

The Duty of Tolerance as Duty of Public Civility

Religious and philosophical insights for a culture of convivence and political responsibility

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“Man’s capacity to live in and for community
is the Image of God”¹

In this paper I will focus on aspects of political philosophy as considered by two main representatives of political liberalism, John Locke and John Rawls. Whereas John Locke uses the notion “duty of tolerance”, John Rawls speaks about a “duty of public civility”. Rawls concepts of “public reason” and “reasonable pluralism” allow us to understand tolerance as responsibility both of political and of moral reason as well. Furthermore, I would like to reflect on some resources for a culture of tolerance, as culture of convivence² and political responsibility from a Christian point of view. What is the sense and significance of a culture of proactive tolerance? Why is the duty of tolerance a duty of public civility? Why is tolerance a duty and a sign of political responsibility?

Introductory remarks on the meaning and understanding of tolerance

We live in a time that is characterised by intolerance, violence, national, confessional, and economic egoisms and first-ism (America first etc.). In this context, a culture of tolerance sounds promising, healing and peace-building.

The definitions of tolerance vary from “toleration of people, actions or opinions that are rejected for moral or other reasons” to “acceptance of the ‘other’ and stranger” and “leeway for technical and statistical measurement

1 Rawls 2009: 193.

2 Sundermeier 2012.

inaccuracies”.³ From a historical point of view tolerance has many aspects: “an exercise of love for the other who errs, a strategy of preserving power by offering some form of freedom to minorities, a term for the peaceful coexistence of different faiths, who share a common core, another word for the respect for individual liberty, a postulate of practical reason, or the ethical promise of a productive pluralistic society”.⁴ Tolerance can be seen both as political virtue and as a way of life.⁵ There is indeed a difference between the understanding of tolerance as moral virtue or as political virtue of civil duty. The concept of duty involves the social reason that each member of the society has to act according to the principles of toleration. As a civil virtue tolerance has roots in the moral philosophy.

In patristics, the term tolerance is used as a synonym for patience and “believer's ability to suffer”, “*tolerantia passionis*”.⁶ Martin Luther spoke of “*tolerantia Dei*” as “*incomprehensibil(is) tolerantia (...) et sapientia*”⁷, in the sense that God is tolerant to human misbehaviours.⁸ John Calvin defined tolerance as “gentleness of the spirit” (“*mansuetudo animi*”).⁹ During the Renaissance, the concept of tolerance was related to religious freedom and pluralism of religions. Here, a meaningful aspect is the concept of equality of all people before God, on which the demand for tolerance and for freedom of consciousness are founded.¹⁰ A society should tolerate “religious heterodoxy” because nobody can be forced to practice a specific religion. Religious identity is a matter of belief, not of political coercion.¹¹ Tolerance is not only a positive side-effect of civilisation, but mainly a duty of every human being for his or her fellowman, a fundamental premise of a just and well-ordered society.

One of the most influential philosophical writings concerning tolerance was “A Letter Concerning Toleration” by John Locke. John Locke was “one of the greatest philosophers in Europe at the end of the seventeenth century”.¹² He distinguished between religious and civil tolerance. For

3 Gabriel 1998.

4 Forst 2017.

5 Heyd 1996: 4f.; see: Bobbio 1992: 93: “So tolerance is the result of an exchange, a *modus vivendi*, a *do ut des*”.

6 Schlüter/Grötter 1998.

7 Tietz 2009: 122.

8 Schlüter/Grötter 1998: 1254.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid. 1254.

11 Ibid. 1255f.

12 Uzgalis 2019.

him tolerance is a “chief characteristic mark of the true church”.¹³ Tolerance has to be cultivated both by the Church and by the state in order to achieve the commonwealth.

1 Religious tolerance as “business of true religion” according to John Locke

In the vision of John Locke the Church of Christ cultivates “the regulating of men’s lives according to the rules of virtue and piety”.¹⁴ True religion cultivates the human being for a pure and holy manner of life, for “benignity and meekness of spirit”, for charity and compassion.¹⁵ As orientation and foundation for a Christian *lifestyle of respect and tolerance*, for a *culture of friendship and kindness*, John Locke introduce the definition of Christ as “Prince of Peace”, who sent out his apostles “not armed with the sword, or other instruments of force, but prepared with the Gospel of peace, and with the exemplary holiness of their conversation”.¹⁶

Christian tolerance is therefore founded in the Gospel of Jesus Christ as *Gospel of peace* and ought to become a *modus vivendi*. Christian faith means to embrace the principles of kindness and charity in your heart. Faith is a matter of love, not of coercion. To be Christian means to practice love, not to persecute, to destroy and to “kill other men upon pretense of religion”.¹⁷ John Locke criticizes the “burning zeal for God” and “salvation of souls” of the others that leads to cruelties toward mankind. “Burning zeal” is religious fanaticism that destroys the others who are not conforming to a specific orthodoxy. The truth of the Church of Christ is not violence, but charity and love.¹⁸ Nobody has the right in the name of Christ to compel others to profess a certain doctrine or faith. Persecution and cruelty aren’t conform to the principles of Christian faith.¹⁹ “The toleration of those that differ from others in matters of religion is so agreeable to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to the genuine reason of mankind, that it seems monstrous for men to be so blind, as not to perceive the necessity and advantage of it, in so clear a light”.²⁰ A true Church cannot persecute

13 Locke 2003: 215.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid. 217.

17 Ibid. 216.

18 Ibid. 217.

19 Ibid. 218.

20 Ibid. 217.

other people “and force others by fire and sword to embrace her faith and doctrine”.²¹ Ecclesiastic authority is based on “conviction and approbation of the mind”, not on force that “belongs wholly to the civil magistrate”.²²

There are indeed *limits of toleration* in the Church. If one member disrespects the principles of faith, the ecclesiastical authority does have the right to excommunicate this person. Anyway this person cannot be deprived of any civil goods or of civil rights.²³ “No private person has any right in any manner to prejudice another person in his civil enjoyments, because he is of another church or religion. All the rights and franchises that belong to him as a man (...) are inviolably to be preserved to him. (...) No violence nor injury is to be offered him, whether he be Christian or pagan”.²⁴

John Locke mentions a *fruitful aspect of intolerance*. Each Church or religious community should be *intolerant with all members that do not respect the virtues of tolerance*. The Church should *educate* their adherents to practice tolerance and the church should correct or condemn every intolerant behaviour of their members even with the last instrument of excommunication: “It is not enough that ecclesiastical men abstain from violence and rapine, and all manner of persecution. He pretends to be a successor of the apostles assumes the office of teaching, is obliged also to admonish his hearers of the duties of peace and good-will towards all men; as well towards the erroneous as the orthodox; towards those that differ from them in faith and worship, as well as towards those that agree with them therein. (...) I will not undertake to represent how happy and how great would be the fruit, both in church and state, if the pulpits everywhere sounded with this doctrine of peace and toleration”.²⁵

We can find in John Locke’s philosophical foundation of tolerance some ecumenical principles of a *culture of interconfessional and interreligious convivence*: “Peace, equity, and friendship, are always mutually to be observed by particular churches, in the same manner as by private persons, without any pretence of superiority or jurisdiction over one another”.²⁶ For John Locke every church is a “free and voluntary society”.²⁷

Another way of achieving tolerance in society is for him to stay aware about the distance to absolute truth and true orthodoxy. “Every church

21 Ibid. 222.

22 Ibid. 223.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid. 224.

25 Ibid. 227, 223.

26 Ibid. 224.

27 Ibid.

is orthodox to itself; to others, erroneous or heretical". The decision about the true orthodoxy or heterodoxy belongs only to God as "Supreme Judge".²⁸

1.1 Boundaries of ecclesiastical power as logical reasons for a culture of tolerance

1. *Absolute truth* is an illusion due to the fact that each Church, each religion promotes its own orthodoxy as genuine or true. Besides, God is the Supreme Judge presiding over the religious truth of each church and each religion. "I cannot but wonder at the extravagant arrogance of those men who think that they themselves can explain things necessary to salvation more clearly than the Holy Ghost, the eternal and infinite wisdom of God".²⁹

2. According to John Locke the Church has to avoid violence, sword and oppression of other people on account of their different believes. Each Church ought to promote a *culture of peace, of charity and respect* of the human being. True Christian Church promotes a decent form of life, moral edification and "holiness of life".³⁰ Therefore it ought to be or cannot be but tolerant, i.e. a vivid source of tolerance.

