

**“How does the Holy See judge
the activity of the international military apostolate –
what do we expect from them?”
(AMI General Convention 2005, Vilnius, 29 September 2005)**

Dear brothers in the (episcopal and) priestly ministry,
dear brothers and sisters,
ladies and gentlemen!

I am grateful for this invitation of *Apostolat Militaire International* to participate in the convention of 2005 in Vilnius. On the occasion of the 40th anniversary of your association, which strives on the level of the universal Church to promote the participation of the laity in the life and mission of the Church, I would like to convey the best wishes of the President and members of the Pontifical Council for the Laity .

You have asked me to contribute to the convention by speaking on the topic “How does the Holy See judge the activity of the international military apostolate – what do we expect from them?” Since I have exercised my office as the Secretary of this Council for only 21 months, I can say little about your activities over the last 40 years, so I must stress in my presentation the future challenges that an international Catholic lay organization with such a specific stamp anticipates at the beginning of the third millennium.

I. Theological Foundations of the Lay Apostolate

On November 18th of this year we commemorate the 40th anniversary of the publication of Vatican II’s decree *Apostolicam actuositatem populi Dei*¹ on lay apostolate. It is a happy coincidence that AA and the AMI can celebrate their 40th birthday together, since this very document has taken on a sort of “spiritual paternity” for many lay organizations. Alongside AA are also other noteworthy Council documents, above all *Gaudium et Spes* and *Christifideles Laici*, but I refer here primarily to *Apostolicam actuositatem populi Dei*.

As a second important official commentary, Pope John Paul II’s Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*² (12/30/1988), which is based on the work of the October 1987 Synod of Bishops “Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church

¹ Decree of the Second Vatican Council on the Apostolate of the Laity “*Apostolicam actuositatem populi Dei*”, 18 November 1965, in: LthK, Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil II, 602-701 (=AA); cf. F. Hengsbach, Das Konzilsdekret über das Laienapostolat. Text und Kommentar, in: Konfessionskundliche und kontroverstheologische Studien, Bd. 23, Paderborn 1967; see also: W. Kasper, Berufung und Sendung der Laien in Kirche und Welt. Geschichtliche und systematische Perspektiven, in: StdZ 205 (1987) 579-593; H. Filser, Das Dekret über das Laienapostolat *Apostolicam actuositatem*, in: F.X. Bischof / St. Leimgruber (Hrsg.), Vierzig Jahre II. Vatikanum. Zur Wirkungsgeschichte der Konzilstexte, Würzburg 2004, 253-279.

² Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* on the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World, Pope John Paul II, 30 December 1988 (=CL).

and the World.” This document analyzes more than 20 years of post-Conciliar development and insists on further application of the conclusions and suggestions of the Council.³

My first general proposal is that we not only undertake a “post-reading” of these two important documents, but that we should remain in constant “dialogue” with them. The statement of the Second Vatican Council and the suggestions of the Post-synodal Exhortation still offer today an *outstanding theological foundation* and a *practical impulse* for the reflection and application of the lay apostolate.⁴

a. The Church as missionary *communio*

A word about the theological foundations of the missionary lay apostolate: *baptism and confirmation* are the foundation of membership in the Church and therefore of all apostolic work.⁵ Through baptism, all members of the Church have entered into the community of the faithful, and all are called to apostolate.⁶ Ministry in the Church is principally in the service of the community of the faithful.⁷ The statement of the Second Vatican Council is fundamental for this truth: “In the Church there is a diversity of ministry but a oneness of mission.”⁸

This transformed perspective is of great importance for the lay apostolate and for managing the challenges that lie before us. It applies to the joint mission of all the baptized, since all the baptized are called to proclaim the faith in word and deed.⁹ After the decree on the laity, the ministry – in this case, the military pastoral care –

³ cf. CL 2

⁴ cf. Kasper, *Berufung* 579-586; K. Lehmann, *Wer ist Kirche? Plädoyer für ein erneuertes Laientum*, in: idem, *Glauben bezeugen, Gesellschaft gestalten. Reflexionen und Positionen*, Freiburg im Breisgau-Basel-Vienna 1993, 295-307.

⁵ cf. AA 3: “The laity derive the right and duty to the apostolate from their union with Christ the head; incorporated into Christ’s Mystical Body through Baptism and strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit through Confirmation, they are assigned to the apostolate by the Lord Himself. They are consecrated for the royal priesthood and the holy people (cf. 1 Peter 2:4-10) not only that they may offer spiritual sacrifices in everything they do but also that they may witness to Christ throughout the world. The sacraments, however, especially the most holy Eucharist, communicate and nourish that charity which is the soul of the entire apostolate...” Cf. also CL 9 referring to LG 51; cf. CL 8, 10-15, 18-20; cf. also D. Tettamanzi, *The Church: Mystery, Communio and Mission*, in *Building Blocks of Christifideles Laici*, 19-28.

⁶ cf. AA 25: “Bishops, pastors of parishes, and other priests of both branches of the clergy should keep in mind that the right and duty to exercise this apostolate is common to all the faithful, both clergy and laity, and that the laity also have their own roles in building up the Church” (cf. LG 37); cf. CL 55: All the members of the People of God –clergy, men and women religious, the lay faithful—are labourers in the vineyard. At one and the same time they all are the goal and subjects of Church communion as well as of participation in the mission of salvation. Every one of us possessing charisms and ministries, diverse yet complementary, works in the one and the same vineyard of the Lord. ... All the states of life, whether taken collectively or individually in relation to the others, are at the service of the Church’s growth. While different in expression they are deeply united in the Church’s ‘mystery of communion’ and are dynamically coordinated in its unique mission.”; cf. also CL 64

⁷ cf. CL 20, 22

⁸ AA 2; cf. also CL 22, 55: “All the states of life, whether taken collectively or individually in relation to the others, are at the service of the Church’s growth. While different in expression they are deeply united in the Church’s ‘mystery of communion’ and are dynamically coordinated in its unique mission.”

