

Socio-Theological Interferences Regarding the Suicidal Act in a Society in Crisis

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Abstract: The paper entitled "Socio-theological interferences on suicide in a society in crisis" presents some aspects of suicide over time in some peoples from different cultures and spaces. In order to present the evolution of the mentality over time, several legislative landmarks from various countries were mentioned, the last part being focused on highlighting the theological perspective on the suicidal act and on a sociological research on the perception of individuals in the theological space on this act.

Keywords: Suicidal act; theological perspective; crisis; perception; legislation

1. Short journey on suicide

Respect for life continued to be the highest and most beautiful doctrine, so suicide has always been a time of varying significance for philosophers, doctors, sociologists, psychologists, theologians, etc. but also for the various religions and ordinary people who considered it a "scandal", a stone that stops and is against any order "a crime against God".

The act of suicide has been recorded since the beginning of mankind, but the notion of suicide was first used in the seventeenth century. From the twelfth century the term suicide took place, and in the eighteenth century it circulated in the form of "homicide de soi-même" (Dictionnaire de Médecine Flammarion, 1975). The term suicide first appears in 1726 in Abbot Desfontaines's "Dictionnaire neologique".

Some have accepted suicide as a form of freeing man from the burden of life, its imperfections or a manifestation of the spirit of freedom, and others have condemned and blamed the person who resorted to such an extreme act. It is known that the immediate reason for suicide is despair, the self-murderer sees no meaning for his life, does not see the meaning of his suffering and decides "not to belong to this world" through the most blamed death. The question is, with what right we judge those who have not heard the cry of man alone in the darkness of despair. It can be said that this cry is the voice that accuses this imperfect world to which mankind

pays an increasing tribute every year. We have a duty to prevent the desperate from killing himself but at the same time to take responsibility for ensuring an acceptable life, for giving meaning to life. A German historian (Tetaz, 1971) states that "the priest of a small village in the Black Forest had the following phrase engraved on the tombstone of a poor servant who was found hanged in the barn: Who are you, man, to judge your brother?"

2. Suicide and the Theological Perspective

The Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church and the Protestant Church consider suicide a sin and do not admit it. Christianity views suicide as an act of rebellion against the One who gave life and as a destruction of the temple of the Holy Spirit, which is the body "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are" (I Corinthians 3: 16-17, Biblia sau Sfânta Scriptură, 1991). Suicide has been present in all peoples and at all times, even in primitive peoples to prove that it is a temptation of human nature.

In the Bible, the Old Testament mentions characters who commit suicide, such as Samson, Saul, Abimelech, Acitophael, Zimri. However, the Mosaic Law does not mention anything on this subject, Jewish morality reminds of the sacredness of life leaving no room for suicide. An example of this might be Job, whose wife asked him to curse God and die, but Job replied, "But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips" (Job 2: 10, Biblia sau Sfânta Scriptură, 1991). Even the rather pessimistic book of Ecclesiastes does not contain any encouragement about a voluntary end, but at the same time, the Mosaic Law does not judge the suicidal. Thus Acitophael, who had strangled himself, was buried in his father's land. Later, probably under the influence of the Roman Code, changes took place, so that (St. Augustin, 1994) Joseph reports that the body of the self-suicide could not be buried until after sunset, and not to take care of the corpse's person who committed suicide in full mental faculties (Landsberg, 1992).

In the New Testament, self-murderers are mercilessly convicted in this situation, with only one case of Judas committing suicide, and this is presented rather succinctly, with death appearing as a consequence of the betrayal of the unbelieving disciple. Origen condemns the suicide of Judas, on whom God's judgment is awaited.

Tertullian, Eusebius, and Chrysostom glorify suicide that prevents dishonesty, with Ambrose especially praising Pelagia, who killed herself to defend her virginity, honor, and later was canonized.

