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The idea of tolerance in social life

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Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

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Introduction

In the title of this paper there are two concepts. They need to be discussed and comprehended; this is the concept of society and social life as well as the concept of tolerance.

1. Society and social life

By society I understand the widest in numbers and territory community of people, inwardly differentiated in relation to nationality, philosophy of life and religion but also economy, profession and political views, shaped by history and joined by the social bonds such as family bonds, history, culture, institutions, behavioural principles, norms of activities, ideals, aspirations, ideologies etc.

If in the past the dominating factor was the family, nationality and also patriotic bonds, so in the modern society, especially in Europe, we can notice the influence of the pluralistic elements in aspects of nationality, economy and philosophy of life (ideology).

The social life consists of the whole conglomerate of social relations of individuals and groups, what characterises by the family relations, education, profession and the attitude to ideology (religious, interconfessional) and political, i.e. in relation between the citizen and authorities.

Together with the development of the social pluralism of nationality, economy and philosophy, though we have to realise the development of human individualistic views and attitudes, we can notice the growth of the meaning of tolerance, as the important regulator and moderator of the social relations.

2. The nature of tolerance

To understand the great moral, cultural and even civilization value of tolerance, one can confront it with the drama of all forms of religious and social intolerance and many of its forms, such as xenophobia, fanaticism, fundamentalism, bigotry, chauvinism and their degenerated forms of nationalism, persecution and even killing in the name of Christ. They were the attitudes and acts written in the greatest tragedies of people and nations of all ages, including

– what we have to admit with sorrow – the history of Christianity, for what the Christian leaders apologize God, people and nations and what could be noticed in the numerous acts of penance and what created one of the important elements the Jubilee Year 2000. The Polish Pope, John Paul II, the great advocate of tolerance, called intolerance „the sickness of humanity and infamy of churches” (The Message for XXVI World Peace Day).

In agreement with the modern philosophical and theological understanding of the nature of tolerance, by tolerance we understand the opened, well-wishing and friendly attitude of one man to another and his dissimilarity of appearance, sex, race, colour, nationality, religion and beliefs, in the universal boundaries of ethics and connected to them legal norms that in a sense should by nature create the „minimum of morality”.

We should add here that tolerance in its narrow meaning, that lifts up and often exaggerate the differences in spite of the similarities and the spiritual value of our neighbours, is very close to intolerance. But the tolerance in general, uplifting rather the similarities, not the differences, though noticing them also, is much closer to religious and social liberty, as younger but nicer and more beautiful sister, for such is the religious liberty and freedom of conscience. Intolerance is born from the spirit of hatred that mostly comes out from xenophobia, the wrong information, the prejudice in piety and faith, feelings of superiority and confessional exclusiveness and also from the feeling of rather delusive, not real dangers from the side of „strangers”, etc. But the tolerance comes out of the spirit of love to our neighbours, general kindness, respect to dignity of human being, simply saying, just of the Christ-like spirit of the Gospel and humanism.

The opened and friendly attitude to people and their differences does not obviously mean our inevitability of accepting those differences as the principles of life and models, as well as the need of personal acceptance and adopting them into our life mission. For we do not have to accept all the differences in view of our own system of values. But this opened, friendly and kind – just human – attitude to our neighbours should be the result and at the same time the proof of – *firstly*, personal Christian culture, moral or humanistic, and *secondly* – the respect to the human dignity in others. In such situation we should not put on the first plan the human differences but the dignity of each person as a human being, created by God in His image and responsible before Him, as well as the similarities and values of each man.

The exposition of differences and evaluation or appraisal of other man through the prism of our own, often exaggerated and distorted ideas of truth, goodness, beauty and justice always leads finally to intolerance, in opposition to God’s love and even people’s humanism, i.e. the top values, and to things that help to bond people, not to divide them.

But tolerance has its limits. For it is hard to have tolerance to some attitudes and human deeds, especially such that aim at the universal moral norms of life and human rights and the principles of social coexistence, that are

guarded by the state and expressed in its constitution and by-laws; but even where it is hard to be in opened, kind and friendly relations with others, it of course does not exclude the need of respect to a man and keeping the general principle of humanitarianism towards all people, including the criminals. That is the reason the states do not tolerate any tortures or other means of pressure that are humiliating the man in his dignity.

