and significance in view of great social demand and lack of similar studies.

Keywords: Religious feelings, Psychology of believers, Psychology of religion, Insult to religious feelings, Confessional differences.

INTRODUCTION

In 2013, Article 148 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation was amended to provide for punishment by deprivation of liberty for up to 3 years for “insulting the religious feelings of believers”. Since then, the number of believers’ filing for the protection of religious feelings has increased, and the content of the appeals is becoming more varied: the Buddhists – for the Buddha bars open throughout the country, the Muslims in Tatarstan – for a girl’s dance against the background of a mosque, and others. There is a difference in the views of believers towards these situations: some consider that there was an insult, while others dismiss it.

At the same time, the process of consideration of these cases requires commissioning of an expert investigation that would answer the question of the presence or absence of an insult. However, in the performance of this expert examination, it becomes necessary not only to determine what the “religious feelings of believers” are but also in what circumstances they can be offended (Ural and Berg, 2019; Uzlaner & Stoeckl, 2019; von Scheve & Walter-Jochum, 2019). As practice has shown in the perception of situations that have become grounds for the institution of criminal proceedings by Article 148 of the Criminal Code, there is no uniformity among believers.

Ntonov and Samokhina (2015), discuss how the Russian judiciary formulates legal policies in adjudicating cases that include religious beliefs. First, based on the theory of legal argumentation, the authors define the context within which their research on this matter is performed. The application of this structure to the examination of the practice of the Russian court has made it possible for the authors to discover important characteristics which they claim are characteristic of the judiciary’s legal reasoning in this category of cases.

From the viewpoints of modern psychology, which originate from the works by (Barker, 2005; James, 1929; Priestley, 2001; William, 2009), the specificity of religious feelings is not in their psychological content, but in their focus on the objects. This point of view is confirmed by modern research in the field of neurotheology (Malevich, 2012; Malevich, 2015; Lipton, 2016). So, H. Fred writes, “There is no evidence that specific areas of the brain or the mechanisms deal with a religious activity as such” (Previc, 2006). The feeling is often called religious because of its focus, content, or its origin (Laing, 2019; Zinnatullina and Popp 2019).

In addition, each individual religion has its own objects or personalities of devotion. For example, in Orthodoxy, a person may have special feelings in relation to some icon or saint, while a Muslim, due to their religious characteristics, does not feel anything for an icon, but loves Prophet Muhammed and has a special attitude to his name. In addition, in the same religion, people may have different attitudes to the same religious object, everything will depend on the

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individual characteristics of a person. Thus, the content of the faiths has significant differences, which also cannot but influence the understanding by believers of what is permissible or unacceptable with religious objects.

In a study by Thalbourne (1995), believers were no more conservative overall than disbelievers, nor were they more likely during their childhood to read the Bible or to have been religiously associated. Contrary to the forecast, believers at the time of the study were no more likely than unbelievers to have a religious affiliation. Numerous works show the psychological differences between religions and the psychological characteristics of believers (Hood Jr, Hill, P and Spilka 2018; Spilka, 2019; Granovskaya, 2004; Wulff, 1991) and many others. The complexity of the issue is also determined by the fact that from the point of view of psychology, any actions can be perceived by a person as offensive if they go beyond their permissible boundaries. But at the same time, according to the personal principle (Koye, 2019; Kumar, 2020), everything external acts through the internal.

Accordingly, the relevance of this study is determined by the existing practical request to determine the factors of violation of the religious feelings of believers. At the same time, taking into account the multi-confessional nature of Russia, this study should be organized with the participation of representatives of various confessions.

In this regard, the *object* of our study was the perception by believers of various factors that can offend religious feelings, and the *subject* – confessional differences in the perception of factors of offending religious feelings.

Religious feelings, like any feelings, are subjective, but at the same time they are faith-based, therefore, in each individual confession, in connection with its doctrinal characteristics, the factors of violation of religious feelings will differ greatly.

Overall, the main aim of the study is to investigate the results from the survey carried out to analyze the confessional differences in the perception of factors of offending the feelings of the believers. This study engaged 220 representatives of the main confessions of Russia: Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism. The outcomes reveal that insult to the emotions of believers is subjective and has confessional characteristics determined by the content of the religious doctrines.