Blessed Augustine (1994) condemns suicide, and his attitude has three important motivations:

- the first, the Platonic philosophy, which makes the citizen a slave of the city, who has no right to dispose of his person;
- the second, Roman law, which does not contain identical rules of law for slaves and for the free man, regarding the possibility of disposing of his life;
- the third position was against Manichaeism and Donatism, religions that approve of suicide.

Blessed Augustine and St. Thomas argue this prohibition as follows: "Suicide is contrary to man's natural inclination, against the mercy that must be shown to him. Well-governed love begins with it self" (St. Augustin, 1994). If suicide is contrary to man's natural inclination, it means that it would exist only in pathological cases. What is certain is that man's desire for life is neither unlimited nor conditioned. The suicidal person is practically deprived of a good that is life, instead of a greater evil, such as the loss of honor and freedom. It can be mentioned that the person kills himself out of self-love. The suicidal man lacks his own salvation, which would be the denial of mercy to himself, which the gospel demands. But most self-murderers do not think they are losing their salvation, but hope for a better life.

The theological sin of despair is not defined by the loss of ordinary hope, but by the loss of "fundamental hope in God and His goodness, which is the human soul itself." Suicides are not theologically hopeless as Landsberg mentions (1992), man never despairs, despair being an impossible state contrary to his existence. It is not proper for a man on this earth. The act of suicide is not despair, but a hope of a mad life, addressed to the great stranger beyond death.

Blessed Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas contradict the Platonic argument, "that man belongs to the homeland and to society, not having the right to commit suicide by his presence and activity. As long as society is imperfect, causing countless material and moral misery, determining, in a way, escape from this world, it can no longer be granted the right to condemn those who evade its domination through death" (Landsberg, 1992). Man has not asked to be born in a society and does not understand why he would not have the right to leave it, using an extreme means, if life in that society no longer has any meaning for him.

Kant suggests to the man tempted to commit suicide to ask himself whether the principle of his judgment could become the principle of universal law or whether it is only a single, particular situation.

Christian moralists also claim that suicide is not allowed because it is a crime against the family. This argument is not justified because in most cases those who commit suicide do not have families or have disorganized families, which is difficult to bear.

The most important argument is not that we are the property of the family or society, but that we are the property of God. Man is not, as stated, "sui-iuris", but God decides about our life and death. Suicide can become pride, proving that man can become "secut Deus". Montaigne (1984) invokes, from a stoic point of view, that "God allows us enough, that He gives us such torments, that life may seem worse to us than death. If it is a tyrannical God or a slave master, this argument is enough, but the best argument is the example of Christ." By its nature, Landsberg (1992) notes, "the human being is terrified of the idea of suffering and seeks happiness, so by suicide, man seeks to escape suffering. To the man who suffers and is tempted to commit suicide, we can say: remember the suffering of Christ and the martyrs, you must carry your cross like them. Ask your conscience if you are truly innocent. You may be innocent of something that the world blames you for, but you are guilty of countless other things. If Christ, who is innocent, has suffered for others" and, as Pascal mentions, "shed a drop of blood for each of us, do we have the right to refuse suffering, which is the work given to man by God, as a punishment and a remedy at the same time?" (Dostoievschi, 1986).

The Catholic Church is more intransigent about this sin, so Tesson in his study "Suicide and Canon Law" makes a human analysis of Canon 1240 which emphasizes that "those who have deliberately committed suicide must be deprived of ecclesiastical burial". The author studied this deliberate term "deliberato consilio" and uses the explanations of psychiatrist Schneider to say that "the attack on one's own life is almost always the manifestation of a psychopathological crisis, which has disturbed the appreciation of values". The author thus specifies his position. "Broadly speaking, church burial should not be denied in the case of suicide". And he adds "that we hope that the renewal of canon law will take into account all these elements in order to formulate a legislation that goes beyond the old thinking and adapts to the works of psychology of our times".

Reformed churches do not know a law comparable to canon law, but Protestant moral theology addresses this issue. If the position of the Reformers was no less rigorous than that of Catholic and Orthodox morals,

the evolution towards a charitable attitude was simpler for Protestantism due to the lack of a canon law codifying the laws in this regard.

