

Latin America, Argentina and the Development of Christian Life in the Armed Forces

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Point One

Historical Overview

The history of Latin America appears to be complex and extremely diversified, though united by similar characteristics.

Being aware that Soldiers have to provide the security of their country, the Church has always spiritually assisted them with special care. The armies that came to America after the discovery of the New World had their chaplains, mostly coming from the regular clergy. Upon request of Philip IV of Spain, Pope Innocent X created a special jurisdiction for military chaplains by the papal brief *Cum sicut majestatis tuae*, issued on September 26th, 1645. All military chaplains directly depended on the king's Great Chaplain, who was elected by the king himself and received a mandate by the Pope, together with considerable authority to be exercised only in times of war. This was meant to ensure pastoral care, including the Administration of Sacraments, the care of souls and the solving of canonical issues that dioceses and parish priests were not able to deal with. In 1762, Pope Clement XIII granted the same authority to the Patriarch of India, who excluded the voluntary militia from his jurisdiction.

Later on, during the Latin American Wars of Independence, a considerable number of priests took part in this movement, taking up arms and accompanying armies during liberation campaigns.

The new republics progressively established relationships with the Catholic Church, to which almost all their citizens belonged. The great majority of new states, considering themselves as being the natural heirs of monarchy, claimed the right of "royal patronage", a type of authority that had Pope Alexander VI had given to the Castilian crown to appoint bishops and to create dioceses. This was the beginning of the "national patronage", which would give states the right to intervene in the selection of bishops and in the settlement of dioceses. This right was tolerated by part of the Church.

From the beginning, the new states accepted the religious support provided to armed forces as a natural consequence of a spiritual care existing even before these states were born. They also recognized the merits of the clergy in helping the process of independence. Most of the newly born republics granted in their constitution the freedom of worship as well as the agreements signed with the Holy See.

In South America, most of the nations foster spiritual assistance within military units. The only exception is Uruguay, where pastoral care in the army was guaranteed through the presence of military chaplains until 1911. However, after the secularization of the military code, all ecclesiastic roles in the camps were removed and since then Uruguay declares its indifference in front of the religious phenomenon and defines itself as a secular country.

In all other countries, religious assistance to the armies was disorganized and it depended on the diocesan bishop of the territory where the military unit was located. In some cases, the archbishop used to coordinate the activities of the priests in charge of religious services for soldiers.

In 1910, Saint Pope Pius XII, at the request of the Chilean government, founded the first military vicariate in the world. This was fundamental to confer to the military pastoral a form of government. This way, the Pope gives a prelate the power to organize the presbytery and all other things required for the pastoral care for soldiers. A further and important step was the Instruction *Solemne Semper* by Pius XII in 1951, which made the organization of all the military vicariate uniform. Since then, the number of military vicariates kept on growing in the whole region (Argentina 1957, Bolivia 1961, Brazil 1950, Colombia 1949, Ecuador 1983, Paraguay 1961, Peru 1943, Venezuela 1996). Under the guide of Pope Pacelli, three documents on religious organization in the army were issued, which paved the way to a confirmation by the Council Fathers during the Second Vatican Council.

Through the decrees *Christus Dominus* and *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, the Council invites to pay particular attention to the social body formed by soldiers.

The 1983 Code of Canon Law considers, in Can. 372 §2, the possibility of a particular church on the basis of “peculiar reasons”.

In 1986, Pope John Paul II created a collection of rules were not written in the Code but were included in the Apostolic Constitution *Spirituali Militum Curae*, to establish a common law for all military vicariates. The Constitution, then, was completed with the statutes of each ordinariate promulgated by the Holy See, raising all these rules to the level of pontifical law. One of the main points of the Constitution is the fact that they are no more vicariates but ordinariates, which means that the Military Ordinary now rules with ordinary and not with vicarious authority.

This way, we have analyzed the historical development of religious assistance to soldiers until the current structure of ordinariates took shape.

