

ASPECTS REGARDING THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS MILITARY SERVICE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF HUMILITY, AS A CHARACTERISTIC OF THE FUTURE AUTHENTIC LEADER OF THE ROMANIAN AIR FORCES

Cristian DRAGOMIR, Ionuț POPA

”Henri Coandă” Air Force Academy, Braşov, Romania (cristian.dragomir@afahc.ro, ionut.popa@afahc.ro)

DOI: 10.19062/1842-9238.2024.22.1.12

Abstract: *This paper was born out of the desire to clarify certain aspects regarding the role played by religious assistance and the actions taken by military chaplains, in resonance with those led by military instructors and teaching staff, in shaping a desirable/ideal profile of Romanian Air Force officer, through the lens of training and development of leadership skills specified by the graduate model. The approach through the prism of the element of humility was imposed by the desire to highlight the importance of training, within the "Henri Coandă" Air Force Academy, those leadership skills, with an intrapersonal connotation, which would contribute to the practice of authentic leadership by the young officers of this category of armed forces.*

Keywords: *leadership, authentic leadership, religious assistance, self-confidence, self-awareness, skills training, graduate model, Romanian Air Force.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Elite military organizations have hundreds of generals, thousands of officers, and each, in their area, is a vital, trusted leader. They became leaders through a complex process, not through mere learning or mastery of an art.

Chances are, every leader began their journey through this process as a recruit or cadet with zero haircuts, nervous and at least half-scared of what was happening, while wondering if they could survive the first week in uniform.[1]

The history of the Romanian Air Force is full of examples regarding the quality of the leaders who worked within this category of forces, and one of the aspects that made this possible was the interest shown by this organization in their training and development. What made them come to prove, through the actions they took, that they were successful leaders was the set of characteristics they each possessed and through which each of them proved their uniqueness and authenticity.

2. THEORETICAL ASPECTS OF THE AUTHENTICITY APPROACH IN THE ACADEMIC TRAINING OF THE MILITARY LEADER

The theory of authentic leadership is found in the novelty area of research in the field and has, as its focal point, the degree of originality or the extent to which the leadership practiced is real or not.

Unlike other theories that study leadership, the authentic approach refers to the authenticity of leaders and, from this point of view, can be considered more tempting to apply.

At first glance, authentic leadership would appear to be very easy to understand. In reality, it is a complex process, difficult to characterize. Among authentic leadership researchers, there is no single, accepted explanation of this theory. Instead, there are several definitions, each written from a distinct point of view and with a different emphasis.[2]

One of these points of view is the intrapersonal perspective, which focuses closely on the leader and what is happening inside him. It incorporates self-knowledge, self-regulation, and the leader's self-concept.

A second way of definition is that of an interpersonal process. This perspective highlights authentic leadership as relational, a joint creation of leaders and followers [3] resulting not only from the efforts of the former, but also from the response of the others.

As a final facet, authentic leadership can be defined from a developmental perspective, which is exemplified in the work of Avolio and his associates.[4] The development perspective, from which the theoretical approaches start, is the one that associates authentic leadership with a characteristic that can be implemented, through education, in a leader.

An approach to authentic leadership based on the unique characteristics of leaders was developed by George.[4] This leveraged her experience as an executive director in several multinational companies in that it facilitated countless opportunities for her to speak with over 125 other successful leaders. In scientific terms, she used the conversation method to discover that authentic leaders demonstrate three common characteristics: they are open to making themselves available to others, demonstrate high self-awareness, and want to apply leadership based on their own values.

Taking the practical route, George describes the essential qualities of authentic leadership and how individuals can develop these qualities if they wish to become authentic leaders.[4]

Specifically, authentic leaders demonstrate five core dimensions:[4]

- (1) understand their purpose;
- (2) have strong values about what is the right thing to do;
- (3) establish trusting relationships with others;
- (4) demonstrates self-discipline and acts according to its values;
- (5) are passionate about their mission (*act from the heart*).

Taking the developmental approach, Walumbwa and his collaborators conceptualized authentic leadership as a pattern of leader behavior that develops and is based on positive psychological qualities and strong ethics.[5] They all suggested that authentic leadership consists of four distinct but related components: self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency.[6] Throughout their lives, authentic leaders learn and develop each of these four types of behavior.

Self-awareness refers to the personal, inside perspectives of the leader. It is a process by which individuals understand themselves, including their strengths and weaknesses, and the impact they have on others.

The internalized moral perspective refers to a process of self-regulation, whereby individuals use their internal moral standards and values to guide their behavior rather than allowing external pressures (eg, peer or societal pressure) to control them.

