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The Mission of the Military Priest. A Small Canonical, Patristic and Biblical Analysis for the Current Context

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In today's times, Christianity, especially its Orthodox side, has to assume an extraordinary fact, that of ensuring the presence of clergy in the army, but the analysis of this special mission must be done with a special theological and practical discernment. It is one thing not to accept violence, it is another to protect life, in its entirety, on Christian moral principles. One is the role of the fighter, morally justified or not, and another is the mission of the clergy for such people. This analysis highlights the moral dimension of military service. And for this moral dimension to be properly upheld and respected, the fundamental role of a military chaplain is implicit. He can bring to light all the evils resulting from human pleasures, correct them through his fundamental work of military reform based on Christian principles, and has a specific purpose in providing religious assistance to all those who do not wish to be merely bearers and users of weapons, but who wish to be Christians in military service, with all the consequences and all the evils that may arise from undertaking military service. The greatest Orthodox theologian of the 20th century, Saint Dumitru Stăniloae, argued in the midst of World War II that defense is legitimate, based on biblical, patristic, and canonical texts. The Orthodox Church views military service as one of the fundamental services of a society, but also draws attention to the danger of power, the danger of losing discernment, and of crossing territorial and, above all, moral boundaries.

Keywords: *military priest, mission, clergy, weapons, moral repsonsability, the chaplain military mission*

Introduction

In the context of contemporary global conflicts, the role of the military chaplain and the theological foundations of his pastoral mission require renewed scholarly attention. The relationship between Christianity and military service has evolved considerably throughout history, reflecting persistent tensions between the Gospel's imperative of love, the use of force the protection of human life. During the early centuries of Christianity, certain ecclesiastical attitudes and canonical provisions expressed reservations about military service, particularly in relation to ordained ministry. In later historical periods, however, religious authority became increasingly associated with the legitimization of warfare, occasionally contributing to the emergence of religiously justified military campaigns and the involvement of clerics in their leadership. These contrasting developments raise fundamental questions about the moral boundaries of religious engagement with military power.

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Today, the Orthodox Church faces the challenge of providing pastoral care within the armed forces while preserving the integrity of its theological and ethical principles. Addressing this challenge requires distinguishing between the moral assessment of military action and the pastoral responsibilities of the ordained minister. The chaplain's mission cannot be reduced either to an endorsement of military activity or to an abstract rejection of violence. Rather, it involves accompanying military personnel in confronting the moral dilemmas of their profession, fostering spiritual discernment encouraging conduct consistent with Christian teaching on human dignity, responsibility the protection of life.

This study examines the theological and pastoral foundations of the military chaplain's mission, with particular attention to the apparent tension between Christian love and the realities of military service. Drawing on biblical, patristic canonical sources, it investigates the historical development of Christian attitudes towards military service and the moral limits of the use of force. It also considers historical instances in which religious authority was invoked to legitimize warfare or clerical involvement in military campaigns. Through this critical examination, the study seeks to articulate a coherent framework for understanding the Orthodox military chaplain's vocation and defining the responsibilities and ethical boundaries of his ministry in contemporary society.

A Canonical Point of View for the Mission of the Military Chaplain

Although the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea was convened in AD 325 1.700 years have already passed, its canonical legislation continues to provide an important point of reference for Orthodox ecclesiology and pastoral theology. The enduring significance of these canons lies not only in their normative status within the Church but also in their capacity to illuminate the historical circumstances in which particular ecclesiastical questions arose. From the perspective of military pastoral ministry, Canon 12[1] is especially relevant because it addresses the conduct of Christians who abandoned their military positions and subsequently sought to return to military service under circumstances that raised serious moral and ecclesiastical concerns.

For this study, Canon 12 of the First Ecumenical Council is particularly important, as it states that "those who were called by grace and initially showed zeal (zeal) by casting off their belts, but then returned like dogs to their own vomit..."[2]. This first part of Canon 12 draws attention to two issues.

