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*What is and what is not Religious Tolerance?**(In) a phenomenological approach*

*Let me start with two remarks. My first remark concerns the method of this essay, the second remark is of historical retrospection to the beginnings of toleration in Hungary.*

**PHENOMENOLOGY IN RELIGIOUS SCIENCES**

As far as I have observed, strife exists over the method of religious studies. Some scholars say that the method of religious studies is a simple positivist method of collecting data about the phenomenon observed. Positivism is a system of working hypothesis based on things that can be seen or proven rather than on speculation. Analysis of data and data processing play a decisive role in religious studies, but the most salient feature of religious studies is obtaining information and setting out facts.

Others say that the proper method of religious studies is phenomenology. Adolf REINACH was convinced that the core of every science is the method: "For the essential point is this, that phenomenology is not a system of philosophical propositions and truths...but rather it is a method of philosophising which is required by the problems of philosophy (and let me add that it is required by the problems of every science – K. H.), which is very different from the manner of viewing and verifying in life, and which is even more different from the way in which one does and must work in most sciences" (194-195). According to this view, the proper method of religious sciences requires going beyond mere observation and induction in order to obtain knowledge about the world of essences and states of facts necessarily grounded in the initial observations.

REINACH writes that, "Many sciences, by their very nature, do not involve direct intuition of essences (*Wesensschau*)" (196). In contrast to the positivist account, the realist phenomenology emphasizes the essence-intuition. It is

to be remarked that Dietrich VON HILDEBRAND also refuses the genetic explanation when he speaks about the method of phenomenology: "it (phenomenology) is also in contrast to any genetic approach which claims that we understand the object when we know its causes" (223). Knowing the causes of something is not enough, knowing the real essence of the thing itself—this is true knowledge.

Let me clarify it with a very simple example of mathematics. The main question of mathematics is "What is the essence of number?" The mathematician has no answer to this question, because he is totally satisfied with the mere use of numbers; he or she is not interested in the construction of axioms and principles. Not only has the mathematician no need, within his discipline, to verify the assumed axioms; he also does not need to understand their ultimate content (REINACH, 201). REINACH claims that the method of the modern mathematicians is an anti-phenomenological attitude. From their attitude, one can infer that they don't want to bring light to the essence of things (that) they are working with. As John CROSBY says, this method is in opposition to the evident nature of mathematical entities. (148). He goes on like this: the mathematician "simply stipulates certain things about these mathematical entities for the purposes of a given mathematical system, and then makes deductions from this stipulations" (CROSBY 148). One can ask whether the law of association or a simple adding up can be explained without profound knowledge about the essence of numbers? If not (and I do not think it can be explained without that), then one can say that mathematics is grounded in mere unproved presuppositions and conventions. Mathematicians do not investigate the nature of the objects which mathematics deals with. The evidence of axioms and the nature of number are not

investigated and this attitude is in perfect opposition with (realist) phenomenology.

Referring to the all-embracing nature of this phenomeno-



logical method, we can say with John CROSBY, “that phenomenology has something to give to all of philosophy (and sciences – K. H.) by restoring the attitude of inquiring into what things are in their innermost being, what their essence is” (CROSBY 150). It is also a salient feature of the phenomenology that its emphasis is on the existential, immediate intuitive

contact with the object, which is in opposition to any abstractionism or any dealing with mere concepts. (VON HILDEBRAND, 224)

Obviously phenomenology has an anti-empirist tendency in its origin, but we see that this tendency does not mean an absolute rejection of empirical data: “The phenomenological approach is not, however, restricted to the philosophical essences, that is, to philosophical apriori knowledge. It is also indispensable for the deeper understanding of many data which play a predominant role in the humanities, such as a great individual personality...”(VON HILDEBRAND, 224-225). One must not restrict the scope of phenomenology only to necessary essences; one can apply it to the questions of real existences, such as questions of religious studies and questions of religion in general.

Without going further into the clarification of the question, I claim that the essence analysis leads to the real core of things where the essence will be necessarily-having-to-be-so (*Notwendiger-so-sein-Müssen*) and essentially-cannot-be-otherwise (*Nicht-anders-sein-Können*) (REINACH, 210).

The essay will examine phenomenologically – in the sense of the foregoing – what is tolerance and what is not. In this context, phenomenology means a study of essences (*Wesensanalyse*), which tells us – apart from any particular case – what tolerance is in itself. I, however, am going to answer the question of *tolerance* pointing out not only the salient features, but the features which belong to the very essence of the phenomenon. Nevertheless, it is an interesting attempt to illustrate it with the current Hungarian situation. So much for the method.

### THE NATURE OF TOLERANCE

My second remark is a memento, and as a Hungarian I am very proud of it. In the XVI<sup>th</sup> century Hungary was divided into three parts. The middle of Hungary was invaded by the Ottoman Empire, the northern part of Hungary was under Austrian rule, and independent

Transylvania was, in reality, “Hungary” at that time. Of all European countries, the doctrine of religious freedom was codified first in Transylvania, in 1568. The law stated that all religions had the same rights and that nobody should be punished for changing his or her denomination. Until the fall of the Transylvanian Principality (1711), the Calvinist Church, the Catholic Church, the Lutheran Church, the Unitarian Church, and moreover the Romanian Orthodox Church and Antitrinitarian churches such as the Sabbatarian Church could live in a peaceful coexistence. This was the first document of religious toleration in the known world. I think the religious toleration realised in Transylvania was not only a unique example of that epoch, but a model to be followed in the new European Union.

