

**Ovidius University Constanța
The Faculty of Orthodox Theology**

**Religious Assistance in the Romanian Army in Time
of War. The Missionary Role of Military Priests**

**(Summarized PhD Thesis Prepared by Pr. MARIUS-
EMANOEL GUGUCI, under the guidance of Pr. Prof. Univ.
Dr. VASILE NECHITA)**

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B. CONTENT SUMMARY

In the current thesis – entitled *Religious Assistance in the Romanian Army in Time of War. The Missionary Role of Military Priests* – I highlighted the permanence of the relationships between the Army and the Church – two basic

institutions of the Romanian society as well as the legitimacy of the Church and its servant's presence in military camps. Also, I have emphasized the role of the priests and the military cleric in accomplishing our troops' mission.

In the first chapter of this thesis I have spoken about the way in which the war is presented in the three abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islamic.

I have showed – speaking about Judaism and Christianity – that we encounter references about the war in the pages of the Old Testament, as well as in the New Testament. The text of the Old Testament offers us numerous references about war; most of them being in closely related to the chosen people. I pointed out the fact that these wars are just a natural result of the alteration of the relationships between mankind and God, and regarding the wars of the chosen people I highlighted the fact that not all of them were held at the behest of God. The most contested aspect of wars held by the Jewish people is the concept of *herem*. In this thesis I have shown that this manifested just as a means through which God has chosen to punish the iniquities and crimes of mankind. Furthermore, this concept had been limited in time and had not extended outside the boundaries of the land promised to the Jews by God. The *herem* was held only at God's direct command. With reference to the New Testament I have shown that a Christian is not forbidden to be part of a military system.

Furthermore, Christianity teaches that all rulings are permitted by God, and soldiers just fulfill Jesus Christ's words, that say: "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."(John 15,13). In the special subchapters I have spoken about other aspects concerning the war issue; I have expressly emphasized that in the language of the New Testament we encounter numerous military expressions, but I also written about the presence of soldiers in the New Testament and the martyrdom of some Christian soldiers of the Roman Empire.

To all this I have added an inter-confessional point of view – but also inter-religious – through the analysis that I have made upon the way war is understood in one of the most violent monotheistic religions: Islam.

After I have seen the way war is perceived in the three abrahamic religions, I have studied the way war was perceived by the Christians of the first three centuries and what was the Church Fathers and the ecclesiastical writers attitude upon armed conflicts.

And – because the Holy Bible can also be interpreted in a biased way – I called upon the stance of the Church Fathers of the Early Church to understand the attitude that they have taken upon the wars issue and Christians participation in fratricide battles.

The second chapter of this thesis studies exactly this issue, showing that – just as in the Holy Bible we encounter military

terms and expressions – the Church Fathers from the first three centuries use the military language to clarify some aspects of Christian life. The study of the Church Fathers writings shows that they don't have a clear stance concerning war and military service. The war was described by the Church Fathers as an abominable crime, a hell of hatred, the father of disaster and death; in fact, war is the worse evil, because no other disgrace cannot equal with it concerning the cruelties, the sufferings, the destructions of human life and goods. The deepest causes of war – according to the Church Fathers – are of moral order. Wars aren't natural catastrophes, which would unravel like an earthquake, independent of human will.

The Church Fathers preached – with and without time – that the Redeemer had brought peace to the world; they have shown that the material or heavenly goods can only be obtained in peace and that the promoting of life conditions for the whole community would end the old habit of turning to war.

The Church Fathers – through their writings – advise us to search peace, to be against the sin and to have a different type of war against the sin, a religious war that we should have every day of our lives as soldiers of Jesus Christ.

Our battle with the devils is different than physical wars. To overcome these battles, the Christian should arm itself with spiritual weapons and put them under the guidance of a confessor.

As soldiers of the heavenly Father, we ought to make ourselves pleasant to God, because after entering in the army we are asked to perform our duty attentively.

The third chapter of this thesis is based on the idea that our people – from its beginning – was a Christian people, there is no certain date linked to the Christianization neither a moment in which it was something else than Christian. The presence of Christian artifacts through the Romanian territory proves the theory of our continuity on these lands as well as the Christian way of life of our forefathers. Besides this reality I have pointed out that – until the Independence War – there had been numerous priests and hierarchs whom understood that the love for this land implicates debts much larger than family our own good and that in name of this high ideals one should sacrifice its own life. The Church has always been there for its people and in hard times of history it has stood in the first line.