Today, many people still wonder whether it is necessary and useful to have a specific ecclesiastic structure, like a particular church, for the pastoral of the militia. The answer comes from the prologue of the *Spirituali Militum Curae*, in which it is claimed that military people “(...) constitute, as a matter of fact, a particular social body, and “...because of the special conditions of their way of life, ...” (*Christus Dominus* n.43, Council Vatican II) *they belong permanently to the armed forces by virtue of voluntary enrollment, or are called up temporarily by law, they have need of a concrete and specific form of pastoral assistance*”. But why are they in need of a “concrete and specific form of pastoral assistance”? The council decree *Christus Dominus* declared, in its Point 18, that “special concern should be shown for those among the faithful who, on account of their way of life, cannot sufficiently make use of the common and ordinary pastoral care of parish priests or are quite cut off from it.”

If at the beginning spiritual care was justified by the mobility of the military personnel and by the impossibility for the priests to follow it, today, the most important explanation is no more based on an external factor but on an inner one, namely the mentality, the identity and the vocation of the soldier. Thanks to these three characteristics, the military man appears as being the target of a dedicate pastoral attention, which aims to provide thorough answers on a moral and a spiritual level to questions directly pertaining its conditions. These include the use of violence if necessary, taking decisions on the life and death of others, risking one’s own life, obedience to one’s superiors, long periods of time without family. These and other problems are different from those that a priest usually needs to deal with during his pastoral service. What I am writing aims at justifying the zeal of the Church over the years in establishing a structure that could be able to satisfy the peculiar needs of the lives of its faithful. This was done by establishing military ordinariates and by giving them precise norms.

The May Revolution took place in 1810. The first governments clearly showed their intention of limiting the Church's prerogatives in civil society, even affirming that the State was independent from any ecclesiastic authority.

On July 9, 1816, Argentina proclaimed its independence and became a Republic. At this time, the relationship between Church and state was arranged according to the model similar to the patronage, the so-called "national patronage". However, the first National Constitution that granted Argentinian citizens their freedom of worship and the Church a peculiar role was only issued in 1953.

... "Since 1953, the national constitution grants the freedom of practicing one's religion (art. 14) and the freedom of conscience (art. 19), while admitting that the catholic Church has a very special role, even though it is not considered a State or official religion. Art. 2 of the Constitution states: "The Federal Government supports the Roman Catholic Apostolic religion."

At the same time, the Argentinian constitution envisaged an ecclesiastic patronage which was not formally accepted by the Catholic Church but resulted in a very moderate and generally non-conflictual *modus vivendi*. Nevertheless, the ecclesiastic patronage was suppressed in 1966 after an agreement with the Holy See. This agreement, together with the unilateral state law and with a previous agreement (issued in 1957 and reformed in 1992) about the spiritual assistance of armed forces, are the main source of the present relationship between Church and State. However, the agreement signed on July 28th, 1957, by both the Holy See and the Argentinian State, is way more important to us, because it establishes a specific legislation on the military vicariate. A further agreement signed in 1966, ratified the first agreement of 1957 on the subject of the military vicariate legislation.

Point Two

The christifideles of the military ordinariates

The military ordinariates are a particular church since one does not belong to them on the basis of the geographical territory where one lives, but because of an unusual way of life (military). The membership derives from the fact that the jurisdiction belongs to the Military Ordinary, who –as pointed out in the art. IV of the SMC - has a personal jurisdiction, which is ordinary and cumulative. The peculiarity of being “personal” eliminates the territorial aspect, gathering instead people according to their involvement in the militia and to their specific *modus vivendi*.

Since jurisdiction is personal but cumulative, the SMC apostolic constitution preserves part of the territorial trait, taking into account that all those who are part of the ordinariate due to their lifestyle remain faithful to their “territorial church” on the basis of their homeland. This way, whenever the faithful are in a military camp, the Military Ordinary has the main jurisdiction over them. However, in his absence, the jurisdiction automatically goes to the territorial Ordinary. This does not only happen in camps, but also in everyday life, so that the faithful are under the jurisdiction of two ordinaries or bishops at the same time: one for their personal characteristic and the other because of their homeland and rite.