In order to start our investigation about the nature of tolerance, let us formulate, with the help of intuition, a preliminary definition of tolerance which we can use as a working hypothesis: *tolerance is a policy of patient forbearance in the presence of something that is disliked or disapproved of. Toleration is far from an ideal policy; it is contaminated by that very implication of evil which its meaning contains.*

The central problem of tolerance in Western history had been for centuries the problem of religious toleration. This is one of the consequences the West faced because its religion is Christianity—properly speaking, a rather “secularized” Christianity. It is clear that tolerance is not liberty nor indifference, nor love, nor some form of patience or respect. What is tolerance?

The opposite of tolerance is *intolerance*. The decisive quality of intolerance is that patient forbearance is missing. In a situation of intolerance, the religious action is not accepted, and the tolerator’s negative attitude is not suppressed toward the object of toleration. Acting against another’s religious persuasion is intolerance. A religious fanatic can act in such a way. On the part of such an intolerant person, he or she not only despises the other religion, but *de facto* he or she wants to anni-





hilate it. In the case of intolerance, there are no traces of permissive conduct and sometimes not only the religious act but also the person of another conviction is hated.

Fortunately, apart from some anti-Semitic manifestations which can be considered as political crimes and some politically motivated anti-Catholic acts, there have been no serious intolerant actions against religious groups in Hungary. But it would only be proper to ask whether we would tolerate a dangerous religious group which coerces its members to commit suicide and kill other people? We can remember the horrible crime of the Japanese religious sect called *Aum Sinrikiō* (in English 'Supreme Truth') in 1995, when 12 people were killed and hundreds were injured. Or, in Uganda, where the sect called 'Restoration of God's Ten Commandments' in the building of its church in Kanungu, committed a collective suicide, among whom also innocent children were forced to die.<sup>1</sup> No one would behave in a permissive way against such religious groups. Nevertheless, it is important to remark that in this case, it is not the subject (the group, or the members of this religious group) that is not tolerated, but the form in which they practice their belief. Consequently, we can say that not every form of intolerance is wrong. There are some forms of intolerance that the policy of a society has to maintain.

In the following, let's address the difference is between *indifference* and tolerance. There are some religious minorities in Hungary in which the majority does not seem to have much interest, e. g. the Islamic minority. In a certain sense, we do not tolerate them, but we do not hate them either. They are simply indifferent for the Hungarian society, as the public mood was indifferent

when a Muslim leader was arrested and charged with supporting terrorist networks in 2004. We don't know their traditions; we don't know much about them. This absence of interest creates the difference between tolerance and indifference. On the one hand, in the case of indifference, one is not interested in the values or valuelessness of the other religion. On the other hand, in the case of tolerance, one is interested in the other religion because in toleration there is always an element of evaluation. In other words, in order to tolerate something one has to know what is to be tolerated in that phenomenon or action. One tolerates something because one is familiar with its negative aspects, i.e. one knows what is to be tolerated. In the case of indifference, one is not able to tolerate anything, because one does not have enough information about the thing in question. Consequently, one cannot identify without further ado tolerance with indifference.

Now, how does tolerance differ from *love*? It is clear that we feel a deeper relationship between love and tolerance and we are inclined to think that they are the same. In my account, love is essentially a relationship involving mutuality and reciprocity, rather than a polite way of forbearance. Love is an *active interest* in the well-being of the other; it does not stop at the evaluative element, it goes further and tries to change the other if this other is wrong according to his or her evaluation. One can observe this feature in the Christian religion. The so-called baptismal-command of the Gospel clearly states the active and obligatory mission of every Christian.<sup>2</sup> In this sense, love does not endure without protesting the otherness

of the other, it interferes. The similarity between love and tolerance is based upon the negative attitude on the part of subject/tolerator toward the object of toleration; dissimilarity lies in the degree of restraint in acting against it.

Finally, there are misusages of tolerance (*Zerformen der Toleranz*). In this case, one tolerates everything indiscriminately, i. e. disregards the evaluative moment. One cannot tolerate to the same degree two different kinds of religious group if one of them is obviously dangerous. It would be a total misunderstanding of tolerance. For example, the Hungarian society does not tolerate to the same degree the 'Church of Satan' and the 'Lutheran Church.'

We have seen now what tolerance is not. Let's sum up what *tolerance* is—according to this phenomenological method! These are the principal components of the concept of toleration: firstly, a tolerating subject and a tolerated subject (either may be a religious individual, group, organization, or institution); secondly, an action, belief or practice which is the object of toleration; thirdly, the act of evaluation and a negative attitude (dislike or moral disapproval) on the part of tolerator toward the object of toleration resulting from this; finally, a significant degree of restraint in acting against the negative attitude.

The questions of the range of religious tolerance, namely what things should or should not be tolerated, and the degree of restraint required by toleration do not belong to the field of religious studies. These questions are philosophical and political issues. Nevertheless, religious studies can help in a proper formulation of the concepts and of their application.

#### Suggested reading

CROSBY F. John: *Reinach's Discovery of Social Acts*. *Aletheia* vol. 3, 1983.

HILDEBRAND Dietrich von: *What is Philosophy?* Milwaukee, 1991.

REINACH Adolf: *Concerning Phenomenology*. The Personalist 50.

#### (Endnotes)

1 But the most horrible was Jim Jones' sect, „Church of the People”. Jones claimed to be the reincarnation of Jesus and Lenin. The whole community had to take poison – 638 adult and 236 child died! 1977, Guyana.

2 “Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mk 16, 15-16.) and “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded

you.” (Mt 28, 18-19.) We have to admit that it is a very strong claim. This passage explicitly expresses the “unicity”, “universality”, and “absoluteness” of Christianity.

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