On the one hand, the expression "those called by grace" refers to those who were baptized of their own free will, either because they were convinced of the

[1]Primary source for this text is found in ΑΓΑΠΙΟΥ ΙΕΡΟΜΟΝΑΧΟΥ ΚΑΙ ΝΙΚΟΔΗΜΟΥ ΜΟΝΑΧΟΥ *„ΠΗΔΑΛΙΟΝ ΤΗΣ ΝΟΗΤΗΣ ΝΗΟΣ ΤΗΣ ΜΙΑΣ ΚΑΘΟΛΙΚΗΣ ΚΑΙ ΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΙΚΗΣ ΤΩΝ ΟΡΘΟΔΟΞΩΝ ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑΣ..."*, published by ΒΛΑΣΤΟΥ Χ. ΒΑΡΒΑΡΡΗΓΟΥ, Athena, 1886, p. 120 (see also: Archd. Ioan, Floca, "The Canons of the Orthodox Church – Notes and Commentaries", Sibiu, 2005, p. 64 – the edition used for this brief study).

[2]Archd. Ioan, Floca *The Canons of the Orthodox Church* – Notes and Commentaries, Sibiu, 2005, p. 64.

reality and message of the Gospel, or because they received the "call" of the Holy Spirit to be baptized through a supernatural revelation. This reality denotes the free will of the one who "laid aside his armor," that is, voluntarily left the ranks of the army.

On the other hand, the expression "*to lay down one's belt*" in Roman military culture meant demobilization, retirement, withdrawal or expulsion. Roman soldiers actually wore a belt called a *cingula* or *cingulum militare*, from which the Romanian term *cingătoare* derives[3]. In the first century AD, the Romans did not wear pants or leggings, as barbarians or slaves did. They wore a kind of tunic and over it they put that belt to which they attached the weapons they carried into battle. Even the shields that protected them during battles were fastened to it. Depending on the military rank of the person wearing such a belt, the ornaments or decorations were either increasingly sophisticated or simpler[4]. Removing the belt signified leaving the army's duties, either of one's own volition or by obligation.

Therefore, when Canon 12 speaks of "*laying aside the belts*", it refers either to demobilization – that is, leaving the ranks of the soldiers – or to voluntary discharge before the end of service or as a punishment. However, Canon 12 of the First Ecumenical Council sanctioned the return to military office with all the obligations of that era, especially through bribery and provided for the excommunication of those who engaged in such conduct. Literally, the canon refers to the sin of purchasing military positions with money: "since some have spent money and, through gifts, have managed to return to service in the army, they shall be humbled for ten years, following a three-year period of obedience. But the sincerity and nature of their repentance must be examined in all of them."[5]

This means that those who joined the army were banned from receiving communion for 10 years, following a three-year probationary period during which their obedience was tested and they were no longer going to serve in the army. The primary focus of this canon is not on military service – which could be mandatory or voluntary – but rather on the bribery involved in purchasing a position in the army.

When analyzing this canon from the perspective of the intent of the participating holy fathers, many aspects must be taken into account. These relate to the context in which the canon emerged, the reason for its emergence its consequences.

In the Roman army, there were so-called clerics or religious officials. They ensured that the traditional rules of the imperial cult were respected among the soldiers. Pagan religion played an essential role in ensuring discipline and cohesion within the Roman army. The military oath (*sacramentum militiae*), through which the soldier declared his loyalty to the emperor and the state, had a profound religious dimension: it was taken before a god (usually Jupiter or Mars) breaking it was considered sacrilege[6]. The army had an entire cultic infrastructure, including the legion's altar, temples within the camp (such as the *aedes principiorum*), priests

[3]Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language, (2nd revised and expanded edition), Romanian Academy, Institute of Linguistics, Univers Enciclopedic Gold Publishing House, 2009, p. 241.
[4]Adrian, Goldsworthy *The Complete Roman Army*, ed. Thames&Hudson, London, 2007, p. 119.
[5]Archd. Ioan, Floca *The Canons of the Orthodox Church*…, p. 64.
[6]Brian, Campbell *The Roman Army: A Sourcebook*, ed. Routledge, London, 1994, p. 11–13.

appointed from among the officers (*pontifices militum*) mandatory religious festivals[7]. Refusal to participate in such rituals constituted military insubordination[8]. In addition, the emperor was revered as a living deity the imperial cult ensured the political loyalty of the troops[9].