⁹ cf. AA 2: “Christ conferred on the Apostles and their successors the duty of teaching, sanctifying, and ruling in His name and power. But the laity likewise share in the priestly, prophetic, and royal office of Christ and therefore have their own share in the mission of the whole people of God in the Church and in the world.”

and the “laity” do not compete with one another, but rather have a relationship of complementarity and mutual assistance.¹⁰

b. The Christian View of Man

According to *Christifideles Laici* the decisive contribution of Christians consists in bringing to light in public national and international dialogue the Christian image of man and the view of his dignity and value: “To rediscover and make others rediscover the inviolable dignity of every human person makes up an essential task, in a certain sense, the central and unifying task of the service which the Church, and the lay faithful, are called to render to the human family.”¹¹

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (1992) recalls this foundation: “The dignity of the human person is rooted in his creation in the image and likeness of God.”¹² This is *the* first maxim of our social dealings. A horizontal and a vertical dimension intersect in this Christian term of human dignity.¹³ All people are children of God and thus brothers and sisters among themselves! This basic anthropological approach is its own internal dynamic, for it possesses an intrinsic correspondence to “humanum”, to the needs of a true human person.

I am not the only person who possesses this dignity, but it is true for all people. It is not only a “shield” (a “right”), but it bears in itself a social dimension (“duty”). In the same line, the Catechism teaches us, “The equal dignity of human persons requires the effort to reduce excessive social and economic inequalities. It gives urgency to the elimination of sinful inequalities.”¹⁴

We must acknowledge, however, that in the present conflict of ideas, *Weltanschauungen* and even religions we must discern the spirits within statements about the view of man, even if they are expressed in the same way. The decisive question is: “What follows *concretely* from this verbal confession of the dignity of man in the judicial system and in everyday socio-political life?”

In many political “reform projects” and legislation, it is clear how far man has strayed from a Christian-inspired anthropology. Many proposals for the “modernization” of our social and legal order leave this realm, and also the fundamental anthropological categories, almost unnoticed. Some socio-political “reforms” are intricately tangled in the social “web” and yet appear to be the fruit of “momentary analysis”, “ideologically” determined as the product of party-political compromise.

¹⁰ cf. AA 6; cf. CL 15, 55

¹¹ CL 37; cf. CL 5, 37; cf. K. Lehmann, Gibt es ein christliches Menschenbild?, in: idem, *Glauben bezeugen, Gesellschaft gestalten*, 43-51

¹² cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (=CCC); CCC 1700; cf. also CCC 1700-1715, 357, 1930; cf. also CL 5, 37

¹³ cf. CL 37

¹⁴ CCC 1947

As a result, the Christian view of man and the legal and socio-political consequences due to him are pushed aside, where they seem not only like one view among many, but are even presented as a *counter-opinion* that is difficult to communicate. It maintains a peripheral position, a place that was previously tolerated and that is now occasionally categorized as an *extreme position* alongside the often-feared religious fundamentalism. Whoever stands up for fundamental rights, such as the right to life, easily comes under the suspicion of being a “fundamentalist” in current discussion.

Last but not least, the debate about the European Constitution showed how weak the awareness of Christian history has become in Europe.¹⁵ In this discussion, the French Constitution on the necessary “laicity” of the state was one of the driving forces. This mentality or ideology of laicism has also spread to other countries and continents, coming back to life after years of hibernation. Think about the political conflicts of the last few months in Spain, which were commented on by a cardinal in the Roman Curia with the term “laicismo fundamentalista”.¹⁶

c. The development of the Christian view of man

We should carefully analyze the developments listed above and indicate their long-term consequences. Many people have forgotten that our democratic form of government and our social structures are born of a “*condensate*” decisively defined by the Christian view of man. It is the result of a long and difficult process, in which the essential Christian convictions have been melted together.

Therefore, our first great challenge is to indicate the development of faith through history with the all-embracing idea of man.¹⁷ We should point out that the consequences of this specific conception of man are at stake in many of these “achievements” of our era. We must work to “liquidate” or decipher this *condensate* so that it can be recognized in its ethical foundations and implications.

The democratic form of government doesn’t concern primarily a “mechanism of involvement” for all citizens, but it is above all *influenced by and dependent on ethical conditions*. Democracy is meant for the responsible participation of all its citizens in the common good, and it presupposes a responsible perception of rights and the fulfilment of civil duties. We can currently observe that the welfare state, for example, collapses without a responsible use of its benefits. Considering the expectations placed on citizens, democracy may be the most ethically justified form of government.

¹⁵ cf. L. Kühnhardt, *Christliches Menschenbild im Prozess der europäischen Einigung*, in: *Kirche und Gesellschaft*, No. 280, publ. by the Mönchengladbach Center for Catholic Social Sciences, Köln 2001.

¹⁶ cf. Homily of Julián Herranz in honor of Card. Marcelo González Martín, Archbishop emeritus of Toledo, in: O.R., 1 October 2004, pg. 7.

¹⁷ cf. for the questions on the development of law: e. g. A. Freiherr von Campenhausen, *Christentum und Recht*, in: P. Antes (publ.), *Christentum und europäische Kultur. Eine Geschichte und ihre Gegenwart*, Freiburg im Breisgau 2002, 96-115.

Our current social and legal “quality of life” is the result of a long and complicated process, which contains many elements and has in no way run in a straight line. It is impossible to remove single elements – individual rights or state achievements, for example – from this *condensate*. It is worth observing the ethical assumptions on which our social and legal level rests. Under all these assumptions, the view of man is finally the all-encompassing and decisive reference point.

