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In defence of the fundamental values of society

An analysis of blasphemy trials and debates in Sweden around 1900

The attack on the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo in Paris in January 2015 made the Western media establishment to rally in defence of freedom of expression, but it also raised the question of the limits of this freedom. There are always defined limits to freedom of expression, which change over time and are adapted to the prevalent political system. Ideas that in various ways question or threaten the current value system are not accepted. In Western society, racism is an example of such an opinion, while blasphemy and criticism of the state-sanctioned religion took the same position in pre- and early modern society – and in today's Islamic states.

In my paper I will discuss the blasphemy phenomenon and its changing meaning and position in Sweden with examples from the turn of the century 1900, and with an outlook on the development up to the present in a Scandinavian and European perspective. My focus will be on the blasphemy trials, their discursive meaning and importance, and the question of societal value systems and symbolic violence.

In 1889 the blasphemy was highly topical. The Socialist leader and later Prime Minister Hjalmar Branting and his party comrade Axel Danielsson were serving prison sentences for blasphemy, and the utilitarian freethinker Viktor Lennstrand had just been sentenced to six months in prison for the same offence. Lennstrand, a former free church Christian who ran an intense campaign against church and religion, had been convicted of blasphemy offences several times before – and more convictions would follow.

This wave of blasphemy prosecutions ending in convictions represented a break with the trend that marked the Swedish development since the beginning of the 19th century. The new constitution adopted in 1809 stipulated freedom of worship within the existing state church order. Admittedly, the criminalisation of blasphemy remained both in the Penal Code and in the new Freedom of Press Act from 1810, where also mockery and denial of the Christian faith was indicated as crimes, and the death penalty for blasphemy was removed first with the new Penal Code of 1864. Yet, at that time it had since long only a symbolic function.

These changes were part of a process of gradual dismantling of the confessional system of unity. In Sweden as in the other Nordic countries, the transformation from a confessional to a secular social order was marked by the successive liberalisation of religious legislation from the mid-nineteenth century and onward. In line with this shift, blasphemy was no longer defined justified by reference to God, but with the need to safeguard religious peace and the religious feelings of the believers.

Yet, in the mid-1880s a new wave of prosecutions for blasphemy and denial of God began, initiated by a petition with over 6000 signatures demanding actions against this form of violent heckling with the Christian faith. The prosecution of blasphemous offences now became part of the political establishment's fight against radical movements and what was perceived as tendencies of social disintegration. A similar trend can be observed in other European countries, where radical freethinkers and Socialist were attacking and ridiculing Christianity were convicted for blasphemy. Unlike the prosecution and sentencing of blasphemy crimes in the first part of the 19th century, these trials were not about philosophical and theological expositions but about texts and speeches intended for a wider audience and

aimed at radical social change. Basically, it was about society's value system and political order, which at least formally was still based on the Lutheran faith.

In the period 1888-1890, the blasphemy prosecutions reached a peak with more than twenty charges against half a dozen individuals, who were sentenced to heavy fines or prison for different kind of blasphemy offense. The trials were motivated by allegations of having caused general annoyance and the offenses were seen as a violation of and as a threat to public order. From the point of view of the convicted, among them a distinguished professor at Lund University, the harsh punishments were regarded as an abuse and as a violation of against a violation of civil rights.

In connection with the revision of the Penal Code, the press laws and the religion legislation in the mid-twentieth century, the blasphemy prohibitions were replaced with a ban on publicly insulting of what was defined as sacred by religious denominations in the country. Blasphemy was removed from the Penal Code in 1949, and in 1970 all regulations relating to violation of religious beliefs were replaced by the new legislation against discrimination and hate speech. Attempts to use this new legislation against violations of religious feelings all failed as these kinds of charges are conflicting with the right to freedom of expression. This was clearly manifested at the beginning of the new millennium when the blasphemy issue was actualised by the cartoons and drawings of the Prophet Mohammed. Unlike a century earlier, it was now no longer about safeguarding the established political order but about the religious interests of minority groups, not considered to be particularly important to protect.

Here it is interesting to note that today's immigration hostile media often use Islam as a target of criticism, thereby relating to rhetoric used by religion critical movements in the 19th and early 20th century. Another interesting observation is that it has virtually only been men who have committed blasphemy offenses and that women started to engage only after this kind of defamation of religion had been decriminalized and seen as a politically correct expression of artistic freedom. Today it's rather the defence of traditional Christian doctrines concerning homosexuality, abortion, etc. which are described as offensive and "blasphemous" by the media establishment.