Religious practices in the army included *animal sacrifices, libations, auguries, divination and participation in official religious festivals*[10]. A central ceremony was the sacrificium legionis, during which a sacrifice was offered to the supreme god for the welfare of the army, accompanied by a collective oath. At the beginning of each year, soldiers participated in ceremonies to renew their oath to the emperor, accompanied by prayers and sacrifices. Purification rituals were also performed before military campaigns, as well as lustrationes (ceremonies for the ritual cleansing of the troops or camp), to invoke divine protection in battle[11].

To provide an overview of the role these religious clerics played within the Roman Empire's armed forces, we find a large collection of inscriptions and military altars dedicated to the cult. For example, *the inscription from the Vindolanda fort* (Britain), a votive plaque dedicated to Emperor Hadrian: "*pro salute Imperatoris Caesaris Traiani Hadriani Augusti milites cohortis I Tungrorum votum solverunt libentes merito*"[12]; we also find evidence of the cult of the god Mithras, such as the altar at the Roman fort of Carnuntum (Austria), which bore the inscription: *initia militaris* (initiation of soldiers): "*Deo invicto Mithrae. Aelius Heraclianus, centurio legionis XV, votum solvit*" – to the invincible god Mithras. Aelius Heraclianus, centurion of the 15th Legion, fulfilled his vow[13].

From these inscriptions, we can see that religion played a central role in the lives of soldiers, as evidenced by the large number of altars dating from the early centuries[14]. The general belief was that victory depended exclusively on *pax deorum*, peace with the gods[15] the army followed a series of rituals to ensure divine favor. Alongside these rituals that the Roman army felt it needed, the Christian faith emerged as a separate and new religion, but one that began to gain traction among soldiers in the 3rd and 4th centuries and even came to play an increasingly decisive role[16].

After the Edict of Milan in 313, Christian clergy also appeared in the Roman army; *military bishops* are even mentioned at times, though this occurred after the

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[7]Adrian, Goldsworthy *The Complete Roman Army*…, p. 148.
[8]Jörg, Rüpke *Religion of the Romans*, trans. Richard Gordon, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2007, p. 112.
[9]Ando, Clifford, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire* ed. Berkeley University of California Press, 2000, p. 118–121.
[10]Rüpke, Jörg *Religion*..., p. 110-112.
[11]Adrian, Goldsworthy *The Complete Roman Army...*, p. 151–153
[12]For the health of Emperor Caesar Trajan Hadrian Augustus, the soldiers of the First Cohort of the Tungri fulfilled their oath willingly and with distinction. (See Flavius Vegetius Renatus – *De Re Militari* (The Military Institutions of the Romans, translated by Lieutenant John Clarke, 1767) – electronic edition available at: http://archive.org/detalis/pdfy-sOkC, accessed on 12 februare 2026, at 20.15.
[13]See: Roger, Beck *The Religion of the .Mithras Cult in the Roman Empire: Mysteries of the Unconquered Sun*, OxfordUniversity Press, New York, 2006, pp. 10–11.
[14]Adrian, Goldsworthy *The Complete Roman Army…*, p. 108.
[15]Adrian, Goldsworthy *The Complete Roman Army…*, p. 112.
[16]Roger, Beck *The religion of the Mithras Cult…,* p. 171-173.

First Ecumenical Council. Thus, the imperial cult and pagan religious traditions were gradually supplemented with Christian practices the clergy began to play an active role in the Roman army. Starting in the 4th century, we have the first mention of a *military bishop* (episcopus cas*trensis*) and of *military priests* (presbyteri militum) who were tasked with providing spiritual support to the soldiers[17]. In addition to their priestly duties, Christian clergy were tasked with bolstering the morale of the troops through Christian teaching. An interesting figure during the time when Canon 12 of the First Ecumenical Council was written is Saint Martin of Tours, commemorated in Orthodox churches on November 11 or even November 12, who is very popular in Western Europe but less so in the Eastern Orthodox world. He was a Roman soldier, but he abandoned his military career to become a monk and later a bishop. His transition from Roman soldier to monk came about following a miracle: "He met a poorly dressed beggar at the gates of the city of Amiens, for whom Martin cut his military cloak in two and gave one piece to the beggar. That night he dreamed of Jesus wearing the half-cloak that Martin had given him and heard Jesus say to the angels: '*This is Martin, the Roman soldier who has not been baptized. He clothed me*." This miracle confirmed his Christian beliefs Martin was baptized; after serving in the army for another two years, he left the army."[18]

