

## Religion and Freedom

Religion was developed as a social and legal system to regulate human relationships in society; to set rules for behavior; to transform man into a social animal bound by certain traditions, values and ethics; and to explain how the universe was created, how it works, and who is in charge of it. Lack of scientific knowledge to explain how the universe came into being and how it functions was instrumental in facilitating the development and spread of religion. The absence of political and legal systems in older times to regulate human and societal relations gave rise to religion and enabled it to expand its sphere of influence and deepen its roots in society; it gave subsequently the opportunity to gradually transform itself into a comprehensive societal philosophy leaving nothing for experimentation, scientific inquiry or speculation. As a consequence, religion became a tool to manipulate man and make him subservient to religious thought, while causing human life in general to become an instrument dedicated to serving religion and the men who spoke in the name of its god. In such an environment, it was not possible for the concepts of freedom, free speech, and human rights to be conceived, let alone be developed and institutionalized.

When societal life and social relationships were still primitive, religion was very much needed to create communities and give human life a meaning and man a sense of direction. During tribal and early agricultural times, for example, neither government nor law existed; religion was thus needed to provide a code of conduct to make man more civilized and community life more peaceful and productive. The introduction of religion in society when relationships were characterized by enmity and dominated by war had reduced threats and made social relationships more enjoyable; religion transformed harsh social environments into more hospitable ones where people could live and interact without much fear.

Religion in general claims to be the only system capable of explaining life's complexity, and the spirit guiding man to living a moral and rewarding life. Some religions insists on owning the whole truth regarding the creation of the universe and man's place in it and

what lies after life. Such claims and people's belief in them have made scientific speculation about the past and the future largely unneeded, often unacceptable, if not a heresy. As a result, religion has become a bind that ties people to certain past notions and assumptions that cannot be proven. And since people tied to the past are unable to think about the future and plan for it; hard core religious believers are likely to find themselves enslaved by outdated religious ideas and rituals and symbols and traditions and convictions.

For humanity to become free it needs to transcend religion and reduce its role in human life to what it used to be; a social system to govern man's relationship to his or her god without mediators; and to being an ethical code of conduct that guides, not binds people. In older times, when religion was a mere social system, it served humanity well, uniting people and creating communities where social justice, harmony and tolerance prevailed. In contrast, when religion became a societal ideology, it made older communities exclusive, transforming harmony and tolerance into enmity and hatred; it also precipitated countless wars and caused the death of hundreds of millions of people needlessly. Today, there is no religiously conservative society that tolerates dissent or accepts the other as equal, is socially progressive or scientifically or economically or technologically advanced, or provides an environment where man feels free to think and write and publish and pursue happiness without fear. If humanity fails to transcend religion, man will never know real freedom, live life as it is meant to be lived, reach his potential and employ his talents and creativity to serve society, and attain the level of humanity he is capable of attaining and deserves to enjoy.

Mohamed Rabie

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