In the process of development I mentioned before, the Christian faith claims no monopoly, but it sees itself as one of the main currents, if not the crucial current. The *Revelation in Jesus Christ* broke barriers and bounded walls that neither the Greco-Roman antiquity nor Judaism were in a position to do. The *universal offer of salvation in Christ* and the *universal dignity of man* are closely related. Christ’s care was equally valid for men and women, rich and poor, young and old; indeed, his actions were defined by a clear preference for the outsiders and the marginalized.¹⁸ These “revolutionary elements” of his message and his example do not remain inconsequential even in the sociopolitical and political realm.¹⁹

If one thinks this theory is a posterior fabrication, he should take a good look at our world. Hunger and poverty are also the consequences of a defective or incomplete view of man: whoever isn’t or can’t at all be my “brother” or my “sister” doesn’t deserve my respect, nor do I have to help him out. The following questions inevitably arise: “*Why could the democratic system in its modern form only develop in the spiritual realm of Christendom? Can there be a “government of the people” without the equality or participation of all citizens? Can there be true freedom without the difference of the secular and spiritual order? Can there be a state of law without the balance of power?*”

Even the positions contrary to the Christian view of man, in a certain sense, rest on fundamental Christian intuitions. We must admit, however, that alternatives to the Christian viewpoint or against it were developed because the principles in the lives of Christians were hardly recognizable or inconsequential. We must also concede that we have not always been faithful to the Christian view of man during our two-thousand-year history. It is an undeniable fact that there have been relapses behind this level of knowledge, steps backward and abuses in the course of history. Even so, the fundamental vision was always valid! It remained an occasionally-hidden but ever-present reference point, to which everyone could fundamentally refer. It remained the ever-present model – like a mirror or a “spiritual Damocles’ Sword” – that silently judged every abuse.

¹⁸ cf. CL 49, 53ff

¹⁹ cf. CL 49: “In fact, for the believer the Gospel, namely, the word and example of Jesus Christ, remains the necessary and decisive point of reference. In no other moment in history is this fact more fruitful and innovative.”

Many think that our actual social standard, our general system of law, and the demands of our fundamental human rights aren't digressing. Above all, many young people think that everything has always been this way, especially with certain restrictions in the comforts of life today. It must be said that forgetting the roots of our social and legal culture should be counted as the first step backward.

We, as faithful Christians, perform an irreplaceable service to our society and the human family when we valiantly bring the balanced and integral Christian view of man into public debate. If we attentively look around us, we discover that there are other responses, models and lifestyles. Anyone in touch with the world knows that even today, sad images of men exist, and not just in the so-called "Dark Middle Ages"! It is frightening to see that slavery and forced labor, caste systems tolerated by the state with third- and fourth-class citizens, exploitation and oppression still exist. We must realize that the Christian breakthrough for the equal dignity of all people has not been fulfilled by all, indeed, that it has been, and continues to be, diminished.

This is not a call to arms for war between cultures or religions, but a call to be grateful for and aware of a great inheritance that has been placed in our hands. It is a call to reflect on our spiritual and cultural roots! We must become more conscious of our own responsibility and look after it in the measure of our possibilities as emancipated Christians and active citizens!

II. The Identity of the Catholic Military Apostolate

In this second point I will try to set the legal and theological orientation of your association by relating it to the Church's teaching about the lay apostolate.

a. Legal Foundations of the Official Military Apostolate

As the foundation of the universal Church for the *official* military pastoral, the Apostolic Constitution "*Spirituali militum curae*" by Pope John Paul II (21 April 1986) is in effect.²⁰

²⁰ cf. AAS 78 (1986) 481-486; cf. *Verordnungsblatt des Katholischen Militärbischofs für die Deutsche Bundeswehr*, No. 5, 23rd year, 20 August 1987, No. 22. Following are quotes from papal documents for the military pastoral in the German armed forces. Regulations on the organization of Catholic military pastoral, in: *Sonderheft der Zeitschrift Militärsorge* 32 (1990) 24-33. The new edition reads: "Nun aber muss man sagen, dass die Zeit gekommen ist, die genannten Bestimmungen zu revidieren, damit sie von größerer Kraft und Wirksamkeit sein können. Dazu hält uns vor allem das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil an, das den Weg für geeignete Initiativen zur Durchführung spezieller pastoraler Aufgaben geebnet (see. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 10) sowie sehr aufmerksam das Wirken der Kirche in unserer heutigen Welt ins Auge gefasst hat, auch was den Aufbau und die Förderung des Friedens in der ganzen Welt betrifft; dabei müssen sich diejenigen, die Militärdienst leisten, als ‚Diener der Sicherheit und Freiheit der Völker‘ betrachten, denn ‚indem sie diese Aufgaben recht erfüllen, tragen sie wahrhaft zur Festigung des Friedens bei‘" (2nd Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 79); cf. also: *Dieci anni dopo la promulgazione della Costituzione Apostolica 'Spirituali Militum Curae'*. Atti del Simposio Internazionale degli Ordinariati Militari, Buenos Aires (Argentina), 4-8 September 1969, publ. by the Congregation for the Bishops, Vatican City.

