

THE ETHICAL DIMENSION OF WAR BETWEEN THE MILITARY DOCTRINE AND THE CHRISTIAN TEACHING

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*„The wildest and brightest
soldiers are those who belong to
religious people. When you die
under the flag you believe that
you're going to your ancestors¹”*
Petre Țuțea

Since the beginning of their existence people have tended to discover and to choose the course of their action. The drama of the human condition is that man has to decide which action to carry forward, whereas his decisions can really have long-term consequences.

From a very young age we are taught to discern between good and evil, between desirable and non-desirable, between useful and useless, and later on we come to the situation to apply in our life or our fellows' the thing we think we have to do. Sometimes it is imposed to us, and on other occasions we are left to experiment, but we end by preferring certain situations, actions, and we manifest certain attitudes. Once this orientation and

¹ „322 de vorbe memorabile ale lui Petre Tutea”, Editura Humanitas, Bucuresti, 2008, p.100. The author expresses here his vision regarding war. He says „war is not made by humans, it is much too serious. God makes the war. He gives us war the same way He gives us earthquakes.”

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choice have been realized, there is only one step to its assumption as a value: this step is given by the effort of keeping this orientation and choice. The structuring, systematization and adjustment in time of these values conduct to the set up of an own value system which guides our options, choices and actions. Value stays this way at the basis of the own emerging value system which then, by coming to terms with the value system of the people around us, is the background of the internalisation of a socially accepted value code which constitutes the morals of that society or that group.

As we deepen this domain of the morality of our doings² we are more and more aware that from the spiritual point of view, the reflection principles, the judgement criteria and also the acting directions from which the orientation and substantiation of this intercession come are to be found in the social doctrine of the Church³. That is why in this context the theological dimension is extremely necessary for the explanation and interpretation of the current problems of human cohabitation (i.e., crises, conflicts, wars, etc.) and for their solution as well.

To transform the social reality with the power of Jesus Christ's Gospel and of the Christian morals has always been a challenge especially for those who held forth with pertinacity to participate in the strengthening of the frail bunch of Christian virtues and morals for which God still adjusts our existence. From this perspective the military profession can be viewed as a qualified and exigent expression of engaging in the service of the others in order to search for the common good by realizing and maintaining the security climate, by promoting dialogue and peace in the perspective of solidarity, and also by developing the sense of justice and other virtues. All militaries, as beholders of civic rights and duties, are called upon to respect these orientations and moral principles and to bear them in mind especially when managing the complex problems of conflicts or those of the environment where they perform their missions.

The highly responsible duties in the military organisation require serious and coherent commitment, which, by contributing to the structuring of the political and military doctrine through planning and practical decisions, can highlight the absolute necessity of a high spiritual and moral qualification of the military life⁴.

² See „Discursul cu ocazia întâlnirii Papei Ioan Paul II cu membrii Sfântului Sinod al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române la Palatul Patriarhal din București, sâmbătă 8 mai 1999”, and also the „Consiliul Pontifical pentru dreptate și pace”, Editura Sapiența, Iași, 2007.

³ „Gândirea socială a bisericii, Fundamente, documente, analize și perspective”, volume coordinated by Ioan I. Ică jr. and Germano Marani, Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 2002.

⁴ Ion Coman, Emil Burbulea, „Coordonate umane ale apărării naționale”, Editura Militară, București, 1984, pag. 295. Besides the spiritual qualities, the army fighter's profile has to include political and moral peculiarities defining the new man, expressed by synthesis

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By itself, the concept of military profession is perceived by society as a specific part of the military profession⁵. Every profession appeared and became perennial because it responded to a social need. Any profession implies a certain type of preparation, which distinguishes it from the others, in order to respond to specific necessities. Of course, many professions have common reference elements: performing a service for the sake of the nation, leader qualities, high professional ethics, etc. What essentially differentiates the military profession from the others is the functional requirement to use violence in order to defend the country with its spiritual and material goods and to win the armed conflicts which affect or could affect the nation and its security interests. The elite corps of the military profession – the officers – assures the management of applying this violence in the conditions and limits imposed by the lawful state authorities. The violent nature of an armed conflict and the enormous consequences which a military failure causes hallmark the ethos of the military profession decisively. The militaries do not detain the monopoly of the situations when decision making is realized in uncertainty conditions and under the pressure of a multitude of factors. The militaries can be more frequently exposed to some circumstances when they have to demonstrate that they have the courage and the moral strength to make decisions when their lives and those of their subordinates are at stake. When we speak about state and national security, officers have the moral responsibility to accomplish the assigned missions, even if paying with their own lives and those of their subordinates.