Prof. Viana writes: “*art. X of the SMC expresses the will of integrating in the ordinariate all faithful who are in some way in contact with military life.*”

The titles of military jurisdiction could be summarized in the following four points: the soldier and his family, the professional service in the military institution, living in military environment, attending to ecclesiastical duties depending on the military ordinary. The regulations of SMC considers these four titles, but it allows for additional membership titles to the ordinariate to be determined in single regulations.

This is mentioned in the norms of every South American ordinariate, which incorporate as well their own characteristics. In its presentation of art. 4 of the statutes, Argentina makes clear that within the jurisdiction there are the incardinated and the aggregated clergy. In addition to soldiers, security forces (Gendarmeria and Prefectura Naval) and the staff of the ministries they depend on are mentioned in SMC X n.1. A new further title of jurisdiction is introduced: it regards foreigners living in the national territory and serving the army for a given period of time. Two additional conditions for membership are explained in the art. 4 of the statutes, note 6: the first one is the head of state, who is the president of the republic and the first faithful of the ordinariate due to his position as commander of the armed forces. The second one are all the soldiers of other nations carrying out a mission on the national territory, such as military aggregates or apprentices of the military academy.

A problem that has only been partly solved by the Holy See is the case of the *Islas Malvinas, Sandwich y Georgias del sur*. This archipelago was occupied in 1833 by the United Kingdom. From then on, the Argentinian government has been asking internationally to have these lands back. In 1982, it even came to a war, which saw Argentina as a loser. Today, based on a resolution of the UN and supported by South American nations as well as by other states, Argentina is still asking the UK for negotiations, a request that has been ignored by the UK. Both nations at present consider Islas Malvinas as part of their national territory. As far as diocese’s territorial jurisdiction is concerned, the Church managed to take it away from both states and to create an apostolic prefecture in 1952, headed by a prefect priest. In the archipelago lives a religious man who also serves as military chaplain.

Argentina considers these territories as its own with respect to personal military jurisdiction. It follows that these should go under the jurisdiction of Argentinian military ordinariates, since art. 4 point 5 states that all foreign members of the military community serving the army on the national territory are under the Ordinary's jurisdiction. As a result, we can say that all British catholic soldiers living in the archipelago are, from a territorial perspective, under the jurisdiction of the apostolic prefect. However, as far as personal jurisdiction is concerned, they depend on the Military Ordinary of Argentina. We find here an example of a seat that cannot exercise its function, since the military Ordinary will be prevented from attending his duty by the British authority.

The prologue of the SMC declares that the Church has always taken care of the spiritual assistance to soldiers, who form a precise social body and require a specific form of pastoral assistance due to their peculiar situation. A retired soldier does not cease to be a soldier, because this is not a matter of "staying", but a matter of "being". Even though he retires, a soldier still belongs to that social group and he does not leave the military environment. The same is true for the widows of soldiers who have died during their military service. The question here is whether it is right *not* to include these people under the jurisdiction and the pastoral care of the ordinariate anymore. Retired soldiers, in particular, could still carry out an apostolate and serve the Church in the military environment in a more attentive and incisive way. After all, this is the way they have spent most of their life. It has also to be considered that in the military world it is not uncommon to see families being part of the armed forces for generations. We do agree with Cardinal B. Gantin when he asks that former lay members of the ordinariate be given the opportunity of carrying out an apostolic activity even after the end of their mandate, as established by the Military Ordinary. This would be possible, as the SMC declares that all faithful working permanently in the ordinariate as part of the military community are under the jurisdiction of the Military Ordinary. This would allow to find a common point to avoid excluding from the military ordinariate those who have always been part of it and who could be excluded because of their age or status (widowhood).

