**Education to tolerance and the task of world citizenship**

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**The relevance of education to tolerance**

The Italian national constitutional charter and international recommendations indicate the horizon value to be followed to make tolerance a way of thinking, to be acquired through the right education to the knowledge and exercise of human rights, and among these the right to education merits special mention. In the *Declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education* of the informal meeting of Paris, 17 March 2015, the European Union Education Ministers “reaffirm our determination to stand shoulder to shoulder in support of fundamental values that lie at the heart of the European Union: respect for human dignity, freedom (including freedom of expression), democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights. These values are common to the Member States in a European society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail”. Tolerance is one of the most important contents of education and we understand it should be included in school plans of teaching and learning to open the door to democracy and to living together peacefully.

In the study on the concept and experience of tolerance Erasmus of Rotterdam represents the open intellectual able to discuss the risk of a narrow vision of religion. In the past scientists reached the conclusion that religions tend to increase with a parallel growth of diversification, rather than unification. The multiplication could be a sign of vitality, but it could also forge a passage to new conflicts. From this point of view, the analysis is augmented by the universal message spread by the Church, which, particularly during the Second Vatican Council (1965), called for the tolerance of Catholics for everyone, even atheists, since everyone contributes to building the world in which we live and, for this purpose, dialogue is to be considered a plausible, shareable form, through which the right position for the fundamental rights of the human person can be found. It follows that the commitment to live the right to life, the right to education and the right to peace and justice can never be considered depleted, but, rather, is to be rendered vibrant in the closest and farthest human vicissitudes. Multicultural societies are the ones that feel problems of tolerance the most, due to both the pluralism of values and the asymmetry of the distribution of power. The only possible path is that of dialogue, as much interpersonal as institutional, in which taking care of the person implies interpreting his or her past experience, not limited to the historical and social contingency, but aimed at a project of universal transcendence.

In practice, there is no shortage of signs of the international recognition of the need for encounter, as the exercise of a universally recognised right, if one thinks that in 2014, the Nobel Prize was awarded to Malala Yousafzai for peace and the defence of the rights of children, referring, in particular, to women’s rights to education: a statement that tolerance is not exclusively a question of good sense, but also the sole reply to a civility that is vastly shared for our survival. It is an educational action for the formation of consciences towards a constitutional culture that democratic countries choose to pursue, as a preferred path of social responsibility and participation in the continuation of our existence.

From a research point of view we conducted a survey amongst secondary schools students (age 12-13-14-15) asking: **“**What does it mean for you to be tolerant in our contemporary societies? “. We collected comments from Italy, Albania and China and allowed mutual access to written protocols. Results are under comparative consideration adding other countries. We can register different levels of tolerance meaning and awareness.

**The condition for living together**

At the end of the Second World War, Primo Mazzolari reflected on the need for tolerance that originated in the past in a Europe troubled by religious struggles. Whether due to scepticism or Christian charity, people felt that hate in the name of a creed and a profession of faith could not continue to be nurtured.

This issue was brought up again whenever the divisions caused a distancing from a common point of contact. In fact, if we were able to define a general interest around which we could all converge, without worrying about our particular passions and specific desires, the necessity to pursue and spread the culture of tolerance would drop away. The reality, however, is quite another matter.

We continue to fight wars and sign treaties. It seems hostilities divide us more than friendships bring us closer. The language is the same, and yet, what we feel inside carries us to raise borders and walls. As the divisions escalate, we perceive how indispensable it is to turn to what can unite and no longer separate us. This allows us to live in our essentiality, without feeling threatened by peremptory, devastating judgements. It is where the understanding of tolerance begins, as a *forma mentis* that prepares thinking towards the other as thinking aimed at good. Mazzolari wrote that tolerance, which “could also be called ‘the effort to think good thoughts’, as Pascal put it, is the condition for living together” (2013, p. 58).

If freedom was missing before, what is now missing is tolerance, in which the principle of equality of all men is affirmed both before God and in interpersonal relations. We were created as equals, but unlike one another in personality; we are thus dissimilar. The profile of a tolerant person is a person who sees and accepts equality as much as dissimilarity. We are equal by dignity and respect, but different by emotions, feelings, thoughts and personalities. The profile of the intolerant person is a person who is devoid of a sense of equality and would like everyone to be modelled the same way, shaped with precision, making it possible to overcome the unpredictability and surprise that arise from dissimilarity.