Moreover, they must act such as to never transfer the risks they are exposed to on to the population and civil property. First, they must know how to fight and to win because the nation's life depends on it. At the same time, they must be prepared to carry out a wider range of missions, of prevention, of stabilization or of assistance, according to the new challenges which the military body must meet in a geo-strategic environment of increasing complexity⁶.

constitutions, like devotion to one's country; faith in the justice of the national cause; the high level of social responsibility and aspiration; firmness in promoting and defending the fundamental values of society; self-control and self-discipline; permanent self-exigency and the refusal to concede to the own person when there is a problem of moral integrity. Also see Alexandra Sarcinschi, „Impactul profesionalizării Armatei României asupra raporturilor sale cu societatea în care ființează”, București, Editura Universității Naționale de Apărare „Carol I”, 2005.

⁵ Gl. bg. prof. univ. dr. Nicolae Uscoi, „Discurs rostit la Cursul festiv al promoției anului 2003”, <http://www.armyacademy.ro>

⁶ Gl. bg. prof. univ. dr. Nicolae Uscoi, cited work. See also NICULA, Tudor, The military profession and its prestige in society, *Modern military spirit*, no. 4-5/1994, and

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Militaries have their own professional ethics⁷. The latter acts like a very strong form of social control. The professional military ethics is an imparted agreement of the professional and personal conduct standards, which officers reveal every day, while fulfilling their duties, during peace time or wartime. The professional military ethics is determined by the functional requirements of the military institution, by its traditions, and, last but not least, by the national faith and culture. The components of the officer's professional ethics are complex and interacting⁸. Intentionally, it is not coded in a unique document, because its sources are numerous. Therefore, in order to carry out the requested missions – especially during wartime – the military must act according to requisites imposed by caution such as to have the ability to tell, in any circumstance, the real good and to choose the appropriate means to get to it. Caution makes humans able to make coherent decisions based on reality and responsibility regarding their consequences, being possible that, through it, moral principles be applied in an accurate manner. In general, caution can be stated in three key moments: it clarifies the situation and evaluates it, inspires the decision and urges to action⁹. The first moment is described through reflection and guidance in order to analyze the subject making reference to the necessary opinions; the second step is the moment of analysis and judgment regarding reality; and the third is the moment of decision, based on the previous actions which make possible the perception between actions that must be carried out.

Insofar as the war ethics dimension, developed and analyzed in a political and social context, is concerned, we are tempted to discuss not only an ethics recognized by the state, but also one which has church recognition. The highest ethics that anyone can expect from the state is that of a natural law, based on the premises of a rational human being and on the universality of this law. On the other hand, the church assumes the Gospel ethics¹⁰. It is very important for people to be aware of the fact that, although the Christian people already belong to God's

AGABRIAN, Mircea, *The military profession – social dimensions*, The Land Forces Academy Magazine, No. 3 from 1997.

⁷ *Parameters of Military Ethics*, Edited by Lloyd J. Matthews & Dale E. Brown, Pergamon/Brassey s. see also: Lewis B. Smedes, *Mere Morality*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1983.

⁸ Tatar Octavian, *The officer and the moral change*, The Land Forces Academy Magazine, Sibiu, No. 2 from 2001.

⁹ The Pontifical Council for justice and peace, *Social doctrine compendium of the church*, Sapientia Publishing house, Iasi, 2007, page 418. See also *The Catholic Church Catechism*, 1806.

¹⁰ Ieromonah Teofil Mada, *Homo eticus*, Agnos Publishing House, Sibiu, 2007.