In the next chapters I follow the activity of the priests designated by the Romanian Orthodox Church hierarchy to the military area, beginning with regiment priests and continuing with their activity in the people great wars: the Independence War, the 1913 Campaign, and the two world wars.

A turning point of the military priests' activity had been the emergence of a legislation that limited and settled the duties of the military cleric during peace time or war; this way, their

activity was supervised by a military diocese. The founding of the Military Diocese and a legislation which settled the priests' mission in the Army constitutes a distinctive chapter of this thesis, which also contains the presentation of the four military bishops.

The last two chapters describe the tragic moments related to the dissolution of the military cleric and the military diocese with headquarters at Alba Iulia, the result of interference of the Bolshevik power in the issues of the Army and the Church – with a short reference to the resistance struggle in the mountains; I wanted to point out the presence of the cleric also in this type of armed conflict.

The reestablishment of the military cleric, in 1996, imposed me to present the legislative frame in which the military priests do their activity and an emphasis – in international missions, in which the Romanian Army and Romanian military priests are implicated – the religious activity is held according to the spiritual needs of the soldiers and conform to the Christian teachings of the Orthodox Church. I have written about those that turned the military cleric into clergy elite.

C. FINAL CONCLUSIONS

Researching the holy texts of the *Holy Bible* we can find numerous arguments which determine us to understand that in no

circumstances war hadn't been seen as part of a daily human life. On the contrary, the peace promised to people by God through revelation isn't a illusion but an ideal that all mankind should aspire. We cannot not observe the described the horrors of the war, the thefts (Micah 2:8) or the sacrifice of so many innocent lives (II Kings 1,25 and 11,25; Deuteronomy 20, 5-7 and Isaiah 22,2).

Although in the *Old Testament* God is associated with the image of a warrior, king or judge – the final goal of God's actions isn't the beginning of wars or punishing those that drove away from His will, but reestablishing peace and justice. God's Wars are means through which God mends the evil man have done, reestablishing justice or justice's peace.

Focusing our attention to the holy texts of the *New Testament* we cannot not observe that the red thread that crosses from one end to the other the teachings of the christian faith is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ through which mankind has made peace with God and the sacrificial love that each one of us should have for our fellows.

From the contents of the *New Testament* results in an obvious manner that the war is convicted, because people don't have on earth an eternely citadel, but they search of the heavenly realm. That is the reason why all of a Christian's efforts should be concentrated on the removal of evil and establishing peace.

All of the *New Testament*'s books have the spirit of love on which true peace is founded. It is useless to remember that the Holy Tradition asks from the true Christian love for all his kind, mutual forgiveness and peace. Defending the peace is at the foundation of Christianity's legacy, because when Jesus Christ had come He made peace between God and mankind, between men and his own kind, and as well there had been made peace in the human being. That's why, when we preach peace and fight for it, we are in the middle of our apostolic mission. Peace and goodwill between men are the ways of the Christian Church, and it had carried out its redeeming mission, because without peace it is impossible for us to say or do anything. Peace is our nurturing mother and she warms us up gently at her breast.

With a lot of attention - due to the current socio-political reality - I had to approach the way in which war is pictured in the Koran and other texts considered holy in the Islamic world, because the reality of our days determines us to know them.

All the affirmations that refer to the holy land and the holy heaven on which the prophet Mohammed lived, all the terrorist attacks that haven't took place in Dar al Islam, also maintaining the division of the world in Dar al-Islam and Dar al-Harb, correlated with the Muslim stance that denies these realities but also with the politicians stance and of the Christian Church leaders or the representatives of non-Christian religions - that

deny the religious component of the terrorist attacks, saying that religion isn't an important factor in the terrorist attacks and that is why Islam must not change its ideology - lead us to one conclusion: **The peace wanted by the whole humanity can be obtained only by the transformation of the whole world in Dar-al Islam.**

The solution to this impasse can be the initiation of a real and honest inter-religious dialogue, in which everyone must find itself through those that are different from him¹, a dialogue in which the leitmotif is tolerance and love for one's neighbor in the truth spirit, without making affirmations such as: "Jihad is *bellum justum islamic and can be considered the base of Islam's relationships with other nations*"² or „*Jihad is the acoustic signal of Islamic history*“.³

After I presented the way in which war is seen in the three abrahamic religions, I studied the way in which war was perceived by the Christians of the first centuries and what was the Church Fathers and the Ecclesiastic Writers' attitude about armed

¹ Pr. prof. PhD. Vasile Nechita, *Abrahamic Religions in the postmodernist context*, in the collection „The Young. the Church's Chance”, nr. 6, Ed. Vasiliana_98, Iași, 2010, p. 142

² Majid Khadduri, *The Islamic Law....*, p. XI

³ M.J. Akbar, *The Shade of Swords: Jihad and Conflict between Islam and Christianity*, London and New York, Routledge- Taylor & Francis Group, 2002, p. XVI

conflicts.

