

HUMAN VALUES AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, THE RIGHT OF LIFE IN THE REVELATION OF THE OBJECTION OF CONSCIENCE ACCORDING TO THE PERSPECTIVE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISM

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ABSTRACT: Human Values and Freedom of Religion. The Right to Life in The Revelation of The Objection of Conscience According to The Perspective of Seventh-day Adventism.

Seventh-day Adventism suffered greatly from the two world wars, especially against the background of non-combat. Faith in God's command not to kill has become the norm of life and the value of faith for conscientious objectors who have valued the Word more than they own life. In the course of history, Seventh-day Adventism experienced division, persecution, and suffering to the end, but with all these causes the Adventist message could not be overcome. Passing through different political systems, like a totalitarian monarchy, a Legionary government, and then a military one, the church fought back bravely by changing to fit the situation so that the standards of the Advent faith could be carried on. The values of Seventh-day Adventism embody human values and create the context for a peaceful and harmonious existence from the biblical point of view. This way arises the question: Can we still consider conscientious objection a human value from a theologian's angle under the authority of God's existence ?

Keywords: *conscientious objection, conscience, non-combatant, monarchy, communism, Adventism, faith, death, war.*

Introduction

The right to life is a fundamental right that cannot be negotiated under any legal or philosophical form. Life is the creative foundation of human exist-

tence and the only process at the basis of the perpetuation of the human species. Researchers are free to consent to whatever they wish, indeed they can build theories, ideas and opinions, but the right to life in whatever form is non-negotiable. In the immediate context of the Russo-Ukrainian war (or rather of Russian aggression) the revelation of conscientious objection confers on all decision-makers the right to life and on those who accede to this desire of the Godhead. Those who through various forms, abortion, abortion, murder, suicide, arrogate to themselves the right to attempt life do nothing more than attempt to undermine the balance and the will of the Godhead regarding human life as revealed to us in Christ.

As a Romanian, born and raised in the Carpathian region, and educated in a national and patriotic spirit, I understand the need to defend the values of the nation against any threat, something that was done with great dedication by the descendants of my own people when the culture, faith and values of the nation were threatened. In the face of the Ottoman threat, for example, the risk was not only that we would lose our freedom, that we would be subjugated and turned into an annex or a pasha, but also that we would lose both our national identity and our Christian faith. Today the Ottoman invasion is no longer knocking at the country's gates, but other invaders are gaining ground in different forms.

Conscientious objection and religious freedom

Within the Seventh-day Adventist faith there have been and are many conscientious objectors who have suffered for their faith without anyone ever having asked their forgiveness for the injustice committed. Human values sum up a conduct that brings with it a different vision. Love of one's neighbour as a human value and faith is invoked as a desideratum of conscientious objection because he who loves his fellow man, whoever he may be, cannot kill or harm his neighbour. Love of God as an intrinsic value of the human being confirms the need to show affection and love to those around us.

Religious freedom¹ confers the possibility to decide how one can freely choose how to be in relation to oneself and to one's fellow human

1 Ioan-Gheorghe Rotaru, "Libertatea religioasă – temelie a demnității umane", în Daniela Ioana Bordeianu, Erika Androne, Nelu Burcea, *Manual pentru liderul Departamentului de Libertate religioasă*, Casa de editură "Viața și Sănătate", București, 2013, pp. 210-215.

beings. In this article we will take a close look at conscientious objection as a human value in the spirituality of Seventh-day Adventist Christianity. Against the background of World War II, Europe was shaken by death, poverty, and much suffering. Romania was by no means exempt from these events, nor was the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The adventism in Romania's History

Against the backdrop of the faltering monarchy under Carol II, Marshal Antonescu took power following the abdication of the king, and having no better solution at hand, established a quasi-military dictatorship, and a government together with the Legionary movement, headed by the young King Mihai I. Taking advantage of the political situation and of the war, Marshal Ion Antonescu removed the Legionaries from government in 1941, and Romania became a country with an authoritarian regime, a regime ruled by an iron hand, a military hand, in the shadow of which the young, newly re-crowned king was to watch.

These moves only brought closer ties with Nazi Germany and helped tie the knot around Adventists who had no desire to participate in the war. It should be mentioned that during the First World War there were Adventists who actively participated in the war, considering duty to the fatherland a necessary virtue without which it could not exist. Among the Adventist leaders there were even officers of the Romanian Army in reserve, as the Adventist leader, Ștefan Demetrescu himself had said.² These statements and actions unfortunately led to a split within the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Romania, because some of the Romanian Adventists were non-combatant, and condemned the war effort even by the simple gesture of refusing to touch or carry a weapon, and considered that those who choose to satisfy the military service and participate in the war, despised the Decalogue, especially the 6th commandment, which clearly says "Thou shall not kill"³.

Marshal Ion Antonescu mobilized the entire army, which included Seventh-day Adventists and Reformed Adventists. Although some believers agreed to go to war, many refused, citing reasons of conscience. However, these conscientious objectors were not to be defended by anyone; on

2 Ștefan Demetrescu, *Ce credem noi Adventiștii – Răspuns calomniilor debitate despre noi de către cei interesați*, Atelierele grafice SOCEC & Co., București, 1915, p.11.

