VIOLENCE, TOLERANCE, AND JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE

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Abstract

This essay explores the nature of biblical tolerance as a median attitude between the extremism of violence and indifference. The present challenge is aggravated by the fact that Christianity, in the last fifty years, has had to adopt to the change from a majority to a minority situation. If different aspects of Christian tolerance are present within and outside the Church, the biblical message of justification by faith and the freedom of conscience against coercion, encourage patience in the context of a sometimes hostile culture.

Christians have always struggled to temper their doctrinal or ethical convictions. In the past challenges that were faced from a majority perspective, now have to be met from a minority one[1]. What can or should be tolerated? Where does acceptability end? When is « enough enough » and what response is appropriate to what is intolerable in the light of the Christian faith? These questions are particularly delicate today, when people in the West expect and enjoy almost limitless freedom, apart from if they stray into forms of extremism. Public transgression of all the ten commandments is tolerated, the mockery of the Christian faith, the name of Jesus in verbal blasphemy, and so on. Hate crimes, however, are not tolerated, nor are torture, unjust war, racism, anti-semitism, and environmental pollution. So social tolerance has invisible limits.

In the Christian churches, those who do not totally conform are also implicitly accepted, even sometimes on fundamental points of creed or confession, such as the bodily resurrection of Jesus or His eternal divinity — truths for which martyrs have died in bygone days and which would have been considered essential to orthodoxy fifty years ago. Extra-marital relationships, same-sex mariage, or infrequent attenders at communion have become acceptable, although in some isolated cases far-right sympathizers are excluded. Religiously we tolerate Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism, New Age spirituality and religious pluralism, but the line is drawn over the radical Muslim brotherhood, Jehovah's Witnesses, Catholic traditionalists, or American fundamentalists.

Why are contrasting attitudes accepted with so few questions? These questions also have implications as to who hospitality, a correlate of tolerance, is extended[2]. This is a hot topic today and has stimulated much discussion[3].

I A BIBLICAL DISTINCTION

In Scripture, particularly the Old Testament, there does not appear to be any striking dividing lines between reason and faith, the temporal and the eternal, the public and private, the

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[1] Wells Paul, « The Missional Minority in Post-Christian Europe », in Paul Wells, Peter Lillback and Henk Stoker, *A Covenantal Vision for Global Mission* (Phillipsburg, NJ, Presbyterian & Reformed, 2020); Moscovici Serge, *Psychologie des minorities actives* (Paris: PUF., 1982). Translation of *Social Influence and Social Change* (London: Academic Press, 1976).

[2] Boersma Hans, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005).

[3] On hospitality: Montadon Alain, (ed.), *Le livre de l'hospitalité. Accueil de l'étranger dans l'histoire et les cultures* (Paris: Bayard, 2004), Levinas Emmanuel, *Entre nous. Essais sur le penser-à-l'autre* (Paris: Grasset, 1991), Derrida Jacques, *De l'hospitalité* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1997).

temporary and the absolute, or human enquiry and faith. These contrasts are essentially part of modern dialectic, mirroring a dualism of grace and nature, passed through a post-kantian filter of utilitarianism and pragmatism. But the fundamental question is not « what are we to do? » but « what story do we belong to? »[4].

In the New Testament, the major contrast is one between faith and sight, and this is the story to which Christians belong. What is believed is eternal; what is visible is temporal. The saints of the Old Testament described in Hebrews 11 acted by faith, not based on what they could see, but precisely in opposition to their experience. Faith in a promise still unfulfilled stimulates eschatology, pointing to the future and embodying a dynamic that works in the visible world. It provides a new way of being, with a transformed attitude to the present. All human relationships are affected because they are relativized — whether national, social, sexual, familial, or interpersonal. Positively, faith enters a fallen world with a new principle: the promise grounded in the eternal covenant of redemption fulfilled in Christ. All of life is illuminated by faith, including relationships within the Church, between believers, and outsiders.

