

AMI Conference 2009, Austria

Proposal for a Draft Document “Ten Years after the AMI Declaration of Rome 2000” Outline and questions for discussion

I. Introduction:

Ten years ago, on 15 November 2000, the Apostolat Militaire International (AMI) adopted, during its General Assembly in Rome, a Declaration entitled “*The Catholic Soldier at the Beginning of the Third Millennium. Self-perception, Self-presentation and Acceptance*”. The Holy Year 2000 provided a particularly suitable occasion to issue such a document aimed to provide orientation and guidelines for catholic soldiers after a decade of political and moral challenges following the end of the communist political system in Eastern and Central Europe. At the same time the document served as a platform and an invitation for a wider public in the military, in the church, in politics and in society, to consider and to discuss the perspectives and orientations contained in the document, and to participate, in the way of an open and sincere dialogue, in our ongoing reflections on the religious, moral and political challenge soldiers today are facing worldwide. The basic message of the Declaration and even many of its more concrete guidelines remain valid also for our present time. However, AMI feels the need to review this document in the light of the dramatic political and military changes during the last decade and in the light of experiences gained from the ever more demanding military missions many of our member nations had and have to perform today and in the foreseeable future.

Factors that should be considered in revising the draft:

A. What has changed in the period 2000 – 2009?

GLOBAL

1. Balance of economic and hence political power
2. Global climate change awareness
3. Rise of militant Islam and recourse to massive terrorism attacks
4. Further secularisation of western civilisation and the concomitant uncertainties about ethics, values and standards.
5. Increasing number of countries becoming involved in UN peacekeeping/making roles.
6. Situations where a shallow level of peace exists but where a sense of injustice remains.

SOCIETAL

7. Sceptical post-modern view of life with no reference points in established religion or philosophy.
8. Transient nature of commitment amongst young people affecting the armed forces.
9. Materialism increasing with ephemeral pleasures and pastimes a priority.
10. Pace of life increased, instant world communication widely available.

FUNCTIONAL

11. Role of Chaplains now has an ambassadorial dimension in peace keeping deployments in addition to looking after one’s own flock.
- 12.

II. The Rome Declaration in context:

1. The Declaration starts with the biblical vision of peace as God's gift to mankind and as a common goal to be pursued by all men and women of good will, especially by those who profess faith in Christ: "*Peace on Earth to all people in whom God delights*" (Luke 2:14).

B Does our attitude need to be revised?

1. Self knowledge – Sometimes we perceive ourselves as perfect, or if not perfect, certainly in possession of the best way to attain it. However, we must be strong enough to acknowledge our inadequacies, first to and amongst ourselves but then to allow ourselves to be vulnerable in admitting our shortcomings to others.

2. Does our position change if we do not find "good will", when we are faced with an enemy who wishes only to kill us and is not interested in dialogue or negotiation?

"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."

In this vision of peace, soldiers find their true and authentic mission as a way to obey Christ's great commandment of love of God and of the neighbour.

"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."
- **By giving aid in the event of natural disaster and**
- The guiding principle of this vocation can be found in the Pastoral Constitution of Vatican II *Gaudium et Spes*, 1965, No. 79: "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". **by the**
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C. SOME PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. **by the lawfully sanctioned use of force (UN?) to inhibit the violence in pursuit of criminal ends or political ambitions that contravene the Universal Declaration of Human Rights should replace "by opposing violence".**
2. **Spiritual resilience weakens in the face of perpetual injustice, violence, death, for both soldiers and families. Compassion for non-combatants may suffer.**
3. **Exhaustion is a serious factor, staying fresh both for the combat and the peace keeping role when resources are limited or overstretched.**
4. **Justice and peace should always win but sometimes politics sets limits that make it impossible for military success.**

5. A level of ignorance exists amongst ordinary soldiers concerning underlying causes and eventual aims. The gap between political decisions and practical implementation of peace keeping/making has to be narrowed.
6. The Chaplain is not the moral justifier of the mission or of its consequences though he may be the only person who can offer consolation when a unit or individuals are faced with moral dilemmas and unanswerable questions.
- 7.

2. The last decade of the 20th century was a time of profound political change, especially in the former communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. These changes had a deep impact on world politics and on the role and missions of Armed Forces. Regrettably, these changes were in some places connected with the resurgence of ethnic tensions and conflicts, even with brutal civil wars, politics of “ethnic cleansing” and crimes against civilian populations on a vast scale, such as in the Balkans or in the Caucasus. Also outside Europe, e.g. in some African countries, such terrible events occurred. The public political debate worldwide, while discussing a necessary reshaping of the international order and its challenges for international law, was dominated by the impression that the instruments and means of peaceful settlements of conflicts available at the time had failed to put an end to these morally deeply disturbing and politically destabilizing events. So the concept of “*humanitarian intervention*”, long time seen as dangerous by politicians and lawyers likewise because of its high risks to political stability, got new attention and was widely discussed. As a consequence, also the role of the military was put into a new perspective which presented profound challenges and sometimes even troubling questions for the armies as organizations and for the individual soldier: The tasks of Armed Forces were reformulated in the view of international solidarity and so called “robust” missions to re-establish and to secure peace beyond the traditional Peace Keeping missions within the framework of the United Nations, in cooperation between armies of different countries, but also with civil institutions.

