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Untea, Ionut

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# The Golden Rule in Interfaith Relations from Early Modern to Contemporary Times The Evolution of Arguments for Religious Tolerance

Ionut Untea

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## Título / Titre / Titolo

La Regla de oro en las relaciones entre religiones en la Edad Moderna y Contemporánea. La evolución de los argumentos por la tolerancia religiosa  
La Règle d'Or dans les relations interreligieuses des Ages Moderne et Contemporaine. L'évolution des arguments en faveur de la tolérance religieuse  
La Regola d'Oro nelle relazioni tra religioni nell'Età moderna e contemporanea. L'evoluzione degli argomenti attraverso la tolleranza religiosa

## Abstract / Resumen / Résumé / Sommario

Right from the beginnings of its association with the name «Golden Rule», the moral principle of reciprocity was significantly used in moral arguments dealing with political decisions. Thomas Hobbes, one of the earliest authors using the Golden Rule as a political argument, argued that Christians of his time did not make enough effort to place themselves in the position of a non-Christian person. Early modern theologians remained preoccupied by the confessional rivalries at the core of the theologico-political projects of the theocratic-like states. Philosophers like Locke, Leibniz, Clarke, Kant, were fully aware of the unwanted consequences of the application of the Golden Rule principle in regulating social behavior. Kierkegaard represents an early example of the willingness to eliminate the social or political predominance in the application of the Golden Rule. Globalization and multiculturalism, in the 20th and 21st century marked the beginning of a return to a Golden Rule of compassion, as originally stated by the sacred texts of each great monotheism.

Desde el principio, la noción «Regla de oro» se ha usado como valor moral de reciprocidad y argumento para las decisiones políticas. Thomas Hobbes, uno de los primeros autores en emplear el término con este sentido, sostenía que los cristianos de su época apenas se ponían en el lugar de las personas de otra creencia. A los teólogos de la Edad Moderna les preocupaban las rivalidades religiosas en el seno de proyectos teológico-políticos como los estados de corte teocrático. Pensadores como Locke, Leibniz, Clarke o Kant eran conscientes de las consecuencias imprevistas derivadas de la aplicación del principio de la Regla de oro para regular la moral de la sociedad. Kierkegaard aporta un primer intento de superar la predominancia social y política en esta aplicación. El desarrollo de la globalización y el multiculturalismo en los siglos veinte y veintiuno han marcado el retorno a la regla de oro como regla moral, a aquella Regla de oro de la compasión que promulgaban los textos sagrados de los credos monoteístas.

Dès le début de son utilisation sous le nom de la « Règle d'Or », le principe moral de réciprocité a été utilisé dans des argumentations morales à portée politique. Thomas Hobbes, l'un des premiers auteurs ayant utilisé la « Règle d'Or » en tant qu'outil politique, considérait que les Chrétiens de son temps ne faisaient pas suffisamment d'effort pour se mettre à la place des non-Chrétiens. Les théologiens de la première modernité étaient préoccupés par les rivalités confessionnelles au sein des projets théologico-politiques des Etats constitués selon le modèle théocratique. Des philosophes comme Locke, Leibniz, Clarke ou Kant connaissaient les conséquences négatives de l'application de la « Règle d'Or » au domaine de la morale sociale. Kierkegaard offre le premier exemple visant à éliminer toute forme de prédominance sociale et politique de l'application de la « Règle d'Or ». Suite à la mondialisation et au multiculturalisme, on assiste aujourd'hui à un retour à cette « Règle d'Or », en tant que règle morale, telle qu'elle fut décrite par les textes sacrés des grandes religions monothéistes.

Fin dalle origini della sua associazione con il termine «Regola d'Oro», il principio morale della reciprocità era utilizzato negli argomenti morali a scopo politico. Thomas Hobbes, uno dei primi autori che ha utilizzato la Regola d'Oro come argomento politico, ha sostenuto che i cristiani del suo tempo non facevano abbastanza sforzi per mettersi nella posizione di una persona non-cristiana. I primi teologi moderni erano preoccupati dalle rivalità confessionali che hanno caratterizzato i progetti politico-teologici degli stati quasi-teocratici. Filosofi come Locke, Leibniz, Clarke o Kant erano consapevoli delle conseguenze indesiderate dell'applicazione del principio della «Regola d'Oro» nell'ambito del comportamento sociale. Kierkegaard è uno dei primi esempi della volontà di eliminare la predominanza dell'ambizione sociale e politica nell'applicazione della «Regola d'Oro». La globalizzazione ed il multiculturalismo hanno segnato l'inizio di un ritorno nelle relazioni interreligiose verso una «Regola d'Oro» della compasión.