3. *Civil rights and civil affairs*: According to John Locke a tolerant society can be achieved, if each Church respects the civil rights: "Nobody therefore, in fine, neither single persons, nor churches, nor even commonwealths, have any just title to invade the civil rights and worldly goods of each other, upon pretence of religion".³¹ John Locke argues that the church should focus on worshipping of God, on the salvation of the souls and not on civil affairs.³² In his view the Church has "no connection at all with civil affairs"³³ but this opinion is limited by his own statement on the contrary that every religion has a responsibility to cultivate the duty of tolerance, that has an immediately impact on the civil society. Each Church has to promote civil peace. The path towards a culture of peace is built on the respect for the rights of the others. All people have common rights, the "same benefit of the laws", the same benefit of civil

28 Ibid. 225.

29 Ibid. 253.

30 Ibid. 232.

31 Ibid. 226.

32 Ibid. 233.

33 Ibid.

peace or of a peaceful society.³⁴ This understanding of the *universality of civil rights* is crucial for a peaceful society: “neither pagan, nor Mahometan, nor Jew, ought to be excluded from the civil rights of the commonwealth, because of his religion. (...) Shall we suffer a pagan to deal and trade with us, and shall we not suffer him to pray unto and worship God? If we allow the Jews to have private houses and dwellings amongst us, why should we not allow them to have synagogues? Is their doctrine more false, their worship more abominable, or is the civil peace more endangered, by their meeting in public, than in their private houses?”³⁵ According to John Locke preconceptions like inclination to tumult and civil war of the members of other religions have to be corrected. He shows that the Christian religion was “turbulent and destructive of the civil peace” in history.³⁶ The main cause of tumults and civil wars is not religion but the “refusal of toleration to those that are of different opinions”.³⁷

4. *Freedom of conscience as natural right*: Both religious and civil authorities are responsible for promoting the respect of the freedom of conscience. Religious societies are “free societies”. Nobody can be forced to believe something. “Every man (...) has the supreme and absolute authority of judging for himself”.³⁸ This privatization of religious identity and religious issues seems indeed a historical necessity of those times, in order to avoid religious conflicts. Eternal happiness and salvation of the souls is not a state’s task. Religious communities have to respect the liberty of consciousness. Besides this privatization of religion or religious matters, John Locke is aware of the social and civil meaning of moral actions. By promoting a culture of tolerance, both religion and state have to contribute to public peace. John Locke argues that “liberty of consciousness is every man’s natural right (...) and nobody ought to be compelled in matters of religions either by law or force”.³⁹ Universal respect for the liberty of conscience is actually the foundation of all Churches liberty in the society. To respect the liberty of conscience of a human being involves also respecting the liberty of religious societies.

5. *Human dignity*. Locke’s political philosophy has anthropological premises according to which each human being is “free, equal and inde-

34 Ibid. 248.

35 Ibid. 249.

36 Ibid. 250.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid. 242.

39 Ibid. 246.

pendent” by nature.⁴⁰ “Every man has an immortal soul, capable of eternal happiness or misery. (...) the care of each man’s salvation belongs only to himself”.⁴¹ John Locke presents the idea of “immortal soul” as an argument for the *untouchable dignity of the human being*.⁴² Furthermore, each human being has by nature powers of reason, more precisely *natural reason*. The fundamental law of nature as “common law of reason” is written only in the human soul.⁴³ This dignity of all mankind as rational soul has to be respected by both state and religious communities. Every man is free to decide about his or her eternal salvation and happiness. Besides the political power cannot dictate against the liberty of consciousness. A person can “abstain from the actions that he judges unlawful (...); men are not in these cases obliged by that law, against their consciences”.⁴⁴ For Locke, the law of nature is normative, because it leads human beings as free and rational to their wealth. “Reason and law, freedom and commonwealth” are intimately linked or interdependent.⁴⁵

1.2 *Civil tolerance as “business of magistrate*

i.e. laws”

John Locke distinguishes between state and church. The “business” of the state, i.e. of “civil magistrate” or “civil government” is to assure “civil interests” like “life, liberty, health, and indolency of the body; and the possession of outward things, such as money, lands, houses, furniture, and the like”.⁴⁶ The “laws of public justice and equity” establish the preservation of people’s rights. The jurisdiction of the magistrate has nothing to do with the salvation of souls, but only with “civil concernments”.⁴⁷ By defending human rights and equality by law, the civil government contributes to the commonwealth, i.e. to a free and prospers society. This distinction between the “business” of the Church and the “business” of the state seems to be essential in Locke’s vision for a tolerant society, that promotes

40 Ibid. 141; see also: Rawls 2012: 42.

41 Locke 2003: 241.

42 Ibid.

43 Rawls 2012: 180.

44 Locke 2003: 243.

45 Rawls 2012: 181f.

46 Locke 2003: 218.

47 Ibid.

religious tolerance. Without religious neutrality of the civil government and respect for the boundaries of religious and political jurisdiction, there cannot be any respect for the liberty of faith. “The care of souls cannot belong to the civil magistrate, because his power consists only in outward force: but true and saving religion consists in the inward persuasion of the mind, without which nothing can be acceptable to God. And such is the nature of understanding, that it cannot be compelled to the belief of any thing by outward force”.⁴⁸

Religious freedom is, therefore, a freedom of conscience and the liberty of mind that cannot be convinced by penalties. Penalties cannot produce belief or change man’s opinion. For Locke, another way or *strategy in order to promote a tolerant society* occurs when the political power has been denied any religious grounds. Civil power is not founded in God’s grace. Therefore, no government has any duty to propagate a specific religion or to defend the interests of a specific religious community.⁴⁹ John Locke rejects any religious foundation of political power, for practical reasons. If the state regards him as empowered by grace, it would act to establish by force a specific religious grace and rationality.⁵⁰

2 *Justice as fairness and tolerance. John Rawls’ contribution to a public culture of tolerance*

John Locke’s understanding of tolerance had a historical impact on political philosophy. John Rawls, “the most distinguished liberal political philosopher of at least the last half century, (...) has quite explicitly adopted this defense as model for how to ground a coherent conception of social justice on a full recognition of the equal right to see, value, and live differently of all adult human beings”.⁵¹ One of the main questions of John Rawls was about “how reasonable citizens and people might live together peacefully in a just world”.⁵² John Rawls is considered one of the most important political philosophers of the twentieth century⁵³ with “the richest and most complex contractual account of ethics yet

48 Ibid. 219.

49 Ibid. 226.

50 Ibid.

51 Dunn 2003: 273.

52 Rawls 1999: vi.

53 Wenar 2017.

advanced”.⁵⁴ He underlined in his writings very often the interdependence between justice and tolerance and proposes an understanding of “justice as fairness”.⁵⁵ “No other work in modern political philosophy has placed the link between justice and tolerance more clearly in the foreground than John Rawls’ Political Liberalism – the work that deserves a special place in the continuation of the modern discourse on tolerance”.⁵⁶ Without justice there can be no tolerant society. A just and fair society needs to overcome “unjust war and oppression, religious persecution and the denial of liberty of conscience, starvation and poverty, (...) genocide and mass murder”.⁵⁷ “Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought. A theory however elegant and economical must be rejected or revised if it is untrue; likewise laws and institutions no matter how efficient and well-arranged must be reformed or abolished if they are unjust”.⁵⁸

For John Rawls *tolerance is a virtue of justice*. He shows that a society needs to be just, i.e. fair. Without social justice, there can be no peace and tolerance at all. A just society needs at the same time *institutions* that preserve *basic freedoms* like freedom of thought and of consciousness⁵⁹, religious freedom, political freedom, constitutional liberties and equal justice.⁶⁰ Justice as fairness is for Rawls the first *virtue of social institutions*.⁶¹ Such institutions have to be considered a fundamental structure of society.⁶² For Rawls there are many pragmatistical aspects of a just society: “The Theory of justice as fairness sees the society as an endeavor of cooperation for reciprocal benefit”.⁶³ A fair society needs the public structure of institutions in order to promote fair equality of political, economic and social rights.⁶⁴ A world without tolerance is a world of totalitarianism or of atomistic individualism, of alienation, and of “egoistic aloneness”.⁶⁵

54 Williams 2006: 78.

55 Rawls 1999: 3.

56 Forst 2003: 615.

57 Ibid. 7.

58 Rawls 1999a: 3

59 Rawls 1979: 223ff.

60 Rawls 1999: 9.

61 Rawls 1979: 19.

62 Ibid. 74.

63 Ibid. 105.

64 Ibid. 227.

65 See: Gregory 2007: 185.

Tolerance serves in this sense as foundation of fair social cooperation, i.e. of a “culture of the social”.⁶⁶

Rawls’ idea of justice as fairness shows the importance of equal rights (like liberty of conscious and of thought). In a just society, all citizens have the same rights, enjoy the same degree of freedom (like freedom of moral, of thought, of faith, and of religion).⁶⁷ “The state is not allowed to favor a religion” and no member of a specific religious community is to be disadvantaged due to his religious belonging. The duty of the state is to protect the equal freedom of speech, of thought, of religion, and of consciousness of every citizen. This guarantees free access to political activities and offices. The state assures the people to be protected from discrimination and to enjoy the same civil rights in a free society.⁶⁸ The state has the duty to assure the same conditions of moral and religious freedom.⁶⁹

