

The Christian Soldier in the Service of Just Peace

Declaration of the AMI General Assembly, Berlin, October 2010

Introduction

1. As the third millennium dawned, His Holiness Pope John Paul II began his address on World Peace Day 2000 with the timeless Christmas salutation of the angels, *"Peace on Earth to all people in whom God delights!"* (Luke 2:14). Using The Holy Father's subsequent message as a foundation, the Apostolat Militaire International (AMI) examined how the profound message of peace and universal human kinship might best be advanced by Christians serving in the armed forces of the world, issuing a declaration from its General Assembly in Rome 15 November 2000.¹

2. Any position formulated in an environment of change becomes less relevant with the passing of time. During its 2009 General Assembly, AMI assessed what significant changes had taken place in the ensuing decade. A working group and timetable were established to carry findings forward with a view to revising the former declaration for publication at the 2010 General Assembly in Berlin.

Defining Factors

3. Global Phenomena – The decade has seen increasing foreboding regarding worldwide climate change and a high incidence of natural disasters that are thought to be linked to human activity. Globalisation, the integration of trade and economics across the world, has engendered a mixing of cultures that could bring humankind closer to the ideals of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights² and the aspirations of the modern church. However, self interest and protectionism are leading to further economic disparity and unprecedented migratory pressures on the chronically disadvantaged. Although emerging markets have brought greater prosperity to some former and newly industrialised nations, there remain countries where absolute poverty persists with the attendant debt, instability, and increasing population.

4. Secularism – In the West aggressive secularism has, in the latter part of the 20th century, challenged many of the fixed moral and ethical norms of two Christian millennia. However, it is recognised that in failing to live up to the ethical standards of the gospel, the church as an institution and individual Christians have caused disillusionment and even contributed to the tendency

to secularism. Now, ten years into the 21st century, the inherent uncertainties carried forward are overlaid with a decade of seismic changes in the world political, religious and economic orders.

5. Information Technology – During the decade, the internet moved into new dimensions. Burgeoning social network sites emphasised and elevated individuality, super search engines placed an unprecedented store of knowledge at the fingertips of all. Simultaneously however, the World Wide Web's insidious dangers have increased with negative influences in morality and integrity.

6. World Financial Crisis – Cyber buying and selling of assets for short term gain made possible massive, speculative and unsecured gambles with borrowed money. National and international regulating bodies neither recognized nor moderated this fatally flawed finance which was centered on individual gain for an unscrupulous few who brought some entire states to the brink of ruin. The present generation, having bailed out the banking system, is now mortgaged to this mixture of recklessness and incompetence.

7. New wars – Many of today's armed conflicts are internal, in some cases related to a loss of power in weak or failed states, to organized crime, or rebel and insurgent groups operating across borders. These conflicts are often characterised by escalating cruelty, war crimes, the use of child soldiers, economic exploitation and distorted political or religious ideologies. Any peace keeping force deployed in such circumstances enters a labyrinth of ambiguity.

8. Terrorism – Although terrorism has, historically, left its scars on societies worldwide, the unprecedented horror of the attack on the twin towers in 2001 laid a depraved foundation on which many terrorists sought to build in the subsequent years of the decade. The event precipitated a military and ideological conflict that has seen a dramatic rise in asymmetric warfare which is prosecuted across borders but is not primarily between states. The damage to international cohesion has been immense, the continuing attrition in lives tragic, and the economic effects devastating.

Defining Effects for the Christian' Soldier

9. The post-modern view of life, accentuated by the destabilising events of the decade, has further diminished reliance on established norms of religion and

* Although prepared under the auspices of AMI, this paper offers a perspective considered common to Christians of most denominations therefore "Christian" has been used rather than "Catholic" where appropriate.

philosophy. Loyalties to a corps, a cause or a country and acceptance of military discipline have become harder to establish. Conversely, a society with a healthy scepticism about authority may, in itself, be a subtle form of conflict prevention with people less disposed to follow where confrontational politicians lead.

10. In addition to the increasing uncertainties in civil society, there is a considerable gap between the political process and the practical implementation of deployment for the military. Whilst accepting the hazards of death, injury and long term trauma, soldiers must respond to commitments with resources that do not keep pace with changing operational situations. Progress is often slow and exit strategies poorly defined.

