

**Jürgen Bringmann**

## **What was, what is AMI - History and Future**

### **I. AMI - Mission and Objectives, Activities within 40 years**

It was in 1965 when Catholic soldiers from many countries came together in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, to found the Apostolat Militaire International (AMI). The main reason was to confront the so called extremely pacifistic Peace Movements - not only in the Catholic Church – with our vision of the soldier being a servant for Justice and Peace (soldier here meaning military personell of all ranks and sexes). The AMI became and still is an international Catholic association which is meant and willing to serve nationally and internationally as a mouthpiece and an instrument to translate into actions the views of Catholic soldiers in the Church, in the armed forces and in the public.

The AMI unites more than 40 organisations and representatives - from European, North and South American, African and Asian countries where a Catholic chaplains' service exists, being either members or associated members or friends. As an International Catholic Organisation (ICO), the AMI is a member of the Conference of ICOs which is currently comprised of about 40 of such International Catholic Organisations (for example Catholic doctors, teachers, women and men, youth, farmers, pharmacists, nurses, press and other media, universities - almost all professions and ages) thus representing more than 150 million organised Catholics worldwide.

So AMI this year is celebrating its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary since for 40 years the Apostolat Militaire International (AMI) has performed its self-chosen tasks in the Church, in the armed forces of the different countries and in the public, which are

- to clarify and explain the moral standards and values of Christian soldiers and represent them at national and international level,
- to promote international understanding and cooperation - as a contribution to peace throughout the world,
- to jointly work on the spiritual, moral and social problems in the military in the light of the Gospel and the teachings of the Church and to reach, if even possible, commonly accepted and represented solutions.

As time went by, the importance of the AMI did not shrink but grew since its foundation, especially since 1989 with the end of a world stamped by bi-polarity. Developments are becoming more and more uncontrollable, terrorism and wars within countries have become of predominant influence. At a time when peace, freedom, justice, human dignity and the rights of the peoples are often called in question, threatened and attacked, it is important that Catholic soldiers

- reflect upon their service and shape it in line with their Christian faith,
- support military service in the Church and in the public as a service for true peace.

In the armed forces of their countries, the members and member countries of the AMI strive to create an ethic and atmosphere which correspond to the Christian conception of the world and of mankind.

Out of their twofold commitment as members of the military and Christians, Catholic soldiers, especially those serving as superiors, shall make efforts to ensure that

- the interior structures of the armed forces reflect the Christian concept of human dignity,
- the practice of religion is respected and supported also in the armed forces - normally in the framework of the military chaplaincy,
- the military members become aware of the high ethical standards which, on the one hand, justify their service as a service for the community but, on the other, limit the application of military power.

Since 1965, the work of the AMI and its annual General Assemblies have been serving these objectives - not only to the benefit of its members and the friendly countries but also in the interest of the armed forces and the chaplaincy service of all nations. In this year 2005 we should really become aware that this means 40 years of engaged and honorary work of lay people within the armed forces. Despite their very different national and geographical backgrounds, Catholic soldiers and chaplains' service frequently reach a broad consensus on the tasks and frame of mind of the armed forces but also on practicing the Christian faith in the armed forces.

The results of our conferences and work, which are made available to all countries with a chaplains' service, and the public declarations formulated at these conferences on important issues with respect to the service and personal life of Catholic soldiers speak for themselves.

The focus of future AMI activities shall and must be on the following issues, some of which we already addressed in the past:

- the peace-keeping and peace-making mission of the armed forces and the moral justification of the military service;
- the new tasks of the armed forces in support of international solidarity, the fight against terrorism, defence of ones own country also outside its borders, humanitarian aid and disaster relief;
- the inner situation, the climate within the armed forces;
- the (international) cooperation with allies;
- carrying out the teachings of the Church regarding peace in a radically changed political and social environment.

Apostolat Militaire International - that is lay work of Catholic soldiers. The necessity and importance of lay work of Christians in the armed forces cannot be over-emphasized. The Church is made up of both the official church and the laymen. They belong to and complement each other. Laymen perform the secular service of the Church. In associations and councils, which are the pillars of organised lay work, laymen act independently and in joint responsibility within the Church, for the Church and as members of the Church.

