

Does reviewing a religious service in a sarcastic tone constitute the crime of vilification? The case of the TikToker from Ravenna “Taylorismo”

Recensire con toni sarcastici una funzione religiosa integra il delitto di vilipendio? Il caso del TikToker di Ravenna “Taylorismo”

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For having published on the TikTok platform six videos in which he “reviewed,” live, the celebration of certain religious services¹, a 31-year-old TikToker has been placed under investigation for the offences set out in Articles 403 of the Italian Penal Code (offending a religious denomination by insulting its members) and 404 of the Italian Penal Code (offending a religious denomination by insulting or damaging objects of worship).

In the videos, which were later removed, certain moments of the religious ceremonies were commented on in a playful and irreverent tone: the rite of the Eucharist was described, as reported in the press, as the “dish of the day,” and the swinging of the thurible with incense was likened to the “Quidditch World Cup final”². The TikToker also expressed judgments and gave ratings regarding the manner in which the rite was celebrated, the priests’ attire, and the church’s interior furnishings, as in the case of comments on the loud creaking of the pews³.

Although he never interrupted or disturbed the proper conduct of the religious services—hence the inapplicability of the offence under Article 405 of the Italian Penal Code (disturbance of worship functions of a religious denomination)—and despite the evident intent to create parodies of the reviews that flood social networks on a wide range of topics, the Public Prosecutor’s Office of Ravenna, following the publication of the videos, initiated criminal proceedings against the TikToker for both forms of vilification. These are offences prosecuted *ex officio*, in view of the fact that the sarcastic comments were directed both at ministers of religion and at objects of worship.

Moreover, there is no doubt that the aforementioned offences can also be committed through the publication of posts or videos on platforms or social networks, as confirmed by the most recent rulings of the Supreme Court’s case law on hate speech⁴.

Since the entry into force of the 1930 Italian Penal Code, the two offences of vilification provided for in Articles 403 and 404—being open-ended offences—have raised certain concerns regarding compliance with the principles of legality and definiteness in criminal law, as well as the

¹ Cf. GIORGIA ARGIOLAS, *Ravenna, Taylor Ragazzini indagato per vilipendio dopo aver recensito le messe: “Non volevo offendere le credenze altrui”*, in *Tgcom24*, 24 March 2026.

² According to press reports, the TikToker allegedly commented on the celebration of a Catholic Mass of the Byzantine rite as follows: “It’s time for Holy Mass, Byzantine rite in Ukrainian—if I don’t get beaten up today, the parish priest goes freestyle: he keeps going for 30 minutes.” Cf. ANDREA COLOMBARI, *Chi è Taylor Ragazzini, il tiktoker nei guai per le recensioni delle messe: denunciato per vilipendio*, in *Il Resto del Carlino – Ravenna*, 21 March 2026.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ Cf. ITALIAN COURT OF CASSATION, *Judgment of 7 March 2023, no. 9656*, in which it was held that the offence under Article 604-*bis*, paragraph 1, letter (b) of the Italian Penal Code may also be constituted by the publication or sharing of posts on Facebook.

punishability of conduct which, while potentially offensive to religious sentiment, may instead constitute an expression of the right to freedom of expression, including religious satire.

In this regard, it should be noted that judicial interpretation has limited the scope of application of the offences set out in Articles 403 and 404 to conduct from which—consistent with the etymology of the term “vilification,” meaning “to hold in contempt” and thus to expose to public scorn or ridicule⁵—there can be inferred an offence capable of amounting to an insult to the believer, as well as an affront to the ethical values underlying the religious phenomenon considered in its objective dimension⁶.

Such an effect, in fact, does not appear to arise in the present case. The conduct attributed to the TikToker, while arguably objectionable from a moral standpoint or in terms of the decorum expected when participating in a religious celebration, is characterized by the evident absence of any offensive intent and therefore seems fully attributable to the exercise of the right to freedom of expression. Indeed, the young videomaker’s subsequent statements also suggest that the subjective element of the offence is lacking, namely the requisite intent (*mens rea*), and more specifically the awareness and will to cause serious offence to a particular religion⁷.

In conclusion, no serious offence to religious sentiment can be identified in the conduct attributed to the TikToker. In any event, even if one were to consider that one of the two offences had been made out, the ground for exclusion of punishment based on the particular triviality of the act could certainly apply, provided that the requirements set out in Article 131-bis of the Italian Penal Code are met.

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⁵ Cf. ITALIAN COURT OF CASSATION, Third Criminal Section, Judgment 7 April 2015, no. 41044.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ Cf. ANDREA COLOMBARI, *Chi è Taylor Ragazzini, il tiktokker nei guai per le recensioni delle messe: denunciato per vilipendio*, cit.