In this light, a clear distinction is drawn between the tolerance Christians are called upon to show toward outsiders, and standards expected within the Church[5]. New Testament teaching contrasts with pagan attitudes and practice. It calls for conviction and a rejection of sin within the Christian community, while recognizing differences and tolerating socially accepted mores in the broader world. Where the truths of the faith are concerned error and the behavior that follows on from it, is not accepted. But when it comes to the lifestyle characteristic of the present world, even evil is tolerated. As Paul writes in Romans 12.17, 19: "Do not repay anyone evil for evil… leave room for God's wrath." This is the opposite of accepted attitudes today, where the present and its values are the standard for ultimate judgement.

II THE SLIPPAGE

The grace and nature hierarchy eventually made the Church an authority over the world and, in this context, made the issue of tolerance acute for Roman Catholicism. Competition from heresy and later from the Reformation gave rise to difficulties, and to the extreme reaction of the Spanish Inquisition. In this context, the word « tolerance » originally had a negative connotation. To tolerate something or someone was to withhold judgment, an attitude implying disapproval or reserve toward unacceptable words or actions. When the pendulum of disapproval swung to the other side, tolerance morphed into hatred, rather in the same way that love can swing to its opposite. Classic tragedies were often driven by such animus. When hatred passes into action it becomes violence and a repetitious cycle is set in motion[6].

In Western society, where Christianity is now no longer a dominant factor, Churches have had to learn some hard lessons. They are tolerated only as long as their members' convictions do not lead to imposition on the freedom of others. Christians have learned to tolerate the diversity of ideas and lifestyles typical of a secular and pluralistic society, and to show public compliance, even if in

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[4] Cf. McIntyre Alisdair, *After Virtue. A Study in Moral Theory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011/1981).

[5] Criteria for Christian behavior are found in Galatians 5 or the First Epistle of John, for example.

[6] Cf. The many writings of French anthropologist René Girard on sacred violence, for instance *Violence and the Sacred* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

private they do not restrain from contrarian ideas. Christianity now has a marginal, non-directive, position in society, and often finds its convictions at odds with mainstream culture. So it must practice tolerance with a smile, something its representatives have not always had to do in the past. Christians have adapted and even contributed positively to secular society, as Jean Baubérot has shown in many works with regard to French Protestantism[7].

However, Christians today have moved beyond this learned tolerance into an unprecedented situation: they have become hesitant and unsure as to how their faith might inform public behavior. Without realizing it, they often speak and act as though their convictions had only relative value. The following opinion, already expressed in the last generation (and all the more relevant now), is worth recalling:

> "Properly understood, tolerance does not lead to relativism… Christians today seem to suffer from relativism and a misunderstood tolerance. They remain silent and don't know what to say, for fear of being accused of inquisition. They no longer dare profess their faith because they fear offering answers in a world that only values questioning."[8]

The classical idea of tolerance that implies a judgment of right and wrong has been overtaken: we have entered an age of fluidity where everything is acceptable and everything is compromise[9]. Many Christians have become unable to articulate their faith or to imagine its concrete implications. Is biblical teaching truly the foundation for thought, life, and action? Is that even desirable? Are all theologies equally valid — and do they all, even the most contradictory, lead to the same outcome in attitudes?

This doctrinal fluidity has ethical consequences, largely unnoticed in many Christian circles. Reincarnation, euthanasia, abortion, same-sex marriage, New Age ideas, praying with non-Christians, eco-zealotry — these attitudes no longer raise eyebrows. As Cole Porter's song says, "Anything Goes!" How then are we to understand and respond to this new *zeitgeist*?

