

TERTULLIAN ON WAR FROM AN ETHICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: The paper deals with the mapping of Tertullian's views on war, the appropriateness and permissibility of military service and combat with arms in the military sense. The authors attempt to map the various texts that, in more compact units, but sometimes scatteredly, discuss Tertullian's views on the topics. Sometimes we do not even know whether Tertullian revealed an actual opinion on the subject he was writing about. The aim of this study is to grasp Tertullian's views on the army, war, and military service in the context of the appropriateness of such a connection for Christians. We will focus, firstly, on texts that comment on the subject at some considerable length. Next, we will discuss various scattered references that are closely related to the topic. One can speak here of positive and negative statements on the relationship between Christians and service in the military. Finally, we seek to answer the question of whether there is continuity within Tertullian's work on the subject, or whether we can say that Tertullian changed positions during different periods of his work.

Keywords: army, Christianity, Tertullian, weapon, war.

1 Introduction

Tertullian is considered one of the most important church fathers of the West. Of the Latin writers, he is currently second in interest to scholars after Augustinus Aurelius, who are concerned with patristics. This is testimony to the high interest of the scholarly community in this thinker. The period of activity of this ecclesiastical writer is not exceptionally long. What is exceptional is the frequency of the production of writings, as well as the influence he had on other Church Fathers. This is all the more remarkable when we consider the fact that Tertullian was later on the list of undesirable authors, or rather his influence was weakened in view of the later identification of his positions with various heresies. The question to what extent we can speak of the validity of this identification I will not address in this study, as it is an issue that is complex and requires extensive space to elaborate - compare (McGowan 2006). In any case, Tertullian remains one of the most influential representatives of both patristic and early Christian philosophy. This statement stands given the breadth of his theological and philosophical range, the scope of his original work, and his continuing influence, despite his later diminution.

2 More compact testimonies

The issue that resonates in this study is devoted to the grasp of war and peace in the works of our author. It is an issue often grasped by philosophers - cf. (Švaňa 2023). Its relation to pacifism also resonates in the works of contemporary ethicists (Conley 2013). In his extensive work, the theologian and philosopher has also commented on these issues. This is all the more interesting because the relevant Christian authorities, popes and ecclesiastical writers were silent on the subject until Tertullian's time. "Justin Martyr wrote in 150 C. E. that Christians do not wage war, but he meant that statement in the sense that Christians do not rebel against their persecutors (First Apology 39.2-3)" (Mercurio 2014, p. 64). Since wars are ever present in the world, it is timely to know the compact views of a major representative of Christian thought. As we know, Tertullian was an inhabitant of the Roman Empire, and his African ancestry did not change that. It is where he was born that Wilhite considers to have influenced his views (Wilhite 2007). This researcher argues that Tertullian's African identity determined his attitudes towards the Romans. Wilhite writes of antagonism towards Romans, including Christian Romans. Wilhite considers African influence as a determining factor in a political sense. Perkins makes a similar point (Perkins 2020). In any case, Christianity in antiquity must be seen as politically independent - compare (Wang 2024).

Tertullian's political thought has been mapped by several researchers – compare (Dunn 2015). A thorough description of our author's political thought has been made in an extensive study by Petr Kitzler. He considers the situation under Septimius Severus to be more peaceful than under his predecessors, among whom stands out, for example, the eccentric ruler Nero, a well-known opponent of Christians. Already Traianus, as Kitzler documents, was somewhat milder, not accepting anonymous denunciations and not inclined to mass executions of Christians. Septimius Severus was also not one of the outright enemies of Christians, at least in the area of persecution. Kitzler seeks to correct the distorted historical view that only Nero and Domitianus were among the persecutors of Christians. While this comes from the writings of early apologists, it is not historically accurate. Kitzler refers to Paulus Orosius as having left a more realistic account of ecclesiastical persecutions (Kitzler 2011, pp. 50-54). There are views about the connection between the persecution of Christians and the problems of the Roman Empire's economy (Caldas 2013). Tertullian himself writes of Septimius Severus as an emperor in a favourable vein. According to him, his reign was a period of peace and he even attributes to him a favorable attitude towards Christians - compare (Kitzler 2011, p. 55). Kitzler attempts to argue against the view that Tertullian's political stance is Christian isolationism towards Roman society and state - compare (Wilhite 2007); (Isichei 1964).