It was precisely these kinds of soldiers in the Roman army who succeeded in bringing Christian morality into the ranks. The Codex Theodosianus, dated 398 AD, mentions tax exemptions and privileges granted to the military clergy, so that this corps began to consolidate and even become institutionalized[19]. The synergy between Christian concepts and military rigor and discipline began to become compatible the transformation of the Roman Empire into a Christian state, after 313, harmonized with the shift in the paradigm of the emperor's cult from worship to a duty toward him.[20]

Father Professor Ioan Floca, in his analysis of this canon, states that: "Some, after leaving their posts in the army, sought by every means to regain them, thereby implicitly abandoning their faith. For these, the penance is made more severe".[21] The Army and the Church, through this 12th canon of the First Ecumenical Council, Nicaea 325, are not two institutions that exclude one another. Nor could they have done so, especially since the assembly of bishops was facilitated by the supreme commander of the army, Saint Constantine the Great. It is very interesting that it was possible to discuss and reach a decision regarding this canon, which was related to those who ensured the tranquility of the great empire and, implicitly, the peace, integrity sovereignty of the emperor. If we look more closely, Canon 12 effectively prohibits military service, even if it applies only to those who return to Christianity after voluntarily remaining in the civilian ranks and being baptized.

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[17]Bachrach, Bernard *Religion and the Conduct of War*, c. 300-1215, Boydell Press, London, 2003, p. 28-29.
[18]Clark, Gillian *Late Antiquity: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2011, p. 74 ff.
[19]Jill, Harries *Law and Empire in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, p. 154.
[20]Peter, Brown *The Rise of Western Christendom*, Blackwell Publisher, Oxford, 1996, p. 82.
[21]Archd. Ioan, Floca *The Canons of the Orthodox Church*…, p. 63.

Viewed as a whole, Canon 12 highlights the sin associated with military service, but it does not condemn soldiering itself; rather, it condemns only its negative aspects, the most significant of which is bribery for enlistment. Thus, it was not the status itself that was sinful, but the consequences of the restrictions were deemed incompatible with the military way of life. Among the martyrs of the first four Christian centuries, most were soldiers. Hence the importance of the present study: it shows us that military service was never considered a crime against the soldier's soul, but only certain restrictions and obligations that soldiers were absolutely required to fulfill.

Another important point that emerges from the text of Canon 12 is that military service is not directly incompatible with life after baptism – life with Christ – as is indeed the case even today. Nor could such a thing have been done, especially since it is known that the great Constantine was always present at the synod's proceedings and adopted a series of laws based on Christian life and promoted the freedom of Christianity through state law; moreover, some biographers of his era say that Emperor Constantine's Christian decisions influenced the entire history of his reign and the period that followed[22].

Thus, by not directly prohibiting enlistment in the army, the holy fathers of the First Ecumenical Council established a military-oriented policy. This direction is evident in that, taken as a whole, the canon addresses the issue, condemning it in rather harsh terms in its first part, while the second part imposes a severe penalty: "they shall bow down (fall, humble themselves) for ten years, following a three-year period of obedience".[23]

A Brief Pauline Analysis (biblical perspective) for the Mission of the Military Chaplain

