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« [Pastor Jones and Freedom of Speech](#)

## **An analysis of Pastor Terry Jones' beliefs**

Earlier today we posted an analysis of the ['takedown' of the Doveworld Outreach Centre's website](#).

So let's take a look at the rights and wrongs of Pastor Terry Jones and his congregation's actions and beliefs;

### **Basic Rights**

We at Freedom4All believe that every individual has the right to free speech, and the right to practise the religion of their choice, amongst others. The unfortunate thing about true Freedom of Speech is that there will always be those who use this freedom to offend others. Any attempt to stop these people, no matter how distasteful their words may be, means that there is no freedom of speech.

I disagree strongly with what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.

The quote above is regularly used and are possibly some of Voltaire's most famous words. It precisely illustrates exactly what true freedom of speech is, whether you agree with what is being said, the important thing is that everyone is free to say what they think.

### **Is the Pastor Justified?**

**Do not think**, however, that this means that we believe Pastor Jones is right in what he says. Whilst we must defend his right to speak his belief, we must also urge him to respect the rights of others. Another fundamental right, enshrined in the [UDHR](#) is the right to practise the religion of their choice. In promoting Anti-Islamic and Anti-Semitic feelings, the Pastor and others of his ilk are interfering with the rights of Muslims across the world.

This is a particularly complex issue, because the Pastor is free to believe as he does and to speak those thought, however in doing so he interferes with those who practise other religions.

At this point, we believe that it is **very important to note** that whilst much of the media attention has focused on the Pastor's plans to burn the Qur'an, the Pastor also intends to burn

the Jewish Holy Text - [The Talmud](#).

Although Pastor Jones is exercising his rights to freedom of belief and of speech, this does not mean that he is not committing a wrong. Desecration of the holy book is highly offensive to those of the Muslim faith. This is also true for those of the Jewish faith.

## Local Laws

Many western countries also have laws prohibiting citizens from '*inciting racial hatred*'. This is, in fact, a form of censorship, but one that the majority of citizens are willing to accept. Pastor Jones is free to hold the beliefs that he does, but he should not use his beliefs to try and incite others to cause harm, or to discriminate against others on the basis of their beliefs.

Some would argue that simply burning a book cannot incite racial hatred, however it is not the act, but what it represents that is important;

In 2005, *Newsweek* published a story claiming that Muslim captives had been tortured by being made to watch the Qur'an be flushed down a toilet. The story promoted great anger in the Islamic community, and was later found to [have no factual basis](#). This example does, however, represent the regard in which the Qur'an is treated by muslims. The violence resulting from these claims lead to a number of deaths, and numerous retaliations against US forces in the Middle East.

Already, [lives have been lost in protests](#) against the planned Qur'an burning.

Clearly, it is deeply offensive and psychologically painful for a muslim to witness (or even hear tell of) desecration of their holy book. The laws regarding the incitement of 'racial hatred' do not specify that any harm must be physical, destruction of such a treasured artefact is clearly an act of hate. Indeed, the *Doveworld Outreach Centre* admits to this hate;

We are using this act to warn about the teaching and ideology of Islam, which we do hate as it is hateful.

In our [previous article](#) we provided copies of two articles from the (now offline) *Doveworld* website. The above quote is taken from '[Ten Reasons to burn a Koran](#)', although the passage attempts to qualify by stating that they do not hate any people, only their beliefs. However, many muslims would say that their religion defines who they are, a sentiment that many Christians would also hold. How then, is it possible to hate such a strongly held conviction, without hating those who hold it?

The second article that we provided - '[Islam is of the Devil](#)' - contains the following line;

It is time that all Christians unite, stop being passive and selfish and stand up and fight for the truth.

Although the passage does not explicitly state that harm should come to muslims, it's meaning is reasonably clear to even the most casual of observers.

So despite exercising his fundamental rights, Pastor Jones has infringed those of others, and likely breached local laws.