The AMI will continue to help set up organisations of Catholics within the military in the countries where there exists a chaplains' service. The Church will only have a future and continue to exist in the world if both laymen and the official church work hand in hand for this future: in different functions, in their respective areas, and in different ways but as a single Church with common objectives and with one Lord. This also applies to the lay Apostolate in our armed forces and the chaplains' service.

The main conference theme of the General Assembly in Rome in autumn of the Holy Year 2000 was "The Catholic Soldier at the beginning of the third Millennium". The document which was unanimously accepted at the end of that Conference explains and underlines all the problems, changes, and chances mentioned before. From there we have to derive our orientation and aims for the future. Some aspects of this document which will be valid for the work of Catholic soldiers for the years to come will be addressed in the second part of my intervention.

Much has been done - on a small and on a large scale. However, much remains to be done. The AMI has to continue its activities in our armed forces, in our Church and in our society. I encourage you and all of us to do so.

This concludes my preliminary remarks. Thanks to all who have conducted this international lay work, who are executing it right now and will do so in the future. Thanks to all who nationally and internationally have supported and still support AMI: the AMI Countries with their Military

Chaplaincies, the Pontifical Council for the Laity (PCL), the Secretariat of State of the Holy See, the Conference of International Catholic Organisations (CICO) and many others.

Recognize, assess, accept, decide, and act – that is what we are expected to do as Catholic soldiers, based on our Christian faith. That is why we need the Apostolat Militaire International (AMI) also for this third Millennium after Christ's birth - it has just begun and we need to begin again every day. Please remain faithful to our association and objectives and help to disseminate our ideas and find new friends and members for the AMI wherever the opportunity arises.

## **II. The Catholic Soldier at the Beginning of the Third Millennium**

### **I. Peace on Earth to all people - Why do we serve?**

#### **1. "Peace on Earth to all people in whom God delights!" (Luke 2:14)**

This wish from the Gospel was the message which His Holiness Pope John Paul II, sent to mark the celebration of the World Peace Day on 1 January 2000. An old, yet enduring appeal from amidst Christianity.

The realisation of this wish will be possible to the extent in which humanity succeeds in providing our interconnected present world, shaped as it is by the dynamics of globalisation, with soul, meaning and direction towards this goal. What must be communicated is the original vocation of humanity to a status in which the dignity and rights of an individual are of prime value, regardless of rank, race and religion, and in which all people are viewed as a single family.

Catholic soldiers, as well as many others, stand for this goal:

- by serving the security and the freedom of their own people and of the community of nations,
  - by opposing violence,
  - by assisting others in solidarity in every form of emergency and danger,
- thus making a substantial contribution to peace in the world.

The guiding principle of this vocation, which also has an undeniable reference to the Sermon on the Mount, can be found in the Pastoral Constitution of Vatican II *Gaudium et Spes* (GS), 1965, No. 79, where it says:

"He who serves his country as a soldier is to consider himself as a servant of the security and freedom of the peoples. In performing his task properly, he really contributes to consolidating the peace".

The nature of military service is also emphasised in the following statement by Pope John Paul II, issued on the occasion of the Holy Year 1984: "Your profession makes you servants and co-responsible for the highest human good (...) Learn from the Cross of Christ and his dedication, how to truly serve humanity and your people!" (08 April 1984).

#### **2. Most people still feel very uncertain as far as the topic of the ethical dimension of the image of a soldier is concerned. We as believing soldiers find the fundamental guidance for our ethical conduct in the doctrine of Christ and the Church:**

It is the commandment to love God and our neighbour, which obliges us to respect and protect human beings in their dignity and their rights. It is also the duty of soldiers to realise this commandment in all its dimensions.

Nobody lives alone for himself. In an age of globalisation, this also applies to peoples, countries and continents.

This means that the area of responsibility of each community and policy, and therefore also of its citizens and soldiers, has been decisively expanded. Transnational and even international responsibility has grown to an unparalleled degree. The task of securing the common welfare therefore no longer ends at borders, but rather calls for solidarity in thought and deed in larger, worldwide contexts.

