

THE MILITARY PROFESSION AND CHRISTIAN ETHICS

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Generation after generation, man has sought to base his life on certainties and to express confidence in commitment to those institutions providing stability and safety. Thus, not accidentally, at least in contemporary Romania, the Church and the Army enjoy great trust and are considered two fundamental institutions of our society.

Since ancient times, the Church and the Army have shown mutual understanding, respect and even support for each other. The history of the Romanian people testifies of these lands' countless children, ready to defend their faith and family, land and country they had given their lives for, as well as sincere and living sacrifice for these noble ideals. Therefore, there are countless heroes and even saints among the military, who enjoy great honour, both national and religious, and among the best known we should mention Saint Great Martyr George, Holy Great Martyr Demetrios or Prince Steven the Great.

The church is an institution that promotes peace, as a gift of God, harmony, understanding and reconciliation, constantly giving hope, confidence and stability¹. Complementary to this view, we could say the military support and preserve a fundamental axiology of life, dignity and Romanian human civilization, giving us the belief that earthly life, everything we create and love in our country, and not only, will not be lost so easily, and neither could it be destroyed.

The military and religious worlds are certainly two separate realities and thus they should remain: each with its own purpose and fundamental values and

¹ Cf. I. ICĂ, jr., G. MARANI, *Gândirea Socială a Bisericii*, Deisis, Sibiu, 2002, p. 223.

carrying both visions. But the believer and the citizen shall merge into the same person and each person must be aware of both of her/his religious responsibilities and the responsibilities regarding the defence of national values. Therefore, between these two realities there must be natural collaboration, deprived of any complex and demystified, to serve man best, that is, the Romanian and the Christian, integrally.

Our history is one of suffering and sacrifice, but also of the accomplishments and generous elevation, and the Church and the Army have often been the catalysts of these elevations. If we look into the history of our nation, we will easily notice that when many symbols or institutions have collapsed, before the pressure of history, both the Church and the Army have remained the banners of our unbroken confidence and hope.

Equally notably, some could even raise the question: Does the military profession, which supports defence readiness, that is for war, not come to grapple with the precepts of the Scripture, the Christian ethics, which recommends promotion and protection of life and the commandment: "do not kill"; is there a permanence of Christian teaching about human life and society?²

The Christian ethics, based on the teachings of Jesus Christ the Saviour, our divine Master, promotes respect for life, defence, support and protection of life and everything that has to do with it, anytime and anywhere, which means to promote the true divine vision on human and world. This idea is based on the fact that God did not create anything for destruction, and He argues in life, so that when we defend life, we defend our reason for being, we respect the great gift that Our Father in heaven gave us, and also our dignity³.

Jesus Christ the Saviour did never support, appreciate and promote any form of aggression or violence and did not bring suffering to anyone, for that human life has in its origins and destiny an indelible and inviolable sanctity⁴; that is why we find it in the middle of human interest and it involves fundamental values and the image of God, the person, dignity, respect, etc.⁵

In this line of logic we can say that any man, and especially Christian, has a great duty to defend the people next to him, the weak, to do his best so that

² O. CLEMENT, *Bartolomeu I, Patriarhul Ecumenic Bartolomeu I-Adevăr și libertate. Ortodoxia în contemporaneitate* (romanian translation), Deisis, Sibiu, 1997, p. 61.

³ J. BRECK, *Darul sacru al vieții. Tratat de bioetică* (romanian translation), Cluj-Napoca, 2003, p. 15.

⁴ Cf. N. GEISLER, *Ethics – Alternatives and Issues*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1971, p. 164.

⁵ V. LOSSKY, *Teologia Mistică a Bisericii de Răsărit*, (romanian translation), Anastasia, București, 1993, p. 144.

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aggression and violence, everything that might humiliate, or infringe upon human dignity, be removed from the social paradigm⁶.

The military profession, especially as we Romanians know, is a noble institution, which aims to defend the nation, the faith and our country, so that the military is, rather, the one who defends life against any physical aggression, which makes him a true promoter of life.