Tertullian's Apologeticum was not the first apologia, it may have built on earlier predecessors. Kitzler characterizes it as more confident than similar writings of the apologists who had been active earlier. Tertullian, according to Kitzler, wants to show that Christians are not enemies of Rome, but its loyal subjects (Kitzler 2011, p. 61). The real intention is unmasked by this researcher as giving the Christians courage and self-confidence. This is a writing situated in the image of a divine courtroom with the expectation of divine judgment, an imagery typical of Tertullian (Kensky 2015, p. 95). The core of the dossier is a refutation of the accusations, rejecting the charges of atheism, of disloyalty to the sovereign. Kitzler points out the contradictions between the position in the Apologeticum and other writings in relation to the Roman state, not on a general level, but, for example, in the prayer for the delay of the end of the world, as well as in the possibility of serving in the Roman army. These contradictions, in his view, are not explained by an adherence to Montanism. Kitzler points out that Tertullian often used arguments purposively, which is characteristic of his rhetorical style of writing. In the Apologeticum Tertullian, according to Kitzler, abstracts from his own opinion and speaks for the whole Christian church. In the matter of the attitude towards the Roman state and its ruler, Tertullian nowhere falsifies its legitimacy or the claim to power of its ruler. He appeals to the religious freedom which the Romans practiced in the various provinces (Tertullian 1890, pp. 83-85). Finally, the true God pleads for prosperity for the Roman monarch. He is ordained by God, but he is not himself.

Apologeticum is a work in which our author has expressed himself, among other things, on the subject of war and peace. Let us therefore take a closer look at what views he expressed. The dating of this writing is shifted by Minelli from 197 to a slightly later date within a few years (Minelli 2000). This text in question contains many layers, and there are not many passages where the author deals with the military. Much of it contains polemics with traditional Roman religion. Human laws are considered by Tertullian to be ones that can be improved. He refers to the written testimony of Marcus Aurelius, which speaks in favor of Christian soldiers in the Roman army. "Emperor Marcus Aurelius be searched, in which he testifies that the well-known Germanic drought was dispelled by the shower obtained through the prayers of Christians who happened to be in the army" (Tertullian 1890, pp. 18-19). He also mentions the above event elsewhere. "However, he also mentions the rain miracle in Ad Scapulam 4.6, maintaining that it is a famous incident."

(Huttunen 2020, p. 211). Mercurio considers the letter of Marcus Aurelius purporting to document this event to be a forgery (Mercurio 2014). Nota bene, this very event was used by later Christian authors to manifest their difference from Montanist pacifism (Ramelli 2002). Tertullian values the defenders of the laws, which could also be interpreted in terms of their protection by arms. He warns that Christians are intransigent in a situation where they would have to sacrifice their beliefs at the cost of their physical salvation (Tertullian 1890, p. 92). Here he does not take an a priori antagonistic position towards the relationship of the army and soldiers towards Christians. "Whence come those who burst into a palace armed, bolder than all Sigerii or Parthenii" (Tertullian 1890, p. 106). Christians are not allowed to kill, though they may be killed. Only Christians can be considered innocent according to the lines of this text (Villani 2012). In doing so, he recognised the natural right to religious freedom (Tănăsescu and Dăneci-Pătrău 2023).

Christians are involved in services that are useful to society. Their worldview is not a philosophy. Tertullian gives the metaphor of the Christian's lifelong struggle with the soldier's struggle. Even the soldier does not like to suffer, but in necessity he ventures into danger with fear. The Christian's summons to trial is a struggle where he fights even when death threatens. "But we are overwhelmed; yet only when we have won our cause; therefore we conquer, when we are slain; and in fact we escape, even when we are overwhelmed" (Tertullian 1890, p. 144). He does not regard suffering for God's sake as illicit, but on the contrary as a good struggle, comparing it with the similar suffering of non-Christian victims of torture.

As was evident, Tertullian, while nowhere glorifying the cult of the Christian soldier, did point to an example where it was Christian soldiers in the army of the home country who had distinguished themselves in a particular way. Although he did not say so *expressis verbis*, yet in this work he did not even speak out against the service of Christians in the army. He mentions combat as a common activity that Christians perform in the service of the state: "We sail and fight with you; we till the ground and engage in trade just as you do; likewise we join crafts, and throw our workmanship open to the public to your profit" (Tertullian 1890, p. 123). On the other hand, he reminds us that a Christian must not kill, only be killed. Kitzler says that this is merely an argument in favor of defending Christians. His view is supported by the fact that Tertullian does not write directly that such service to the state is worthy of emulation, that it is the standard for a Christian, he merely tacitly accepts service in the army by describing a well-known anecdote without comment. He is also supported by the austerity of Tertullian's language, which speaks of a common "militamus". Conversely, it can be said that Tertullian does not distance himself from the possibility of service in the army in this writing. Whether he personally shares a different position on the matter of military service at this time (also taking into account the possible time-shift in dating according to Minelli) is open to conjecture. Mercurio, too, comments that Tertullian writes without moral judgment about military service (Mercurio 2014, p. 66). I suggest that he made minimal use of military service in the argument, leaving two other possibilities. Either, as Kitzler says, Tertullian has simply tactically glossed over his personal (different and negative) opinion, or he also accepts this service to the state in this work, although he does not claim it as a model of Christian behaviour and nowhere glorifies it. He condemns killing outright; a Christian must not kill, even though he may be killed, which seems to be a reference to the acceptance of possible martyrdom. Mercurio interprets this as a message to the emperor not to worry about Christian rebellion (Mercurio 2014, p. 70), which is contradicted by Kitzler's view, according to whom the addressees of the writings are Christian readers (Kitzler 2011). Mercurio considers the addressee of the writings to be the emperor Septimius Severus, as well as the Roman magistrates. Slight criticism can be seen in the allusions to the standard of worship in the Roman army, which worshipped in the manner of a deity. To Tertullian, this represented an unacceptable model of Christian behaviour.