A further point to be analyzed is the juridical position of soldiers who are living abroad, and the one of foreign soldiers in the military ordinariate's territory. Information can only be found in the statutes and agreements of Argentina and Bolivia. The former affirms that all foreign military personnel serving the army in the national territory is under the jurisdiction of the military ordinariate, whilst the latter asserts that its military staff still depends on the Bolivian military ordinariate even when living abroad. Given the hypothetical fact that a Bolivian soldier is sent to Argentina in order to serve the army there, which jurisdiction (primary and secondary) needs to be considered? If we follow the statutes of the Argentinian military ordinariate, the primary jurisdiction has to be the one of the Argentinian Military Ordinary and only then that of the Ordinary of the territory where the soldier is sent to. However, if we consider the Bolivian statute, the primary jurisdiction corresponds to the Bolivian Military Ordinary and only then to the bishop of the territory of the soldier's destination.

We are facing the possibility of a soldier being under three jurisdictions at the same time, creating a sort of a competition (but no conflict) between the two ordinaries, which are the two main jurisdictions. Difficulties may rise in these situations. The solution might be the fact that the jurisdiction is personal and it is not related to national boundaries. This would mean that the primary jurisdiction is the one of the military ordinariate of the soldier's homeland, and the secondary jurisdiction, on the basis of cumulative jurisdiction, would be that of the Military Ordinary of the place where the soldier is sent to. As a result, there might be a situation where we have a personal jurisdiction, with another personal jurisdiction, with the jurisdiction of the bishop of the territory due to *ratione loci*. Prof. Baura believes that a multiplicity of cumulative jurisdiction is possible. When analyzing the CD, he writes:

The reference to military vicariates undoubtedly constitutes a valid hermeneutical key to understand what kind of phenomenon refers to Christus Dominus refers to.. It is the possibility of creating ecclesiastical jurisdictions capable of governing - among other – the pastoral work done by priests for the faithful belonging to a plurality of specific churches.

Cumulative jurisdiction needs an ecclesiastic jurisdiction to exist, which competes and cumulates with another ecclesiastical jurisdiction or diocese. This is not an interference nor a competition between ecclesiastical jurisdictions, but it is necessary to look at this kind of cumulative jurisdiction having a concrete and focused pastoral work in mind, that of the *salus animarum*, which includes the faithful of the militia in this case.

In his article about military ordinariate, Arrieta believes that art. X of the SMC has very flexible criteria to determine the boundaries of the *portio populi Dei* of the ordinariate. At the same time, the author is questioning the awareness that faithful (especially those mentioned in art. X §§2-3) have of belonging to this particular church:

«Aunque en mucho de esos supuestos quepa la duda de si los fieles son conscientes de esa pertenencia».

Viana adopts the same approach:

No hay que olvidar, en efecto, que los títulos de pertenencia al Ordinariato son muy amplios, de tal manera que puede bastar por ejemplo una matrícula académica, un servicio profesional transitorio, o incluso, como reconocen algunos estatutos, un período de convalecencia en centros sanitarios militares para ostentar la calidad de miembro del Ordinariato. En estos casos cabe preguntarse hasta qué punto esos fieles son conscientes de su pertenencia al Ordinariato militar.

The two authors we just quoted highlight an aspect that is quite common, and this not only within ordinariates. It is true that someone might not be aware of its being part of this *portio populi Dei*, while being under military jurisdiction in accordance with SMC X, though temporarily or superficially.

The Church confers the ordinariates these membership titles aiming at achieving a more focused and more direct pastoral work to reach all its members in the military reality, even when temporarily. This awareness mentioned by Arrieta and Viana does not depend on how long someone has been living in a certain place, but it comes from an effective pastoral work through the proclamation of the Word, the celebration of Sacraments and the priest's ability of speaking with the faithful and working for the *salus animarum*.