11. Christian Soldiers on active duty in multinational forces are expected to exercise inter-cultural competence and moral integrity but may be increasingly distanced from, and doubtful about, the political initiatives that deployed them. This is especially so where a military initiative alone cannot resolve a complex crisis and where intervention may be misconstrued as prosecuting a "Holy War".

12. Strategic goals are not decided by soldiers however, tactical implementation of the political will may fall to military commanders who may be held responsible for the consequences of actions in the field although not for the moral justification of the mission. Similarly, military chaplains cannot be the moral arbiters of military missions or of their consequences though they may be the only ones who can offer independent moral, ethical and spiritual advice and consolation when a unit or individuals are faced with operational dilemmas and unanswerable questions.

13. Whilst an individual soldier may conduct himself in a manner worthy of his faith, embedded spiritual and moral leadership must augment the undoubted courage and skills that soldiers take to areas of conflict and tension. Nations, whose historic Christian traditions are fast evaporating, are under greater moral examination than ever before as they commit forces to hostile theatres or seek to keep a fragile peace in the presence of underlying injustice or entrenched polarised positions. Legal analysis and human rights scrutiny are perpetually present.

14. The Christian soldier, subject to all the pressures of his society and caught in the maelstrom of recent events, is in need of some waypoints to mark his path, to define his approach to duty and to make his contribution to

a just peace. The foregoing paragraphs address the present situation. The following paragraphs offer advice on the calling of Christians as soldiers.

Understanding the Perspective

15. In every Christian debate about war, the defining perspective must be peace, peace that results from justice based on respect for human dignity and paves the way to universal brotherhood. The New Testament declares a timeless message of peace on earth, "*Peace on Earth to all people in whom God delights!*" (St Luke 23:14) The Universal Declaration of Human Rights says, "*All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.*"³

16. His Holiness Pope John Paul II also declared, "*For the Catholic faithful, the commitment to build peace and justice is not secondary but essential. It is to be undertaken in openness towards their brothers and sisters of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, towards the followers of other religions, and towards all men and women of good will, with whom they share the same concern for peace and brotherhood.*"⁴

17. Peace as the main objective in the military field has been emphasized throughout the history of Christian thinking. St Augustine of Hippo said, "*Peace should be the object of your desire. War should be waged only as a necessity and waged only that through it God may deliver men from that necessity and preserve them in peace. For peace is not sought in order to kindle war, but war is waged in order to obtain peace. Therefore even in the course of war you should cherish the spirit of a peacemaker.*"⁵

18. Peace as the ultimate perspective of political and military action is not just the absence of war. From a Christian point of view peace is a gift, the totality of life God has promised us. Peace in its Biblical context is always associated with the pursuit of the common good and justice for all. Pope Pius XII chose the words, "*Opus iustitiae pax*" as his motto, "*Peace as a work of justice.*" Pope John Paul II added the concept of solidarity, "*Opus solidaritatis pax*", peace as the fruit of solidarity, – and combined both concepts in the motto, "*Opus iustitiae et solidaritatis pax*", peace as the product of justice and solidarity. Both are necessary if mankind is to become a global community capable of co-existence".

19. Thus, according to Pastoral Constitution “Gaudium et spes” of the Second Vatican Council, *“Those too 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.”*⁶

Steps in Advancing the Cause of Peace

20. The first step in advancing the cause of peace is, therefore, to protect the moral restraints of our defining principles for engaging in armed conflict and to apply them rigorously when hostilities seem to be a possibility, when engaged in conflict and in its aftermath. Catholic teaching emphasizes that military action should only be the last resort, when all peaceful means have proved to be unsuccessful. Further just peace criteria are: Legitimate cause and authority, chance of success and the existence of a just political concept acceptable for all parties of the conflict. Civilians have to be protected, military means must be used according to the principles of military necessity, proportionality, discrimination and humanity. Soldiers in every part of the command chain are accountable for their actions during military operations. Just peace responsibilities in post conflict scenarios include contribution to reconstruction, compliance with peace treaties and international regulations, dialogue and reconciliation.

21. Allied to our commitment to these moral criteria must be continued development regarding international humanitarian law and the fostering of the orderly institutions essential for a just peace. The rise of asymmetric conflict in which only one side may be restrained by moral and legal strictures does not absolve us from further cultivating an humanitarian morality that has its roots firmly planted in Christian ethics.

22. The second step in advancing the cause of peace is, therefore, a diligent dialogue to improve and make more relevant these just peace criteria in our contemporary situation.

