

## **„THE CHRIST LOVING ARMY” BETWEEN WISH AND REALITY**

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**Motto:** *„if my people who  
are called by my name humble  
themselves, pray, seek my face,  
and turn from their wicked ways,  
then I will hear from heaven, and  
will forgive their sin and heal  
their land.” (2 Chron. 7:14)*

*In this work are presented: the subject of the relationship between military profession and Christian ethics by using the inspired phrase „The Christ loving Army”; the Relationship between Military Profession and Christian Ethics; the advantages of practicing Military Profession by applying the principles of Christian Ethics and suggestions.*

I see this opportunity as a high privilege of speaking in front of so distinguished an audience on a topic that, for me, is of a very special significance. The importance of the role of Christian ethics in the military profession is derived for me from my dual status: that of a professional soldier – from the age of fourteen years, when I entered the gates of the military high school – and that of a devoted Christian – once by grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, ten years ago I realized the matchless value of His atoning sacrifice, and I

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took Christianity seriously, entering into the covenant commanded by Him, in order to live a life entirely devoted to fulfillment of His Will.

I will address the topic of the relationship between the military profession and Christian ethics by using the inspired phrase „*The Christ loving Army*” that, as you know, is the leit-motif of every prayer for the Armed Forces in the religious ceremonies conducted in our organization. I will try to identify the connections between its content and the reality of our everyday lives as soldiers.

In my approach I have used no other scientific tools to give weight to the assertions expressed, and thus persuade the audience, except the Holy Scripture, whose weight and authority I know is not disputed by anyone of the people present.

In addressing the issues related to this generous topic, I made two main assumptions: first – for the Christians in the Armed Forces, the main issue is not if a disciple of Christ can serve as a soldier or not, but rather how to serve in terms of the specific values of the Christian ethics; second – the Christian ethics can be fully manifest within a Christian character only.

### **1. The Relationship Between the Military Profession and the Christian Ethics**

As a member of *The Christ loving Army*, and a soldier of Christ, I have always been very much concerned about the relationship between the military profession and Christian ethics. What did I find?

Seen as a profession in which one is dedicated to the defense of the homeland and the preservation of the constitutional order under the law, it would be hard to find in the Scriptures any teaching or doctrine consistent with the whole gospel of Christ, which restricts the practice of military profession by dedicated Christians or that is contrary to the requirements posed by the military profession. Neither John the Baptist<sup>1</sup> nor Jesus Christ<sup>2</sup> or Paul the Apostle<sup>3</sup> commanded or even suggested that a believer should give up practicing this profession. Instead, we can easily find commands and teachings for practicing it with justice and righteousness.

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<sup>1</sup> <Soldiers also asked him, ‘And we, what should we do?’ He said to them, ‘Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.’> (Luke 3:14).

<sup>2</sup> <When Jesus heard this he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, he said, ‘I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith’> (Luke 7:9).

<sup>3</sup> ‘In Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Cohort, as it was called. He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God’ (Acts 10:1-2).

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Regarding the application of the requirements of Christian ethics in the military profession, we can say there is not any substantial incompatibility between the military profession and Christian ethics. What we can find instead are amazing connections and interdependencies. A good soldier can be a good Christian, but in order to be perfect, a soldier must be a Christian. This means, for instance, that the hazardous part of warfighting requires the favorable intervention of the divine power, which is more likely in the case of a Christian commander.

Meanwhile, most of the requirements of the military profession are enriched in the presence of a genuine Christian character. For example, the love for one's own country, courage and loyalty of a Christian soldier are deeper when accompanied by his trust in God. At the same time, the military profession can have a positive influence on some of the values of Christian ethics, which are amplified by the specific features of a professional soldier: discipline, determination, firmness, perseverance, etc. Thus, Christian traits such as faithfulness and obedience are very well understood by a soldier, who, by the daily practice of his occupation, knows how to be obedient and faithful in his relationships.

### **2. The Advantages of Practicing the Military Profession by Applying the Principles of Christian Ethics**

Practicing the military profession in the light of the principles of Christian ethics in their entirety – according to the Scriptures - is beneficial for both that person and the organization.

Profitability coming for an individual from practicing the military profession by living authentic Christianity includes both career success on earth, and divine reward for a life given to Christ, in heaven. Given the promise of Christ on what the people who follow him will get<sup>4</sup>, we can be sure that both in this life and in the eternal one, those who faithfully practice Christian ethics will benefit.

The advantage for the military establishment resulting from the fact that its members carry out their work scrupulously respecting the scriptural precepts of faith is the special quality of human resources animated by these principles, with all the consequences arising from this: mission accomplished in parameters, optimal relationships, efficient use of resources, high morale, etc. In this regard, most of us know too well the case of the faithful Christian conscripts in the Armed

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<sup>4</sup> ‘And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and will inherit eternal life’ (Matthew 19:29).

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Forces of the Communist period of our history, which were assigned with priority tasks of great responsibility, that required discipline and unconditional obedience.

It is also expected that, at the organizational level, God intervene in His providence and bless the Armed Forces, due to the prevalence of men fearful of Him, in the command corp and the troops.