There are four aspects urgently needed for a fair and tolerant society. Each human being, as a free subject, wishes a just and tolerant *system of political and social institutions* that allows him to develop as a free subject. Secondly, such a just and tolerant system is affirmed by each subject as expression of his own will. Thirdly, the free will needs to be educated by public institutions in a way that respects him or her as a free subject of the society. These institutions that will educate the free will have to be expressions of the free will.⁷⁰

2.1 *The nature of the rational social world*

A main way how we can shape of our social world is by *education* and *political culture*. Our society is defined by “historical, social and economic circumstances”.⁷¹ In these contexts a *creative imaginary* of the political philosophy can show or procure new practical political possibilities. Our social and political world can be constructively marked by a “realistic utopia”.⁷²

66 Rawls 2005: 14.

67 Ibid. 241.

68 Ibid. 253ff, 249f.

69 Ibid. 242.

70 Rawls 2003: 450f.

71 Rawls 1999: 5.

72 Ibid. 8.

According to Rawls *public political culture* of the society faces the fact of “reasonable pluralism”, i.e. “the fact of profound and irreconcilable differences in citizens’ reasonable comprehensive religious and philosophical conceptions of the world, and in their views of the moral and aesthetic values”.⁷³ Due to this real and complex pluralism a “well-ordered society” needs a regulative public concept of justice as “public agreement” or “overlapping consensus”.⁷⁴ Rawls’ solution is the concept of justice as fairness, which assumes that society has to be a “fair system of social cooperation”.⁷⁵ Such a society regards and promotes all citizens as “free and equal persons” whose acts are lead by the “idea of reciprocity” and “rational advantage”.⁷⁶ A society – well-ordered according to the principle of justice as fairness – is a “form of social community”, a “social community of social communities”.⁷⁷ “Reciprocity is a moral idea situated between impartiality, which is altruistic, on the one side and mutual advantage on the other”.⁷⁸ Tolerance as duty of reciprocity contributes to the “regulation of conduct”.⁷⁹

Due to this, tolerance can be understood as premise for a fair society and social cooperation as well.⁸⁰ Tolerance, reciprocity and justice as fairness build the “basic structure of society”.⁸¹

Reasonable pluralism and diversity can be seen as a positive chance for the society. There are “different cultures and traditions of thought, both religious and nonreligious” that are to be respected.⁸² Here, Rawls affirms a “reasonable pluralism” that “allows a society of greater political justice and liberty”.⁸³ Therefore he proposes consequently his own theory only as a way to a greater justice in a contemporary and future society.⁸⁴ It is worth both for individuals and for a society to promote a culture of tolerance. Only such a culture of reciprocity, of fairness, and of equality

73 Rawls 1999: 132: “The fact of reasonable pluralism – the fact that a plurality of conflicting reasonable comprehensive doctrines, religious, philosophical, and moral, is the normal result of its culture of free institutions”.

74 Ibid. 32.

75 Ibid. 5f.

76 Ibid. 6.

77 Rawls 1979: 14, 572.

78 Rawls 2001: 77.

79 Ibid. 6.

80 Rawls 2005: 15ff.

81 Ibid. 16; see: Audard 2007: 35f: “The motivational basis of justice: mutual advantage, impartiality and reciprocity”.

82 Rawls 1999: 11.

83 Ibid. 12.

84 Ibid. 10.

contributes to prosperity, sociality, and cooperation. In this sense tolerance is not only an ideal but a civic historical responsibility of everyone for the common wealth. Tolerance is, in this regard, a basic form of “reasonable overlapping consensus”.⁸⁵

Tolerance belongs to the “framework of the public social world”⁸⁶ and means to respect the voice, the rights and the dignity of the other. As duty of public reason, i.e. as duty of civility, tolerance is both a political and a moral virtue. The political dimension involves the affirmation of political justice and of its intrinsic values. As moral virtue, tolerance is a fruit from within of a religious, philosophical, or moral tradition. Rawls’ concept of political justice (as openness towards or empowerment by different resources of the reasonable pluralism) is tolerant and tolerance-promoting. His ethics of justice is tolerant and a philosophy of justice at the same time.

One meaningful foundation of his philosophy of tolerance is also his anthropology with the affirmation of the *untouchable dignity of each human being*: “Each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override. For this reason justice denies that the loss of freedom for some is made right by a greater good shared by others. It does not allow that the sacrifices imposed on a few are outweighed by the larger sum of advantages enjoyed by many. Therefore in a just society the liberties of equal citizenship are taken as settled”.⁸⁷ Justice as fairness and basic structure of the society has to serve to this untouchable dignity of the human being. Rawls concludes the inviolable dignity of human beings through the idea of an original fair society based on a fair contract under the conditions of the “veil of ignorance”. Justice like tolerance is a *social rationality*. As *moral subject*, each human being has a *sense of justice* or of social cooperation.⁸⁸ Social justice like tolerance serves to promote a fair society with fundamental rights and duties and cannot be reduced to a closed ethical system, due to the reasonable pluralism of our world.⁸⁹

85 Ibid. 62.

86 Ibid. 53; see: Vogt/Schäfers 2021, 8f

87 Rawls 1999a: 3.

88 Ibid.

89 Ibid. 15: “Justice as fairness is not a complete contract theory”.

2.2 Human dignity and the moral powers of rationality

One of the anthropological premises of Rawls' philosophy is the understanding of individuals as "free and equal moral persons"⁹⁰, "capable of acting both reasonably and rationally", and "capable of taking part in social cooperation among persons so conceived".⁹¹ For Rawls the understanding of "moral persons" as "rationally autonomous agents of construction" involves the affirmation of the rational autonomy and of a "public conception of justice" that regulates a society.⁹² Tolerance belongs to the very foundations, norms, or "basic structure of society (...) in which everyone accepts, and knows that others likewise accept, the same first principles of right and justice".⁹³

As reasonable and rational beings, persons have moral powers and moral duties. John Rawls' social ethics is marked by the trust in the *communicative capacity of reason* or in moral persons as reasonable beings: "Public reason further asks of us that the balance of those values we hold to be reasonable in a particular case is a balance we sincerely think can be seen to be reasonable by others. (...) this preserves the ties of civic friendship and is consistent with the duty of civility".⁹⁴ Due to the consistent and intrinsic power of rationality, the duty of civility means also "a willingness to listen to what others have to say and being ready to accept reasonable accommodations or alterations in one's own view".⁹⁵ As *duty of civility*, tolerance is also a process of getting more tolerant, more reasonable. Openness for public reason as such means openness for the other persons as reasonable, free, and equal citizens. Tolerance or duty of civility is also a cultural duty of respect of the untouchable dignity of the other people. Therefore, Rawls describes the duty of civility as central for his concept of public reason, i.e. as an "ideal of democracy".⁹⁶

In a constructivist approach of moral or justice as fairness, persons are regarded as equal "rational agents of construction"⁹⁷, able of "political reasoning (...) within a political culture".⁹⁸ To understand each human

90 Rawls 1980: 518, 521; cf. Taylor 2011: 59f.

91 Rawls 1980: 518.

92 Ibid. 520f.

93 Ibid. 521.

94 Rawls 2005: 253.

95 Ibid.

96 Ibid.

97 Rawls 1980: 516.

98 Ibid. 517.

being as free and equal moral person is a fundamental premise of the “public culture of a democratic society”.⁹⁹ One of the main questions regards the discovery and formulation of “the deeper bases of agreement (...) embedded in common sense”.¹⁰⁰ This approach is per se tolerant and essential for tolerance: “The search for reasonable grounds for reaching agreement rooted in our conception of ourselves and in our relation to society replaces the search for moral truth interpreted as fixed by a prior and independent order of objects and relations, where natural or divine, an order apart and distinct from how we conceive ourselves. The task is to articulate a public conception of justice that all can live with (...)”.¹⁰¹

According to Rawls there are two main moral powers of persons:

“The first power is the capacity for an effective sense of justice, that is the capacity to understand, to apply and to act from (and not merely in accordance with) the principles of justice. The second moral power is the capacity to form, to revise, and rationally to pursue a conception of the good. Corresponding to the moral powers, moral persons are said to be moved by two highest-order interests to realize and exercise these powers. By calling these interests ‘highest-order’ interests, I mean that, as the model-conception of a moral person is specified, these interests are supremely regulative as well as effective. This implies that, whenever circumstances are relevant to their fulfilment, these interests govern deliberation and conduct. Since the parties represent moral persons, they are likewise moved by these interests to secure the development and exercise of the moral powers.”¹⁰²

We can distinguish in this text many constructive issues that concern the topic of tolerance. All these moral powers of rational agents serve for a fair cooperation in a just society. Tolerance can be seen here as a force of social connectivity, due to its intrinsic implications in sustaining reciprocity and mutuality. Tolerance is worth and necessary for each participant’s rational advantage as rational and free agent of the society. Each human being as moral person has moral powers that can be described also as moral responsibilities.¹⁰³ At the same time each person is a “self-originating source of claims”.¹⁰⁴ The duty of tolerance as duty of public civility means to respect each moral person as free and reasonable “source

