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Freedom and Tolerance

The word “tolerance” today is an integral part of our description of western democracy. On the one hand, the word “tolerance” expresses an attitude of being open to the views of others in matters of world-view and religion. On the other hand it has become a yardstick for whether a person fits in the world of our time. Intolerance is stigmatized as fundamentalism or even fascism. We may say that without tolerance there would be no democracy today, but the word unfortunately has also become part of the vocabulary of “political correctness”.

The term “tolerance” began its career in the seventeenth century. Before that time it appeared in Latin in association with the virtue of fortitude. Apart from its literal meaning, it had a moral meaning. Tolerance was steadfastness. In its most literal sense, it referred to physical endurance. To tolerate something is quite literally to bear something, or bear with something. By analogy it referred to endurance or steadfastness in the face of some evil. Part of the virtue of fortitude is the ability to put up a sustained resistance to evil, and so tolerance is very close to fortitude.

In the seventeenth century, the tolerance (or toleration) was extended to matters of religion and politics. At that time the religious conflicts that arose in the Reformation were still raging and were leading to political battles and even bloody wars. On the twenty-fourth of May in 1689, the British Parliament passed the “Toleration Act” that allowed dissenting Protestants freedom of worship. The act particularly concerned Baptists, Congregationalists, and Methodists. Also in 1689, John Locke published the first volume of his *Epistula de Tolerantia*. Tolerance acquired a religious, philosophical, and political status, but its most important context was matters of religion. The “Toleration Act”, interestingly enough, did not extend to Catholics. The umbrella of toleration did not protect Catholics. Their religious practices were not tolerated, and they had no place in public life. Religious freedom was not something to be enjoyed by Catholics.¹

Over time toleration extended beyond religion to the sphere of world-views, until it became the first commandment (the “prime directive”) in an ideological sense. Tolerance has today essentially changed the meaning of freedom. Freedom in the classical sense ended where evil begins, and evil was forbidden², but today tolerance sets the boundaries of freedom. Tolerance, however, has its own axiological system, its own system of values, and this is not in complete agreement with the Decalogue or with the classical ethics of natural law, which conforms with the Decalogue.

Today in the west the traditional ethics as upheld by Christianity is more and more in conflict with the ideological principle of tolerance. The perennial ethics for which Christianity has been a vehicle commands us to do good and avoid evil.³ The ideological principle commands us simply to be tolerant.

“Evil” is neutered in this ideology. Instead of “evil”, we are taught to speak of “differences”, “diversity”, and “minorities”. We must be tolerant of anything different. When new laws strike at traditional principles and values, and offend the upright and well-formed conscience, the media is immediately prepared to re-educate us and reshape our attitudes. We are manipulated to speak and think in terms of tolerance instead of in terms of good and evil. This manipulation begins in how we speak of moral matters. From there it extends to the political arena and to civilization as a whole. By changing the way we speak, the media tries to change reality itself. This attitude, that by using certain phrases, we can actually change reality is in fact a reversion to magic. The west is not merely going back to pre-Christian civilization, but is turning its back on civilization as it looks to barbarism. Before Christianity, Greek and Roman thinkers and lawmakers had worked to refine their ideas of morality, but this heritage is rejected as well.⁴ Aristotle had observed more than two thousand years ago that a man without morality is worse than a beast⁵. What can remain of a man’s conscience if he can no longer distinguish between good and evil? If he has lost the ability to distinguish, he cannot be accountable for his actions. Is the ethics of our day supposed to be a system designed for people who are held to be morally incompetent? Is it a system designed for the morally insane?

What does it mean to be tolerant? The problem of tolerance was raised during the Reformation and it primarily concerned religion. The principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*, was that he who rules a land may also impose his own religion upon his subjects. In the face of this principle, statesmen looked for ways in which people of different religious confessions could coexist, how Catholics could live with Protestants, and vice versa. The Edict of Nantes was one of most famous acts of tolerance, and from 1598 to 1685 it granted many rights to the Huguenots in a France that remained officially Catholic. Today, tolerance is more than a question of religion. Tolerance is a panacea for questions of morality, life-style, and world-view. The civilized man is a tolerant man, and he sees people who don’t practice his kind of tolerance as primitive fundamentalists.