METHODS

To elicit the main factors that can be insulting to the religious feelings of believers in different denominations, a questionnaire was developed in which people who identify themselves as believers were asked to answer a number of open-ended questions and one semi-closed question. The open-ended questions contained the data of the passport group (gender, age, place of residence), and it was also proposed to describe the emotions experienced when their religious feelings were being insulted.

The semi-closed question was formulated as follows: which of the following actions can offend your religious feelings? Its main task is to identify the most common forms of insult. The question was non-alternative and allowed the respondent to choose several answer options in order to determine the significance of each of the identified forms of insult.

The offered answers for representatives of each religion allowed for their confessional and theological characteristics. However, the semantic load of the answers was the same. All the offered answers can be divided into the following semantic groups:

1. Disregard by someone for religious norms of behaviour in the presence of the respondent.
2. Abusive and mocking remarks about the founders of religion and other religious authorities.
3. Insulting or mocking remarks about religious norms confessed by the respondent.
4. A rude remark about the sacred books.
5. Rude and scornful comments on religion and fellow believers.
6. Caricaturing religious shrines and authorities.
7. Misbehavior on the territory of a religious building and other sainted places.
8. Vandalism in relation to religious objects and objects of devotion.
9. Preventing believers from standing in prayer and worshipping in churches.
10. Impossibility mockery of religious beliefs.

All questions were prepared with the account taken of the doctrinal characteristics of the confessions.

There were no limitations in a number of possible factors for choice. In addition, in order to prevent a situation when we did not anticipate all areas where the feelings of believers could be offended, the respondents were also offered the possibility of a free answer.

The respondents were representatives of the traditional religions of Russia represented in the preamble of the Federal Law of September 26, 1997, № 125- Ф3 “Concerning Freedom of Conscience and Concerning Religious Associations” – Christianity (Orthodoxy (30 people), Catholicism (14 people), Protestantism (68 people)), Islam (30 people), Judaism (37 people) and Buddhism (41 people). There were 220 people in the survey, including 100 women and 120 men. It was a personal interview. An insignificant part of the respondents lived in the CIS countries, the Baltic states, Europe and Turkey, and it was an electronic questionnaire-assisted interview.

RESULTS

The main interest is the results of the analysis of the calculation of the frequencies of the choice of the factors suggested to the respondents for the possible insult to their religious feelings.

Table 1 illustrates each factor with the values (in percent) of the choices of the respondents – the

representatives of each of the six confessions; the factor chosen by the maximum number of believers are marked with green for each confession, yellow marks the factors that ranked second and third in the frequency of choice.

As can be seen from the table, all factors have been chosen by at least one representative of each confession. An exception is the factor “Ignoring of religious norms by someone in the presence of the respondent”, which has not been chosen by any of the Orthodox and Jews. This means that any improper actions with religious objects can be perceived by at least some of the believers as offensive. Moreover, some believers, with the exception of Muslims, offered their own option of answer (“Other”).

In addition, it is noteworthy that none of the factors has not received 100%. That is, there is no such action that would offend everyone. Of interest, in our opinion, is also the fact that the very believers have a different attitude to religious feelings: some see a sacred nature in them and a singular value that needs to be defended, while others believe that such feelings cannot be violated (“Impossibility to insult religious feelings” has been chosen by 10 to 41.5% of the respondents).

Further, the results obtained in each confession will be analyzed, and their common and different

Table 1: Frequency of Choosing the Factor of Insulting Religious Feelings by Representatives of Various Religions in Russia (%)