#### **3. The armed forces are a country's instrument of power, symbol of sovereignty and tool of politics. The question was and is always one of whether and when the use of the army – that is, the application of force – is allowed. The answer to this question from a religious-ethical perspective**

stems from the tradition of a Just War - *bellum iustum* -, developed over many centuries through to the present day. This tradition continues to evolve in order to keep pace with the changing global context as well as with the changing nature of warfare, although its fundamental principles remain true.

4. The dangers, hazards, perils and risks for humanity in the third millennium have become more diverse. The classical war between nations is becoming ever less likely in the light of growing mutual interdependencies resulting out of the process of globalisation.

On the other hand, other threats like internal processes of decay and radical nationalisms have gained in significance. Their origins lie in the affluence gap, i.e. in the exponentially growing discrepancy between population growth and resource allocation, and in technological leaps.

Thus it was that at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century an increase in conflicts of low intensity could be detected, triggered by weak or even non-existent state authorities and by irreconcilable internal societal opposites, such as ethnic, religious or social tensions.

Such conflicts generally involve grave violations of human dignity and human rights.

The greatest threat in such conflicts lies in the danger of escalation. The risk of conflict escalation can be identified in numerous historical examples. This is why these conflicts must be checked or pacified as quickly as possible, so that either their rapid spread or the development of larger military conflicts can be prevented.

Due to technological progress and the range of modern weapons, geographical separation is no guarantee of isolation from the effects of distant conflicts. The amassing of combat arms and arms of mass destruction can be identified throughout the world. The ways in which a cyber war can disable military and civilian information, control and supply systems are becoming more extensive. The danger of terrorist threat, from the use of weapons of mass destruction through to poisoning water, and organised crime supplies, has increased and continues to become ever stronger. This means, however, that the responsibilities of the armed forces extend beyond that of classical national defence.

5. Responsibilities for the community of nations are becoming a decisive element in the future profile of the soldier. Cooperation and solidarity measures to secure peace and political or social stability in an extended international security-policy context, move ever more into the limelight.

This does not rule out the use of military force, which is meaningful and justifiable when it is embedded in a political, overall strategic concept for maintaining or re-establishing peace and human rights. In this field, military action extending beyond direct defence against current military aggression is only ethically justifiable, if it, in its capacity as the *last resort (ultima ratio)*, serves to bring about comprehensive and lasting peaceful arrangements.

6. However, the responsibility for promoting peace and securing stability on the international stage call for a capacity for cooperation eg. between soldiers from various nations and cultures as well as with police forces and civil institutions, active in re-construction in crisis regions.

Depending on the functional or responsibility fields, this demands knowledge of and sensitivity for the ethnic, cultural, social, environmental and religious conditions prevailing in a possible theatre.

7. The central solution approach for politics is represented by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights issued by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, and similarly in the Charter of the United Nations of 1945 and the Geneva Conventions.

Also the church, especially in the last decades, has referred repeatedly to human dignity and human rights and underlined their universal validity for all human beings and all cultures as an indispensable prerequisite for justice and peace. Here, we are very concretely called to act in our life, in our state, in the world. For, the origin of this respect is the love of every human person, to which each of us is obliged.

The Charter of the United Nations after all contains only two cases for the legitimate use of military

force between nations:

- measures legitimised by the Security Council under Chapter VII, Art. 39 and 42, and
- use of force as self-defence, individually or collectively justified (Art. 51), with some restrictions.

## II. The Soldier as a Servant of Peace - What do we stand for?

8. When we speak about "soldiers", we address the soldier serving a legitimate political authority in a democratic and free state within the bounds set by the national and international legal order. Also the Church in its tradition of teaching has issued morally-binding rules for maintaining or securing peace.

The Pastoral Constitution of Vatican II *Gaudium et Spes* addresses the topics of justice for all, the right of defence, restrictions in the use of force and endeavours to promote peace.