Saint Paul the Apostle, in his Epistle to the Ephesians, 6, 10-17, uses military imagery to explain his pastoral mission; it is therefore possible that many of his listeners were soldiers, as he frequently refers to 'the armour of God', 'the shield of faith', 'the helmet of salvation' and 'the sword of the Spirit'. In the Epistle to Timothy, 2, 3-4, Saint Paul speaks of a 'good soldier of Christ Jesus', highlighting the devotion of soldiers to their commanders—a quality required in bearing witness to the faith. And in the Epistle to the Romans, 13, 1-4, the Apostle Paul says that 'there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore, whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will bring judgement upon themselves' (Romans 13:1–2). And he goes on to say: 'Do you wish, then, not to fear the authorities? Do what is right, and you will receive their approval' (Romans 13:3). The Apostle Paul then states that the authority mysteriously ordained by God 'bears the sword' (Romans 13:4), and here

[22]Henry, Chadwick *The Early Church*, ed. Hodder and Stoughton Limited, London, 1967, pp. 125–151; see also: Lionel Smithett Lewis *Constantine the Great: The Biography of the First Christian Roman Emperor, his Military Life and Revolution*, United Library, 2023, 86 pp.; G.P., Baker *Constantine the Great and the Christian Revolution*, Cooper Square Publishers Inc., New York, 2001, 384 pp.; Jacob, Burckhardt *The Age of Constantine the Great*, University of California Press, California, first published 1853, edited in 1949, 404 pp.

[23]Archd. Ioan, Floca *The Canons of the Orthodox Church*…, p. 63.

we are referring to military authority or the authority that defends security or the common good, 'for it is God's servant and an avenger of His wrath against the one who does evil' (Romans 13:4).

Father Stăniloae refers to Saint Paul the Apostle who, invoking the rigours of the law, says: 'But if you do wrong, be afraid; for it is not for nothing that the sword is borne; for it is God's servant and an avenger of His wrath against the one who does wrong' (Romans 13:4). Commenting on this biblical passage, Father Dumitru states that 'The State is from God only if it possesses these three qualities: just punishment, the awareness that it serves God, and the purity of the servant who metes out punishment, untainted by passion'.[24] We may therefore deduce that the servant who serves is either the priest who has a mission in the army or in the community, or the soldier who serves the State through the armed forces. In the latter case, the soldier needs the Church to remain free from passion when punishing, to punish with the sword for the greater good, even if the act of punishment conceals the evil inherent in punishing.

One of the major conclusions drawn by the Holy Father Dumitru Stăniloae on the basis of Scripture is that 'all natural and necessary orders and actions can be carried out with good intentions and a pure heart. In all things, we can conduct ourselves with our souls bound to God. But all can also be carried out with evil intent, abusively, in opposition to God. The intention behind our actions is what matters: 'So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God' (1 Corinthians 10:31)."[25]

A Patristic Perspective through the Works of Saint Dumitru Stăniloae

Father Dumitru Stăniloae[26], during World War II, in April 1943, stated without reservation that "the great merit of the Orthodox Church lies in the astonishing spiritual power with which it has known how to instill and sustain in the Romanian people this strength of a faith of their own, as a factor setting them apart from other nations. Where did a humble Church, lacking the imposing organization, the missionary and theological apparatus the endless estates that other Churches possessed, obtain this power?"[27] And this rhetoric finds its answer in the fact that the Romanian Church – specifically its priests and bishops – has become "the guides of the people along the path of our national destiny".[28] From this, one can deduce

[24]Pr. Dumitru, Stăniloae *The tow kingdoms*, in *Gândirea Magazine*, Anul XVI, nr. 1 din ianuarie 1937, pag 34.
[25]Pr. Dumitru, Stăniloae *Naţionalismul sub aspect moral* (The nationalism in moral aspect), in *Gândirea Magazine*, anul XVI, nr. 9, noiembrie 1937, pag. 419.
[26]Father Dumitru Stăniloae (1903–1993) was the greatest Romanian Orthodox theologian of the 20th century, a distinguished professor of dogmatic theology, priest, writer translator. He revitalized Romanian theology through his translations and commentaries on the Philokalia and patristic writings is regarded as a leading figure in universal Orthodox spirituality.
[27]Pr. Dumitru, Stăniloae "The Orthodox Church of Transylvania," in *Gândirea Magazine*, Vol. XXII, No. 5, 1943, p. 243.
[28]Pr. Dumitru, Stăniloae "*The Orthodox Church of Transylvania*" …, p. 245.

the idea that the Church's mission, including within the army, is entirely justified, as will be seen below.