According to Mercurio, Tertullian radically changed this view in later years. "Tertullian switched his position radically in the 14 years between writing the *Apologeticum* (197 C. E.) - an apology directed to Roman magistrates to defend Christians from persecution - and *De Idololatria* and *De Corona Militis* (both 211 C. E.) - treatises directed to Christians about the dangers of idolatry and the idolatrous military crown" (Mercurio 2014, p. 60). It is possible that in reality there was a somewhat smaller time gap, since the time of the writing of the *Apologeticum* has been shifted by some scholars to a few years later. He must have acted inventively, since the biblical position is ambivalent on this issue. The number of soldiers of the Christian faith was increasing in our writer's time. According to Mercurio, this occurred under Septimius Severus.

As many scholars have argued, the impact of Tertullian's transition on Montanist positions cannot be absolutized (Braun 1985), in various aspects. Nor can it be argued that he may have edited the *Passio Perpetuae* in a Montanist spirit, which is not even a Montanist text after all - compare (Kitzler 2007a); (Kitzler 2007b). Several authors have argued that it was Montanism that inhibited Tertullian's changes in the area of his relationship to the army and the possibility of a Christian being a soldier. This is not entirely universally accepted, as it is not entirely clear to what extent it was Montanist views that determined Tertullian. Indeed, his rigorism is present throughout the whole range of his work.

On the subject of the permissibility for a Christian to serve in the army, Tertullian also speaks in *De Idololatria*, which is a writing of a younger date than the *Apologeticum*. It is a presentation of the ways in which, under the conditions of necessity of life in the Roman Empire, daily life can be lived in accordance with patterns of behavior that are compatible with Christian beliefs (Binder 2023). It is dated 211. The text is in many ways aimed at criticizing the worship of idols. "Speaking about idolatry, Tertullian's thinking focuses not on the idol but on the demons" (Van Winden 1982, p. 113). Here he turns his attention to idolatry in the military. He regards idolatry as a crime. He describes its various forms and condemns it as a grave sin, incompatible with the life of a Christian. In terms of the topic of the study, Tertullian does not begin to report extensively until chapter 19. No mention of Christian soldiers appears in this writing. Our author postulates the goal: "now inquiry is made about this point, whether a believer may turn himself unto military service, and whether the military may be admitted unto the faith, even the rank and file, or each inferior grade, to whom there is nonessence for taking part in sacrifices or capital punishments" (Tertullian 2009, p. 146). One soul cannot serve two masters. Tertullian argues that Christ took Peter's sword when he defended him from the soldiers. His answer is in the negative. "The *De idolatria* rigidly rejects any service in the army" (Huttunen 2020, p. 222). Our author identifies the connection with idolatry as the reason. The ornaments and dress that should be used by a public figure are not for Christians. Here, perhaps, according to the lines of this book, an ordinary soldier might not participate in idolatry. Tertullian fails to refute the testimony of Scripture as to how a centurion who believed in Christianity persisted in his, as Huttunen argues. Here we see the dichotomous division into two worlds that is so characteristic of Augustine Aurelius. "There is no agreement between the divine and the human sacrament, the standard of Christ and the standard of the devil, the camp of light and the camp of darkness" (Tertullian 2009, p. 146). It is thus a clothing that is associated with idolatry. Simply put, the Christian writer is bothered by army symbolism (Mercurio 2014). This is not the only reason for the incompatibility of military employment and Christian beliefs. Tertullian's reference to Peter's disarming is apparently about pointing to combat and killing itself as an activity that is forbidden for the Christian. Our author admits that the Old Testament points to warfare, which he does not condemn. The New World Order simply forbade the shedding of blood (Rordorf 1969, p. 111). Such a categorical view was not the voice of contemporaries who would have proclaimed the same views in unison. For example, the *Traditio apostolica* of

Hippolytus accepts some conditional, limited involvement of Christians in the military.