## Keywords / Palabras clave / Mots-clé / Parole chiave

Golden Rule, compassion, political theory, confessional rivalries, theocracy, interfaith relations

La Regla de Oro, compasión, teoría política, rivalidades confesionales, teocracia, diálogo interreligioso

La Règle d'Or, compassion, théorie politique, rivalités confessionnelles, théocratie, dialogue interreligieux

Regola d'Oro, compasión, teorie della politica, rivalità confessionali, stati teocratici, relazioni interreligiose

## 1. The Golden Rule and the Question of Tolerating Other Confessions and Religions in Early Modern Times

The association of the name «Golden Rule» with the widely-known principle of moral reciprocity appears to have been articulated within the Calvinistic milieu of the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth century England (Gensler, 2013: 183-184). The short and concise form of its first formulations in print (*Do as you would be done by*), as they appear in the work of theologians like Edward Topsell (1599), Charles Gibbon (1604), William Perkins (1606), although consciously associated with the biblical text of Mt. 7:12, show its previous wide use in popular culture as a proverb (Du Roy, 2014: 36, 40).

Right from the beginnings of its association with the name «Golden Rule», the moral principle of reciprocity was significantly used in moral arguments dealing with political decisions. Influenced by John Calvin's use of the principle under the names of «supreme rule of equity» (*summa aequitatis regula*) and «common rule of equity» (*communi aequitatis regula*), in his Order of Equalitie, Charles Gibbon argues that taxation should be regulated by the principle of the Golden Rule, which would require that «every man» should apply taxation thinking of the amount that he would accept to be asked from him. In addition, Gibbon uses a Latin version of the Golden Rule, which he attributes to Seleucus: *quod tibi non vis fieri alteri ne feceris* (Gibbon, 1604: 17; Gensler, 2013: 183-184; du Roy, 2014: 38). This Latin formula will later be used by Thomas Hobbes in his political treatise *Leviathan, or the Matter, Form, and Power of a Commonwealth, Ecclesiastical and Civil* (1651), naming it «that law of all men». Together with «that law of the Gospel», it would constitute the core of Hobbes's second law of nature, which requires that «a man be willing, when others are so too, as far-forth, as for peace, and defence of himself he shall think it necessary, to lay down [t]his right to all things; and be contented with so much liberty against other men, as he would allow other men against himself» (Hobbes, 1839: 118).

Hobbes writes under the impression of the English civil war, in which he sees the expression of a society torn down to a mere «state of nature», where individuals are left to their own passions and where force and fraud are «the two cardinal virtues» (*id.*: 115). However, the fact that the Golden Rule operates in this state of one's absolute right to every thing and every body shows for Hobbes both its innate and revealed character (being at the same time the law of all men and the law of the Gospel). It is significant that in the particular socio-political context of the early modern England, Hobbes chooses to maintain that one of the essential responsibilities of the sovereign consists in regulating civil as well as ecclesiastical issues.

Tolerating other religions seemed for Hobbes a questionable political practice, at least from the perspective of a Christian commonwealth: «the Romans, that had conquered the greatest part of the then known world, made no scruple of tolerating any religion whatsoever in the city of Rome itself; unless it had something in it, that could not consist with their civil government» (*id.*: 104). Hobbes did not say that tolerating other faiths was intrinsically wrong. On the contrary, he accepts that this kind of politics had helped the Roman Empire in maintaining its dominance and legitimacy over centuries. The reason for which Hobbes disagrees with the Roman religious toleration consists in acknowledging the Empire's intolerant policy toward the Jewish people: «nor do we read, that any religion was there forbidden, but that of the Jews; who, being the peculiar kingdom of God, thought it unlawful to acknowledge subjection to any mortal king or state whatsoever» (*id.*: 104-105).

In *Leviathan*, Hobbes displays an ambivalent attitude toward religious toleration: on the one hand, he seemed to acknowledge its benefic repercussions; on the other hand he dismisses it, in considering that it did not allow the Jewish theocratic state to flourish. The Roman Empire failed to reconcile the temporal submission to earthly governors with the religious and political allegiance to the God of Israel. If the Romans were simply wrong in tolerating all the religions except the Jewish one, the Christian state was still in a questionable position regard-

ding its policies that dealt with the demands for religious toleration. The Jews were right, according to Hobbes, not to accept an earthly superimposed authority, as they already had sworn allegiance to the theocratic state inaugurated by Moses. This was acceptable for Hobbes, as he considered Jews the representatives of the one true faith, revealed by God to Abraham. But as the destruction of the Temple marked also the end of the Jewish theocracy, was this principle of the preeminence of God's command over any other worldly decision still active?