In his writings, the Holy Confessor Priest Dumitru Stăniloae also drew upon biblical arguments to examine the positive aspects of military life. In the article "The Two Kingdoms",[29] he recalls that in the Book of Genesis (3:24), God placed at the gate of Paradise "a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life". And this sword is nothing other than a cherub tasked with guarding the path to Paradise: "Thus the symbol of the sword appears... the devil contributed nothing to the creation of this sword. But it appears after the Fall. Its appearance is dependent on sin".[30] Therefore, just as God decided to protect the Tree of Life from humans with a sword, so too can humans defend their lives with a sword, for God also placed a sword in the hand of a cherub to guard the Tree of Life. So, defending life with the sword is not evil in itself, but this placement "with a sword" served the purpose of "representing a threat, compelling the protoparents to avoid entering paradise. It was not a mere appeal to their freedom."[31]

In the same article, Father Professor points out that the New Testament contains the commandment: "Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you pray for those who mistreat you and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44): "Jesus no longer opposes evil with the law, with punishment, with justice, but with love".[32] But, "as long as many people do not know Christ and many know Him only by name almost all are still dominated by much evil, the law and its guardian continue to exist automatically, so to speak. Indeed, order is eternal. It exists in heaven as well. There it is willingly upheld by love, but people still dominated by much evil very easily tend to disturb it".[33] And further on, Father Dumitru emphasizes: "The Church cannot demand that the State act according to its calling of mercy, forgiveness love, but it must answer to God for the full order. The State makes the severity of sanctions – whether greater or lesser – dependent solely on the better or worse moral state of its citizens. The Church can work indirectly to avoid harsh sanctions or to lessen them by raising the moral level of the citizens who are also its members".[34] Furthermore, Father Stăniloae recalls the Holy Apostle Paul who, appealing to the rigors of the law, says: "But if you do wrong, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword in vain; for it is God's servant and an avenger of His wrath against the one who does evil" (Romans 13:4). Commenting on the biblical passage, Father Dumitru will say that "the State is from God only if it possesses three qualities: just punishment, the awareness that it serves God the purity of the servant who administers punishment, untainted by passion".[35] We can therefore deduce that the servant who serves is either the priest who has a mission in the army or in the community, or the soldier who serves the State through the armed forces. In the latter case, the soldier needs the Church to remain free from passion when

[29]Pr. Dumitru, Stăniloae *The tow kingdoms…,* p. 26.
[30]Pr. Dumitru, Stăniloae *The tow kingdoms…,* p. 28.
[31]Pr. Dumitru, Stăniloae *The tow kingdoms…,* p. 28.
[32]Pr. Dumitru, Stăniloae *The tow kingdoms…*, p. 29. See also Pr. Dumitru, Stăniloae *Orthodoxy and Romanian Identity*, published by the Archdiocesan Printing House, Sibiu, 1939, p. 247.
[33]Pr. Dumitru, Stăniloae, *The tow kingdoms…,* p. 30.
[34]Pr. Dumitru, Stăniloae *The tow kingdoms…,* p. 31.
[35]Pr. Dumitru, Stăniloae *The tow kingdoms…,* p. 34.

punishing, to punish with the sword for the good, even if the evil of punishment is hidden within the act of punishing.

One of Father Stăniloae's major biblical conclusions is that "all natural and necessary orders and actions can be carried out with good intentions and a pure heart. In everything, we can act with our souls bound to God. But all can also be carried out with evil intent, abusively, in opposition to God. The thought we put into our actions – this is what matters: 'So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God' (1 Corinthians 10:31)".[36]

In the same context, but especially in the face of an impending war, other biblical quotations appear in Father Stăniloae's work regarding military service: "And the soldiers also asked Him, saying, 'But what shall we do? And He said to them: 'Do not oppress anyone, nor accuse anyone unjustly be content with your pay'" (Luke 3:14). Saint Dumitru points out that "by being told to be content with their pay, they were not forbidden from fighting in war. […] Moreover: while no council has condemned war or military service, the Council of Arles[37] in 314 imposes the harshest penalty of excommunication on soldiers who lay down their arms," that is, those who flee from military duty, those who are overcome by fear, by the terror of imminent and unforeseen death, or even by the responsibility to which they had previously committed themselves or to which they were bound.[38]

