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Religious Tolerance in Catholic Tradition

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RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE IN CATHOLIC TRADITION†

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TOLERANCE IS A PARADOXICAL CONCEPT. It consists in permitting what one knows certainly to be an evil or an error. *Permissio negativa mali* (negative permission of evil), the theologians define it – negative, because the permission in no way implies encouragement of the evil.

It would follow, therefore, that tolerance is not a virtue in the strict sense of the term. But virtue sanctions and requires the practice of tolerance, for the evil or error it permits is always in the interests of a greater good that is thereby defended or promoted.

Tolerance finds its basic justification in the analogy between human law and the divine law which governs the universe. St. Thomas Aquinas taught:

> Human government is derived from divine government which it should imitate. Though God is all-powerful and sovereignly good, He permits the occurrence of evil in the universe which He could prevent. He does so in order that the suppression of evil may not entail the suppression of greater goods or even beget worse evils. Similarly in the case of human government, those who govern well will tolerate evil in order to foster good or prevent worse evil.[1]

Leo XIII returned to this thought in his encyclical "Libertas"[2] when he said:

> With the discernment of a true Mother, the Church weighs the great burden of human weakness and well knows the course along which the actions of men are being borne in this our age. For this reason, while not conceding any right to anything save what is true and honest, she does not forbid public authority to tolerate what is at variance with truth and justice for the sake of avoiding some greater evil or preserving some

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1 AQUINAS, SUMMA THEOLOGICA, II-II, q. 10, art. 11, obj. 3.

2 ACTA LEONIS XIII 205.

> greater good. God Himself in His Providence, though infinitely good and powerful, permits evil to exist in the world, partly that greater good may not be impeded and partly that greater evil may not ensue. In the government of states it is not forbidden to imitate the Ruler of the world; and, as the authority of man is powerless to prevent every evil, it has, as St. Augustine says, "to overlook and leave unpunished many things which are punished, and rightly, by divine Providence."[3]

If, in certain circumstances, human law can and should tolerate evil for the sake of the common good – and for this reason alone – this does not mean that it can approve of or wish evil for its own sake. Being in itself the privation of good, evil is opposed to the common welfare which the human legislator must seek out and promote to the best of his ability. Human law should strive to imitate God who, though He allows evil to exist in the world, "wills neither that it come to pass nor fail to come to pass. He simply permits it. And that is good."[4] This single brief formula of the Angelic Doctor contains the entire Catholic doctrine on tolerance.

In the allocution to the Italian Catholic jurists on 3rd December, 1953, Pius XII remarked:

> Hence the affirmation that religious and moral error must always be impeded when it is possible, because toleration of them is in itself immoral, is not valid *absolutely and unconditionally*. Moreover, God has not given to human authority such an absolute and universal control in matters of faith and morality. Such a command is unknown to the common convictions of mankind, to Christian conscience, to the sources of Revelation and to the practice of the Church. To omit here other scriptural texts which are adduced in support of this argument, Christ in the parable of the cockle gives the following advice: let the cockle grow in the field of the world together with the good seed in view of the harvest.[5] The duty of repressing moral and religious error cannot therefore be an ultimate norm of action. It must be subordinate to *higher and more general* norms which in particular circumstances permit, and perhaps even seem to indicate as the better policy, toleration of error in order to promote a *greater good.*

But what is the greater good which justifies, even demands, tolerance on the part of Catholics in respect to other religious confessions?

Prudence, in so far as it provides a man with a correct insight into how he must act, is the virtue generally recognized as justifying tolerance. In our case, however, should this prudence amount to mere practical foresight? To put it graphically, are we prevented from once again condemning the heretic to the stake only because of the peculiar historical situation of the Church to-day? Or should tolerance proceed from loftier principles, such as respect for the truth or for the manner in which God acts on the human soul?

Religious tolerance, we maintain, should proceed from respect for the truth and for the manner in which the human intellect arrives at the truth, rather than from respect for freedom in itself. Here we are drawing a distinction between the Catholic concept of tolerance and the ideas expressed by John Locke in his *Letter on Tolerance.* Pius XI clarified the essential elements of that distinction in his encycli-

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[3] ST. AUGUSTINE, DE LIB. ARBITR., Lib. 1, cap. 6, num. 14.

[4] SUMMA THEOLOGICA, I, q. 19, art. 9, ad 3.