Balanced processing is also a self-regulating behavior. It refers to an individual's ability to analyze information objectively and explore other people's opinions before making a decision.

Relational transparency is about being open and honest in presenting your true self to others. It is self-regulating because individuals can control their transparency with others.

Relational transparency occurs when individuals share their underlying feelings, motives, and inclinations with others in an appropriate manner.[7]

As the theory of authentic leadership develops, further antecedents can be identified that may *influence* the process. To date, however, positive psychological capacities, moral reasoning capacities, and critical life events have been identified as factors influencing a person's ability to become an authentic leader.

The "Henri Coandă" Air Force Academy is "*...the institution of higher military education whose objective is to train licensed officers in the field of military sciences, information and public order...*", as stated in the University Charter.[8] This institution, with a tradition of training military leaders from the base of the military organization, is the one that must mold military students of all specialties so that, after the completion of the years of study, they correspond from the point of view of the requirements imposed by the beneficiary, through graduate model.

At the moment, the approach to the training of military leaders within the "Henri Coandă" Air Force Academy aims at a leader image that corresponds to the one described by means of Bloom's taxonomy of learning objectives: cognitive, affective and psychomotor.[9] The descriptive framework of this taxonomy is applied inside the model of the graduate, by describing the 5 selected competencies (citizen, educator, leader, fighter and military specialist), using in this sense 3 verbs, associated with the learning outcomes: *to be*, *to know* and *to do*. The element that is of interest to us, through the lens of the approach carried out in this article, is the one described by the verb *to be*.

The personality of the leader sums up traits, qualities, abilities modeled on the basis of the temperament, skills and character of each individual. This also builds the authenticity and originality of each individual leader. The military field follows the same path, because although the mission remains the same, a leader will always think and act in his own way. In this sense, we can consider that the elements of personality, those that define the character of an individual, are those that constitute guiding elements in terms of building the profile of the successful military leader.

Character is the one that describes the inner strength of a person. Character helps us to know what is right and to connect knowledge with action. In the native military doctrine the character of an individual is presented as consisting of:[10]

- Military values;
- Empathy;
- Ethos and fighting spirit;
- Discipline;
- Humility.

It can also be noted that the elements presented above are similar to those that can be discovered and are taken into account, in this sense, when applying the leader development framework, in the specialized military literature of the U.S. Army (Fig. 1). [11]

All the elements contained in the model, as a component part of the character, are particularly important, both as single elements but also as a unitary whole, where the value is highlighted by their synergistic effect.

In FM 6-22, *Developing leaders*, humility is presented as "*... an attribute of an Army leader's character and is associated with the absence of arrogance. To be a leader, one must be confident and competent. Effective leaders temper confidence with humility. However, it is often difficult to judge one's own humility. Humility is a subjective perception based on a*

leader's behaviors and interpretations differ based on cultural or gender context. The attribute humility has one component: Seek feedback and explore personal performance."

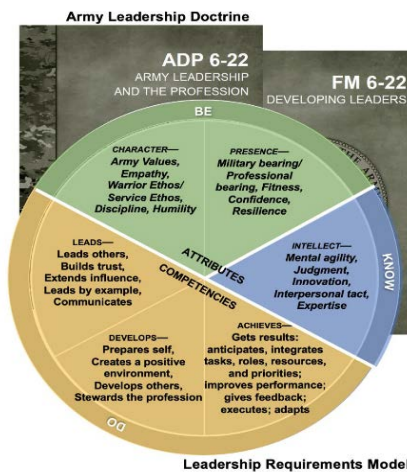


FIG. 1 Leadership requirements model

In both documents the definition of humility is done by means of its association/identification with a characteristic desired to be found in leaders at all levels of the military organization. In this sense, it is said of them that they should be able to recognize that others may have specialized expertise that is indispensable to success.

Humility exists on a continuum. [11] At the tactical level effective leaders must exhibit an appropriate degree of humility. Not too much, not too less. There must be a balance between the two extremities and this balance must be reached in the same time with the students graduation. Therefore, building up self-confidence and developing self-awareness, as one's leader ability, should occur within the time frame of military students being at the Academy.

It seems that each of us is gifted with the spark of leadership regardless of the field in which we operate. The real challenge is *"to understand ourselves so that we can discover where we can use our leadership abilities for the benefit of others"*. [12]

3. INVOLVEMENT OF THE RELIGIOUS ASSISTANCE IN THE PROCESS OF TRAINING THE FUTURE AUTHENTIC LEADERS OF THE ROMANIAN AIR FORCES

When we approach a profession, the first aspects we refer to are those related to the work performed, the years of study and training, the diplomas to be obtained, the code of ethics and the status acquired in society. If we refer to a nurse, a policeman, an accountant, an architect, a priest or a soldier, there is only one thing, common to all of them, that will make us truly understand what a profession is, namely that it is a calling, a vocation. [13]

Carried out on the basis of Law no. 195 of 06.11.2000 regarding the constitution and organization of the military clergy, as well as the Order of the Minister of National Defense no. M2 of 13.01.2014, for the approval of the *Regulation on religious assistance in the Romanian Army*, religious assistance is provided by military priests present in all echelons of the Romanian Army.

