AVENUES FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM: INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE

by Rev. Peter Tufts Richardson

I. Liberal Democratic.

Deriving from the western enlightenment is the liberal democratic principle of the protection of minorities. This is built into the Bill of Rights of the U. S. Constitution for example. It is instituted to counter the danger of the "tyranny of the majority" and an often forgotten aspect in popular understandings of the democratic process. In the words of Spanish philosopher, José Ortega y Gasset:

> The political doctrine which has represented the loftiest endeavour towards common life is liberal democracy. It carries to the extreme the determination to have consideration for one's neighbor. Liberalism is the supreme form of generosity; it is the right which the majority concedes to minorities and hence it is the noblest cry that has ever resounded in this planet. . . .

The right to religious freedom for all individuals and groups is seen as inborn; it is not a right granted by societies but an unalienable right, inherent in human nature. It is a right which populations may rightfully assert taking it back from majority opinions or imposed legal restrictions. It has found expression in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Articles 18 and 19.

> 18. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.
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> 19. Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Whether honored in the breach or not it stands as a world standard of religious freedom.

IARF itself was fashioned out of a liberal democratic matrix, organized by the old AUA in 1900, adding liberal Christians in Europe and the Brahmo Samaj in India, and later making great strides as a liberal multifaith and truly global organization.

2. Stages of Development.

The capacity of the individual to practice freedom is a patient growth process through what Robert Kegan calls the "orders of consciousness." I have given a parallel identification for the practice of religious freedom. Kegan's third order is what he calls "the socialized mind." A person perceives the wants, desires, goals, ideas of others as important to us. Also known as "traditionalist," people in the third order when stressed by conflicting values, ideas, imperatives turn to leaders to sort and decide what should be done. Deference to outside authorities frames decisions. The largest segment of the general population can be found in this order. I have likened this to Tolerance in interfaith relationships. When the authorities in one's own religion require tolerance of others, those in the third order can acquiesce to the reality of conflicting values, beliefs,

practices. It helps to have this reinforced by the society as in the Bill of Rights. Tolerance is not easy to practice. It begins with misgivings. It is important to impress in this process experiences of the humanity of those outside one's own religion.

When a person enters, in degrees, into the fourth order we become able to sort and decide as an internal deliberation. We become our own authority. The self has developed within, apart from the relational context. Sometimes called a "modern" orientation the downside can be an ideological inflexibility. One knows who they are internally and stands apart from alternatives. This is the place where interfaith dialogue leads to greater understanding of others, but with the understanding that you are always your religion, your group, your stand in the whole picture. Alternatives are at arms length.

The fifth order of consciousness is rare in populations. It is known as self-transformational in the sense that the former identity has softened where alternatives, polarities, paradoxes, unresolvable factors are welcomed and held within as aspects of the whole. In a way one can be multifaith within oneself, to be related to traditions as participants from within multiple frames. I have called this global consciousness. Here one can even be critical of many traditions but from a participant place of affirmation. To others this stage can be seen as confusing, chaotic and easily dismissed. And to be avoided as it confounds attempts to give it a label, to make it arms length as in fourth order dialogic relationships. You can be a citizen of the world quite naturally because the world is within and your consciousness is a response to and from the whole and the multitude of values, ideas, critical appreciations therein.

A multifaith organization and religious leaders in the many religions need to be careful to be supportive at all three orders: tolerance, dialogue, global consciousness. All are important accomplishments and to be supported. The great majority in the population will not enter the fourth and fifth orders of consciousness. Religious Freedom in this perspective is patient and vigilant work.

3. Collective/Individual.

Through most of human history we have lived in the collective, in kinship and tribal systems. There was no individual consciousness, no sense of entering into society from an individual or separate place. With the differentiation of individual consciousness well within the last 4,000 years certainly, the concern for social cohesion was born. Only then did even primitive ideas of religious freedom become possible.

An example of early possibilities may be Moses. But even here in the exodus, freedom consisted in the liberation of a people, not of individuals. But the invention of the alphabet made possible the differentiation later of an individual consciousness. Here it became necessary to formulate laws and rules. There were too many contrary influences coming in and incipient individuating processes as a result, that social cohesion was an issue needing to be addressed.

Life for most of humanity remained tribal until the near present and remains so for large numbers today. For many nationalism has replaced tribalism or the two have merged.

With the differentiation of individual consciousness we begin to live a narrative, what Antonio Damasio calls "an autobiographical consciousness" a more sophisticated "higher" form of consciousness. This differentiation has brought into being analytical psychology and therapies for that fragile reality we experience as individuality.