So, to refer to what I pointed out initially – there are always defined limits to freedom of expression that change over time and are adapted to the political system that prevails!

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In defence of the fundamental values of society: an analysis of blasphemy trials and debates in Sweden around 1900¹

By Yvonne Maria Werner, Lund University

Critique of religion and its consequences is a topical theme. The attack on the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo in Paris in January 2015 made the Western media establishment to rally in defence of freedom of expression, but it also raised the question of the limits of this freedom. There are always defined limits to freedom of expression, which change over time and are adapted to the political system that prevails. Ideas that in various ways question or threaten the current value system are not accepted. In Western society, racism is an example of such an illicit opinion, while blasphemy and criticism of the state-sanctioned religion took the same position in pre- and early modern society community – and in today's Islamic states such as Saudi Arabia and Iran.

In my paper, I will discuss the blasphemy phenomenon and its changing meaning and position in Sweden around the turn of the century 1900 in a European perspective.

In October 1889 the Liberal student association Verdandi organised a public discussion in Uppsala on freedom of expression and freedom of the press. This subject also dominated the tracts that the association published this year, starting with a publication on Voltaire and his fight against prejudices and ending with a work on Giordano Bruno as a martyr of freedom of thought. The theme was highly topical, and during the discussion it was noted that the



prosecution on press freedom had increased in recent years with two convictions of defamation of the Parliament, three of lese-majesty and eleven for religious offences of various kinds (Verdandi 14, 1889).

There was thus a clear dominance of religious crimes. The Socialist leader and later Prime Minister Hjalmar Branting and his party comrade Axel Danielsson were serving prison sentences for blasphemy, and the utilitarian freethinker Viktor Lennstrand (picture) had just been sentenced to six months in prison for the

¹ This paper is a non language-checked draft.

same offence and would shortly begin his jail stay in Malmö in southern Sweden. Lennstrand, a former free church Christian who ran an intense campaign against church and religion, had been convicted of blasphemy offences several times before – and more convictions would follow.

This wave of blasphemy prosecutions ending in convictions represented a break with the trend that marked the Swedish development since the beginning of the century. The new constitution adopted in 1809 stipulated freedom of worship within the existing state church order. Admittedly, the criminalisation of blasphemy remained both in the Penal Code and in the new Freedom of Press Act from 1810, where also mockery and denial of the Christian faith was indicated as crimes, and the death penalty for blasphemy was removed first with the new Penal Code of 1864. Yet, at that time it had since long only a symbolic function.

These changes were part of a process of gradual dismantling of the confessional system of unity. In Sweden as in the other Nordic countries, the transformation from a confessional to a secular social order was marked by the successive liberalisation of religious legislation from the mid-nineteenth century and onward. The Dissenter Act of 1860 abolished the banishment punishment for apostasy and made it legal to leave the Church of Sweden and join another religious community. Swedish citizenship was thus separated from membership of the established national church. In line with this shift, blasphemy was no longer defined directly in relation to the “pure evangelical faith” in the new Penal Code 1864, and the punishments for this kind of crimes were mitigated. Prison sentence was stipulated for blasphemy against God and mockery of worship both in the Penal Code and in the Freedom of Press Act. In the latter also the prohibition of denying God and the Lutheran faith remained until 1941, although there were no longer any provisions against this in the Penal Code.

That religion was no longer the foundation of society in the same way as before was marked also by the fact that the ban on blasphemy was no longer justified by reference to God, but with the need to safeguard religious peace and the religious feelings of the believers. A similar change can be observed all over the Western world. In Denmark, for example, the new Penal Code of 1866 changed blasphemy from a capital crime, for which death penalty could be imposed, to a crime against public order with four months’ imprisonment as the maximum penalty. Denmark was also the first Scandinavian country to introduce freedom of religion, which occurred with the new constitution of 1849, which transformed the country from an absolute monarchy with severe legislation on religion into a liberal state. In Sweden full religious freedom was introduced first in 1951.