99 Ibid.

100 Ibid. 518.

101 Ibid. 519.

102 Ibid. 525.

103 Ibid. 545: Rawls describes freedom as “responsibility for ends”.

104 Ibid. 545, 548.

of claims". The mentioned moral powers need to be respected by all members of the society, due to the principle of equality, liberty, and dignity. "The capacity to understand, to apply and to act from (...) the principles of justice" and "the capacity to form, to revise, and rationally to pursue a conception of the good" are "supremely regulative" and "effective". Moral powers are not only capacities of moral persons but also regulative interests that "govern deliberation and conduct". It is quite difficult to understand how Rawls can keep an open system of moral deliberation and growth of the human being. He assumes that "a well-ordered society is a closed system".¹⁰⁵ For him there is a so called "background justice" or it is necessary to establish such a "background justice".¹⁰⁶ This justice is present and builds a *basic structure of the society*, only when people are treated as equal moral persons.¹⁰⁷

2.3 Tolerance as "duty of civility" and public reason

As *animal rationale* each human being has "powers of reason, intellect, and moral feeling"¹⁰⁸ and therefore the responsibility to try at least to contribute to the practical and cognitive horizon of a *culture of tolerance*. Indifference for tolerance would presume indifference for justice, fairness, equality, reciprocity, social cooperation, etc. Responsibility for tolerance and responsibility for the social world can be indeed described as *duty of public civility*: "citizens are to think of themselves as if they were legislators and ask themselves what statutes, supported by what reasons satisfying the criterion of reciprocity, they would think it most reasonable to enact".¹⁰⁹

John Rawls' differentiated perception of public reason as fact, ideal and duty is very creative and helpful to understand the meaning of *proactive toleration*. As citizens, we belong to a society with an established public reason. This public reason is not divine, but empowered by citizens. We act in conformity with public reason if we like to be reasonable citizens. At the same time, there is a *public duty* of everyone to contribute to the universe and universality of the historical public reason:

"When firm and widespread, the disposition of citizens to view themselves as ideal legislators, and to repudiate government officials and candi-

105 Ibid. 536.

106 Ibid. 529, 562.

107 Ibid. 529.

108 Rawls 1999: 60.

109 Ibid. 56.

dates for public office who violate public reason, forms part of the political and social basis of liberal democracy and is vital for its enduring strength and vigor. Thus in domestic society citizens fulfil their duty of civility and support the idea of public reason, while doing what they can to hold government officials to it. This duty, like other political rights and duties, is an intrinsically moral duty".¹¹⁰

Tolerance is a "moral duty" for a common good idea of justice.¹¹¹ Tolerance is the only way to mutual respect of religious, philosophical, moral, and political pluralism. Tolerance is the way to and the foundation of a reasonable and decent society.¹¹² In such a society all members are equal, "decent and rational, as well as responsible and able to play a part in social life".¹¹³

The "duty of civility" means to contribute to the "public reason" from or with our own "background culture". A "background culture" includes, for Rawls, "the culture of churches and associations of all kinds, and institutions of learning at all levels, especially universities and professional schools, scientific and other societies".¹¹⁴

As citizens, we have a "duty of civility" as duty to "act from and follow public reason"¹¹⁵, due to the fact that this public reason is open to plural ways of reasoning and marked by the "reasonable overlapping consensus"¹¹⁶ of different traditions or families of reason. John Rawls rejects a closed concept of public reason. There cannot be a "fix public reason once and for all in the form of one favored political conception of justice".¹¹⁷ A free society needs not only a public reason but also "public reasoning" from within a different secular or religious reason. For instance, Rawls differentiates between "two ideas of toleration": "One is purely political, being expressed in terms of the rights and duties protecting religious liberties in accordance with a reasonable political conception of justice. The

110 Ibid.

111 Ibid. 71.

112 Ibid. 63f; see: Förster 2014: 45f., 111f.

113 Rawls 1999: 66.

114 Ibid. 134, footnote 13.

115 Ibid. 135.

116 Ibid. 143.

117 Ibid. 142: "Political liberalism, then, does not try to fix public reason once and for all in the form of one favored political conception of justice. That would not be a sensible approach. For instance, political liberalism also admits Habermas discourse conception of legitimacy (...), as well as Catholic views of the common good and solidarity when they are expressed in terms of political values".

other is not purely political but expressed from within a religious or a non-religious doctrine”.¹¹⁸ This calls Rawls a “reasoning from conjecture”.¹¹⁹

The duty of civility is for Rawls a moral duty, with certain premises like “willingness to listen to another” and willingness to fairness: “The ideal of citizenship imposes a moral, not a legal, duty – the duty of civility – to be able to explain to one another (...) how the principles and policies they advocate and vote for can be supported by the political values of public reason. This duty also involves a willingness to listen to another and a fairmindedness in deciding when accommodations to their views should reasonably be made”.¹²⁰

To summarize, Rawls’ conception of tolerance is deeply connected with his understanding of justice as fairness, equality, and liberty of conscience: “Where justice as fairness to make an overlapping consensus possible it would complete and extend the movement of thought that began three centuries ago with the gradual acceptance of the principle of toleration and led to the nonconfessional state and equal liberty of conscience. (...) To apply the principles of toleration to philosophy itself is to leave to citizens themselves to settle the questions of religion, philosophy, and morals in accordance with views they freely affirm”.¹²¹

Toleration as duty of public civility is a *duty of mutual respect*, a virtue of *reconciliation*. As public duty it involves a public use of rationality that leads to a “reasonable overlapping consensus”.¹²² The principle of toleration enjoyed a wide acceptance as the “only workable alternative to endless and destructive civil strife”.¹²³ Political liberalism “seeks common ground and is neutral in aim”, but still “encourage[s] certain moral virtues. Thus, justice as fairness includes an account of certain political virtues – the virtues of fair social cooperation such as the virtues of civility and tolerance, of reasonableness and the sense of fairness”.¹²⁴ One of the most important contributions of a culture of tolerance consists in its attempt to overcome different forms of discrimination.¹²⁵ Rawls underlines that tolerance is not only a matter of practical rationality or “imperative of rea-

118 Ibid. 152.

119 Ibid. 152.

120 Rawls 2005: 217.

121 Ibid. 154.

122 Ibid. 157f.

123 Ibid. 159; see: Bayle 2016.

124 Rawls 2005: 194.

125 Ibid. 195.

son”¹²⁶, but also a matter of “feeling that sustain fair social cooperation”.¹²⁷ A culture of *mutual toleration* allows an atmosphere of *mutual trust*. Tolerance is therefore more than conformity with the practical rationality. It involves confidence and loyalty not only to the political justice but also to different religious, philosophical or moral values and principles. One can describe the duty of public civility as *loyalty to the principle of mutual tolerance*, enabling to respect the fact of pluralism.

2.4 Tolerance as public reason and public use of rationality

A communicative way to understand tolerance as milestone for a *culture of communication* is to show its *rational character*. For Rawls, goodness involves rationality.¹²⁸ Due to this tolerance is mainly a political virtue for the public goodness of convivence, of peace and mutual respect.

Rawls describes three aspects of *public reason*: “Public reason (...) is public in three ways: as the reason of citizens as such, it is the reason of the public; its subject is the good of the public and matters of fundamental justice; and its nature and content is public, being given by the ideals and principles expressed by society’s conception of the political justice”.¹²⁹ In this context, tolerance is not a private option but a *duty of public use of rationality* from different background cultures, “from within (...) own reasonable doctrines”.¹³⁰ Each of us has a *moral duty of civility*¹³¹ as “*duty of fair play*”.¹³²

We live in different worlds that are simultaneously co-existent in the spatio-temporality of our different contexts of the present time. This *post-modern awareness* of huge and complex horizons of plurality of traditions,

126 Rawls 2016: 25.

127 Rawls 2005: 195.

128 Ibid.

129 Ibid. 213.

130 Ibid. 218.

131 Ibid. 217.

132 Rawls 1999b: 117ff; 195: “Players in a game do not protest against there being different positions, such as that of batter, pitcher, catcher, and the like, nor to there being various privileges and powers specified by the rules. Nor do citizens of a country object to there being the different offices of government such as that of president, senator, governor, judge, and so on, each with its special rights and duties. It is not differences of this kind that are normally thought of as inequalities, but differences in the resulting distribution established by a practice, or made possible by it, of the things men strive to attain or to avoid.”

ways of life, understandings, and the diverse nature of being and thinking makes tolerance a key virtue of public reason, of civility, and of religious authenticity as well. An increasing awareness about the texture¹³³ of reality and truth can help us to become more tolerant. Speaking with John Rawls, tolerance can be regarded as a utilitarian tool of “amour-propre”¹³⁴; everyone is interested in and looking for a stable, secure and peaceful society. Each society as such needs inner harmony (see Plato’s eudaimonistic ethis).¹³⁵ Plato, for instance, thought that the *structure of justice* is similar between an individual and a state organisation.¹³⁶ Therefore, tolerance has to be promoted by individuals, by society and by religious and philosophical reason as well. We need indeed a *common sense on tolerance* as a foundation of a “civic culture”, that allows “political, economic, and social cooperation”.¹³⁷ The premise of this undertaking is the trust in the human ability to find rational and cooperative solutions to the problem of violence and intolerance. Each socio-cultural solution needs the process of cultivation by education of the new generations.