The subject of the permissibility of Christian service in the army is also addressed in the work of De Corona. The very first chapter touches on the relationship between the military and the Christian religion. Tertullian describes a soldier who refused to wear a laurel crown even in the face of ridicule and possible punishment. According to our author, "the laurel-crowned Christians" (Tertullian 2009, p. 191) are to be refuted. He means that those Christians who do not object to wearing laurel wreaths do not have a right relationship to the thing that is the offense.

Wearing a laurel crown on one's head is considered by Tertullian to be incompatible with the status of belonging to Christianity. The ecclesiastical writer seeks to problematize the subject. As he writes, Scripture does not directly forbid it. Here he tries to argue that it is also true that wearing it is not commanded by Scripture. He postulates another argument that it is against nature, since flowers are meant to please the eye and not to be placed on the head. Tertullian argues that there is an association of such a crown with Bacchus, and hence the roots of this custom are idolatrous. The crown of Christ by the Roman wicked was a presumptuous temerity, hence there is no argument that Christ also was crowned. This adornment is worthy, according to our author, of an idol. A Christian, in the words of Tertullian, ought not to dishonour his gate with a crown of laurel. Christ wore a crown of thorns and thistles on his head (Tertullian 2009, p. 209).

He poses the question in the way he used in De Idololatria. "I think we must first inquire whether warfare is proper at all for Christians" (Tertullian 2009, p. 204). It is lawful warfare if Christ says he who fights with the sword shall perish with the sword. So will service for others be more than service for Christ? "Then how many other offences there are involved in the performances of camp offices, which we must hold to involve a transgression of God's law, you may see by a slight survey" (Tertullian 2009, p. 204). If a soldier believes in the God of the Bible, he must leave the army immediately. For military service cannot be an argument, an excuse for sins that a Christian may commit in direct causal relation to it, nor does it exempt one from martyrdom. Tertullian considers it an excuse, "there is a higher necessity to dread denying and to undergo martyrdom" (Tertullian 2009, p. 205). Martyrdom is hugely valued by our author, although it is probably a misinterpretation that Tertullian assumes that only martyrs will receive immediate access to heaven (Wilhite 2020).

We can discern a rather significant difference in Tertullian's approach to state power. "While Tertullian seems willing to reconcile Christianity with the Roman state in the Apologeticum, he is absolutely unwilling to do so in De Idololatria and De Corona" (Mercurio 2014, p. 77). Serving in the army is considered by our author to be inconsistent with the duties of a Christian. De Corona in particular is an extension of the reasons why a Christian should have nothing to do with the military. Idolatry connected with the wearing of a crown, various pagan rites, the unnaturalness of a crown of flowers on the head, a crown of flowers for a follower of Christ crowned with a crown of thorns, the avoidance of martyrdom for the sake of army duties, the adoration of human sacraments, fighting with arms directed against the life and health of man, these are the set of causes for which, according to Tertullian, a Christian must not exercise the profession of a soldier. He mentions idolatry more than killing. "He mentioned killing only in Chapter 11 where he argued that the army was idolatrous because it demanded the oath, the sword, inflicting torture and guarding pagan sanctuaries" (Helgeland 1974, p. 172). De Corona, early in his writings, shows himself as a model of the Christian soldier who would rather undergo martyrdom than defile himself with the symbols associated with idolatry. The military practice of the army is incompatible with self-identification as a Christian. The armor of the apostles and the crown of martyrdom are considered by Tertullian to be worthy of choice for a Christian, not military symbols and weapons. The inclination to

Christianity, according to Tertullian, is to be loud, conspicuous, even in the context of attempts by the Roman ruling power to involve individual Christians in its military services.

If we are to characterize Tertullian's attitude towards the army, it can be described as escalating in a negative relationship. In the Apologeticum Tertullian tolerates the service of the Christian in the army, though he does not extol its virtues, nor does he postulate models of Christian soldierly conduct worthy of emulation. In De Idololatria he already rejects military service, mainly because of idolatry in the army; he is equally bothered by participation in combat and the possibility of killing another person. Here he switches to a position of antimilitarism. He enunciates his position in De corona, where he also points out that a Christian should differ from a non-Christian and manifest his negative attitude towards the army and weapons. The reasons remain virtually the same as in De Idololatria, except that Tertullian stresses the need for the Christian's attitude to be made manifest in a demonstrative way.

