

Historical and conceptual background and Future of the AMI

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Vilnius, September 2005*

40 years ago, the 27th of June 1965, I delivered a speech in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, under the title: **“The Military Apostolate in Spain”**.

Years before, in the same place, I had held another conference, whose title was: **“Christendom and Military Service”**; this speech finally appeared as one chapter in a book called: **“The problem of the Armed Forces”**. This book was a collective work of several authors whom I will mention later. The book obtained the “Nihil obstat” in July 1961, and my article in it is even older. The Preface of the book came from a Jesuit priest, Jesús Iturrios.

The participating authors were the following:

- 2 veteran soldiers, both of them Lieutenant Generals, Carlos Martínez Campos and Alfredo Kindelán Durany
- A Major General, Ángel González de Mendoza
- 3 Lieutenant Colonels, Eduardo Blanco Rodríguez, Francisco Sintes Obrador, José Tafur Ruiz
- 2 Lieutenants, Julio Busquets Bragulat and me, Miguel Alonso Baquer.

Finally, an Epilogue has been given to the book by the Lieutenant Colonel of Military Justice José María García Escudero.

All those authors were well-known military professionals and active Christians. I am the only one still alive, all the others died meanwhile.

Thus, the small study on **“Christendom and Military Service”** I made being an Infantry lieutenant of 25 years. Being a captain of 33, I held the speech in Santiago de Compostela in 1965 which I referred to at the beginning. What I expressed there were the ideals and concepts defended by the **Spanish Military Apostolate** of that time, when the decision was made to invite to an international military pilgrimage with the idea to create what finally became the **“Apostolat Militaire International”** (AMI).

You will certainly understand that I see those two texts as the manifestation of an early vocation and a long-lasting commitment, which is reaching 40 years now in the field of international collaboration. I think it has become clear, that for me and other founders of the AMI we may add some years more, so that we easily may consider half a century on the whole.

The first text concentrates on church doctrine, whereas the second one is more or less a concise description of a special situation, the one of the so-called “Spanish Catholic Action”, an apostolic organism of that time.

Both articles were theoretical, analytical and descriptive of the situation in Spain. I think, all the national delegations in Santiago de Compostela in 1965 had brought with them comparable texts written by military authors of good standing in the intellectual sphere of their countries.

The book I referred to as a collective work has, in my opinion, a very important factor: It was conceived by three generations of Spanish soldiers. And they shared one common view on the essentials. Three of them were born in the 19th Century, and I, the youngest among them, in 1932. The intention of those three generations was to give Military Service - in that time - a Christian meaning and sense. And they all were disposed to act apostolically in order to deepen Christian inspiration as it was proposed by the Church.

The Jesuit priest, Iturrioz, a prominent theological thinker, a friend of mine, who died recently at the age of 90 years, said the following regarding my small study:

“Even if Christendom and Military Service seem to be extreme contradictions, history has put both of them in such a close connection that we must just think that their roots also are very closely connected.”

I will mention another commentary of his on one of my basic statements in that book:

“Military Service is not just violence, power, service and risk – as captain Miguel Alonso Baquer is saying -; Military Service is human life and human life among human beings; it is life dedicated to service, and to service under risks. It is a life that finds in Christ and Christendom his long-lasting and heroic impulse to strive for a process which could overcome the status of man of being imperfect.”.

I would also like to mention a commentary made in the Epilogue by the Lieutenant Colonel of Military Justice García Escudero. He has been the only one in the group of authors who did not collaborate from the beginning, and he was the only one who did not belong to “combatant” officers.

His Epilogue is more or less the final step in finishing a book which took time to be published. Gracia Escudero died, as a friend of mine, with more than 80 years of age at the beginning of our current century. He said:

“Paradoxically you may say, that a man, the more he is prepared for war, the less he is a friend of war. The soldier is the first pacifist, in the best sense of that word that is so easily misused. Certainly, the great formula to overcome hatred which captain Miguel Alonso Baquer describes in the book is this: ‘Give war a Christian sense and meaning’.”