Rights and Duties of Lay People in the military ordinariate

The Second Vatican Council devotes an entire chapter of the Dogmatic Constitution *LG (Lumen Gentium)* to the lay people, stating their rights and duties as apostles and evangelizers. All faithful need to be missionaries in their own environment, with the support of Church pastors, who should encourage them and give them the means to help them to carry out their evangelization activity:

Now the laity are called in a special way to make the Church present and operative in those places and circumstances where only through them can it become the salt of the earth (2*). Thus every layman, in virtue of the very gifts bestowed upon him, is at the same time a witness and a living instrument of the mission of the Church itself "according to the measure of Christ's bestowal".(197)

Besides this apostolate which certainly pertains to all Christians, the laity can also be called in various ways to a more direct form of cooperation in the apostolate of the Hierarchy (3*). This was the way certain men and women assisted Paul the Apostle in the Gospel, laboring much in the Lord.(198) Further, they have the capacity to assume from the Hierarchy certain ecclesiastical functions, which are to be performed for a spiritual purpose.

The Constitution goes on outlining the importance for lay people to actively participate in evangelization work, asking pastors to help lay people to carry out evangelization, a work that requires the collaboration of all Church members.

The same magisterial position was recalled in the post synodal exhortation by Pope John Paul II, who states that the source of the lay activity within the Church lies in the very baptismal vocation, which is common to all christian:

The Church's mission of salvation in the world is realized not only by the ministers in virtue of the Sacrament of Orders but also by all the lay faithful; indeed, because of their Baptismal state and their specific vocation, in the measure proper to each person, the lay faithful participate in the priestly, prophetic and kingly mission of Christ.

The Pastors, therefore, ought to acknowledge and foster the ministries, the offices and roles of the lay faithful that find their foundation in the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, indeed, for a good many of them, in the Sacrament of Matrimony.

(Christifideles Laici)

The rights and duties of the lay faithful are regulated in many canons of the 1983 *CIC (Codex Iuris Canonici)*. Since it is an important and topical issue, we believe it is suitable to include the most significant canons.

Can. 225 §1 states that it is necessary that lay people cooperate – alone or together - in the apostolic work, to allow the evangelic message reaching everybody everywhere.

Can. 226 makes clear that lay people need to work through marriage and the family and to educate their children according to their faith.

Can. 228 affirms that lay persons who are found suitable are qualified to assume ecclesiastical offices. In addition, lay persons who stand out for their knowledge of science, for their prudence and honesty can assist the Church's pastors as counselors or experts.

Can. 230 confers only to lay men the possibility of receiving and exercising the ministries of lector and acolyte, as well as of permanent diaconate. If necessary, and only in specific cases, they might also be entrusted with the pastoral care of a parish.

Many other canons make a list of the rights and duties of the faithful, inviting lay persons to be witnesses of the message of the Gospel through their life and words. In some cases, they are also given the possibility of preaching, of being missionaries, and catechists, and - in case of extreme necessity – of administering the baptism and be extraordinary ministries of the Eucharist. Moreover, if no cleric is available, the bishop may delegate lay persons to assist weddings.

These canons that determine the rights and duties of lay persons in dioceses can be applied by analogy to the faithful in military ordinariates. The contribution to the evangelization of faithful in this particular

church is as necessary as the contribution that lay people may give to local churches, as highlighted several times by Pope John Paul II while addressing Military Ordinaries. During the Third International Conference of Chief Military Chaplains, he talked about the evangelization work among lay military faithful who can and have to help their chaplains in spreading the Gospel and the knowledge of Christ together:

In this evangelization work, the lay military faithful - who are an integral and predominant part of your particular churches - can carry out a highly effective pastoral work together with the chaplains. Even within the military sphere, the participation of lay persons in the mission of the Church is an essential condition for evangelization to reach every human situation in its depth and entirety.

Even specific regulations of different ordinariates reflect and underline the great importance of this pastoral work.

The Military ordinariate in Argentina, for example, gives enough space to lay people in its statutes, asking them to conduct a holy life to promote the Church and to make it grow. It recognizes their right to receive the Word and the Sacraments and it invites them to improve their missionary vocation as military lay people.

b. Permanent Deacons

Permanent diaconate in the military ordinariate

As far as the subject of deacons, we will limit ourselves to Permanent Deacons.