Is there an end to this process of education? If we refer to John Rawls’ concept of “moral learning”, this process is perpetual, individual, and social. This means that not only individuals need to be open or active subjects of moral learning but also corporative identities like societies, religions or other collectives. In this context, I would like to mention the meaning of “cultural memory”, a remarkable contribution of Jan Assmann.¹³⁸ A *culture of tolerance* is not possible without “healing of memories”, i.e. without a critical analysis of the historical and real conflictual potential of religious absolutism, fanaticism, and fundamentalism. Religious wars, persecution, inquisition, colonialization¹³⁹, holocaust are indeed confirmations of the “demonic madness” of the mankind.¹⁴⁰ “Yet

133 See: Munteanu 2020: 329–351.

134 Rawls 1999a: 34.

135 Schriebl 2017: 290–294.

136 Platon 1998: 63: “We speak of justice both in relation to the individual as well as to the whole state”. Plato compares individual and state with small and capital letter; 167: “The same elements that are found in the state also dwell in the soul of each individual and in the same number”.

137 Ibid. 19.

138 Assmann 1999.

139 Buzzi 2017: 113: “the Christian conquistadores” wiped out “entire pre-Columbian cultures”. “Terrible violence occurred – in spectacular contradiction to the Christian faith (...). An analogous story could be told regarding the first Christian missions in the Far East”.

140 Rawls 1999a: 22.

we must not allow these great evils of the past and present to undermine our hope for the future of our society as belonging to a Society of liberal and decent Peoples around the world. Otherwise, the wrongful, evil, and demonic conduct of others destroys us, too, and seals their victory. Rather, we must support and strengthen our hope by developing a reasonable and workable conception of political right and justice applying to the relations between peoples”.¹⁴¹

A culture of tolerance as common sense (as a result of a social and political agreement) creates an *atmosphere of equality* and of respect for the free, independent and equal people, that share the same dignity, liberty of conscience and equal human rights. A culture of tolerance presupposes some basic moral and political values about the relations between citizens. One of these values is the “criterion of reciprocity”.¹⁴²

“When political liberalism speaks of a reasonable overlapping consensus of comprehensive doctrines, it means that all of these doctrines, both religious and nonreligious, support a political conception of justice underwriting a constitutional democratic society whose principles, ideals, and standards satisfy the criterion of reciprocity. Thus, all reasonable doctrines affirm such a society with its corresponding political institutions: equal basic rights and liberties for all citizens, including liberty of conscience and the freedom of religion”.¹⁴³ All other doctrines that do not agree with the principles of a free society “are not tolerable. Their principles and ideals do not satisfy the criterion of reciprocity, and in various ways they fail to establish the equal basic liberties”.¹⁴⁴ Rawls emphasizes that “unreasonable doctrines are a threat to democratic institutions”.¹⁴⁵ Besides, it is necessary for citizens to keep their devotion to the ideal of public reason in order to contribute to the “vitality of the public political culture”.¹⁴⁶ This means that a duty of public civility involves the duty of tolerance, of reciprocity, and of dialogue with members of different traditions.

141 Ibid.

142 Ibid. 132.

143 Ibid. 172.

144 Ibid. 173.

145 Ibid. 178f.

146 Ibid. 175.

3 Religious resources for a culture of tolerance

John Rawls' understanding of tolerance as foundation of a just society is deeply connected with the concept of reciprocity. The duty of tolerance as duty of public civility is actually a duty of reciprocity or mutuality in and for a fair society. There are many ways to promote or illuminate reciprocity from a Christian point of view. One of them is the concept of "communion of a communicative freedom", promoted by Heinrich Bedford-Strohm.¹⁴⁷ He underlines not only the meaning of pluralism from the perspective of pneumatology as "productive force of communion"¹⁴⁸ but points out different contexts of reciprocity: reciprocity of agape, reciprocity of "self-forgetfulness" love of my neighbour, reciprocity of the Golden Rule, and eschatological reciprocity.¹⁴⁹ These powerful resources for tolerance and reciprocity contribute to a "social culture of solidarity".¹⁵⁰ The issue of tolerance is a matter of structural justice.¹⁵¹ Successful social structures of the modern societies are *structures of reciprocity*.¹⁵² A meaningful aspect of Christian understanding of reciprocity might be the existential one. Reciprocity makes mutual recognition possible and leads to a fulfilled human existence: "to become for your neighbour a Christ" (M. Luther) means a christocentric view on a "reciprocal human being" ("*reziprokes Menschsein*").¹⁵³ Another central aspect of reciprocity from the point of view of Christian social ethics is the duty to *shape reality* ("*Wirklichkeitsgestaltung*")¹⁵⁴ like "love through structures"¹⁵⁵ in order to grow more justice and commonwealth. Reciprocity has a "community founding significance" ("*gemeinschaftsstiftende Bedeutung*").¹⁵⁶ This transformative reciprocity is empowered by "the passion for justice".¹⁵⁷

147 See: Bedford-Strohm 2018.

148 Ibid. 324f.

149 Ibid. 237ff. Eschatological reciprocity can be understood as a creative vision of the eternal social life transfigured by the divine sociality as perfect rationality of supreme love.

150 Ibid. 444.

151 Blattner 1985: 368: "The uprising towards tolerance means for ethics the uprising towards a changed structure"; 371: "Ethics of tolerance as a culture of relationship".

152 Bedford-Strohm 2018: 368, 379.

153 Ibid. 281.

154 Ibid. 35.

155 Ibid. 320f.

156 Ibid. 375.

157 Ibid. 377.

From a Christian point of view, we can speak about the creative potential of *protological* and *eschatological imagination*. Both in paradise and in “heaven”, i.e. in God’s Kingdom, we find images of the conditions of perfect coexistence, reciprocal respect, love, openness, dialogue, and justice. The world of paradisiacal condition is a world full of fresh light, optimism, energy, innocence, and expectations. Both perspectives, the one of paradise and of eternal Kingdom, are marked by the concept of God’s presence and divine unmediated immediacy.

3.1 *Tolerance as an emergence process*

In the process philosophy, tolerance is understood as a process. The Heidelbergian theologian Michael Welker speaks of emergence processes initiated and sustained by the Holy Spirit, who creates new and complex conditions.¹⁵⁸ The work of the Spirit is creative, re-creative and peacemaking. Furthermore, without justice, there is no peace. An important prerequisite for peace and justice is the liberating experience of the new, fleshly heart. The healing work of the Spirit breaks up the imperial monocultures – religious, nationalistic, racist, sexist etc. and creates sensitivity for differences as well as for “poly-individual diversity and abundance”.¹⁵⁹ The longing for power, narcissism and egoism can be overcome only in the *force field* of the Spirit.¹⁶⁰ The creative work of the Spirit reinforces a context-sensitive and liberating “ethos of free self-withdrawal”.¹⁶¹ The Spirit of God enables “understanding” “in the midst of the rich diversity of human languages, cultures, traditions and visions of the future. The Spirit of God awakens joy in the power fields of faith, hope and love”.¹⁶²

True tolerance is thus understood in process theology as the will and action of God, who as force field enables human participation and actions. Without the force field of love, faith and hope there is no creative tolerance. Any form of successful tolerance can also be described as anticipation of God’s Kingdom. Therefore, Christian theology offers exciting resources

158 Welker 2010: 170: “The emergence processes initiated by the power of the Spirit enable those affected by their work to act independently and, at the same time, to radiate to their surroundings in a way that bears witness to them”.

159 Ibid. 34f.

160 Ibid. 39ff.

161 Ibid. 224, 232.

162 Ibid. 312.

for a culture of tolerance, with eschatological orientation and rationality “as in heaven, so on earth”.