In this document, soldiers are described as “*tamquam securitatis libertatisque populorum ministros*”²¹, referring to the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the world today, *Gaudium et Spes*.²² *Gaudium et Spes* coined this quotation. I quote: “Those too who devote themselves to the military service of their country should regard themselves as the agents of security and freedom of peoples. As long as they fulfill this role properly, they are making a genuine contribution to the establishment of peace.”²³ These very ambitious words encourage us even today to make our contribution as “*servants of the security and freedom of the nations...for the strengthening of peace*” in an international association on different military conditions.

b. Legal Foundations of the Lay Apostolate Within the Military

For the sake of completeness I mention the legal foundations of the unions of lay apostolate as they are presented in Canon 215 and under the 5th title of the Code of Canon Law, “Associations of the Christian faithful.”²⁴ Canon 298 says, “In the Church there are *associations* distinct from institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life; in these associations the Christian faithful ... strive in a common endeavor to foster a more perfect life ... or to exercise *other works of the apostolate* such as initiatives of evangelization, works of piety or charity, and those which *animate the temporal order with a Christian spirit*.”²⁵

The *Statutes*, which the AMI drew up in Vienna in June 1985, are in effect as the legal foundation of your association.²⁶ I refer here, however, to the similar statement in the *Handbook of International Catholic Organizations* of the Pontifical Council for the Laity.²⁷ There it says about the AMI:

“The aims of the AMI are:

(1.) to foster the Christian view of military life and its characteristic values;²⁸

²¹ GS 79

²² Apostolic Constitution *Spirituali Militum Curae*, 25

²³ GS 79; cf. also *Für Christus leisten wir Botschafterdienste*, Ansprachen und Predigten des Katholischen Militärbischofs für die Deutsche Bundeswehr, Erzbischof Dr. Elmar Maria Kredel 1978-1990, in: Dokumentation zur Katholischen Militärseelsorge, publ. by Kath. Militärbischofsamt, Bonn 1991, esp. 310-313.

²⁴ cf. CIC Cann. 298-311 (Chapter I: Common Norms) and Cann. 312-320 (Chapter II: Public Associations of the Christian Faithful), Cann. 321-326 (Chapter III: Private Associations of the Christian Faithful), Cann. 327-329 (Chapter IV: Special Norms for Associations of the Laity).

²⁵ cf. AA 19

²⁶ Hectographed text of the *Statutes of Apostolat Militaire International* (A.M.I.), Vienna 1985 (=AMI Statutes)

²⁷ Pontifical Council for the Laity, Repertori delle Associazioni Internazionali di fedeli, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 2004, 20ff.

²⁸ cf. Art. 2.a of the AMI Statutes

(2.) to favor the international understanding and cooperation as a contribution to the construction of world peace;²⁹

(3.) to discuss the spiritual, ethical, moral and social questions proper to military life in light of the Gospel and the teaching of the Church.³⁰

b. Correspondence to the Conciliar Demands

To (1.). The first goal corresponds to the central expectations of the Council for the Lay Apostolate.³¹ The layperson is called to fill his world – above all, his workplace³² – with the spirit of the Gospel, “inspiring the temporal order in a Christian way.”³³

To (2.). Similarly, the second goal matches the Council’s often-expressed desire for international cooperation for the building up of peace.³⁴ The efforts of the International Military Apostolate rest on a special relation of the Christian Faith and the world; it is an important element of the Church’s presence for the preservation or reconstruction of international peace.

Gaudium et Spes places special hopes on the International Catholic Organizations. I quote in detail the Conciliar “*Magna Charta*”: “An outstanding form of international activity on the part of Christians is found in the joint efforts which, both as

²⁹ cf. Art. 2.b of the AMI Statutes

³⁰ Repertorio, 20; cf. Art 2.m c of the AMI Statutes; cf. also the *Declaration of the AMI General Convention* (Rome, 15 November 2000), publ. by the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Katholischer Soldaten, *Der katholische Soldat am Beginn des 3. Jahrtausends. Selbstverständnis, Selbstdarstellung und Akzeptanz*, Landesverteidigungsakademie Wien 2000.

³¹ cf. LG 32; cf. AA 2, CL 9, 15, 17, 36, 40

³² cf. AA 14.

³³ cf. LG 31; cf. also AA 5, 13, 14, 30, and esp. 7: “God’s plan for the world is that men should work together to renew and constantly perfect the temporal order ... The whole Church must work vigorously in order that men may become capable of rectifying the distortion of the temporal order and directing it to God through Christ. ... The laity must take up the renewal of the temporal order as their own special obligation. Led by the light of the Gospel and the mind of the Church and motivated by Christian charity, they must act directly and in a definite way in the temporal sphere.”; cf. CL 55: “Thus the *lay* state of life has its distinctive feature in its secular character. It fulfills an ecclesial service in bearing witness and, in its own way recalling for priests, women and men religious, the significance of the earthly and temporal realities in the salvific plan of God.”

³⁴ cf. CL 6: “Finally, we are unable to overlook another phenomenon that is quite evident in present-day humanity: perhaps as never before in history, humanity is daily buffeted by *conflict*. This is a phenomenon which has many forms, displayed in a legitimate plurality of mentalities and initiatives, but manifested in the fatal opposition of persons, groups, categories, nations and blocks of nations. This opposition takes the form of violence, of terrorism, and of war. Once again, but with proportions enormously widespread, diverse sectors of humanity today, wishing to show their ‘omnipotence’, renew the futile experience of constructing the ‘Tower of Babel’ (cf. *Gen* 11:1-9), which spreads confusion, struggle, disintegration and oppression. The human family is thus in itself dramatically convulsed and wounded.

“On the other hand, totally unsuppressible is that human longing experienced by individuals and whole peoples for the inestimable good of *peace* in justice. The gospel beatitude: ‘Blessed are the peacemakers’ (*Mt* 5:9) finds in the people of our time a new and significant resonance: entire populations today live, suffer and labour to bring about peace and justice. The *participation* by so many persons and groups in the life of society is increasingly pursued today as the way to make a desired peace become a reality.

“On this road we meet many lay faithful generously committed to the social and political field, working in a variety of institutional forms and those of a voluntary nature in service to the least.”

individuals and in groups, they contribute to institutes already established or to be established for the encouragement of cooperation among nations. There are also various Catholic associations on an international level which can contribute in many ways to the building up of a peaceful and fraternal community of nations. These should be strengthened by augmenting in them the number of well qualified collaborators, by increasing needed resources, and by advantageously fortifying the coordination of their energies ... [S]uch associations contribute much to the development of a universal outlook ... [and] an awareness of genuine universal solidarity and responsibility.”³⁵

In light of the Council, the security of peace occupies an outstanding place in the general care for the world, to which the AMI has especially devoted itself to.

