Tolerance for Ukraine: Interreligious Insights

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In this chapter I will attempt to address two questions. First, why do churches in Ukraine and beyond have difficulty with embracing tolerance?[1] I will argue that one of the reasons is the ambiguity of liberal tolerance and modernity as a whole, of which tolerance is a key element. Second, what theological resources can help churches to foster a proactive tolerance? I will argue that the correct theological approach implies the recognition of, and respect for, the limits of our understanding. Moreover, a proactive interest and engagement with the 'other' helps us to understand our own tradition more profoundly.

My aim in writing is that not only the content of my reflection, but its very method, reflect acceptance of the 'other'. Therefore, I have chosen two voices, belonging to a different tradition from my own, to lead me in my reflection on tolerance. I will engage with two Jewish thinkers, Emmanuel Levinas and Martin Buber, who are both connected to Ukraine. Buber, who was born in Vienna, spent his youth in Lemberg (Lviv): His grandfather Salomon Buber raised him after the divorce of Martin's parents.[2] Levinas spent five years of his early childhood in Kharkov (Kharkiv).[3] His family fled there from Kovno (Kaunas), when it had been occupied by the Germans during the First World War. I would suggest that Christians in Ukraine and beyond can learn a lot about the issue of tolerance from these two sages of the Jewish tradition.

Throughout my reflection, I will draw on one text by each of these authors. Levinas' essay, entitled "Desacralization and Disenchantment"

1 By tolerance, I mean acceptance of people, identities, views and beliefs, with which one does not agree. As Adam B. Seligman points out, if we do not reject the latter as "wrong, unreasonable, or undesirable" "we would not need to be tolerant towards [them]" (Seligmann 2000: 133). This moment of disagreement is a key characteristic of tolerance, which distinguishes it from other concepts. It is indicative that Raimon Panikkar proposes translating "tolerance" as "patience" – thus the aspect of bearing a "burden", which accompanies acceptance, is preserved. See: Panikkar 1979: 19–36.

2 Mendes-Flohr 2019: ch. 1.

3 Critchley 2004: xv.

presents several images and associations, with which the topic of tolerance can be approached.[4] The essay is dedicated to the topic of sorcery and contains Levinas' commentary on a passage from the Talmud about the use of magic in order to deceive. A Mishnaic norm, that regulates it, and to which Levinas' essay is an extended commentary, reads as follows: "The sorcerer, if he performs an act, is subject to penalties, but not if he merely creates illusions. […] Two people pick cucumbers: One of them is subject to penalties, the other is exempt; the one who performs the act is subject to penalties, the one that gives the illusion of it is exempt."[5] Levinas' text also comments on the punishment to be inflicted upon sorcerers who violate the above rule. A key story here is that of Ov and Yidoni, necromancers and casters of spells, interrogated by Saul on the eve of an important battle.

In *The Way of Man*, Martin Buber recalls a beautiful Hasidic anecdote by Rabbi Bunam about Rabbi Eizik from Cracow.[6] Rabbi Eizik has a repetitive dream in which he is told to go to Prague and search for a treasure hidden under a bridge. Finally, Eizik decides to go, arrives in Prague, but views it impossible to dig under the bridge, since the bridge is guarded by soldiers. The captain, who sees Eizik wandering every day, gets curious and approaches Eizik to find out what he is doing. Eizik tells him about his dream, at which point the captain makes fun of him, saying that he, as well, had a dream about a treasure hidden under the oven at the house of Rabbi Eizik in Cracow. Of course, the captain says, he is not so stupid as to act upon his dreams. Eizik listens carefully, returns home and finds a treasure under the oven of his own house.

At first glance, these stories have nothing to do with the issue of tolerance and post-secularism. However, if one scrutinizes these texts in the right way, they are very illuminating. Levinas himself invites readers to play with the texts, to "tease" those texts, "which invite teasing *[sollicitent la sollicitation]*; without it, they remain silent or incongruous."[7] These are the instructions I intend to follow throughout this chapter.