3.2 Tolerance as an intersubjective attitude

In my opinion, a vivid culture of tolerance cannot be prescribed. Rather, it has to do with the personal, intersubjective affirmation of a *culture of affective communication*. Without an “attitude of intersubjective openness”, no affective communication is possible that takes the affectivity or emotions of others into account.¹⁶³ Even Rawls recognises the importance of the sphere of affectivity or affective communication as part of “moral constitution of the human nature”.¹⁶⁴

The affirmation of tolerance as capable of intersubjectivity means the assumption of a mutual, affective and in this sense truly reciprocal participation in the basic attitude of the other. This way of “consentire” might be regarded as a premise for the establishment of true sociality. The self-commitment to tolerance as a duty of civility cannot be established as a “public reason” without an intersubjective validity or affirmation justice. Values of *community*, *justice* and *sociality* needs to be affirmed both by individuals and by society. The principle of reciprocity, i.e. “mutual tolerance”, belongs to the “normative-epistemic justification of tolerance”.¹⁶⁵

3.3 The ability of people to relate and their obligation to relate

The theological anthropology underlines the inviolable dignity of the human being as *imago dei* even today, without drawing conclusions for the *social responsibility*. I see one of these consistent and direct conclusions in the necessary self-commitment to an *ecumenical culture of tolerance*, *self-limitation*, and the *acceptance of the other in his otherness*. This might be described as internalization of a “social grammar of responsibility”.¹⁶⁶ The perception of the intersubjective nature of man as well as of truth is significant in this context. A conception of truth as intersubjectivity leads to overcoming intolerance in Church and society. Such an effort to portray

163 Tugendhat 1993: 296.

164 Rawls 2012: 623.

165 See: Buddeberg/Forst 2016: 11, 25f.

166 Vogt 2019: 39f.

God as Holy Trinity, absolute community of love, highest rationality and empathy, can be found in Dumitru Staniloae's Theology, who called the mystery of God "structure of supreme love" and "intersubjectivity".¹⁶⁷

Theological relational anthropology understands the person not only as capable of relations but also realized by the plenty of intersubjective relations. Christian anthropology hereby affirms the human rights to relationship, to participation, to recognition. The understanding of the transcendental, inviolable relationality offers a new perspective or a new quality of relationality and tolerance. Due to man's uniqueness, likeness to God and ability to relate, human dignity is inviolable from the very beginning as a dignity bestowed by God. Thus, every person has an intrinsic, inviolable value as a person that needs to be respected by other people.¹⁶⁸ This is a central anthropological premise of tolerance.

3.4 *The human being as cultural creation and creator of culture*

Today's cultural anthropology describes man not only as a creation of culture, but also as an active and free creative subject of culture. It is known that individual philosophers and theologians have been able through their creative power and ingenuity to shape cultures over millennia. Classic examples are Plato and Aristotle, who are now recognized as champions of philosophy. A. N. Whitehead goes so far as to esteem the whole Western philosophy as a footnote to Plato and Aristotle. Theologians like Clement of Alexandria, Origen, the Cappadocian Fathers, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas shaped theology over centuries. The "intense thinker and sharp dialectician, gifted psychologist and brilliant stylist and ultimately passionate believer Aurelius Augustine" created a synthesis between Christian faith and Neoplatonic thinking, "an epoch-making theological macro-model for almost a millennium".¹⁶⁹ A paradigm or model of explanation involves a "constellation of theological premises, concepts, values".¹⁷⁰

"The development of new forms of thought out of the content of faith"¹⁷¹ is possible and necessary. Today's feminist theologies state that a change of paradigms is necessary, due to the fact that some theological premises strengthen certain patriarchal ideologies that have led to sexism,

167 See: Staniloae 1998: 245; Munteanu 2003: 157f.

168 Ibid. 133.

169 Küng 1984: 54.

170 Ibid. 53.

171 Welker 2010: 224, footnote 3.

oppression, marginalization and discrimination of women in Church and society.¹⁷² Therefore, cultural and theological structures of thought and all preconditions of our thinking need a thorough revision so that a *cultural and political ethos of liberation* can be realized. An *ethos of liberation* “does not only express who we are, but also constitutes who we are”.¹⁷³

Every theology and every understanding of justice and tolerance is “situated”, i.e. in a certain place, in a certain context, in a certain culture, with a certain language and own vision. By affirming certain texts or interpretative traditions, we situate ourselves as human beings and acquire an identity. What happens when the knowledge systems or cultures we grow up in are *discriminatory, patriarchal, sexist, racist, ideological*? How can such cultural sins and *crypto heresies* be eliminated or overcome?

One possibility would be the conscious perception and identification of the societal-social and political problems of our society and our time. In a discriminatory society, common sense cannot be normative or reliable for just action because the discriminatory habit tarnishes common sense. “People converge in their beliefs about *x* because they are suitably sensitive to truths about *x*.”¹⁷⁴ The reflexive perception alone is not enough to unleash processes of transformation. An ideology establishes a “system of knowledge and rule” that Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza calls “structural sin”.¹⁷⁵ “Ideology can be defined in summary as the making of sense and meaning in the service of power. Ideology structures how we see and make sense of the world. It is thus a range of meaning-making practices that determine what counts as reality, how things really are”.¹⁷⁶ A rising aware-

172 Schüssler Fiorenza 2007: 158f; 76: Schüssler Fiorenza describes “patriarchy as a pyramidal, political-cultural (...) system of domination structured by gender, race, class, religious and cultural affiliation, and other historical formulations of domination.”

173 Ibid. 71.

174 More 1993: 218.

175 Schüssler Fiorenza 2007: 134: “Such structural sin is composed of three elements: 1. it is practiced and realized through the institutional injustices, dehumanizing measures, and collective discriminations. 2. it is not recognized as injustice because it is legitimized and perpetuated by the dominant cultural-religious symbols, value systems, and discourses such as theology. 3. Structural sin creates a collective and individual consciousness that is alienated from itself. This alienated consciousness is perpetuated as self-evident and natural through kyriarchal ideology; it is internalized and appropriated through education, media, and socio-religious socialization.”

176 Ibid. 135.

ness and a “theoretical visualization” of the complex interrelationships that an ideology establishes are required.¹⁷⁷

The *academic discourse*, thus, bears a historical responsibility with regard to the production of knowledge as a contribution to the *humanization of the world* and man. In my opinion, this kind of knowledge production is also involved in the establishment and awareness of the significance of *proactive tolerance*. It is about promoting a culture of equality that supports a *political ethics of peace*. Given all the positive dynamics of proactive tolerance, we must not disregard athematic intolerance. A culture of tolerance is vis-à-vis intolerance, discrimination, injustice, racism, sexism, violence, and the like intolerant behaviour. A limitless tolerance cannot be tolerated, due to “the right not to tolerate the intolerant”.¹⁷⁸ Therefore, the description of tolerance as a “conflict term”¹⁷⁹ is quite appropriate, although the intrinsic rationality (“Sitz im Leben”) of tolerance lies in overcoming conflicts.

Proactive tolerance thus represents *liberation of the human being*, namely liberation from one’s own ignorance, aggressiveness, ideological blindness, and religious-cultural ideologies. There is no proactive tolerance without an *education to tolerance*, in the basic attitude of respect for the voice and the dignity of the other.

As a contribution to a polyphonic, pluralistic culture of difference, proactive tolerance thrives on the cultural and religious resources of different traditions.¹⁸⁰

3.5 Ecumenical culture of proactive tolerance

Values have a connective function, just like language, memory, and hope. People who share the same values are consciously or unconsciously connected with each other. Proactive tolerance represents a cultural horizon that is integrative, connective, and identity-forming. By affirming proactive tolerance as a “key value of modern, plural societies” and as a “key virtue of democracy”¹⁸¹, the ecumenical horizon of peace-building tolerance and the living culture of conviviality emerge and exist.

177 Schüssler Fiorenza 2007: 69–71f.

178 Plesu 2004: 29, quotation from Popper; see: Härle 2008: 132ff; Ricoeur 2000: 26f.

179 Vogt/Husmann 2019: 7.

180 See: Munteanu 2020: 329–351.

181 Vogt/Husmann 2019: 3.

We can describe proactive tolerance also as one of the “kingdom’s values”.¹⁸² Tolerance does not exist and cannot exist alone but only in connection with justice (“basic justice”) and freedom, with economic, social and cultural human rights.¹⁸³ The philosophical-political concept of tolerance also needs a connection with the *living sources of spirituality*. That is, there is a unity between *spirituality* and *political practice*: “The affairs of this world, including economic ones, cannot be detached from the hunger for spiritual nourishment in human hearts”.¹⁸⁴ Tolerance includes a “sense for transcendence” and an imitation of God’s justice who “causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matthew 5:45).¹⁸⁵ “In necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus caritas”¹⁸⁶ is a well-known tolerance promoting sentence of the ecumenical wisdom.

3.6 Social and self-conditioning for tolerance

As a social being, everyone is subject to social conditioning. Attitudes, thoughts, ideas, and emotions of the individual person find no thematic expression without the horizon of sociality. “Mind is the appearance of significant symbols in behavior. It is the acceptance of the social process of communication by the individual”.¹⁸⁷ “Through society, the impulsive animal becomes a rational being, a human”.¹⁸⁸ In *social behaviorism*, the importance of language as the foundation of identity is underpinned. One thinks “only in the context of language”.¹⁸⁹ As humans, we live in

182 See: Harakas 2007: 107.

183 Bedford-Strohm 2018a: 89f, 100f.

184 Der Wirtschaftshirtenbrief der katholischen Bischöfe der USA, in: Bedford-Strohm 2018a: 58.

185 Plesu 2004: 30; see: Schmidinger 2015: 26; further sources in the New Testament – Luke 6, 27–36; 6, 37–38.

186 de Dominis 1617: 676; see:

https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/In_necessariis_unitas,_in_dubiis_libertas,_in_omnibus_caritas#cite_note-buch-QcVFAAAAcAAJ-676-1.

