The Fall and Rise of Blasphemy Law

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Preface

The troublesome state of affairs concerning freedom of expression in a world of religiously motivated terrorism (“theoterrorism”) is what prompted us to edit *The Fall and Rise of Blasphemy Law*.

In today’s world, we are witnessing two conflicting developments taking place with regard to freedom of expression and religion. On the one hand, we are seeing the continuation of the modernisation project. Influenced by the Enlightenment and critical thinking, laws combatting the defamation of religion (blasphemy laws) are in many parts of the Western world either abolished, or enforced to a far weaker extent in comparison with their historical counterparts. On the other hand, we are seeing a resurgence of religious fundamentalism in extreme forms. The most extreme form is the conviction that the blasphemer, heretic or apostate has to be killed.

This perplexing development gives a whole new dimension to the discussion on freedom of expression. Legal limits on freedom of expression, established by legislators and judges, are now only one part of the picture. Terrorist attacks, which cause fear and, subsequently, self-censorship, have become another part of the picture. The protection of freedom of expression now also depends on the ability of governments successfully to combat theoterrorism.

We thank the contributors to this book. We are also grateful for the two peer reviews that we have received, which have helped us improve this book. We thank the pre-eminent scholars Eric Barendt, Alan Dershowitz, Menachem Mauthner and Bassam Tibi for gracious quotations they allowed us to use as endorsements. And last but not least: we are very happy that Leiden University Press has shown great enthusiasm throughout every stage of this project. It was a privilege to work with such an excellent publisher.

Paul Cliteur and Tom Herrenberg
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