III A NEW CONSENSUS

At its root this changed attitude has good philosophical pedigree in the West[10]. Without referencing Greek or Latin antecedents, during the European Renaissance Rabelais and Montesquieu could be named. Tolerance is close to temperance, one of Plato's four classical virtues, a moderating point between deficiency and excess in certainty. Religion is one approach to truth, and must recognize human fallibility. It cannot claim access to truth itself, which is taken to be inexpressible and transcendent in an objective or ultimate sense. Truth reveals itself only in personal and subjective, and therefore, fragmentary fashion. By consequence, tolerance is a natural human virtue, since both truth and error coexist in society and in every individual. Accepting this, one is encouraged to be tolerant of all convictions and to respect everyone. Thus Laurent Gagnebin can

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[7] Baubérot Jean, *Le protestantisme doit-il mourir?* (Paris: Seuil, 1988), 234f.

[8] Stucki Pierre-André, *Tolérance et doctrine* (Lausanne: Age d'homme, 1973), 10.

[9] Bauman Zygmunt, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).

[10] Cf. Wells Paul, « Freedom of Conscience, Reformation and the Advent of Secularism » in P. Berthoud, P.J. Lalleman, (eds.), *The Reformation. Its Roots and Legacy*, Pickwick, Eugene, OR, 2017, 191-219. Also in *Hapshin Theological Review* 6 (2017), 159-177.

say, for example, that the opposite of truth is not error but violence — or more precisely, constraint, resulting in the imposition of truth[11].

Many Christians today, reviving an old form of skepticism, doubt the uniqueness of their belief. If goodness exists in all faiths (even in communism, despite Stalin), then Christianity and its message of salvation cannot be exclusively true. Consequently, many Christians have become implicitly universalist and believe sentimentally that all beliefs are acceptable in one way or another. People find it unnecessary to stand against current opinions on the grounds of conscience, whether in articles of faith or questions of lifestyle. Religion has come to be seen as a private matter, and a consensus has formed: intolerance is undesirable because it is outdated. Christianity is simply part of a great global mosaic, contributing positively in some way to humanity's progress, which is perhaps the fundamental idol of out time. Present in all political platforms, scientific and social enterprises, and in public discourse, the idea of progress is beyond any possible criticism[12].

In the public square, which is full of conflict and division, hatred and exclusion, with internet fanning the flames of intolerance of contrarian opinions, disagreements often occur about who represents progress best. If, in the 20th century, Churches did not engage in inquisition or mass intolerance, secularized national, racial, and political ideologies took up the baton, and were more destructive than the Church had ever been. What are today's flash-points of social and political contention? Partisan politics, liberalism, populism, social marxism, environmentalism, racism, terrorism, sexism, and every other imaginable "-ism." In other words, « neutral » non-religious topics.

Modern social groups, and this includes many Churches too, champion tolerance through religious neutrality, but have blindly become politically and socially intolerant. They wear a mask of tolerance and laud its virtues, but generate new, unexpected forms of intolerance. Why? Because modern ideologies, even the « soft » ones, now seem to function like religions — with roles once filled by the Christian faith. Jean Baubérot, the French sociologist, notes:

> « When the State is no longer simply a pluralist one but becomes secular, it declines not only to endorse one god, but all gods… The only value the secular State recognizes is religious freedom… and in so doing, it more or less imposes secularism as a social creed[13]. »

Jean Ansaldi adds the following comment from a psychoanalytic viewpoint:

> « Once the God of Jesus Christ is absent from culture, capital letters start appearing everywhere: Man, Nation, Reason, Science, Party, Progress, Race… All sorts of atheism become forms of idolatry that repress the name of their gods…[14] »

Religious needs are not abolished only redirected, as our age replaces invisible values with visible ones.

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[11] Cf. Gagnebin Laurent, « Défis du christianisme, défis au christianisme, » *Études théologiques et religieuses,* 56:2 (1981), 243-252.

[12] Cf. Hermann Dooyeweerd on the criteria of progressive and reactionary, in *Christian Philosophy and the Meaning of History* (Grand Rapids: Paideia Press, 2013), 47ff.

[13] Baubérot Jean, "Conviction, tolérance et pluralisme" dans le *Bulletin du CPED*, 1987:320, 151. Jean-Paul Willaime says that « the French civil religion is a secular religion with a residue of Catholicism » quoted by Jean Baubérot, *Le protestantisme doit-il mourir?* 233.