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kingdom, they still live in Cesar's kingdom, which has its own terms. One cannot take ideas which refer to an eschatological reality of God's Kingdom and impose them to the reality in Cesar's kingdom. One can and must look for justice and peace, but he/she must search for them according the present reality requirements.

It is known that there are three synthetic opinions regarding war ethics:

Pacifism – which rejects any type of war as being, religiously speaking, against God's will, expressed in His commands and in the mountain sermon, and, from an ethical point of view, is considered to have no ethics at all.

Activism – which is opposed to pacifism, claiming that all war is fair, as ordered by the state, the Christians having no alternative but to obey the authorities¹¹.

Selectivism – which claims that some wars are unfair and the Christians cannot take part in them, ethically and religiously speaking, and some wars are fair, the Christians have to take part in them, ethically and religiously speaking¹².

Not only for pacifism, but also for activism things are clear: no matter the nature of war, the believer gets or does not get involved in war. For selectivism, the question always emerges if there is a war which can be called 'just' and if the war in which he/she is required to get involved is or is not just. Therefore, our purpose is to find out if there is or there is not a just war, and in case which there is, we must show that both pacifism and activism fail, ethically and religiously speaking, the only solution which deserves attention being selectivism.

In the Old Testament we must distinguish between "just war" and "holy war". Our aim is not to analyze the motivations or the purposes of holy wars, but to notice the difference between a holy war and a just war in order to discover if we can find pertinent moral arguments that can support the just war. In a simple manner, the holy wars are those led in the name or for the defense of some religious ideals, while the just wars are led in the name of justice. We cannot help

¹¹ Out of all the modern apologists of war as progress factor, we mention Joseph de Maistre, in the work "Les soirées de Saint Petersburg", 1982, in which he writes: "War is divine by itself, because it is a law of the world, is divine in the mysterious glory that surrounds it, in the protection given to the great captains.... In the way in which it declares itself... through its results...it is divine even in the instinct of killing", cited at D. Gusti, *Sociology militans*, page 487.

A similar idea we can find in Proudhomme, in the work "La guerre et la paix", volume I, Paris, 1861, page 33: "war is a heavenly phenomenon, I might say a miracle.... Which rises to the rank of a religion... War is a form of our reason, a law of our soul, a condition of our existence", cited by D. Gusti, page 487

¹² From this point of view, the position of the Holy Fathers of the Church is also interesting but especially the canons regarding this subject.

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noticing, though, the harsh climate of a life lived under the threat of wars, as well as some of the beliefs that some day a time will come when people will give up their warrior ambitions, letting themselves be taken in tow in their relations by the moral and humanness laws.

War itself is seen as a big evil in the Old Law. This is very well understood from the fact that God stops David from building the temple for the reason that he spilt blood and made big wars.¹³

The key note in the moral learnings of the Old Testament is peaceably, the texts here giving us the conviction that the people of those times were pointing their hopes and powers not only to the organization and to waging wars, but especially to a certain way of moral life, based on understanding and peace. Moreover, most of the greatest prophets of the Old Testament were consolidating the people's hopes in an epoch without wars, which was about to start when Mesia comes.¹⁴

It is certain that as soon as the Saviour appears, a revigoration of the spiritual life starts and, at the same time, the bases are laid for some new forms of living together, of some very clear moral norms needed to accomplish that social community from which war should be deleted for ever. It is true that neither the Saviour nor the Saint Apostles gave a special commandment regarding war, but that was not necessary anyway, because the Decalogue, by the commandment „Don't kill”, then the commandment of love and the testament of peace were showing very clearly that war cannot be integrated in the doctrinary substance of Christianity.¹⁵

Although among the old ones there were some that considered war as a necessary factor for transformation and progress¹⁶, the Saints Parents unanimously consider it the expression and construct of the biggest physical and moral evils that the can live, a social earthquake with catastrophic consequences. Thus, Tertulian condemned vehemently the military service f his time, although, on the other hand, he admitted the state's duty to sustain orders, security and defense.¹⁷ Origen shares the same opinion, by saying: „Through Jesus Christ we became sons of peace. The

¹³ I Paral. 2,8

¹⁴ Psalms 21, 34, 132; Isaia 2, 4; Miheia 4,3; Zaharia 9, 10.

