

tion in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in charity' (Ephes. iv, 16). According to the measure of every part; for as there is a gradation in charity, so the tones of truthfulness differ for the near, the dear, the distant, the weak, the strong, the young, the old, though always there should be 'rational milk without guile, that thereby you may grow unto salvation' (I Peter ii, 1).

The eternal principle of this conversation is truly in heaven, in the Father who by declining himself begets the Word: *Verbum spirans Amorem*, the Word breathing forth Love. Thence proceeds the Spirit, the *Donum*, the Gift we receive and share with others, for the kingdom of heaven is already among us. Love cannot live with pretences, however kindly meant; charity rejoiceth in the truth (I Cor. xiii, 6). Neither ostentatious nor secretive, neither thrusting nor evasive, says St Thomas, each should deal with his neighbour with open mind and open heart according to circumstance. So St John would have us avoid lies less because they debase the currency of human transactions than because they belong to the Devil, 'who is the father of lies' (John viii, 4). So St Paul looks beyond reasons of civic decency; 'speak ye the truth because you are members of one another' (Ephes. iv, 25). So St Thomas observes that every truth, whatever and by whoever uttered, is from the Holy Ghost, and St Catherine bids us remember that whenever we think and speak we should reflect some likeness of the Word.



## RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE AND INTOLERANCE<sup>1</sup>

CARDINAL LERCARO

**T**HE Concept of *Tolerance*. There is about tolerance something paradoxical, for it consists, in fact, in permitting something which we know with certainty to be either an evil or an error: *permissio negativa mali*, as the theologian carefully defines it. Negative, because the permission does not imply either encouragement or approval.

<sup>1</sup> A French version of this conference by the Cardinal Archbishop of Bologna appeared in *La Documentation Catholique*, March 1959, and this translation of it by G. F. Pullen is here printed by kind permission of the editor.

From this definition it follows that tolerance is not, in the strict sense of the word, a virtue. We ought rather to say that the exercise of tolerance is authorized and required *by* a virtue, on account of some greater good which must be promoted or defended. The ultimate justification for tolerance has to be sought in the reflection of the divine laws governing the world, which human rulers are required to achieve. 'Human government', says St Thomas, 'is derived from the divine government, and must imitate it. But God, although he is almighty and supremely good, permits the appearance in the universe of certain evils which he could prevent, to the end that the suppression of these evils should not at the same time involve the suppression of a still greater good, or the creation of still greater evils. We see, then, that in human government also, those who govern as they should, tolerate certain evils, so as not to hinder certain goods, or even so as to prevent greater evils still' (*S. Theol.* IIa. IIae. 10, xi, c).

This thought has been taken up with vigour by the popes of modern times, notably by Leo XIII in his encyclical *Libertas*, and by Pius XII on many occasions. The latter, in one of his allocutions,<sup>2</sup> made a statement which will be found to contain, in one brief passage, a great part of Catholic teaching on the tolerance of evil. He said: 'The statement that religious and moral error must always be prevented if possible, because toleration of such error is itself immoral, cannot be valid in any absolute and unconditional sense. Moreover, God has not given, even to human authority, any such absolute and universal precept in matters of faith and morals. Nothing of the kind is found in the ordinary and common convictions of men, nor in the Christian conscience, nor in the sources of revelation, nor in the practice of the Church. Apart from other scriptural texts which could be adduced in support of this argument, Christ gives, in the parable of the cockle, the following advice: "Let the cockle grow in the field of the world together with the good seed until the harvest" (Matt. xiii, 24-30). The duty of suppressing moral and religious deviations cannot therefore be an ultimate rule of conduct, but must be subordinated to other rules which are more lofty and of more general application. These may, *in certain cases*, permit—and they may even recommend as the better course—the non-prevention of error, so as to promote a greater good.'

<sup>2</sup> Pius XII. Allocution to Italian Catholic Jurists, 6th December 1953.

Now, what is that greater good which justifies, and may even require, the tolerance by Catholics of other religious denominations?

The virtue which in general justifies tolerance is prudence, in so far as this virtue discerns with precision, and according to justice, what ought to be done in a particular case. Is prudence, then, no more than a kind of practical *clairvoyance*, or is it governed by higher principles—by a respect for truth, or even by a respect for the activity of God in souls?

'Respect for truth', we say, and 'respect for the human mode of adhering to it', rather than 'respect for liberty'. Here it is possible to note the distinction between the Catholic concept of tolerance, and the liberal view as formulated by John Locke in his *Letter concerning Toleration* (1689). The elements essential to establish the distinction are firmly laid down by Pius XI in his encyclical, *Non abbiamo bisogno*, where he says: 'We recently said that we were happy and proud to fight the good fight for the liberty of consciences, and not . . . for liberty of conscience. The latter is an equivocal expression which has frequently been abused, being made to signify an absolute independence of the individual conscience, a thing which would be an absurdity in a soul created and redeemed by God.'