[14] Ansaldi Jean, « Laïcité sans idéologie?, » in Hubert Bost, ed., *Genèse et enjeux de la laïcité* (Genève: Labor et Fides, 1990), 174.

But what about those with firm convictions that diverge from the secular consensus? How are dissenters tolerated, whether they be Islamic fundamentalists wanting to wear the burqa in school or to work, racists who demonstrate to expel immigrants, or evangelicals who ostensibly pray in the street outside abortion clinics? What attitude should a Christian adopt in the context of what is often an intolerant and exclusively aggressive secularity?

To relativize, privatize, or trivialize what is eternal — while turning the temporary here and now into a battleground, reverses the former order. Earthly matters now stir passion; eternal ones provoke indifference. Vital questions about our eternal destiny are ignored, while passing issues are magnified in polarized, intolerant debates, while matters of faith or doctrine raise no controversy.

How are churches adapting to this shift? It's hard to say. But we do see widespread disinterest in theological teaching and biblical knowledge even within the Church, alongside an intense focus on human rights, animal rights, developing-world reparations, or ecologism. Christians, perhaps unknowingly, reflect the surrounding culture, and their positions on today's major issues often mirror those of the world. Little is expected from the Bible. Could this be why Christian witness seems tasteless and odorless to outsiders? Perhaps it offers no truly different perspective from the social consensus and has the same reticence about metaphysical questions.

When it comes to faith and doctrine, there is silence. People are reluctant to emphasize distinctive beliefs or defend their convictions. Should we not accept everything if truth is found everywhere? Thus, modern Christianity is tempted to espouse a dictum attributed to G.K. Chesterton: « Tolerance is the virtue of those who believe in nothing » — with today's variation « ...because they believe in everything. »

Indeed, as theologians such as Jürgen Moltmann have said, we have become practical monotheists, or rather, deists[15]. It's increasingly controversial to claim that God is the Father of the eternal Son, Jesus Christ, the only way of salvation. It's more socially acceptable to say there are many paths to God and that everyone must find their own. It's popular to say that Jews, Christians, and Muslims worship the same God and that the « face of Christ » is hidden in every religion. Some hope that all religions will unite humanity.

Western Christians are therefore facing the consequences of misplaced tolerance and a diluted monotheism. They are at the edge of a precipice, unless there is a return to « the Word and the testimony, » to a revitalized Trinitarian faith that is more than naturalistic monotheism.

IV TOLERANCE FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD

From a biblical perspective, tolerance has characteristics very different from what we see today. It is useful to revisit the relationships of Christians among themselves within the Church, and with those outside it[16].

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[15] Moltmann Jürgen, *The Trinity and The Kingdom of God: The Doctrine of God* (London: SCM Press, 1981).

[16] The Qur'an makes the same distinction between the standards to be applied within the Islamic community and the tolerance to be observed towards those outside. See Qur'an 2.209, 257; 3.19; 9.6; 10.20; 16.37; 22.66s; 29.45; 33.40; 42.13s; That this distinction is common to the Bible and the Qur'an should provide common ground and foster social and public tolerance where the two religions have to cohabit. It should not be forgotten that some 16th-century Calvinists in Hungary and Transylvania preferred the Muslim yoke to Habsburg rule. See "Tolerance (Muhammadan)" in *Hastings Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (1908), xii, 365b-369b.