It is not the moment to expound on the ethics of peace as expressed in the Second Vatican Council.³⁶ Let us reduce ourselves to the resonance of the Conciliar ethics of peace in the Papal Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*. There it says, “[A]s disciples of Jesus Christ, ‘Prince of Peace’ (*Is* 9:5) and ‘Our Peace’ (*Eph* 2:14), the lay faithful ought to take upon themselves the task of being ‘peacemakers’ (*Mt* 5:9), both through a conversion of ‘heart’, justice and charity, all of which are the undeniable foundation of peace ... The lay faithful in working together with all those that truly seek peace and themselves serving in specific organizations as well as national and international institutions, ought to promote an extensive work of education intended to defeat the ruling culture of egoism, hate, vendetta and hostility, and thereby to develop the culture of solidarity at every level. Such solidarity, in fact, ‘is *the way to peace and at the same time to development*.’”³⁷

In these words, characteristics of a specific Christian concept and contribution to peace come to light: the national and worldwide “external” peace is the result of an “internal” peace; that is, the Church is a sign of the *necessary ethical conditions*, the foundations of a peace that reaches the inmost depths of the human person. In this perspective, the “culture of peace” is not faced with the “unculture of war”, but the “uncultured of hate, revenge and hostility.”³⁸

³⁵ GS 90; cf. also AA 14: “A vast field for the apostolate has opened up on the national and international levels where the laity especially assist with their Christian wisdom. In loyalty to their country and in faithful fulfillment of their civic obligations, Catholics should feel themselves obliged to promote the true common good. Thus they should make the weight of their opinion felt in order that the civil authority may act with justice and that legislation may conform to moral precepts and the common good ... Among the signs of our times, the irresistibly increasing sense of the solidarity of all peoples is especially noteworthy. It is a function of the lay apostolate sedulously to promote this awareness and to transform it into a sincere and genuine love of brotherhood.”

³⁶ cf. GS 77-90

³⁷ CL 42; *ibid.*: “The fruit of sound political activity, which is so much desired by everyone but always lacking in advancement, is *peace*. The lay faithful cannot remain indifferent or be strangers and inactive in the face of all that denies and compromises peace, namely, violence and war, torture and terrorism, concentration camps, militarization of public life, the arms race, and the nuclear threat.”; cf. also the pastoral letter of the German bishops „Gerechtigkeit schafft Frieden“ (1983), in: *Die Deutschen Bischöfe*, 34 and 48; also, the pastoral letter „Gerechter Friede“ (2000), in: *Die Deutschen Bischöfe*, 66.

³⁸ cf. CCC 2302-2304; CCC Compendium 480; cf. also *Compendio della dottrina sociale*, 517

Thus, true peace doesn't follow "mechanical" rules, but it requires a more profound *metanoia*. *Gaudium et Spes* speaks of an "renewed vigor"³⁹ or "reformed attitudes"⁴⁰. This perspective on peace contrasts the interpretations that view peace as the result of joint interests, which in turn can be determined by personal profit. This Christian view also opposes a political implementation of the idea of peace as a kind of "moral bludgeon".⁴¹ Finally, the Christian concept of peace is about more than just a "work of justice", since it is love that defines and bears peace.⁴²

Before this great step (peace as a work of love), another necessary step must proceed, which is recognizing the dignity of the others! An attentive reflection on all the widespread and constant conflicts of our day shows that they can be traced back to the negation or reduction of the human dignity of one's supposed "enemies".⁴³ This discrimination can be founded on sex, color, religion, ethnicity or other factors.⁴⁴

Here is the ultimate reason for war and terror, whose witnesses we are today: it is the contempt for the dignity of our fellow humans! It is an illusion to think that there could be lasting economic and social progress with the disregard for the equal dignity of all people. The same is true for peace. It is impossible to reach a lasting peace without respecting the equal dignity of all. Even in so-called "peace forums" an invisible line is drawn between tolerated and forbidden wars. Even here the Christian must take a stand and emphasize the fact that all people have an equal right to live in peace and that universal peace is a fruit of justice and love.

To (3.). The Magisterium underlines time and time again the continuous formation of the lay faithful.⁴⁵ This demand corresponds to the third goal of the AMI. *Christifideles Laici* dedicates the entire fifth chapter, "The Formation of the Lay Faithful in the Lay State", to the question of formation.⁴⁶

³⁹ cf. GS 77

⁴⁰ cf. GS 81

⁴¹ K.-J. Klein, *Katholische Soldaten im Dienst für Frieden, Freiheit, Sicherheit und Gerechtigkeit. Die nationale und internationale Gemeinschaft Katholischer Soldaten (GKS)*, in: „*Meinen Frieden gebe ich Euch*“. Aufgaben und Alltag der Katholischen Militärseelsorge. FS für den Kath. Militärbischof für die Deutsche Bundeswehr, Erzbischof Dr. Johannes Dyba, Bischof von Fulda, publ. by Jürgen Nabbefeld, Bonn 1999, 353.

⁴² GS 78: "Hence peace is likewise the fruit of love, which goes beyond what justice can provide." cf. CCC 1829, 2304.

⁴³ cf. CL 37, 83

⁴⁴ cf. CL 53.

⁴⁵ cf. AA 28: "The apostolate can attain its maximum effectiveness only through a diversified and thorough formation. This is demanded not only by the continuous spiritual and doctrinal progress of the lay person himself but also by the accommodation of his activity to circumstances varying according to the affairs, persons, and duties involved." Similarly AA 29 requires: "Well-informed about the modern world, the lay person should be a member of his own community and adjusted to its culture ... This formation should be deemed the basis and condition for every successful apostolate ... In this way the lay person engages himself wholly and actively in the reality of the temporal order and effectively assumes his role in conducting the affairs of this order. At the same time, as a living member and witness of the Church, he renders the Church present and active in the midst of temporal affairs."