*The Catholic Position as Seen by Non-Catholics.* Before we expound the Catholic position, we must examine the view non-Catholics have formed about what the Catholic position is, under the guidance of the secular press.

The non-Catholic attitude to tolerance is subjective, and it affirms the human, rather than the theological, value of truth. This opinion is met with in a sense which I shall call 'dogmatic' (the 'religion of liberty', a modern form of religiosity); or in the sceptical sense, of a decadent historicism. Thus, Renan thought to personify the essential attitude of tolerance by putting forth the opinion that all views of the world and its meaning were, at bottom, equally false. In the same way, a certain philosophical relativism current in our own day claims to admit every position—except that very one which offers itself as absolute truth.

For this reason, secular culture is only able to define the Catholic attitude in terms which were attributed by his opponents to the Catholic controversialist, Louis Veuillot: 'When we are in a minority, we claim liberty for ourselves in the name of your

principles; when we are in the majority, we refuse you liberty in the name of our own' (a remark of which in fact he was quite innocent).

It must be borne in mind that the thesis, according to which intolerance is necessarily linked with any assertion of religious transcendence, is an essential element in the secular historical argument. It is common to every secular position, even the most moderate. It appears to be a consequence of that historical judgment which asserts that by the end of the middle ages the Church had exhausted her positive historic mission and her civilizing powers; that she no longer provides any kind of spiritual stimulus for the development of civil life; that she is now only concerned with self-preservation, meeting the modern world with a nostalgia for things past, and nourishing herself upon those crises which cannot be dissociated from the forward march of history.

We may honestly recognize that the course of events in the nineteenth century sometimes gave an appearance of reasonableness to opponents of the Church. But the historical period which began with the first world war, and which has not yet reached its term, has given them the lie in a very striking manner. The doctrine so dear to marxism, that 'humanity is truth', has now been built into history—but it led directly to totalitarianism and to a persecution, not of Christianity only, but of reason itself; an oppression, for which the Inquisition in its very worst colours would offer, as to harshness and cruelty, a very poor pattern and precedent.

It is moreover clear that secular liberalism has not been able to solve the problem of transition to democracy, to a *régime*, that is, within which each individual would be able to feel that he was himself the object of the whole of the social process. Thus it has lost its position in history, and is now compelled by its theorists to be content with 'crying up the past', and caressing the image of a world which vanished yesterday.

On the other hand, the work of defending human dignity, as well as the arduous labours involved in the transition from liberalism to democracy, have in the main been assumed by Catholics, who have undertaken, not only the defence of their own liberty when they are in a minority, but also of general liberty even when they find themselves in a majority.

*The Catholic Position.* If we are to form any precise idea of

the Catholic doctrine of tolerance, we must rigorously dissociate its principle from subjectivist philosophical affirmations. It is most certain that the Catholic Church, conscious as she is of being the sole legitimate representative of truth, cannot be other than intolerant on matters of dogma. Religious indifference she can only repudiate, and she must insist that the truths of religion correspond to metaphysical realities, and are no mere symbols for attitudes of life. Indeed, if a situation could be envisaged in which the Church did *not* profess dogmatic intolerance, she would thereby, and necessarily, subject herself to a view of truth which was merely historical; so that her universality would appear as no more than a rough and ready historical manifestation of the religion of liberty or the religion of humanity.

Dogmatic intolerance is thus closely associated with the very idea of the eternity of truth. It is clear that to deny its rightness would lead to holding as equal in validity, even where the historical situation is a different one, propositions which are morally or theologically opposed to each other. Dogmatic intolerance must therefore be maintained, but it ought not to give rise to an attitude of civil, or practical, intolerance, as was pointed out by Pius XI in the encyclical mentioned above.

The Catholic defence of human liberty must be completely separated from the affirmations of 'the religion of liberty', that is, from the false elevation of freedom (of the human mind in its historical development) to the rank of a religion. As we read the text of Pius XI's encyclical, and parallel passages from the writings of other Popes in this century, we may observe *the beginnings of a theology of tolerance and liberty of conscience*. One of the greatest and noblest tasks confronting present-day theology is to work out a fully satisfactory treatment of this concept of tolerance, free from the philosophical postulates of rationalism and liberal immanen-tism.<sup>3</sup>

Such a theology, if it is to be complete, would have to show how, from the idea of the eternity and objectivity of truth—in a word, from its divinity—there flows also that of respecting liberty of consciences; whereas from the idea of truth as something merely human there flows only the extreme intolerance of the secular totalitarian religions. As expounded by Catholic thought,

3 R. Aubert, *L'Enseignement sur le Libéralisme*, in *Tolérance et communauté humaine*, Casterman, 1951 (a symposium).

the idea of tolerance is an extremely simple one, and may be thus expressed: 'No man ought to be compelled against his will to accept the Catholic faith'. Respect for truth requires freedom of consent. A truth imposed is a truth which has by no means been freely accepted *as such*. Persuasion, as Rosmini so rightly said, cannot be forced.