The doctrine of peace by the Church has continued to develop since *Gaudium et Spes*. In his message on World Peace Day 2000, Pope John Paul II makes particular mention of the new developments in the field of security policy: "In view of the ever more dramatic and complex situations, the outstanding value of human rights and therefore the duty to guarantee suffering populations and refugees the right to humanitarian aid, must be reinforced against all conjectured 'grounds' for war. ... If the civilian population is in danger of succumbing to the blows of an unjustified aggressor, and the endeavours of politics and the instruments of non-violent defence remained fruitless, it is obviously legitimate and even imperative to commit oneself with concrete initiatives aimed at disarming the aggressor."

The Holy Father ties these words with clear conditions which either exist or have to be met, and states: "The moral and political legitimacy of these rights ... is based on the principle according to which the well-being of a human person has priority above all and is prominent over any human institution." These words are a particular help for the Catholic soldier and for meeting his military mission at the beginning of the 3rd millennium.

9. Force and the threat of force have always been part of human existence, just as the necessity to protect oneself, one's goods and resources, and not least one's religion, against the threat of force. The individual's duty to take part in the defence of the community has always included the duties of a guard or soldier.

After what has been experienced, especially in the 20th century, there is now a growing consensus within the international community of nations on intervening in favour of countries or ethnic groups which are threatened. This development has taken place particularly within the framework of the United Nations Organization.

The United Nations Charter and the universal human rights, declared by this international forum, constitute an essential political and legal justification for the eventual perhaps necessary use of arms, when performed under a UN mandate, as has also been adjudged to be permissible in the peace doctrine of the Catholic Church.

On this basis, the range of responsibilities has constantly expanded since the first assignment of soldiers in response to a United Nations mandate in 1948 (UNTSO). While at first they had, above all, the function of expert observers, the separation of conflicting parties, and verification duties, the responsibilities expanded in the framework of Peace Support Operations to include practically all forms of military action. This development of the mission of a soldier from national defence to that of a "*miles protector*" in international solidarity requires that the soldier faces and answers new ethical challenges.

10. In his moral integrity, a human being is endangered in many ways, today as always. The increasing extent of international linkages, the endeavours to achieve a balance of international interests within international forums, on the one hand, are contrasted by enormous economic, cultural and religious differences between regions and countries. On the other hand, the issues of lack of resources, migration, urgent problems faced by endangered minorities, and critical developments within some countries and regions, will lead to outbreaks of violence time and again. Even the legitimate use of force, but above all the use of force to prevent such dangers, always finds itself in a complex area of concerns made up of theological, ethical, legal and humanitarian

considerations. This calls on soldiers to have a particularly high sense of responsibility. Along with these ethical demands, it must always be taken into consideration that it is the mission which first confronts the soldier with many factors which hardly play a role in everyday life under conditions of peace. Decisions which soldiers, especially superiors, have to make on assignments would remain largely theoretical in peacetime and therefore without any real or possibly serious consequences. Exercises and simulations prepare the soldier in his specialist field for the higher mental and physical demands during missions. But there is also a way of preparing the individual for the application of ethical norms in emergencies under mission conditions: arranging daily life on and off duty in accordance with one's sense of responsibility and one's conscience; the conscience remains the final authority for personal decisions. However, in order to build a conscience, the individual needs both a valid system of values as well as sufficient expert knowledge. The major ethical traditions provide a starting point for this, such as the Golden Rule from the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 7:12): "Do unto others as you would have done unto yourself". In performing his mission, he should endeavour to acquire those fundamental characteristics aiming to help him in his decisions and actions, thus made comprehensible to others, and protecting him against serious mistakes.

These characteristics, called, according to the moral tradition, cardinal virtues are:

- Prudence, which helps him distinguish between good and evil in concrete situations,
- Justice, which helps him respect the dignity, rights and legitimate interests of others,
  
- Strength, being the power to stand firmly by value orders and decisions, but also to be able to correct mistakes made earlier,
- Moderation, meaning the ability to recognise and consider the strengths and weaknesses, the capacity of himself and others.

### III. On the path to peace - What do we expect?

11. Conscious of his responsibility before God, the Catholic soldier serves his country, his fellow citizens and the system of values he shares with them. He is, however, also duty-bound to fulfil his responsibilities which arise from alliance obligations, or international solidarity towards people whose human dignity and human rights have been violated.