3 Exodul 20:13. *Biblia cu explicații*, versiunea Dumitru Cornilescu, 1996.

the contrary, most were to receive years of hard time, some even the death penalty.⁴

During the Second World War, the Adventist Church in Romania had no recognised status, so it was outlawed and its believers were often persecuted, and their only hope was an end to the war or the return of Christ and the end of world history.

Seventh-day Adventists and the Royal House

It is a known fact that Seventh-day Adventists have received the support of the Royal House of Romania in various forms, from scholarships abroad to coming to the rescue of believers when they faced various predicaments. For example, in the case of the Stupini Bible Institute, after it was confiscated by the German army and turned into a barracks, and later turned into an Orthodox Church School, after which it suffered serious damage at the hands of Soviet soldiers, King Mihai I, gave it back to the Seventh-day Adventists, and also offered a sum of money for renovation. In the matter of conscientious objectors there have been several interventions to save soldiers by the grace of God and His Majesty King Michael. It was in 1949 that the atheistic communist regime decided to banish the Adventists and requisition the school at Stupini.

King Michael, after dismissing Marshal Antonescu by a palace coup, decided to end the war against Russia and obtained an armistice that was not at all favourable to Romania, especially for the Adventist Christians who were conscientious objectors, because this time they were forced to fight against Nazi Germany alongside the Soviets, who turned out to be just as ruthless towards them. Many Adventist Christians who persisted in their decision not to participate in the war ended up in Siberia and the Gulag, many of whom never returned.

Romanian Adventism and the Communists

It is well known that the Communist regime promoted atheism and denial of Christianity as well as persecution of Christians regardless of denomination. The prisons were full of Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic and Orthodox priests, pastors of all denominations and believers belonging to different religious denominations. When Seventh-day Adventists and Re-

4 Fondul IRJ (Inspectoratul Regional al Jandarmerie) Dosar 353/1942.

formed Adventists invoked conscientious objection to various situations, this displeased the Communists, who were quick to express their displeasure.⁵ If at first the situation was treated locally, either by small warnings or by sanctions, after gaining all the power, the communists reacted harshly and extremely violently.

There are numerous cases in which not a few believers were beaten and publicly humiliated for refusing to send their children to school on Saturdays, or because they did not go to harvest on Saturdays or because they refused to meet their military service. There were also Adventists who completed their military service but refused to report on Saturdays, which entailed all sorts of consequences, some even ending up in front of the military court where they received harsh convictions.

Adventist officials sought to solve these extremely painful and difficult situations through a form of collaboration with the Communist authorities, but even so, by offering sums of money or material benefits to the communists, the Department of Religious Affairs was the control body through which the communists installed their key people in positions advantageous to them. By the decree of 1948, many cults were banned, leaving only 16 of them legal, the ones they thought they could control. Thus, it was the atheist Communist state that had to give its endorsement so that the leaders of the cult could function⁶, so if you wanted to train a pastor, or ordain him, you needed the approval of the department, not only of the church.

The Leninist-Marxist philosophy had at all costs to be taught to the people and applied in such a way that it became a way of life, a new religion of the people. Thus the way of life of the Adventist Christians was not approved by the Communist leaders and they felt the need to continue their work even illegally or even at great risk. The *Curierul Adventist* periodical (*Adventist Courier*) was the only publication Adventists could print, as extremely many other materials were banned, confiscated and destroyed. With all these state bans some pastors and believers took extreme risks and printed books, pamphlets and Bibles and formed an underground network of religious literature distribution. Although the printing activity operated clandestinely and with much sacrifice, in official publications excessive

5 Corneliu Ghiocel, Fitzai, *Mișcarea adventistă de ziua a șaptea din România*, Editura Viață și Sănătate, Pantelimon, 2008, p. 324.

6 Gheorghe, Graur, *Istoria Bisericii Adventiste din România*, Editura Viață și Sănătate, Pantelimon, 2019, p. 144.

praise of the regime was necessary, especially for the freedoms it offered to churches. One thing that should also be noted is the breaking off of official relations with the church in America and the complete isolation from the Adventist world outside.

Thus, under the communist regime even if it was an atheist one, the Church survived even if there were collaborating or laymen⁷, the mission of spreading the Gospel could not be prevented and the number of believers was increasing.

Conclusion

Against the background of very effervescent political changes, the transition from royalty to Communism, the Seventh-day Adventist church was forced to survive and adapt very quickly to the new situations. One strength of Adventist believers has been that they have been able to survive even imprisonment because their faith is a rigorous one. As conscientious objectors, Seventh-day Adventists have made it abundantly clear that the right to life is an indisputable human value. Because they have chosen to defend biblical values, especially the right not to fight and kill, Seventh-day Adventists have suffered from the atheistic communist system. So human values such as love of one's fellow man and more are closely related to religious freedom. Conscientious objection is clearly one of these values.

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⁷ *Ibidem.*