Although the status of the military priest - as it is found in the previously specified legislative acts - is ambiguous, oscillating between that of a military and that of a civilian, even if by the Order of the Minister of National Defense no. MS 107 of 21.09.2017, for the

approval of M.R.U. 2/1, *Norms for defining the functions of personnel in the structures of the Ministry of National Defense*, the military priest is assigned a specific type of military function of execution, the role of guide, leader of the military priest is one obviously and vocationally.

On the basis of this responsibility, intrinsic to the priestly mission, the military priest has the duty to communicate to the people he coordinates, from the perspective of religious assistance, the landmarks of authentic leadership.

Religious assistance in the Romanian Army is part of the Ministry of National Defense's area of attributions and responsibilities regarding the fulfillment of the spiritual-religious requirements of the personnel and contributes, through specific means, to the development of the cognitive component of the armed forces, by advising commanders on the psycho-moral state of subordinate staff.

Religious assistance is provided, in each unit that has a staff position, by a military chaplain. This, by the nature of the duties specified in the job description, ensures:

- assistance, accompanying military and civilian personnel to specific activities;
- counselling, guiding the commanders regarding the psycho-moral situation of the personnel under their command, offering spiritual support to the families of the personnel and guiding the personnel belonging to other confessions or cults regarding their spiritual need;
- the service, performing the liturgical acts of the cult it represents, taking care of the good organization of the cultic space and giving special importance to honoring the memory of the nation's heroes;
- catechizing, communicating the faith teaching of the Romanian Orthodox Church to military and civilian personnel;
- pastoral care, guiding the military and civilian personnel towards the fulfillment of the assigned missions, presenting milestones for the development of a healthy social and family climate, caring for the prevention of antisocial acts and collaborating with the other responsible factors in the unit to ensure the psycho-moral quality of the staff's life.

The essential condition for the military chaplain to be able to exercise his role as an advisor in the field of leadership is that he himself knows his status very well and assumes it. By this is understood both the informational assumption of the laws, provisions, statutes and regulations that define the role of the military priest, as well as the awareness of the priestly mission.

If there are still gaps in the univocal legislation of the status of the military priest, even 24 years after the resumption of the activity of religious assistance in the Romanian Army, regarding the triple dignity - teacher, servant and leader - of the priest, this is clearly established, has divine power and divine institution:

- *"And Jesus said to them again: Peace be with you! as the Father has sent Me, so I am sending you. And saying this, He breathed on them and said: Receive the Holy Spirit! Whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven, and whose sins you retain, they are retained (good)."*;
- *"And Jesus approaching, he spoke to them saying: All power in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore, go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." (Matthew XXVIII, 18-20)*



FIG. 2 Matthew XXVIII, 18-20 [14]

The awareness of this charic appropriation of the priestly dignity obliges the military priest, in addition to the rigorous evaluation of his own gestures, attitudes and actions, to the continuous appropriation of the legislative norms that establish - directly or indirectly - his military status.

Through his entire life, teaching and activity, Jesus Christ offered the world not only a soteriological gift, but also a pedagogical one, a benchmark. In this regard, Christ is the leader, the leader par excellence:

"...the shepherd of the sheep...goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know His voice... I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his soul for his sheep... I, the good shepherd, know mine and mine know me." (John X, 2, 4, 11, 14).

The supreme principle of the leadership quality of the Savior Jesus Christ is the sacrificial love for those he leads, respect for those "subordinates", recognition of human dignity: *"... whoever wants to be great among you will be your servant; and whoever wants to be first among you, let him be your servant - to all, according to Mark X, 44 - just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his soul as a ransom for many"* (Matthew XX, 26-28).



FIG. 3 Matthew XXVIII, 18-20 [15]

Within the structures of the Romanian Army, the religious assistance section conveys the christian way of life to the staff and families of this institution. a special place is reserved for the christian leadership principles mentioned earlier. these perceptions are current and useful for the psycho-social concerns of military career guidance.

The eternal truth of christian spiritual psychotherapy corresponds to the psychological objectives of self-determination of one's own instinctive starts through the awareness and self-control of emotions and the correct management of the experiences of those around, for a better efficiency of the act of command.