23. Discussions at the 2009 AMI General Assembly indicated that the celebrity centred social attitudes of the last decade have increased the tendency to regard the aggressive assertion of self as a desirable quality. Thus, in much of modern society, the Christian standard is inverted and a root cause of conflict is insidiously and increasingly woven into our cultures.

24. The third step in advancing the cause of peace is, therefore, a recognition that the seeds of hostility are within us all and lie dormant even in the

noblest soul. Any quest for peace and brotherhood must therefore begin in the heart of the individual, cultivating the seeds of peace and suppressing the roots of bitterness.

25. There are many others causes of conflict. Wars over historic identity, political or religious dogma, territory, resources, injustice, human needs and human rights continue and may have aggressive or defensive motives. The more fundamental the opposing positions, the less room for mutual accommodation, and the greater likelihood of intractable hostilities and unremitting inhumanity. The totalitarian, regimes of the 20th century inflicted a dogmatic atheistic slaughter on millions and the historic path of the Church has seen its share of violence in the name of God that would, today, be rejected by Christians of all persuasions.

26. The fourth step in advancing the cause of peace is, therefore, a willingness to understand and accommodate other perspectives and an avoidance of negative typecasting in unfamiliar cultures much in concert with the theme of inter-cultural competence developed at the AMI 2009 General Assembly.

27. Exponential population growth, polarisation of religious extremes, relentless global warming, increasing wealth disparity and the rapid decline in natural resources have the potential, singly or in combination, to start conflicts of low intensity that may cause the failure of fragile states and quickly escalate as insurgent opportunists fill political vacuums. The dangers are multiplied when there is a possibility that chemical, biological or nuclear weapons may fall outside the control of stable governments.

28. The fifth step in advancing the cause of peace is, therefore, international mediation or intervention, preferably UN authorised, to pacify unstable situations with the role of military forces extending beyond conventional national defence and alliances.

29. This requires a comprehensive approach, integrating diplomatic, military, civil, legal, social and economic agencies. Military intervention in this context is a demanding task, must be carefully prepared, properly equipped and quickly followed by a just settlement in which the indigenous people are the greatest shareholders.

30. Understanding a cause and nature of conflict does not, of itself, effect a cure. Prevention lies in identification of latent hostility before escalation progresses through low, high and unrestrained violence. More options exist

early in the conflict cycle.⁷ This requires an upstream approach, with political and diplomatic antennae tuned to receive the signals of impending violence and appropriate contingency resources standing ready to respond in mediation or intervention.

31. In theory, international law recognises only three legal criteria for waging war: self defense, defense of an ally, or under UN sanction. Although military forces in coalition have been authorised to intervene many times historically under the auspices of the UN as observers and to provide a cordon sanitaire between belligerents, the turbulence of the first decade of the new millennium has necessitated an increased need for more assertive operations. Although national politicians and defence chiefs will always have an eye on national defence interests, the employment of military forces is now directed towards international peacekeeping rather than conventional defence or the projection of national power. It is in this turbulent and complex arena that today's soldier has to manoeuvre, morally as well as militarily!

32. Professor Gustav Däniker coined the term "miles protector" in 1992 following the Gulf War of 1991 and summarised the emerging tasks of the future soldier as "protect, aid, rescue" ("Schützen, Helfen, Retten").⁸ The soldier, whose core task is combat, remains ever adaptable and, with a some sad exceptions, added this composite role to his repertoire, though initially more by intuition than training. It might be observed that a soldier, be he Private or General, with an appreciation of Christian ethics or indeed a personal Christian commitment, might be better placed to encompass such an expansion. In these things, historic Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant intuitions coincide.

- Pope John Paul II (World Day of Peace 1 January 2000), *"Clearly, when a civilian population risks being overcome by the attacks of an unjust aggressor and political efforts and non-violent defence prove to be of no avail, it is legitimate and even obligatory to take concrete measures to disarm the aggressor."*⁹
- St Cyril (Russian Orthodox Church teaching on War and Peace, Arch Priest Fr Konstantin Tatarintsev) *"We generously endure offences caused us as private people but in company we defend one another and give our lives in battle for our neighbours."*¹⁰
- 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."*¹¹

33. The paradox of fighting efficiently and simultaneously guarding human rights and dignity remains. The 2002 Conference of the Austrian Military Ordinariat's Institute for Religion and Peace concluded that the dilemma is

exacerbated by a growing recourse to cyber weapons with high level technology and low level discrimination.¹² It may be ameliorated however if timely military action by well trained soldiers is accompanied by an instinctive ethical reaction.