1 *Tolerance within the Church*

Does Paul show tolerance in Galatians 1 when he denounces « another gospel » in 1 Corinthians 10.14-22 regarding the adulterous man, or toward those who think the resurrection has already taken place? Hardly, such a thought does not seem to cross his mind. He knows full well that tolerance in such matters would lead to a compromised faith, while what must be done is to preserve the « good deposit » and « fight the good fight of faith. » There's no need to elaborate further: even a cursory reading of the New Testament — see the letters to the seven churches in Revelation — shows that primitive Christianity was intolerant when it came to deviant error. Should this surprise us? Within the community of God's people, other « truths » are not tolerable:

> « For all the gods of the nations are idols,
> But the Lord made the heavens. » (Ps 96:5)

The survival principle of God's people is separation (despite the modern negative connotation of the word and the fad of inclusivity), which in the New Testament is no longer geographical, but theological, spiritual, and moral. Separation implies sanctification, a setting apart for the service of God. It is therefore an aspect of the Christian life, modeled on the one who, as the Head of the new humanity, was « separated from sinners » (Heb 7.26). Without a clear distinction between good and evil, both in doctrine and in life, obedience to God is not possible.

Christians make this distinction every day in practical ways and in their own thoughts. The Christian community is also called to do the same in order to serve God « in spirit and in truth », and to reject certain gross errors. In the Church, unlimited pluralism and inclusivity is a destructive factor that leads to a watering down of commonly held beliefs. The confession of the truth of the *Credo* is essential. Doctrinal laxity in the name of tolerance has no more place in the Church than a traitor in an army. This implies not intolerance but a resistance to indifferentism in matters of faith. Modern theological pluralism, on the other hand, provides some fine examples of intolerance while claiming to be latitudinarian and tolerant to all.

2. *Tolerance Toward Non-Christians*

The New Testament also indicates the tolerance of Christians toward people outside the Church, simply by noting that their thought and behavior are misguided. It also acknowledges that even without the light of the Gospel, non-believers can do the will of God, because « the work of the law is written in their hearts » (Rom 2.15). Solomon, in the Proverbs, embraced the wisdom of the nations, and Paul positively cites Greek poets in his speech in Athens (Act 17.28-29)[17].

In short, Scripture calls the people of God to tolerate other people's errors, even if they must be theoretically opposed, while recognizing what is right and good beyond their own community boundaries. Paul exhorts believers to submit even to the pagan emperor, likely Nero during his reformist phase, calling him a servant (*liturgos*, Rom 13.4). Even slavery is not directly condemned. Why? Because even this evil is temporary and will, sooner or later, be judged by the God of Daniel who brings down empires. Revelation 12, written in a very different context from Romans 13, describes the inevitability of eschatological judgment. The New Testament demonstrates genuine tolerance toward society at large, and, as long as faith is not compromised, it calls for respect for the

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[17] Pardigon Flavien, *Paul Against the Idols: A Contextual Reading of the Areopagus Speech* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock 2019), 185-199.

established order and for secular power which, in spite of its erroneous religious views, is preferable to anarchy.

Are there theological foundations for this invitation to tolerance? Three aspects of biblical teaching seem to provide a positive answer, and they call Christians not only to practice tolerance but to grant freedom of thought to others.

The first consideration is general. Human beings are made in the image of God, a divine creation, and this image remains even in spite of its' being marred by human disobedience. Common grace implies respect for others' integrity and freedom, even when they are mistaken. Furthermore, human conscience, created to be personal and free to serve God in love and fellowship, needs to be unconstrained. A human being must not be subjected to mental or physical coercion in the realm of belief and behavior[18].

The second aspect is soteriological, concerning the renewal of the human conscience. Romans 8:29-30 states that salvation is like the links of a chain beginning with God's eternal love in Christ and ending in future glorification. The intermediate links are election, calling, and justification. Salvation is God's work: « It is God who justifies » (Rom 8.33). The Holy Spirit is its instrument. Salvation comes from God and is accomplished by God's grace. Saving faith is spiritual; it is neither a human act nor a human merit, and it cannot be induced by human means, including fear. All of this, emphasized during the Reformation, should encourage Christians not only toward tolerance, but also to be compassionate and to care for non-believers. It is impossible to be intolerant if one understands that without God's grace one would be just another sinner.