### **3. "The Christ Loving Army"**

#### *a. Wish*

The wish expressed by the phrase „The Christ Loving Army” can be briefly explained in terms defining the place that the love for Christ, the greatest command in the Law<sup>5</sup>, holds in the hearts and minds of the Armed Forces members. To this end, the love for Christ ought to be the supreme value and as such, it determines and supports all others moral values. From this position, as the supreme moral value in the military, it motivates each or at least the overwhelming majority of its members to adopt a behavior and to shape a character of Christians living the lofty ethical values required by the commands of Christ<sup>6</sup>. This love is so strong that it takes practical action to express in deeds. Thus, it does not stay at the top of a wish list, a beautiful metaphor, just a word which is hollow to most. Instead, it can be seen in the deeds of each and every moment, in the results obtained in carrying out the routine and special tasks, in the level of discipline and morale, the quality of interpersonal relations, the degree of cohesion among groups, the effectiveness of spending the funds, the prestige of the institution, and many others.

#### *b. Reality*

What is the reality? There are no studies, even polls on the correspondence between the wishes coming from the phrase „The Christ Loving Army” on the one hand, and the reality "in the field" - as we, the soldiers would say - on the other. Though we could use mainly our personal experience as well as the statistics on various indicators of the Armed Forces’ performance for annual plans, the status and nature of crimes, or any other data and information that reflect the real state of the organization. But since most of the data are at least for internal use, sometimes highly classified, we can only use what constitutes a common heritage for the military personnel, that is what is found in the common conscience, the non systematic one.

As members of these Armed Forces, we know quite well how, first

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<sup>5</sup> <Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?> He said to Him, ‘ “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.> (Mathew 22:36,37).

<sup>6</sup> ‘If you love me, you will keep my commandments.’ (John 14:15).

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ourselves and, second, our comrades love Christ. We know the place held by the love of Christ in the assembly of all the values that determine the way we practice our profession. We know what role our relationship with Christ has, the principles of Christian ethics in making decisions to act in one way or another, to fulfill our duties according to a named professional standard or another, more or less right, "as working for The Lord"<sup>7</sup>, or to work for the eyes of the boss, etc., etc. We know how many obstacles stand in our way and impede the love of Christ if / how much there to motivate most of our actions taken professionally and not only, what factors intervene and prevent this love to be born, grow and to manifest fully.

If we seek to understand where this started from, we would easily find out that everything comes with *the lack of knowledge of God*. Christ himself said that religious people of His time were confused when they came to practical matters of faith because they knew neither the Scriptures nor the power of God<sup>8</sup>. This lack of knowledge which Hosea the prophet pointed out when saying it leads people to ruin<sup>9</sup> is determined, in most cases, by *non systematic, wrong or partial information* coming from the use of uncertain, incomplete, distorted sources or by the *lack of information* that comes from carelessness or / and the prevalence of other priorities. In this way, the lack of knowledge of the Scripture as well as of the power of God leads to a faith based on empiricism, to a mixture of the apostles teaching with profane myths, old wives' tales<sup>10</sup>, and with pagan customs, to superstitions and many other nonbiblical representations of the deity, and even to lack of belief and atheism.

*Weak Christian beliefs* arising from the lack of knowledge of God lead to *lack of trust* in the power, providence and God's reward for those who faithfully follow Him, and hence the *lack of motivation* for loving and following Christ. Therefore, even if in certain situations I know with certainty what is right, ethical and Christian, I have not the power to fulfill it because I lack the power source, which comes through a living faith in the One who died and was resurrected and sits at the right hand of The Father to intercede<sup>11</sup> and help those who obey and stay firm in hope.

Other obstacles that stand against the manifestation of love of Christ in our lives as Christian soldiers are the *lack of alertness* regarding our thoughts, words,

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<sup>7</sup> 'Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters' (Colossians 3:23).

<sup>8</sup> <Jesus answered them, 'You are wrong, because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God.> (Mathew 22:29)

<sup>9</sup> 'My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge'. (Hosea 4:6).

<sup>10</sup> 'Have nothing to do with profane myths and old wives' tales. Train yourself in godliness (1 Tim 4:7)

<sup>11</sup> It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us'. (Rom 8:34).

deeds and actions; *inappropriate company* for a Christian; *imitation without a proper discrimination* - limiting the practice of a living faith commanded by our Savior and holy apostles, at a minimum of rites and rituals undertaken by imitation, which often are lacking fervor, immovable confidence, strengthened by the Holy Spirit, into the One who is the Light of the world, so that if someone follows Him to stop walking in darkness, but have "the light of life" (John 8:12).

#### **4. Suggestions**

Given the situation briefly described above, the question is whether we need to do something about it, and, if the answer is yes, what shall we do? In my opinion, we as soldiers, people who look for solutions and take action as soon as they meet a problem, should do something. In particular, our love for people "in truth and action" (1 John 3:18), and also our individual and common interests urge us, in this case not sit passively in front of the state of affairs presented. I think it is time to open our hearts and not to let ourselves be deceived to believe that we are very well if we are baptized according to our national religious tradition, we marry at the church and we are led on the last journey according to a specific ritual and, moreover, participate in worship services on holidays, and even do some good deeds, less often or more often as it seems appropriate to us.