⁴⁶ cf. CL 57-63

In this context, I would like to indicate an important aid to formation and further education. In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* we have a valid reference point for our personal reflection and work of formation, as well as for our public opinions.⁴⁷ In this handbook we do not simply find one more voice among many, but an official, integral presentation of the obligatory doctrine of the Catholic Church. Only well-formed and well-trained Christians can resist the strong social headwinds and stand up to the “question and answer sessions” of inquisitive people.⁴⁸ In addition, the *Catechism* and its recently-published *Compendium*⁴⁹ grant us the possibility, on a global scale, to speak in unison about the important questions, which also gives clarity and conviction to the contribution of Catholic Christians.

On the background of the goals set by the AMI, “*Compendio della Dottrina Sociale della Chiesa*,” which came out a year ago, deserves mention as a second important resource.⁵⁰

In a first evaluation we can affirm that the AMI corresponds to central expectations in the three goals, which the Church herself has proposed and accepted and which the Second Vatican Council and the further documents of the Magisterium have directed to international associations of lay apostolate. The present hour demands that we deepen in the Christian role or the concept of human dignity and of total peace, and that we bring its full richness onto the public stage.

III. A Look at the Sociopolitical Changes

After this brief presentation of the legal and theological state of the lay apostolate among the members of the military, I would like to take a look at the past years of political (and economic) changes, which have influenced the socio-political involvement of Catholic laypeople. I will name the following factors, which partially overlap and will be listed separately only for methodological reasons:

- a. National political developments:
 1. Ongoing de-Christianization of social conditions in penal and family law (abortion, euthanasia, homosexuality, divorce laws) as well as in biotechnology and bioethics (stem cell research, cloning etc.)⁵¹
 2. The evermore diffused objection that the Church demands that the state adopt Her system of values in laws and administrative measures
 3. Continual secularization in almost every aspect of life⁵²

⁴⁷ cf. CCC 1700; cf. also CCC 1700-1715, 357, 1930; cf. CL 5 and 37.

⁴⁸ cf. 1 Peter 3:15

⁴⁹ *Compendio del Catechismo della Chiesa Cattolica*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 2005

⁵⁰ Pontifical Council for Peace and Justice (publ.), *Compendio della dottrina sociale della Chiesa*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 2004.

⁵¹ cf. CL 38.

4. Ongoing disintegration of classic family structures, spreading of new forms of living together (“temporary marriages”, same-sex unions, separated couples)
 5. The decline in family size
 6. High average age of Western societies
 7. Crisis of social systems (unemployment, disease, and care for the elderly)
 8. Crisis of the welfare state (consumerism, industry of leisure)
- b. International political developments:
1. Increasing competition in distribution and innovation (“world market”, “globalization”)
 2. Ceasing of the East-West conflict, ending of the Warsaw Pact
 3. Emergence of regional and tribal conflicts
 4. Swelling of North-South disparity (increase in the gap between rich and poor nations, problematic of blame)
 5. Increase of worldwide tourism
 6. Expanding emigration and immigration movements (refugees, North-South, South-North)
 7. Rise of terrorism and xenophobia
 8. Mounting tensions of ethnic and religious nature (Islam, Buddhism)
 9. Growing importance of the mass media (agencies, television, radio, press, Internet)

IV. Consequences and Expectations

Let it be said beforehand that there should be no Christian inferiority complex in the light of these challenges and their consequent struggle of ideas! We should work for a distinct Christian profile and bring it onto the national and international stage with *humility*, but also with *courage*.

a. Commitment in Public Life

In the previous decades the Magisterium has drawn up a clear position on all levels and in many sociopolitical questions. Thus, our most important contribution today consists in a *deepening in and assimilating its foundations* and *presenting its anthropological contexts*. Only then can strengthened public involvement in the fundamental ethical conditions of the Faith follow. With reference to *Christifideles Laici*, the following areas come to mind:

- Study of the foundations (“human dignity”) (CL 38)
- Action for the unrestricted right to life (CL 38) and to freedom of conscience and religion (CL 39)

⁵² cf. CL 4 and 34.

- Involvement for solidarity and charity (CL 41), justice and the common good (CL 42)
- Effort for the attitude of service (CL 42)

First, one must say that the obstacles that Christian involvement in our time are not small. In a time of ethical pluralism, the main objection to the adoption of the Church's positions is that it is not the obligation of the state to take "special" hierarchies of values into consideration by implementing them. This reproach of a non-negotiable or non-applicable Christian *ethos* presents one of the central challenges for modern-day Christians.⁵³ *Christifideles Laici* encourages us to participate actively in political events: "In order to achieve their task directed to the Christian animation of the temporal order, in the sense of serving persons and society, the lay faithful *are never to relinquish their participation in "public life."*"⁵⁴

The social teaching of the Church serves as the foundation of this participation, and the doctrine of natural law, among other teachings, justifies its argumentative basis.⁵⁵ In this context, I would like to refer to the "Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life" of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.⁵⁶

The central idea of this note is that it is not about "confessional values"⁵⁷ or opinions, but that "such ethical precepts are rooted in human nature itself and belong to the natural moral law."⁵⁸

In his Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* Pope John Paul II lists these aspects among the special challenges of the new millennium.⁵⁹ This means that the challenge of the Christian in a time of ethical pluralism⁶⁰ is to point out that there are reasonable and universally valid ethical standards, which acquire their legitimacy by natural law and thus are not at the mercy of political authority.

⁵³ cf. GS 75; AA 14; cf. also CL 42-44, 60

⁵⁴ cf. CL 42

⁵⁵ cf. CL 60

⁵⁶ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life", 24 November 2002 (=DN)

⁵⁷ cf. DN Nr. 5: "This is not a question of 'confessional values' per se, because such ethical precepts are rooted in human nature itself and belong to the natural moral law."