How to explain the shift in Tertullian's views regarding the participation of the Christian population in the army? Recall that it is not many years between the texts written, and the difference may be even less than the general assumptions indicate. The scholar Wilhite (2007) argues that the Apologeticum was written by Tertullian from the position of a native African, the audience for which the text is intended being the Romans themselves. There are other views; Zilling (Zilling 2004) considers the audience of this text to be the Christian community. Eckert (Eckert and Tertullianus 1993) makes a similar point. Kitzler (Kitzler 2008) also shares this view. The Czech scholar Kitzler finds such a position more impressive. We are thus inclined to the view that speaks of a Christian addressee of the Apologeticum, we believe that it would be tactless to attack the state in which Tertullian was active in the Apologeticum, as this would have the opposite effect to its purpose. The intent was (among other goals) to show Christians in a loyal light to the state.

Wilhite (2007) points out that the leaning towards Montanism did not have any major impact on Tertullian's change of opinion. After all, he was a convert from a pagan religion - compare (Balfour 2017). "Interest in philosophical questions often irreversibly and fundamentally changes the life of those who are interested in them" (Marchevsky and Sucharek 2023, p. 33). The spirit of his writings throughout his oeuvre is one of inclination towards moral rigorism. In the field of moral theology he was and remained a rigorist, for example, he considered human impatience as one of the causes of sin (Steenberg 2008). His moral rigorism did not stray from the framework of the complementarity of soul and body (Bogatay 2022). It is fairly well known that after the resurrection in a glorified body that will be different from the body present in the earthly world, according to Tertullian, there will be no sexuality (Forrester Church 1975, p. 99). If he has tightened his view in anything, it is his rejection of a second repentance after the conversion to Montanism; selected views on partial issues, such as the Sabbath (Pakpahan and Hasiholan 2024), may have changed, as well as his rejection of flight from persecution and remarriage after the death of a spouse. Even higher than marriage, he values abstinence - compare (Wysocki 2011). However, these are not radical changes in the field of moral theology.

Dunn notes that Tertullian adapts his arguments like a skilled rhetorician. In De Corona, for example, he hardly mentions the veiling of virgins, as in De Virginitate Velandis, because it did not suit his argument. "For the sake of argument, Tertullian could exaggerate or downplay or even contradict what he actually believed" (Dunn 2005, p. 29).

3 Other scattered short mentions

In addition to the three above-mentioned works, we find references to military service or combat in Tertullian's other writings. It must be admitted that some of these treat the subject more latently. Their wording, however, at least entitles us to

mention them and to attempt an analysis, especially in the context in which Tertullian mentions and uses them. We have divided the passages we have found into those that connote the subject positively and those that are negative to the connection between military weapons and Christianity.

3.1 Positive connotations

A latent form of a positive view of the issue under study is found in Tertullian on the question of his attitude to the use of violence by the sovereign (state, government ...). From the question he asks in *De Anima* (c. 210), ch. 33, which reads: "Who would not prefer the justice of the world, which, as the apostle himself testifies, "beareth not the sword in vain," and which is an institute of religion when it severely avenges in defence of human life? (Tertullian 2009, p. 444)" we can directly infer his positive attitude towards the above-mentioned action of the sovereign by referring to the Apostle Paul and his letter to the Romans (13:4). Tertullian does not speak directly of sanctioning violence, but in the question posed he directly guides Christians to have no problem with such (necessary and, of course, lawful) violence.

For the purposes of this study, mention should also be made of the *Ad Martyras* (Kitzler gives the year 197 unambiguously). In ch. 3 we find the metaphysics: "We have been called to the military service of the living God since the moment when we responded to the words of the Sacrament" (Tertullian 1900, p. 55). After this statement, Tertullian further explains the reasons for this example. He mentions the rather brutal life of a soldier because of the harshness, discomfort, drudgery, hardships, constant training, etc., their training leads them to composure, endurance, and adaptability. Finally, he urges Christians to regard all hardships experienced as exercises of mind and body. In the context of the above, he compares the Holy Spirit to a coach, the victor's garland to the Beatitudes, and Christ as the one who brings Christians to this wrestling ground. All of this also refers to Paul's words in 1 Corinthians.

For the sake of balance, we need to cite here the view of Carlson (1948, p. 94), who evaluated the use of examples by ancient Christian authors by feeling that by using examples to illustrate their arguments, Christian authors would gain some argumentative superiority over pagan authors and help them to refute the errors of their pagan opponents.

Here, however, we do not see the use of a special example, as this is a common human practice and thus an effort to ensure, if nothing else (military strikes), at least the defence of the state or society.

In this context, I think we can concede here that if someone is giving advice to another and referring to an example, he himself considers that example to be appropriate and worthy of following. From such reasoning, we can concede that Tertullian here does not have any particular objection to the practice of military service, indeed, he regards it as necessary for human functioning.

