

## The Christian Commander – What makes the difference?

Before I start, allow me to introduce myself:

I am Major General Norbert Sinn and I am the Commandant of the Theresan Military Academy in Wiener Neustadt. In my function I am responsible for military training and education of the young officer cadets of the Austrian Armed Forces.

### Looking for Luck

There is no doubt that all people – we all – live in the pursuit of happiness or are looking for the real good luck. I think it is one of the motivation forces behind all ideas, decisions we take, activities we undertake.

There are some pillars existing that should provide the appropriate setting for our possible luck:

- freedom,
- peace,
- social integration, economic independence,
- culture,
- personally development.

Maybe culture forms the most important part of all, because it is just the human being able to think about, to create ideas and thoughts, to reflect on his doing, causing that way the responsibility of the sole person concerning others, but evidently also the responsibilities of societies and communities.

This personal conception is at least accepted by all Christian scientists and scholars.

It forms part of the Enzyklika “Gaudium et Spes” by Pope John Paul II, where are, and I tried to translate it myself, written the following sentences:

“Culture is to be understood as all things done by human beings, developing their intellectual and physical possibilities to submit themselves the world by work, knowledge and recognition; that he tries to organize social life of families and the society better and more human. The conclusion is that culture of human being includes a historic and a social dimension. Culture as a definition includes regularly terms of society and peoples.

Why do I stress the question of culture within this lecture?

## Influence of Christianity on the European and world's development

European history is unthinkable without Christianity. Its historical, social, scientific, political development is deeply influenced by Christianity, christian thoughts, Christian philosophers, Christian educated politicians.

Unfortunately Christian faith was not able to prevent war!

These last 2000 years were accompanied by errors, human tragedies, revolutions, wars of religion, terrible wars fought, - the most terrible ones took place in the last century. The most terrible crimes and war crimes happened up to the Holocaust in the first half of 20 th century. But also later on and without further talking about I 'd like to mention Korea, Algeria, Vietnam, the Near and Middle East, Cambodia, Yugoslavia, the Africa.- I know this list can't be complete.

Especially the European wars, their results and political implications contributed essentially, better to say most to the evolution of modern law.

Most of the international laws are influenced by Christian thoughts and goals and bear its trademark, starting maybe after the end of the so called 30 years war. The more modern examples are

- The law on warfare,
- The Charter of the United Nations from 1945
- The declaration on Human Rights from 1948
- The Geneva conventions of 1949
- The Hague Convention on Cultural Property,
- At least the Protocols to the Geneva Conventions

The question today is - do we need soldiers, do we need Christian educated soldiers, officers, commanders, and what in reality makes the difference?

Looking back onto the early 16 th century and knowing the "Utopia" by Thomas Moore, he stressed:

"It will not be possible that all things become good until all men did become good, and this fact I don't expect from now not really within a pretty while" (Thomas Moore – Utopia A.D. 1415). Thomas Moore tried to explain how an ideal state could be reigned and how its political, social, economic, cultural goals should be defined. – also this ideal state Utopia "Nowhereland" faced challenges, provocations and dangers – and had to be defended.

Fact is that since he had written this book already almost 500 years have passed without changing mankind and peoples. Thus it looks like we'll need soldiers not only now but also still in the far future.

To be honest I myself don't expect a change of behaviour of mankind!

Nevertheless, what I do like to express is that many regulations concerning behaviour in wartimes are existing and how to treat for instance prisoners of war, wounded, civilians. In theory things should work!

## Changing of the world after world war II

The end of World War II brought essential changes in thinking concerning military questions, for instance military responsibility and questions of respect of the personality especially in Germany and Austria. While Germany = Federal Republic of Germany became member of the NATO in 1955, Austria regained its independence after signing the so called state treaty.

Both states rebuilt their armed forces. Both had to play a crucial role in world politics and the cold war.

During the cold War the western armies prepared the defence of Western Europe, its independence, its way of life, its political system and political and social rights of the citizens against the Warsaw Pact Treaty organization with the Soviet Union as a leader. It was not really difficult to explain in a changing social western world why to defend our countries.

Thank god we didn't have to offer proof of the seriousness of political and military intentions!