⁵⁸ *ibid.*; cf. also DN 2: "The history of the twentieth century demonstrates that those citizens were right who recognized the falsehood of relativism, and with it, the notion that there is no moral law rooted in the nature of the human person, which must govern our understanding of man, the common good and the state." cf. also CCC 1954-1960.

⁵⁹ Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to the Bishops, Clergy and Lay Faithful at the Close of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, 6 January 2001 (=NMI)

⁶⁰ cf. DN 2: "A kind of cultural relativism exists today, evident in the conceptualization and defence of an ethical pluralism, which sanctions the decadence and disintegration of reason and the principles of the natural moral law. Furthermore, it is not unusual to hear the opinion expressed in the public sphere that such ethical pluralism is the very condition for democracy."

Therefore, we do not represent any “Catholic *ethos*”, but we defend the existence of a comprehensible and acceptable basis for believers and non-believers alike.⁶¹ On this point, the *Catechism* states: “The natural law expresses the original moral sense which enables man to discern by reason the good and the evil, the truth and the lie⁶² ... The ‘divine and natural’ law shows man the way to follow so as to practice the good and attain his end. the natural law states the first and essential precepts which govern the moral life⁶³ ... The natural law, present in the heart of each man and established by reason, is *universal* in its precepts and its authority extends to all men. It expresses the dignity of the person and determines the basis for his fundamental rights and duties.”⁶⁴ It is not about any counter-opinion of the Church or interference in state competencies, but about the universally-valid demands of the human being!

To the possibility of the natural law, we can make two contradictory observations in our days: on one hand, its existence or discernibility is doubted (“suspicion of ideology”); on the other, it is always (implicitly) called upon when the great catastrophes of the past century (the crimes of Nazism and communism) are evoked. The question is asked again and again: “Where was the ‘natural’ resistance of the intellects behind the scenes, where was the ‘internal measure’ of humanity in policemen, judges, doctors or other helpers?” And this “internal measure”, which spontaneously bursts open in the face of obvious injustice in the conscience of every person, is nothing other than expressions of the natural law!

It seems to me that, in the light of the horrible experiences of inhumanity, the disposition to accept a natural law and, even more, to affirm its necessity, has grown. The abuses in the name of (positive) law, or at least tolerated by it, were so great that one might doubt the necessity of a natural law that transcends human law and time. This transformed situation of awareness opens new opportunities to build a bridge to the claims of a Christian *ethos*.

Another problem is found in the tendency to force ethical questions from public to private life and to label them “one’s own business.” That is an especially disastrous development. The consequences of living out an *ethos* or not, affects all aspects of life; and what is more, our *ethos* is the ultimate and decisive factor in many areas of our life. The all-important *ethos* cannot be the result of a democratic mindset, since fundamental values and principles precede government.

⁶¹ NMI 51: “For Christian witness to be effective, especially in these delicate and controversial areas, it is important that special efforts be made to explain properly the reasons for the Church’s position, stressing that it is not a case of imposing on non-believers a vision based on faith, but of interpreting and defending the values rooted in the very nature of the human person.”

⁶² CCC 1954

⁶³ CCC 1955

⁶⁴ CCC 1956

Here a courageous word by the laity in the public forum is in order, and this word is interpreted by *Christifideles Laici* as the participation in the prophetic role of Christ.⁶⁵ Along with the priorities mentioned before, I would finally like to direct your attention to the final essential one, “*Plus Christianum.*”

b. The Personal Testimony of Christians (the “*Plus*” *Christianum*)

One’s real conviction takes on the Christian vision of man in one’s application to concrete action.⁶⁶ The documents on the lay apostolate stated before repeatedly stress the necessity to harmonize doctrine and life.⁶⁷ The necessity of “coherence”, “living union”⁶⁸, and “vital synthesis”⁶⁹ are emphasized.⁷⁰ “Christian, live what you are!” This command applies to all the baptized, for laypeople and ordained ministers, and in all walks of life.

The teaching about the dignity of man is proven by our dealings with the others. It is a dynamic doctrine that must be lived, exercised and converted into action. Church history shows us the manifold ways that the Christian view of man, with all its implications and imperatives, can be translated into concrete acts. Let us think about the many saints of charity, who recognized the special need of their time and, in the spirit of the Gospel, found a solution (formation, schools, care, for the sick). Let us think about the many silent and unknown saints of every day. One of the great historical breakthroughs of Christendom came in the form of assistance to the sick and elderly.⁷¹ This is a clear example of what the Christian view of man brings about.⁷² “Action” preceded “right”! One fact is common to all these accomplishments: I see the very same human dignity, given also to me, in the face of every person.

⁶⁵ cf. CL 14; cf. CIC Cann. 905

⁶⁶ cf. CL 34: “This [testimony] will be possible if the lay faithful will know how to overcome in themselves the separation of the Gospel from life, to again take up in their daily activities in family, work and society, an integrated approach to life that is fully brought about by the inspiration and strength of the Gospel.”

⁶⁷ cf. CL 2: “In reality, the challenge embraced by the Synod Fathers has been that of indicating the concrete ways through which this rich ‘theory’ on the lay state expressed by the Council can be translated into authentic Church ‘practice’.” cf. also DN 9: “The principles contained in the present *Note* are intended to shed light on one of the most important aspects of the unity of Christian life: coherence between faith and life, Gospel and culture, as recalled by the Second Vatican Council.”