Blasphemy was thus made to an offence of public order that should be punished because it aroused anger and violated religious sentiments. This didn't however mean that religious separatism was tolerated, and the Swedish authorities used harsh means against the growing

revivalist movements. In the first part of the 19th century both church and secular courts took legal action against those who violated ecclesiastical order, using old statutes against religious associations (Conventicle Act from 1727) and the ban for lay people to distribute the Eucharist. In the period 1830-1856, for example, 603 persons were sentenced for mockery of worship, including 412 in the county of Gävleborg. Most of these charges concerned a group of revivalists who regarded the worship of the established church as impious and therefore formed a separate parish (BiSOS B, table 28). The blasphemy laws were sometimes used in the trials against this kind of “apostates”. This was the case in a trial against a farmer in the county of Bohuslän, who in summer 1879 was prosecuted for blasphemy, mockery and defamatory statements against the clergy. The local court acquitted him of the first two charges, but sentenced him to a fine for his “libellous” speech against the clergy (*Göteborgs Veckoblad* 23 Sept. 1880).

Most of these religion trials ended with fines, but in some cases the defendants were sentenced to banishment. This was the case with the Baptist leader Fredrik Nilsson and six women who had converted to the Catholic Church. This penalty also hit the publisher of the radical weekly newspaper *Demokratien*, Adolf Pettersson, who in summer 1851 was prosecuted for blasphemy and denial for his satirical causeries on the Ascension of Christ. The Stockholm City Court sentenced him to prison for blasphemy and to banishment for denial, a judgment that was confirmed by the Svea (Middle Sweden) Court of Appeal. After serving his sentence at a prison in Stockholm, Pettersson went to Denmark, where he was arrested for vagrancy and sent back to Sweden.

Yet, otherwise the authorities were restrictive with blasphemy and denial charges. The famous author Viktor Rydberg was thus spared prosecution for his book on the Bible’s teaching on Jesus (*Bibelns lära om Kristus*) from 1862 after an intervention of the minister of justice, although he rejected the doctrine of the divinity of Christ as unbiblical. Several of the blasphemy trials held had an academic character and focused on the theological boundaries of freedom within the frame of the Lutheran faith. This is illustrated by the following examples.

In the early 1820s a blasphemy charge was brought against the famous author and university professor Erik Gustaf Geijer in Uppsala for critical statements about the trinity and the atonement doctrine in a publication about the philosopher Thomas Thorild. The trial, which in accordance with the then current academic jurisdiction was dealt with by a university court, was conducted in written form and had the character of a theological debate. Geijer was acquitted and thereafter carried by cheering students in triumph from the academic Senate, where the sentence was pronounced, to his home. The blasphemy case against the editor of the liberal newspaper *Aftonbladet* (The Evening Paper) Evening Paper Lars Johan Hierta, in the early 1840s ended in the same way. He was charged with having published a Swedish summary of the German Protestant theologian David Strauss’ book on the historical Jesus,

whose divine nature he denied. Also the trial against the publisher Fredrik Theodor Borg, who in spring 1850 was charged with blasphemy and denial of God for a speech he gave in the newly established Stockholm Workers' Association, ended with acquittal in the Svea Court of Appeal.



These court rulings were interpreted as an expression of the breakthrough of a more liberal interpretation of the “pure evangelical faith”. But in the mid-1880’s a new wave of prosecutions for blasphemy and denial of God began. The starting point was the acquittal of the author August Strindberg in a freedom of press trial in the Stockholm City Court in autumn 1884. The indictment referred to his satirical description of the Eucharist in *Giftas* (Being married), a collection of short stories published that year. According to prevalent rules the prosecution was directed against the publisher Albert Bonnier, but Strindberg (picture)

took on responsibility as the author. In a submission to the court he denied being guilty of blasphemy or mockery in a legal sense, and stressed that it was not a punishable to deny the deity of Christ, an argument that the court thus endorsed.

The trial caused a great stir with articles for and against in the press. As in most blasphemy trials at this time the prosecution related to violations of the Freedom of Press Act. But unlike the above-mentioned trials against Geijer and Hierta this was not a matter of theological interpretations but coarse satire. In the novel in question, Strindberg describes the Eucharist as an “impudent fraud” purported to be the “flesh and blood of the “instigator Jesus” when it was in fact simple wine and maize wafers (Protocol 1884, Nr 251, p. 24-27). This satire was in line with the free-thinker’s and the emerging labour movement’s criticism of Christianity as hypocritical and superstitious. Similar cases occurred all over Europe, and provoked outrage among professing Christians and harsh reactions from the authorities.

In Sweden, a petition with over 6000 signatures demanded actions against this form of heckling with the Christian faith. This led the government to decide on a revision of the freedom of press legislation with the expressed aim to create a more solid defence against blasphemous activities. A bill on the subject was presented in spring 1887 and after heated debates adopted by the two Chambers of Parliament. The new legislation, issued in October 1887, meant a tightening of the Penal Code’s provisions on blasphemy and mockery but also that conviction was connected to the criterion of general offense (Swedish Code of Statutes 1887:82). The penalty was set at imprisonment up to eighteen months or a fine.