But before I develop my two arguments, let me situate my analysis within the context of Ukraine. Since the independence of Ukraine in 1991, the religious situation in the country has been characterized by

4 Levinas 1994: 136–160. The essay was published in Levinas' *Nine Talmudic Readings*, an English edition, which includes two French publications: *Quatre lectures talmudiques* of 1968 and *Du sacré au saint: cinq nouvelles lectures talmudiques* of 1977.

5 *Sanhedrin* 67a-68a, cited in Levinas 1994: 136.

6 Buber 1951: 39–41.

7 Levinas 1994: 143.

a high level of religious freedom and pluralism. The latter made the Ukrainian case unique amongst its neighbors, where usually one denomination plays a dominant role (as is the case in Russia, Romania, and Poland). In Ukraine, several Orthodox jurisdictions co-existed with two Catholic churches (one of the Latin and another of the Greek tradition), a variety of Protestant denominations, and traditional Jewish and Muslim (Crimean Tartar) populations. Although this plurality led to a general environment of tolerance, inter-confessional conflicts were not unusual. In the 1990s, Western Ukraine became a battleground between the Orthodox and Ukrainian Greek Catholic Churches, when the latter finally came out of the underground, following decades of Soviet persecution. This made Ukraine a 'stumbling stone' between Rome and Moscow, and, for a long period, blocked ecumenical dialogue between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. The creation of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine in 2018 has also led to conflicts. These sometimes violent outbreaks have occurred between those Christians, on the one side, who wanted to join this Church, and those on the other, who decided to remain in unity with the Patriarchate of Moscow. There are still remaining problems such as xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and Russophobia.[8] Another context in which there is a need for more tolerance is that of LGBT+ people; in this field the churches with their accent on the defense of 'traditional family values' struggle to find a way of making members of this group feel respected and welcome.[9] In this chapter, I do not intend to analyze the status of tolerance in Ukraine. I would rather reflect on the problems related to a more general embrace of tolerance by religions and would like to propose some theological arguments from an inter-religious perspective on why religions should be promoters of a proactive tolerance within society.

Age of Confusion

Let me start by addressing the question of why churches sometimes find themselves reluctant to be active promoters of acceptance of diversity of different worldviews, values and identities. The Christian theological tradi-

8 Mierzejewski-Voznyak 2018. An objective evaluation of many of the issues mentioned above remains problematic, as is an evaluation of Ukrainian society's progress on these issues, partially due to the fact that discussions on these topics are often instrumentalized in the propaganda battle between Ukraine and Russia (as well as some other neighbours).

9 Martsenyuk 2012; Madrigal-Borloz 2020.

tion (which entails the doctrine of the Trinity lending space for differences even within God himself, and the teaching that human beings are the image of God) could be a key conceptual contributor to the defense of tolerance.[10] However, today we witness – both in Ukraine and beyond its borders – a tension between two camps, Orthodoxy and some factions within Catholicism and Protestantism, on the one hand, and the advocates of tolerance, on the other. I am referring, in particular, to aspects such as: the question of acceptance of the religious and ethnic 'other', modern liberalism, human rights as a discourse, and some of its implications, as well as attitudes towards human sexuality and sexual identity.

One could argue that one of the problems is that some churches struggle to evolve beyond the logic of the Constantinian age, and fail to acknowledge their own marginality.[11] It would seem, however, that the post-Constantinian age, the modern *novus ordo saeclorum*, is also not unproblematic, and that the concept of liberal tolerance, as part of modernity's package, is profoundly embedded in ambiguity.[12]

It is on this ambiguity that I wish to reflect in more detail, by engaging with Levinas. In his "Desacralization and Disenchantment", whose point of departure, as I mentioned earlier, is magic, Levinas offers a brilliant exposé of ambiguity – especially relevant in our age which is marked by an abundance of fake news. "Sorcery", Levinas teaches us, "is the mistress of appearance."[13] The aim of true religion is the disappearance of sorcery. It requires an "attempt positively to separate the true from appearance, maybe even to separate the true from the appearance *essentially* mixed with the true."[14] This idea is illustrated by two stories from the Talmud, which speak of deception provoked by the use of magic.[15] Both stories teach us that we need to be prudent and to test the information we encounter.