The Second Vatican Council reinstated the institution of Permanent Deacons in the Roman Catholic Church, in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church.

The affirmations of the LG illustrate the necessity of the presence of Deacons in the Church, above all for the role they play for *Salus animarum*, i.e. in doing charitable work, in preaching the Word of God, in administering Baptism, in distributing the Eucharist, in assisting and blessing weddings, in assisting the dying, as catechists and at funeral services. This sacrament is also conferred to, and carried out by married men. This means that it is not just considered as a step before priesthood, but it is restored as the possibility of being a permanent minister serving the People of God. In the Latin American military ordinariates, three countries - Brazil, Colombia and Chile - refer to them in their statutes and/or regulations, and three other countries - Argentina, Bolivia and Paraguay - mention Permanent Deacons in their structures even if they do not consider the subject in their regulations.

As of 2014, the ordinariates that have Permanent Deacons serving the armed forces are: Argentina (2), Bolivia (4), Brazil (47), Chile (11) and Paraguay (6).

Two types of training are possible for Deacons, depending on the fact that they are married or not. In both cases, in accordance to Can. 236, an appropriate time for training is urged: three years of seminary for unmarried men, while married men have a three-year program according to the regulations issued by the Episcopal Conference.

For example, Chile has a body of apostolic collaborators that also includes Permanent Deacons who come from the armed forces. This body of Permanent Deacons is guided by a Chaplain General Councilor, who is designated by the Military Ordinary.

Two types of Permanent Deacons may serve the armed forces: the first are adult men who have their own job and who support themselves with their own salary but who are also committed to pastoral duties. Officials or civilians who are employed by the armed forces may also be ordained as Permanent Deacons of the ordinariate after having followed a training.

After their ordination, Deacons have a special recognition and are considered by the Armed Forces as having a specific profession, in addition to the one they already have, e.g. a parachutist in the Air Force. The following table of statistics on Permanent Deacons in military ordinariates starts from year 2000, the year in which official figures from the AP begin.

	2000	2005	2010	2016
Argentina	-	-	-	1
Bolivia	-	2	5	4
Brasile	5	5	5	41
Cile	7	6	12	11
Colombia	-	-	-	-
Ecuador	-	-	-	-
Paraguay	-	1	1	7
Perù	3	-	-	-
Venezuela	-	-	-	-

As we can see, there are ordinariates in which the figure of the permanent deacon is almost or completely non-existent; in other ordinariates their presence is discreet and only two ordinariates have a significant number of them.

In general, we can say that the institution of permanent diaconate has not put down solid roots yet and that its function within military structures still needs to be discovered and tested.

The permanent diaconate is a situation that is poorly developed within military ordinariates. It is important to understand how necessary this figure is, and what kind of service it can make to help military chaplains.

Permanent deacons can be of great help if they are soldiers, as they could be of more effective service since they know from within the military environment. Another aspect is that their economic livelihood would be guaranteed by the salary they would perceive as soldiers. On the other hand, we cannot forget the importance of a military chaplain especially in administering the Eucharist, in the sacrament of Reconciliation and the Anointing of the Sick. We understand that the ministry of a deacon without the presence of a chaplain is very limited in the activities he might do in a military barracks with respect to the sacramental - liturgical field. From the point of view of social service, he could offer his diaconate as a training by offering a vision that comes from his life experience, while at the same time being enlightened by his theological education.

Conclusion

Lay people, Diaconate and Religions

One wonders what kind of apostolate the lay faithful might carry out. The apostolate of military lay people is usually considered as being equal to that of parishes. It is clear that, in addition to the difficulties that exists, there would be a competition with parish activity, which does not reflect the sense of cumulative jurisdiction. With respect to this, apostolate could take place in parishes that are located in military quarters, but we think that something more can be offered by lay people in carrying out their apostolate, something that would make the difference between a competition and a collaboration with the cumulative jurisdiction of the parishes.