3.2 Negative connotations

Tertullian presents his opposition to war and to defence by violence in several writings. We begin chronologically with the writings of *De Spectaculis* (197 and 202). In it our author states that God forbids all killing. "God puts his prohibition on every sort of man-killing by that one summary precept: 'Thou shalt not kill'" (Tertullian 2009c, p. 157). "... (God certainly forbids us to hate even with a reason for our hating; for he commands us to love our enemies" (2, Tertullian 2009c, p. 174). This strict reasoning entitles us to conclude that it also applies to the issue of military service in its various manifestations.

Another indirect reference to something connected with combat or the soldier's service and its perception by Christians is in his writing *Ad Nationes* (Summer 197). In this writing Tertullian mentions, among other things, Christians as those who have

become famous and won admiration because of their unwavering strength in the face of death. The pagans, though possessed of many instances of heroic resistance and associated heroic deeds in their past, were apt to accuse Christians of stubbornness because of their heroism. To emphasize the contrast, Tertullian cites several examples of pagan heroism in the face of death. But all of this takes place in the context of the fact that what the pagans consider glorious in their own practices, they condemn as vanity and stubbornness in the case of the Christian.

If we consider the contents of ch. 18, we can see that Tertullian is speaking here of conviction. Of the convictions of pagans (because of the glorious past of their ancestors) and of the similar convictions of Christians (we assume for gospel reasons) to act in such a way as to gain glory and to act as they see fit. Specifically, he states, "Since, forsooth, the sword through their contempt of death produced stories of heroism amongst your ancestors, it is not, of course," (it sounds a bit ironic) „from love of life that you go to the trainers sword in hand and offer yourselves as gladiators, (nor) through fear of death do you enrol your names in the army (Tertullian 2009d, p. 263)".

What Tertullian argues here for clarification toward the Gentiles could be transferred by analogy to the actions of Christians. It could read as follows: but if contempt for death and the glorious death by the sword created the traditions about our ancestors (the Christian martyrs), then one thing is clear, it is not the love of life that leads us to be recruited as warriors, nor is it the fear of death that leads us to enter into military service.

It is more than that, it is a Christian vision of glory. It lies not in physical struggle but in the struggle for the values that Christians profess. Implicit here, then, is Tertullian's disapproval of physical struggle, reminiscent of the soldier's struggle, for the sake of the Christian's action.

A similar negative reasoning where Tertullian draws on the prophet Isaiah, where in verses we hear of swords being crossed into ploughshares and peace among the nations, is found in the work *Adversus Iudaeos* (c. 200), where (chap. 3, verse 10) speaks of the custom of the New Testament being to call attention to forbearance, and to convert the former fury of "swords" and "spears" into peace, and thus to rebuild the former waging of "war" against the rivals and enemies of the law into peaceful acts of ploughing and tilling the soil.

We find statements of a similar type in other writings. In his work *De Patientia* (c. 200-203) we find such statements about the illegality of retribution in four places. In ch. 3 he states that God would send him hosts of angels, but he does not approve, he does not want to, in spite of being aware of the fact, and further on Tertullian notes that He (Jesus) for the time to come has cursed all the works of the sword... In ch. 6 he also highlights the general rule of patience, which he clarifies by saying that we must not do evil, even though it may seem justifiable. Also noteworthy is the text (ch. 7, vv. 11-13) „To exhibit impatience at all losses is the Gentiles' business, who give money the precedence perhaps over their soul; ... when, in their cupidities of lucre, they encounter the gainful perils of commerce on the sea; when, for money's sake, even in the forum, there is nothing which damnation (itself) would fear which they hesitate to essay; when they hire themselves for sport and the camp (military)...“ (Tertullian 2009e, p. 1574). Tertullian here, as a recommendation to Christians, puts forward the idea that Christians are different from them, which leads to the Christian not laying down his soul for money, neither in the forum, nor in trade at sea, nor in the service of the army, but on the contrary giving money for his soul, whether spontaneously in the giving of it to others, or even in patience if it is lost. Finally, in the above work, ch. 8, he warns Christians against allowing themselves to be provoked to violence. On the contrary, they are to adhere to the Gospel whoever strikes you on one cheek, turn the other also. He explains this by patience and protection from God, who will avenge the patient against the aggressor. Vicastillo (2018, p. 16) explains the attitude found in *De Patientia* in the sense that impatience is the matrix of all sin.

Even the sins of Israel are caused by impatience. The contrast here is Abraham, with faith and patience being intimately connected; and Christ and his teaching, which abrogates the law of retribution, which promotes impatience and fulfills the Law by commanding love to one's enemies.