Finally, the third aspect is eschatological and relates to anticipation of the Kingdom of God. Its advancement owes nothing to human actions but depends on God's will. The Kingdom manifests itself in the world as a hidden, ambiguous, and mysterious reality. It is in no way identified with historical progress. Its *modus operandi* is the Word and Spirit of God. Before Christ's return and the final establishment of God's reign, there can be no ultimate justice on earth, and no religious consensus will be achieved. For the Christian, the opposite of intolerance is not tolerance of error, but patience and waiting.

Even though psychologically tolerance can be difficult, especially when major stakes are involved, Christ's disciples are nonetheless called to practice the principle of « to each their own ». The baptist Roger Williams, one of the early Puritan settlers of New England, demonstrated before Milton, Locke, Bayle, or Voltaire, that forced conversion can only be fraudulent, basing his view on the doctrines of election and freedom of conscience[19].

V JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH AND TOLERANCE

With these principles in mind, how has Protestantism practiced them? For the Magisterial Reformation, God's action is not primarily a sacramental act transmitting grace to human beings

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[18] Theodore Beza and the monarchomaques were early defenders of freedom of conscience against coercion. Cf. Wells Paul, « The Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre, the Huguenots, and Taking Up Arms », in *My Kingdom is not of this World*, Westminster Ministers Conference, Dewsbury, 2021, 119-144. Also in *Hapshin Theological Review* 10 (2022), 200-243.

[19] Roger Williams in 1644 published *The bloudy tenent of persecution for cause of conscience: discussed in a conference between truth and peace* (Mercer University Press, 2001), available on line.

through continuing incarnation. It is the power of the Gospel in the once and for all event of the cross of Christ, which is the promise of forgiveness granted to humanity. This explains why the ecclesiastical institution developed a different attitude in Protestantism and in Roman Catholicism[20].

In Roman Catholicism, the Church is the instrument of God's grace standing above history and culture incarnating the action of God for all humanity. It is the place in history where God acts and his grace is manifested. This implies the superiority of the role of the Church over society, and also of the believer over the non-believer, which can foster an attitude of intolerance[21]. For the Reformation, on the other hand, grace entered history in such a way that all human projects are rendered void before God. God's justice was satisfied by Christ at the cross and attested in the resurrection. Divine justice precedes us in history and grants salvation to those who receive the Gospel in faith. Salvation is by pure grace; it is anchored in the believer's experience by faith, to which God's promise is made and which, for that reason, is justifying. Faith is the foundational reality that defines believers. While awaiting their eternal destiny, they live in a historical situation marked by finitude, sin, and relativity. Christians are not superior beings to others, either by the grace received or by works that express it; they are simply different from others because of justifying faith.

For Protestantism, the Church makes its presence visible where the Gospel is preached and where God is confessed. It is not the means of transmission of grace; it is an institution passively justified and actively sanctified by the Word of God and it is always humanly fallible. This view stands over against the concept of *Christendom*, since it separates the Church and the body politic, seeing them as parallel human institutions with distinct callings, as attested by Martin Luther's two kingdom theology[22]. The Church is not called to govern the world but to serve through the prophetic witness of the Gospel.

The Protestant view of grace and of the Church invites Christians to walk the path of tolerance toward individuals and societies where that faith is not acknowledged. Put differently, both the Church and its individual members are *simul justus et peccator*, at once righteous and sinful. The act of justice accomplished by Christ and recognized by faith guarantees the believer's freedom and the certainty of salvation and grants freedom of conscience. It frees from pessimism, skepticism, and relativism. Christians who understand the value of human nature and the meaning of history as revealed in justification cannot adopt a cynical or irresponsible social attitude. Individually and in the Church, they strives to act consistently, recognizing that they are always sinners and that the church community is also fallible. Believing human nature, with all its weaknesses, is no different from others'. Their works, even those inspired by faith and love, contribute nothing to salvation. This is why they must guard, individually and collectively, against fanaticism, absolutism, and perfectionism, and refuse to persecute heretics. Freedom of conscience respects the inviolability of the conscience of others. No-one can be forced into a change of heart.