This brings us to asking what that *greater good* might be, which justifies the Catholic in showing religious tolerance. And a provisional answer may be thus worded: 'The requirement that truth should be *recognised* as true'.

This means that the affirmation of the objectivity of truth implies its own distinction from the subjective act by which a human being assents to it. This is why recognition of the objective nature of truth provides at the same time a basis for the liberty of the person. In the case where a truth is imposed, there is a confusion between religion and politics: truth tends to become an instrument in the hands of the politician, and it is a very easy matter to provide confirmation of this fact from history. As to the truth which is imposed, we find that, in place of the living, yet subordinate, relationship of politics to religion, as desired by the Christian conscience, we have that inclusion of religion within politics which is the typical feature of every form of paganism, and which we find today in its extreme form in the totalitarian systems.

We may also say that it is the presence of God in the human soul—a doctrine proper to *Christian* anthropology—which is the reason, both for the absolute value of the human person and his power to transcend history, and also for the necessity of persuasion and the prohibition of coercion and violence.

If this be a principle which is valid for every metaphysical and moral truth, it is *a fortiori* valid in the domains of faith and of grace. Who indeed could claim, without manifest sacrilege, to substitute his own will for the action of God upon the soul? No theologian of our own day could fail to stigmatize as a tyrant the politician who sought to impose a form of religion upon his subjects by force. How, indeed, could any man think of imposing Christianity, without throwing open the door to sacrilege, and especially—and worst of all—to sacrilege against the eucharist?

*The Catholic Principle of Civil Toleration is in Conformity with Tradition.* So far as modern times are concerned, we may affirm

with certainty that the possibility of dealing in a new way with the problem of liberty of consciences and of civil tolerance first made its appearance under Leo XIII. He declared in his encyclical *Immortale Dei*: 'If the Church decides that it is not permissible to put the various Protestant sects on an equal legal footing with the true religion, she does not thereby condemn those heads of state who, in view of a good to be attained, or an evil to be prevented, tolerate in practice that each of these sects should have its own place in the State. It is moreover the custom of the Church to see to it with the greatest care that no man be forced to embrace the Catholic faith against his will, according to the wise observation of St Augustine: "A man cannot believe against his will"' (*In Joann. xxvi, 2*).

This means that with Leo XIII emphasis begins to be put, not only on dogmatic intolerance (which is maintained unimpaired), or on the historical evils which civil tolerance may prevent (such as wars of religion) but also on the positive good which can be promoted by religious liberty: the protection of the freedom of the act of faith. It is very easy to see the connection between this concept of liberty and the same pope's call for a return to thomism.

The doctrine is clearly affirmed in the encyclical '*Libertas*':

'Freedom can also mean that man as a citizen has the right to follow the will of God according to his conscience, and to obey his commandments without any interference. This true liberty of the children of God, which is so powerful a vindication of the dignity of the human person, is beyond all violence and all oppression. It has always been the object of the Church's desires, and of its affectionate regard. It was this liberty which the apostles urged with so much constancy, which the apologists defended in their writings, and which an unnumbered host of martyrs have consecrated in their blood.'

The idea is very widespread, among Catholics as well as unbelievers, that this modern view of freedom is no more than a concession to the spirit of the times, suggested by prudence, but made with a very poor grace. Yet it would be easy to show that this freedom, in the terms defended by modern popes from Leo XIII to Pius XII, is firmly grounded in tradition and clearly enunciated by St Thomas: '*Et tales nullo modo sunt ad fidem compellendi, ut ipsi credant: quia credere voluntatis est*' (*Summa Theol. IIa. IIae., 10, viii*).



However, even though it can be shown that such theses, in particular the distinction between dogmatic tolerance and civil tolerance, are no more than developments from traditional principles, an easy and apparently legitimate objection may be raised; how is it that these principles have been so slow in producing these developments? After all, it can hardly be denied that the mediaeval Inquisition persecuted liberty of consciences; or that in the nineteenth century the immediate sense of a great many expressions used by Gregory XVI and Pius IX is explicitly against religious liberty.