[5] Matt. xiii, 24-30.

cal, *Non abbiamo bisogno,* where he declared:

> . . . We are, as we stated above, happy and proud to wage the good fight for the liberty of consciences, not indeed for the liberty of conscience, as someone, perhaps inadvertently, has quoted us as saying. This [liberty of conscience] is an equivocal expression, too often distorted to mean the absolute independence of conscience which is absurd in a soul created and redeemed by God.

A False View

Before developing the Church's position on tolerance, let us first view Catholic doctrine through the eyes of non-Catholics who have been influenced by the secular press.

According to the viewpoint commonly called radical to-day the principle of religious tolerance is part and parcel of those philosophical systems that are known as relativism and philosophical historicism. These systems teach that *truth is human* rather than divine. They can be understood in a twofold sense. I would call them dogmatic, in so far as they have given rise to a new form of religiosity called "the religion of freedom." They may also be called sceptical, in so far as they inspired the decadent interpretations of historicism. Renan, for example, considered himself the embodiment of the spirit of tolerance when he taught that all views of the world were, in their essence, equally true. Similarly, modern relativism claims to admit all positions save any which presents itself as absolute truth.

Because it is under the influence of relativism, our modern secularist culture has no alternative but to define the Catholic position on tolerance through words which have been attributed to the Catholic apologist, Louis Veuillot: "When we are a minority, we claim freedom for ourselves in the name of your principles of tolerance; when we are a majority, we deny freedom to you in the name of our own principles." (Actually Veuillot never made any such statement.)

At this point it is most important to recall the thesis which lays the foundation for the secularist perspective of history. The proposition that a transcendent religion must lead to intolerance is necessary to the secularist view. That is why all secularists hold it, even the most moderate. Their position is the result of an historical judgment according to which the Church exhausted its positive civilizing function in the Middle Ages. To-day it is unable to provide the spiritual ferment necessary for the development of civil life. It is concerned only with its own survival. In its nostalgia for the past, the secularist maintains, the Church resists the modern world and finds its strength in the inevitable crises which accompany historical progress.

In this view, the Church, from the Counter-Reformation on, inevitably became the centre around which every type of conservatism rallied. The Church found it possible to ally herself with the established order, and even to take on the colouring of its strongest ally. Thus, in the nineteenth century, the secularists maintain, when the ultimate victory of the *ancien régime* still seemed possible, the Church was anti-Liberal. To-day it is ready to borrow the Liberal ideology proper to the bourgeoisie.

The secularist would argue, therefore, that the Church to-day is ready to accept the principle of tolerance only because she would be otherwise incurably impotent in the modern world.

Adolph Harnack, the Protestant Liberal historian, expressed most clearly the idea that intolerance and transcendent truth

went hand in hand. In 1925 he wrote: "We would again see raging the religious persecutions the Catholic churches are forced to employ when they have attained power. Their concept of the nature of the Church and of the nature of obedience in matters of faith demands persecution."[6]

Other authors go so far as to pretend that intolerance, in the eyes of the Church, is the logical consequence of the virtue of charity. Indeed, they argue, since the Church believes that membership is a necessary moral condition if man is to attain eternal salvation, then its transformation into an institution of power and the development of an inquisitorial character become for her a duty of mercy. As Nietzsche put it, it is therefore not charity, but the impotence of charity which prevents Catholics from once again setting fire to the stakes. Croce, who furnished the cultural ammunition for the anticlerical Liberalism made popular to-day by *Il Mondo* and *l'Expresso,* held the same point of view. So too did Jaspers, a secularist, but by no means an extremist in his thinking:

> The pretence to dogmatic exclusiveness is constantly on the point of again preparing the lighted stake for the heretic. It is in the nature of things, for, even though the great number of believers lack the stomach for violence or for the suppression of those who, in their point of view, are infidels, the pretence to exclusiveness common to all forms of biblical religion demands it.[7]

In all honesty one must admit that the history of the nineteenth century seemed at times to lend an air of truth to such assertions as these. The realization that the so-called "modern world" suffered from fundamental error weighed heavily on the mind of nineteenth-century Catholicism. The new values of this world (though imperfect in their expression and in the logic which accepted them) could not be made to conform to the potentialities of Catholic doctrine. As a result, Catholics felt impelled, on the one hand, to turn back to the Middle Ages in their search for a unique, ideal model of Christian civilization and, on the other, to confuse the concept of freedom with the doctrine of naturalism, thereby conceding far too much to their adversaries.