A contemporary Lutheran dictionary, "Die Religion Geschichte und Gegenwart" (1961), mentions the issue of suicide as a sin without forgiveness. Bonhoeffer (1969) in "Ethics" published in 1949, after his death in the Concentration Camp, points out that "but who would dare to say that God's grace does not comprehend and bear the weakness of the supreme temptation?" (Tetaz, 1971).

Indian Buddhism has taken a clear stand against any form of self-destruction. The escape from a world of suffering - dukkha - is not allowed by suicide, looking for an alternative to change, the attitude towards oneself and towards the world. For genuine Buddhism, suicide is a mistake, a stalemate. What the Buddha calls thirst, Schopenhauer calls the will to live, cannot be defeated by suicide. One cannot escape existence in this violent way. The self-murderer transforms according to his karma, but does not reach Nirvana. Buddhist aversion to suicide is nothing compared to Christian condemnation, Buddhism does not know the notion of sin in general. From the Buddhist point of view, if a person makes the mistake of refusing his suffering through an act of voluntary will, he will have to bear the karmatic consequences, which will initiate him in a new cycle of reincarnation.

Similarly, Islam, a monotheistic religion, forbids suicide, based on the supreme right of Allah, over any life. The Qur'an states that "no soul is allowed to die unless Allah allows it at some point". The Hadith Islamic tradition forbids, by the command of the Prophet, included in the Sunnah, the burial of the one whose death is due to suicide. Almost all religions condemn suicide as a form of human aggression.

The secret of human existence as the image and likeness of God is to enjoy life, even in extreme situations. Only in this sense is suffering creative, sanctifying, and saving. Life "is a trial and not a dream, and believing gives meaning to life". Dostoevsky (1986) stated in this regard "If man does not believe in God, anything is possible" (Dostoevsky, 1986).

3. The legal perspective on suicide

The attitude towards suicide in our culture, both religiously and legally, has changed from one society to another.

Looking at the legislation on suicide, we can say that it has gone through two main phases (St. Augustin, 1994):

- the individual was first forbidden to commit suicide on his own initiative, although the state could authorize him to do so (in this case, the act is only immoral and not illegal because it belongs exclusively to the individual and not the state);

- in the second case, the conviction is absolute and without exception, the right to have a human life being withdrawn from the individual, belongs to the state, to society, with the exception of death penalty as a punishment for a questionable crime.

Among the primitive peoples, the most common form of suicide is altruistic, but it is difficult to clarify a regulation, which leads us to believe that the act was formally prohibited.

In Greek-Latin cities, the suicide acts were considered illegal when they were not approved by the state. In Athens, for example, the self-murderer was hit with "atimia", a kind of punishment, because the person committed an injustice against the city. The honors of the usual burial were forbidden, and the deceased's hand was cut and buried separately. In Athens, permission was sought from the Senate, stating the reasons why life was considered intolerable and if the request was approved, suicide was considered legitimate. The same law was in force during the reign of Emperor Valerius Maximus. The magistrates had a reserve of poison, which they distributed to those who obtained the authorization, after exposing the reasons before the Council of Six Hundred.

The Roman Code, in the law of the Twelve Tables, contains no references to suicide. However, Servius, in his commentary on the Aeneid, mentions that those who hanged themselves were deprived of their proper burial. The measures appear later in the Romans, in the era of royalty. In the time of Tarquinius, according to Pliny the Elder, the crucifixion of the corpses of those who took their days to protest against the tyranny of the sovereign was ordered. This is to prevent these dead from exercising revenge on the tyrant (Minois, 2002).

In Sparta, the rule was so strict that it was applied without exception even to the fighter Aristodemus, who sought death in the battle of Platea.