In meeting this objection we must make it quite clear that the problem of religious liberty is an essentially modern one; and so we have to distinguish carefully between the doctrine of the Catholic Church (which is unchanging) and the theoretical or speculative repercussions of any given historical situation. That said, we are in a position to see that the mediaeval Inquisition was not an essential factor in the Catholic Church's discipline, but a historical phenomenon to be explained in terms of the particular spiritual situation of the middle ages. It was a period marked by the unity of a faith that was lived. One can understand how it was then, that the middle ages concentrated their attention on the *objective truth*, and left the *subjective* aspect of a man's adherence to the truth somewhat in the shadows. Hence it is natural that they should insist on dogmatic intolerance, while rather under-emphasizing civil tolerance. Granted the unity of faith that marked the Christian middle ages, anyone who withdrew from the Church was a heretic in the strictest and formal sense of the word; you could not talk about a variety of religious denominations, of what you might call hereditary heresies; and in any case the heretic was not persecuted so much for his error as for cutting himself off from the unity of faith and love which constitutes the religious community.

It is not then very surprising that freedom of consciences was not at that time a live issue. What is important is to enquire if at the heart of the Roman Church's brand of Christianity, as distinct from other mediaeval variations of the religion, the principles were to be found for facing the issue when new historical climates should force it to the fore; as we have seen, the answer can only be 'Yes'.

As for the affirmations of Gregory XVI and Pius IX in the



nineteenth century, we cannot but admit that upon examination they do not give an impression of having stressed in the least our distinction between dogmatic tolerance and civil tolerance; they express instead a total intransigence at the theoretical level, to the point of preventing Catholics from granting any *spontaneous* recognition of freedom for people who think differently from themselves. However, here again we must consider these pontifical utterances in relation to the actual opponents their authors had in mind.

Now most of what the nineteenth century called liberalism, would today be labelled radicalism; that is to say, nineteenth-century liberalism usually tied its political theories to an explicitly anti-Catholic philosophy of life in general, to affirmations of 'the modern conscience' in contradistinction to the relics of 'mediaeval darkness and superstition'. The freedom to be granted to all forms of worship and opinion really meant, very often, in the minds of its promoters, a denial of freedom to Catholic worship, since the whole point of religious freedom was to purge this 'residue of mediaeval intolerances' from the modern conscience. A sort of Inquisition in reverse was established, which used the penalty of ridicule instead of the stake, and simply excluded catholicism from serious discussion, as the outmoded expression of a pre-scientific mentality.

In thus linking freedom to humanistic rationalism, the radical (equals the nineteenth-century liberal) is not repudiating dogmatism, but simply replacing the old dogmas by what one could label as the dogma of the modern conscience. And so it was nineteenth-century liberalism itself which put the whole argument on to the dogmatic level; and this explains why the utterances of the popes were so predominantly concerned with reiterating the principle of dogmatic intolerance which, as we have seen, the Church simply could not possibly disown.

We can surely say that in the twentieth century the opponent has changed, and that one at least of the nineteenth-century equations, that between humanistic rationalism and the assertion of freedom, has turned out to be false both in theory and practice. Today the cause of civilization is manifestly bound up with respect for personal freedom, and the cause of barbarism linked with a persecuting intolerance of extreme ruthlessness, which nobody

could pretend derives from any doctrine formed in the bosom of catholicism.

Our purpose has been to show that the Church today, in coming to the defence of liberty, is not simply adopting an attitude forced on her by historical necessity, nor compromising with principles different from her own, but is quite clearly re-asserting in a new historical context the dignity of the human person in conjunction with the primacy of truth, a joint principle which has ever been the constant standard of her teaching and her activity.



## IN MIND OF HEAVENLY THINGS

*An Ascensiontide Meditation by PAX*

**E**ACH year I am dazzled anew by what Paul Claudel calls 'the atmosphere of glory' that is the Ascension. Perhaps I am prejudiced, as the Ascension once marked the end of a long trial of ill-health when I was allowed to make my solemn vows and final monastic profession.

It was the odder as in the past I had so often been ill on that day. So much so that I wondered if lying on one's back were not, after all, the best way of looking up at the sky and, paradoxically enough, of following our ascending Lord to glory.

A very ancient ascensiontide hymn remarks that it was  
 'after being spat upon, after being scourged,  
 after the cross, that he rose to the Father's throne'.

The beginning of the Ascension is the way of the cross. We climb Calvary and mount the cross before we ascend to the Father. But the best way of ascending is to be in him, who is the way, who said, 'No man cometh unto the Father, but by me'. The way must also be in us.

As St Augustine remarks (in Treatise 24 on John): 'By many it is understood that the Son was glorified by the Father in that he spared him not, but delivered him up for us all'. But if that were all, there would be none of that admirable 'atmosphere of glory' that is the chief note of the Ascension. So St Augustine continues: 'But if he can be said to be glorified by his passion,