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TOLERANCE AND POWER OF CONVICTION IN G.K.CHESTERTON'S THE BELL  
AND THE CROSS

It would certainly be an exaggeration to say that the concepts of Tolerance and Power of Conviction are the main preoccupations of G.K.Chesterton's novel The Bell and the Cross. But it would also be a careless neglect on the part of the reader to overlook them altogether. Now and then throughout the novel G.K. Chesterton touches upon these concepts either explicitly or in an implicit but nevertheless very acute manner. And the problem is worth noticing and worth pondering about. Of course from the very beginning one should make it clear that neither Toleration nor Power of Conviction apply solely to religion. At a deeper reflection we realize that all kinds of freedom and all moral principles hang together, no matter whether they are perceived in a religious or extra-religious context.

In Historical and Philosophical Perspective

Tolerance and Power of Conviction appear as timeless and universally valid conceptions which recur in history and make themselves manifest in micro- as well as macro- relations: in society, in politics, in personal lives. In the course of the history of mankind we can see how people long for strong belief and aspire to firm convictions. From our historical as well as direct experience we also know that the everyday art of living together demands a certain amount of tolerance and compromise; and in everyday language we speak of something being tolerable or not. That we notice already on a basic and the most fundamental level. The problem reaches a larger dimension when it is transplanted on the level of national and international coexis-

-tence.

In the history of ideas Power of Conviction did not undergo such great changes as Tolerance. It always meant what it means now and there were always people ready to give up their lives but never their beliefs. Tortures and threats could not make them quit their opinions and embrace others, totally alien. Force could not deprive men of their beliefs. Those who did not hold fast to their convictions were despised as cowards and those who did were prepared to undergo torments and persecution to defend them. The historical record of the concept of Tolerance has been less uniform and more susceptible to change. In the first place we observe an enormous shift in people's attitudes: from tolerance being a vice in the past ages to tolerance being a virtue in the 20th century. Up to the beginning of the 18th century "tolérance" had a pejorative meaning in French and was defined as a lax complacency towards evil; and religious toleration was often condemned as a heresy that might provoke God's wrath. Even later tolerance with the positive colouring, i.e. tolerance in the sense of complete acceptance of one's neighbour as different from oneself was not free from negative overtones because it still sometimes meant forbearance without full approval.

The second thing that we should become aware of before we proceed to the analysis of tolerance in Chesterton's novel is that tolerance - even if it was considered and acknowledged as a virtue - was rarely given its complete and satisfactory expression. John Locke, one of the chief advocates of the idea of toleration in England, in his Letter concerning toleration writes: "I esteem that toleration to be the chief characteristic mark of the true church"<sup>1</sup>. But the same John Locke, who argues that somebody who is cruel and implacable toward those who differ from him in belief does not aim at the kingdom of God, denies toleration to an atheist; and his famous Epistola de Tolerantia, the work which canonized the ideal of religious tolerance, does not embrace those who lack faith altogether: "... those are not at all to be tolerated who deny the being of a God. Promises, covenants and oaths, which are the bonds of human society, can have no hold upon an atheist"<sup>2</sup>. And Milton who was all for diversity in

religion would never concede toleration to Catholics in England. Tolerance it seems is aspired to, upheld as an ideal and defended, but in most cases it is limited tolerance.

The same holds true for various legal acts and practical application of tolerance in the life of a community. Let us take as an example the Act of Toleration which is regarded as one of the milestones in the struggle for tolerance. Passed by the English Parliament in 1689, it granted religious freedom to the Protestant dissenters from the established Anglican Church; but the law did not apply to everybody and it left outside the pale Roman Catholics, Unitarians and Jews. What was popularly regarded as a milestone emerges as a very imperfect attempt to reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable, namely the firm convictions of a certain group of people and foundations of their political and social set up with a vague feeling of duty to accept holders of different beliefs and opinions within that established framework. One should say that paradoxically enough the Toleration Act seems to be to a certain extent intolerant. The same claim could be made in reference to other similar legal acts in different European countries. What we usually find is tolerance with restrictions; tolerance under certain conditions; tolerance with provisos; in other words tolerance with a certain degree of intolerance, officially recognized and confirmed.

