

## **Intolerance in the Coming Order**

By Archbishop Fulton Sheen

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The purpose of this article is to show that broadmindedness has given way to intolerance. But this cannot be understood until the terms are well defined. Tolerance and intolerance, it must be recalled, do not refer to the same thing. Tolerance applies only to persons, but never to principles. Intolerance applies only to principles, but never to persons. We must be tolerant to persons because they are human and apt to err, and also because false education received in good faith may be responsible for their opinions and even their bigotry. But we must be intolerant about principles, because truth is not of our making but God's. When the grocer adds twenty and twenty to make sixty, we are very intolerant about the addition making forty, but we do not for that reason insist on beheading the grocer. The Church, in like manner, when due reparation is made, will always receive the heretic back into the treasury of souls, but never the heresy in the treasury of wisdom.

Until only a few years ago America and the Western world generally considered tolerance as always right and intolerance as always wrong. Having never made the distinction mentioned above, it considered broadmindedness the ideal, but such broadmindedness was really nothing else than indifference to right and wrong, truth and error. It was only natural for a world governed by the philosophy of individualism—the heritage of the collapse of Christian unity—to hit upon some policy which would enable men with different opinions to live together in some kind of accord, even though it was only an agreement to disagree. If one religion is as good as another, if every business man is free to determine his own economic policy without regard for ethics and morality, if truth is only a matter of utility, and if God exists only for those who feel a subjective need for such an ideal, then in order to prevent chaos and increasing conflict of individual opinions, broadmindedness, or indifference to the uniqueness of truth, had to become the rule.

The typical attitude of youth during that era of broadmindedness was a refined skepticism about everything, externally symbolized by the raising of the eyebrows. Comparative religion, which insisted on comparing the incomparable, deluded minds into believing that not only was one Christian religion just as false as another, but even one world religion was just as illusory as another. The man in those days who could make up his mind about anything was called narrow, and the mind which had no conviction was called broad. Fundamental and basic principles of the natural order, such as the principle of contradiction, were regarded as disputable as the League of Nations. Of all virtues none was more to be condemned than zeal, for zeal meant intolerance, and intolerance meant enthusiasm, and enthusiasm meant “in God,” but could one be sure there was a God?

Speaking of such indifference, Leo XIII wrote in his Encyclical *Immortale Dei*:

Everyone is to be free to follow whatever religion he prefers, or none at all if he disapproves all. From this the following consequences logically flow: that the judgment of each one's conscience is independent of all law; that the most unrestrained opinions may be openly expressed as to the practice or omission of Divine worship; and that everyone has unbounded license to think whatever he chooses and to publish whatever he thinks.

And now all this is changing. I do not mean that broadmindedness is completely dead, but rather it is dying in the sense that the principles of death already possess it. Today we are entering into a new era, the era of the new intolerance. Just as the old concept of tolerance was wrong, because it confused the person and the principle and made indifference to truth always right, so, too, the new intolerance is wrong because it applies intolerance not to the truth which is God-made, but to the system or philosophy which is man-made. The new intolerance, however, insists not on the uniqueness of Divine truth, but on the uniqueness of human error. It asserts that a man-made philosophy of life, backed by force, must be accepted with the same finality, must be defended by the same sacrifices, and must be propagated by the same apostolic fire as the truth which is God's.

This new intolerance is found principally in Communism. Communism is as intolerant about its philosophy of life as Catholicism is about hers. It is just as uncompromising about the economic as the highest end of man, as the Church is uncompromising about the spiritual as the highest end of man. Communism will set no rat trap to catch the rats in the barn, but insists on the burning of the barn—that is, it remakes society by remaking man to the pattern of an economic animal. It is not a party, but a philosophy of life.

Now Communism is a philosophy of life and as such is intolerant; like a religion it claims to be the sole authority; it has its own catechism; it persecutes its heretics; it claims absolute validity in all spheres, even demanding unqualified allegiance of both the body and the soul. It makes progress not by a dictatorship of an individual, but by a dictatorship of a party and a principle. It grows only accidentally through the personal appeal of its leader; but principally by the acceptance of its ideas. The person is secondary; the ideology is primary. Just as in the biological order individuals are sacrificed for the good of the species, so, too, in Communism persons are sacrificed for the good of its philosophy. Everything is subject to it.