The prosecution of blasphemous offences now became part of the political establishment's fight against radical movements and what was perceived as tendencies of social disintegration. A similar trend can be observed in other European countries, where radical freethinkers and Socialists were attacking and ridiculing Christianity and its links to the political order were tried and convicted for blasphemy. In Sweden these strivings coincided with attempts to tighten up the religious legislation against Catholics and other religious "deviants", but these proposals did not win parliamentary approval.

In the period 1888-1890, the blasphemy prosecutions reached a peak with more than twenty charges against half a dozen individuals. The above-mentioned Viktor Lennstrand, who had just founded the Utilitarian Society, accounted for many of these trials, and several of the other prosecutions were in some way related to his activities. He was sentenced to nearly nine months in prison for three different blasphemy offenses and to three months for denial of God. Prosecution for violating the Freedom of Press Act was directed against the Socialist newspapers *Social-Demokraten*, *Arbetet* (The Work), *Folkets Röst* (The People's Voice) and *Proletären* (The Proletarian) and their responsible editors, who were all convicted of various kinds of religious crimes. The newspaper *Folkets Röst* in Gothenburg was particularly hard hit and forced to close down in 1889 after the editor had been sentenced to one year in prison for publishing two "blasphemous" articles.

Let's look more closely at some of these blasphemy trials.

In March 1888 Branting (picture) as editor-in-Chief of the daily *Social-Demokraten* was prosecuted for the publication of an article by Lennstrand entitled "A greeting" (*En Hälsning*), where the existence of a God and eternal life was denied and Christianity described as a lie, against which man had to fight to be free and happy (3 March 1888). The prosecution concerned denial of God and the Lutheran faith. Branting assumed that he would be acquitted and described the indictment as "the most genuinely stupid that since long has been dispatched by a Swedish minister of justice". The prosecutor motivated the indictment by arguing that the article was published in a newspaper intended for what was referred to as the "ignorant part of the population" not able to critically evaluate it (Protocoll 8 March 1888).



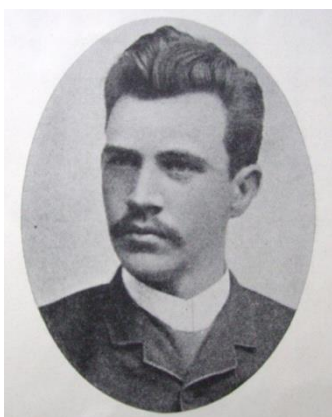
Branting responded to the prosecutor's argumentation by pointing to the fact that verbal denial was no longer a criminal offense in the 1864 Penal Code. He also criticised the idea of one kind of freedom of speech for ordinary people and another for the more educated and concluded with a plea for acquittal to safeguard the freedom of thought in the country. Yet,

the jury declared the publication of the article criminal, and the Stockholm City Court sentenced him to a fine of 300 crowns (Protocol 6 April 1888). The article was published also in the newspaper *Arbetet* together with an ironic commentary on the conviction of Branting. The issue was suspended, and the editor Danielsson was sentenced to a fine of 500 crowns for violation of the Press Freedom Act (*Arbetet* 28 April 1888).

Before the lawsuit was terminated, Danielsson published a satirical article, signed with the pseudonym Marat and addressed to “Creator of the Universe”, which led to yet another indictment, this time for blasphemy. In this article the trial against Branting was described in allegorical terms as a dispute about an “old idol in the antiquarian museum of mankind”, placed on a pedestal of “concentrated stupidity” that “Madame Justitia” had now valued at 300 crowns. Danielsson also heckled with the trinity doctrine and with the clergy, and expressed his wish that the cabinet minister Johan Henrik Lovén, who had acted as prosecutor in the trial, should “get a tile on his head or be struck by a thunderbolt from the creator of the universe” (*Arbetet* 9 Mai 1888).

Danielsson was put on trial in the Malmö City Court. Instead of, as in the previous cases, basing the prosecution on the Freedom of Press Act, the blasphemy clause of the Penal Code was used. Danielsson was sentenced to three months in prison, a sentence that was confirmed both by the South Swedish Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court. In letters of appeal Danielsson acknowledged that he had questioned the, as he put it, “medieval” trinity dogma, but denied having blasphemed the “creator of the universe”, whose existence he meant was not possible to prove. He also pointed to the injustice that he would be convicted of blasphemy when Strindberg and others who had expressed similar ideas had been acquitted (Danielsson, Project Runeberg, p. 143-144).