I will stop here making comments on those early articles. I would just like to show the harmony and the consistency of that message and testimony. The publication of the book was an impulse for all the authors to go on deepening the concepts and make them more universal, more “catholic”.

My speech on the foundation of the AMI has been “optimistic”, in the sense of theological hope. I will go on with some remarks which illustrate the 10 basic points of that speech.

1 - We were sure that we had found a good organic working structure which enabled us to fulfil a good deal of theological commitments.

2 - The unity of Spanish catholic soldiers, the confessionality of the Spanish State of that time and the traditional religious orientation of our people favoured the creation of centres of spirituality.

3 – The Spanish Military Apostolate of that time was a religious institute within a "state-protected Catholicism", a situation not without risks. Especially they had to fight religious routine and lack of sincerity.

4 – Spanish conscripts of that time lived in the Armed Forces a situation familiar to them in Spanish society in general.

5 – The Apostolate moves on two ways: First: A catholic soldier committed to faith should never be considered a "bad professional". Second: A good professional should feel that his human qualification will get stronger if combined with a life in the grace of God.

6 – The Apostolate is orientated towards efficiently complying with military duty. That implies a strong participation of lay people. It is inconceivable the clergy to be the motor of the Apostolate.

7 – Whereas the Armed Forces are split up in three branches – Army, Navy, Air Force – the Apostolate is just one for all, likewise its three journals "Reconquista", "Formación", and "Empuje".

8 – The overall missions are piety, religious studies and action. The idea is to find in all relevant fields of culture sectors where spirituality and military concept meet. The assistance to comrades and soldiers is a manifestation of charity.

9 – Apostolic activity must be carried out with the highest possible level of unpretentious sincerity.

10 – We do not think that with just not talking on the ethics of military service and military installations we will solve the conceptual conflicts of war and peace. We need a thoroughly conceived ethical and theological system constructed on the teachings of Christ, our Lord and Master.

The final part of my speech in Santiago de Compostela preconceived or took in advance – in some way - the foundation of the AMI:

"This line of thinking and acting is what commits us in the Spanish Military Apostolate. But I am sure that we still could learn from other countries. And therefore we meet here with delegations from other countries in order to make important steps ahead."

That was the situation some 40 years ago. Today we will not find anywhere a place of "state-protected Catholicism". Our Catholicism now suffers from all modern risks. More than before, and that is one of my points regarding the future of AMI, we need the life-long practical testimony of the Catholic military.

Finally, I would like to indicate some of my books which have been published along the years and show the consistency and development of ethical thinking. One of those I wrote during my years in the Presidency of the AMI from 2002 to 2005.

Those are the books:

Religiosity and combat. I got the "Nihil obstat" for this book in 1967, 38 years ago, from the archbishop of Sion and Military Vicar General, Luis Alonso Muñozerro.

Testimonies of the mystery. This book was published in 1968 with the approval of the dioceses of Burgos and got the price “Monte Carmelo de Espiritualidad”.

Military moral in times of reformation. This was published in the collection of texts of the Spanish Military Ordinariate in 1988.

Where is Peace dwelling? Edited in 2004, on the festivity of St. John Crysostomos, by “Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos”.

The book most directly related to AMI has not yet been published. I am still on it, and it will express my deepest hope regarding the presence of Christian life in the Armed Forces all over the world. The basic themes are “**Lack of faith, Despair and Enmity**” (A military reflection on the theological virtues).

In “Where is Peace dwelling?” there is a chapter under the title “**A space for Serenity and Tolerance**” which shows a way from military service to the seeds of Peace. The Epilogue of the book shows a comprehensive and diligent résumé of the catholic doctrine as put forth in the “**World Peace-Day Letters**” of the Popes.

I am convinced that reflections on Faith, Hope and Love (**catholic Faith, Hope that reaches out transcendently, Christian charity**) are a perfect orientation on our way into future. Future of man depends essentially on mankind’s ability to overcome inherent lack of Faith, despair and enmities, and to emerge from nihilism which is obfuscating occidental societies.

AMI should, and that is some sort of a humble farewell-desire combined with saying “thank you”, go on trying to strengthen faith, hope and friendship in the soldiers and their families, since we all are the sons of the Father in Christ.