The obvious conclusion is that for the period of the first century and approximately half of the second century (170-180) there is no proof that shows in a clear way what the Early Church stance about the military service was. Also, for this period there is no proof that can confirm the presence of Christians in the Army. The subject referring to the army and military service didn't get special attention from behalf of historians; probably every Christian that opted to join the army assumed his choice and also his refuse.

The first proofs from the second century which refer to the military service aren't very clear. From the allegations of the pagan Celsus we find out that it was a common thing among Christians to refuse military service, and in the data about the Legio XII Fulminata - from the same period but a different region - we find out that a considerable percent of the soldiers were Christians. If Jesus Christ hadn't asked the pious centurion to renounce military service, if John the Baptist hadn't asked the soldiers that came for an advice to leave the army, the Church couldn't forbid its sons to join the army; the choice was left up to every single one.

In the third century there wasn't a uniformity concerning the primary objection against joining the army. For some, the primary motif of not joining the military service had been the

peaceful character of the Christian teachings and the respect for life, while for others the primary objection was idolatry - but also an immoral life - that characterized a soldiers' life. Writers have treated this subject without making a hierarchy of these objections but they pointed out what they considered important. Thus, Tertullian doesn't refer to the bloodshed, but to the idolatry; Origen dismisses the military service when writing about Christians: All people can do military service besides the Christians that will say prayers to support them. Lactantius refers to the bloodshed only in the context of it becoming a sickening obsession (the pleasure that some had for bloodshed in the gladiators arena). In others opinion it is important - when referring to war - to put an accent on the value of human life and the conduct that a Christian should have regarding the Christian moral values.

To emphasize the fact that it isn't forbidden to a Christian to be a soldier, I have considered necessary both the studying of the Orthodox Church's canons and the Acts of the Martyrs. Analyzing the ecclesiastic canons with direct reference to the Christian soldiers issue, we can only observe that not even one canon doesn't have a reference to the bloodshed, but to the immorality that was perpetuated in the army or the idolatry of the military cults, such as the cult of the Mithra God.

Never had the Church any objection against the army of

the state, so long as it had fulfilled its mission in this temporary world. The Church has received soldiers among Christians- conforming to Saint John the Baptist- and has refused receiving them as long as their morality was disappointing.

The Holy Bible shows in an obvious way that rulings are allowed by God but the state authority has the military power, because it is the servant of God, and it can be God's avenger over the one that does evil (Romans 13,4). If nobody would serve in the army of the order forces, because it is forbidden for a Christian to have a weapon, how could the order issues be resolved in a country or a town? Or how could the problem of defending against an enemy invasion would be resolved? How could the authority-being Christian - be an avenger of God's wrath against those that do evil by destructing the holy houses and churches, if they don't carry weapons?

This is the canonic rule and the Orthodox Church's practice: the war started for defense is allowed, and the soldiers are honored. The war for defense is a just war. In the Orthodox Church, the theologians and the canonists haven't developed a doctrinal system regarding the distinction between the just and unjust war, because such a distinction is not lacked by the sensitive Christian conscience. The country's calling- in time of sadness and danger- enters quickly and profoundly in Christians' consciences.

We add these conclusions to the idea that in the study of the Acts of the Martyrs it is clearly revealed that in the imperial army- both in legions and imperial guards- there were Christians that fulfilled their duty towards the country. In the moment they were made to choose between serving God and worshiping or sacrificing for idols, they have always chosen to be faithful to the Christian God- the true God- paying with their life for this option. We have to admit that they weren't hunted by their superiors from the army, excepting the period of Christian persecution, and they could stay in the army. There also were cases when those that were going to join the army-or as we saw in the case of Marinus - were either accused by their comrades that they were Christians, either forced to break Christian precepts.