In order to reconcile sovereign power with religious authority, Hobbes suggests that this principle remains active only «inwardly», in the realm where the sovereign cannot reach, although «profession with the tongue», being an «external thing», will still be a gesture that might be required by the sovereign, being part of the external signs of political obedience (*id.*: 493). Moreover, as there is no other legitimate theocratic state in the world, toleration should be applied also to non-Christians in a Christian state. In order to emphasize this aspect, Hobbes uses the principle of the Golden Rule, by giving the example of a subject of a Christian commonwealth who is «inwardly in his heart of the Mahomedan religion».

What would a Christian say, asks Hobbes, about the situation where a Christian sovereign commands, using the menace of death, an inwardly «Mahomedan» subject to come to the service of a Christian church? Should such an unfortunate subject refuse, and suffer death, or rather accept the external obedience while continuing to be attached to his faith in his heart? It would not be acceptable for a Christian, Hobbes believes, to say that this individual should accept to die, as this would encourage «all private men to disobey their princes in maintenance of their religion, true or false». But neither would the other option, because the Golden Rule itself forbids a Christian to treat others as he would not like to be treated, even in matters of religion: «if he [the Christian] say, he ought to be obedient, then he alloweth to himself that which he denieth to another, contrary to the words of our Saviour, (Luke vi. 31) *Whatsoever you would that men should do unto you, that do ye unto them*; and

contrary to the law of nature, which is the indubitable everlasting law of God, *Do not to another that which thou wouldst not be should do unto thee*» (*id.*: 494).

In other words, Hobbes considers that Christians of his time do not make enough effort to place themselves in the position of a non-religious person, as they don't renounce their conviction that their religion is the «true» one. Actually, Hobbes believes, it doesn't matter if the other's religion is true or false, as long as Jesus himself requires from Christians to treat others as they would like to be treated. Moreover, putting himself in the place of a «Mahomedan», the Christian would have to accept the exercise of supposing that if he was to be born in another religion, he would not be able to say that Christianity is the true religion, so he would wish to be allowed to worship the religion he now, as a Christian, considers to be unworthy.

Unfortunately Hobbes does not go on with his argument for the illegitimacy of forcing a subject toward professing in public an imposed faith for the sake of earthly obedience. On the contrary, he argues that the subject should not worry for what he will respond to God in the afterlife for this kind of actions generated by an external obedience, because actually these actions are actually made by the prince, as their true author (*id.*: 147). Hobbes's argument about political representation made sense within his own political theory, but was this explanation easily acceptable in the multiconfessional context of his time? His example of the «Mahomedan» subject had been intended to suggest that, if the sovereign should not be so harsh on non-Christians, then there would be no acceptable reason to persecute Christians of other confessions.

However, there was one point on which the sovereign should not make any concession: the recycled argument of the preeminence of God's commandment over earthly rule, an argument still proclaimed at the time by the Roman Pope. Hobbes considers that it was the Fourth Council of Lateran, held under the pope Innocent the Third (1215), that reestablished the subordination of the earthly sovereign to the Pope by the extension of excommunication to political rulers

that refused to «purge» their kingdoms of heresies (*id.*: 607). Thus Hobbes argues in favor of maintaining the political road opened in England by Henry VIII when he proclaimed total independence from the authority of the Pope. This move had the merit of denying the legitimacy of any papal pretences for authority in the life of the English commonwealth and, at the same time, bringing the English kingdom closer to the model of the Jewish theocracy, by centralizing in a single person, directly subordinated to God, both the political and ecclesiastical life. While Hobbes's argument remains in principle open to a wider religious toleration in virtue of his use of the Golden Rule, his theory of a centralized theocratic-like state brings back the limited toleration, which allowed subjects to practice their religion in the privacy of their homes, while displaying in public only signs and gestures related to the religion officially accepted by the sovereign (*id.*: 493).

The same adversity to the perspective of the Pope's pretences for authority that animated theological debates of the early modern England had a profound impact on the use of the Golden Rule in theological discourses dealing with religious toleration. Instead of making progress on the path, already explored by Hobbes, of a fuller acknowledgement of the consequences of the Golden Rule principle applied to religious toleration, early modern theologians remained preoccupied by the confessional rivalries at the core of the theologico-political projects of the theocratic-like states of the early modernity, where kings followed the model of a God-like king, as it had been described by King James I: «The state of monarchy is the supremest thing upon earth, for kings are not only God's lieutenants upon earth and sit upon God's throne, but even by God himself they are called gods» (James VI and I, 2003: 107).

