

WAR AND THE VALUE OF FAITH, A THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE

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ABSTRACT: *War and the Value of Faith, a Theological View of Freedom of Conscience.*

The fight for freedom is fought every day, but especially today, when technology can create real global crises. Faith that educates, and education that strengthens the main values born of faith, strengthen the transcendental relationship. Thus, in the face of global crises, the affirmation of freedom is freedom itself. The moment of silence is when freedom is willingly renounced. The era of digitalization does not elude us, but it must nevertheless be limited within the perimeter of human control. Different religious confessions struggle for the affirmation of personal beliefs, but also for the non-restriction of manifestations of worship, especially in the context of great crises. Freedom of conscience is a desire of the believer regardless of the context of the crisis, and this freedom must not be restricted no matter what. Humanity must also face contemporary challenges.

Keywords: *lie, war, communism, faith, reason, victory.*

Lying in St. Thomas' vision

War has become a word almost out of the contemporary vocabulary, because we can consider that we enjoy relative peace, until recently when the military forces decided to prove their possible usefulness again. What is the usefulness of war, but what motivation can it have?

Lying and truth become similar when it comes to justifying an error or even an atrocity.¹ In this sense, St. Thomas raises a topical question:

1 Niccolo Machiaveli, *The Art of War*, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing, 2022, p.62.

What if every lie is sin?² Of course, lying can sometimes produce beneficial effects, but at least for the moment it can avoid certain embarrassing situations. Of course, lying is not a sin when it aims to save a human life, as is the case with the Catholic Germans who hid Jews and when asked if they had Jews in their homes, they said they did not and thus offered them protection.

The lie cannot clothe itself in the garb of truth in any form, but nevertheless it can assimilate certain nuances that make it appear or come to the truth. Referring strictly to what St. Thomas says, we can say that not every lie is a sin, as we demonstrated above in the case of saving a human life.

The objections present several biblical and other situations, but which are not fully documented. Because it is possible for two people to hear a story from the same person but give different information³ when retelling, which does not automatically lead to a lie, but to the fact that it is possible to emphasize different elements. In the case of the midwives in Egypt, it is clear that God rewards them for the good they have done, not for lying, but could this good have been done without a lie? Likewise, examples given in the Bible, such as Abraham or Jacob, should be understood spiritually or prophetically.

A lie is a sin when maliciously the promise made is not kept or when from the beginning what is said does not conform to reality. Looking into present times, people often tell lies and invoke causes external to them and their actions to exonerate themselves.

It is easy for a political faction to promise a certain benefit when it is not in charge, and if it ends up taking over, to blame those who came before it for consuming resources. Lying brings with it a lack of accountability.

In my opinion, lying is a sin as long as it produces negative effects, whatever they are, whether they are small or large. The lie that saves a life, as is the case enunciated by the Bible with the harlot Rahab, or the case of the Jews saved from certain death, cannot be considered sin, but when the lie divides, creates suffering, confusion, and not only that, it is certainly a sin.

2 *Summa Theologica* II-II, q. 110, a.3.

3 Marius Cazan, Daniel-Valeriu Boboc (eds.), *I sign and answer before the law!*, Bucharest, Polirom Publishing, 2021, p. 95.

There are several cases of lying that Holy Scripture relates, which have only brought with it problems.

Lying as a pretext for war

Peace is a desideratum that should be desired by each of us, but often wars are those that begin from a lie, a lie so well told and embodied that it becomes a truth in the mouth of the one who utters it.

If we refer to war, regardless of its nature, religious or military, conquest or defense, all elements only deepen the gap between people. Emptiness that cannot be filled with lies, but only with truth. Truth that compels us to love and self-sacrifice. An authentic faith in the spirit of Christian brotherhood cannot conceive of manifesting itself violently. Although war must have nothing to do with faith, we often find people thirsting for God right at the front, among shells and cannon splinters.⁴

Lying is the only way people can accept the reality of war, in the sense that some can exert a belief on others by using the lie to provide an appropriate motivation for an act of violence. Adolf Hitler managed to inspire his countrymen that they were suffering from hunger and poverty, thanks to Jews and Russians, thus achieving hatred and death. Lying is criminal in itself, because its immediate and long-term effects are devastating.

Communism was installed as a lie, the promise of a better life, equality of citizens and abundance crowned by the applause of the single party proved to last as long as a breeze. A faith established by terror and violence cannot endure or be applied, even one with logical reasoning. "John Henri Newman showed that, from the perspective of content, faith is greater than reason."⁵

So although some try to prevail with reason, especially in case of war, it is still faith that has a higher degree of living. It is faith that sees beyond lying as a pretext and can only conclude in truth as elementary living.

Truth as freedom

On a wall of the penitentiary in Sighetul Marmăției is written in many languages the following verse from the Gospel of John: *you will know the*

4 S. Skultety, *Beyond the Trenches*, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing, 2022, p. 210.

5 Boulton, David J., *Objection Overruled: Conscriptio and Conscience in the First World War*, United Kingdom, 2015.

*Truth, and the Truth will set you free.*⁶ Man's only possibility to truly experience freedom is in truth. My grandfather told me that in communist times they were told that Americans were poor and that many had nowhere to sleep or eat, and that they in socialist countries were the ones who had to help them. The lie was so well wrapped up under the veneer of pity, but when he arrived in America, he actually understood what the truth was.

When the Savior affirms the above, He is referring to the absolute freedom that every man seeks, freedom in truth, an assumed and mature freedom.⁷ Truth is always revealing, and it alone brings full knowledge. Only one who lives in truth and comes to truth incessantly can expose himself to joy and loving living.