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10 Of course, Christianity also has a certain record of promoting intolerance and persecution of dissidents. See, e.g., Filoramo 2011; Stroumsa 2011.

11 Cf. Demacopoulos/Papanikolaou 2017.

12 For a critical approach to modernity from a theological perspective, see: D'Costa 2009; Cavanaugh 2009.

13 Levinas 1994: 141.

14 Levinas 1994: 141.

15 "Rab was telling Rabbi Hiyya: 'Once I saw an Arab cutting a camel into pieces with his sword. Then he beat a drum before it and the camel came back to life.' Rabbi Hiyya responded: 'Did you find blood and dung (after this performance)? It was only an illusion.' One day Ze'iri went to Alexandria, in Egypt, and bought himself an ass. When he went to give it something to drink, the spell broke and he found himself sitting on the boards of a gangway. Then the others said to him: 'If you weren't Ze'iri, we wouldn't give you back your money. For here no one

But Levinas goes further. He takes them as an image of the modern world: "Nothing is identical to itself any longer. That is what sorcery is: the modern world; nothing is identical to itself; no one is identical to himself; nothing gets said for no word has its own meaning; all speech is a magical whisper; no one listens to what you say; everyone suspects behind your words a not-said, a conditioning, an ideology."[16] Finally, sorcery, Levinas argues, "has some new mode of existence, between being and nothingness, in the madness of human minds."[17] I believe that in contemporary populism, in politics run by comedians, but also in religious fundamentalism, in its sporadic use of terror, we can discover the madness Levinas presciently spoke of.[18]

What does this have to do with the churches feeling uneasy about the modern principle of tolerance? I would like to argue that tolerance is feared as an instrument of the world in which Christianity is marginalized and in which the defense of rights can become a step towards the ideological exclusion of dissidents (in this case those in the Church).

Let me start by pointing out that modernity came as a great challenge to Christendom. Here is how Luis Dumont describes the modern departure from the conception of religion as the place of the highest provider of value and identity: "medieval religion was a great cloak – I am thinking of the Mantle of Our Lady of Mercy. Once it became an individual affair, it lost its all-embracing capacity and became one among other apparently equal considerations, of which the political was the first born. Each individual may […] recognise religion […] as the same all-embracing consideration as it used to be *socially*. Yet on the level of social consensus or ideology, the same person will switch to a different configuration of values in which autonomous values (religious, political, etc.) are seemingly juxtaposed, much as individuals are juxtaposed in society."[19] Vincent Descombes, commenting on Dumont, rightly points out that this modern change "implies the *principle of secularism*,"[20] in the sense, that religion must become a matter of individual, private choice, and separated from the state – the new *res publica*. Now, it would not be difficult to see why the latter would want

buys anything without first testing his purchase by water.'" (*Sanhedrin* 67a-68a, cited in Levinas 1994: 138).

16 Levinas 1994: 152.

17 Levinas 1994: 147.

18 Todd Phillips' movie *Joker* might serve as a parable on both populism and fundamentalism.

19 Dumont 1971: 32.

20 Descombes 2016 : 166–67 (emphasis in the original text).

religions to be tolerant. The unity of the nation-state – which serves to cement the new *res publica*, Dumont's "Mantle of Our Lady", which unites all of its citizens, – would be endangered if *private* differences between its members acquired excessive social force. This has already been pointed out by Rousseau, who, in the concluding chapter of *The Social Contract*, entitled "Civil Religion", argued that religious intolerance poses a threat to the state and should not be tolerated: "It is impossible to live at peace with people who we believe to be damned; to love them would be to hate God who punishes them. […] Wherever theological intolerance is allowed, it cannot but have some effect in civil life […]. We should tolerate all those which tolerate others, as long as their dogmas have nothing contrary to the duties of a citizen. But whosoever dares to say, 'Outside the Church no salvation', ought to be driven from the State."[21] The logical conclusion of this is that religion should be *depoliticised* in a Schmittian sense of the word.[22] Moreover, it gives the state the authority to be the arbiter of which ideas are to be considered "tolerant", which are "intolerant" and which should be "driven from the State."