187 Mead 1978: 25.

188 Ibid. 28.

189 Mead 1978: 41; see: Schleiermacher 1977: 77: “no one can think without words. Without words the thought is not yet finished and clear”; 78: “The individual is conditioned in his thinking by the (common) language and can think only those thoughts which already have their designation in his language”; see: Wittgenstein 2019, 67, 141: “The boundaries of my language mean the boundaries of my

linguistic communities that shape our thinking, our identity, and our self-image. Each Church is a community of memory, of understanding, of interpretation of reality but also of responsibility.¹⁹⁰ “The ability to use language requires a shared capacity to see similarities, but (...) the capacity to see ethical similarities goes beyond anything that can be adequately be expressed in language”.¹⁹¹

Moral codes and social structure belongs together.¹⁹² The *sociology of knowledge* shows that the human being cannot be and act without the social sphere to which he or she belongs. Each human being is socially conditioned, not only intellectually but also morally. Therefore, the sense of justice mentioned by Rawls needs to be embedded in the social horizon of community. Without language and community, each human being is blind and not able to think properly. Tolerance is a fragile concept as democracy is, too.

A contemporary *culture of tolerance* as culture of convivence and political responsibility can be creative and influent only if it takes into account the historical and fragmentary nature of the human knowledge (*conditio historica*).

3.7 *Tolerance for understanding – tolerance as creative power for responsible shaping of the society’s social structure*

Each moral philosophy needs a “set of ideas” in order to realize a cognitive “picture of ethical thought”. Moral philosophy can help to “recreate ethical life” or at least to “understand it”.¹⁹³

The concept of “proactive tolerance” can serve as meaningful “embodied rationality” of this “picture of ethical thought”.

The premise of duty of tolerance is a necessary step for a rationally reflective way of life both for individuals and for the entire society as such. An essential question of the individual and social ethics is: “How one should live”? How should individual and social life look like, so that those circumstances are worth living under? How can we contribute to more justice, equality, and tolerance in the society? How can the society

world”; Durkheim 2020, 642: “A man who does not think in concepts cannot be a man, for he would not be a social being”.

190 Bedford-Strohm 2018a: 139.

191 Williams 2006: 97f.

192 See: Bryant 1996.

193 Williams 2006: viif.

contribute to protect human rights, human dignity, and human equality? A culture of tolerance is necessary for both individuals and collectives. Without tolerance, there cannot be peace; without justice, there cannot be tolerance. On the one hand, a culture of tolerance can establish the rule of reciprocity and its rationally persuasive meaning. On the other, we need to accomplish *the duty of tolerance as duty of public civility* even when this reciprocity is missing, i.e. when this rule of reciprocity is disobeyed or ignored by the others. Even though reciprocity is missing, the duty of tolerance is a duty of self-respect.

Our society is a “social construction” that needs resources for tolerance and convivence in order to be civilized. A culture of tolerance cannot be established without institutions of justice. In a “well-ordered-society”, as Rawls mentioned above, we need to trust and to establish such institutions of law and order, like a “Supreme Court”, as public embedded and constitutional established realities of social justice, of equal rights, and of equal dignity.

Even a secular or utilitarian society can promote “virtues” of sociality, solidarity, and respect with its own frames of structural rationality. Each kind of socialization involves cultivation of some kind of virtues or basics of an “ethical thought”. Even a society of robbers needs some rules in order to coordinate activities effectively. The law of tolerance is the minimal virtue of a society interested in decency and peaceful convivence. John Rawls’ theory of justice as fairness shows that “ethical egoism” or self-interest does not necessarily need to come into conflict with the commonwealth. In matters of tolerance, justice, fairness, and reciprocity, all members of the society can benefit from the cultivation of those individual and social virtues as well.

Where does this “duty” originate? Is the concept “duty of tolerance” a deontological pattern of ethical thought? The Kantian roots of Rawls’ ethics of fairness are more than evident. Besides, we cannot reduce the duty of tolerance to a deontological way of thinking that is meaningful only in such system of ethical reasoning.

One can describe both “duty” and “tolerance” as concepts that are open to different sources of ethical reasoning. “The drive toward a *rationalistic conception of rationality* comes (...) from social features of the modern world, which impose on personal deliberation and on the idea of practical reason itself a model drawn from a particular understanding of public rationality. This understanding requires in principle every decision to be

based on ground that can be discursively explained”.¹⁹⁴ This means that we cannot impose definitive concepts or ideals of rationality on the public or public reason. Public reason and ethical way of reasoning need to be affirmed, confirmed by people’s experience, as it will be explained below.

“We are dependent on concepts such as ‘human dignity’ and ‘human rights’ that are open to interpretation and justification. Only in this way can there be a basis for intercultural dialogue. Only in this way does the possibility of overarching consensus remain open”.¹⁹⁵ Similar to the concept of *human dignity* or *human rights*, the concept of *tolerance* has to be regarded as “begründungsoffen” (open to justification) as well. If we take into consideration the “retarded love” between Christian ethics and human rights¹⁹⁶, we need to openly appreciate the historical achievements of secular reason. Secularisation has a positive and a historical significance: “Overall, the development towards a secular and religiously neutral state has proven to be a blessing. Religious freedom can only be guaranteed if the state does not identify with a particular religion. (...) The state can be completely secular precisely because society is not completely secular. Yes, the state has to be consistently secular precisely because society is not obliged to be consistently secular. Only thanks to the secularity and neutrality of the state can society offer that free space in which the coexistence of the religious and the secular is possible. Religious peace can only succeed in a secular state”.¹⁹⁷

Religious and secular reason ought to stay open and dialogical, in order to avoid intolerance. “*Pathologies of religion*”¹⁹⁸ like fundamentalism¹⁹⁹, fanaticism, or terrorism can be healed by the light of reason. “*Pathologies of reason*” (like the use of atomic bombs or research with human embryos²⁰⁰) can be corrected by the light of religious cognition. A “polyphonic correlation” between faith and reason should serve as foundation of a culture of tolerance.²⁰¹

194 Ibid. 18.

195 Bedford-Strohm 2011: 19; Vögele 2008; Huber 2015.

196 Bedford-Strohm 2011: 10f.

197 Huber 2015: 9, 11.

198 Ratzinger 2005: 56f.

199 See: Boff 2007; see: Decker 2012: 143: “Mass persecutions of witches and sorcerers organized by the authorities have only occurred in European history”; see: Grünschloss 2009: 163ff.

200 See: Ratzinger 2005: 56f; Habermas 2001; Bedford-Strohm 2004: 121–140.

201 Ratzinger 2005: 56f.

In order to understand the “duty of tolerance as duty of public civility”, we need at the same time to accept and to promote the *public significance of religion*. We can speak with Heinrich Bedford-Strohm about a public responsibility or “public mandate” of the Church to be a “public voice for moral and humanity”.²⁰²

To be “salt of the earth and light of the world” is hard work for one's own cultivation and humanization of the world, as well as for the social shape of the Church and society.²⁰³ The “social structural change of the public”²⁰⁴ needs the orientation knowledge and the cultural formative power²⁰⁵ of the Christian tradition. Public Theology serves as illuminating power and moral reasoning. Heinrich Bedford-Strohm speaks about Public Theology as communicative “pastoral”, “discursive”, “political-consultative” and “prophetical”.²⁰⁶ “If civil discourse is something like the 'beating heart' of society (Bert von den Brink), then the value orientations, on which it is based, can be understood as the oxygen without which this discourse would soon come to a standstill. Places, such as churches, where they are reproduced again and again and continuously nurtured, would then be something like the lungs of society. Only in such places, where discourses also develop affective binding effects, consensuses, generated by argumentation, can develop action-motivating effects.”²⁰⁷

202 See: Heinrich Bedford-Strohm 2015: 13.

203 See: Wolfgang Huber 1991: 645: “The orientation of the church’s action to the commandment of love, its understanding as social diakonia, finally also excludes the separation of the political responsibility of the individual Christian from the political responsibility of the church. The responsibility for peace, justice, joy, the responsibility for the reduction of violence, of bondage and of need is not only a responsibility of the individual Christians, but a responsibility of the church as ‘earthly-historical form of existence of Jesus Christ.’”

204 Jürgen Habermas 2019a: 225ff.

205 See: Heinrich Bedford-Strohm 2015: 28; see: Wolfgang Huber 1991: 623: “1. The public action of the church is service to the public claim of the gospel; the publicity of proclamation is therefore the core of all public action of the church. 2. the public action of the church is diaconal action; it is the attempt to correspond in being for others to the being of Jesus for others”.

206 See: Heinrich Bedford-Strohm 2015: 47f: he underlines “four dimensions of the public speech of the Church”; see: also Vogt/Schäfers 2021, 8f.