¹⁵ Metropolitan Dr. Nicolae Mladin, Prof. Diac. Dr. Orest Bucevschi, Prof Dr. Constantin Pavel, Prof. Diac. Dr. Ioan Zăgorean, Teologia Morală Ortodoxă pentru institutetele teologice, vol. II, EDITURA Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al B.O.R., București, 1980, page. 324

¹⁶ Heraclit from Efes 576-480 before Hr. said: „War is the father of things, makes some of them gods, and the others people, some of them slaves, and the others free”, quotation at D. Gusti, op. cit., page. 487

¹⁷ De idolatria XIX

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Christians will fight for the Emperor, but not with guns, but with an army of devoutness and prayer.”¹⁸

We can notice in this context too related to this theme, that both the church writers and the Saints Parents did not have a unitary attitude. Clement the Alexandrin blamed the war, but he admitted that the Christian soldiers keep their services.¹⁹ According to Lactantiu, the Christian cannot wear guns.²⁰ In Canon I, Saint Atanasie the Great says that „in war, to suppress the enemies is allowed and honourable”, and the Saints Parents Vasile the Great, Gregory of Nisa and John the Golden-Mouthed condemned war in the most categorical terms, calling it the father of disaster and death.

If at the beginnings of the Church there was a reserved and sometimes contradictory attitude of the Christians regarding the military career, because during that time there were some religious practices which were not compatible with the Christian learning, for instance „Caesar’s cult”, and also the conflict between „the Christian love” and the spilling of blood, during the years there appeared some elements which influenced this attitude.²¹ The factor which determined the Christian Church to pass from the initial rejection of the military service and war to their approval was the recognition of the citizen’s duty to defend the state with guns against the attacks of other people.

In the epoch of Emperor Constantin the Great, when the relations between the church and the state changed, as part of the whole life of the state, the opposition against war gradually decreased, getting to the acceptance of war against the defence of the state. Thus, now there appeared in the history of wars the notion of war created by Christianity in order to reconcile the carrying out the duties for the country with the principles of the Christian morality and also of war.

In building the theory about the „right war”, the ethics of the war also formulated the criteria for its identification and which are essentially reduced to:

a) The right cause – the defence of an unfair attack, regaining the stolen territory, punishing some insults on the state, great harms in its vital interests, the threat and offense to law, discipline and security, etc.

b) The good intention – peaceful purpose, without hate or ambitions.

As a result of the agreements between states, it got this way to set up some rules regarding the waging of wars, such as the Geneva Convention in 1864 or the one from Hague in 1907, which could somehow lead to the humanization of war.

¹⁸ Contra Celsum V, 33; P.G. VIII , 73

¹⁹ The Padagog I, 12

²⁰ Divinae Institutiones, I, 48

²¹ *Ibidem*, pag.326

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We can therefore conclude that the Church, in principle, condemned the war, and from the Ortodox moralists' interpretations we may understand that the defence war can be permitted only as an act of self defence. The state, as well as the individual, has the right to defend itself when attacked in its existence by enemies, has the right and duty to defend the material and spiritual goods of the citizens against the enemies' attacks.

The Romanian Ortodox Church wants to accomplish and fulfill its service to achieve peace both at the national level, and at the international one, doing one's best to help putting an end to different conflicts and to urge to harmony both citizens, ethnic groups, organizations, governments or political powers. For this purpose, it calls upon all the influence factors of society and tries its best to organize negotiations between the parties in conflict. The church is also against the propaganda of war and violence, and the different manifestations of hate which can escalate into conflicts, promoting education and serving the affirmation of some autentic spiritual and morale values.

In the current situation, knowing the moral principles of the Church regarding war, this can be very helpful. From this point of view, the Church states very clearly that it is not war, but peace which is the normal and good element for a normal development of the human life and that the world cannot see a more ideal light than the one of the peaceful living together among different peoples and countries.