Tolerance has been put into practice in the same incomplete and imperfect way. In various countries that apparently cherished and guarded the ideal of toleration members of minority - and not always minority - religious, racial and political groups have often had economic, social and political disadvantages. We need not look for examples in the Far East or South Africa. England, for instance, admitted Jews to Parliament only in the second half of the 19th century /1858/ and in Spain the ban on Jewish or Protestant public services was dropped only in 1967. All these deficiencies concerning toleration and the practical applications of the concept point to the fact that tolerance as such is far more difficult than one imagines at first sight. It seems that wherever higher reasons or supreme values come into play tolerance, if not abandoned altogether, is at least checked

and brought under restricting control.

There is then a remarkable tension between the struggle to uphold certain ideals which one considers extremely valuable and important, and an effort to achieve tolerance towards people who hold different views and opinions. The clash between different strong convictions seems to exclude /if not always, at least in the context of some problems/ any common ground of tolerance. The tension or clash is even more curious if we realize that both power of conviction and tolerance are two positive values, two virtues, one may say, which in the name of the dignity of the human person everybody should possess. A strange paradox is involved here: the two are essential and it seems that by their very nature they cannot coexist; the two are of extreme importance to the dignity of man and it seems that they exclude each other. Must one find then that Power of Conviction always suppresses Tolerance, or Tolerance dissipates Power of Conviction? Is there only one possible couple of alternatives: kill or convert? This of course may be translated depending on our respective circumstances into other combinations: eradicate or change completely; force to comply or get rid of, and many others. In the history of religion we can easily see that strong religious views in very many cases led to intolerance of which persecutions of dissenters, burnings at the stake of heretics and the most dire penalties for schismatics are the example.

In G.K.Chesterton's novel *MacIan*, a fervent Catholic, cannot stand the opinion which hurts his belief. Why is he not tolerant? Why does he not respect the conviction which differs from his own? "I thought people in our time were supposed to respect each other's religion"<sup>3</sup>, says Miss Drake surprised by MacIan's and Turnbull's unusual manifestation. Can we ever reach any relation between Power of Conviction and Tolerance that will prove satisfactory? Before we answer all these questions let us look more closely at the concept of tolerance itself.

#### Misconceptions about Tolerance

The dictionary definition of tolerance as "the intellectual and practical acknowledgement of the right of others to live in

accordance with religious beliefs that are not accepted as one's own"<sup>4</sup>, is not of much help. It does not take into consideration the extension of the meaning from purely religious to extra-religious and what is more important, being very general it does not account for the complexity that we have already alluded to. It does not allow for various shades of meaning and hence various mutilated or imperfect tolerances arise which have nothing in common with the high ideal. Thus we have tolerance which borders on indifference. It does not guard any value and therefore it does not desire to pass it to anybody else. In Chesterton's novel we find people who are indifferent to values and who only for this reason find it quite easy to be tolerant. What is more they cannot understand people who act otherwise. Mr. Cumberland Vane, the police magistrate, "honourably celebrated for the lightness of his sentences and the lightness of his conversation"<sup>5</sup> is disgusted at the lack of tolerance in the sense of respecting other people's beliefs. He asks MacIvan in the court:

What conceivable right have you to break other people's windows because their opinions do not agree with yours?

This man only gave expression to his sincere belief<sup>6</sup>.

And for the strange lady the whole fight is absurd, primitive in a sense and unsuitable for modern man. Neither Mr. Vane nor Miss Drake are seriously attached to any value and consequently Chesterton presents them as decadents: a weak magistrate lacking determination, and a bored lady tired of everything. She in particular is a warning to the duellists lest they should reach such a state of distorted lukewarm liberalism. If one formed one's idea of tolerance on the basis of these two examples, the concept would appear as something pallid and shaky; not a virtue but an aspect of decadence and weakness.

There are many similar misconceptions about tolerance. One of them is the attitude which promotes tolerance as the only way out of a difficult situation. The only ground for tolerance seen in this perspective is expediency. Tolerance is a means undertaken "for the sake of peace"; it is an expression of shrewd tactics; therefore a lack of it may be indiscreet but not morally wrong. And again the virtue of tolerance as an attitude towards a human

person who thinks differently from oneself is here diminished and impoverished; a high ideal is changed into small currency of practical gains. It is for those bigger gains and for the sake of peace that the student of Shaw and Tolstoy tries to prevent the duel. Both MacIain and Turnbull despise the Peacemaker and find nothing convincing or attractive in his bombastic speech about love by which all differences should be settled. The very word "love" sounds hard and heavy in his mouth as if he were saying the word "boots". In due time they will find themselves under the influence of love but that would be quite a different kind of love.