Liberalism's Failure

But history, as far back as World War I, has given the lie to the Modernists. The extremes of immanentism – the doctrine that *truth is human* – has to-day become historic fact in Marxism. It has given way to what we call totalitarianism, to a form of persecution not only of Christianity, but of reason itself. In comparison, the harshness and cruelty of the Inquisition, painted even in their blackest aspects, pale into insignificance.

Moreover, it has become obvious that secularist Liberalism has proved incapable of resolving the problem of the transition to a democratic form of society in which every development is considered to be the end result of a purely social process. Forced by its theoreticians to hold fast to the "prophecy of the past," and to cherish its vision of the world of yesterday, secular Liberalism has forfeited its influential place in history.

Catholics, on the contrary, have taken up the defence of their own minority rights

[6] DIE EICHE, 13, Munich, p. 295, cited in PRIBILLA, UNITE CHRETIENNE ET TOLERANCE RELIGIEUS 189 (Paris 1950).

[7] DER PHILOSOPHISCHE 73 (Munich 1948).

and, where they find themselves a majority, the freedom of all others. As true defenders of human dignity, they point the way toward the transition from a Liberal to a democratic form of society.

For a precise notion of the Catholic sense of tolerance, we must first dissociate the teaching of the Church from the principles of philosophical relativism. The Church, conscious that she is the unique legitimate representative of truth, must be intolerant from the dogmatic point of view. By that we mean that she must reject religious indifference. The Church insists on the primary importance of the problem of truth and on the fact that religious truths correspond to metaphysical reality. These truths are not mere symbolic attitudes. Indeed, if the Church did not profess dogmatic intolerance, she would in fact be yielding to the relative concept of truth taught by historicism, even to the point of considering her own universality as a mere historical accident dependent on the so-called religions of freedom or of humanity.

Moreover, the Church must continue to reject all forms of Averrhoism and Spinozaism, systems which make a distinction between the religion of the savants – philosophy, in other words – and the religion of the common man, which pretends to adapt for the profane those truths which only the philosopher can know in their rational form.

This means that the Church cannot accept Modernism in any shape or form. Were the Church to yield to Modernism, it would mean putting the stamp of approval on the false values of the philosophies of history and of the human religions of the nineteenth century. Catholicism itself would disintegrate into a mere human religion in its anxiety to realize an effective universality.

Dogmatic intolerance, therefore, logically follows from the idea that truth is eternal. To deny the objectivity of truth is to consider equally valid, even in different historical circumstances, positions which, from the religious and moral point of view, are mutually contradictory.

All the papal condemnations of rationalism, therefore, from the *Mirari vos* of Gregory XVI (1832) to the Syllabus of Pius IX, retain their original force. It is entirely erroneous to suppose that Leo XIII indicated a new and different direction in the encyclicals *Immortale Dei* (1885) and *Libertas*. *Immortale Dei* begins, as a matter of fact, with a rejection of the rationalist and naturalist concepts of the state which have for their essential and characteristic purpose the establishment of the authority of man in place of that of God. *Libertas* clarifies perfectly the relationship between what the Sovereign Pontiff calls Liberalism in the language of the period (what is to-day known as radicalism) and a certain philosophy. The promoters of Liberalism correspond in the social and civic order to the partisans of rationalism and naturalism in philosophy, for they would introduce the philosophical principles of these systems into daily life. It should be clearly understood that the term naturalism signifies the rejection of the supernatural to the point of fusing those concepts which are proper to materialism and historicism.

The Church then has no alternative but to remain *dogmatically intolerant*. But dogmatic intolerance should not beget an attitude of civil or practical intolerance. This is the distinction which Pius XI implied in *Non abbiamo bisogno*. It follows from his

words that the defence of freedom has nothing in common with the tenets of the so-called religion of freedom. Genuine freedom is something quite distinct from the false elevation of freedom to the rank of religion. As Aubert has correctly observed, in this text of Pius XI, and in analogous texts of Popes who succeeded Leo XIII, one can perceive the beginnings of a theology of tolerance and of freedom of conscience in the sense understood to-day. He correctly adds that to work for a fully satisfactory elaboration of this theology, one liberated from the philosophical postulates of Liberalism and rationalism, constitutes one of the greatest tasks of the modern theologian.