We all know the slogan "citizen in Uniform". Compulsory military service became one of the trademarks of modern democracy. Rights and obligations were drawn in so called "general instructions on military service" (similar to the general regulations we in Austria already knew in the first Republic!).

Military service was of public interest and, of course, under public control. Many institutions, like the houses of parliament, newspapers and magazines were interested in military activities, especially how professionals behaved to the young people joining the army for military service.

## The "End of History" and its challenges

With the fall of the iron curtain we recognize a reduction of public interest so far. First, and also his statements are well known slogans, Francis Fukuyama stressed "the end of history" indicating the beginning of a better world.

Just few years later already second Irak war broke out, the Balkan wars became a matter of interest, because it directly touched European security questions and slightly astonished we had to accept, that history had any intentions to end, but we just opened a new page to discuss in the aftermath of 9/11 the questions of a new world order or a world governance!

With the fall of the iron curtain, the expansion of NATO and the more and more growing cohesion of the European Union, political, economic and military challenges and tasks are changing. National armies have to redefine their position as the armed forces of both, the national state and the European Union. Following the concept of the so called “Petersberg Missions” National armies are more extramural oriented and more and more involved in peace keeping and peace support operations like that we just started in the Chad. With the new orientation military questions and the military itself are not prime interest of public opinion anymore. Missions abroad become more and more a task of professional soldiers, which had decided themselves to join the army and therefore are self responsible for tasks, danger, injury or death. It is one of the great challenges to bring military questions and European security back into public interest, because our security can’t be understood as a question of governments, their generals and soldiers. European security is directly connected with national security, and national security is, as I understand it, a precondition for prosperity, culture, individual rights.

Time and world have changed. European Union and the national Defence Forces are more and more abroad oriented. More and more trouble spots arise. Maybe as a consequence of the ending influence of superpowers in some regions of the world. Territorial, economic, racial and tribal conflicts take place. The EU is beginning to accept a role as a world police starting with defining its area of influence outside Europe. Africa is one of it.

Why such a round-about way? What about the Christian Commander?

## New missions – new challenges

Let me pop up a few examples, why all these questions are important for a Christian commander.

In 1995 during the war between Croatia, Bosnia and Serbia a terrible slaughter took place in the surroundings of Srebrenica, a town of in the beginning approximately 6.000, then, with refugees about 60.000 Bosnian inhabitants in the north-east of Bosnia. The UN- security counsel had already installed a security zone to secure Bosnian Moslems, unfortunately based on a weak UN- Mandate and, due to the costs, not really filled with big enthusiasm by the European nations. At Srebrenica a Dutch battalion was deployed. The town itself was surrounded by Serbian troops, the Dutch battalion became weaker and weaker, at least around 450-600 soldiers. When the Bosnians had formed a convoy trying to escape they were first attacked, after that caught, men were

separated and killed. Approximately (the numbers are still unclear) 7000-8.000 men were killed by Serbians.

In the aftermath a long lasting discussion started concerning guilt or contribution of the blue helmet soldiers to the massacre, done by the Serbians. The events of Srebrenica are called the biggest mass murder in Europe after World War II. The question to be answered was, were the Dutch blue helmets at least partly informed about the tragedy which happened or not; and if why didn't they do anything to prevent the massacre.

Today it seems to be with a reasonable certainty clear that world community left the Dutch soldiers alone, to weak in strength and they didn't have to expect reinforcements. At least the mandate was too unclear. What remains as a question is, shouldn't they have to try to defend the refugees? Accepting also the own death?

Another terrible example:

Already before British colonisation started a kingdom with strong frontiers existed on the territory of Rwanda. Hutus (as a minority), Tutsi and Twa lived in family clans there. Due to radical changes in Rwanda already in the early sixties ten thousands of Tutsi citizen left Rwanda. In the early nineties about 600.000 Tutsi lived as refugees in the neighbouring countries. A Tutsi rebel army (Rwanda Patriotic Front) started some successful attacks from Uganda against Rwanda. Almost one million people were driven away from their homes inside Rwanda! Some two thousand Tutsi were killed during that phase of the inner conflict.