Such a subordination of the interpretation of the Golden Rule in matters of religious toleration to the ideals of a theocratic state appears in the 1661 short essay *Sions groans for Her Distressed*, addressed to the King, Parliament and People by a group of Baptist and Presbyterian theologians dissatisfied by the weak measures of the Church of England to distance itself further away

from the traditions of the Roman Catholic Church (du Roy, 2014: 49). In the first part of their argument, Thomas Monck, Joseph Wright and the other co-authors, advance a view that might create the hopes of opening the path toward confessional tolerance: «Art thou a stranger in our Island, and hast not known the things that have come to pass in these daies, while the father hath been divided against the son, and the son against the father (...) and how unpleasing this is to Jesus Christ, and how unlike his golden Rule» (Monck *et al.*, 1661: 1).

This way of presenting the religious rivalries of their time creates the impression that the theologians will follow a path of a religious reconciliation, already suggested by their analogy of the early modern English religious context with the hours following the laying in the tomb of Christ's broken body after Crucifixion. However, these expectations are not met, as the Golden Rule is instantly turned into a polemical tool:

In which Book [Revelation] (...) it is testified, that the Nations of the world (...) would drink the wine of the fornication (...) until they become drunk, and altogether incapable (...) to receive the pure waters of life, tendred to them in the plain way of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus. This with grief of heart we see too visible, for the Doctrine and Traditions of Rome have so corrupted the earth, and clouded the understandings of the sons of men, that the great and most important truths of God cannot bee received or beleaved (*id.*: 1).

In other words, with grief of heart the authors have to accept that they are going against the Golden Rule, being convinced that this is the only way corruption of the earth could be eradicated. The Golden Rule becomes instantly a moral principle to be applied only between those that have preserved their minds unaffected by the «wine of fornication». Its validity as a moral principle applicable between equal persons is not questioned, on the contrary, the authors suggest that Christ has established such an equality of human persons and opened the source of the «pure waters of life» to everybody. Nonetheless, since a great number of Nations not only refuse to be purified by such a water, but tend to corrupt

the true followers of the path toward the salvation, it becomes the responsibility of unstained Christians to preserve the purity of faith by refusing those nations the dignity of human beings until they will restore the integrity of their «minds». According to this argument, Catholic Church becomes the main responsible for the failure of Christianity to spread the word of God to all Nations, thus preventing the unification of the Nations of the world into an eternal theocracy of the Gospel sustained directly by God as the source of the waters of life.

The theologico-political ambitions of the early modern times did not leave enough space for the development of the Golden Rule arguments of religious toleration, their use being limited to an ideal applicability restrained to people of the same confession. Where wider religious toleration was envisaged, it was rather within a larger framework of political arguments that accepted a limited diversity for prudential reasons, i.e. for the wellbeing of the commonwealth. But what seems to have lacked in the particular contexts of inter-confessional struggles within the socio-political life of early modern European states was the willingness to follow the implications of the idea that the Golden Rule commanded by Christ to his followers had universal applicability.

In England, as well as in France for example, either Protestants or Catholics preferred to further restrain the principle, not only to members of the Christian faith, but merely between members of the same confession. As part of the efforts to save as many fellow Christians as possible, in the early 1680s in France, Catholics would develop the conviction that, since Huguenots refused to return as members of the Catholic Church, then at least their children should be saved. The edict of June 1681 proclaimed that Huguenot children of a minimum age of seven were free to «choose» to be taken from their parents in order to embrace Catholicism. Pierre Jurieu's *Last Efforts* (1682) saw the edict, which generated massive Huguenot emigrations to other European countries, as «repugnant to the Laws of Nature» (Marshall, 2006: 20). In 1685 the Edict of Fontainebleau revoked the Edict of Nantes of 1598, which had granted the French

Protestants a limited religious freedom of public worship in the area of one thousand French towns. The new edict, issued by Louis XIV, stated that «all concessions, of whatever nature» were «null and void», all children would have to be baptized in the Catholic faith, and children between five and sixteenth years of age were taken from any Huguenot caught practicing his own religion in his private home, while parents were to be put to death (Cohen, 2010: 50). The Golden Rule principle was dissolved into a more general confessional interest to apply to children of other confessions the same treatment that Catholics wished for their own children. Whether sincere or not, the unwanted consequences of the intention of doing for the other what one believed to be the best for oneself, raised questions about the validity of the Golden Rule principle in regulating social behavior.

## 2. The Critiques of the Golden Rule and the Path Chosen by the Enlightenment

John Locke, one of the first critics of the Golden Rule principle, denied its innate character as it contradicted his empiricist philosophy, which stated that human mind was a *tabula rasa* at birth, asserting that the principle will not appear as evident to all people, but will require further proof in order to reasonably be accepted (Wattles, 1996: 81). The relation between the Golden Rule principle and Locke's argument for religious toleration remains limited, as his *Letter concerning toleration* (1689) extends toleration to people of different religious orientations who did not threaten social order, but not to Catholics or atheists (Murphy, 2001: 226). This was an influence of the early modern political model, which saw the central tenets of religion as essential to the functioning of a theocratic-like state, and atheism as incompatible with a balanced political life.

