

FREEDOM AND TOLERANCE

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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 determining 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 to bear with something. By analogy, tolerance 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 to 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*, in which he analyzed tolerance and touched the problems of the relation between politics and religion. Tolerance then 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, ends where evil begins, and evil was forbidden,² but today tolerance, not evil, 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 to 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.

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

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).

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 it 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 beast.⁵ 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 the 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.

⁴ The preamble to the Constitution of the European Union omits any mention of Christianity. It appeals to an indelible and general "religious heritage" ("[T]hey 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.

What the word "tolerance" exactly means today is rather vague, because the word has become an ideological slogan. The slogan, in its extreme form, is 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 is thus 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 does have binding authority, its authority is not connected with the name of any leader or 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 it moved from Germany to the USA.

Taking into account all that has been said, we have to face a basic ethical question today: will we choose the ethics of the good or the

ethics of tolerance? In other words, we must define the moral principle that will be a real principle for all who live in the civilization that rests upon freedom.

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, man needs more than education. 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 and to 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 to 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 it realizes that the person is still capable of willfully rejecting evil.⁶ Mercy demands that we climb toward the

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

good. Tolerance accepts evil, and it even demands that we lower ourselves to its level. These are two different ethics, and they 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 first filtered through the intellect if we are to know whether it inclines us to virtue or to vice. This "filtration," namely, our intellect changing emotion into virtue, will depend on our intellect's ability to properly understand what is good and what is evil.⁷ When people promote tolerance as a basic principle of action, they appeal not to the intellect, but to the emotions 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. As the difference between reprehensible and responsible behavior is erased, criminals are transformed into victims by evoking feelings of pity in violation of logic. When the feeling of mercy prevails over our ability to make rational judgments and over our ability to recognize causes and effects, mercy is quickly transformed into its opposite. Instead of healing evil, we leave the evil untouched, and so it grows all the more.

Another danger in failing to distinguish between the ethics of the good and the ethics of tolerance is that people will confuse their

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 intellective appetite, in as much as one person's evil is displeasing to another" *S.Th.*, II-II, 30, 3.

feelings with their conscience. Conscience is an act of rational judgment!⁸ It is an act of reason. The feeling of mercy is an emotion, a response of the sense appetite. The ideology of tolerance aims to eliminate the role of the intellect in moral judgment. The intellect is to be left unengaged with reality because the good is understood to be relative and subjective. The good will be irrelevant to the conscience because the emotions are more important, and pity is the most important. When the intellect 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 or 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, that we should be solicitous of man's spiritual development, and that 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, and it also has no qualms about the use of deception and manipulation in public life, when this suits its aims.

In the economic order, the ethics of the good focuses on the family. The child comes into the world and develops within 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 to the child. The promotion and legalization of "homosexual marriages" results from the application of the principles of the ethics of tolerance.

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

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, the ethics of the good views justice as the foundation of the political community, 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. Because social life is complex, the idea of social justice is complex. The perfection of society requires that these three types of justice should all go together. In the ethics of tolerance, on the other hand, we find reductionism. The ethics of tolerance accepts only one kind of justice, namely, any one of the three exclusively but understood only from the egoistic point of view. The other kinds of justice either do not exist or are regarded as unimportant. The ethics of tolerance 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; it does not concern the nature of their businesses themselves. 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 political system is sick, and these are mere 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 us, and what we have received from God. Yet our parents, our predecessors, and God are at the foundation of our existence. 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, but also the entire heritage of Europe is being rejected. Finally, society is shutting its eyes 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. This is the final effect of the civilization which is trying to take toleration as its first principle, a civilization which wants to stay without God and without its true western heritage.

The ethics of tolerance is a fusion of two seemingly opposed ideologies: liberalism and socialism. Liberalism is individualism. It treats our moral judgments as relative and as completely dependent upon the individual. Morality and religion thus become private matters. Socialism, on the other hand, is the ideology of the group. The idea of socialism is based upon the conviction that the true being, the true substance is society; individuals are only parts of the society like a hand or a leg is a part of a body. Liberalism, on the other hand, literally related to freedom, glorifies an individual as individual, undermining his relations to society. Liberalism with its proclaimed glorification of individual rights is the starting point. It draws people in, but eventually liberalism is swallowed up by socialism. Hobbes and Locke taught that, in socialism, the individual freely relinquishes his natural rights to the political authorities. This socialist state is superior to the individual. The socialist authorities determine the law and how the law is interpreted. The slogan of tolerance, then, is merely a tool for destroying the individual's ability to understand reality in terms of good and evil so that he will no longer react properly to good and evil. When our understanding is dimmed, the media can easily manipulate our social reactions without regard to good and evil. Tolerance is a way of manipulating society.

When we refer in our moral judgments to tolerance, as it is understood by modern man, we are eroding the ground we stand on, for we are losing contact with reality and reason. The fundamental moral questions are whether man is capable of objectively recognizing good and evil, and whether in recognizing them, he can take a proper stand toward them by making the right choices. The traditional western ethics of the good is based on a positive answer to these questions. Man can recognize objective good and evil, and he can take a proper stand by using his powers to choose rightly. The ethics of tolerance answers in the negative: man cannot know objective good and evil because good and evil are only subjective realities determined

by him, and so either choice he makes is good because it is his choice, and not because it aims at the objective good.

The ethics of tolerance is the foundation of post-modern ethics. Post-modern ethics gathers together most of the destructive philosophical positions in western philosophy as it seeks to destroy the western heritage, especially Christianity. The ethics of the good enables man to live and act on the rational level rather than merely on the emotional, which can so easily miss the objective good and can so easily be manipulated. If morality is to be true and if men are to be free, then we must work to save the ethics of the good. 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

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, (Bray et Retaux, France), pp. 17-19.