

# HONOUR

# RELIGIOUS STUDIES

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Through the lens of religion, we understand that actions can be pivoted to honouring a divine superior, and supporting the rationale behind this. In today's world the influence of honour in extremist groups such as Daesh demonstrate how scriptures from the Quran can supposedly justify their actions. Through looking at values attached to family relationships and ethics through history, we are shown the way in which religious opinion is integrated, and how lifestyle affects an honourable reputation. Additionally, how open one is willing to be about their religious stance in society, and show the honour that they hold their religion to.

Through Jesus, Christians are able to be connected with God once more and live in a way that benefits society; Jesus honoured mankind through his own sacrificial actions. Other key aspirational people in the Bible include Job and the Good Samaritan, both of whom indicate to Christians how the Ten Commandments can be applied in everyday circumstances, and how to act in a way God would see as honourable. The Bible's definition of showing honour to someone is to "value him highly or to bestow value upon him"<sup>1</sup> and furthermore teaches Christians to divide honour in three ways: To your parents, to the Authority, and to God.

The concept of paternal and maternal honour is included in the fourth commandment, "Honour your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you."-Exodus 20:12<sup>2</sup>. Christians believe that one should seek to honour parents in much the same way that we strive to bring glory to God: in our thoughts, words, and actions. For a young child, obeying parents goes hand in hand with honouring them, and that includes listening, heeding, and submitting to their authority. For those of a more mature age, parental honour can be served through attention, love and nourishment also.

The idea of honouring others, especially those in authority, comes from the fact that they represent Gods authority, and in some cases, can be seen as Gods mouthpiece in the world, for example the Pope. Religious doctrine suggests that people were put into positions of power by God to help us all develop individually, and through his omnipotence we will be able to follow in his plan. Nevertheless, individuals must remain mindful of their own free will, and ensure to honour their God at all time and not follow superficial leaders, for "everything they do is for men to see"-Matthew 23:4.

The rationality behind honour killings can provide an interpretation of honourable acts. Honour killings are acts of vengeance, usually committed by male family members against female family members, who are held to have brought dishonour upon the family. A woman can be targeted by her family for a variety of reasons, such as refusing to enter an arranged marriage, seeking a divorce or committing adultery. Through these killings, the patriarchy attempts to bring back an honourable reputation to their community as they have performed an act which 'cleansed' their family of sin. According to BBC, "Women's advocacy groups, suspect that more than 20,000 women are killed worldwide each year"<sup>3</sup>, with the highest reported numbers<sup>4</sup> in the region of Middle east Asia. Whilst many Islamic speakers deny any direct association or justification of honour killings in the Qur'an<sup>5</sup>, it is easily seen as passages such as "sexual intercourse...confine the women to houses until death takes them"-4:15 could be interpreted to instruct as such. Resolution 1327 (2003) of the Council of Europe

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.gotquestions.org/Bible-honor.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.biblegateway.com/verse/en/Exodus%2020%3A12>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-22992365>

<sup>4</sup> In most countries data on honour killings is not collected systematically, and many of these killings are reported by the families as suicides or accidents.

<sup>5</sup> <http://time.com/3273873/stop-isis-islam/>

states that: "Whilst so-called "honour crimes" emanate from cultural and not religious roots and are perpetrated worldwide (mainly in patriarchal societies or communities), the majority of reported cases in Europe have been amongst Muslim or migrant Muslim communities (although Islam itself does not support the death penalty for honour-related misconduct)." This example, could be interpreted as honour being used through religion in order to justify personal gain, the killing of another person, exploits the honour that may be found in religion and uses it to justify a means to an end.

The issue of interpreting divine scripture to one's own views relates to the extremist jihadist militant group ISIS, alternatively named Daesh, which is supposedly based upon Islamic fundamentals. In November 2015, ISIS claimed an attack on France, their official statement<sup>6</sup> started with "In the name of Allah, the All Merciful, the Very Merciful" and included quotations such as "Allah came upon them from where they had not expected, and He cast terror into their hearts" and "blessed attack for which Allah facilitated the causes for success". Through these statements, ISIS do appear to believe that they are working at the will of Allah, and bringing honour to his name by doing as such. However, by what degree should we declare this as honourable? One may question how murder of innocent people can be seen as an honourable action, however, does this give them the right to say it was not honourable? For those partaking in these beliefs, they believe they performed an act of liberation, a justified persecution of those being deluded by an alternate faith, and by setting an example of not to follow that faith, or perhaps encouraging others to join the ISIS movement, they are providing honour to their divine superiority.

Nevertheless, there are some that argue that what the Daesh stand for, is not a belief that represents that of Islam, and should not be associated with such. A common view amongst Muslim followers reflects that of Nihad Awad, writing for time.com<sup>7</sup>, "Every time we refer to ISIS as the "Islamic State," call its members "jihadists" or in any way grant it the religious legitimacy that it so desperately seeks, we simultaneously boost its brand, tarnish the image of Islam and further marginalize the vast majority of Muslims who are disgusted by the group's un-Islamic actions." The issue of personal subjectivity arises through this quote, if the Qur'an can be interpreted so differently from person to person, then multiple honour perspectives can be created, taking the scripture in completely contrasting ways.

As such, honour can be used in varying contexts for different reasons. We can see honour being used as a justification or excuse for actions in the light of terrorism or warfare, as exemplified in Holy War such as the Crusades (1095-1204AD). The Christians that went on the Crusades for honour wanted to appear more prestigious to their village. Before any knight set off on a crusade they had to kneel and take a promise to God saying that he would try to capture Jerusalem from the Saracens. After that he would have the cross 'badge of honour' sewn onto his clothes showing he was a crusader knight. Knights sometimes went to honour someone or their family, which was well respected. You have to love your religion if you are willing to lay down your life for it. They knew that it would be an honour to die for Christ, as the respect that they had for God outweighed the importance of their own life.

As well as honour for respect of the individual, we must consider honour in light of admiration. One may choose to stimulate ideal behaviours, such as those upheld by Mother Teresa; Or even power structures such as the Mafia. As the use of the word honour changes diachronically and contextually, from the 'high respect or great esteem'<sup>8</sup> that is easily applicable to those surrounding us in society, or the prestigious honour that may only be subjective to a religion, or 'an institution to express belief in a divine power'<sup>9</sup> the concept of a divine power must in itself seem easy to admire, simply as a result of its omnipotence that is beyond us as human beings, and as a result our honour stems from a desire to be more powerful. In this light, we may be able to conceptualise ISIS actions with more consideration, as the motives do not differ considerably from that of the Christian crusaders. From structures like the mafia, we can see how the honour gained from honour killings can be moving oneself closer to the higher rankings, towards the leader in the mafia, or alternatively towards Allah for Muslim fundamentalists.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://heavy.com/news/2015/11/official-isis-announcement-state-on-paris-attacks-shootings-attack-paris-france-petit-cambodge-restaurant-stade-de-france-bataclan-arts-center-terrorism-bombs-tweet-twitter-english-translation/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://time.com/3273873/stop-isis-islam/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/honour>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.wolframalpha.com/input/?i=define+religion>

Ergo, each individual acts in a way that is perceived as honourable behaviour in their belief system, whether this is agreed with or no, and therefore we may conclude that honour is subjective to one another, and religion acts as a guideline for the interpretation of such. Throughout time we are able to perceive changes in political leadership and the following of their potentially dogmatic opinions in order to honour those in power, as they are seen to be of a superior status. In retrospect, the honouring of others can teach society not to be blinded by a hierarchical system and to honour oneself in one's actions instead of others.