In 1993 a peace treaty between the government and the RPF was signed, without essential results while in October 1993 a UN-peace keeping mission started. It was in theory a strong mandate and should have been able to prevent crimes against humanity in particular the following massacres.

The government started a political, racial oriented campaign against the Tutsi minority still living in Rwanda which rhetorically laid down the basis for the following genocide. Also militia units for "self defence" were recruited.

When UNAMIR (United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda) started, up to 2200 soldiers, 331 military observers (unarmed) and 60 police men took part in the mission. Most of the soldiers were Belgians – a problem, because especially the Belgians were seen as part of a colonial army, not a peace keeping operation. When the genocide started in the beginning of 1994, 10 Belgian soldiers were killed in action with the result that Belgium withdrew its contingent and the number of soldiers went down to approximately 540.

The commander of UNAMIR, Romeo DALLAIRE from Canada, reported several times to the UN but didn't get the permission to react.

Maybe 500.000 to one million people were killed, up to 500.000 women were raped, two million people fled the country/Rwanda.

Romeo Dallaire and UNAMIR weren't in the position to prevent the genocide. At a later momentum world community started another mission to secure and pacify the country.

Romeo Dallaire stated:

“I now know that god exists...because I shook the devil's hand. I have seen him, I have smelled him und I have touched him. I know that the devil exists, and therefore I know that god exists too.”

Romeo Dallaire suffered psychically for a long time and tried to several times to commit suicide. 2003 he published a book: “Shake Hands with the Devil: the Failure of Humanity in Rwanda.”

Additional remark: the plupart of the population of Rwanda are Christians!!!

One of the youngest interviews: the National Commander of the Austrian Contingent for Chad newly explained in an Austrian newspaper:”If necessary we will use our weapons, but... If we are confronted with some thousand rebels, we will stand aside”.

What do I try to explain?

If a mission is to be started it is the main task of the commander not to close its lips, but to insist in a strong mandate, soldiers to fulfil the military mission and the material necessary. If not, to refuse starting the mission.

Maybe one of the lessons learned has to be that we really have to fulfil the military task and mission. We have to accept that soldiers feel fear or horror in front of a mass of people ready to kill.

Nevertheless we will have to accept losses amongst our soldiers but that just should be losses although we excellently prepared our mission and due to the fact that mismanagement and mistakes accompanied the mission.

**The Christian Commander – what really makes the difference!?**

As I already mentioned, danger of international or bilateral conflicts is diminishing, while internal conflicts, caused by extreme nationalism, decline of states, ethnical, religious and social tensions are growing. Not to forget the struggle for resources and space.

For all these reasons and the necessities to contain or bring to an end conflicts by missions in the frame of UN, OSCE, NATO or EU one of the most important issues from my point of view is, to bring back the armed forces in mind of politicians and the societies. We are not a foreign body living within the society – we form part of it and it is always a citizen in uniform to be sent on a mission abroad.

There are no missions existing without danger and the possibility to get injured or killed. Our soldiers are representatives of the respective governments and there will be a political responsibility for us soldiers too. It is responsible to provide our troops with the material, financial and moral conditions to organize, prepare and conduct our tasks and missions. Soldiers are still the only professional group which is obliged to be aware of death and this is the reason why soldiers have the right to be accepted and recognized within the whole society.

Again in the Enzyklika “Gaudium et Spes” is formulated that soldiers should “serve the security of their countries and the communities of peoples, fight against violence, help others in danger and distress and to contribute comprehensive to peace in the world. Doing this right, he truly contributes to fostering peace on earth.”

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Living and serving in democratic countries we are allowed to trust our legal governments that they decide in a right and acceptable way following the aim to organize a better life or to support states/countries/ populations to reorganize their lives or to help them survive.

Concerning the commander’s responsibility from my point of view it always starts with the responsibility for his soldiers or subordinates and as I regularly set out: the commander takes the responsibility to bring them in, but he has to take the responsibility to bring them out and back, too!

At home a broad responsibility exists for the families of soldiers, to provide them support in their daily life, to provide them with information and to organize to get in contact with the soldier elsewhere. The commanders are also responsible for support in difficult and maybe terrible situations. Families or partners have to be social integrated or embedded. We are forced to not leave them alone!