207 Heinrich Bedford-Strohm 2018: 458.

3.8 Tolerance as ethical disposition to structure intersubjective relations

The concept of tolerance can become an ethical force or powerful reason that regulates conduct, ethical behavior, “ethical dispositions”, and “reactions to others”.²⁰⁸ Words are meaningful only if their rationality is internalized in someone’s own worldview. Practical reason and reason as such can transform the self and the society, i.e. the personal and social life, only if they reach the deepest levels of “internalization”. Internalization of virtues as interpersonal or political rationalities means both “self-control” and “dispositions of action, desire, and feeling”.²⁰⁹ As virtue of practical reason, tolerance can promote or inhibit certain reactions to other people. It can be described as an “intelligent disposition” or cultural instrument that intelligently forms the intelligent conduct of the rational agent. If we act rationally, our behaviour is rational and we live a rational life. Only then we are rational beings. Commitment to tolerance is commitment to the rational patterns of communicative reason and justice.

A *rational conversation* is possible only if there is something like “minimal trace of an ethical consciousness”.²¹⁰ Tolerance and culture of tolerance are desirable even from the perspective or in virtue of our own interest. It serves as foundation of a well-ordered society and for an atmosphere of peace, of trust, and of reciprocity. Some of the premises of tolerance deal with the *self-awareness* as responsible person in the society and with the *principle of impartiality* that harmonize the interests of different persons: “The idea of a rational agent is not simply the third-personal idea of a creature whose behavior is to be explained in terms of beliefs and desires. A rational agent acts on reasons, and this goes beyond his acting in accordance with some regularity or law, even one that refers to beliefs and desires. If he acts on reasons, then he must not only be an agent but reflect on himself as an agent, and this involves his seeing himself as one agent among others. So he stands back from his own desires and interests, and sees them from a standpoint that is not that of his desires and interests. Nor is it the standpoint of anyone else’s desires and interests. That is the standpoint of impartiality. So it is appropriate for the rational agent, with his aspiration to be genuinely free and rational, to see himself as making rules that will harmonize the interests of all rational agents”.²¹¹

208 See: Williams 2006: 35f.

209 Ibid. 35.

210 Ibid. 28.

211 Ibid. 65f.

We live, think, and act *in the shadows* of our influential ancestors that might be described also as founders or initiators of the *moral language*²¹², of “moral grammar”, or “moral topography”.²¹³ Each language is a kind of logical landscape that involves a *semantic structure of the reality*. For each human being, tolerance sounds differently due to the different experience and specific levels of understanding. On the other hand, we can speak about “sematic axes” like tolerance, justice, liberation, or “implicite axioms”.²¹⁴ An analysis of the “inferential structure of a language”²¹⁵ increases the meaning of the language as a code of mutual behaviour. As human beings, we do not grow up in an entirely natural world but in an already ethically shaped world that we assume during the processes of socialization through which we receive cultural, or religious identity. Our self-understanding, our expectations, and orientation are deeply marked by reasons embedded in words, in sanctified or “holy” images. On the other hand, each culture is dynamic, caught in a process of effective interference with other cultures: “Cultures, subcultures, fragments of cultures, constantly meet one another and exchange and modify practices and attitudes”.²¹⁶

We need to bear in mind that a culture or cultivation of tolerance is also confronted with dangerous psychological processes of disinformation or spiritual malformation: “If you were to be brainwashed by a certain religious group, you would strongly identify your interests with those of the group”.²¹⁷ A culture of tolerance has to deal with ideologies or realities of “brainwashed believers”. In awareness of the real dangers of nationalism, religious fanaticism, and terrorism, a culture of tolerance is the only way or tool for peaceful coexistence. Tolerance has to be accepted as virtue of a just society and as medicine or therapy for a disordered world. “We need to live in society (...) and if we are to live in society, some ethical considerations or other must be embodied in the lives of quite a lot of people”.²¹⁸ Tolerance belongs to the minimal “set of values” or minimal moral standards of a civilized society, like a sense for justice. Tolerance is necessary not only for the development of human personality or psychological health, but also for the human happiness and well-being

212 Ibid. 85. At the other hand each of us has his own personal shadows.

213 See: Taylor 1996: 207.

214 Bedford-Strohm 2018a: 146, footnote 30.

215 Peregrin/Svoboda: 4.

216 Williams 2006: 158.

217 Ibid. 42.

218 Ibid. 45.

in a peaceful world. Tolerance is an achievement of the human culture and a civic duty or virtue of political and religious responsibility. Tolerance is at the same time a matter of *duty to oneself*, a “*self-regarding obligation*” as rational agent. As responsible subjects, we need to take into account the positive human potential. There are huge possibilities of shaping the social world that are waiting to be realized. This possibilities of a better, just world can be seen also as a duty corresponding to the claims of self-respect and of respect towards other rational agents, and as obligation to fight for a just society for rational human beings.

Without “corrective reflection” we cannot be a “reflective self” with “reflective deliberation” and “reflective freedom”.²¹⁹ For our own sake and the sake of our social world, “prereflective beliefs” and “prereflected dispositions”, that at the very first glance seems to be self-evident truths, should be filtered by the “reflective self” through ethical judgments or intellectual analysis²²⁰ even as “self-interested rational choice” that respects a faire equality and the liberty of the others.²²¹ Mature *ethical thought, experience, and life* are characterised by a “reflective equilibrium”²²², a process and a result of searching coherence. Another aspect of mature ethical thought, experience and life is the “inferential reasoning”, that allows to establish “standards for acceptable inference”, “rules of inference”, and “inferential practice”.²²³ For instance, a world in which sexual, ethnical, or social discrimination belong to the “common sense” of a specific tradition, due to different colonializations of the mind, only a “reflective equilibrium” might be helpful. This reflective equilibrium does not mean that only a secular rationality is responsible for the present and future social world. Religious reasoning and secular rationality are complementary, boundary expanding, and communicative through the medium of reason.²²⁴ According to the Christian faith the world is not only “in need of improvement”, but it is also able to be improved.²²⁵ For instance, the *eschatological imagination* as anticipatorily rationality is a critical and creative rationality at

219 Ibid. 68f.

220 Ibid. 69–73.

221 Ibid. 78f.

222 Williams 2006: 99; Daniels 1996; Pogge 2007: 162f.

223 Daniels 2020.

224 Bedford-Strohm 2018a: 139.

225 Ibid. 143f.

once. On the other hand, there is a “pre-structure of understanding”²²⁶ that keeps the religious truth and imagination meaningful and creative.

We need to believe that through a critical and self-critical process of intercultural dialogue, liberation from pathological premises of our intellectual landscape might follow. Each interreligious and interdisciplinary dialogue opens “inferential landscapes”²²⁷ that allow new levels or fields of rationality, tolerance, and justice. Contemporary *paradigms of theology*²²⁸ like liberation or feminist theology, for instance, make clear, that wrong hermeneutics have malicious social consequences. “Patriarchal symbolism of God serves to legitimize and strengthen patriarchal social structures in the family, society and church”.²²⁹

To summarize, a culture of tolerance can enjoy or be marked by many fields of thought or traditions of thought. Religious tolerance has to be tolerant and open-minded towards the secular resources of tolerance and vice versa. One can describe tolerance as rooted in the common sense or common language or common imagination. We can also differentiate between a bottom-up and a top-down tolerance, i.e. a tolerance from the historical reality and a tolerance from above as an inspiring imagination of a perfect society. Both roots of tolerance, from the experiences of the past and from the anticipation or creative imagination of the future, should serve to achieve a greater tolerance, justice, and liberty in the world. Both imperatives of reason and of faith lead and should lead to a tolerant ethical wisdom and ethical behaviour. We can describe both imperatives as a duty or responsibility in front of the human creative potential to strive for a better world. Pro-active tolerance does not only involve mutual respect but also an *appreciative recognition*²³⁰ of the other in his or her otherness. Proactive tolerance can be defined as an essential *duty* and *identity marker of Christians*, who ought to be “children of love and peace” and should hereby contribute to the establishment of peace and justice in the society through a *culture of convivence*. “What is peace? What else than the loving disposition towards our fellow. And what is the contrary to love? Hatred,

226 Habermas 2019: 193: “The pre-structure of understanding is universal – in all cognitive performances the moments of draft and discovery complement each other”; see: Durkheim 2020, 108: “Today it is generally acknowledged that law, morality, scientific thought itself came from religion”; cf. Bedford-Strohm 2018a: 143, footnote 24.

227 Peregrin/Svoboda 2017: 137f.

228 See: Bosch 2011.

229 Johnson 1994: 61.

230 Klein 2014: 63f.

wrath, anger, jealousy, vindictiveness, hypocrisy, disaster provoked by war” (St. Gregory of Nyssa).²³¹

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231 Tsetsis 2007: 57; see: Harakas 2004: “He who seeks peace, seeks Christ, for he is the peace” (St. Basil). St. Basil’s understanding is similar with John Locke’s description of Christ as “Prince of Peace”.

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