If Locke's critique was rather related to the compatibility between the Golden Rule and empiricism, G.W. Leibniz's evaluation comes closer to the unwanted social realities of the early modern times: «One would wish for

too much, if one were the master», he asserts; «do we therefore owe too much to others?» He emphasizes that «the veritable sense of the rule is that by putting oneself in the place of the other, one gains the true point of view for judging equitably.» However, since this act of putting ourselves in the place of another does not guarantee that we won't want more than it would be equitable, there is a need for proclaiming a «just will» or a moral standard in order to keep the Golden Rule functional and avoid unwanted consequences that would clearly contradict some of the laws of the society (Wattles, 1996: 81-82).

A further analysis of the Golden Rule principle is proposed by Samuel Clarke, who acknowledges the easy distortion of its applicability by the inclination to corruption of the human beings: «Were not men strangely (...) corrupted (...), it would be impossible, that universal equity should not be practised by all mankind» (83). Therefore it will be very difficult for the Golden Rule to be taken simply as a principle of reciprocity. In applying the Golden Rule, one should seek for the «necessary and eternal different relations [that direct] the will of God (...) to choose only what is agreeable to justice, equity, goodness, and truth, in order to the welfare of the whole universe» (*id.*: 82). What represented the weak point of the Golden Rule in the view of the two previous critics (the fact that the Golden Rule requires an external standard of justice and equity in order to safely be put into practice), becomes the solution in Samuel Clark's interpretation: when putting himself in the place of another, one should aspire to look away from his temptations and limitations and seek for a godly-inspired action. In order to achieve this, Clarke combined the early modern ideal that reason itself is God's word with the Christian ideal of unconditional love in order to propose a revised version of the Golden Rule, according to which our duty is «that in particular we so deal with every man, as in like circumstances we could reasonably expect he should deal with us; and that in general we endeavour, by an universal benevolence, to promote the welfare and happiness of all men. The former branch of this rule, is equity; the latter, is love» (*id.*: 82).

With both reason and love as two interrelated dimensions of the Golden Rule, Clarke hopes to avoid the unwanted social consequences that determined the critiques in the first place.

In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* (1785), while discussing the respect for persons, Immanuel Kant introduced a very short critique of the Golden Rule. Kant included this critique in a footnote, and quoted only the beginning of the Rule in Latin, in order to avoid any accusation from religious and political authorities (*id.*: 85):

Let it not be thought that the trivial *Quod tibi non vis fieri*, etc. [what you do not will to be done to you] can here serve as a standard or principle. For it is merely derived from our principle, although with several limitations. It cannot be a universal law, for it contains the ground neither of duties to oneself nor of duties of love toward others (for many a man would gladly consent that others should not benefit him, if only he might be excused from benefiting them). Nor, finally, does it contain the ground of strict duties toward others, for the criminal would on this ground be able to dispute with the judges who punish him; and so on (*ibid.*).

As the critiques before him, Kant observes that the Golden Rule cannot stand as a universal principle of morality, but it is rather derived from such a principle.

Jeffrey Watles considers that Kant's categorical imperative differs from the Golden Rule in three major points:

First, the categorical imperative focuses on principles of the will rather than on actions we want to have done to us or on how we want to be treated. Next, it focuses explicitly on the logical generality of our decisions, on maxims or rules for action. Third, it focuses on a rational criterion for judging those rules. Not what you want, but what you rationally judge to be an appropriate universal law is the standard of duty (*id.*: 84).

These major differences appear because the Kantian moral subject uses three formulations of the supreme moral principle: a principle of universality, where the moral subject acts only according to a maxim that rationally can be universally willed and used by all moral subjects; a principle of humanity, which requires that

humanity, either in one's own, or in another's person, be treated with respect, that is always as an end, and never as a means; a principle of a supreme legislator, where the moral agent must imagine himself as part of a community of supreme moral beings that legislate universal laws for all moral beings (*id.*: 84).

If Samuel Clarke had emphasized the aspect of love in producing a revised version of the Golden Rule, it can be noticed that in Kant's formulations of the categorical imperative there is no reference to emotions. This is because Kant wanted to clearly distinguish between inclinations and duty. Although valuable, inclinations like love, compassion, sympathy cannot serve as a basis for moral action, as they vary from one person to another (Obler, 2002: 267). This kind of inclinations have been placed by nature in every human being, and can serve as a «provisional» substitute of morality, «until reason has achieved the necessary strength» (Wood, 1999: 270). In addition, compassion may determine a person to become too sentimental, and act in virtue of self-indulgency of her feelings rather than toward what reason shows as moral ends (*id.*: 270).

