

Freedom of Religion or Belief for Children – theological aspects

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What do we mean by children's rights?

- League of Nations declaration 1924:
the child as an **object** and **recipient**
the responsibilities of adults to protect and provide for children
- UNCRC 1989:
the child as **subject** and **participant**
the responsibilities of adults to listen to and respect the child's own rights and (evolving) autonomy

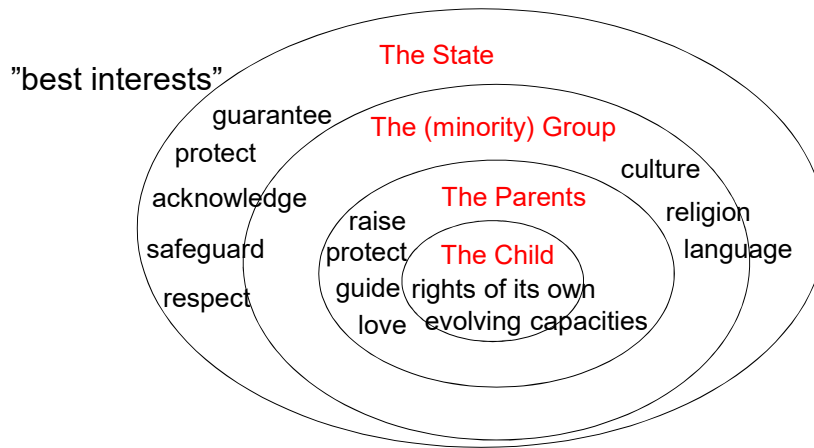
The role of parents – Article 5

States Parties shall respect the **responsibilities, rights and duties** of parents or, where applicable, the members of the extended family or community as provided for by local custom, legal guardians or other persons legally responsible for the child, to **provide**, in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child, **appropriate direction and guidance** in the exercise by the child of the rights recognized in the present Convention.

The child as a member of a group - Article 30

In those States in which **ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities** or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to **profess and practise his or her own religion**, or to use his or her own language.

Four agents



Theology: the Child

Three classical models:

- The sinful child
- The innocent child
- The ambivalent child

Let the children come... Children as role models for adults

Theology: the Family

Role of parents

- Rearing and upbringing as a vocation
- Traditional family – new family constellations
- Authority and obedience
- Respect and mutuality

Honour your parents...

Theology: the Group

The people of God

What place is there for children in our churches?

Recipients or participants?

Children and freedom of religion before the UNCRC:

The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the **liberty of parents** and, when applicable, legal guardians **to choose for their children schools**, other than those established by the public authorities, which conform to such minimum educational standards as may be laid down or approved by the State and **to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.**

ICECSR, Article 13:3

UNCRC- Article14

1. States Parties shall respect **the right of the child** to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.
2. States Parties shall respect the **rights** and **duties** of the parents and, when applicable, legal guardians, to **provide direction** to the child in the exercise of his or her right in a manner consistent with the **evolving capacities** of the child.
3. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morals, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

”profess and practice”

Forum internum: the right to **have** or **change** religion or belief. Inner freedom with focus on beliefs and religious affiliation. A non-negotiable right.

Forum externum: the right to **manifest** your religion or belief through outer actions, individually as well as collectively. Negotiable.



Three models for the religious freedom of the child

Where lies the focus in the understanding of **religion**?

How is the responsibility shared between **parents** and **state**? Active or passive?

How will the child's **own right** be weighed against the right of the parents to **raise and guide** the child?

Religion as **belief** and **conviction**

Confessional statements

Content

Thoughts and ideas

Intellectual focus



Religion as **praxis**

Actions
Traditions
Rites and observance
Ethical choices
Lifestyle



Religion as **identity**

Meaning-making
Interpretation of life
Experience
Belonging



The Tradition-model



The right to **take part** in the traditions of the parents, religion as **praxis**

Focus on the parental **right to raise** their child, which the state shall not limit without good reasons

The autonomy of the child as **growing in responsibility** in continuity with tradition

The Liberty of Thought-model



The right to **choose a world-view**, religion as system of ideas

Parents and state should be **neutral** and not actively influence the child.

Autonomy as **independence** and individual decision-making

The Life Interpretation-model



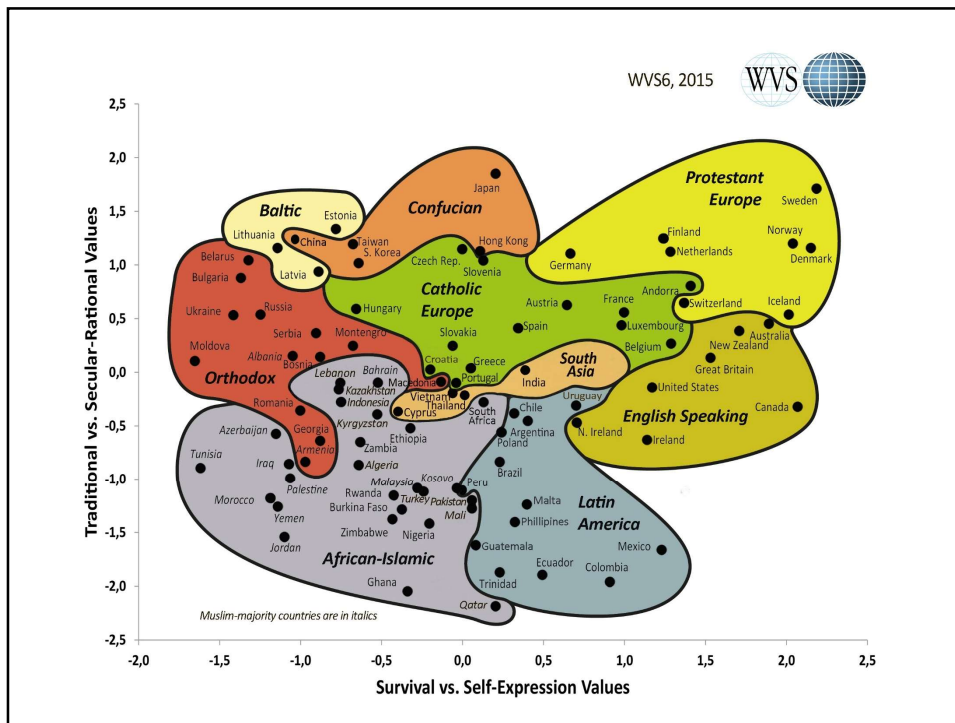
The right to **search for meaning** in relation to existential issues in life, religion as identity and meaning-making

Parents and state should **promote** and **facilitate** the exercising of the right

Autonomy as being **recognized as a subject** in interaction with its environment

Theology: faith and practice

How do different Christian traditions perceive faith?





Margin of appreciation in the Swedish context

- Many who are strong supporters of human rights have a limited, one-dimensional view of religion.
- Many who belong to groups that would benefit from a strong standing for the freedom of religion in society are not comfortable with 'human rights language', especially in relation to children.
- Who, then, will be the advocates for the child's right to freedom of religion?

..... Svenska kyrkan 