Conclusion

In a world increasingly marked by armed conflict and the persistent threat of war, Christian theology must articulate the moral conditions under which the use of force may be justified, distinguishing legitimate defense from aggression and territorial conquest. Although the created world falls short of the perfection intended by its Creator, Christian moral reflection must nevertheless guide human action towards that ideal, particularly in circumstances involving violence, the use of weapons the potential loss of human life. Such preparation requires a sound biblical, patristic, canonical liturgical foundation capable of informing both the conscience and the conduct of the Christian soldier.

The present study has demonstrated that the Orthodox Christian tradition possesses substantial theological and moral resources for addressing the realities of military service. These resources acknowledge the legitimacy of defending one's life, family, community nation while simultaneously establishing moral limits on the exercise of force. As Saint Dumitru Stăniloae argued in the context of the Second

[36]Pr. Dumitru, Stăniloae *The tow kingdoms…,* p. 424.

[37]Areles is the ancient Latin name for the town of Arles (a city in France, a subprefecture of the Bouches-du-Rhône department, in the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region). The Council of Arles in 314 was the first representative assembly of Christian hierarchs held in the western part of the Roman Empire, convened to examine the appeal of the Donatist heretics regarding the condemnation of their doctrine as heresy by a council held in Rome in 313. The Council of Arles was the first ecclesiastical council convened by Emperor Constantine and paved the way for his convening of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 325.

[38]Pr. Dumitru, Stăniloae "Elements of Christian Morality," Telegraful Român Magazine, vol. LXXXVI, no. 5, January 30, 1938, p. 1.

World War, defensive action may be justified on the basis of biblical, patristic canonical principles. Nevertheless, the legitimacy of defense does not eliminate the need for moral discernment: the distinction between necessary and excessive force remains essential to a Christian understanding of military responsibility.

From an Orthodox perspective, military service may constitute a significant contribution to the protection and stability of society. However, the exercise of military authority must remain subject to moral accountability. The Church therefore has a dual responsibility: to recognize the legitimate protective function of the armed forces and to warn against the misuse of power, the erosion of moral judgment the transgression of both legal and ethical boundaries. Military service cannot be assessed exclusively in terms of strategic objectives or operational effectiveness; it must also be evaluated in the light of human dignity, moral responsibility the Christian understanding of the person.

Within this framework, the military chaplain occupies a distinctive position. His mission extends beyond the provision of religious services to encompass pastoral accompaniment, moral formation the cultivation of spiritual discernment among service personnel. By drawing upon Scripture, patristic writings the canonical tradition, the chaplain helps soldiers confront the moral complexities of their profession, including the psychological and spiritual consequences of armed conflict. His ministry does not consist in legitimizing every military action, but in assisting those entrusted with the use of force to exercise their responsibilities with conscience, restraint accountability before God and their fellow human beings.

The chaplain's contribution to the moral life of the armed forces is therefore inseparable from the broader vocation of the Church: to offer spiritual guidance while preserving the distinction between legitimate service and conduct incompatible with Christian moral principles. Through pastoral care, theological reflection individual spiritual guidance, the chaplain supports soldiers who seek not merely to fulfil their military duties, but to remain faithful to their Christian identity within the demanding circumstances of military life.

Ultimately, war cannot be understood solely through the categories of combat, destruction and death. The moral evaluation of military service must also consider the responsibility to protect human life, the limits of legitimate force the obligation to preserve one's humanity amid violence. The use of weapons, when undertaken in defense, must remain subject to moral discernment and must never become detached from the dignity of the human person. A Christian understanding of military service thus requires neither the uncritical glorification of war nor the denial of the moral complexity of defense. Rather, it calls for a sustained engagement between faith, conscience professional responsibility – a task in which the military chaplain plays an indispensable pastoral role.

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