After the advent of Christianity, suicide was banned. In 452, the Synod of Arles declared that suicide was a "crime", the result of an "evil rage". In 563, the Prague Synod established a sanction in this regard. It was decided that "the suicidal should not be honored with any commemoration in the Holy Sacrifice of the service, and that the songs of the psalms should not accompany the body to the grave." Civil law was inspired by religious law, adding material punishments to canon law, such as confiscation of property and mockery of a corpse. In Bordeaux, the corpse was hung by the legs, in Alberville it was dragged through the streets, placed on a fence, in Lille, the corpses of men were held in forks and then hanged, and those of women were burned (Garrison after Durkheim, 1993).

Among the environments most affected by this phenomenon are prisons where detainees were faced with the prospect of detention, fearful of torture, some prefer to commit suicide.

From 1690 onwards, during the reign of Louis XIV, the governments that followed began to worry about these suicides in captivity and to undertake several investigations in this regard to camouflage these acts. As mentioned in 1704 by the Paris police chief, "a trial must be avoided and everything must be kept secret, as always when similar misfortunes have happened in the Bastille", he wrote to the Attorney General in order "not to alarm the public that was willing to exaggerate such accidents and attribute them to the barbarity of the government, which the public does not know but it can be assume" (St. Augustin, 1994).

However, the frequency of suicides in captivity is very high and the government camouflages the "accidents" that occur in prison but applies sanctions on the bodies of self-murderer, especially on the rest of people. In these situations, suicide meant the confiscation of property, the corpses were dragged on a grate facing the ground, along the streets and then hanged or thrown in the trash. The people of the Church and the nobles were the exception at first, but in time the nobles also came into disgrace and were declared commoners, their forests were cut down, their houses demolished and their coats of arms destroyed. There is also a decision of the Parliament of Paris, issued on January 31, 1749, which confirms this legislation (Durkheim, 1983).

The revolution of 1789 abolished all such repressive measures and removed suicide from the list of crimes. Religions continue to ban suicide and public morality condemns them. Suicide retains something of a criminological nature and the legislation in this regard states that accomplices to suicide are prosecuted. Perhaps the situation would be different if suicide were seen as a moral act.

Italy was one of the last mainland countries to abolish criminal sanctions against suicide in 1931. In Switzerland, the body was subjected to very harsh treatment. If the man had stabbed himself, a piece of wood would be stuck near his head, into which the knife would be inserted; if the suicide was done by drowning the dead person was buried in the ground five steps away from the waterfront. Article 115 of the Swiss Penal Code stipulates "a person who, determined by a selfish cause, will incite a person to suicide or provide assistance for suicide, will be, if the suicide has been committed or attempted, punished with imprisonment from five to several years" (Tetaz, 1971).

In Prussia, Frederick II repealed in 1751 all laws, as mentioned, which resulted in suicide, and until the Criminal Code of 1871, burial could

take place without fasting and religious service in the case of suicides. In the new German Penal Code, complicity in suicide was sentenced to three years in prison (art. 216). In Austria, Joseph II maintains the old canonical prescriptions in the Penal Code of 1787, he does not follow Frederick II.

Russian law is severe, if the self-murderer did not act under the influence of a nervous, chronic or temporary disorder, own will is considered null and void as are all provisions relating to the eventuality of death and he is not entitled to a Christian burial. Even the simple attempt is punishable by a fine set by the ecclesiastical authority.

In addition to religious and moral penalties, the Spanish Code prescribes the confiscation of property and, in addition, the conviction of complicity. "Anyone who urges someone to kill themselves or helps them in any way to do so by providing them, for example, with the necessary tools, is considered an accomplice to premeditated murder".

England, long considered the "land of suicides" has known the strictest laws against this act. Anglo-Saxon legislation has slowly adapted to the new mentality. As early as the tenth century, Edward of England likened suicide to theft, murder, and crime of any kind in his canons. Until 1823, the same rule was maintained for dragging the body to the streets and being buried near roads, without any ceremony. Even today, the funeral of the suicidal is done separately, the suicidal being considered a traitor and the property is confiscated returning to the crown. The last shameful burial of a self-murderer took place in 1823, and in 1870 the order to confiscate property was abolished, granting the right to wrap the body in a shroud in 1882.