Should the above account of the genealogy of modern tolerance prove correct, it is no wonder that churches may be skeptical toward the principle of tolerance. They may consider modernity – and tolerance as part of modernity's package – as inimical towards religion. Tolerance can be seen as a way of keeping religion out of social life and as an attempt to marginalize religion, if not to make it disappear. Such a perception seems to be especially apt in contexts, which have experienced religious persecution. For example, in Soviet Ukraine and other socialist countries,

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21 Rousseau 2002: 253. Cf. De Roover 2016: 240–241. Apart from the link between the privatisation of religion and the rise of the modern state, it has been argued that secularism and interiorisation of religion constitute the 'secularisation' of Protestant religiosity. See: Seligman 1993: 28.

22 Depoliticisation is defined by Carl Schmitt the as incapacity to make a friend/enemy distinction, which leads to the ceasing of existing politically (Schmitt 2007: 49). Hugh Nicholson, drawing on Schmitt, argues that a "modern theological project" (i.e. pluralism and tolerance), which consists of "freeing religious conviction from the manifestations of social antagonism" should be understood as "a ramification of the larger cultural processes of neutralization and depoliticization" leading to "the displacement of religion as the controlling domain of culture" (Nicholson 2011: 50). See also: Saba Mahmood, who claims that the declining Ottoman Empire followed a European example by "the implementation of these concepts [religious liberty and minority rights] aim[ing] less at instituting interconfessional tolerance than at establishing the principle of state sovereignty and reorienting the parochial loyalties of its subjects to the emergent nation-state" (Mahmood 2016: 25).

faith had been driven not only out of the public sphere but, in many cases, out of the sphere of legality – into the underground and into Gulags. Now, this past experience colors the churches' current reactions to any attempt to limit their public presence, authority, and attempts to dictate the Church's discourse. This has an effect on how the principle of tolerance is perceived – namely, as an ambiguous and suspicious practice. Paradoxically, communities that had been victims of intolerance face the temptation to reject tolerance or, even worse, becoming intolerant themselves.[23]

Another argument, raised against tolerance, is its foundation in individualism and its prioritization of the individual over society. Greek Orthodox theologian Christos Yannaras argues that the promotion of the difference of opinions inevitably "undermine[s] the functional cohesion, the creative dynamism, or the cultural productivity of a specific social group", and transforms a *koinonia* (community, united by a mutual worldview) into a *societas* (unity whose purpose is the attainment of utilitarian goals).[24] Adam Seligman, a Jewish thinker, adds that the principle of liberal tolerance is "contradictory, for it involves a refusal to advance a politics of the good while at the same time resting on at least one very clearly defined principle of the good, that of individual autonomy."[25] In brief, in a world in which churches feel threatened by modernity, tolerance is suspected of promoting its own ideology, rather than making space for those it claims to protect.

Furthermore, the suspicion, that there is an ideological drive behind tolerance, is felt far beyond the realm of religion. Ashish Nandy, reflecting on the South Asian situation, claims that through the concept of secular

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23 The history of the church's intolerance repeats itself. Consider the following observation by Karl Marx: "Hegel remarks somewhere that all facts and personages of great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce" (Marx 1972: 10). This image is well suited to describe the ecclesial history of intolerance. The first, 'tragic' instance is that of the fourth century AD, when, in the course of one generation, Christians went from being the persecuted to the persecutors (Cf. Filoramo 2011). The second, 'farcical' moment is the present situation in Eastern European countries: In the context of unprecedented religious freedom, ironically, churches often practice intolerance, while lamenting that they are the ones being persecuted by the powers of modernity and secularism.

