

The Catholic Soldier at the Beginning of the Third Millennium

Self-perception, self-presentation and acceptance

Declaration of the AMI General Assembly on 15. November 2000 in Rome

1. 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 in 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 other 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 consolidation 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 polity, 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 – from Augustinus to Thomas of Aquinas, Francisco de Vitoria, Franz Suárez 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 3rd 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 20th 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 the combat arms and arms of mass destruction can be identified throughout the world. The way 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, 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 e.g. 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 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 underlines 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.

2. The Soldier as a Servant of Peace

What do we stand for?

1. Statements by the Church on military service

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 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. The following illustrative statement of Martin Luther: „Let no Christian call for or use the sword for his own sake. Rather, let him call for and use the sword for others to defend against evil and protect righteousness“, is in line with this Catholic thinking.

2. The development of the soldier into a „miles protector“

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.

3. Ethical demands on the soldier and realisation of ethical standards for operations.

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 differences between regions and countries. On the other hand, the issue of 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 technological, 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 have endeavoured 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.

3. On the path to peace

What do we expect?

1. The Catholic soldier at the beginning of the 3rd millennium

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.

All this has to be integrated into a comprehensive process of development and education.

2. What we demand of politics, society, the military and the Church

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.