It remains now to show how, from the idea of the eternity and objectivity of truth – in a word, of the divinity of truth – there follows the idea of respect for freedom of consciences, while from the notion that truth is human there follows the extreme intolerance characteristic of modern secularistic, totalitarian religions.

The idea of tolerance as exposed in Catholic thought is extremely simple. In substance it can be reduced to this: *no one should be forced against his will to accept the Catholic faith.* Respect for the truth demands freedom of consent. A truth imposed is not a truth accepted as such. Persuasion, Rosmini rightly noted, cannot be forced.

With this in mind we can now turn to a consideration of the greater good which justifies religious tolerance on the part of the Catholic – namely, *the need for truth to be accepted as truth.*

What we mean is this: when one affirms that truth is objective, by that very fact he admits of a distinction between truth itself and the act by which the individual yields to truth. Hence in recognizing the objectivity of truth, the individual is, at the same time, establishing the right to personal freedom. Where truth is imposed, there arises confusion between religion and politics. As history has so often demonstrated, truth tends to become an instrument in the hands of the state. According to the Christian conscience, the relationship of politics to religion is one of subordination. But where truth is imposed, religion and politics become entangled. This confusion of religion and politics has been typical of every form of paganism and reflects a situation which has been carried to extremes in the totalitarian regimes of to-day.

Moreover, Christian teaching concerning the presence of God in the human soul and belief in the absolute, transcendent value in history of the human person lays the foundation for the use of persuasive methods in matters of religious faith and forbids coercion and violence. On the contrary, systems of thought which radically deny the Christian concept of man, in so far as they hold that the thought of man is always determined by his historical situation, must necessarily lead to the most rigid form of intolerance. Indeed, if man must change as society changes, then it makes no sense at all to speak of methods of persuasion.

If this principle is valid for metaphysical and moral truth, it is with more reason valid in the domain of grace and faith. No man can pretend to substitute for the action of God in the human soul without exposing himself to obvious sacrilege. No modern theologian would hesitate to stigmatize as a tyrant the political leader who would impose a religion by force on his subjects. Indeed, how could one think of imposing Christianity without opening the

door to the worst sacrilege of all – that against the Eucharist? Cajetan observes that sacrilege against the Eucharist is the most serious, because it directly offends the humanity of Christ which is contained therein.

In modern times the possibility of treating the problem of freedom of consciences and civil tolerance from a new angle begins with Leo XIII, who stated in *Immortale Dei:*

> The Church indeed deems it unlawful to place various forms of divine worship on the same footing as the true religion, but does not, on that account, condemn those rulers who, for the sake of securing some greater good, or of hindering some great evil, tolerate in practice that these various forms of religion have a place in the State. And in fact the Church is wont to take earnest heed that no-one shall be forced to embrace the Catholic faith against his will, for, as St. Augustine wisely reminds us, "Man cannot believe otherwise than of his own free will."[8]

Thus with Leo XIII the Church begins to stress, not only dogmatic intolerance, which must be strictly maintained, and the historical evils that civil tolerance can prevent, such as civil discord and wars of religion, but also the positive good that can come from religious liberty – namely, the safeguarding of the act of faith.

There is an obvious relationship between this concept of liberty and the appeal which Leo XIII makes to Thomism. As a philosophical system, Thomism best establishes the necessary distinction that must be drawn between the domain of the Church and the domain of the State. In general, Thomism distinguishes between faith and reason. It rejects the tendency to absorb the demands of the natural law into the sphere of supernatural justice, *i.e.,* the law of the State into the law of the Church. According to Arquilliére, its most competent historian, this tendency characterized medieval Augustinian political philosophy. Yet, in the light of the teachings of St. Augustine himself, this tendency must be put down as an oversimplification, for it does not represent the integrity of his thought even though the letter of his writings be pushed to the extreme.

This principle that the positive promotion of the common good demands civil and religious tolerance is again explicitly defended by Leo XIII in *Libertas* where the Pontiff says:

> Liberty may also be taken to mean that every man in the State may follow the will of God and, from a consciousness of duty and free from every obstacle, obey His commands. This indeed is true liberty, a liberty worthy of the sons of God, which nobly maintains the dignity of man, and is stronger than all violence or wrong – a liberty which the Church has always desired and held most dear. This is the kind of liberty which the Apostles claimed for themselves with intrepid constancy, which the apologists of Christianity affirmed by their writings, and which the martyrs in vast numbers consecrated by their blood.