24 See: Yannaras 2011: 63–66.

25 Seligman 2000: 136. See also Slavoj Žižek, who claims that "it is only modern Western capitalist culture for which autonomy and individual freedom have a higher status than collective solidarity, connection, responsibility for dependent others, and the duty to respect the customs of one's community" (Žižek 2008: 662).

tolerance, the modern state and elites silence and even justify violence against non-compliant members of society as well as poor and rural populations.[26] Wendy Brown criticizes liberal tolerance for being an instrument through which the modern state imposes itself as a universal culture, superior and more powerful than any other culture, thus depoliticizing local cultures and differences.[27] Similarly, Slavoj Žižek argues that through liberal tolerance, "differences, conditioned by political inequality, economic exploitation, and so on, are naturalized and neutralized into cultural differences, different ways of life, which are something given, something that cannot be overcome but must be merely tolerated."[28] In brief, tolerance is suspected of being an instrument which attempts, quite contradictorily, to both protect differences *and* more importantly, to 'swallow' them and make them irrelevant. "Homogenize to hegemonize", as Amartya Sen puts it.[29]

I hope this may provide some of the background to understand the reasons for suspicion of tolerance. At this point I would like to propose two examples of how these dynamics condition the attitude of the Christian churches in Ukraine towards tolerance. My first case is related to the suspicion of LGBT+ rights. Although Catholic social teaching is officially in favour of respect and against "unjust discrimination"[30], there has been almost no positive sign of acceptance of homosexual people from the leaders of Ukrainian Catholics or other Christian denominations.[31] One reason could be the fear that a gesture of support of a legal ban on

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26 Nandy 1998: 177–194; Nandy 1997: 157–176. Nandy also argues that since this tolerance has done more harm than good, religions should be looking for resources of respect and acceptance of the other, within their own traditions.

27 Wendy Brown also claims that "deployment of tolerance by the state is in part a response to a legitimacy deficit and, in particular, to its historically diminished capacity to embody universal representation. Tolerance discourse masks the role of the state in reproducing the dominance of certain groups and norms, and it does so at a historical moment when popular sensitivity to this role and this dominance is high" (Brown 2006: 83–84).

28 Žižek 2008: 660. See also Seligman, who argues that within the framework of liberal tolerance, "all conflicting views are reduced to matters of taste or aesthetics" (Seligman 2000: 135).

29 Sen 2005: 313.

30 CCC § 2358; cf. AL § 250–251 (pp. 190–191).

31 This is true of Catholicism more generally. As Patricia Jung argues, "the [Roman Catholic] Church has not focused much of its considerable political energy on reducing the scope of these abuses [against homosexual persons] or exploring the reasons for the persistence of hate crimes related to sexual identity within society" (Jung 2007: 195).

instances of "unjust discrimination" and its enforcement, might imply that homosexual activity is morally acceptable.[32]

A second example regards ecclesial life in the context of the conflict with Russia. Some churches are reluctant to raise their voices in defense of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) because of the suspicion – often well informed – that the latter uses religious narratives in order to promote political ideologies and serves as a soft power tool for the Kremlin's influence in Ukraine.[33] Even calls for peace and reconciliation within the context of the ongoing military conflict are not immune from ideological interpretations. The problem here is when a narrative is *both* religious and political. In fact, post-secularity is an age, in which the strict modern distinction between the political and the religious does not function any longer (provided it ever did), and the two spheres tend to be in a perichoretic relationship.[34]

What is clear from both mentioned cases of intolerance, is that there is a fear within the churches that tolerance diminishes the value of truth – giving truth the same value as opinions that are considered erroneous.[35] This leads us to the question of relativism, indifference to truth, and fake news. The mixture of truth and appearance, mentioned by Levinas, is, I would like to argue, the very essence of what we call today post-truth. In fact, post-truth or fake news are not exactly non-truth, they are the illusion of truth. A recent document on post-truth, *Longing for the Truth That Makes Us Free*, produced by a group of Ukrainian scholars under the leadership of Myroslav Marynovych, points out the extent to which post-truth, in the modern world, is linked to illusion: The problem is that, today, fake news appears "plausible, but [is] no less untrue."[36] Zygmunt Baumann and Leonidas Donskis, in a brilliant dialogue on the fluidity of the modern concept of good and evil, argue that, what is new today, is that "the present-day liquidized evil is hidden from sight and avoids being spotted, as well as [it puts an obstacle to the] recognition of what it is and