What the word “tolerance” means exactly today is rather vague, because the word has become an ideological slogan. The slogan, in its extreme form, is even a reversal of traditional morality. Tolerance means to do evil and avoid good! How else can we explain why perverts and criminals are protected? How can we explain the invasion of books and films that glorify evil and present blasphemies against Christianity? Tolerance has come to mean the ostracism of those who hold normal moral attitudes. In a more moderate form, tolerance does not urge people to support evil, merely to accept it and consent to it. It makes the good into something relative and subjective. The good becomes merely one of several options, a mere matter of taste. The question of good and evil must be trivialized. Evil may not be condemned or rebuked, and so it is sheltered and strengthened. This is the ethics of the west today.

This ethics is based on an ideology that produces a social psychosis through the media and politics. Any public person who dissents from this ideology loses his position in public life. He is stigmatized or becomes a social non-entity. The ideology of tolerance has become one of the most important requirements of “political correctness”.

It is interesting that unlike previous ideologies of the twentieth century such as Hitler’s Nazism and the Communism of Marx, Lenin, and Stalin, the ideology of tolerance has no

single author. While it has binding authority, its authority is not connected with the name of any leader or any founder. It exercises its authority impersonally as a kind of artificially produced social pressure. If someone disagrees with it, he does not know to whom he should direct his objections. Like every ideology, it grows out of something deeper, whether a philosophy or a type of civilization. In fact, political correctness as a tactic was developed by the leftist Frankfurt School. It was a tactic to advance communism by destroying the West from within, specifically by neutralizing those who dared to criticize Marxism. Political correctness was the tactic of changing the way people talk and think, by teaching people that if they express their beliefs they are being disrespectful to others. They must avoid expressing their beliefs to make up for the injustices of the past. The Frankfurt School was founded in 1923 and in 1935 moved from Germany to the USA.

We face a basic ethical question today. We must define the moral principle that will assign the space to a shared civilization that rests upon freedom. Will we choose the ethics of the good or the ethics of tolerance?

The ethics of tolerance is a perversion of the ethics of the good. It is a caricature, but it is so cunning that the one ethics may be easily confused with the other. The ethics of tolerance is also a caricature of the virtue of Christian mercy and willingly cloaks itself in that garb.

The ethics of the good is rooted in classical Greek ethics. It is based on the idea that man can objectively recognize the good and choose it. This, however, is difficult in practice, and so people must be properly educated and formed. Each person must be educated and formed to develop his ability to recognize and choose what is good. Christianity explained the weaknesses of human nature in terms of the effects of original sin, and to overcome these effects education is not enough. Supernatural grace is necessary to do good, especially to attain the final end of life. The ethics of the good does not conceal the truth about man and his difficult moral condition. The ethics of tolerance tries to dispense with this truth in the name of humanism. It permits man to do what he pleases without regard to good and evil. The ethics of tolerance undermines our ability to recognize to recognize and choose objective goods. The good, like religion is a private matter for the secular post-Protestant state. While the good is a private matter, evil in all its forms is publicly advertised. There is pressure from many sides to live at peace with evil and accept it. This is what is meant by a tolerant man, while someone who does not accept evil is considered to be a fundamentalist.

The ethics of tolerance disguises itself as Christian mercy, but it is no such a thing. Christian mercy understands that someone may find himself in a bad situation but is still capable of willfully rejecting evil.⁶ Mercy demands that we climb toward the good. Tolerance accepts evil, and even demands that we lower ourselves to its level. These are two different ethics and correspond to two different civilizations.

How is it that the ethics of the good and the ethics of tolerance are so easily confused? In both cases, we are dealing with a situation that evokes our pity. Tolerance wears the disguise of mercy, but it is not mercy. The emotion of pity must be filtered through the reason first if we are to know if it is inclined to virtue or vice. This will depend on our

rational attitude toward evil.⁷ When people promote tolerance as a basic principle of action they appeal to the emotions but not to the reason in an effort to evoke pity. People are led to think in this way: the poor murderer who must sit for so many years in isolation without his family; the poor deviant, the poor thief with no family or friends, unable to come and go as he wishes. Criminals are transformed into victims by evoking feelings of pity in violation of logic as the difference between reprehensible and responsible behavior is erased. When the feeling of mercy prevails over our ability to make rational judgments and our ability to recognize causes and effects, mercy is quickly transformed into its opposite. Instead of healing evil, we leave it untouched, and so evil can grow all the more.

Another danger is that people will confuse their feelings with their conscience.

Conscience is an act of rational judgment!⁸ The feeling of mercy is not the conscience. The conscience is an act of reason. The ideology of tolerance aims to eliminate the role of the reason in moral judgment. The reason will be cut off from reality because the good is relative and subjective. It will be cut off from the conscience because the emotions are important, and pity is the most important. When the reason is disengaged, people are easy victims for manipulation.