3. Accordingly, the Rome Declaration puts a central focus on these new challenges for Armed Forces, analyzing the situation and outlining an ethical approach to the role of the soldiers based on Christian ethics and the social doctrine of the church. The Declaration states: “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, serves to bring about comprehensive and lasting peaceful arrangements.“ (1.5.)

However, the Declaration stresses also the need of “knowledge of and sensitivity for, the ethnic, cultural, social, environmental and religious conditions prevailing in a possible theatre”, and underlines the validity of the framework provided by the Charter of the United Nations and its rules for measures aimed at ensuring or re-establishing peace and international order. (1.6.)

4. In this discussion, the voice of the church was heard, too. The Declaration quotes explicitly Pope John Paul II. who states in his message on the World Peace Day 2000: "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”, a principle linked by the Holy Father to clear political and ethical requirements which have to be met in such a mission. (2.1.)

5. The Rome Declaration thus concludes that these developments can be best described as an evolution of the profile of the soldiers into a “*miles protector*” and states: “This development of the mission of the soldier from national defence to that of a ‘miles protector’ in international solidarity requires that the soldier faces and answers new ethical challenges.” (2.2.) The Declaration continues by describing some of these challenges in a more detailed way, and reassumes this reflection with a summary on “*The Catholic soldier at the beginning of the 3rd millennium*” which has lost nothing of its fundamental importance:

“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.“ (3.1.)

III. Present challenges, ten years after

1. Less than one year after AMI had adopted the Rome Declaration, dramatic events occurred again. The terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers in New York on 11 September 2001 shocked the world and revealed new threats to international peace and stability. Not that terrorism was an entirely new phenomenon. Terrorist attacks had occurred in many countries and presented a constant danger to states, societies and the international community for decades. Nonetheless, the dimension and the size of these attacks together with the ensuing “war on terrorism” presented new levels of violence, led to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and confronted the international community with a wide range of fundamental political, moral, religious and military questions. Some of these questions concern directly the field of ethics, e.g.: How to fight against international terrorism effectively and by morally justifiable

means? Do we have to alter radically our existing ethical standards and juridical frameworks regarding the reasons and decisions to wage war? Do we have to reconsider our ethical convictions regarding morally acceptable means of warfare? These questions are not of a purely academic nature, tragic incidents during combat missions resulting in heavy civilian losses prove their seriousness. Even the question of torture as a means of gaining information re-emerged dramatically, troubled the conscience of many people and led to passionate debates.

2. AMI has dedicated much effort to discuss these and similar questions during the last decade with the aim to promote and to *strengthen Christian values in the Armed Forces worldwide*. In the course of the discussions the need has been felt to deepen the religious and moral foundations of our own organization and to acquire more knowledge and experience of our faith. This is in line with one of the fundamental issues raised on many levels in politics and society during the last two decades: the role of religion in inter-ethnic and inter-cultural relations, in politics and society, and particularly in relation to war and peace.

3. For the aim of our commemorative declaration, AMI wishes to address two topics of utmost importance: the just mentioned role of religion regarding war and peace and conclusions gained from experiences in performing military missions and assignments during the last ten years.

a. *Questions concerning the role of religion:* Is religion, as often presented in public debates, an obstacle to peace and a factor of divisions, or even a main cause of conflict, intolerance, hatred and war? Or do religions provide an enormous potential for peace building, for love, compassion and understanding, to overcome conflicts and to enhance reconciliation?

D. PHILOSOPHICAL ASPECTS

1. All major religions preach and teach peace and harmony but extreme minorities will always corrupt.
2. Respect, recognition, reconciliation will not work when faced with the reality of radicalisation.
3. Whereas the moderates of good will in all religions will seek the way of a civilised social harmony with others, all religions have radicals, renegades, and reprobates who want to make war not peace. It is difficult therefore to answer the question using either the positive or negative options offered.
4. People of faith need to analyse the “whys” of radicalism ... especially with respect to the marginalised who have no hope but radical action through their brand of their faith and will even resort to suicide bombing.
5. However, there will always be those without conscience who kill and maim for no rationally discernible reason.
6. The principle of universal brotherhood should not be lost, if shared, if adopted, could and should underpin our civilisation and inform our religious experience
7. Deliberately inflammatory language “Islamist” for example, should be avoided.
8. Evangelising religions want everyone to adopt their way. Therefore a level of tension is always going to exist between these competitors for the souls of the undecided and each other’s spiritual scalps!
9. Quite strong in guiding our soldiers to God but not so good at leading them to themselves. Are soldiers trained to kill rather than to protect?