Danielsson’s article was published also in the papers *Social-Demokraten* and *Proletären*, whose editors were prosecuted and sentenced for blasphemy and mockery at the end of 1888. The editor of the latter received a month’s imprisonment, while Branting was sentenced to three and a half months in prison. One of the members of the freedom of press jury that found Branting guilty was the aforementioned Viktor Rydberg, who had himself been investigated for blasphemy for his work on the historical Jesus. To Branting’s surprise and chagrin he voted of conviction. Branting appealed to the Svea Court of Appeal and to the Supreme Court, but the judgment was confirmed, and in fall 1889 he served his sentence at a prison in Stockholm.



Danielsson (picture) was tried and convicted in two other blasphemy trials at the end of 1888 and in spring 1889. The first one concerned a poem with the title “War” published in *Arbetet*, which contained a harsh attack on contemporary European

militarism and an insinuation that religion was instrumentalized, as it was expressed, “to kill in the name of God”. In his defence Danielsson stressed that the intention was to attack militarism, not the concept of God (Danielsson, *Project Runeberg*, p. 144-146). But that didn't convince neither the Malmö Municipal Court nor the Court of Appeal or the Supreme Court, which all sentenced him for blasphemy. The penalty was set at three months in jail.

Also the second trial went all the way up to the Supreme Court and ended it with a conviction for blasphemy and a penalty of four months prison. The prosecution related to a speech Danielsson had given at a public meeting in Malmö, where he made sarcastic comments about the blasphemy charges brought against him. Notes made by a present policeman were used as basis for the blasphemy charge, and at the trial witnesses stated that Danielsson had ridiculed God and that his blasphemous comments were received with laughter and applause. This made it possible for the court to use the Penal Code, which required that the blasphemous statements must have caused general annoyance to be criminal.

Yet, the blasphemy prosecutions didn't end with these trials. In 1895 the editor of the liberal newspaper *Söderköpings-Posten* was convicted for both blasphemy and mockery for publishing a critical article on primary school catechism teaching and sentenced to two month prison, later on mitigated to a fine. Lennstrand's successor as spokesman for the Utilitarian movement, Oscar Ljungdahl, targeted the verdict in a lecture entitled “What is blasphemy?”, for which was sentenced to a fine for defamation. In 1908 Ljungdahl was once again, this time by the Kalmar Municipal Court, sentenced to prison for blasphemy for a lecture with the title “The moral of the God of the Bible”, where he described God as a perjurer who had committed adultery by seducing a betrothed maiden (*Arbetet* 28 April 1888). The verdict was confirmed by the Göta Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court, which, however, transformed the prison verdict to a fine. Before the final judgment Socialist youth clubs arranged a support meeting at the People's House in Stockholm.



Among the participants was the Social Democrite economist, Knut Wicksell (picture), since 1901 professor at Lund University. He was charged with having committed mockery and disorderly conduct in connection with a lecture entitled “The throne, the altar, the sword and the money bag”, where he criticised the power supporting institutions of society and made fun of the doctrine of the virgin birth. Wicksell denied the accusation, and in a written defence he gave an erudite exposition of the theological interpretations of the doctrine

in question (Protocol with attachments 19 November 1908). Yet, it didn't help, and both the Stockholm City Court and the Supreme Court sentenced him to two months imprisonment. In autumn 1909 he was brought to the local prison in Ystad to serve his sentence.

The trial against Wicksell was the last great blasphemy case in Swedish history. The legislation used in these blasphemy trials persisted until the mid-1900s, but it was applied only exceptionally. The fight against blasphemous offenses now became a local issue manifested in the prohibition of meetings and police surveillance but rarely led to prosecutions.

By this time, the Social Democratic Party had since long left the field of anti-Christian and atheistic agitation and established the principle of religion as a private matter as the party's official line. In a famous debate with Lennstrand in Stockholm 1890, Branting repudiated the Utilitarian critique of religion arguing that it took the attention from the real problems, namely people's material conditions. After having come to power after the First World War, the party developed a more positive attitude to the Protestant state-church system, which was now used as a barrier against ecclesiastical independence tendencies and Conservative church politics.