Tertullian presents the opposition to war and to defence by violence in his *Adversus Marcionem* (c. 207-208). He does this directly and indirectly in three places. In the third book he states. "Truth, and meekness, and righteousness." But who shall produce these results with the sword, and not their opposites rather—deceit, and harshness, and injury—which, it must be confessed, are the proper business of battles?" (Tertullian 2009f, p. 713). This is a statement that is directly directed against the use of violence in the form of the sword, and therefore against war. Moreover, Huxley (1936) remarks very aptly on this that it is an excellent statement of the almost always neglected truth that good ends cannot be achieved by bad or even inappropriate means.

Later in the same book we read another statement "Christ is promised not as one who is powerful in war, but as a bringer of peace" (Tertullian 2009f, p. 523). Tertullian here reflects again from the prophet Isaiah ch. 2, where in the first verses we hear of the swords being turned into ploughshares and peace among the nations, and it is there that he finds the answer to what attitude the Christian is to take when he emphasizes Christ as the bringer of peace, not as a warrior prince.

Finally, in this work, in the fourth book, he presents his argument, which is also telling of his rejection of it. He draws on ch. 9 of the prophet Zechariah, namely, "... And the Lord their God shall save them in that day as the flock of his people: for they shall be as the stones of a crown, lifted up as an ensign upon his land." (Zechariah 9:16). There is a wholly anti-war attitude felt in this reasoning when he speaks of "No one gives the name of sheep to those who fall in battle with arms in hand, and while repelling force with force ..." (Tertullian 2009f, p. 898), which is his vision of the above prophecy. God's people are those who prefer to surrender with patience and refuse to fight even in self-defense.

Here we can say that Tertullian goes to the extreme, so to speak, of rejecting the use of violence even if it were a necessary form of defence. As mentioned above, his leaning towards Montanism is evident here. In this vein, perhaps too harshly, Popov (2005) says that in Tertullian there was more love for the principle, for Christianity as a doctrine, for the triumph of which he was prepared to sacrifice everything, than for the people with whom he was surrounded. ... Tertullian's rigorism was manifested not only in demands that were often excessive but also in his lack of indulgence for the weaknesses of others and his disregard for extenuating circumstances.

The last writing in which we find a very brief mention of military service is that of *De Pallio*. In view of the ambiguity of the dating, and the ambiguity of the writing in general in the context of Christian teaching, we conclude. "Non milito" (Tertullian 2005, p. 58) - "I do not engage in military service" - is the stark statement we find in ch. 5 (4,2). Thus Minn (1941) writes briefly in his study focusing on the issue of war in Tertullian, without adding anything more. To attempt to present something more about this statement here will require a brief excursus into the issue of the writ as such. As Hunink states this writing is "... one of the strangest texts ever written in Latin. It is a speech about the need to change clothing from the standard Roman toga to the philosophers' pallium, composed in an outrageously difficult style, confronting its readers with questions at every possible level" (Hunink 2005, p. 9). It should be added here that it is debatable in terms of dating and authorship, in terms of its intended audience, and in terms of whether it should be considered a Christian writing or perhaps a writing of late Latin sophistry. Similar questions are posed by McKechnie (1992), who comments on the introduction with the wonderful phrase: "The *De pallio* is an enigma".

In view of the above, we will limit ourselves to our vision of the issues in the selected text. We do not think it can be untrue to say that in the case of the *De Pallio* writings this is a "personal" apologia by Tertullian for the use of a garment called the Pallium instead of the toga which he chose to wear. From this position the text: „I owe nothing to the forum," it says, 'nothing to the Campus Martius, nothing to the Senate-house. I do not watch for a magistrate's function, do not occupy any platform for speakers, do not attend to the governor's office; ... I do not act as a judge, a soldier, or a king: I have withdrawn from public life. My only activity concerns myself; I do not have any care, except for this: to have no care. A better life can be enjoyed in seclusion than out in the open' (Hunink 2005, p. 259) appears quite clear. Tertullian himself says in *De Pallio*. We are to take it that Tertullian is here speaking of independence from the outside world, whether or not there is a connection with Christianity. Hunink comments on this: „a final clause sums up what the pallium claims to have done, namely to have withdrawn from public life, as Christians tended to" (Hunink 2005, p. 262). Of course, in view of the problems mentioned above, we dare not claim that this is a recommendation for Christians to shun expressions of public life, including military service, but neither can we deny the inner sentiments of Tertullian, who in the words of this text, whether for Christians or just for himself, prefers a life of seclusion.