On the surface and on the basis of the early chapters, so far considered, it might seem that G.K.Chesterton is against tolerance; he is certainly against tolerance as the modern world understands it. No doubt he is opposed to that kind of tolerance which is voiced by Mr. Vane, the Peacemaker or the strange lady and which he would call a misconception of tolerance. What is the place of Tolerance spelled with capital "T" ? Does anything like Tolerance in this deeper sense exist ? What is G.K.Chesterton's attitude to it ? On the first reading of the novel it appears that G.K.Chesterton gives more time and attention to Power of Conviction with the apparent negligence of Tolerance which recedes into the background.

#### Power of Conviction as a Mark of Spiritual Strength

Power of conviction is emphasized throughout the novel as a particular attachment to a value or to what one considers to be a value. G.K.Chesterton understands power of conviction not only as firmness of one's beliefs but also a readiness to fight for them and defend them /cf. Chesterton's book on St.Thomas Aquinas, chap. "The Aristotelian Revolution"/. Already from the very beginning MacIain's reaction to Turnbull's article and his smashing the window of the editorial office of the "Atheist" is something exceptional and deserving special attention. The later development of the events in the novel indicates that he has as if woken up the world by breaking that window. The duel which is the immediate

consequence of the incident in Ludgate Hill proves to that world that one's opinions may be stronger than one's self-preservation instinct, or one's sense of the ridiculous, or one's membership of a certain community. It shows to that world even more, namely that man must have a value or a set of values on which he rests all his life and which he will fight for and defend. The fighting is really fighting for one's existence, for the spiritual or transcendental dimension of that existence. MacIan answering the surprise, indignation and disgust of the police magistrate puts it simply:

Shall I not fight for my own existence ?<sup>7</sup>

And a bit earlier:

If a man must not fight for this, may he fight for anything ?<sup>8</sup>

If he does not have a value in his life, he is not a complete man. That is why the importance of the fight is so much emphasized. MacIan and Turnbull are the most important people in England and in Europe; what is more, the convictions for which they fight are the only reality in their existence. MacIan first notices this fact and he says to Turnbull:

It is strongly borne in upon me that you and I, the sole occupants of this runaway cab, are at this moment the two most important people in London, possibly in Europe. I have been looking at all the streets as we went past, I have been looking at all the shops as we went past, I have been looking at all the churches as we went past. At first I felt a little dazed with the vastness of it all. I could not understand what it all meant. But now I know exactly what it all means. It means us. This whole civilization is only a dream. You and I are realities<sup>9</sup>.

Turnbull is just as keenly and acutely aware of the discovery:

We must fight this thing out somewhere: because, as you truly say, we have found each other's reality. We must kill each other - or convert each other<sup>10</sup>.

The fight thus appears as something fundamental, as an act of universal importance; an immense demonstration which will set the world on fire:

This man and I are alone in the modern world in that we think that God is essentially important. I think He does not exist; that is where the importance comes in for me. But this man thinks He does exist, and thinking that very properly thinks Him more important than anything else. Now we wish to make a great demonstration and assertion - something that will set the world on fire like the first Christian persecutions<sup>11</sup>.

The attitude of the public corresponds to the importance attached to the duel. The unusual phenomenon of the two people who are determined to fight for their beliefs attracts attention of all England. Newspapers speak about them and there are signs of treating them as heroes: workers bet on the duel and drink the health of the duellists. The police on the other hand treats them as if they were extremely dangerous criminals. Almost the whole plot of the novel consists of the pursuit and the running away; but G.K.Chesterton makes sure that the reader understands the true reasons for the chase. The police and all other guardians of the public order attack the two duellists not on the grounds of their atheism or Christianity but simply because they are ready to fight for and defend their convictions. Mr Turnbull makes it clear:

The police are after me not for atheism but for being ready to fight for it<sup>12</sup>.

