

Lecture B: “ How can you be a military leader when continents are drifting? What are your roots and motives?” by **Lieutenant General Roberto Nordio, Deputy Chief of the Defense General Staff on behalf of General Claudio Graziano, ChoD of Italy**

Before I move on to talk on leadership, let me offer a special and respectful salute (*to his excellency the Archbishop Silvano TOMASI of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development,*) his excellency the most reverend Monsignor Santo MARCIANO’, the Chief Chaplain for Italy, to Monsignor Werner FREISTETTER, the Archbishop of Austrian Military Ordinate, the President of the International Military Apostolate, Maj Gen. Norbert SINN, the secretary General of Apostolate Militaire International (AMI), Mrs. Nelleke SWINKELS, and all those who are attending here from all around the world.

Being here today in front of such a distinguished audience to talk about leadership in the military in a constantly changing world makes me immensely proud and filled with satisfaction.

But before entering the subject at stake, please allow me to underline two points:

- First of all my English does not allow me to give an impromptu speech, so that I am forced to read my intervention, hoping to be plain and understandable;
- Then my education: my origins are rooted in a Catholic family, I received a Catholic education, I am Catholic and to my children I gave and I am giving a Catholic education.

Nevertheless in my speech I will try to identify those values that, in my understanding, should characterize a military leader, or, as we call him, a Commander whatever his religious belief is.

Introduction

Today’s world is influenced by continued political, economic, and social changes. New hybrid and asymmetrical threats, pose persistent challenges to peace, international security, and prosperity. They also exercise indirect and yet relevant influence on leadership in the armed forces, as they transform, innovate, and adapt themselves to new geopolitical contexts. In all sectors, exercising leadership relies on the ability to manage changes, intercept, predict and control them, so that the organization one works for, can cope with different and unsettled challenges.

Management efforts put in place to govern constant change are a case in point that has spurred intense politico-military debate in the last few years that is no longer centered on bipolar confrontation. Rather, it focuses on the need to clearly identify threats and their points of origin, and to find a way to respond to international challenges posed by mutable terrorist movements having a hybrid, asymmetrical, and hardly foreseeable modus operandi. Against this backdrop, erratic factors influence the art of command. This requires further consolidation and sharing among all ranks of the profound and deeply rooted values of the organization I am honored to represent today.

Values and tradition

In exercising the Art of Command, our traditions and values are in fact the solid foundation of all our daily efforts. They allow us to acquire and maintain our ability to lead, motivate, and guide our personnel and to create an organizational culture pursuant to achieving new and complex objectives. The same values and traditions are, of course, the very essence of our military status that proudly inspires us to respond to the aforementioned challenges adequately.

Loyalty, respect for others, sense of honor, moral integrity, sense of duty, military ethos, sense of discipline, solidarity, and spirit of sacrifice represent our traditional and unchanging values, which we defend vis-à-vis a changing world that often questions them.

Setting an example and teaching these values to one's subordinates is one of the greatest responsibilities of our organization's leaders. An organization that outsiders see, and not by chance, as one of the main points of reference for the revival of fundamental ethical principles.

Can we deny that loyalty and respect for others are the basis for ethically strong and united organizations where everyone is treated with dignity and without prejudice?

The fundamental values of sense of honor and moral integrity are equally indubitable. These should be considered, as we always say when the idea of leadership arises, as a compass that guides the daily work of leaders and personnel in every organization.

Internalizing sense of duty and military ethos makes every member of the organization aware that fulfilling institutional tasks comes before personal needs. Such awareness turns into a virtuous behavior that is well beyond the mere respect of norms and regulations.

The sense of discipline, that is the conscious and partaking acceptance of these military values and fundamental principles are the natural consequence of their assimilation.

Solidarity is ingrained in the nature of military units' activities. Not only does it emerge unequivocally within the organization as a result of unity among its personnel.

It is also observed when the military provides relief to populations in the aftermath of natural disasters and/or in national and international theatres of operations permeated with human suffering.

Last, but not least, the spirit of sacrifice is a mark soldiers bear, because they are aware that fulfilling their duties can require sacrificing their lives.

As a matter of fact, these values, which we cherish as the foundation of our organization and that leaders shall preserve and pass on to their subordinates, are in my opinion a reflection of our Christian roots and traditions.

As a result, soldiers who internalize them, irrespective of the maturity of everyone's faith, become Bonus Miles, a good soldier.

The qualities of a leader

Undoubtedly, when considering the main qualities that a modern Commander should possess as a leader, especially at difficult times as these, one can see evident similarities with religious ethics. In fact, fulfilling such duty implies an actual mission based on a strong vocation.

These qualities include first of all the example.

A Commander who is not able or willing to do what he is asking to his soldiers will not have any success and no one will follow him. Our organization is not only shape but also substance, represented by the aforementioned 9 values. If the Commander does not understand, epitomize and follow those 9 values, he

cannot ask to his men to do it. Only partaking the same sacrifices we can transmit values, we can be appreciated, trusted, and followed by our soldiers even in the worst moment of our activity: the fight.

Thanks to the ability of leaders to influence and guide soldiers through giving them scope, direction and motivation, whatever the organization will be, it will reach its mission. This is the very essence of leadership.