Concluding reflections

Unlike the prosecution and sentencing of blasphemy crimes in the first part of the 19th century, the trials from the 1888 to 1909 were not about philosophical and theological expositions but about texts and speeches intended for a wider audience and aimed at radical social change. Basically, it was about society's value system and political order, which at least formally still based on the "pure evangelical faith". The Swedish clergy were often the target of working-class agitation, and the priests were described as bigoted, unloving and generally villainous, and characterized by double standards and hypocrisy. This kind of anticlerical criticism was found also in fiction and literature as for example in the works by Strindberg and other famous authors such as the Norwegian Alexander Kielland and the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard. Yet, in contrast to atheists as Lennstrand, these authors didn't, reject the Christian faith as such but the prevalent state church system and what they perceived as a false understanding of Christianity

Prosecutions, abstracts of trials and verdicts were published and commented on in the media. The media reporting followed the current political dividing lines, and the conservative and socialist newspapers ran direct campaigns for and against judgments and penalties. The liberal papers were keen to assert the principle of freedom of religion and didn't take a clear position in the same way. In the first part of 1888, the blasphemy and mockery indications were mainly based on the Freedom of Press Act, where the punishment was a fine. But the use of these old regulations upsets both Liberals and Evangelicals, who saw them as a tool of

oppression of the free speech. In this situation, the authorities chose to bring charges for this type of religion crimes according to criminal law by reference to the offended feelings of the faithful, which both these groups could support. The use of Penal Code proved to be more successful in terms of the number of convictions and the penalties were harsher and more noticeable.

The blasphemy legislation was discussed from time to time in the Parliament with proposals in different directions. The Socialists argued for its abolishment, whereas the Conservatives opted for an extension of the penal sanctions against blasphemy and mockery to include all recognised denominations in the country. In 1909, the Bishop of Lund, Gottfrid Billing, expressed support for such a proposal that would provide protection not only for the established church but also for the nonconformist denominations. Previously, the conservative representatives of the Church of Sweden had used the blasphemy legislation to combat the revivalist movement. Now they were eager to have their support in the fight against Socialists and other antireligious forces in the country.

In connection with the revision of the Penal Code, the press laws and the religion legislation in the mid-twentieth century, the blasphemy prohibitions were replaced with a ban on publicly insulting what was defined as sacred by the churches and denominations in the country. Blasphemy was removed from the Penal Code in 1949, and in 1970 all regulations relating to violation of religious beliefs were replaced by the new legislation against discrimination and hate speech. Attempts to use this new legislation against violation of religious feelings have failed as these kinds of charges are conflicting with the right to freedom of expression. This was clearly manifested at the beginning of the new millennium when the blasphemy issue was actualised by the cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed published in the Danish *Jyllands-Posten* and the Mohammed drawings of the Swedish artist Lars Vilks.

Unlike a century earlier, it was now no longer about safeguarding the established political order but about the religious interests of minority groups, not considered to be particularly important to protect. Here it is interesting to note that today's immigration hostile media often use Islam as a target of criticism, thereby relating to rhetoric used by religion critical movements in the 19th and early 20th century. Another interesting observation is that it has virtually only been men who have committed blasphemy offences and that women started to engage only after this kind of defamation of religion had been decriminalised and seen as a politically correct expression of artistic freedom. Today it's rather the defence of traditional Christian doctrines concerning homosexuality, abortion, etc. which are described as offensive and "blasphemous" by the media establishment.

A Swedish example of this is the exhibition *Ecce Homo* by the photographer Elisabeth Ohlson Wallin in Uppsala cathedral 1998, where Jesus was portrayed in sexual situation. The

exhibition, which was sanctioned by the Archbishop K.G. Hammar, was praised by the cultural establishment and the protests from conservative Christians hardly meet any positive any positive responses in the media. A parliamentary motion submitted by Christian Democrats that the legal protection against the violation of religious faith should be reintroduced was rejected (The Constitutional Committee 2000/01).

Regarding the other Scandinavian countries, the blasphemy legislation is still in force in Denmark and Finland, but was abolished in Norway in 2015. Here, the last conviction of blasphemy was delivered in 2012 for a satirical description of Jesus in an article in the Freethinkers magazine, and the punishment was a fine of 10 crowns. In Denmark the last conviction of blasphemy leading to imprisonment occurred in 1938 and was about anti-Semitic placards claiming that Talmud invited to the sexual assaults on non-Jewish girls. In 1946 a couple was fined for having baptised a duck in connection with a carnival. Also in the following period some indictments for blasphemy were brought but without leading to conviction. In Germany, blasphemy is still a criminal offence, and the law was used as recently as two months ago, when a man was fined for displaying anti-Christian bumper stickers on his car (*Die Welt* 25 Feb. 2016).

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