Some not yet defined forces in society try to do everything to prevent the duel - that demonstration of one's convictions - even if it is by locking up the duellists, their supporters and all who approve of the duel in a lunatic asylum. No price is too high. At the end of his novel G.K.Chesterton creates a picture of England turned into a prison-like madhouse. Insanity is no longer an exception. All citizens have to undergo a careful medical examination that will certify that they are sane:



... all England has gone into captivity in order to take us captive. All England has turned into a lunatic asylum in order to prove us lunatics<sup>13</sup>,

says MacIan. All this is done to get rid of the inconvenient duellists or rather of the idea that they now represent and which is becoming to spread and "contaminate" the innocent, inactive, indifferent and empty minds of some people. It is significant that characters in the novel do not take sides either with MacIan or Turnbull; with either Christianity or atheism. The line of division goes somewhere else, namely between people who are attracted or even fascinated by their way of thinking and people who openly hate them. On the latter side we find the mysterious Master and all the staff of the mental hospital-prison. MacIan says to Turnbull:

... these people hate us more than Nero hated Christians, and fear us more than any man feared Nero. They have filled England with frenzy and galloping in order to capture us and wipe us out - in order to kill us<sup>14</sup>.

Fear and hate are the attributes of those who cannot bear people ready to stand firm by their convictions even against overwhelming odds.

Thus we have come across another strange paradox that G.K. Chesterton makes us aware of: power of conviction is something that the world is afraid of; but at the same time it is something essential in the life of man who needs to be accepted and recognized for what he is or wants to be. This inner need of recognition seems to be one of the basic needs of man. In view of it it is easy to explain why Turnbull is angry with MacIan only superficially and for a very short time for what his adversary did in his office. In fact he is glad and proud that at last he has met somebody who treats his views seriously:

Year after year went by, and at last a man came who treated Mr. Turnbull's secularist shop with a real respect and seriousness<sup>15</sup>

A great light like dawn came into Mr. Turnbull's face. Behind his red hair and beard he turned deadly pale with pleasure. Here, after twenty lone years of useless toil, he had his reward. Someone was angry with the paper<sup>16</sup>.

On the margin of what has been said one more fact concerning power of conviction becomes obvious. Power of conviction is not a solely personal attitude; It is not an attitude that one cherishes only for oneself. On the contrary, it is an attitude which must be given an outward expression. The good-natured liberal police magistrate Vane cannot understand it and therefore he does not get approval from G.K.Chesterton. The author of The Ball and the Cross cannot agree to his:

Be quiet, . . . , it is most undesirable that things of that sort should be spoken about - a - in public, and in an ordinary Court of Justice. Religion is - a - too personal matter to be mentioned in such a place<sup>17</sup>.

Power of conviction, if it is genuine, must inevitably lead to its outward manifestation. That inevitability can be easily felt in the shortness and innocent frankness of MacIen's response. MacIen simply cannot understand Mr. Vane's reaction; in his opinion he did nothing offensive or extraordinary, just gave an expression to his belief.

The question about the relation between power of conviction and tolerance cannot be dismissed. But let us put this question in slightly different terms. Let it not be the question about which is stronger or which takes greater hold on men. Such questions cannot be answered in a satisfactory way. We should rather try a tentative solution that takes form of a logical statement: only if A happens, B may happen. Translating it into the language of G.K.Chesterton's novel we may say that only those who have strong beliefs may or may not be tolerant. In other words, as we have already seen, the concept of tolerance does not apply at all to people who have no strong beliefs or convictions. Power of conviction is a prerequisite for tolerance and the two are rather complementary than contradictory. But the concept of tolerance from this proposition must be richer and deeper than the toleranc

from dictionaries or else from current popular misconceptions and misunderstandings about it.

#### Towards Deeper Understanding of Tolerance

In his novel G.K.Chesterton puts forward many important issues of religious, philosophical or even political nature /cf. Ian Boyd: The Novels of G.K.Chesterton, chap. "The Early Novels"/. But above them all he seems to be searching for that deeper and broader understanding of tolerance. It is not strange that he should do this since all these: religion, philosophy, politics... call for tolerance. Chesterton, very un-English in his lack of compromise, does not grasp that tolerance quickly and easily. A zealous Christian, he is only too ready to discard everything that does not bear the name or the appearance of Christianity. His arriving at the deeper understanding of tolerance is a gradual process which is best shown in the character of MacIan. But not only. It is also reflected in the dynamism of the novel.

Three factors basically contribute to that dynamism: the presentation of Mr. Turnbull, MacIan, and the evolution of their mutual relation. Let us start with the editor of the "Atheist". Turnbull at the beginning of the novel is quite unlike Turnbull whom we find closely to the end of it. A short red-haired man whose appearance and behaviour leave no delusion whatsoever as to his lack of gentleman-like qualities. That revolutionist dreaming about streams of blood flowing along the streets gradually gets nobler and more humane. Disagreeable and unpleasant at the very beginning, he is step by step transformed by the author. One may even risk a statement that G.K.Chesterton as if changes his mind about Mr. Turnbull in the course of the novel. Turnbull at the beginning of the novel is a flat character in whom G.K.Chesterton tries to caricature a typical moralist, rationalist and a devotee of science. But he soon gives up that idea and as if discovers the depth of his character and presents a dramatic inner struggle for Truth in the editor of the "Atheist".

