

FAITH, KNOWLEDGE AND FREEDOM OF BELIEF: OPPORTUNITIES AND LIMITATIONS IN THE MODERN WORLD

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A B S T R A C T	K E Y W O R D S
<p>Faith plays a fundamental role in shaping every religion. Belief, in this context, refers to a person's conviction that a certain goal, idea, doctrine, or the existence of an event or entity and its characteristics are true. Trust forms the foundation of belief. However, not every belief becomes a lasting or healthy belief.</p> <p>Belief can exist independently of knowledge, but for it to be strong and healthy, it must be rooted in basic knowledge. This knowledge may stem from reason and logic or metaphorical evidence, such as divine revelations. Belief can be both religious and secular. While religious faith is formed through worship and belief in the supernatural, secular belief is rooted in emotional experience and scientific understanding of the world. This article explores the relationship between belief, knowledge, and faith in contemporary society, as well as the role of tolerance in promoting global peace.</p>	<p>Healthy belief, religious organizations, opportunities, limitations, rights, religious tolerance, freedom of religion, international law, human rights</p>

Introduction

It is well-known that faith plays an essential role in the foundation of every religion. At its core, belief is a person's conviction that certain goals, ideas, doctrines, and the existence of events or entities are true. Trust underpins faith, making it a powerful psychological and spiritual phenomenon. However, not every belief transforms into true or lasting faith. Is faith connected to knowledge? Faith can exist without formal knowledge, but to be strong and healthy, it requires foundational knowledge. This knowledge can be derived from reason and logic or metaphorical evidence, such as divine sources.

While faith is often associated with religion, it can be both religious and secular. Religious faith arises from belief in and worship of supernatural forces and phenomena, whereas secular faith is grounded in emotional experience and scientific knowledge of the objective world surrounding a person.

Faith, Knowledge, and the Modern World:

In the modern era, marked by rapid globalization, faith and belief continue to evolve. We are witnessing a historical stage in human development where dramatic shifts are taking place, from technological advancements to sociopolitical transformations. Amidst this change, one of the most important principles for establishing global peace is religious tolerance.

Religious tolerance requires individuals to not only remain steadfast in their own faith but also to develop an understanding of other religions, beliefs, and traditions. In this way, tolerance becomes a bridge, fostering coexistence and peace across diverse cultures and belief systems.

International Standards on Religious Freedom:

The 1989 Vienna Document, in clause 16.3, commits member states of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) to "recognize, upon their request, the status granted to religious associations professing or desiring to profess their religion within the framework of their national constitutions." This commitment applies to the vast majority of religious and faith communities across the OSCE region. However, the implementation of these protections is often hindered by legal and practical barriers.

For example, the mandatory registration system and the associated challenges in obtaining legal status often discriminate against minority religious or belief communities. This issue was addressed in 2004 by the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the Venice Commission in their publication, "Guidelines for the Analysis of Laws Relating to Religion or Belief." Despite efforts by regional and international human rights organizations, many religious groups continue to face obstacles to fully exercising their rights.

The OSCE, in its decision at the 2013 Kiev Council of Ministers, called on member states to "refrain from imposing restrictions that are incompatible with political commitments and international legal obligations regarding the practice of individuals and religious communities." It also emphasized the need for rulings on "freedom of thought, conscience, religion, and belief."

Freedom of religion or belief is recognized as a fundamental human right in international instruments, including those established by the OSCE. According to international standards, every person has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. This includes the right to change one's religion or belief, as well as the freedom to teach, worship, and practice religious rituals and ceremonies either in private or public, alone or with others.

The self-identification of religions and beliefs is a central component in determining the scope of freedom of religion or belief. Public authorities often rely on objective criteria for recognizing these concepts, but it is important to remember that freedom of religion or belief encompasses a wide range of theistic, non-theistic, and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right to not profess any belief.

Religious freedom is closely linked to other human rights and fundamental freedoms, particularly freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and the right to non-discrimination. Protecting these rights is essential for ensuring that individuals can freely express and practice their faith or belief.

Limitations on Freedom of Religion or Belief:

While freedom of religion or belief is widely recognized, there are situations where this freedom may be restricted. However, such restrictions must meet specific criteria:

1. **Established by Law:** Any limitation must be grounded in clear, publicly accessible legal provisions.
2. **Purpose:** The restriction must serve to protect public safety, order, health, or morals, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.
3. **Necessity and Proportionality:** Any restriction must be necessary to achieve a legitimate goal and proportionate to that goal.

4. **Non-discrimination:** Restrictions cannot be imposed for discriminatory purposes or applied in a discriminatory manner.

For a restriction to be "prescribed by law," it must be stated clearly enough to allow individuals or communities to understand the rules governing their behavior. Additionally, national legislation must provide protection against arbitrary interference by public authorities, in accordance with the principle of the rule of law.

The Balance Between Public Needs and Individual Rights:

Maintaining a balance between societal needs and individual rights is crucial in any democratic society. Restrictions on freedom of religion or belief must be directly related to a legitimate objective and proportionate to the goal. In this sense, any intervention should address an essential societal need and not be overly broad or intrusive.

Moreover, it is essential to minimize the interference with individual rights while still addressing public concerns. Legal systems must ensure that the justification for any restriction is both necessary and sufficient, and that the measures used involve the least possible interference with personal freedoms.

Conclusion:

The intersection of belief, knowledge, and religious freedom continues to shape the modern world. While opportunities for fostering tolerance and understanding have grown, significant legal and practical limitations remain.

As nations and international organizations work to uphold fundamental rights, it is crucial to strike a balance between protecting public interests and preserving individual freedoms. In this context, healthy beliefs — grounded in knowledge, tolerance, and mutual respect — provide a foundation for both personal and societal well-being.

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