We make a proposal for a possible specific apostolate of military lay people: this ministry could develop in activities that have not been sufficiently considered yet.

A military lay association acting at the level of all ordinariates could be created, to be articulated and promoted by all military chaplains to ensure that, despite the frequent movement of staff, the apostolic activity does not break into pieces but instead it continues regardless of where lay faithful carry out their activity.

This associative activity would find various socio-pastoral applications. One of them is the sphere of the elderly and the sick, not just those who are staying in a military health facility, but also military people are living at their family place because of illnesses or old age. In this sense, in addition to visiting them, the association could create and manage a retirement house for military people and their families.

Another important and significant area is the service to war veterans or veterans of other military operations. This activity is absent - also in its pastoral dimension - from statutes and/or regulations. We believe that this area is very important because it is specific to the military world. This work has been overlooked so far, and lay people could make a significant contribution to it, as it has a very broad scope. This pastoral activity would first consist in accompanying those soldiers and their families who have experienced traumatic experiences while serving in times of conflict. It often occurs that young men are enrolled temporarily in the army. If, for any reason they have to participate in a military action, be it a war or a conflict, the return to their family goes unnoticed and their service is totally forgotten. These young people sometimes lose their lives; they come back mutilated or suffering of other psychological consequences. In principle, both the government and the Armed Forces do not deal with either of these young people nor with their families. Sometimes, governments think that their debt of gratitude to them can be paid back with health care or a war pension. This way, however, a moral and spiritual emptiness is unavoidable, a task that needs to be carried out by the military ordinariate. Accompanying young people who come back as well as their families could be a wonderful apostolate to be carried out by the lay faithful of the ordinariate.

Today, the Magisterium of the Church provides guidelines for the Pastoral Care of military ordinariates. When referring to the encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, Pope John Paul II emphasizes the four pillars on which peace rests on, as mentioned by Pope Roncalli: truth, love, justice, and freedom. Given that freedom, as well as peace, have their roots in the a correctly enlightened conscience, the specific service that the military chaplain can and needs to carry out for the military is the education of the consciences in the ethos as instrument of of freedom and peace.

Through their chaplains, military ordinariates today need to help shaping consciences. This is the great challenge for the future, as the way soldiers address the issues they encounter, behave in front of prisoners of war, behave with the fallen and the losers, all depends on the formation of their conscience.

This training activity becomes of paramount importance because the soldier faces a paradox: on the one hand, he guarantees the peace of his own people, on the other hand, he is ready to take up arms. From this paradox arises the unavoidable need to have a military pastoral work. The Church is able to reconcile the extremes between war and peace for the security of peoples.

The military man is called to be, in the society, the largest peace builder and this happens when he strives

against injustice, oppression, fighting against hatred and abuse of power.

It is expected that a specific religious assistance in the military world will raise soldiers' awareness of this new approach to their role, so that soldiers might be represented in the public opinion as peacemakers. From now on, their new role needs to start from a positive principle consisting in non-indifference, or even better, in humanitarian intervention.

Actually, if the international community does not want to become an accomplice of an unjust aggressor, it needs to provide all means to disarm those who foster the war. These interventions of the international community in countries with a crisis are a right and a duty for the sake of humanity.

During the Fifth International Conference of Military Ordinariates, in 2006, Pope Benedict XVI defines Military Ordinaries as "shepherds of peace", and hopes that military chaplains are "experts and teachers" of what the Church teaches and practices for building the peace in the world.

Pope Benedict XVI does not only warn the military against indifference to humanitarian interference, but he goes further and establishes a relationship between humanitarian regulations and the military. This relationship need to be defined by the military chaplain through his pastoral work.

The soldier is increasingly serving "*peacekeeping*" and "*peacebuilding*" operations. The Church's social doctrine declares that any person who serves in the armed forces is concretely called to defend right, truth and justice in the world. This shows that today the soldiers cannot remain to ensure peace and security only within their own national borders. Today, it is expected that military forces - through the coordination of international forces - become a guarantor of the principles of security and peace in the world, as well as a peacemaker.