As it can be seen, the Golden Rule, since its coming to prominence in the theological and philosophical thought of the early modernity, has triggered different critiques that tried to give palpable solutions to its limitations. Jeffrey Wattles considers that the thinkers that dealt with the applicability of the Golden Rule to moral situations had three options: the earliest option was to retain the Golden Rule as a supreme principle of morality; the second option was to reformulate the rule in order to avoid unwanted consequences of too-subjective interpretations; the third was to discard the rule, depriving it from serious ethical value. In following Kant, Wattles asserts, the influential philosophers of the Enlightenment operated an essential change in ethical enquiry, a change which will be included in the new Enlightenment paradigm: «Just as theocrats had tolerated unbelievers in the state, so long as they managed to live in conformity to common moral standards, so secularists would tolerate believers, so long as they managed the same» (Wattles, 1996: 87).

### **3. The Golden Rule, Religious Tolerance, and the Spirit of the Times**

Besides its limitations, formulated by the philosophers of the early Enlightenment, the weak aspect of the Golden Rule consisted in the fact that it had been incorporated, and was practically dissolved, in the dominant confessional interests that animated the competing communities or states of the pre-Enlightenment Europe. The desire to save the children of the members of a dissenting confession from corruption, by facilitating for them the same education as for one's own children, shows to what extent a Golden Rule blinded by confessional interests may be used against itself. The religious wars followed the pattern of confessional ideals, that were even more strengthened by the theocratic ideal of politics, which saw religious disunity as a «nightmare justifying persecution» (Vroom, 2006: 340). This shows the serious danger of linking the Golden Rule to the spirit of the times.

In an effort to safeguard both the Golden Rule and the idea of religious tolerance from the spirit of the times, more exactly from the influence of the political and social ideals of the nineteenth century Denmark, Soren Kierkegaard develops his thought on religious tolerance in a way that today may be interpreted as rather pointing toward religious intolerance. However, his developments represent an early example of the willingness to reinterpret the traditional vocation of religions for proselytism exclusively at the level of the individual engaged in a personal relation with the source of revelation, excluding any social or political ambition.

The rising nationalism transparent in the work of N. F. S. Grundtvig and his followers determined Kierkegaard to highly criticize the exhortations of the Grundtvigians for a spiritual awakening against the influence of foreign powers, exhortations that went as far as sustaining that embracing Danishness would constitute a preliminary condition for becoming a good Christian (Holm, 2009: 126). In an article published in 1847, Kierkegaard considers the Grundtvigians' discourses about

nationalism in connection with religion to be a «non-sense» and a «retrogression to paganism», since «Christianity specifically wanted to do away with paganism's deification of nationalities!» (*id.*: 126). In Kierkegaard's eyes, this nationalism pushed Grundtvigians to think that they were the only true Christians, a conception with consequences on the idea of religious tolerance. In an journal entry of 1848, Kierkegaard writes: «Their talk about tolerance is rubbish. Christianity has never been tolerant in such a way that it has let others be pagans or be lost. No, it has been so intolerant that the apostle would rather lose his life in order to proclaim Christianity. Intolerance, to be sure, is wanting to dominate others, but we forget that it certainly is not intolerance to be willing to suffer in order to help others» (*id.*: 127).

As Anders Holm explains, Kierkegaard's main concern in this text is to clearly distinguish between what is essential for Christian life and what is characteristic to the political dimension: «There is no connection between political determinations of freedom of faith and the individual's faith, and therefore the struggle for tolerance distracts from what is actually the higher Christian goal: suffering to help others instead of merely wishing for freedom in itself, like the Grundtvigians do, according to [Kierkegaard]» (*ibid.*).

Kierkegaard's main struggle with the concept of tolerance of his time consisted in the fact that, in his view, Grundtvigians used the term «tolerance» as another word for indifference (Cain, 1997: 58). Although reminiscent of the earlier convictions that peoples of other faiths or confessions should not be left to damnation, Kierkegaard's thought evolves in a totally different direction, especially by refusing to involve political projects in the higher spiritual missionary vocation of religion.

By refusing the accomplishment of the religious vocation by political means, Kierkegaard intends to eliminate the possibility for religion to become intolerant. With such a possibility erased, Christians would finally enjoy the religious freedom which allowed them to go as far as to «suffer in order to help others», but without being intolerant. A new dimension of martyrdom opens

in this case, one in which the martyr will never sacrifice others in his project of pursuing the missionary vocation. By trying to take away the intolerant consequences of a religious perspective developed over centuries on the basis of the positive form of the Golden Rule (*Do unto others as you would have them do unto you*), Kierkegaard proposes a new understanding of the religious mission, this time at the level of the individual engagement with the religious vocation of spreading the revealed message to any person willing to listen. This new perspective produced by Kierkegaard closely follows the demands for religious freedom, while challenging the negative implications of the individualism brought about by the Enlightenment project, as it can be seen in his critique of the nationalist understanding of religious tolerance as indifference toward those who would only accept a part of the revealed message.