32 Jung 2007: 196.

33 See: Hovorun 2014: 163–172; Mulford 2016: 89–107. Cf. Smytsnyuk 2021: 69–89.

34 See two case studies: Kalaitzidis 2002: 357–379; Zubrzycki 2006.

35 A critique of this aspect of tolerance can be found in Christos Yannaras (Yannaras 2011: 63–66).

36 Religious Information Service of Ukraine (2020), Longing for the Truth That Makes Us Free, https://risu.ua/en/longing-for-the-truth-that-makes-us-free_n103953 (last access: 05–10–2021).

what it pretends."[37] In brief, post-truth, as Levinas' sorcery, creates *illusion*: illusion of reality, illusion of fact.

However, the fact remains that both cited cases of the lack of proactive tolerance – towards LGBT+ and the Moscow Patriarchate – manifest the ambiguity suggested by Levinas. Here, both the actors' words, and their interpretations are subjects to accusations of being "a not-said, a conditioning, an ideology."[38]

Although we happen to live in a world influenced by skepticism, I would not consider indifference and relativism as necessary implications of tolerance. There are certainly ways in which tolerance may appear to be synonymous with relativism. However, if one understands tolerance as in part the acceptance of another's right to believe or act in a certain way, with which one disagrees, – this very disagreement, the 'burden' of such acceptance, will prevent us from falling into indifference or relativism.[39] Therefore, acknowledging the ambiguous character of modernity and tolerance, the church, rather than rejecting them a-critically altogether, must approach them with discernment.

I would suggest that this conclusion is relevant to various modern Christian attitudes to tolerance. Sometimes the churches are so focused on the past, that they are unable to see modernity's progress in a positive light. But in our world of illusion, not only the fake-news maker is the sorcerer but also the fundamentalist. In the post-secular age, like in Stephen King's *Pet Sematary*, the once dead can come back to life again – but as monsters, as demonic shadows of what they had been before they died. This tells us something about truth and identity – if they are just copy-pasted from the past into the present – they will be nothing but a necromantic ideology.

Can tolerance be grounded theologically?

In the second part of my chapter, I would like to push my argument further, and address the question of whether tolerance can be grounded theologically. In the following I will give two reasons to embrace tolerance: the limits of theological understanding and the benefit of proactively learning from the 'other'.

37 Bauman/Donskis 2016: viii.
38 Levinas 1994: 152.
39 Cf. Panikkar 1979; Seligman 2000: ch. 5.

Let me turn to Levinas. One of the types of sorcery Levinas refers to is necromancy: Saul, on the eve of an important battle, orders a necromancer woman to bring up dead Samuel to question him about the outcome of the battle (*1 Sam.* 28). Levinas uses the story to point out the trouble in going beyond our limits: "Sorcery is the fact of looking beyond what is possible to see. It is to go beyond the limits within which one must stay, when truth approaches, [it implies] not to stop in time. […] Sorcery is the curiosity which manifests itself, when the eyes should be cast down: indiscretion regarding the Divine; insensitivity to Mystery; clarity projected unto something the approach to which requires some modesty […] and, finally, [claims about] certain forms of the sexual life itself."[40] Levinas continues: "it is the excess of knowledge itself, that which is beyond what can be borne in truth, the illusion which derives from the unbearable truth and which tempts from the very depths of the truth; […] the perversion of all those able to rise to the true, of all those who assemble at the foot of Mount Sinai."[41]

Now, back to our question of tolerance. I wonder whether in some cases, when our societies, institutions and churches absolutize certain principles, they do not go beyond what they really see and know. Should not the fact that the church has been gifted with Revelation, be also balanced against the fact that she is its keeper, not its owner, and that Revelation is not there to provide all the answers? Are we really sure that human sexuality is such an open book, that we can make infallible judgments with such ease? Should we not be more modest?