4 Discussion

From our findings, we venture to formulate a final summary statement. Tertullian was a convert who very likely never left the ranks of the Christian Church, never separated from it. He certainly should not be seen as a schismatic. It should be remembered that he held rigorist positions virtually throughout his entire period of work. Already in his early works one can perceive different views on the matter. While in the *Apologeticum* he shows an example of how Christian soldiers begged for rain, he does not distance himself from the service of Christians in the army, already in the *Ad Nationem* of the same period one can perceive our author's disapproval of struggle, such as struggle in the military sense. In *Ad Martyres*, on the other hand, he cites the peaceful soldier as an example. In the *De Spectaculis* of the same period he is opposed to killing. Finally, he had already spoken out against killing in the *Apologeticum*. In *De Idololatria*, what bothers Tertullian is primarily symbolism. Again, he rails against fighting. But in *De Anima*, which is from a similar time period, our thinker has no reservations that lawful violence and its toleration should not be a problem for the Christian. In *De Patientia*, *Adversus Iudaeos*, as well as *Adversus Marcionem*, *De Pallio*, but especially in *De Corona*, he takes a negative position on military activity, which he funds with several arguments. What is behind these contradictions? How are we to explain them?

First of all, it is important to realize that Tertullian was a brilliant polemicist who often did not write out all of his positions, but simply tailored his arguments to whatever the purpose of the writing was. He did not write for one audience all the time; the purpose of the text was not always scholarly debate. This may explain the seemingly contradictory viewpoints. The second argument is that nowhere does Tertullian call for Christians to become soldiers, nor does he hold up for admiration the activities of the soldier. Even the most oblique references to the army are merely an endurance of the status quo, that some Christians also fight, and not an explicit endorsement of their temporary or permanent association with the army. The more positive references are very far from the *Miles Christi* motif, which only developed in the fifth century at the earliest (Iwanczak 2012). It has been suggested that Tertullian was inclined to Montanism around 207. Negative statements towards the army, combat, and weapons are found in his work even before this date. It is true that the most strident statements come from the period when he was inclined towards Montanism. However, even before that, there were statements that merely accepted the participation of Christians in the military. Nowhere does Tertullian recommend, promote, or glorify this. He escalates his criticism slightly, but it is not a radical shift. Apart

from the actual text he left behind, there is no other source documenting the views of Tertullian himself on this matter. The texts he left relatively soon after his conversion are too poor to give us an exhaustive account of Tertullian's attitude towards war, the army and combat. Moreover, even in this period there are equally references that express themselves negatively. We can also take into account the fact that Tertullian very often tactfully subordinated the text in his writings to the purpose to the extent that he did not write mutually consistent literary works. Mutual incompatibility can thus be perceived even in works of the same time period. Tertullian's attitude towards the army was demonstrably not positive throughout the period following his adoption of Christianity. Although in the *Apologeticum* he writes conciliatorily about soldiers, already in *De Spectaculis*, in *Ad nationem*, as well as in *Adversus Iudaeos* and in *De Patientia* he demonstrably writes negative comments on fighting, killing, and military symbolism. In doing so, these are texts from the period before Tertullian's leaning towards Montanism. On the contrary, in the times where he was already sympathetic to Montanism, he is sympathetic to legitimate military violence on the part of the sovereign. Thus, we believe that Tertullian's attitude towards the army did not change in a fundamental way; if it did, we admit a slight radicalization in his Montanist opinion, which, however, with the relatively modest extent of the extant texts on the subject, cannot be considered confirmed. For we do not know whether Tertullian did not really hold similar views from the time of his conversion to Christianity, except that in selected texts he used more moderate expressions in view of their purpose and their intended readers. Insofar as he radicalized his position on this matter, it is still not a diametrically opposed approach to the army and warfare, since he was demonstrably negative about these things in the period immediately following his adoption of Christianity.

5 Conclusion

The present study is the result of a textual analysis of Tertullian's works, which focused on his texts dealing with war, weapons, combat and their relation to Christianity. We have studied Tertullian's texts and in selected ones we have found references to the subject matter. Most of the references were tinged with negativity. In addition, we were also able to find more ethically neutral passages that had a more conciliatory attitude towards the union of the military and Christians. We also took into account the timeline, specifically the beginning of the inclination towards Montanism. We compared the given findings with each other. Through comparative analysis, we found that the mixed statements are found in the period before the inclination towards Montanism. After this period, Tertullian's statements on the matter are overwhelmingly negative. Thus, we cannot speak of any clear change of attitude. If there was such a change, which we do not consider to have been demonstrated, it consisted only in a slight radicalisation of the attitude towards the army. However, this possibility is only hypothetical, given the austerity of the separated passages, and especially the fact that in the same periods we can find parallel more neutral and negative allusions to the army, combat and the use of weapons. Rather, we are inclined to think that there was a constant attitude that was never friendly towards the military, military service, weapons and killing.

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