The twentieth and twenty-first century developments of globalization and multiculturalism challenged these negative implications of tolerance-as-indifference, as the phenomenon of the melting boundaries between states, communities and identities brings back the question of the missionary vocation, not only in religious terms, but as a responsibility to cultivate, make available and ensure the preservation of one's own heritage.

The merit of the minimal secular framework that emerged during the Enlightenment in order to prevent the advent of new religious wars consisted in the fact that it made possible the development of tolerant societies. However, the path taken by multiculturalism, toward increased public displays of elements considered previously as pertaining to the private sphere, challenges the limits of the Enlightenment paradigm itself and raises questions about the applicability of western concepts to an ever-more complex reality. The stakes of transgressing the boundaries of the western concepts and of the Enlightenment paradigm itself are high: avoiding a «clash of civilizations» (Huntington, 1996).

Such an example of the limits of western concepts in the conversational engagement between cultures can be observed in the western intellectual reaction to Salman Rushdie's embrace of Islam in late 1990 and his

apology to his fellow co-religionists for the problems generated within Muslim communities by the publication of his 1988 book *The Satanic Verses*. As Rushdie's apology came also with financial compensations from the book's royalties for those that had suffered injuries during protests, his attitude brought some comfort to the Muslim community in Britain (Davie, 2015: viii). However, as Grace Davie observes, «the gesture provoked an equally potent reaction from the opposing camp. The rage of the secular liberals at this point could hardly be contained, revealing an alarming illogicality at the heart of their campaign. Muslims should be tolerant of offensive books, but liberals could not tolerate the writer who became a Muslim. Tolerance, it is clear, was a social construct, to be applied in some cases, but not in others» (viii-ix).

The example invites to a deeper exploration of the limits of the western concepts and to a more willingness to find ways in which these limits could positively be challenged. If the minimal secular framework had many advantages, as it prevented other religious wars, and promoted more open societies, the wars of the twentieth century were not religious wars, neither are those of the twenty-first century, although religion plays a central role in conflicts that involve competing identities. Moreover, in a post-Enlightenment society, the minimalist secular framework may have unwanted consequences, against the very same ideas that the Enlightenment was prone to cultivate, as it can be seen in the reaction of western intellectuals to Rushdie's intention to reach the Muslim community worldwide and attempt reparations of the breach of trust for his co-religionists that suffered injuries.

As David Ford observes, the history of Jews, Christians and Muslims has been marked by a «Godcentered motivation not only to engage with each other but also to serve the flourishing before God of the whole world», their religions having inspired projects aspiring to universal applicability, like civilizing missions, conquests and empires, with negative historical consequences that today appear like «painful lessons» (Ford, 2011: 147). These lessons have determined during the Enlighten-

ment the emerging of the minimal secular framework that made religion a private affair. Today, these lessons, together with the new lessons of the contemporary clashes of identities, invites to what David Ford calls a «civil wisdom» of having «pluralist societies in which there is neither religious nor secular coercion» (*id.*: 147).

#### **4. From Clashes of Identities to the Challenges of a Global Ethic Project**

In his programmatic book *Global Responsibility* (1990), published at a time when «the word *globalization* was even not known» (Küng, 2005: March 31), Hans Küng launches the «Global Ethic project» and serves in 1993 as the principal drafter of the *Declaration of the World Parliament of Religions* in Chicago, emphasizing the centrality of the Golden Rule as a principle extant in virtually all religions in the world. As he asserts in a 2005 discourse, the Global Ethic Project was «just the opposite of what Samuel Huntington published about the clash of civilizations» (Küng, 2005: March 31). The main reason for opting for a more optimistic view of the future of interreligious relations at the global scale was for Küng the idea that the religions are «not blocks, with one beside the other», but that there always have been a lively and complex process, which included «interdependencies», «influences» and «convergences» (Küng, 2005: March 31).

Indeed, in the midst of such a process, and especially in places where identities are proclaimed and implemented in an all-too ideological manner, combining political and kinship ambitions, religion and particular historical negative experiences of past encounters between civilizations, violence may break loose. Nevertheless, the serious efforts conducted by the world religions in the previous and present centuries to engage in positive conversations intended to contribute to the facilitation of peace processes or prevent religiously-motivated conflicts, indicate that they have become aware of their interdependency, as their members inhabit in many cases the same regions and interact on a daily basis in their most basic relations.