If necessary, he fulfils his responsibilities at the risk of his own life. In the knowledge of his mission and of the effect of modern weapon systems, he respects his enemy's dignity and human rights and seeks to avoid collateral injuries and damage amongst the civilian population.

He obeys legal orders issued in accordance with the laws of his country, international legal standards, international agreements and also acts in accordance with his conscience. Indeed, he should be prepared, if necessary, to challenge unjust orders if his conscience so dictates and be prepared to take the consequences.

The soldier acts honourably and correctly, loyally and with discipline, openly and courageously. This applies in particular when he is on a mission or assignment, be it as a member of a national or multinational unit. He respects others and also their religion, culture and system of values. He acts cautiously where his mission or his function demands a neutral position towards political or ideological questions or towards other religions.

Particularly on international assignments, the soldier is aware that he is seen as a representative of his armed forces, of his home country, and also as a representative of the international or multinational organisation responsible in the area. This is why he avoids acting in a way which may discredit himself or his unit and cast doubt, in the eyes of the civilian population, on the credibility of the operation.

The following maxims should shape the self-perception of the Catholic soldier today. They apply to all soldiers, in particular to superiors at all levels in their function as leaders, trainers and educators.

- Deeply rooted in faith:

We strive to live our faith in Jesus Christ, to profess our membership to His Church and contribute to being the Church amongst soldiers.

- Morally engaged:

In our duty, we also orient ourselves to the Christian ideals in the knowledge that we are bound by moral standards as developed by Catholic social teaching and the Church's doctrine of peace.

- Politically educated:

We stand up for our democratic state order, are politically interested and take part in social life as self-confident Christians.

- Professionally skilled:

We acquire the theoretical knowledge, practical skills and the appropriate behaviour required for our military profession in order to be convincing in the performance of our daily duties.

- Serving conscientiously:

We stand by our promise to serve our country loyally, and fulfil our duties conscientiously and to the best of our ability. We are aware of the responsibility we have accepted with our mission.

- Committed to peace:

We have placed ourselves in the service of peace. We safeguard the previously achieved quality of peace and support its formation and development in the national and international field. We are particularly committed to protecting human dignity and human rights.

- Striving for cooperation: We cooperate with social and political forces, whose aim is to contribute to creating an order of peace in line with our system of values, also beyond national borders.

- Open to the ecumenical movement:

We stand by the ecumenical ideas and strive for a spirit of unity in order to overcome what separates the denominations and to find new dimensions of common ground.

Over and above this, we respect other religions and strive to enter into dialogue and cooperation with them. We expect that our religious convictions be respected by other religions and moral convictions the same way as we respect theirs.

12. In our capacity as soldiers, we are prepared to serve peace in accordance with these tenets. However, this calls for the political, legal and ethical framework conditions to be in place. The task of maintaining or creating these is the common task of those responsible in politics, the military, society and the Church:

- Pursuing and developing an active policy of justice, peace and integrity of creation, as well as a policy of effective crisis prevention, in order to promote the quality of life,
- Striving to develop international law in respect of the conditions and circumstances of humanitarian intervention,
- Observing ethical standards in all decisions on military operations which – in respect of their targets or the means deployed – must neither violate human dignity nor human rights, giving also high priority to a study of ethical implications and consequences of the development and use of non-lethal weapons, in order to give them the same judicial status as the so-called NBC-weapons since the past century,
- Guaranteeing religious freedom in the armed forces,
- Safeguarding the free exercise of religion and assistance in conscience-building in all issues pertaining to military service by means of pastoral care, wherever soldiers perform their

duties,

- Supporting international arrangements on cooperation between military chaplains from various nations,
- Providing special pastoral care at home for family members of soldiers on international assignments, in order to promote the stability of families,
- Acknowledgement and solidarity from all sections of society for military peace missions,
- Broad support of the religious assistants in the armed forces by the Bishop's Conferences and the local bishops including the further development of the peace doctrine of the Church, committing all its levels.