Especially in Europe and North America, we observe a growing phenomenon of secularization in society. There are more and more people without any experience or knowledge of religion or the Christian faith, who sometimes resort to hostile or even aggressive modes of behaviour, privately, in public discussions and in the media. How does this influence our own faith? How do we react?

E. THE EFFECTS OF SECULARISATION

1. Unbalanced treatment of Christianity and Islam in western society – Christianity denigrated, Islam feared and so treated with respect.
2. Not sure the question has got it right ... secularisation is a challenge for us ... soldiers are more alive to ethical problems than religious ... but these can be an avenue for opening the dimension in individual lives ...
3. Secularisation – let them get on with it and come to a spiritual realisation when reality catches up ...
4. God is privatised, public expression limited to the formal, Sunday only Christianity lack of application in everyday life or relevant in public affairs.
5. However, humanists are no more popular than Christians in the public arena.
6. AMI position could be to note reference points for Christian apologetics.
7. Nigeria – bringing disparate groups together in an environment in which questions may be asked, discussion encouraged and answers sought. Worship integral, dialogue essential, the one supreme being exalted, questions of why, what for etc honestly faced ... suffering resulting from wrong actions – consequences ... God is there – the founding truth that is propounded ... no compulsion But much persuasion.

At the same time, however, we observe a resurging interest for the “deeper questions” of our human existence and a quest for meaning in life, a need for orientation and a research for new answers to old questions. Is this a challenge for us as Catholic soldiers? Does our military service, especially on international missions, provide opportunities for encounter and dialogue?

Yes -

*What does AMI say?
What is our message?*

*Is there a special role for AMI to play?
What concrete initiatives could or should AMI undertake?*

Should we invite an Islamic scholar to the next AMI GA?

b. *Experiences from missions abroad* - the following issues could be discussed: The problem of the shift or peace support missions to actual war-fighting and its consequences for soldiers on a military and human level, the increased risks for soldiers and the civilian population, the moral question the danger to be wounded or even killed in combat, the increasing military and human stress for soldiers, the necessity to fight and to cause harm and death to others, the impact of increasing losses, especially of comrades and friends, the challenge of traumatisation, the impact of lacking support in our home societies, problems of our human relations and families at home, questions of trust in our political and military leadership, the growing responsibility of soldiers on mission, but also of our political and

military leaders and of our civil society and of the media regarding these questions. Is the concept of “*miles protector*” still valid and helpful in the present situation?

F. PERSONAL REFLECTION FROM DEPLOYMENTS

1. Liberia – Evidence of deep Christian faith in the midst of destruction and death ... Reconciliation is not possible without meeting ... love at the centre ...
2. Good personal Christian conduct living in a deployed base is very important Religion becomes more important to a soldier who is deployed away from home.
3. Importance of religion when overseas – perhaps more than when at home. The effect is cumulative, even if little interest is shown initially, it increases especially when casualties occur.
4. If the commander and officers take the lead in spiritual matters the effect cascades down to the benefit of the ordinary soldiers.
5. Worship attendance not necessarily a valid measure of spirituality – shifts, operational situation, sleep/work/eat ... the prayer before action is the most intense ... the soldier on active duty is the true freedom fighter ...
6. People - good and bad in everyone no matter what the credo ... however, experience may place a bias in the mind creating an inward impression of superiority, deploying soldiers should be helped to discern the good and bad in the indigenous culture. A return to basics as refresher training ...

What does AMI say?

What is our message?

Is there a special role for AMI to play?

What concrete initiatives could or should AMI undertake?

IV. Conclusion:

AMI is and remains committed to the ethical framework based on our faith and on the social doctrine of the church as presented in the Declaration of Rome 2000 and in the present document commemorating this Declaration. In harmony with these foundations, AMI wishes to re-affirm the following demands:

“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,
- 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.” (3.2.)

Dr. Werner Freistetter
Ecclesiastical Assistant

G. FINAL THOUGHTS

1. The group was not sure who this paper is intended for.
2. In a simple form it would be useful for every Catholic soldier and probably others of Christian persuasion.
3. Alternatively, an ethical approach is transmitted via leadership, not learned papers?
4. Offer as a Christian ethical statement sponsored by AMI rather than emphasising its Catholic nature.