Acknowledging the existence of a common moral principle of the Golden Rule, encouraging dialogue, conversation between religions, and exchange of ethical views and experiences, may prove only as the first step toward further exploring of what religions find «convergent» not only in their ethics, but also in their doctrines, rituals, prayers, and the personal relation with the Source of all creation, as to engage more freely, without prejudices, in joint projects of sharing their heritages. The Abrahamic religions produced a series of documents meant to encourage not only relations between religious leaders, but also with the declared goal of promoting trust at the most basic level, between members of communities occupying and sometimes having troubles in sharing the same vital space.

Since the 1965 *Nostra Aetate Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions* of the Second Vatican Council, a number of official statements of Judaism, Islam and Christianity, endorsed by an important number of scholars, theologians and religious leaders of the three monotheisms have paved the way toward a more trustworthy engagement on so many topics that await solutions or development. The most visible of these statements or events, *Declaration of the World Parliament of Religions* (1993), *Reconciliation Walks* (1996-1999), *A Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities* (1997), *Dabru Emet* (2000), *Amman Interfaith Message* (2005), *A Common Word* (2007), *Muscat manifesto* (2009), *Charter for Compassion* (2009), *Declaration of International Golden Rule Day on April 5th* (2007 and 2010), *Declaration of World Harmony Week by the United Nations* (2010), *Christian Witness in a Multireligious World: Recommendations for Conduct* (2011), *Vienna Declaration: Putting Global Ethical Standards into Practice in a Dangerous and Divided World* (2014), and the reactions they have generated, mark a particular revival of discourses exploring the possibilities of the Golden Rule to be used as a common ground principle for deeper pluralistic engagements.

The «return» of this «forgotten moral maxim», as Olivier du Roy puts it (*Le Retour d'une maxime oubliée*), as it becomes visible not only in interfaith relations, but also in a number of contemporary ethical perspectives like the

ethics of care, the interest given to empathy in interpersonal relations, or the ethics of responsibility (Du Roy, 2014: 167-174) show the great potential and the positive engagement of religions with regard to issues affecting or preoccupying all human individuals across their particular identities and allegiances. It is remarkable that the above mentioned statements inviting to interfaith conversations assert the validity of the Golden Rule beyond any political project of implementation by force. Instead, the authors of the statements and of the subsequent exegesis have talked about the desirability of future joint efforts of world religions to promote what I would like to call a *global project for education toward a sustainable religious literacy*.

This kind of «return» of the Golden Rule at the centre of interfaith relations marks in fact a return to the exploration of this maxim's original meanings, as intended by their authors and founders of great religions, inviting thus to a wider and deeper interest in understanding the fundamental teachings of each religion in renewed contexts of shared relations of building trust and peaceful openness. This represents an important opportunity for both religious leaders and believers to become fully aware of the new challenges ahead in following the religious vocation of spreading the good news brought about by a particular religion. As never before, with the ever-increasing means of communication at global scale, spreading the word is not anymore reserved to men in power, or linked to political power and cultural domination. In contemporary world, spreading the good news becomes the vocation of each believer, but not without the responsibilities that flow from such a high mission. Making their believers forget the old violent tools of religious mission represents a chief preoccupation of religious leaders engaged in interfaith dialogue.

In a joint effort to widely make known their disapproval of the propagation of religious ideals accomplished with the price of sacrificing the innocent, the interfaith statements propose to each believer the acceptance of *humility*, as a key attitude in allowing a patient and deeply respectful exchange of religious convictions at interpersonal level and in dealing with past or present wounds determined by theocratic ambitions (Hanson, 2007: 138).

As the authors are aware of their use of western concepts to propagate a message prepared to be embraced by members of very diverse cultures, terms like tolerance and respect are cautiously employed, in order to show their limitations in the current western use, using at the same time terms and phrases like «fidelity», «fellowship», «humility» (Hanson, 2012: 138), «wisdom», «full acceptance», «goodwill» (*The Amman Message*, 2008: vii), «reverence for the other», «honoring each-other» (Hailu, 2011), «respecting the faithfulness and the otherness» (European Lutheran Commission on the Church and the Jewish People, 2003), «forgiveness» (Nayed, 2009), «reconciliation» (A.V., 2011). All these terms are meant to refresh the meanings of tolerance and respect, proposing new insights in the mystery of human relationships and their access to the sacred. The limitations of the present terms developed within the Enlightenment paradigm are not seen as discouraging in the discourses emanating from the Abrahamic religions. Optimistic views are promoted, being based on the common religious conviction that communication and reciprocal understanding and acceptance are indeed possible in virtue of the depiction of humanity as a large family (Hailu, 2011), centered around the belief in the One Creator, the God of Abraham.

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