

Reputation is injured in two ways: by *calumny* and by simple *slander* or *detraction*. Calumny is a more serious form of detraction, in that it is lying as well as an injustice against another. Calumny is the uttering, publishing, or otherwise relating to others of statements that are known to be false, which harm the character or reputation of another. It is a grave sin depending upon the nature of the statements and the damage that may follow to the good name of the person. It demands retraction and repair of the damage insofar as the resulting damage was foreseen. An oath disclaiming calumny is given, under canon law, by both sides in a litigation.

Simple slander is the utterance, communication, and attribution of falsehoods about another person, which is sinful against charity and justice. Detraction is committed by revealing the true faults of our neighbor. Both include the sinful judging and censuring of one's neighbor and arise from resentment and envy. A detraction assumes that, which belongs to God alone as judge (cf. Job 4:17). Detraction and calumny are serious sins against justice. Also listening to detraction and calumny is sinful if in so listening one is induced to commit either, if the one listening takes joy or satisfaction from the revealed defect, and if the one listening does not stop the defamation when he can do so. The sins of detraction and calumny demand restitution or repair to the neighbor's reputation and reparation of material loss suffered there from insofar as this was foreseen.

The supposition is of course that this revelation is made without a proportionate reason/ While it is never lawful to commit calumny, it is lawful, and sometimes even a duty, to reveal the occult faults of others for a just reason, as for instance, the public good, or even a private good, and above all to prevent the seduction of the innocent.

We must also be on our guard against unreasonable evil thoughts of our neighbor, since these thoughts would denote an unjust contempt for others. A simple unreasonable suspicion is ordinarily a venial sin. However, the unreasonable judgment, if it is a real judgment, and if it be reckless and concerning grave matter is a mortal sin.

Reference:

Rev. Joseph I Schade, *Catholic Morality: Fundamentals and Summary*, St. Anthony Guild Press, Patterson, NJ, 1943. Pp. 181-186.

### **The Evangelization Station**

Hudson, Florida, USA

E-mail: [evangelization@earthlink.net](mailto:evangelization@earthlink.net)

[www.evangelizationstation.com](http://www.evangelizationstation.com)

Pamphlet 589

## **The Catholic Church and Personal Rights**

Personal rights concern life, the integrity of the body, health, liberty, dignity, honor, and reputation.

The life of any human being is sacred and inviolable, and the Catholic Church defines its infinite value and its relations to eternity. Homicide is, therefore, a most grave crime, which, while violating the right of others, at the same time violates the right of God, the Master of life, who enjoins upon everyone the commandment, "You shall not kill."

"*Human life is sacred* because from its beginning it involves the creative action of God and it remains for ever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end. God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end: no one can under any circumstance claim for himself the right directly to destroy an innocent human being" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §2258).

Human life is sacred and inviolable no matter what may be the condition of his mind and body. It is unlawful, therefore to kill the insane, the deformed, the sick—even the contagiously sick — and the dying. There is no unimportant human being, because there is no unimportant human soul. Each soul is different; yet, each is made in the image of God and is of vital importance to Him.

Sacred and inviolable too is the life on the unborn child.

The exceptions to this prohibition are not left to the whim of man to decide, but are well determined and justified by painful necessity.

In the first place, it is lawful to kill an unjust aggressor, by reason of the necessity of self-defense and within certain limits (under the rule of inculpable self-defense). This extreme self-defense is considered legitimate when there is a question of life or of some other possession of the greatest importance—for example, chastity—which is exposed to the impending attack of an aggressor and the one attacked has no other way of escaping. Self-defense in this case may proceed as far as the killing of the aggressor, but only if a lesser injury would prove futile. It is clear that this self-defense, which is intended to prevent a threatened evil, must not be confused with vengeance, which is intended to punish an evil already inflicted. Private vengeance is not permissible. It is proper to note, too, that for legitimate self-defense, the aggression must be considered unjust even when it is irresponsible, for instance, inflicted by an insane person.

In the second place, it is lawful to kill an enemy in a just war.

Christianity considers war an evil, always a horrible evil, similar to plague and famine, and even more serious. In fact, in addition to the slaughter of human lives, to sickness, mourning, and property damages, there is a corresponding moral disaster, all of which is the clear antithesis of Christian charity. The fact that in the midst of so many calamities, war may offer some

advantages, does not alter the conclusion that it is a terrible evil.

Yet war is sometimes a necessary evil, when there is no superior and jurisdictional power to which a people have effective recourse. Thus, it is evident that a nation attacked by another nation must defend itself. The war, which it then wages, is a *just* war. Other very serious reasons may occur, which render war equally just and therefore lawful.

In this regard, the responsibility of those governing and those governed are different. The responsibility of those governing is very grave. The latter, called to fight in the name of country and unable to know all the reasons for the war, must presume, until the contrary is proved, that the war is just. Volunteers, on the other hand, should be convinced of the justice of the war.

In a just war, it is permitted to kill, but within the limits assigned to war by the natural law and the law of nations. Thus, it is unlawful to kill the unarmed, prisoners, and hostages, to poison water sources, etc.

Lastly, on principle, the penalty of death cannot be considered unlawful, since it is inflicted by a legitimate authority on a criminal who is guilty of a very serious crime that has been proved in a court of law. That a criminal should be condemned to death by private authority, or without judicial process, or by vigilante justice, as in lynching, cannot be justified. Similarly, every abuse, which extends the death penalty beyond cases of exceptional gravity, is to be deplored. That the death penalty is eventually necessary for the effective protection of the social order must be

admitted. Where this necessity exists, the death penalty is justified.

“Assuming that the guilty party's identity and responsibility have been fully determined, the traditional teaching of the Church does not exclude recourse to the death penalty, *if this is the only possible way of effectively defending human lives* against the unjust aggressor” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §2267, emphasis added).

The condemned person, however, should not be denied the opportunity to receive the necessary Sacraments.

Personal liberty must be preserved. It is therefore forbidden to hold a person in slavery, or in any condition similar to slavery, or even for a short time to deprive him of his liberty.

Personal rights include other things that are distinct from ourselves, namely *honor*, which is the acknowledgment of our worth, and *reputation*, which is the good estimation, which others have of us.

Honor is injured by *contumely*. Contumelious acts are those against justice and charity whereby one treats another person to ridicule and loss of dignity through insults of language or gesture, thereby bringing that person into contempt by others. They are malicious damage done to one's honor, character, and dignity, causing the person to suffer. St. Paul called for such actions to be met with patience and even silence (Rom. 12:19).

The gravity of this sin depends on the injury that is inflicted by it, greater or less according to circumstances (quality of the offended and of the offender, manner in which the offense was done, etc.).