It follows that peace is the duty of every Christian soldier and the spiritual assistance offered by chaplains needs to be concrete, specific, and relevant to military life. The vocation of the Christian soldier is not limited to the prevention, the management and the termination of a conflict, but it also includes the cooperation for the renovation or construction of a new order based on the "four pillars" of the encyclical *Pacem in Terris*.

Today, soldiers faces a series of problems that have changed the world scenario, i.e. the global war against terrorism, the local conflicts with international relevance, the asymmetric war and preventive war, the proliferation of increasingly sophisticated weapons. In the region we are dealing with, there is also the fight against drug trafficking and the role played by soldiers to assist during natural disasters. In this perspective, one understands the urgency and the importance of training soldiers in humanitarian law. Military ordinariates need to consider the approach to this right as a preliminary part as well as an essential element of evangelization of soldiers.

During the 28th International Conference of the Red Cross in 2003, the Holy See has made two commitments: organizing interreligious initiatives to defend the dignity of man and promoting international humanitarian law; continuing the training program in humanitarian law of military chaplains.

During their Fifth meeting in 2006, Military Ordinaries in Latin America pointed out that military chaplains are in danger of losing their identity as priests. To avoid this, they wish that a "chair of military pastoral" is established, with the aim to form future Deacons. They also asked the Faculties of Theology to insert in their program the study of military pastoral work.

The Church believes that soldiers today have to play a new role in society, one that is synonym of being a guarantee of peace and security, and of increasing their humanitarian activity to protect Human Rights of people. If the Church intends to continue offering religious assistance within the armed forces in South America, it needs, as one of the most important arguments, to show the capacity of being an expert and

teacher of Human Rights through the Chaplains.

The military Chaplain needs, in turn, to follow a better training to be able to take on this new role.

At the level of the Universal Church, the features and horizons are well defined, but at a regional level a more incisive approach to Human Rights and to the role of the Chaplain in shaping consciences is lacking. South American nations have been suffering from violation of their Human Rights by governments, by the armed forces and by aggressive forces driven by specific subversive ideals. We can affirm that danger is still present and that Military Ordinaries can strongly contribute to limit it through a process of awareness of the fundamental rights of individuals and peoples.

Last but not least, we have noted in our region an increase, over the last few decades, in the number of communities made up of Christians from the Reformed Church, of different sects and of other religious groups. This phenomenon can also be seen in the armed forces and it creates problems in justifying the exclusivity of religious military assistance being administered only by the Catholic Church. This phenomenon is particularly felt in Brazil, Venezuela and Chile. These three countries have provided for the possibility of having a non-Catholic Military Chaplains who assist their faithful.

In 2009, in occasion of a seminar on the presence of different religions in the military environment, which was organized by the Latin American Episcopal Conference, ministers tried, in the concluding documents, to give an explanation to the growing trend of sects and religious movements that do not always have Christian origins. They signaled that their increase was more intense where pastoral care had been neglected.

In this context, military ordinariates should try to create a peaceful and constructive dialogue with the various religious groups. Interreligious and ecumenical dialogue should start from one's own identity: only a solid but open identity can enrich dialogue. A sense of belonging, of knowledge and love for the Church also needs to be encouraged among the faithful.

Efforts need to be made to give soldiers their own clergy and to have a thorough preparation for Chaplains and for future priests, a specific training that is able to face the current situation, especially with respect to the knowledge of sects and of religious movements to give serious concrete answers according to the Doctrine of the Faith.

The Military Ordinaries of the Latin American Episcopal Conference declare, in their concluding document: "we are aware of the presence and incisive activity of sects and of new religious movements in Latin America and among our faithful, and we must not look at them as a threat but as a challenge to our evangelization work."

Facing the proliferation of new religious groups the Church, especially in the military environment, needs to have an adequate preparation and must take up with courage the challenge of a New Evangelization, by recovering a personal contact with every believer.