The Holy Fathers - through their whole writing - urge us to find the peace way, fighting the sin and carrying out a different type of war against it, a spiritual war that we should have every day of our lives, as soldiers of Jesus Christ. Since receiving the Baptism and Chrismation, the Christian becomes a soldier of Christ.

It is an undeniable reality the truth that, to redeem himself, he should carry a spiritual continuous spiritual war with the evil spirits. These are the truly evil enemies, dreadful, wicked and craftsmen in plotting, strong, watchful and immaterial; they cheat the Christian through goods, or through the biased meanings of

goods. Through goods, they cheat those who are among goods, and through meanings on those that are separated from those goods. As easy as it is to commit sin with your thoughts, as harder it is to carry out the war with thoughts than the war with the goods.⁴

In the time of the Church Fathers - as well as in the present - not war, but peace is the natural element and the only benefic one for a normal development of human life. Then, as well as in the present the world can't glimpse another brighter ideal as peaceful cohabitation between men and nations. However, because of the sins of those that haven't received the Holy Bible or those that haven't believed with all their conviction that Jesus is the Peace Lord (II Thessalonians 2,16)- in human history- from past and present-wars haven't disappeared. Therefore both Christian emperors and Christian people have had wars. Through those the Romanian nation is present, that hasn't carried out battles of conquest, but of defense of the parental area and faith shrines, Christianity has spread from an early period in the Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic space.

It had been firmly entrenched on the spiritual level and at the Daco-Roman traditions, finding the right area for a millenary survival. Christianity has intertwined with the ethno genesis of the

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 95

Romanian people. The numerous migratory people - that had came on our lands - couldn't succeed to empty our territories, on the contrary, they hardened the conscience of unity and identity of nation and language, but also the religious, economic and cultural community; an undeniable element of our continuity on these God blessed lands – Christianity - has involved itself in all political, social and cultural events of our people.

From the founding of feudal Romanian states to the Independence War, the Church hadn't missed out on any of the major moments in the country's history. From the beginning of the first Romanian state formations priests have identified with the needs of the people. This is why we encounter priests in the ancient battles for protecting the forefather's lands from the invaders, regardless if they were migratory people, ottoman armies or neighbors with territory claims (Hungarians or Polish). It is important to mention that besides the priests that haven't hold back on fighting for their rights and protecting the boundaries, we also encounter hierarchs that served their country in diplomatic service or as trustfully advisors of Romanian rulers.

This issue has perpetuated itself throughout time until the modern history period. Priests stood by Horia, Cloșca și Crișan but also by the Romanian ruler Tudor of Vladimiri that has benefited from the help of the monasteries from Oltenia and Muntenia. Thus, this presence can't be compared to the large

number of priests and monarchs that participated to the 1848 Revolution. Unfortunately, we can see the duplicitous behavior of the archbishop Neofit of the Romanian Principality.

A moment of great importance for the Romanian people's and our country's history was the Independence War. Finding itself confronted with the new historic events, the Church understood that it has to share both the joys and sufferings of the people and to support the good wishes for a better, free and just life.

Hierarchs and priests-and others servants of the Church- have brought a major contribution to winning the Independence War, fulfilling its duty for country and its sons, that shed their blood for freedom and independence, in the 1877-1878 war. With prayers towards God to send his help, the Church has accompanied soldiers on the battle front, also sending thanking prayers to God, and honored the soldiers' victories. They also told pious prayers of peace to those that sacrificed their lives in battle. The Church accompanied the Romanian Army with its prayers from the moment the Danube was crossed until peace was obtained; and after this through military priests that accompanied the Romanian Army's troops over the Danube River, also caring that all the soldiers had received the Holy Communion. The few confessions that stood up time prove that military priests had an exemplary behavior, encouraging soldiers on the battle field,

comforting and caring for wounded in campaign hospitals or saying prayers at the tombs of those whom sacrificed their lives for their nation and country.

The first great military conflict at which military priests were present was the military campaign of 1913. Although the military rules hadn't had in their component clearly stipulations about the way in which religious assistance activity is held, the deployed priests in the 1913 campaign did all they could possibly do to fulfill their mission. Holy Masses had been held, dignifying speeches were held even building of campaign libraries and it was taken into account the fact that Romanian soldiers should have a civilized behavior regarding war prisoners.