Religious Freedom is not an issue in tribal society. One does not "join" a religion. It is just there. As nations absorb tribes freedom becomes an issue. Toleration has to be imposed. When tribal religions become supplanted by a universal religion, Buddhist or Islamic or Christian, for an entire nation then the issue of religious freedom becomes muted. Only in a plurality of religions does religious freedom need to be protected. An exception is protection for the individual who comes out and stands alone. In the global village it has become an issue for all of us. And of course individual consciousness brings the issue forward from collective groups to individuals within, between, among and outside religious groups.

4. By Inheritance.

In the twenty-first century many are not born into a tribal, or even a member religious tradition and many now grow up in a context of extensive pluralism. Religions absorb the younger generations in several ways. Some belong at birth, some at the age of reason, age 12 to 14 with a rite of passage. Others wait for conversion or membership commitment as adults. Even at the age of reason, a child is unlikely to move away from the childhood millieux. And of course the child is still dependent upon their parents. Many never leave a connection to their religion of birth but religious freedom consists in the option of leaving, connecting with another religion or none.

In some countries it is illegal to try to convert those of a different religion. Pluralism is practiced as a diversity by inheritance. In other societies it is permitted to kill apostates, those who leave their inherited tradition. Religious freedom must begin as an acknowledgement of the accident of birth. I was born in the U.S. whereas I could have been born anywhere on the globe. Why should I or anyone else be deprived of their rightful inheritance in all religious traditions of our humanity. Why place barriers around a child/youth/adult simply because their parents are of only one particular religion?

We are free socially only when we need not petition another person or group to act on our freedom. Ultimately we cannot coerce the individual conscience and we should not attempt to do so. The great diversity in human religion should be held open for all and obstacles should not be placed in the path of anyone.

This brings up a related issue, so-called "appropriation." Is it always appropriate to take elements of another's religious tradition for one's own practice? One should of course be respectful. But no religious practice is owned and delegated like a patent registered with the government. History shows that even the most orthodox of traditions has borrowings in its own path. We are citizens of the planet. All religious traditions are our inheritance. As in music or philosophy or science, in religion we may attend to whatever helps our spiritual growth and understanding. With maturity we may become participants with

many or several living traditions. We are after all part of one great planetary spiritual emergence.

5. Dualistic Freedom From.
In some traditions there are strands of alienation from "this world." Freedom is thought to be a process of freedom from the world or the body to a better, perfect, perhaps divine state. Life here is "a vale of tears" to be replaced by a paradise or heaven in an after-life. Alienation from the world has resulted in hands off attitudes when we face issues such as war and peace or our survival through issues surrounding global warming. Extreme ascetic practices are employed in places to rid oneself of a connection in the body, to be free of it, entering a spiritual consciousness. Commonly at death we hear the assertion, "she's in a better place now."

Paul Bloom at Yale's department of psychology has studied children, concluding they are natural animists or dualists. Rocks, trees, animals, other persons are inhabited by willful mysterious spirits. Later these working assumptions are developed into Theologies and to certain theories of the nature of consciousness. There is earth and then there is an intelligent design beyond or beneath earth, there is human nature and then there is an intelligent design beyond or inhabiting the human individual. This presence is of the nature of consciousness, a homunculous, which may intrude and reorient the workings of the brain from outside/or interior possession. The assumption is that this presence within and permeating beyond is other than body, other than world. The goal of freedom from is to become the one and discard the other.

The alternatives to this are scientific and world affirming forms of religion. Universe is one, world is one, body is one. There are no animants running these from outside or from a presence within. No means of connection as in dualism have been identified. Whatever makes for increased freedom is holistic, enlisting all human potentialities from its own growth in understanding and practice. Nature/human nature is affirmed in and of itself. The human life, life cycle, fulfillment and enlightenment are intrinsic motivations of our natures. We grow into a greater freedom.

Conclusion.
I have come to several working conclusions in this paper: (1) Variations of liberal democracy are most supportive for religious freedom in society. (2) Freedom deepens as humans may develop through the orders of consciousness, supported at each stage by the religious community. (3) The individual consciousness is recent and fragile, to be encouraged in its differentiation from the collective. We cannot assume all have come to a full individuality apart from the whole, and as we are social animals we always remain in relationship to the whole. (4) As citizens of Earth all human religion is our rightful inheritance. We must claim it as our birthright as a resource for our spiritual development. And (5) A cautionary note is essential lest we slip into a general world denial or world weariness that threatens progress towards wholeness i.e. our full freedom towards fulfillment and enlightenment in this lifetime.