



Religious Laws Infringing Upon Human Rights



Religious laws are laws taught by specific religions regarding positions relating to ethics, morality and worship.

The most prominent examples are Sharia Law, Halakha and Canon Law. Usually these are taught by religious groups but have no legal basis and have no legal consequences if defied or broken but in some countries, specifically theocracies (a government where a god is the supreme ruler) they carry harsh penalties if broken, sometimes even the death penalty.

This is often considered to be an abuse of human rights as it is discriminating based on someone's belief or stance, but many people also believe it would also be incorrect to enforce any limits on religious laws, as it would violate a country's sovereignty or in itself would discriminate based on religion.

One of the most prominent examples in recent news is the story of Pakistani Christian Asia Bibi; on 31st October 2018 she was acquitted from death row having spent eight years in solitary confinement. Asia had a row with her neighbor where she allegedly made insulting comments about the prophet Muhammad; she was later beaten up at home before confessing to the police. The court has had to walk a fine line after governor Salman Taseer was murdered for supporting her and after she Asia acquitted her lawyer had to flee in fear of his life.

Stories like this show how delicate the topic is. Many politicians in theocratic countries often call for tough consequences for people who break religious laws, this usually gains them lots of voters and would likely mean that they would oppose any changes in these laws or the legal cases regarding them.

Points to consider:

- What would you do to change religious laws?
- How can you take action without violating a country's sovereignty?
- How can you protect other human rights without violating the right to religion?
- How would you deal with politicians who use religious laws to boost votes?

Useful links:

- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-46130189> - BBC news - Asia Bibi
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religious_law - Wikipedia - Religious Law