Despite such an authoritative statement, the idea is prevalent, not only among unbelievers, but among Catholics as well, that the acceptance of this concept of liberty is only a concession *suggested by prudence and grudgingly made to the spirit of the times.*

Catholic Tradition

It is, therefore, important to point out that it was genuine Catholic tradition that inspired the declarations of Leo XIII, Pius XI and Pius XII. The principles of

[8] TRACT XXVI IN JOHANNEM, n. 2.

tolerance should be explained not as though they represent an effort on the part of the Church to come to a compromise with the modern world. On the contrary, they represent a new development of the permanent principles of Catholicism — a development which is capable of assimilating and, at the same time, purifying what is worthwhile in modern thought. This development, moreover, is accomplished by making more precise the application of permanent principles to new problems.

Roman Catholic tradition is filled with texts which support such a development. It is common knowledge that the ancient State was founded on principles which confused the divine and the social, *i.e.,* the religious and the political, and that Christianity set for itself the task of separating the things of Caesar from those of God. Christianity was far ahead of the State in proclaiming the absolute value of the human person. This theme re-echoes throughout the entire works of Pius XII.

In one of his letters, St. Gregory the Great wrote:

> If, moved by a right intention, you desire to lead to the true faith those who are outside the Christian fold, you should use persuasion, not violence. Otherwise minds which are ripe for enlightenment will be alienated because of your hostility. Those who act differently under the pretext of bringing men to accept their own religious traditions show that they are seeking their own wills rather than the will of God.

In a letter to the bishops of France, dated 6th April, 1233, Gregory IX laid down the lines of conduct to be adopted in regard to the Jews. He declared: "As for the Jews, Christians ought to conduct themselves with the same charity that they would desire to see used toward Christians who live in pagan countries." This shows that the Sovereign Pontiffs and the Doctors of the Middle Ages faced the problem of tolerance in regard to the Jews. *Basically, to-day's position is only a universalization of their attitude.*

Later Innocent III recalled the same principles to the Archbishop of Arles. "It is contrary to the Christian religion," he pointed out, "that a man be forced to become and to remain Christian against his will and despite his opposition."

Some time later St. Thomas wrote in the *Summa* that infidels, such as the Gentiles and the Jews, who have never accepted the faith should in no manner be forced to believe, because belief is an act of the will. When Christians make war on the infidel, the Angelic Doctor continues, "it is not to oblige them to accept Christianity; it is only to force them not to oppose the faith of Christ." For, as he points out, if Christians triumph over the infidel and reduce him to captivity, they should leave him his freedom of choice in regard to religion.

Obvious Objections

Nevertheless, though it is possible to show that the Catholic doctrine on religious tolerance is only a development of traditional principles, an objection remains: How did it come to pass that the principles have been so late in yielding to developments? We cannot deny that the Inquisition refused men their freedom of conscience. Nor can we deny that representatives of the Church often praised the sometimes violent methods employed by the Counter-Reformation. It is also true that many of the expressions used by Gregory XVI and Pius IX are clearly contrary to the idea of religious liberty. We can go further and admit that the distinc-

tion we make to-day between the "thesis" and the "hypothesis" tends to leave the modern mind perplexed. In seeming to distinguish between the ideal of tolerance and the concrete historical situations in which she has found herself, the Church appears to have sanctioned a policy which is based on compromise.

The Answer

In answering these objections it is most important to realize that the problem of religious liberty is *essentially a modern one.* We must distinguish between the doctrine of the Church and the impact given historical situations have made on the Church. Furthermore, it is particularly important to stress that the Inquisition was never an essential factor in Church discipline. As an historical phenomenon, it must be explained in the light of the spiritual situation of the Middle Ages. That period was characterized by a unity of faith which was lived. There was then no question of justifying the freedom of the act of faith, but rather of finding a religious justification for current cultural values.

With this in mind it is easy to understand why, in the Middle Ages, theologians directed their attention to *objective truth,* leaving in the shadows the subjective aspect of human adherence to truth. By contrast, the modern era is called the *age of reflection,* because reflection on the subjective attitudes of the mind is its dominant characteristic.