The picture of MacIan in the novel is perhaps less dynamic but far from static. On the first reading of the novel it may seem

that religious and idealistic values of MacIán are totally accepted and shown in an opposition to materialist and rationalistic values voiced by Turnbull. This, however, is not the case. MacIán undergoes a change which is not less significant for the problem of tolerance and power of conviction than that of Turnbull. Ian Boyd describes this change as romantic otherworldliness being "finally transformed and humanized by the values of intellectual honesty and social awareness which Turnbull expresses through his atheism"<sup>18</sup>.

People whom MacIán and Turnbull meet when they make their hopeless efforts to fight their duel and all the experiences they undergo partly account for that transformation. But more important than the external circumstances is something that takes place within them. It is the discovery of love that weakens their desire to fight. It comes as a wedge into their so far unyielding determination to kill in duel the representative of the opposite cause. The discovery is surprising but the fact remains beyond any doubt: both of them feel the presence of that puzzling friendship which begins to attract them to each other instead of mutual repulsing. They know the danger because they realize that this peculiar love weakens what is the strongest in them. That is why MacIán will say:

We must fight now, Turnbull. We must fight now. A frightful thing has come upon me, and I know it must be now and here. /.../ Now or never. For the dreadful thought is in my mind. /.../ I must kill you now, ... because - /.../ Because I have begun to like you<sup>19</sup>.

And then desperately and with great pain he asks that fundamental question:

Did God make men love each other against their will?<sup>20</sup>

G.K.Chesterton together with MacIán seems to be groping in the darkness in his effort to reconcile power of conviction and tolerance. It is at this moment that the clash between power of conviction and tolerance is most vividly presented in the novel. MacIán's desperate question has a tragic note about it because for a long time he cannot come to terms with that strain of

friendship which appears between him and the atheist who blasphemed the Virgin Mary whom he considers his Mother. Neither Turnbull nor MacIan can accept each other readily. They can no longer be enemies but they cannot acknowledge that they are friends either. MacIan says:

It is hard to guess what God means in this business. But He means something - or the other thing, or both. Whenever we have tried to fight each other something has stopped us. Whenever we have tried to be reconciled to each other, something has stopped us again. By the run of our luck we have never had time to be either friends or enemies. Something always jumped out of the bushes<sup>21</sup>.

Once it was the Peacemaker who wanted to stop them and who in fact encouraged them to fight. Another time it was Mr. Morrice Wimpey, a devotee of Force, who inciting them to bloodshed achieved the opposite result.

At one point MacIan concludes:

We are, in the oddest and most exact sense of the term, 'brothers in arms'<sup>22</sup>.

It is a particularly significant word in the context of the whole problem because it brings us closer to that deeper sense of tolerance. The first segment of the term stands for love that is born between the two fighters: it stands for friendship of which they are so afraid because they fear that it may put in danger the power of their convictions. The second element represents the actual desire to fight out the duel; the determination which springs up from their sense of honour and mutual loyalty and their respect for the values which they protect and defend. The realization of their being truly brothers in arms is an important step on the way to tolerance.

To realize the near abyss that separates the intolerant MacIan smashing the window of the secularist shop from MacIan who laboriously and painfully finds his way towards tolerance it is sufficient to take the case of Turnbull's second blasphemy. It is not much less grave than the first one. Meeting in the garden

of the asylum the lunatics who believe that they are gods, Turnbull indignantly blames Jesus Christ for all that lunacy because as he claims - Christ started all the nonsense about the existence of God. This time MacIen does not seize his sword as might be expected from his reaction to the previous blasphemy. Now, calmer and less impulsive, he starts a discussion with Turnbull. His faith has not decreased and his belief has not been weakened but he makes them manifest in a completely different way.