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[20] Wells Paul, « Eglises et histoire: un modèle pour interpréter la différence entre le Catholicisme romain et le protestantisme », *La Revue réformée,* 54:1 (2003), 40-53.

[21] This perspective is extensively discussed in Reinhold Niebuhr's classic, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, II (London: Nisbet, 1943), chaps. 5-8.

[22] Ebeling Gerhard, *Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 175-191.

The *simul justus et peccator* formula aptly describes the Christian condition and steers away from both triumphalism (which encourages persecution) and historical relativism or skepticism (which foster despair). The Reformers, coming out of a monolithic Christendom, and their heirs have not always remained faithful to these principles. Yet, these ideas contain the seeds necessary for nurturing a tolerant attitude toward the convictions of others and freedom of conscience.

VI WALKING IN THE THIRD WAY

After what has been said, it is clear that Christian truths cannot be imposed on society. The distinction between what happens inside the Church and outside is important. Theological confession of creation, salvation, and eschatology support the rejection of coercive or intolerant behavior toward others. There is no such thing as a forced conversion in Scripture.

Many Protestant churches today seem to adopt attitudes that forget the theological foundation of tolerance and the reasons for it. Why do they think they are doing right by adopting the causes and agendas of the culture and dressing them up in a language of love? Why spend less time and energy proclaiming the biblical message than virtue signaling to appear good according to the demands of the times? Are Christians driven more, like their contemporaries, by a love of « causes » rather than a love of people, as though the Church's practical agenda were written by the world? And on the other hand, there are those who are driven to shut themselves off from others in condemnation, judgment and « holier than thou » attitudes out of reaction or by fear. One extreme is as bad as the other, and sometimes it is difficult to walk in the third path, because it is misunderstood by both.

To survive as communities, Churches must be motivated by the truth of the Gospel, its demands, and by a healthy wariness against internal deviation from biblical truth. One is not born a Christian in Christian nations which, if they ever were Christian, are no longer so. One becomes a Christian by regeneration of heart and life in repentance and faith, as Christ and Scripture teach. Without this, there is only a deceptive veneer of Christianity, and the risk of its disappearance from the West is real.

If Churches are committed to the truth of the biblical message, and are truly tolerant, they will be attractive because the hiatus between how they talk and how they walk will fade away. In their witness they will obviously not seek to impose Christian convictions on those who do not share them, but they will work alongside all those who, belonging to a common humanity, have a conscience aligned to the divine law written on the conscience[23]. A Christian or a Church can therefore act in concert with non-Christians; their motivations will be different, even though they share the « good » as a common goal. For instance, what about racism, fueled by fears of Islamization and the presence of many foreigners in Europe? People denounce racism based on republican principles or human dignity, apart from any considerations of people's origin. The Christian adds more: that every human being is a creature of God and recalls Peter's vision: « nothing is impure » because everything belongs to God[24]. Christians know the earth was given to all, and no place belongs definitively or by right to anyone, as history also shows. Moreover, no geographical place is a sacred space, and even Jerusalem has been replaced by the new Jerusalem above.

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[23] Romans 2.14-16.

[24] Acts 10.15-16.

Christians are rightly concerned with preserving their cultural heritage. The best defense against the spread of hostile ideas is the presence and witness of Christians and an awareness that the fundamental narrative on which Western culture was built is a desirable thing. Unfortunately, the moral picture offered by « Christian » Western countries today is far from impressive and their self-hatred contributes only to further confusion.

CONCLUSION

Should intolerance in society be tolerated? Certainly not! But when can we say there is *real intolerance* and how are we to measure that the legitimate demands of freedom are transgressed? Christians know their calling—to be « the salt of the earth, » meaning that which gives flavor and prevents corruption. And they know that since the weeds (tares) will not be separated from the wheat until Christ's return[25], they must be as patient as their Master, tolerant in today's terms. This programme is far from easy to live out daily, but Christ, who works in us to will and to do through His Spirit, can grant us the wisdom to march to the beat of a different drummer.

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[25] Matthew 13.24-30.