	Orthodoxy	Catholicism	Protestantism	Islam	Judaism	Buddhism
Ignoring religious norms by someone in the presence of the respondent	0	21.4	5.9	3.3	0	2.4
Rude and mocking statements about the founders of religion and other religious authorities	70	78.6	60.3	40	75.7	12.2
A harsh utterance or mockery of religious norms confessed by the respondent	30	50	22.1	30	78.4	14.6
A rude statement to the holy books	43.3	57.1	42.6	36.7	54.1	29.3
Rude and mocking remarks about religion, fellow believers	40	42.9	45.6	33.3	62.2	12.2
Caricature images on religious shrines and authorities	66.7	85.7	47.1	66.7	37.8	4.9
Inappropriate behaviour on the site of a cult building and other sacred places	53.3	71.4	47.1	33.3	56.8	31.7
Vandalism against religious objects and objects of worship	63.3	78.6	23.5	36.7	75.7	46.3
Making believers difficult to take part in prayers and worship services	13.3	64.3	10.3	33.3	35.1	31.7
Impossibility to insult religious feelings	30	35.7	27.9	10	16.2	41.5
Other	3.3	14.3	5.9	0	2.7	12.2

characteristics will be detailed. The description of the content of the creed is generally known and is not provided in this article, due to the limited scope of it.

Orthodoxy

As the results of the research have shown, most often (70%) the religious feelings of the Orthodox believers can be offended in the event of a rude remark about God or about one of the saints whom the believer worships. That is, among the Orthodox believers, religious feelings are expressed not for religious objects, but more for saintly personalities (the icon on which the face of a saint is depicted is not the main object of worship for the Orthodox, but a personality depicted in it is of the greatest importance).

The second most important answer (66.7%) was the answer "Caricature images on religious shrines and authorities", which is also in line with the above.

The third most important (63.3%) is the answer "Vandalism against religious objects and objects of worship."

Particular attention is drawn to the factor "Ignoring of religious norms by someone in the presence of the respondent," which has not been chosen by any Orthodox respondent. In our opinion, this is an indicator of their tolerance.

In addition, 30% of Orthodox respondents have indicated that their religious feelings "are difficult to offend in any way" and have not chosen any factor. One of these respondents has commented on the choice in the following way, "I believe that nothing can offend a person who pursues a spiritual life, but it can be insulting, offensive, and so on. If the Lord tolerates them, then I will tolerate".

Catholicism

The answers of the Catholic respondents are similar to the answers of the Orthodox ones. The three most chosen answers are: "Caricature images on religious shrines and authorities" – 85.7%; "Rude and mocking statements about the founders of religion and other religious authorities" – 78.6%; "Vandalism against religious objects and objects of worship" – 78.6%. The only difference in the answers of the Orthodox Christians is that "caricature images" is in the first place for Catholics, and, this answer is the second most important for the Orthodox faithful. Whereas for the Orthodox "rude statements about God or the saints" are more insulting, while for Catholic believers they are

secondary. The difference may be conditioned by the differences in the leading representative systems of these confessions: in Catholicism – visual, in Orthodoxy – kinesthetic (Previc, 2006).

Protestantism

Among the three leading responses, the two are from the same group as the choices of the Catholic and Orthodox believers. The first place is occupied by "Rude statements, ridicule, slander on Jesus Christ or the Trinity" (60.3%) – the Orthodox Christians have ranked it first and the Catholics – second. In second and third places (47.1% each) are the answers "Misbehavior on the territory of a church building, a house of prayer", "A caricature of God or a biblical hero of faith". At the same time, if Catholics and Orthodox Christians distinguish with assurance the three frequent answers as high, then the Protestants have ranked only one answer as high 60.3%, and then the figures are almost evenly distributed between four more answers. As a result, we have two more popular answers "Rude statement, aspersion on my coreligionists" 45.6% and "Rude remark about the Bible" 42.6% (the difference between the last leading answers is only 1.5 and 4.5 %).

Islam

Analyzing the results of the survey of Muslims, we see that in the first place (66.7%) among the insults is "a caricature of Prophet Muhammed and Allah." As contemporary history has shown, scandals with cartoons of Muhammed do take place. In our opinion, this action is regarded by the Muslims as the most offensive because, in Islam, the image of Prophet Muhammed and Allah is shirk (forbidden act). Therefore, a caricature of them is regarded as a double insult.

However, 10% of the Muslims have answered that their "religious feelings are difficult to offend in any way, and have not chosen any more answers.

Judaism

Studying the results of the questionnaires of the Jewish, we see that most insulting (78.4% of the choices) are the actions associated with a disregard for religious norms and, in fact, with the Jewish lifestyle. The second and third most popular (75.7%) are the answers "Rude statements, ridicule, slander on God Yahweh" and "Vandalism, damage, destruction of sacred objects, buildings and structures" 75.7%.

