

## REFLECTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND FREEDOM OF RELIGION

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**Based on the 1987 Philippine Constitutions, Article 3, Section 5 (Bill of Rights). No Law shall be made respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.**

Scholars debate the meaning of the term “religion”. The Latin term *religare* means “to bind fast together”. The agnostic Stephen Jay Gould, former professor of Zoology at Harvard, found this etymology acceptable in his book *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life*, “if used to construe as fundamentally religious, literally, binding together, all moral discourse on principles that might activate the ideal of universal fellowship among people.”

Sigmund Freud, in his book *Civilization and Its Discontents*, described the meaning of religion told to him by a religious friend as “an oceanic feeling, a sensation of eternity and one may, he thinks, rightly call oneself religious on the ground of this oceanic feeling alone, even if one rejects every belief and every illusion”. Freud commented by saying, “I cannot discover this oceanic feeling in myself, but this gives me no right to deny that it does in fact occur in other people.

Religions or beliefs that explain the ultimate meaning of life and how to live accordingly often are mixture of common and competing principles. As competition, they have their own creeds and moral values, described as truth claims. The Roman Catholic Catechisms, for example, has similarities and differences with the Augsburg Confession, Lutheran doctrine formulated by Martin Luther. Most Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, indigenous and religions hold both common universal principles as well as truth claims in opposition to each other.

Religions have different paradigms. Monotheistic religions look for a messiah or the revealed word of God; or other religions are described as “non-theistic” in search of the Universal Mind. Atheism has different forms. Charvaka, the ancient Indian philosophical system of materialism, traceable to the Rig Veda in 600 B.C. T’ien is the impersonal secular standard of justice of Confucius (551-479 B.C.). Both are different from the Communist Manifesto or modern materialist beliefs known as the “new atheisms”.

Our definition of faith is to have a religion or belief without certifiable proof. Soron Kirkegaard (1823-185) stated a Christian must take a “leap of faith” either/or. Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) said transcendentalism presumed a “special knowledge” derived from institution. Blaise Pascal, a French philosopher and brilliant mathematician (1623-1662) said intuition was the key to God, “the heart has reasons that reason knows nothing about”. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) agreeing with Islamic neo-platonic philosophy said “divine law revealed by God” complemented philosophy.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> of August 1990, a meeting of Foreign Ministers of the 55 country Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) adopted *The Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam*. Article 1 reads, “All human beings form one family whose members are united by submission to God and descent from Adam”. The Cairo Declaration is a religious paradigm for Islam.

Atheism or non-atheism does not accept supernatural views. Richard Dawkins an atheist in his book “a devil’s chaplain says, Science has no way to disprove the existence of a supreme being (this is strictly true).” Charles Darwin, a self-described agnostic after the word coined by his colleagues, T.H. Huxley, was quoted as saying, “one might as well try to illuminate the midnight sky with candle as throw the light of reason on metaphysics.” Yet atheism in support of reason cannot disprove atheism. The mystery remains.

Bahiyyih G. Tahzib stressed the importance of definition in her commentary, *Freedom of Religion or Belief: Ensuring Effective International Legal Protection*; “Sensitivity to labels is critically important for religious and nonreligious people trying to reduce intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief. Passionate anger can quickly arise if people perceive their deeply-held beliefs being described unfairly. Giving a label to matters of religion and other beliefs always been a challenge to the United Nations and its member states as it involves complex and sensitive definitional issues.”

Humanism has different definitions depending on the values of a person or organization. The International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU), according to their mission statement, is the “sole world umbrella organization embracing humanist, atheist, rationalist, secularist and skeptic organization worldwide. IHEU a non-governmental organization (NGO) in consultation with the United Nations has a minimum statement on Humanism which says, Humanism with capital H is not theistic, and does not accept supernatural views of reality.” This is an atheistic or non-theistic statement of humanism, as distinct from other uses of the term such as “Christian humanism” coined during the Renaissance and used to describe Erasmus (1467-136) the famous Dutch theologian.