From a political point of view, we can observe that a tolerant government recognises the equality and dissimilarity of its citizens, chooses respect for freedom, is the government of a population that actively participates in defining and observing the laws and is the government of democracy. Vice versa, an intolerant government is run by one, or a few persons, denies equality and suppresses dissimilarity, forcing everyone to conform, and abolishes creativity and spontaneity; it does not heed the authenticity of behaviours and the value of the uniqueness of each person. The tolerant government may also not be as ordered and disciplined as the intolerant one, but it is worth more, because it is founded on human respect; it is a vital government, in which peace springs from trust and does not fall to pieces due to the consumption of a rule and the intolerability of unshared impositions.

If the States require a philosophical project for perpetual peace, as Kant hypothesised, we, as people, need a natural agreement of tolerance, as Mazzolari foreshadowed (2013, p. 117).

At this point in our thinking, we can definitely say that, today, the subject, problem and choice of tolerance acquire an unbounded extension that cannot be confined to an option of resolution of religious, political and ideological conflicts. This is an option of vast proportions that entails both commonality and taking up a position against revived racisms and reiterated social injustices.

Tolerance is also what makes us compassionate with ourselves and others. It is feeling mercy and pain that makes us accept limitations so as to understand that to offer hand or ask for help are profoundly human actions in a host community. Such actions enable warding off the destruction of those who are often rejected, because they are weak and helpless, and have no say, and yet have a life to be expressed in full. Solidarity starts with a sense of charity that does not sustain situations in which persons must submit to a way of thinking that crushes them and does not free them. Mazzolari’s message anticipates what the core of rebuilding the value of the person was, as well as of human identity and the stability of being God’s creature, in a society subjected to destabilising forces during the years following the Second World War.

**Our intellectual duty**

The course of reflection followed in this contribution has taken moves from the proposition of the subject of choice, understanding it as the ability to distinguish between the many paths of the mind and heart, having a preference for those oriented towards the realisation of what is congenial to human nature, since they are consistent with the path of civilisation to date and with the idea of tolerance on which our coexistence is based. If the authority of the texts written by well-known academics, as Erasmus sustained, has its reasons to be in the cultural heritage that accompanies us, it is true that within that limitless mass of knowledge we find traces of acceptance of those who do not think as we do and, because of this, cannot be treated as a person condemned to death by courts of men and laws they enact, as Voltaire sustained.

The truth has been revealed on a religious plane, but it is to resurface, day after day, as a wealth of the experience that it resides in the inner life of others and that my interpretation, our interpretation, is manifested by continuous discoveries and not once and for all. Along this path, Eco leads through the labyrinths of the Middle Ages and post-modern times to show both the depth of knowledge and the risks of its limitations.

Culture is the name given to those forms of social living that become the roots of our national and cosmopolitan identity. An identity, not a dogma, subject to constant reformulations, always aided by more imagination and fertile creativity, the more the better as we learn to cultivate our humanity. Within this scenario, the call of Martha C. Nussbaum (1997) can be sustained, when she writes: “People from diverse backgrounds sometimes have difficulty recognizing one another as fellow citizens in the community of reason. This is so, frequently, because actions and motives require, and do not always receive, a patient effort of interpretation. The task of world citizenship requires the would-be world citizen to become a sensitive and empathic interpreter. Education at all ages should cultivate the capacity for such interpreting.” (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 63).

Alongside the pedagogical meaning of education to tolerance, such as the acceptance of ideologies, faiths, systems of life different from one’s own and recognition of their validity, we must needs consider the problematic transition, which shifts the analysis from a religious plane to a secular plane. Thus, in noting the great variety of forms and expression of tolerance, we see how their vastness merges into new interpretive contexts that adopt, as binding, not so much the sharing of pluralism as the state of the multicultural society, a challenge to tolerance and promise of tolerance. This way, the subject of multiculturalism, examined by Michael Walzer (1997, pp. 147-153), as a political arena of both economic and social equality, represents an opening for the debate, so as to recognise how many obstacles there still are prior to the realisation of a project, in which we can coexist in full respect of the human dignity of each and every person. The nerve centre of this tolerance is the recognition of the differences of groups through the proposition of programmes for putting aside those possible new discriminations of an economic nature that, in the name of poverty, lead us to again give voice to our intellectual duty to choose the good and shun the bad.

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