Many are confused about Communism because they regard it only as an economic theory opposed to capitalism. If it were only an economic theory it would not be anti-capitalistic, for it is economically capitalism gone mad. It concentrates wealth not in a few, but in the party, and makes the economic not the principal end of man as capitalism does, but the unique end of man. Rather, Communism is as Father LaFarge has so well put it:

A complete philosophy of human existence and human relations, based upon a denial of man's spiritual nature and destiny and a materialistic conception of history; a philosophy of action whereby thought can be translated into deed; and an organized, political, social, educational, economic, and cultural movement for the purpose of propagating that philosophy of human existence through the philosophy of action.

As a philosophy of life it does not exist in Russia alone. There it takes on an economic form; it exists in Germany where it takes only a racial form; it exists also in Mexico where it takes on an anti-clerical and revolutionary form.

Because Communism is a philosophy of life which sets itself up as a counter-church, because it admits no conscience, no morality, except state conscience and state morality, because it possesses man down to the very core of his being, it has sounded the death knell of broadmindedness. By that

same token it has inaugurated the new intolerance—the intolerance of anti-Christianity, for whose error one must die as martyrs die for the truth of Christ.

In this messianic claim to absoluteness lies the secret of its appeal to the modern mind which has become satiated with a fatuous and supine indifference. The youth who was the skeptic is a skeptic no longer; he is looking for something which will make demands upon him, something about which he can enthuse. He is tired of half-drawn swords, one-fisted battles and anemic compromises; he wants an escape from selfishness into which the individualism of the last 300 years has led him, a loyalty to something outside of self, and outside of God. There is no escape from individual selfishness, if one outlaws God, except collective selfishness, which is Communism. But because it has an ideal outside the individual it has the fervor of religion associated with its embrace.

The youths of our country are interested in Communism, not principally because of its protests against social injustice, not because of its rejection of an inane parliamentarianism, not because of its promise of a greater distribution of wealth, for there is not one of them who would leave America, regardless of how bad they say it is, for Russia. They are interested in Communism because they are seeking religion—a religion with faith and sacrifice—and they find only two—the “religion” of Communism and the religion of Catholicism.

For the present the latter is obscured because minds have not yet seen that Catholicism is not identical with the Christianity of the last 300 years which is presently liquidating. But as that latter type disappears or degenerates into social service, the Church will present herself to the world as historical Christianity. This she must do at once. The world is no longer broadminded; it wants intolerance. There are only two kinds from which the world can choose; the intolerance of Communism and the intolerance of Catholicism; the intolerance of human system and the intolerance of Divine truth; the intolerance which is never tolerant to persons, and the intolerance which respects good faith; the intolerance of force and the intolerance of the Cross.

The coming days are days when both sides will have faith and a spirit of sacrifice. The faith in Communism can be effectively challenged only by a faith in Christ; the sacrifice of Communism can be conquered only by the sacrificial spirit of those who walk beneath the shadows of the Cross. Economical and political reforms will not conquer it because they are inspired only by a conviction to preserve the existing order, which is not necessarily the best order. A philosophy of life can be met only by a philosophy of life; intolerance of Satan can be met only by the intolerance of Christ, and not for all the kingdoms of the world dare we be broadminded and cast ourselves down. Our intolerance must be the intolerance of the lawful mother at the Court of Solomon. We want the whole truth or nothing, and we must be prepared to stake everything on that belief. This does not mean preaching a revolution; it means being a revolution, being it by our lives in a Church where there will be no more canonized saints but in which everyone will be a saint, which is the meaning of Catholic Action. The new world will be uninhabitable except for courageous souls, the “saints” of Communism and the saints of Catholicism, the latter of whom will, like the Christ, be put to death by an intolerant Caesar for the sake of intolerant truth.