When reading The Ball and the Cross we can trace step by step the change in the two heroes' attitudes to each other and the fascinating evolution of their mutual relationship. As has already been pointed out love to a considerable extent is the motive power of that evolution. The development starts with open hostility; it goes through the moments of weakness when they childishly fear lest they might drop their swords; then the counter reaction comes: they resume their readiness to fight with the same determination, but at the same time with unconscious gratefulness hail any obstacle which interrupts or puts off the duel. When the tide is coming up and the sea is cutting the duellists off, one of them happens to address the other "my friend". At this point it becomes clear that they do not fight to destroy the opponent but to defend their beliefs which each of them considers of primary importance. They think it a happy solution that they fight in a place where even he who will be victorious is condemned to die:

"You mean," said Turnbull in a voice surprisingly soft and gentle, "that there is something fine about fighting in a place where even the conqueror must die?"

"Oh, you have got it right, you have got it right!" cried out Evan, in an extraordinary childish ecstasy<sup>23</sup>.

And in the prison-asylum MacIen accepting his own fate as a sacrifice and martyrdom wants to defend the one whom some time ago he wanted to kill:

Let it be granted, then - MacIen is a mystic; MacIen is a maniac. But this honest shopkeeper and editor whom I have dragged on my inhuman escapades, you cannot keep him. He will go free, thank God, he is not down in any

damned document. His ancestor, I am certain, did not die at Culloden. His mother, I swear, had no relics. Let my friend out of your front door, and as for me - ...<sup>24</sup>.

Dreams of MacIan and Turnbull are the final stage in that evolution. In the dreams they see dangerous extremes and excesses of their convictions and their attitudes to life and to other people: MacIan cannot agree to substituting uniformity and discipline for charity and justice; Turnbull will not accept a raging revolution in which all who do not join in it are exterminated, he cannot respect impersonal Life without respecting individual lives. The dreams which in a way purge the duellists, bring about the final transformation. Since the time of those dreams MacIan and Turnbull no longer look for their swords. What is more soon after the severe imprisonment in cells B and C and after the meeting with the prisoner from cell A, MacIan admits that killing Turnbull would be a sin. Something in him now is stronger than his strong convictions and his desperate sense of duty to defend them:

Turnbull, three days ago I saw quite suddenly that our duel was not right, after all. /.../ I knew it was not quite right... the moment I saw the round eyes of that old man in the cell. /.../ When I saw his eyes and heard his old croaking accent, I knew that it would not really have been right to kill you. It would have been a venial sin<sup>25</sup>.

He feels that in trying to kill Turnbull he was one of the madnesses of the Church: the massacre of St. Bartholomew or the Inquisition of Spain.

#### Power of Conviction and Tolerance Reconciled

MacIan does not change his strong belief. In fact he does not even condemn the Church for her "madnesses" which he is well aware of. He just states the fact and realizes the danger in his own life: the danger of becoming - as the dream shows him - heartless and cruel, of losing the fundamental principle of Christia-

nity which he defends against atheism, namely the principle of love. In fact none of them loses his convictions, neither MacIain nor Turnbull; but at this point power of conviction and tolerance already seem to be reconciled. At this point they reach that Tolerance which has nothing in common with weakness or a lack of true and strong convictions; which is not an expression of a certain political strategy or a cowardly submission of one's will; which is not a lukewarm compliance obeying current fashion, rules of good breeding or one's narrow personal interests. Their Tolerance is not contaminated with indifference because Turnbull as well as MacIain standing on guard of their respective values are united with the ties of the truest fraternity, and both value and fraternity exclude indifference. Having nothing in common with all these false images of toleration their tolerance is far more difficult.

It is high time one asked the question: what is the reason for this strange change and all this surprising development of the events and the attitudes? Just as power of conviction comes from one's belief that one is in possession of the truth, so that deeper and more difficult tolerance comes from the discovery of a man - a hitherto opponent - on his way to Truth. Truth is the value which is worth fighting for at no matter how high a price. But at the same time it makes men drop their swords and forces them to perceive each other as aspiring after it, aiming at it, groping for it in the darkness, often through painful experiences. There are various ways to the truth and Chesterton is aware of it, in this novel in particular. This romantic medievalist is aware of the fact that an evolution has taken place in the mind of the western man and Truth is very often not looked upon as a sacred legacy or a deposit committed to somebody, but as the object of a quest. In this view of the truth an error may represent a stage in that quest; it is not and can never be a goal, but it has its rights as a stage and therefore those who hold erroneous opinions should not be exterminated. There is, however, one important condition: various ways to the truth are open to those who possess certain qualities such as honesty, uprightness, good will and openness. MacIain in the course of their mutual



adventures gets to know Turnbull; he discovers his moral valour and hence comes his growing reluctance to fight. Their ideologies may be diametrically different but each of them gradually discovers that the base is similar.