Christian ethics, as well as the whole faith in Christ means living according to the truth revealed to us by His death and resurrection. Living and working principles expressed by the precepts of Christian ethics cannot be applied separately from the other elements of Christian faith. Therefore, only a true Christian can apply them in their entirety, by the grace of God. The truth about our Christian ethics requirements described in the pages of the Holy Scripture, and through perseverance in prayer, the Holy Spirit reveals to us the meaning of the Divine Word, its application to our practical lives, both as soldiers and as people in general and help us in applying it into our everyday life. The initial condition is to seek it wholeheartedly<sup>12</sup>. Then, what we receive, to live with faithfulness and determination by continuing to ask and receive more from The One who is infinite in all His attributes, the eternal God.

Identification of our primary need for God both as individuals, and as an organization, looking at the very source - the inspired Word of God, Holy Scripture - the link with the people of God, experiencing God's power through trust and action based on His promises and commandments, dispensing with formalism and superficiality in favor of authenticity and depth in relationship with God, giving the appropriate priority to the spiritual things are only some of the *ways* that we can

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<sup>12</sup> 'When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD' (...) (Jer.29:13,14).

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use to get out of the current state to a higher level of practicing the military profession in terms of the values specific to the Christian ethics.

As I am fully convinced of the possibility, compatibility and benefits of practicing military profession in the light of the requirements of the Christian ethics, I believe that it is time to think and put in place a set of actions and measures to achieve the following **goals**:

- ❖ Raising awareness of the Armed Forces’ personnel of their need for God and developing their motivation for the knowledge of Truth<sup>13</sup>;
- ❖ Increasing the level of knowledge of the person of Jesus Christ, of His commandments as well as of the fundamental Christian doctrines;
- ❖ Developing personal decision-making and identifying specific ways to practice the military profession in terms of Christian ethics;
- ❖ Building and developing a Christian character of every person in the Armed Forces who declares himself as a Christian.

I believe that the following **actions** will contribute to achieving the above mentioned goals:

- ❖ Establishing an annual national day of fasting and prayer for the Armed Forces’ personnel;
- ❖ Instituting the annual conference at the Ministry of Defense level with the subject „The Military Profession and Christian Ethics”;
- ❖ Encouraging individual and group efforts for a solid Christian education and for transforming Christian beliefs into action; increasing the actions organized into the military institutions, through:
  - Establishing an annual training program for the Christian personnel, under the guidance of the chaplains or other qualified people;
  - Instituting the information and discussion process on the relationship between the military profession and Christian ethics through conferences, symposia, debates, etc. at the officers’ clubs;
  - Establishing Christian fellowship and prayer groups at the officer’s clubs;
- ❖ Introducing Morals in the military students’ curricula;
- ❖ Editing a Christian magazine for the Christian personnel in the military.

### **6. Conclusions**

The Christian ethics principles fit very well with the practice of the military profession, as there is no significant incompatibility; moreover, we can easily identify their interdependence and mutual conditioning. Meanwhile, the

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<sup>13</sup> <Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.> (John 14:6).

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practice of the military profession in the light of Christian ethics is beneficial for both individuals and the organization. *The Christ loving Army* is a wonderful phrase, that, so far, has been mainly a wish, but is worth becoming the sign under which the whole Armed Forces close the ranks to remove major obstacles that stand in the way of its transformation into reality, i.e., ignorance of God, decreased interest in spiritual things, weak Christian beliefs, lack of alertness, inappropriate company, imitation without proper discrimination. At the same time, it is clear that the values of Christian ethics cannot be manifest apart from the whole assembly which is called Christianity, but only onto an upright Christian character, of a person with strong, biblical, Christian beliefs.

During this presentation I have proposed some directions and courses of action, as seemed more appropriate to myself, given the situation. I hope you will agree they should be considered, amended and supplemented in order to take the necessary steps ahead in this field as soon as possible. I do not think we should be content with the mere analysis, interpretation and notetaking regarding the situation we are in; I am convinced we are called to action, each of us no matter our rank or position in the organization. The wrong widespread opinion, according to which this job is only for the specialized structures of the Armed Forces (similar to what is unfortunately also thought, in many circumstances, regarding the issue of faith as the job of the priests) cannot mislead us. An enhanced role of Christian ethics in pursuit of the military profession is the problem of us all. Each one as an individual, and at the organizational level, according to his appointment, can do something in order that Christian ethics, life in Christ to truly characterize the way the military profession is exercised by the military personnel, not just in words, but in each thought, each fact, all our actions.

It is for these reasons, and with all due respect for such a distinguished audience, that I dare to come with an urge, which I am sure could be found in any Christ loving heart: let us not be content with establishing the state of practicing the military profession on the terms of Christian ethics in the Romanian Armed Forces. Let us be resolved to seek and do what depends on us to guide things on the track desired by God, of what we know is needed to become true for the Christ Loving Army to which, most of us, with honor, are, have been or will be a part of, if need be.

May God bless us all!