What are the practical consequences when the ethics of tolerance is dominant in particular areas of man's moral life? Ethics concerns the moral life of the individual. The good we should seek is not an abstraction or value. It is the concrete aim of our natural inclinations. When we speak of the three basic inclinations of our nature we may speak as well of three ends and goods: the preservation of our life, the transmission of life, and our development as persons in the truth. The ethics of the good orders us to do good. This is the source of the imperative that we should respect human life from conception to natural death. We should also be solicitous of man's spiritual development, and so we should work for truth in the media, in politics, and in the schools. The ethics of tolerance, on the other hand, promotes suicide and euthanasia as an easy way to resolve the drama of human suffering. It promotes abortion as a way of ridding ourselves of unwanted children. It has no qualms about the use of deception and manipulation in public life, when this suits its aims.

In the economic order, the family is the focus of traditional economy. The child comes into the world and develops in a family. His family protects his material existence and fosters his spiritual growth. The ethics of tolerance promotes alternative models of the "family": the single parent, two adults of the same gender, alternative ways of bringing children into the world such as *in vitro* fertilization, often where the biological parents do not have any personal connection. The promotion and legalization of "homosexual marriages" results from the application of the principles of the ethics of tolerance. The countries of the European Union are more and more intensely moving in this direction. There is a similar movement in North America, most notably in Canada.

In the political order, according to the ethics of the good, the political community is based on the foundation of justice, and there are three kinds of justice: commutative, legal, and distributive. Commutative justice concerns relations between individuals. Legal justice concerns relations between individuals and society or state. Distributive justice concerns relations between the society or state and individuals. The classical idea

of social justice is complex, for social life is complex. The perfection of society requires that these three types of justice should go together. Meanwhile, in the ethics of tolerance we are dealing with reductionism. It accepts only one kind of justice and the others do not exist or are regarded as unimportant. It is guided by the principle of the strong prevailing over the weak, whether it is the stronger individual, corporation, or state. In this way the deepest meaning of social life is destroyed. Commutative justice concerns only the partners in their business agreements but does not concern the nature of their business. Legal justice is abused to promote economic environments connected with the circles of power. Distributive justice makes it possible to treat the state as the fiefdom of certain interest groups. Such a system is sick and these are illusions of justice.

In the relation between politics and justice there is the danger that the most important aim of politics will be denied. Justice demands that we give to each what is due (*cuique suum*), but justice is inadequate when we think of what we each owe to our parents, what we have inherited from those who have gone before, and God. Yet our parents, our predecessors, and God are at the foundations of our social existence. God is the transcendental reason and the cause of causes. Yet we see that these points of reference are denied in the west, especially now in the European Union. Not only is the role of the family and of parents undermined, the entire heritage of Europe is being rejected. Finally, society is shutting its gates to God. The rights of children are increased while the rights of parents are diminished. Since the state is the source of laws and rights, children are more and more the property or wards of the state. Experiments with the preamble to the constitution show how the authors are trying to forget the two millennia of Christianity that essentially shaped the identity of Europe. In the absence of God, the whole legal and moral order drifts like a leaf in the wind, and the only remaining right is the right of the strongest concealed in legalism. The proposed constitution of the European Union refers neither to Christianity nor to God.

The ethics of tolerance is a fusion of two ideologies, liberalism and socialism. Liberalism is individualism. It treats our moral judgments as relative and individual. Morality and religion become private matters. Socialism, on the other hand, is the ideology of the group. Liberalism with its proclaimed glorification of individual rights is only a starting point. In fact, liberalism is swallowed up by socialism. Hobbes and Locke taught that the individual freely relinquishes his natural rights to the political authorities. The state in which the individual lives is in fact a socialist state. The state is superior to the individual. The political authorities determine the law and how the law is interpreted. The slogan of tolerance is a tool for destroying the individual's ability to understand reality in terms of good and evil, and so he can no longer react properly to good and evil. When our understanding is dimmed, the media can easily manipulate our social reactions for or against anything with no regard to good and evil. Tolerance is a way of manipulating society.

When we refer to tolerance in our moral judgments we are eroding the ground we stand on for we are losing contact with reality and reason. The fundamental moral question is whether man is capable of objectively recognizing good and evil, and whether recognizing them he can take a proper stand toward them, and then whether he can make the right choice. The traditional western ethics of the good is based on a positive answer to these questions. Man can recognize objective good and evil, he can take a proper stand,

and it is in his power to make the right choice. The ethics of tolerance answers in the negative: man cannot know objective good and evil, his beliefs are a private matter; choice is good because it is choice, not because it aims at the objective good.