⁶⁸ cf. AA 4

⁶⁹ cf. CL 34

⁷⁰ cf. AA 13 “The laity fulfill this mission of the Church in the world especially by conforming their lives to their faith so that they become the light of the world...”; cf. also AA 16 and 19; cf. CL 59: “There cannot be two parallel lives in their [laypeople’s] existence: on the one hand, the so-called ‘spiritual’ life, with its values and demands; and on the other, the so-called ‘secular’ life, that is, life in a family, at work, in social relationships, in the responsibilities of public life and in culture.” cf. CL 59: “In discovering and living their proper vocation and mission, the lay faithful must be formed according to the *union* which exists from their being *members of the Church and citizens of human society.*” cf. also CL 60 and 62.

⁷¹ cf. CL 41: “*Charity towards one’s neighbor*, through contemporary forms of the traditional spiritual and corporal works of mercy, represent the most immediate, ordinary and habitual ways that lead to the Christian animation of the temporal order, the specific duty of the lay faithful.”; cf. also CL 48

⁷² cf. CCC 1506, 1509

Many parents today would still like to send their children to Catholic school, and many sick and elderly would like to find room in a Catholic institution. In these Catholic schools, hospitals and homes reign a spirit of “more”, a Catholic “plus”, “more” humanity, “more” care and attention. Thus these don’t have to be the most up-to-date institutions, but they are institutions with “more” compassion, “more” kindness. This “more” is the translation of the Christian view of man into concrete actions.

This Christian “plus” lives primarily off its motivation; the Christian wants to be there for the others out of love for Christ.⁷³ This being there for the others is his life work! Pope John Paul II says in *Ecclesia in Europa*, “The challenge for the Church in Europe today consists, therefore, in helping contemporary man to experience the love of God the Father and of Christ in the Holy Spirit, through the *witness of charity, which possesses an intrinsic power of evangelization.*”⁷⁴

This “more” is further concretized in “more” vigilance for overlooked people and the forgotten areas of our society, “more” courage and decisiveness.⁷⁵ No one of any race or religion is excepted from Christian welfare.⁷⁶ This openness is very important, given the worldwide deployment of peacekeeping forces, since state or non-Christian aid often depends on foreign policy or economic gain, or is reduced to serving their own tribe, nation or creed. Here also a quick glance at the world stage, in the Near and Far East, in northern and central Africa, is sufficient to recognize the Christian Proprium, the Christian “plus”!

Reliability and perseverance is also proper to the Christian mission. In the history of the Church we find an endless chain of faithful who have exhausted their entire life for the others. It is not about spontaneous actions or “ad hoc” initiatives, but lifelong “projects”. The Christian mission continues persistently, even when it experiences headwind, when it is no longer supported by mainstream society. This service for one’s neighbor takes place, above all, in secret, where no recognition is ever given or any spotlight of public opinion ever shines.

It is also fitting here to think about the honorable involvement of many laypeople who left their mark on many Church institutions and gave life to them.⁷⁷ Many great works came about by the initiative of a particular lay Christian, who spoke out, “We cannot overlook the needs of others! We want and must do something for this brother or sister in the name of Jesus!”

⁷³ cf. AA 8; cf. CL 41

⁷⁴ EE 84

⁷⁵ cf. CL 53ff

⁷⁶ cf. AA 14

⁷⁷ cf. CL 41

Furthermore, the Christian “plus” contains a prophetic dimension in the areas of marriage and the family. The faithful Christian knows about the responsibility he accepted in the Sacrament of Marriage. He knows that marriage and the family are not “playgrounds” that I use today for “fun” and leave tomorrow when the “fun” ends. The Christian knows about the dignity of his spouse, with whom he has formed a mutual alliance; he knows about the meaning of fidelity and dependence. He gratefully recalls the gifts that he himself has received by fidelity and dependence. He knows about the tiniest cell in human society. The Christian remembers the history of faith, which can move mountains and already has: it creates hope, strength and courage from the acceptance of divine assistance and from the good examples of the past. Some think that the terrain of marriage and family is a “lost land” that must be abandoned sooner or later. He who believes in Christ doesn’t think that way. Statistics are not the laws of nature for him! He never gives up, especially in a field that is settled and blessed by the Lord himself.

Judging from the goals of the AMI, these questions might seem rather out of place. It must be pointed out that the dignity of other people is the midpoint here as well, and that the layperson must show himself to be a believing Christian. The testimony of the Christian yearns for unity and allows no faith-free or testimony-free zones.

c. I would like to conclude these reflections with some answers to the question posed in the topic. What does the Holy See (the Council for the Laity and the State Secretariat) want concretely from the AMI?

1. Fidelity to the Conciliar idea of the soldier as “servants of the security and freedom of the nations...for the strengthening of peace.”
2. Intensifying of the fundamental goals in the Statutes of the AMI, the training and further education with special observance of the Conciliar and post-Conciliar documents.
3. More profound study of the anthropological foundations of Church teaching on peace, justice and fraternity between peoples.
4. Development of guidelines for application to concrete situations, such as justified self-defense and the use of force, according to the principles of Catholic social doctrine.
5. Cooperation with other International Catholic Organizations for testifying to Christian values and Church teaching in International Organizations (UNO, Europarat, UNESCO, BIT, etc.).
6. Regular contact and cooperation with the responsible organs of the Holy See (Secretariat of State, PCPL, PCGP) in the topics named. Participation in the

events of the Pontifical Council for the Laity for mutual exchange and for further study.

7. Competent participation in the works of international government organisms, in which concrete programs (disarmament, no-trade agreements of atomic weapons and resolution of conflicts) are developed.

Summa summarum: all of us stand before great challenges! There is much to do in our time! Let us build on a Christian culture of life with joy and hope every day, in marriage and the family, in our occupation, in the public life of our country and in the international realm! We stand on the sturdy foundation of our faith, which cannot be outdone! Let us be the first to bear witness to the reality and the viability of “*Humanitas Christiana*” in the path given us in military life in our homeland and in the entire world.

Dr. theol. Josef Clemens,
Titular Bishop of Segermes,
Secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Laity

Vatican City, 26 September 2005