And otherwise, if the tolerance would not have any limits, there would be the need of accepting all forms of transgression of the divine and human laws that are in conflict with all benefits of man, his dignity, freedom, health and life. It would mean accepting all dishonesty and crimes, and it would mean also the acceptance of all forms of intolerance, what means all what is wrong and aims at the highest values of life and culture. In this sense there is no place for tolerance that accepts intolerance, that is in itself opposite to the law of God and man, and – as it was expressed by the Polish Pope – „the sickness of humanity and infamy of churches”.

3. Moderator of social life

Tolerance as opened, full of friendliness and Christian love attitude to neighbours, taking into consideration mostly similarities and not the differences, exposing the natural dignity of each man and functioning in the circles of universal values of beauty, goodness, truth and justice, is undoubtedly eminent value, both religious and human. It may play an important role in each society as a moderator (regulator) by creating new forms of social life, keystone of social peace and generator of interhuman dialogue of coexistence.

Such understood tolerance is able to have the beneficial influence not only on the society with all the religious and ideological differences, but also the homogeneous society. But this influence will not happen automatically, coming out of human nature and acting on crowds like a magic wand. Its development, dissemination and the power must come out of the common effort and a result of many conditions. These conditions should be – as it seems to be – *firstly*, education, *secondly*, ideological neutrality of the state, and *thirdly*, resignation of the ideological dominance of socio-political powers of society.

The education in tolerance, that is in respect to the natural idea to each man and the need of promoting it, should be taught at home, in the family and developed at school and shared by the church and other social organizations. It should be also popularised by the moral, social and political authorities, especially the advisory organisations and mass media. Without such unity in social education it is hard to imagine we shall finish with any form of social tolerance. It should be the individual and common value, treasured, talked and practised.

The strong factor in promoting the tolerance is the state ideologically neutral, i.e. that is not denominational state, with the domination of one of any religions, mainly one church, nor the atheistic state, being very opposed to any religion. The ideal would be here the secular state of the law, that is the common

goods of all the citizens, embracing the whole society, guarding the basic human rights, including the tolerance and freedom of conscience and beliefs, not promoting any ideology or religion, with the friendly attitude to all ideologies of the society within the bonds of law, promoting the idea of tolerance. To build and organize in practice such a neutral state is not easy, both in theory and practice, for the state is the political organization of the society, so automatically it reflects in a way, especially the greatest powers of the society and their ideology. Furthermore, among people governing such a state we always find people who represent some ideology, to which they have rights to confess and practice, and to separate their private life and the public function is not easy. At the same time to merge the position of the member of government (even on the local level) and personal views is a real temptation, hard to overcome. The other temptation of the governing people is the readiness of meeting the views and ideologies of the dominating powers in society, as the political factors and it is dictated by the existing state of affairs. But anyhow the neutrality of the governing people in aspect of religion and general ideology is the great worth of our times and it should be the matter of care of all the governments as the platform and chance for the wide promotion of social tolerance.

The most difficult factor of tolerance is the matter of resigning of the ideological dominance of the main social and political powers of the society. It is mainly the problem of the position of the religious organisations like churches and religious denominations, mostly the largest ones. In the past this element used to be the main source of any intolerance and breaking the conscience of men, but also all the crimes and dramas done in the name of God. But the resignation of all of this kind of ideas or hegemonistic simplification is not only the expression of the real godliness that always goes together with morality, but also the proof of the modern culture that more and more notice the natural dignity of man. This creates also the perfect foundation for growth and popularisation of this beautiful idea of social tolerance.

Conclusion

There is no need for proving once again how outstanding cultural and moral value is social tolerance within the bonds of universal ethical principles. It seems that to create it and share can be done with the help of some international normative laws in connection with the human rights, as it was done in the area of religious liberty and freedom of conscience.

We could only wish ourselves that the idea of tolerance in the social life would get the similar international value.

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Streszczenie

W artykule swym autor zajmuje się w istocie rzeczy trzema zagadnieniami, a mianowicie: po pierwsze – kwestią społeczeństwa i życiem społecznym, po drugie – kwestią tolerancji, jej istotą i granicami oraz po trzecie – tolerancją jako moderatorem życia społecznego. Zwraca zwłaszcza uwagę na tak konstruktywne czynniki tolerancji, jak: wychowanie społeczne w duchu tolerancji, państwo świeckie światopoglądowo neutralne i rezygnacja z dominacji ideologicznej głównych sił społeczno-politycznych społeczeństwa, zwłaszcza kościołów większościowych. Rozprawę swą autor traktuje jako wkład w refleksję filozoficzną i politologiczną nad znaczeniem tolerancji w życiu społecznym.

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