The New York Penal Code, although relatively recent (1881), considered suicide to be a theoretical crime, giving up the actual punishment for practical reasons, making it impossible for the culprit to serve his sentence. However, the attempt could result in a sentence of either two years in prison or a fine of up to \$ 200 or both. The mere fact of recommending suicide or favoring its commission is equated with complicity in murder.

Mohammedan societies also condemn suicide as an act of insubordination and revolt against God's will (Șchiopu, 1997).

In Romania, there are very rare cases in which the charge of attempted suicide turns into a charge of murder. In this regard, paragraph no. 168 of the Penal Code provided: "Whoever suggests to another person to commit suicide or cooperates in the commission of the act, if the suicide is committed, or is attempted, commits an offense punishable by deprivation of liberty for a period of up to five years" (Penal Code). Orthodox canon law canon 14 to St. Timothy of Alexandria (Floca, 1990) states that the burial according to the church rite, non-Christians, heretics,

schismatics of those under excommunication or anathema, of those who refuse to receive the Holy Sacraments as well as suicides is forbidden; In the Govora Rule (1640), it is said: "Whoever commits suicide, let not be sung or remembered, and whoever die from an accident, let be sung and remembered (Psalm 40)" (Floca, 1990). In the Târgoviște rule (1652) it is written "and the suicidal person must not be willingly served or mentioned at any service, because gave its soul to Satan like Judas Iscariot. One who commits suicide by being sick and out of own mind can be served. The person who committed suicide out of weakness of soul, that is, out of fear of people, or of persecution, or of a disease that did not touch own mind, cannot be mentioned" (ch. 250). Some additions are also provided in canon 178 of Petru Movilă's Rule (Cioran, 1990). The only code that continues to treat suicide as a crime is Catholic Canon Law (canon 1240), which at the same time prohibits the canonical burial of the deceased "deliberato consilio".

One cannot believe that law, legislation could do something to prevent suicide where morals or faith have failed.

The intervention of the law in the issue of suicide seems meaningless, because it is not of interest to the individual determined to take this step. "Their world does not belong to the living, and they who feel the call to kill them self belong only by an accident to this world; in fact, they do not belong to any world" (Bonhoeffer, 1969). The self-murderer can no longer be touched by the codes of law or can no longer be asked to make amends for the harm they have done. It seems outrageous to punish the descendants, after suffering the social blame instead of the suicidal person by confiscating his property.

4. Research regarding suicidal perception

The research conducted in this paper used a sample of 63 subjects on whom a structured interview was applied. Of these, 29 were male and 34 were female; 43 presented as the area of origin, the urban area and 20, the rural area. In order to obtain information on the mentality and attitudes of people who come into contact with individuals who have had a suicide attempt, an interview was used as mentioned, structured on topics that mostly focused on the causes of this phenomenon. The sample used is relatively homogeneous with subjects aged close to 20-32 years. After interviewing the subjects, it turned out that most of the male individuals, 79%, considered that a particular personality structure can influence the suicidal act, compared to female subjects (53%) also 60% of rural subjects considered the same cause for suicide. Among the listed causes, the economic ones were mentioned in a higher percentage by female subjects (59%), and at the frequency of the suicidal act depending on the gender

variable, higher rates were recorded by men in a percentage of 70%, answer indicated by female subjects. Those in the urban area also mentioned the economic causes as the main factor favoring suicidal acts, in a percentage of 58%, but also the pathological causes registered higher rates of 50%. The high frequency was also recorded in men of 95% for those from urban areas (Tab.1). It can be mentioned that various professional environments were considered to be conducive to suicide, such as military professions, "military" environments as mentioned by Durkheim (1993), some environments with material well-being, suicide being considered a "luxury of the rich", in the worker environment, some statistics published by the WHO indicate, for example, agricultural workers in Switzerland, the unemployed being also mentioned among the frequent cases of suicide, etc.