To take into consideration is also the fact that military priests have realized their mission in such a situation and they have made proposals so that in the future the military cleric doesn't encounter the difficulties from this campaign. (The place of the military priest should be in the military camp and the holy objects should be in their possession). The most important aspect was the awareness of the military priests' role between soldiers and the demands of the military cleric so that in the future every unit should have its own priest for "not having to find borrowed priests".

The First World War had caught the military cleric off guard. There hadn't existed a law that specifies the religious

assistance in time of war. Only the good deeds made by the military cleric in the First World War had determined the Ministry of War to make and to send for approval a political decision for a law regarding the unfolding of religious assistance in the country's army and the founding of a religious service that should take care of the selection, organization and monitoring the military cleric. This way, the Military Bishopric with the headquarters in Alba Iulia and the permanent military cleric in the Army were founded.

If we refer to the legislation regarding the military cleric, we can but observe that the texts of the specific laws have a strong missionary character. In time of peace, the priest is present every day in the soldiers' lives both through educative programs and having the holy masses in time of joys and Sundays, but also in the important anniversary moments from the military unit. In time of war the presence of the priest- conforming to the legislation- was felt all around the area where Romanian soldiers were present. Every holy mass was held and it was accompanied by some words of wisdom. The presence of the priest was felt in the frontlines, in the trenches, to encourage the soldiers or to bring them food or ammunition, in the middle of the battle field to gather wounded or those whom had fallen, in infirmaries or ambulances, to encourage or to pray for those whom were hurt, behind the front taking care of heroes' funerals and burial

arrangements. Beside all these the priests have founded campaign libraries that held an impressive number of volumes, they took care of orphan children and of those that were left without any material support, and they had a remarkable contribution to the eradication and prevention of contagious diseases. We can also remember their contribution to alphabetizing Romanian soldiers, to the continuation of the preschool education in villages where there were no longer teachers or the fact that the priests were censors of soldiers' correspondence.

The Second World War found the military cleric ready for their mission. Certainly the great credit for this was that of the Army's Bishop, Partenie Ciopron. The military priests participated to two large campaigns in which their role was totally opposite: The East Campaign and the West Campaign. If in the East Campaign the military priests proved to be missionary priests, in the West Campaign their activity was limited only to the Romanian soldiers.

The presence of military priests on the East front had a major contribution in determining the relationships between local population and the Romanian army. The intense activity of the priests among civilian population –although this wasn't regulated at all- had contributed decisively to forming a favorable image of our army among local population. Actually, the priests have baptized the babies and children that weren't baptized yet, they

gave people back churches that were transformed in cinema halls, theaters, or communist conference rooms, sheds or warehouses for construction materials; they built churches in the villages, they held holy masses for those that were buried without a service, or they organized cemeteries for fallen heroes. All of these had shown to the civilians that Romanian soldiers hadn't came to conquer but to assure them a decent living, a life in which God isn't replaced by a ruler and where children can ask God for their daily bread, not Stalin.

The West Campaign limited the military priests' activity only to the military units. Although, it wasn't an extended mission among the civilians, the priests continued to have a missionary activity among soldiers. Being supervised by politic officers on the West front the military priests have done their duty, they were present on the frontlines, encouraging the soldiers, they have proven heroism and they've touched the souls of the soldiers, broken by homesickness and the pain of losing their comrades.

Taking into consideration all of these good deeds, the communist authorities determined that the military cleric institution should be dissolved and instead was founded a political replacement. But the dissolution of the military cleric hadn't meant that the anticommunist battle was over. Numerous military priests took part under different forms to the phenomena called the armed resistance from Romania, often paying with their life.

The luckiest ones-if we can call them that- had been locked for many years in communist jails.

The reintroduction of religious assistance in the Romanian Army-after half of century- made those Romanian soldiers to benefit from religious and moral support in all their actions. In the present, our country's army gives a lot of attention to the presence of the priest in military structures, especially in international military missions. The participation of military priests in the missions for maintaining peace and fighting terrorism has shown that those priests that work in military structures perform their duty in God's name and with love for their neighbors. Thus, through their presence, military priests have succeeded to strengthen the faith in those whom were weak, to make God known to those that didn't knew Him before, and to make faith perfect through those whom are strong. Much more than this, those presented in the priests' activities in international missions prove the necessity of having a priest in military structures, and continue the thread of good deeds of Romanian priests that participated in crucial events in our nation's history.

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