

Blasphemy - A Medieval Concept with Modern Consequences

Presented by

John Suarez, AU Nat'l Education Committee Chair

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Irvine Ranch Water District¹ Community Room
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The concept of blasphemy involves all the elements of the First Amendment. The word was coined in the XIII century, but blasphemy ceased to be a major socio-political issue after the Renaissance and the Age of Reason, at least in Western civilization. The situation is quite different in the Islamic world. As the two cultures have come into contact and confrontation in the last few decades, the issue has once again come into prominence in the West. Terrorism and other developments have created anti-Muslim sentiment, and the Muslim world has responded by trying to reduce such through the encouragement of suppressive legislation. This has posed serious conflicts among Western democracies, viz., how to counter religious prejudice without sacrificing basic civil rights and freedom of speech. Europe, thus far, is coping differently than the US.

Dr. John Suarez is a retired Professor of Psychiatry at UCLA. He is a lifelong social activist, concerned with Civil Rights, Social and Economic Justice, the Environment, Public Education and the First Amendment. He has published extensively in the areas of Legal Psychiatry and the Separation of Church and State, including a chapter (*The Path to Theocracy – The Purgation of the First Amendment*) in the book *The Fundamentals of Extremism – The Christian Right in America*.

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