## Targeting Extremists

The Pastor and his church claim that the action is taking place to send a message to fundamental extremists that their actions will not be tolerated, the church uses the September

11th attacks as justification for his act. However, burning the Qur'an will greivously offend all muslims, regardless of whether they are extremist or not.

A quick look at the church's previous 'teachings' would also seem to suggest that it is not just the fundamentalists that are being targeted by the Church. The two articles linked to above deal solely with Islam, and make no distinction between followers of the faith and fundamental extremists. It would appear, the the *Dove World Outreach Centre* intends to offend **all** muslims.

At this point, you must also consider that the church also intends to desecrate the Talmud. The Talmud contains teachings considered holy by the followers of Judaism.

To our knowledge, there have been no terror attacks by those of Jewish Faith, and the term 'fundamentalist' is seldom associated with this faith. If as the Pastor claims, the burning is targeted solely at extremists, why should the Talmud be included?

It's clear to us at Freedom4All that the planned burning is not targeted at extremists, and is in fact **a clear example of religious bigotry**.

## Is Religion the Root Cause?

Some have argued that without religion, this issue would not have arisen. We at Freedom4All are not overtly religious, but we do feel inclined to argue that religion is not solely to blame. Although religion is a powerful weapon (who wouldn't fear eternal damnation?) it is not the cause. Had religion never existed, men like Pastor Jones would simply exploit something else in order to to hate a particular group.

The same holds true for the 'fundamentalists' that Pastor Jones professes to hate, without religion they would find another reason to hate others. We do wonder, however, whether Pastor Jones realises that his own actions are those of a fundamentalist;

**Fundamentalism** refers to a belief in a strict adherence to an [established](#) set of basic principles (usually religious in nature), sometimes as a reaction to perceived doctrinal compromises with [modern social](#) and political life.

So great is the Pastor's belief in his actions, that his church has already lost half of it's fifty strong congregation.

## Simply a spokesman

Although Pastor Jones is responsible for the plans, the fact that he still has a congregation shows that he is not the only person to believe that the desecration should go ahead.

The *Christian Science Monitor* reports that Pastor Jones may have suspended plans, but that a church in Topeka, Kansas plans to desecrate the Qur'an anyway. It's not entirely clear that the Pastor *has* suspended his plans, although the *New York Daily Times* reports that the Pastor's daughter [has pleaded with him not to continue](#). On Thursday the Pastor publicly called of his plan, saying he had received assurances from local Muslim leader that the [planned Islamic centre at ground zero](#) in New York would be moved. However, this assertion has been rejected by the Islamic centres visionary.

It is also odd that the Pastor would cancel his plan on this basis, as the disputed centre was never quoted as a reason for the desecration. It is true that many New Yorkers strongly opposed the building of a Mosque near the site of the September 11th attacks, but the Pastor

had not referred to the centre at all until announcing that he was “rethinking his position”.

Regardless of whether the Pastor intends to continue, it is clear that he lacks the power to stop the ball which he started rolling. Even if his church does not burn the Qur'an, the book will likely be burnt at the Westboro Baptist Church in Kansas none-the-less. The situation may well be out of the Pastors control, but he must still bear responsibility for the acts committed. As the driving force behind the acts, he will be partially responsible for every life that is lost as a result of the desecration.

## Conclusion

We at Freedom4All are strong proponents of the individuals rights to Freedom of Speech and Freedom of Belief, but we cannot condone the actions of Pastor Terry Jones or his congregation. To cause such grave offense to others, simply because they do not believe what you do, is absolutely unacceptable. As we have shown, the planned desecration has nothing to do with stopping extremists, and is simply an act of religious bigotry. Any who participate in the desecration will themselves be committing the act of an extremist.

In closing, we ask you to consider the following quote from President Barack Obama;

With respect to the individual down in Florida, the idea that we would burn the sacred texts of somebody else's religion is contrary to what this country stands for.

We at Freedom4All hope that no desecration takes place, and urge those who would seek vengeance to consider that the desecration is the act of a Bigot who wishes to aggravate you into reacting in order to justify his/her own agenda.

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