34. Coalescing elements of international military forces, indigenous security forces and civil institutions is an ethical and ethnic challenge that must be addressed in parallel with peace making, peace keeping, restoration and reconstruction.

35. The sixth step in advancing the cause of peace is, therefore, appropriate training and familiarisation for deploying forces in the cultural conditions prevailing in a possible theatre of operations. Such familiarisation is equally important between deploying allies, indigenous populations and potential enemies.

36. The church has referred repeatedly to human dignity and underlined its universal validity for all cultures as an indispensable prerequisite for justice and peace. Pope Benedict XVI (Nicosia, 14 June 2010) points out the specific relation between human rights, human dignity, justice and peace, *“By being respectful of the rights of persons and peoples we protect and promote human dignity. When the policies we support are enacted in harmony with the natural law proper to our common humanity, then our actions become more sound and conducive to an environment of understanding, justice and peace.”*¹³ In 1984, Pope John Paul II addressed soldiers and their responsibility for the highest human good, *“Learn from the Cross of Christ and his dedication, how to truly serve humanity and your people!”*¹⁴

37. In most simulated scenarios, there is a “staff solution”, the Hollywood happy ending. In reality, many decisions in the field amount to a choice between evils where the commander, for whom hesitation may be fatal, knows his judgment could be aggressively scrutinised in protracted legal action and media analysis. No matter how devoted to his military calling or true to his faith, an officer who is unprepared beforehand and unsupported afterwards in such tragic dilemmas will suffer lasting mental scars.

38. The seventh step in advancing the cause of peace is therefore focused on operational preparation with loyalty to and support for those constrained to make operational choices all of which may have tragic outcomes. Those burdened with such responsibilities must never be abandoned by the authorities that commit them to such situations of moral ambiguity.

Guidelines for the Christian Soldier

39. The following guidelines should shape the self-perception and the conduct of all Christian soldiers today with particular emphasis on those who have leadership and training responsibilities:

- Deeply rooted faith – We strive to live by Christian precepts and to profess our faith in Jesus Christ, our membership of His Church, our solidarity with other confessing Christians and to contribute to being the Church amongst soldiers. We believe in both the freedom of and support for religion in the armed forces of the world.
- Moral engagement – In the execution of our duty, we recognise the lawful authority of our nations and of the alliances that govern defence policy. We also recognise that, as well as being under authority, we may hold delegated authority over others. Our actions are bound by national and international laws and conventions, overarched by the moral standards implicit in our ethical criteria. A command must come from a lawful authority and must itself be lawful and morally just. Obedience is thus conditional on legality. The soldier should have sufficient confidence in his faith and conscience to challenge orders deemed to be unlawful or unjust, to defend his position and to live with the consequences of either vindication or conviction.
- Political awareness – We support democracy, human rights and the rule of law, taking an active part in the democratic process within the constraints of our military calling where a position of neutrality must often be assumed. Notwithstanding, we try to project a confident, informed presence in social life where our Christian example may improve the quality of community life and attract others to respond to the Christian Gospel.
- Professional competence – We encourage conscientious application to duty from basic training through to deployment on active service in all ranks. We advocate careful initial selection and subsequent promotion of personnel to ensure early potential is transformed into proven ability.
- Conscientious service – We stand by our promises of allegiance, to fulfil our duties to our countries, our loyalty to our comrades in arms and our obligations to humanity with integrity and to the best of our ability. In undertaking such obligations, the soldier may leave his family vulnerable. We therefore expect the authorities to be no less conscientious in their provision of pastoral and social care for those he leaves behind.
- Commitment to peace – In taking up arms, we have, paradoxically, placed ourselves in the service of peace, reflecting St Augustine once more, *“For peace is not sought in order to kindle war, but war is waged in order to obtain peace. Therefore even in the course of war you should cherish the spirit of a peacemaker.”*¹⁵ We are committed to safeguarding peace won in the

past, peace enjoyed in the present and peace making and keeping where there is strife in order that peace may be enjoyed in the future. We are thus committed in order that human dignity and rights might be restored where they have been forfeited and supported where they are weak.