In the Garden of Peace and the more so in cells B and C MacIain and Turnbull are no longer in opposition because they have found and realized something that they hate more than they ever hated each other. It is in the Master of the lunatic asylum that they find their common enemy. He presents a serious threat to all mankind, the threat which undermines a moral and social order, and as such he cannot be tolerated. That is the only conclusion that we get because Chesterton does not arrive /and it seems that hardly anybody can/ at any illuminating solution as to how the concept of tolerance applies to the cases represented by the Master. What happens in the novel is that MacIain and Turnbull become sensitive to certain issues that they have overlooked so far, namely that power of conviction can be inhuman and cruel; and they both hate that cruelty. They hate that disdain and scorn which the Master feels towards all the patients gathered in the hall in the last scene of the novel. Turnbull and MacIain have been ready to fight with full respect for the antagonist. The Master does not want to have any fair fight. What he wants is to destroy and he aims at it full of contempt for his adversaries. In the lunatic asylum G.K. Chesterton builds up a model example of a situation where one cannot speak of tolerance. It is impossible in all the cases where there is an attitude towards another man typical of that of the Master. Power of conviction does not exclude tolerance; but hatred, contempt, scoff and derision do. It is not strange then that Turnbull feels so humiliated when in his final speech at the end of the novel the Master addresses him in particular as a man of science and intellectual progress, both of which oppose the "stupid legend of Crucifixion". It is true that up to this moment Turnbull has been all that; and yet he feels mortified by the Master's speech.

At the end of the novel a clear pattern emerges and all identities are revealed. The Master of the asylum is the same Professor Lucifer who steered the flying ship at the beginning. He is

also the men from the dreams who tempted the duellists to the distortion of their ideologies. The naive serene idiot from the cell A turns out to be the good-natured gentle and loving monk Michael - the passenger of the flying ship. Strangely enough at the beginning of the series of adventures it might seem that Turnbull should be placed in the same line with Professor Lucifer - the Master. They are both atheists, materialists and they both believe in science. Similarly MacIen should be classed together with Michael - the monk. Vertically they represent the same ideologies. In other words the content of their convictions is the same, but the realization is different. The difference is similar in the case of MacIen and the monk; it is enormous in the case of Turnbull and the Master. Turnbull goes away from Professor Lucifer; from his deprecating attitude and derisive tone of conversation. MacIen comes closer to Michael with his calmness and serenity and that loving gesture which would like to embrace all mankind. Thus gradually they approach each other and the gap between their different ideologies is bridged. In the light of it even the final conversion of Turnbull, which is the result of his aiming at Truth and actually finding Truth, is somehow redundant. It is perhaps saying too much where silence would be more meaningful.

The fundamental difference in the novel then is not between Turnbull and MacIen, but that between the two brothers in arms and the Master. From it spring up all other differences that G.K.Chesterton makes his reader aware of. They all contribute to the reader's better understanding of the concepts in question. Thus, says G.K.Chesterton, there is a difference between fighting to kill somebody and fighting to defend a value even if in that fight one of the fighters will have to die. MacIen and Turnbull accept fight as the last resort to defend something that for them is more precious than life itself. They are both unlike Morrice Wimpey who adores the stone statue on Force, indulges in blood and sacrifices of men, cries: "Down with the defeated. Victory is the only fact!" but is not brave enough to risk his life and fight himself. There is also a difference between loving in a shallow sentimental sense, with the sort of love that the Peace-

maker preaches; and loving in a deeper and far more difficult sense with the sort of love which is sensitive to another man's painful experiences on the way to Truth. And finally there is a difference between totalitarian society which uses force and compulsion, and aims to eradicate and exterminate all that does not fall within the established set-up; and tolerant society which keeps its door open to anybody who retaining respect for others seeks the truth. But just as well there is a difference between tolerant society which has certain values; and permissive society which attaches no importance to any value.

Unless one fully realizes these differences the two positive values of tolerance and power of conviction may degenerate: power of conviction into heartlessness, cruelty and despotic regime as it did in the case of Professor Lucifer or the devotee of force; tolerance into permisiveness and a departure from any value as it did in the case of so many people that Turnbull and MacIain met in the course of their adventures.