It was, therefore, natural that the Middle Ages should have insisted on dogmatic intolerance, all the while ignoring the notion of civil tolerance. Granted the unity of faith characteristic of the Middle Ages, whoever separated himself from the Church was a heretic in the formal sense of the word. One could not then speak of a plurality of religious beliefs. One did not inherit heresy. The heretic was persecuted, not so much for his heresy, as for the deliberate separation of himself from the unity of faith and love which constituted the religious community. The fundamental reason why the heretic was persecuted lay not so much in his error as in his grave personal culpability, his evil moral disposition.

It should not be astonishing then that the problem of freedom of consciences was either not at all or rarely posed during this period. What is important is to discover if, in contradistinction to the religious positions taken by the Church during the Middle Ages, there are not doctrinal elements in the teaching of the Roman Church which would enable her to confront the problem of religious liberty as we know that problem to-day. The answer, as we have already seen, is Yes.

It is only fair to consider the condemnations of Gregory XVI and Pius IX in the light of the adversaries against whom they were pronounced. They were not concerned with the distinction between dogmatic and civil tolerance which we have been stressing. They did insist on total intransigence on the theoretical plane even to the point of expecting Catholics to deny all spontaneous recognition of religious freedom to dissenters. But in analysing their statements, we must insist on certain principles of historical criticism which demand that any statement be judged in its historical context — in this case, in relation to the anti-Catholicism of the time.

Much of what in the nineteenth century was called Liberalism we to-day would call radicalism. The Liberalism of the nineteenth century very often associated its political tenets with a view of life which was distinctly anti-Catholic. The so-called

"declarations of the modern conscience" were meant to oppose what remained of the "dark ages." Moreover, the Liberalism of the nineteenth century was associated with Freemasonry. This was the age which not only idolized the figure of Julian the Apostate, but sought to resume his type of persecution. (I refer, for example, to the anticlericalism of the Third Republic of France and the Laws of Combes.)

Hence the freedom to all cults and to all opinions preached by Liberalism was, in the mind of those who promoted it, practically equivalent to a denial of the Catholic cult. The Liberals sought to establish those political and cultural conditions which would result in the disappearance from the modern conscience of what they called "a residue of intolerance." Catholicism, they taught, was no longer adaptable to progress. In reality they were only establishing an Inquisition in reverse, in which ridicule rather than the stake became the penalty. The Catholic was excluded from dialogue on the grounds that he represented a pre-scientific mentality which had long since been left behind by the irreversible forward march of history.

This exclusion from dialogue represented a new type of inquisitorial punishment, at least as serious as those associated with tradition. But radicalism, in linking freedom with anti-supernatural rationalism, was not denying dogmatism, as it wished the world to believe. It was rather marking a transition to a new type of dogmatism – the dogmatism of the modern conscience. Thus it was Liberalism itself, at least in its radical expression, which in the nineteenth century made the issue one of dogmatism. It is this fact which explains why the Sovereign Pontiffs were especially concerned with dogmatic intolerance.

We have already pointed out that the reason for dogmatic intolerance is such that the Church cannot renounce it in any way. Certainly there were Catholic Liberals in the nineteenth century – among whom we may list Cavour who sought during the last months of his life to reconcile Liberalism and Catholicism–but it must be observed that they, while hazily perceiving what was legitimate and Christian in the claims of the modern conscience, were wrong in not seeing the complexity of the problem and in general in formulating their position in terms of compromise.

The adversaries have changed to-day. The notion that there is an essential connection between anti-supernatural rationalism and the affirmation of freedom, in both the theoretical and practical sense of the word, is admittedly false. Conditions are, therefore, ripe for the explanation of the traditional principles of the Church in regard to religious tolerance as we have enunciated them.

To-day, the cause of civilization and the cause of personal freedom are one and the same, while the cause of barbarism is synonymous with an extreme intolerance which has nothing in common with any Catholic doctrine.

We have written these lines to demonstrate that, if the Church to-day leaps to the defence of human freedom, it is not because she has been forced by historical necessity to submit. Nor does her defence of human freedom mean that she has entered into a compromise with principles that are alien to her teaching. In the presence of a new historical situation the Church merely affirms the dignity of the human person and its essential relationship to the primacy of truth which has always been the norm of her teaching and action.