The ethics of tolerance is the foundation of post-modern ethics. Postmodern ethics gathers together most of the destructive philosophical positions in western philosophy and it lies at the base of contemporary European culture. Post-modernism is post-liberalism and post-socialism. It has an aversion to the western heritage, especially Christianity. All the more as Christians we must work to save the ethics of the good, if morality is to be truly morality, and freedom is to be truly freedom. We must recognize true tolerance, which has persons and the good of persons as its object, and never confuse it with indifference, which is only a step away from hatred for our neighbor.⁹

¹ When John Locke promoted his principle of tolerance, he left the door open for intolerance toward Catholics, ostensibly for political reasons rather than on religious grounds.

² As in the words of the 19th century president of Ecuador, Garcia Moreno: "Freedom for everyone and everything, except for evil and evil-doers".

³ This principle appeared in Cicero. St. Thomas Aquinas referred to it and wrote: "... bonum est faciendum et prosequendum, et malum vitandum.", S.Th. I-II, 94, 2. Cf. M. A. Krapiec, *Person and Natural Law*, Peter Lang, New York 1993.

⁴ The preamble to the Constitution of the European Union omits any mention of Christianity. It appeals to an indelible and general "religious heritage" ("they draw inspiration from the cultural, religious, and humanistic heritage of Europe, a heritage whose values are always present in it and which has rooted in the life of the society of Europe a perception of the central role of the human person and his inviolable and inalienable rights, and also respect for law".) There are many various religions in Europe today, but the identity of Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire was shaped by Christianity.

⁵ "...if he have not virtue, he is the most unholy and the most savage of animals...", *Politics*, I, 1. 12.

⁶ "Accordingly the motive of "mercy," being something pertaining to "misery," is, in the first way, anything contrary to the will's natural appetite, namely corruptive or distressing evils, the contrary of which man desires naturally, wherefore the Philosopher says (Rhet. ii, 8) that "pity is sorrow for a visible evil, whether corruptive or distressing." Secondly, such like evils are yet more provocative of pity if they are contrary to deliberate choice, wherefore the Philosopher says (Rhet. ii, 8) that evil excites our pity "when it is the result of an accident, as when something turns out ill, whereas we hoped well of it." Thirdly, they cause yet greater pity, if they are entirely contrary to the will, as when evil befalls a man who has always striven to do well: wherefore the Philosopher says (Rhet. ii, 8) that "we pity most the distress of one who suffers undeservedly." S.Th. II-II, 30, 1.

⁷ "Mercy signifies grief for another's distress. Now this grief may denote, in one way, a movement of the sensitive appetite, in which case mercy is not a virtue but a passion; whereas, in another way, it may denote a movement of the intellectual appetite, in as much as one person's evil is displeasing to another." S.Th., II-II, 30, 3.

⁸ "... for conscience may be resolved into *cum alio scientia* [that is knowledge applied to an individual case]." S.Th., I, 79, 13.

⁹ "... Then as now, true Christians practiced this tolerance with regard to persons, which is quite simply an evangelical virtue. We must guard ourselves from confusing true tolerance with false tolerance. Is it a question of error? We must combat it with all our forces under whatever form it presents itself, just as it is our duty to combat evil everywhere that we find it. Man would abdicate his quality of being intelligent and moral if he were to act otherwise. Tolerance can only concern itself with persons and it consists in acting with kindness as we act toward equals. There is more, dear sirs, because after having determined the object of this virtue, it is important to define the motive. To be true, tolerance must be based on the

feeling of charity and not on indifference in matters of belief or of religion. Many people imagine themselves to be tolerant. They are merely indifferent, which is not at all the same thing. Tolerance does not at all consist in being completely unconcerned about our neighbour under the pretext that we must leave to each his liberty to believe as he wishes. It does not concern in avoiding meddling even if it means his loss. You say you possess the truth, and you will not use all legitimate means to assure its benefits to your equals? You will not look to free them from their errors because you do not want to disturb their liberty of thought and action? You would leave them to run with merry hearts before a certain danger without enlightening them about the consequences of their acts? And you will call this exercising tolerance? But my dear sirs, that would be the most culpable indifference. True tolerance is always accompanied by zeal because it draws from charity the motives that inspire it.”

Msgr. Freppel, *Saint Cyprian*, 1873, 2nd edition, p. 17-19, Bray et Retaux, France.