Summing up it remains to say that coexistence of tolerance and power of conviction is not the question of finding a golden means or striking some sort of a balance. Much more is required. MacIain and Turnbull rise after their experience with new transformed images of the two concepts. They know that power of conviction cannot be devoid of basic humanistic values and the conduct of any controversy should be without acrimony; a strife or criticism without a loss of respect. A tolerant spirit carries on a battle of ideas without loss of esteem and affection. It does not doom the person who happens to be a holder of a different ideology. The clash takes place on a higher level and therefore it does not affect personal friendship. This was clearly the case of the famous friendship between G.K.Chesterton and G.B.Shaw.

G.K.Chesterton, regarded as an ardent and devout Christian and, even more, the representative of militant Christianity, sometimes falls a victim of rash judgements reproaching him with intolerance. Contrary to all these accusations it seems that in the author of The Ball and the Cross strong Christian belief is combined with an openness to all positive values which put men

on the way to Truth. It is therefore rather reckless to accuse him of being narrowly dogmatic and intolerant of all that is not orthodox. As one of his critics says:

Mr. Chesterton has the peculiar knack of being able to be both tolerant and dogmatic. He could not be a Catholic unless he were, for the essence of Catholicism is dogma and toleration admirably combined<sup>26</sup>.

NOTES

- 1 John Locke, A Letter Concerning Toleration, p.1
- 2 Ibid., p.18
- 3 G.K.Chesterton, The Ball and the Cross, p.174
- 4 Encyclopaedia Britannica, vol. X, p.31
- 5 G.K.Chesterton, The Ball and the Cross, p.38
- 6 Ibid., p.41
- 7 Ibid., p.44
- 8 Ibid., p.43
- 9 Ibid., p.63-64
- 10 Ibid., p.64
- 11 Ibid., p.113
- 12 Ibid., p.229
- 13 Ibid., p.379
- 14 Ibid., p.340
- 15 Ibid., p.30
- 16 Ibid., p.37
- 17 Ibid., p.39
- 18 Ian Boyd, The Novels of G.K.Chesterton, p.22
- 19 G.K.Chesterton, The Ball and the Cross, p.83, 84
- 20 Ibid., p.92
- 21 Ibid., p.156
- 22 Ibid., p.67
- 23 Ibid., p.196
- 24 Ibid., p.290
- 25 Ibid., p.377-78
- 26 P.Braybrooke, Philosophies in Modern Fiction, p.29

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## TOLERANCJA I SIŁA PRZEKONAŃ W POWIEŚCI G.K.CHESTERTONA "KULA I KRZYŻ"

### Streszczenie

Artykuł podejmuje próbę analizy pojęć tolerancji i siły przekonań w ujęciu G.K.Chestertona na podstawie jego powieści: "Kula i krzyż".

Wstępne krótkie przedstawienie obydwu pojęć w perspektywie historycznej i filozoficznej ukazuje nieustanne napięcie istniejące na przestrzeni dziejów między dążeniem do tolerancji z jednej strony a wiernością pewnym ideałom i poczuciem obowiązku bronięcia ich z drugiej. W powieści Chestertona konflikt ten materializuje się w postaciach ateisty Turnbulla i katolika MacIana, którzy postanawiają stoczyć pojedynek w obronie swoich przekonań. Tło i okoliczności zamierzanego pojedynku, który ostatecznie nigdy nie dochodzi do skutku, ukazują różne błędne koncepcje dotyczące tolerancji, ucieleśniane w powieści przez przeciwników walki. To samo, barwnie przedstawione tło pozwala wyeksponować siłę przekonań jako coś silniejszego niż instynkt samozachowawczy, poczucie przynależności do jakiejś społeczności, czy też obawa przed ośmieszeniem się. U protagonistów powieści walka w obronie przekonań jest walką o najgłębszy sens egzystencji. Podobnie jednak jak w przypadku tolerancji, i tutaj również sygnalizuje Chesterton niebezpieczeństwo okrutnych wypaczeń, zobrazowane przez Prof. Lucyfera i jego system szpitala psychiatrycznego. W dynamice postaci Turnbulla i MacIana, którzy doświadczają swoistego "oczyszczenia" z deformacji ideałów, oraz w ewolucji ich wzajemnych stosunków można prześledzić sposób dochodzenia do głęboko pojętej trudnej tolerancji, której podstawą jest pełne miłości dostrzeżenie przeciwnika na jego drodze dochodzenia do prawdy.