

The Christian Soldier in the 3rd Millennium
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Being both soldier and Christian in today's world is far from being easy. Being a Christian alone involves many obstacles and dangers today, even more so if you are also a soldier. The very profession of the soldier entails a life full of challenges and tensions. What am I allowed to do? What am I not allowed to do? And sometimes, the fact of being *forced* to do something, forced to kill, is hard to bear. In such a situation, a sound ethical foundation is essential. Acting responsibly and in accordance with your own conscience, at all times: that is an incredible challenge. Moreover, this challenge has to be met in a world and within societies that are increasingly shaped by a multi-cultural and multi-religious environment - and also, often, by indifference. The idea of a universally binding system of values, of an all-embracing global ethic, is utopist today – and will probably remain a dream forever. So, it is even more crucial that the individual can rely on a solid foundation on which to base their thinking, their speech, their actions.

However solid the soldier's reputation as servant of peace and the welfare of mankind, he or she still has to fight for it. As the ultima ratio of politics, a soldier is forced to resort to violence – and even to kill.

But how can this reality be reconciled with the message of the Kingdom of God, the message brought to us by Jesus Christ? The message of the Kingdom of truth and life, of sanctity and grace, of justice, love and peace? This Kingdom has already begun with the incarnation of Jesus Christ, but it still is a Kingdom in creation. It is like the small mustard seed that grows into a large plant – a plant that will bear rich harvest, when the seed was planted into fertile ground.

But this does not come about by itself. There will always need to be people – the sower who plants the seed and who nurtures the plants, the vintner who looks after the vineyard, the shepherd who goes in search of the lost sheep...

Jesus has confided this Kingdom to us, to mankind. He believes that every single one of us is able and willing to contribute to building a world and mankind, as God had created them before and in harmony with God's will and plan.

However, man himself, with his own free will, is always getting in the way, even one's own way. Although the world might not be a vale of tears, it is still an imperfect world: time and again in jeopardy and sometimes full of evil will.

We do not accept this though, we rebel against this situation. For in the end, we all want to live in peace, freedom and prosperity, we want justice for everyone. This longing for a perfect world, where mankind is good and just, is deeply rooted within us. Some teachers of godliness say: This is the voice of the Holy Spirit that lives deep down in our souls, in each of us, and it is its power that enables us to do good.

Let's follow this lead.

In their Pastoral Letter "A Just Peace" (*Gerechter Friede*), the Catholic bishops of Germany define international public welfare as the central challenge for peace policy:

Unless the common good is taken into account, policies lack the moral criteria against which to measure their actions. It is only the perspective of furthering a supranational common good that allows us to recognize where the pursuit of the interests of the nation state loses its legitimacy because it violates the basic rights and interests of others and thus easily leads to new injustice or the continuation of long-standing unjust relations.

Taking care of the common good is the responsibility of all actors in society, the forces of a civil society as well as those of the market.

By this statement, the bishops have defined an aim, a task for all of us, transposing the Kingdom of God into our age. We have to make this aim come true. There will be obstacles to overcome, there will be compromise. However, what is most important to keep walking unblinkingly towards this aim, to stay right on the path without veering off or getting lost. Let us keep to the words of the Apostle Paul. In his Epistle to the Philippians, Paul writes the following words of encouragement and motivation:

Brothers, I for my part do not consider myself to have taken possession. Just one thing: forgetting, what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead, I continue my pursuit towards the goal, the prize of God's upward calling, in Christ Jesus. Let us, then, who are "perfectly mature", adopt this attitude.

Sisters and Brothers, it is in this context and spirit that you can and may understand and exercise your duty as soldiers. *Those 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.* This statement from the Pastoral Constitution "On the Church in the Modern World" (established at the Second Vatican Council) can not be repeated often enough.

Our Community of Catholic Soldiers prays in their Prayer of Peace:

Our Lord Jesus Christ, you have put us soldiers to the service of security and freedom of peoples. Give us the strength and the courage to secure the peace that people need to live and thrive in dignity. Your Kingdom come! Let us pray for and think of a better world with sensitive and sensible people who overcome hatred by love and war by reason.

Let us soldiers bear testimony of Your Holy Will to build a human order that is based on freedom and peace, on truth and justice, that strengthens the love both for you and among mankind.

It is Jesus himself who, just before his Ascension, gives this task to his disciples and to all of us:

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of age.

And in the certainty that Jesus is with us right now, in our midst, let us celebrate the Eucharist.