Adam Seligman invites us to exercise "certain skepticism or tentativeness, a modesty perhaps toward our own epistemological claims."[42] He claims that even "a single religion, with its built-in tension between reason and revelation, between knowledge and faith does also tend to undermine that taken-for-grantedness of the beliefs and values of modernity", as it does with its own beliefs.[43] Raimon Panikkar, a Catholic theologian, engaged in dialogue with Asian traditions, also insists on tolerance as a way

40 Levinas 1994: 145. This quotation seems to be proleptically grasping one of the problems of the modern Christian stance towards modernity and tolerance. Paradoxically, in many contexts the very definition of what constitutes a good Catholic (or a Catholic *tout court*) is an attitude towards human reproduction and sexuality. This was clearly visible in connection to the 2020 electoral debates in the USA.

41 Levinas 1994: 145.

42 Seligman 2000: 134.

43 Seligman 2000: 138–141. The quotation is from p. 138.

of recognizing the limits of our understanding.[44] Tolerance, understood in this way, saves us from the temptation of becoming totalitarian, i.e. attempting to enclose human experience in its totality. Panikkar proposes a parable of the weeds – left to grow freely until the harvest (*Mt.* 13) – as an evangelical foundation of tolerance, adding that a Christian not only should be tolerant towards what exists outside of herself, but also towards one's own imperfections. I would suggest that the parable of the weeds is also interesting because it brings us back to the ambiguity of our age. The weed (or darnel) is not just a harmful plant. The peculiarity of the weed is that until the moment of harvest, it is indistinguishable from wheat, and by pulling it out, the wheat can be damaged. It is not going beyond the parable's message to suggest that, what was truly religious and what was a deceitful travesty, will become known only on the last eschatological day.[45]

The last point, in relation to this, is the one touched upon by Seligman, when he argued that religious epistemology has the potential to challenge the taken-for-grantedness of modernity. I would like to suggest that understanding our limits can be something that religion can teach the secular world. Monism and oversimplification are a common problem for both political and religious praxis.[46] Contemporary populism as well as fundamentalism have been criticized for providing simplistic answers to human powerlessness and anxiety.[47] The American philosopher Martha Nussbaum in her recent book, *The Monarchy of Fear*, invites us to lead an "examined life", lived in "humility about how little we really understand", combined "with a willingness to listen to others as equal participants and to respond to what they offer."[48]

I would like to suggest that this reflection on the limits of our understanding can be 'secularised' in a way that fits into principles of the political and social life. Jürgen Habermas rightly points out that "the eschatological impulse of a [Judeo-Christian] political theology […] can serve […] as a reminder of the temporal dimension in which we raise normative

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44 Panikkar 1979.

45 On *eschaton* as the revelation of the fullness of truth, see: Zizioulas 2011: 39–83.

46 As Domenico Bilotti rightly points out, "fundamentalism, understood as systematic and premeditated exclusion of all differences with respect to one's point of view, exists within religions, economic and financial circuits, the agencies of political participation" (Bilotti 2014: 74, translation P.S.).

47 On populist simplification, see: Rosanvallon 2011. On fundamentalism, see: Greenfeld 2006. Ram-Prasad 1993: 285–309.

48 Nussbaum 2018: 10. Nussbaum draws heavily on Socrates here.

claims.[49] Habermas, drawing on Johann Baptist Metz, emphasizes that both eschatology and a vision of the history of salvation, which develops dynamically "can sharpen our awareness of the fact that the democratic process is also a learning process, one often blocked by a deficient sense of what is lacking and what is still possible. Any democratic constitution is and remains *a project*."[50] This epistemological anti-absolutism of religion could become the contribution of theology to political life. To conclude, in the process of determining what our approach to tolerance should be, before uttering anathemas and condemnations, we should remind ourselves of our limits, and exercise epistemological modesty.

The last point I would like to make is that we should not stop at acknowledging the limits of our understanding, but rather be proactively tolerant – going towards the 'others' and learning from those, with whom we disagree. Here, I would suggest, an engagement with Buber can help us.