By focusing on introspection, as a way of taking responsibility for one's own actions, as well as by caring for the needs of others, the Christian way of life, promoted by the military priest, helps in the process of crystallization of the leader's personality.

Also, the reality of the two starts or "*minds*" - instinctual (limbic brain)[16] or rational - are presented, experienced and promoted by Orthodox mysticism right from its appearance, so that the bimillennial experience of the Church can constitute a significant contribution to the authentic edification of military leadership – "*For I do not do the good that I will, but the evil that I do not will, that I do.*" (Romans, VII, 19).

CONCLUSIONS

In particular, the presence of the military priest within the academic structure of the Romanian Air Force constitutes a concrete support in the process of spiritual counseling of the commander and the management structures of the institution, both in terms of the personal experiences of each of them, as well as from the perspective pedagogical activity. The involvement of the teaching staff and students in the moments of liturgical life, completed with the catechetical side and corroborated with the pastoral effort of the military priest, are essential components of the mission of religious assistance.

Through his attitude and interventions, the military chaplain can alleviate the privations of student military life, generated by the distance from the family, and can capitalize on the positive aspects, such as the joy of discovering people and the creation of new social groups, strengthened by common concerns and skills. At the same time, the involvement of the military priest in activities supporting the educational process can only be welcomed, through the prism of the beneficial effects that can occur at the level of the process of shaping the personalities of future air force officers.

The efforts of the military chaplain, in support of achieving the desired goal imposed by the graduate model and in the sense of what is presented in this article, must be focused on building a strong self-awareness and achieving a high capacity to exercise an internalized moral perspective, through the promotion and cultivation of a personality cult fueled by humility.

Developing such skills and putting them into practice, from the lowest level of applicability in leadership, represents the foundation for a future certainty associated with the impossibility of non-productive/toxic effects in the exercise of the act of leadership.

REFERENCES

- [1] J. D. Murphy, *Courage to execute: What elite U.S. military units can teach business about leadership and team performance*, published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey, 2014, p.32;
- [2] A. Chan, *Authentic leadership measurement and development: Challenges and suggestions*, in *Authentic leadership theory and practice: Origins, effects, and development*, ed. by Gardner, W. L., Avolio, B. J., Walumbwa, F. O., Oxford: Elsevier Science, 2005, pp.227–251;
- [3] A. H. Eagly, *Achieving relational authenticity in leadership: Does gender matter?*, in *The Leadership Quarterly*, 16, 2005, pp.459–474;
- [4] P. G. Northouse, *Leadership - Theory and practice, Seventh Edition*, SAGE Publications, 2016, p.196;
- [5] F.O. Walumbwa, B.J. Avolio, W.L. Gardner, T.S. Wernsing, S.J. Peterson, *Authentic leadership: Development and validation of a theory-based measure*, in *Journal of Management*, 34(1), 2008, pp.89–126;
- [6] B.J. Avolio, F.O. Walumbwa, T.J. Weber, *Leadership: Current theories, research, and future directions*, in *Annual Review of Psychology*, 60, 2009, pp.421–449;
- [7] M. H. Kernis, *Toward a conceptualization of optimal self-esteem*, *Psychological Inquiry*, 14, 2003, pp.1–26;
- [8] <https://www.afahc.ro/ro/facultate/documente.html>, accessed on 03.06.2024;

- [9] <https://projects.ulbsibiu.ro/teachon/teachon/taxonomia-lui-bloom-si-versiunile-ei-initiala-revizuita-si-digitala/>, accesed on 04.06.2024;
- [10] F.N.-2.1.2, *Manualul privind leadershipul în forțele navale*, București, 2022;
- [11] F.M. 6-22, *Developing leaders*, Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1 November, 2022, p.1-3;
- [12] B. George, H. Ibarra, R. Goffee, G. Jones, *Authentic leadership*, Harvard Business Review Press, 2019, p.12;
- [13] R. M. Swain, A.C. Pierce, *The Armed Forces Officer*, in National Defense University Press, Washington, D.C., 2017, p.17, at <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/Books/AFO/Armed-Forces-Officer.pdf>, accesed on 03.06.2024;
- [14] <https://believer.com/right-division/the-great-commission-of-matthew-2819-20>, accesed on 03.06.2024;
- [15] <https://www.bridgemanimages.com/en/english-school/the-woman-of-canaan-matthew-xx-ver-28-engraving/engraving/asset/6021861>, accesed on 04.06.2024;
- [16] D. Goleman, B. Boyatzis, A. Mckee, *Primal leadership*, ed. Curtea Veche, 2019, Bucharest, 2018, p.62.