On these conceptual pillars relies the success of every organization. Especially in the Armed Forces that thinks of his personnel as its most powerful asset. In fact we can influence our soldiers in convincing them to do what we need from them, through example and communication by adopting the right leadership. We can, also, give scope by explaining our intent, not only answering to what? But also to why? And eventually we can give direction in setting priorities, responsibilities and standard we request. In doing so we have to remember that a leader's task is to understand needs and expectations of its soldiers, thus creating a culture oriented to improve the organization. In a very fast changing world we need leaders able to swiftly adapt to the change. A leader is able to orient and motivate people and soldiers.

This is basically the expectation of our organization towards new leaders and Commanders. Instead of a one size fits all, it is rather preferred a different leadership attitude for every different situation, according to possibilities and resources at hand. But always starting by the conscious and positive acceptance, of our values.

Then, of course, a leader should have listening skills, in interacting with one's staff, in order to understand their needs and difficulties with sensitivity, tact, and humility. One should consider that behind any individual there is a private life and a family with their everyday problems. This is way to get to know one's staff and instrumental in adequately enhancing their human and professional qualities, which should be refined by creating opportunities for further development.

Being helpful, fair and generous with our soldiers:

- Helpful and available in order to be always able to respond to their needs in a timely manner;
- Fair in adequately acknowledging their exemplary and commendable actions as well as clearly identifying actions that are not consistent with the values that should constantly inspire their behavior;
- Generous in devoting the necessary time to solving problems and meeting personnel's needs, while allowing them to have the right independence and deserved visibility, and resisting any temptation to be the center of attention, envy, egotism and self-centricity.

These qualities primarily presume possessing strong human skills rather than merely professional ones. They also allow a leader, even in an environment as hierarchical as ours to benefit from one of the greatest advantages one can possibly experience in such a capacity, namely subordinates' admiration and respect. Buttressed by their moral values, subordinates will devote and identify themselves with the institution and work in an effective and efficient manner.

As a matter of fact, in fulfilling his daily duty to guide and direct, a leader should never neglect guaranteeing not only the achievement of expected goals, but also the constant and overall improvement of the organization itself. In doing this, a fundamental premise consist in the Chief being a periodically changing component rather than a structural constant of the organization.

In this regard, an analogy comes to my mind with the priest figure who, in taking daily care of his flock tries to constantly improve his parish through sympathy, participation and sharing in order to leave a community that is better than it was upon his arrival. The continuity guaranteed by the congregation makes all this possible. In order to do so, a leader should be aware of the necessity to nurture and, when possible, refine the qualities in question, by promoting higher performance levels and strengthening the resilience of the organization of which he is in charge.

Against this background, it is absolutely crucial to:

- Search for new and more and more appropriate systems to exert effective and functional leadership with sensitivity, tact and humility to allow soldiers to perform their tasks independently and at the same time consistently with the goals defined by the leader. This will result in fast decision making and adequate decentralization;
- Focus relentlessly on wide-ranging cultural development in order to tackle the various issues effectively and in a multidisciplinary perspective;
- Improve mental fitness, meant as the ability to foresee and adjust to uncertain and changing circumstances, calculating their potential negative impact on the organization;
- Develop increasingly the necessary judgment, while assessing situations from different points of view and with no bias to identify rational organizational choices that are consistent with assigned goals;

Conclusions

Now that I outlined the perfect leader/commander, I have to anticipate a possible question. Am I a perfect leader/commander? Am I a Commander that summarized in itself all the elements I outlined before?

If I simply and swiftly say yes, I will be presumptuous and I will be wrong for sure. Probably the best answer would be to tell you to ask my subordinates. Honestly, I can tell you that I firmly believe in what I told you, that I try to put in place everything I outlined, that for sure I never ask my subordinates to do more than I do. I am pretty aware that without their service and contribution I will not be able to fulfill my tasks, without the help of my previous subordinates in the past I will not be here today talking about leadership. I always think of my today's and yesterday's subordinates thankfully and I appreciated their help every time I reached a good professional result or promotion.

In conclusion, to be an effective military leader in the current international geopolitical scenario, it is necessary to rely on leadership skills and transform the organization dynamically to meet the new and urgent security needs in a prompt, consistent and concrete manner.

In fact, the armed forces are urged to transform while operating to constantly guarantee an operational response that is always adequate to the increasing number of crises and threats unceasingly jeopardizing peace and development of democratic liberties.

This can only be achieved when personnel share goals completely and responsibly. Besides developing an adequate level of expertise and efficiency, personnel need to be motivated and aware of the burden the military status implies.

Such awareness cannot be imposed top-down but should be firmly founded on the internalization of rigorous ethics resulting from the values and human qualities that constitutes our cultural background and traditions.

I strongly believe that a firm course of action and the defense of our traditions are an undeniable factor of success that can be used to counter the latent and serious threats to our fundamental values.

In fulfilling the crucial and complex tasks of protecting those values, a precious role belongs to those who, within the organization and among military personnel, show and disseminate Christian values that are deeply ingrained in brotherly love, tolerance, and solidarity, and significantly help strengthen the values inspiring the Italian Armed Forces. This facilitates the constant development of our institutions and of the men and women who are part of it, and wear their uniform with pride and sense of responsibility.

Let me finish with a question for you: how far the values of a good Commander and of a healthy military organization are from Chapter 63 and 64 of the Rules of Saint Benedict?