However, in the Christian theology the problem of reporting Christianity to war or the appropriateness of war has often arisen, so that ecclesiastical personalities, such as St. Ambrose of Mediolan or Fer. Augustine argued that any war of defence or seeking peace and harmony and where fairness and justice prevail, is a just one⁷.

A just war must be based on love, on love of neighbour, of his inviolable respect for the dignity and winning peace⁸. Besides this perspective, we have to take into account the fact that when defending on the weak and alone ones, who can not defend themselves and support a just cause, the one persecuted, or terrorized, we promote, in fact, peace and dignity of the human divine face⁹.

Surely, in any case we must promote and defend life, this is a universal responsibility, so, we must say firmly that defending life means to defend the dignity of the human image of God, that is, giving God that honour and satisfaction that is only His and Him only He inheres.

However, not getting involved when our close ones or neighbours are suffering, are assaulted and human dignity is violated and is still a sin, for it is indifference that makes us partakers of murder. Our history demonstrates that when civilized and Christian states were not involved, for example, when the Nazi threat grew, it was worse and more crimes were committed, even the Holocaust, to the destruction of not repairing.

In this view, and by taking into account these principles, we believe the military profession does not violate the Christian ethics, and many military saints and heroes fully demonstrate that, in fact, the cult of heroes, of those who sacrificed themselves to defend others. The Logic of defence of the defenceless, of the weak and small is in accordance with the logic of sacrifice and can be considered neither inhuman nor non-Christian.

A testament to this understanding is that the Church established as day of remembrance of the heroes of the nation the Celebration of the *Exaltation of God*,

⁶ O.CLEMENT, *Viața din inima morții*, (romanian translation), Pandora, Târgoviște, 2001, p. 60.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 90.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 93.

⁹ D. ATKINSON, *Peace in our time?*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1985, p. 13.

which is a special day to honour the sacrifice of those who gave their lives to defend our faith and our country's forefathers. Heroes, as living sacrifices, have faith in Lord and stood firm in front of Him and believe in the eternal, bestowed with the consciousness of defending perennial and fundamental values in support of our hope and our world.

Christianity is an intrinsic part of our nation, since we Romanians have no date for the official christening, as the Gospel of Jesus Christ came, mysteriously and gradually, in the training of the Romanian people. This is also why the Church and the Romanian nation have are closely and deeply connected, because all the great national moments were moulded by the spirit of Orthodoxy.

Our Church has been for every Romanian the fundamental pillar for national cravings. As an active participant in all important moments of the Romanian nation, the Orthodox Church is, indeed, creating national history so that it provides our nation today - as it did in the past - safety, reliability and stability.

The Chaplain and the soldier are two essential parts of the community in which they operate, enjoying thus great respect for they build certainty, one in the spiritual life, the other in the material one, but both are seen as defendants and supporters of this great divine gift which is life, so that they, without fail, are true servants of life.

The Church is ready to enhance, along with the Army, the values of democracy, human rights and respect of the laws, to foster inter-religious and ecumenical dialogue in the spirit of truth, justice and love, to perform the service of God, by whatever name we give Him, a great work of moral reconstruction and raising of our whole nation.

In these times of turmoil, when the threat of war is, in many parts of the world, a powerful reality, we can assert that peace should be supported strongly by religious topos, but not the secular one, as *the world has suffered enough because fanatics seeking to impose their will through fear and murder ... (therefore) peace is not only a novelty, but an opportunity to promote a fair coexistence among people, after too many years of conflict and rivalries , sometimes made in the name of God*¹⁰.

The mission of the Romanian Orthodox Church, and also of the Army (already integrated into the North Atlantic structures) of our country, in the united Europe, is that of being faithful witnesses to reconciliation and peace, true enlightenment, durable and robust supports for spiritual and material development.

¹⁰ BARTOLOMEU I, *Discurs în fața președintelui României*, București, 22 octombrie 2004.

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