- Striving for cooperation – We seek dialogue and cooperation with diplomatic, political, civil and social authorities to foster the aims of peace in accord with our faith both within and across national boundaries. We recognise the synergy between an underlying life philosophy and the national and international instruments that promote peace and harmony. We encourage engagement with Military Chaplains across borders and denominations and with other appropriate professionals to develop and maintain the spiritual strength and mental resilience to meet the human and moral demands of modern deployments.
- Ecumenical outlook – We stand by the ecumenical ideals and strive for a spirit of unity in order to overcome what separates the Christian denominations and to concentrate on what is held in common rather than what divides. Additionally, we respect other religions and make every effort to enter into dialogue and cooperation with people of goodwill.

Recommendations

40. Throughout this paper, steps have been identified which aid the cause of peace and help the Christian soldier understand his part in it. These are set out in summary:

- Protection of the moral restraints of our defining principles for engaging in conflict and their rigorous application when hostilities seem to be a possibility, when engaged in conflict and in its aftermath. (para 20)
- Engagement in a diligent dialogue to improve and make more relevant the just peace criteria in our contemporary situation. (para 22)
- A recognition that the seeds of hostility are within us all and lie dormant even in the noblest soul. Any quest for peace and brotherhood must therefore begin in the heart of the individual, cultivating the seeds of peace and suppressing the roots of bitterness. (para 24)
- A willingness to understand and accommodate other perspectives and an avoidance of negative typecasting in unfamiliar cultures. (para 26)
- Intelligence led, UN authorized mediation or intervention to pacify unstable situations with the role of military forces extending beyond conventional national defence and alliances. Military intervention must be properly supported and quickly followed by a just settlement in which the indigenous people are the greatest shareholders. (para 28)

- Appropriate training and familiarisation for deploying forces in the cultural conditions prevailing in a possible theatre of operations. Such familiarisation is equally important between deploying allies, about indigenous populations and concerning potential enemies. (para 35)
- Focused operational preparation with loyalty to and support for those constrained to make operational choices, all of which may have tragic outcomes. (para 38)

Conclusion

41. In this paper AMI has explored a Christian response for military people to the complexities of modern conflict. Peace is more than the absence of war. Such a shallow definition would bring no comfort to those lacking life's necessities or suffering injustice. Conflict may be suppressed by a strong military presence. A just peace itself cannot be imposed for, in the act of enforcement, it is compromised. Those in military service can clear the avenue that leads to peace in order that others may walk it in safety. Our contribution is therefore one of paving and protecting the way for political, diplomatic and civil agencies in concert to establish order, justice and freedom. Whilst we owe loyalty to these great principles, we are conscious that we must also answer to the Prince of Peace for our faithfulness and integrity in answering this call to duty.

¹ The Catholic Soldier at the Beginning of the 3rd Millennium – Declaration of the AMI General Assembly, Rome, 15 November 2000.

² United Nations General Assembly, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 10 December 1948, e.g. article 20.

³ United Nations General Assembly, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 10 December 1948, article 1.

⁴ Message of His Holiness Pope John II for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace, 1 January 2000, paragraph 20.

⁵ St Augustine, Letter to Boniface, epistle 189, 6.

⁶ Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, promulgated by His Holiness Pope Paul VI, 7 December 1965, paragraph 79.

⁷ Saferworld, LU 04.03, *The Conflict Cycle*, 2004.

⁸ Cf. Gustav Däniker, *Wende Golfkrieg. Vom Wesen und Gebrauch künftiger Streitkräfte*, Frankfurt am Main 1992, 170f.

⁹ Message of His Holiness Pope John II for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace, 1 January 2000, paragraph 11.

¹⁰ Russian Orthodox Church Teaching – Arch Priest Fr Konstantin Tatarintsev, *War and Peace*, paragraph VIII.2.

¹¹ Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed – Letter to Lord John, Duke of Saxony, Martin Luther, from Wittenberg 1 January 1523.

¹² “The Ethical Profile of Soldiers Facing the Challenges of a Culture of Peace”, Conference of The Austrian Military Ordinariate’s Institute for Religion and Peace, 9 October 2002.

¹³ Apostolic Journey to Cyprus – Meeting with Civil Authorities and Diplomatic Corps, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI, 5 June 2010.

¹⁴ Greetings of Pope John Paul II to Armed Forces before the Mass for the International Jubilee, 8 April 1984.

¹⁵ St Augustine, Letter to Boniface, epistle 209, 2.