Table 1. Perceptions regarding the suicide

sex	particular personality						cause						frequency by sex				
	yes		no		don't know		economy		social		pathology		male		female		
	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	
m	29	23	79	5	17	1	4	17	59	11	38	1	3	27	93	2	7
f	34	18	53	14	41	2	6	20	59	13	38	1	3	24	70	10	29
u	43	25	58	9	21	9	21	25	58	2	5	16	37	41	95	2	5
r	20	12	60	3	15	5	25	5	25	5	25	10	50	11	55	9	45

Among the causes that recorded the highest rates of suicide at men is stress, a factor indicated by women in the sample investigated, in proportion of 94%, and role conflicts were mentioned in proportion of 42% in those in urban areas. The picture of suicidal ideation by sex shows that in the case of women, emotional conflicts are predominant, especially marital conflicts, and at men material difficulties have been found to be four times more frequent than other causes, to these justice and the authorities conflicts can be added. Physical illnesses play an important role in cases of suicide for both genders. Among the causes of suicide in men of genius was mentioned hypersensitivity in a high percentage of 74%, mentioned by women in the sample and also hypersensitivity in a percentage of 53% for those in urban areas (Tab. 2). It can be considered that in the case of genius people their extreme sensitivity can push them to the fatal act. Each case having to go through its own hell and all those who resorted to this extreme act could not get rid of it. It can be considered that the genius man is out of the norm and the suicidal man does the same. In a way, the genius man pays for his extraordinary talent through a certain deficit. The extraordinary sensitivity that helps him in the act of creation makes him, at the same time, vulnerable (Farberow, 1975).

Table 2. Causes of suicide

sex	the most common causes at men						causes of suicide at people of genius						
	stress		role conflict		other problems		hypersensitivity		pathology		other causes		
	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	
m	29	27	94	1	3	1	3	13	45	9	31	7	24
f	34	32	94	1	3	1	3	25	74	2	5	7	21
u	43	12	39	13	42	6	19	23	53	18	42	2	5
r	20	7	35	6	30	7	35	9	45	5	25	6	30

The component that highlighted the perception of the societies in which suicide is present registered the highest percentage in the case of societies in crisis, and the increased quotas were registered in male subjects 62%, and 70% in those in rural areas. Among the types of societies in which suicide is present, 70% was registered by modern societies and this perception was registered in female subjects and the same percentage of 70% in those in urban areas also in the case of modern societies. It can be said that some societies protect their members better against suicide than others. In general, this defense is also represented by the degree of integration. In an integrated society, the individual feels safe even in times of crisis, physical or mental, does not feel abandoned or desolate. One of the causes of this phenomenon was the influence of the media through media coverage, as mentioned by some female subjects 59% and those in urban areas in proportion of 53%.

Table 3a. Suicide in society

sex	Perception of suicide in societies						Types of societies in which suicide is present						
	normal		in crisis		don't know		modern		traditional		don't know		
	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	
m	29	9	31	18	62	2	7	15	52	9	31	5	17
f	34	7	21	20	59	7	20	24	70	5	15	5	15
u	43	2	5	41	95	-	-	30	70	1	2	12	28
r	20	3	15	14	70	3	15	11	55	7	35	2	10

Table 3b. Suicide in society

sex	the influence of the media						
	yes		no		don't know		
	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	
m	29	15	52	7	24	7	24
f	34	20	59	9	26	5	15
u	43	23	53	18	42	2	5
r	20	10	50	5	25	5	25

In conclusion, it can be mentioned that suicide is perceived as a phenomenon that occurs predominantly in modern societies in crisis but can be perceived in a percentage considered relatively normal in other societies as well. The higher percentage of causes has an economic nature (Cioran, 1990; Bonhoeffer, 1969), the influences of the media and others. In people of genius, the main cause highlighted by the subjects was hypersensitivity but also pathological causes recorded high percentages.

Suicide today continues to be controversial and to be blamed even though progress has been made in changing the mindset over time.

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