Among the answers about the impossibility of wounding religious feelings, we find a figure of 16%, and these are people who have chosen only this answer.

Buddhism

The main difference between this religion from the rest is that it does not imply the presence of God as a creator or a single legislator at all. Buddhism is more likely to be a European definition of Buddhist religious practices and beliefs.

The results of the study of the factors of offending the religious feelings of Buddhists turned out to be the most different from the results of the representatives of other religions. The main feature of the chosen answers is their divergence. First, the Buddhists most often (46.3%) chose the answer "Damage to Buddhist structures." Those who chose this answer indicated other actions that might offend them. The second most popular answer (41.5%) was "Do not offend my religious feelings," and these respondents did not choose any more answers.

As a result, we see that among the Buddhists who took part in the survey, almost half considered an insult to feelings possible, and the second denied it. An interesting comment, left by one of the respondents who denies the possibility of offending religious feelings is as follows, "The more not perfect human consciousness, the more vividly their feelings are manifested." Such survey results reflect the philosophy of Buddhism that the problem of a person is in their negative feelings from which they need to be delivered.

DISCUSSION

Thus, the study has led us to the following conclusions:

1. Any improper actions concerning religious objects can be perceived by at least some of the believers as offensive.
2. There is no such action that would offend all believers to a man – none of the factors received 100% choice, which means that among representatives of one religion, the opinion of people about what can and what cannot offend religious feelings differs, i.e. wounding religious feelings is subjective.
3. The largest number of believers of all major confessions can be offended by rude and

mocking remarks about the founders of religion and other religious authorities, as well as by vandalism in relation to religious objects and objects of worship.

4. Differences in the perception of factors that can offend the religious feelings of believers of different confessions have been found:
 - The most insulting factor of religious feelings for believers of all Christian denominations is connected with their attitude to God and Jesus Christ;
 - Religious feelings of the Muslims and insult to them depend to a greater extent on those norms that are well defined in Islamic canons;
 - Religious feelings of the Jews are connected with their awareness of themselves as a special people of God who saved them once and now gives them life every year. The most painful in the Jewish environment is the information that humiliates their religious way of life;
 - Buddhism is one of the most controversial religions in relation to religious feelings and insults to them. While in theory, the Buddhists should not be offended, in practice about half of the Buddhists have pointed to real factors that can offend their feelings.
5. The least significant factor for representatives of all confessions is the factor "Ignoring of my religious norms by someone", which may indicate a high degree of tolerance among religious people. Thus, we can say with confidence that professing the religious norms of one faith is not an insult to others, even if it is insulting within the confession itself.

In multi-confessional Russia, legislation in the field of religion is of great importance, because the fate of many citizens depends on how it functions and is implemented. However, religious communities are specific and require a special approach to understand. In this connection, one of the essential issues in the field of religious legislation today is the understanding of such a complex phenomenon as "insult to the religious feelings of believers." The lack of uniformity in understanding this phenomenon often creates serious tension in modern society.

CONCLUSION

In this study, the issue of insulting the feelings of believers was considered from the point of view of psychology and confessional characteristics of Russian believers. To study it, a survey was conducted among 220 representatives of the leading confessions existing in the territory of the Russian Federation, which showed that the religious feelings of believers were subjective and even for representatives of one religion the factors of insulting religious feelings were subjective.

This is important to bear in mind when deciding the question of offending religious feelings. To understand religious feelings and the factors that insult a citizen, one must always take into account their religious affiliation and the dogmatic features of their religion.

Thus, our hypothesis that religious feelings, like any feelings, are subjective, but at the same time conditioned by confession, because in each individual confession in view of its doctrinal characteristics the factors of insult to religious feelings will differ, has been fully confirmed.

In this regard, considering the issue of crime prevention and the area of insulting religious feelings and punishment for that, it is necessary to take into account both subjective and confessional characteristics in the understanding of religious feelings by believers and the possibility of insult to them.

The research results are definitely novel in view of the lack of similar studies. At the same time, such studies with the involvement of a wider range of respondents and development of the methodology, are certainly important for the development of interfaith dialogue.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There in none.

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