Faith and war

Faith and war can make a good team. During the time of persecution, faith flourished and spiritual aspects received greater attention.⁸ For Christians of all confessions, war has never come as good news, because it cannot be conceived that the Christ in the Romanian Christian would kill the Christ in the Russian or German Christian - this of course in a logic of assuming the Christian faith authentically.

The disciples would be known as Christ's if they showed love for one another. This desideratum still exists today and it is imperative to be an example of Christian living. The octave moment of common prayer is proof of the Christian tolerance shown today.

Among so many dogmas and doctrines it is often difficult to maintain peace and good understanding because everyone believes that his truth is above that of others. Because an analysis of all confessional beliefs

6 *Bible with explanations*, Dumitru Cornilescu version, 1996. Gospel of John 8:32.

7 Ioan-Gheorghe Rotaru, "Religious liberty - a natural human right", In *Jurnalul Libertății de Conștiință (JLC)*, Ganoune Diop, Mihnea Costoiu, Liviu-Bogdan Ciucă, Nelu Burcea (eds.), Les Arcs, France, Editios IARSIC, 2015, pp. 595-608.

8 Radu Preda, Ion Vicovan (eds), *Martyrdom and memory from Communist Romania*, Bucharest, Polirom Publishing, 2020, p. 230; Ioan-Gheorghe Rotaru, "Libertatea religioasă - temelie a demnității umane" ("Religious freedom - the foundation of human dignity), In Daniela Ioana Bordeianu, Erika Androne, Nelu Burcea, *Manual pentru liderul Departamentului de Libertate religioasă*, București, Casa de editură "Viața și Sănătate", 2013, pp. 210-215.

in Romania is difficult to achieve and extremely difficult to do so objectively, I would rather see it necessary to eliminate dissensions and ideas of personal aggrandizement. For example, an Orthodox Christian may say of himself that his religion is the first to arise from the apostles and that they have succession through bishops, or a Catholic may say that he is in the right direction because he has papal primacy from Peter, the argument of a witness is that Abel the righteous is the first Jehovah's Witness, and the Adventist will say that Adam was the first Adventist, and in this logic everyone can say about himself a great many others.

In the logic of what has already been expressed we can find a lot of arguments that can divide us, which are more or less sustainable, but we can find only one argument against, namely Christ and His cross through which we are all one, children of the same father.

Thus, however, we encounter an incompatibility of the Christian faith with war, even though often on the walls of some churches we find depicted in a special way the depictions of various saints dressed in armor and carrying weapons. They wore weapons and armor because before their personal knowledge of Christ they were soldiers, but through conversion they became soldiers of God's kingdom.

As a contemporary aspect, we cannot in any way endorse the encouraging statements of some church representatives about the war between Russia and Ukraine. It cannot be that the one who represents Christ is urging a battle of conquest against other Christians.

The relevance of pacifism and conscientious objectors

Peace is an element of divine origin because it belongs to the sphere of divinity. Although peace is desirable at the expense of war, there are still plenty today that threaten its maintenance. However, it is conscientious objectors who warn the general public of the necessity of pacifism.

The war, although apparently bringing with it victory, leaves behind a lot of collateral damage. Adding all the elements together, we actually see that war produces more losses than gain.

In the act of war, conscientious objectors are those who put up crucial resistance to the act of violence by protesting and refusing to fight. There are several denominations worldwide that have had conscientious objectors, but the one that has given rise to many remarkable stories is the group

of Jehovah's Witnesses, a religious group that is also present in Romania. The philosopher Tudor Petcu recounts in his book⁹ the history of Jehovah's Witnesses under the persecution of war.

The first Jehovah's Witnesses in Romania are two Romanian citizens of Hungarian ethnicity who were converted in the United States by Charles Russell, who advises them to return to Romania to preach the newly discovered teaching there, which they do. By the two in 1919, about 1700 people had already converted. From this time until the fall of communism, Jehovah's Witnesses will grow, face repeated legal recognition and persecution, and refusing military service will even bring life sentences to some.

By their creed, Jehovah's Witnesses assume the position of conscientious objectors, but also that they do not touch the gun or help anything related to the issue of war. It is interesting that depending on who was in power they were accused of either communism, imperialism or American espionage. The fact is that the witnesses refused at all costs to take up arms or fight because they understood this as a biblical command and could not deviate from it.

The fact that Jehovah's Witnesses were against the idea of war and war itself provides a clear perspective on conscientious objection in the sense that we can define objectors' activity and theoretical framework.

Pacifism and conscientious objection are relevant because they clearly show us that there is another much better option than war. Even though Jehovah's Witnesses were in the minority, they were not the only religious formation that had conscientious objectors within it.¹⁰

Conclusion

In a world where truth often seems relative and lies seem similar in nuance to truth, it is necessary for the Church to be a beacon of light that correctly points to meaning and direction. The truth must be truth, with clear tones of white, not possible shades of gray, because only in this way can we distinguish good from evil. Faith must remain an exercise of active¹¹ and reactive thinking to situations encountered.

9 Tudor Petcu, *Persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses*, Bucharest, 2022.

10 Ibid. p. 25.

11 Daniel Cain. *Roads of blood, the campaign of 1916-1918*, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing, 2020.

Dialogue between religions¹² is also necessary and must bring harmony and peace¹³, precisely so as not to respond to the wounds of the past and to strengthen the possibility of a future beneficial to all.¹⁴ Conscientious objectors¹⁵ remain a flag of confession of faith in difficult times and fulfillers of the commandment of divine love.

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