At the beginning of the chapter, I referred to the story about Rabbi Eizik, who went to Prague only to discover that he had a treasure at his home in Cracow. The interpretation which Buber gives to this Hasidic story is that the truth about oneself, one's identity, one's "authentic existence", and mission can be found only at one's home: "There is something that can only be found in one place. It is a great treasure, which may be called the fulfillment of existence. The place where this treasure can be found is the place on which one stands. [...] We [...] strive to find – somewhere – what we are seeking. Somewhere, in some province of the world or of the mind, except where we stand, where we have been set – but it is there and nowhere else that the treasure can be found."[51]

Now, this 'home', to which Buber is referring, is not necessarily one's religious or cultural tradition. Buber's emphasis is on the idea that one's existential mission should be directed towards everyday's life within one's family and community. At the same time, the message is very clear: One should be focused on the environment, where one lives, and on the situation, in which one is immersed, rather than looking 'outside'. Buber's interpretation of the story is thought-provoking. I would like to argue, however, that the story contains an important intuition, which Buber did not notice or did not consider worth developing. This point consists in going 'away', going to meet the 'other', as a condition of finding one's

49 Habermas 2011: 28.
50 Habermas 2011: 28 (emphasis in the original text).
51 Buber 1951: 41–42.

authentic self. Buber is right in emphasizing that the treasure lies in Eizik's house. However, in order to discover this, Eizik needs to go to Prague. Without this trip he would never know, where he should look for his treasure. Moreover, the existence of the treasure is not revealed to Eizik alone, but also to the captain of the guards – and the captain's treasure does not lie in Prague – but in Cracow. The latter's mistake is to think that going away is purposeless.

I would therefore suggest that the key message of Rabbi Eizik's story is not only about one's 'identity' or the 'truth', that can be discovered at one's home and in everyday's life, but that in order to attain one's truth and identity, one needs to travel abroad, see other traditions and talk to other people. Without this journey one will never appreciate 'home'.[52]

The lesson here is that the 'other', the 'foreigner', helps us to understand who we are. She is the *conditio sine qua non* of understanding ourselves. Moreover, our relation to the 'other' (religious, ethnic, gender, ideological) makes us who we are. Tolerance should not constitute an attitude of 'ignoring' but rather of looking at oneself through the 'other'. Within the field of religion, this proactive tolerance can express itself in ecumenical or inter-religious dialogue or comparative theology.[53] A Christian can learn from the ways a 'foreign' religious tradition exercises understanding and reflection – without having to make a judgment on the validity of the 'foreign' tradition. In this sense, one can step out of one's own tradition into a new one, "learning from – rather than merely about" this tradition. Then one comes back with fresh insights, a better understanding of one's own tradition, and sometimes ideas, which challenge this tradition.[54] The other tradition becomes a mirror, in which one can see oneself and perhaps notice some ugly features. But the idea of 'going abroad' should not be limited to a religious field. It can be extended to the ethnic, gender or ideological 'abroad' – and in every case it can help us to understand ourselves better. Russia can become a mirror for Ukraine, in which it can

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52 I suggest that such a reading is all the more appropriate, as far as it represents Buber's own life journey – from his Hasidic childhood in Lviv to despising Hasidism, interest in secular Judaism, secular art and culture, oriental religions – and, only subsequently, a return 'home', to his grandfathers' Hasidism. This 'U-turn' has been well documented in Buber's recent biography by Paul Mendes-Flohr, and might provide an interpretation key to the Rabbi Eizik's story, even if it was not explicitly envisaged by Buber himself (Mendes-Flohr 2019: ch. 4).

53 For a general introduction to the method of comparative theology, see: Clooney 2010.

54 Drew 2012: 1042.

see both its virtues, and vices. LGBT+ can become a mirror for both the good and evil of the 'traditional family'.

To conclude, the modern world is a *locus* of ambiguity and deception, and Ukraine is no exception to this predicament. Through the concept of tolerance – the liberal nation-state may be able to impose itself as the highest value. In this context, tolerance becomes a battlefield between religion and secularism, between the common good and individualism, between truth and relativism. It is thus comprehensible, why the churches in Ukraine and beyond resist or reject tolerance. I argue, however, that such a choice is too simplistic. Theology should discern the ways in which tolerance could be accepted, and the modality in which it can be articulated based on theological values, such as an awareness of the limitation of our understanding, and the necessity of proactively approaching the 'other'.[55]

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