In our function we serve with respect for the integrity of comrades, subordinates, higher ranking and civilians.

We follow the golden rule: “treat others as you want them to treat you. “  
Matthew 7:12

We work honest, with selfconfidence, because we can trust in god. We treat people in awareness of their personal integrity, we respect women and children and support them in remaining their self-respect by giving them shelter, food and clothing.

Commanders (and their soldiers) respect foreign cultures, foreign cultural heritage, the international laws and the rules of the country of his own. Commanders respect international law, especially the humanitarian laws on military conflict.

Commanders are well educated. That brings them into the position to judge contents of orders received to be correct or incorrect. (I feel great respect for the commander of EUFOR Chad Lieutenant General Patrick Nash of Ireland).

He /she is prepared to refuse orders if they are in conflict to national/international law or his/her conscience.

He/she will accept the negative consequences if they refuse an order. We know our personal weaknesses and how to handle them.

We think about the orders we receive and are able to decide wether it is a correct order or not. We are competent in our function and are able to discuss orders which are at least “strange”. Soldiers are disciplined, they obey correct orders and they fulfil it the best they are able to do.

Commanders are of strong character. They act cool, steady, well considered also inextreme situations and in the face of death and cruelties.

Soldiers and Commanders are brave, honest and disciplined. They don't betray their soldiers and their families. They especially don't leave their families alone even if they are on. mission abroad. They get in contact as often as possible. They remain feeling responsible for their families and partners.

Soldiers and commanders are aware that they are representatives of their sending countries. They all will avoid to behave and act in contrary to national laws, cultural rules and so on, without giving up their personal identity. They act with respect to foreign cultures, customs and traditions. They are self-disciplined and feel responsible for discipline and moral of their soldiers.

Commanders are interested in political, economic and cultural affairs. A christian commander feels responsible for his soldiers in a comprehensive way. They will be interested in the soldiers private affairs, like general questions

“Where are you from, what was your way of life up to now, what ideals, goals and ideas do they have for their future life, how can one help them?”

Christian commanders will try to develop their personality. they will try to expand their knowledges and professional skills to become more steadfast and professional. They attempt to get into position to become better counsellors for their soldiers.

Commanders show their soldiers that comradeship is important To fight and to win without comradeship will not be possible. Commanders are able to live comradeship in the daily life.

Commanders will support their soldiers in organizing their leisure time if necessary. They should show them the importance of healthiness and fitness. They disapprove the abuse of alcohol, smoking and drugs.

To keep it sharp and short: Commanders take care for their soldiers!  
Commanders are not self-satisfied and are not arrogant!

One of the challenges of the future for us, the commanders and the professional soldiers – at least in our country- will be the problem of professionalisation of the armed forces itself. As the danger of a military conflict to be led in our countries is unthinkable for the moment, the will of political classes/governments to provide the army with finances, material, laws to fulfill their tasks – although given by the governments and parliaments – is sinking. To fulfill our tasks becomes more and more difficult. But, if the army isn't in the position to fulfill their tasks public opinion will ask:

“Why do or why should we pay such an inefficient instrument?”

And that brings me to a further possible negative development:

As I already mentioned earlier, one danger will be the drifting apart of civil society and military, exactly for these reasons.

What we have to attempt is to bring us back in mind of our societies as a not only necessary, but worthy part of our society, contributing a lot to the development of our society, economy, culture and its security, freedom and the independence of the individual.

We are not the “*Legion etranger*” but citizens of our respective countries, forming a part of the society with social and, if one can accept, with unusual tasks, including the preparedness to die for our countries best.

Without proposing the forming of a military society, separated from the rest, we nevertheless we have to reckon with such a development in the future. That could mean, and I think this is not really the bad aspect of this possible development, that we have to move and stay closer together, peoples wearing uniform and their relatives.

Beside our goal to remain incorporated and integrated in our societies we shall organize a better social life within our group, to foster comradeship and friendship.

Let me come to a conclusion!

### Attempt of a conclusion

I told a lot. Coming down from the frame of actual developments in politics, society, possible and actual military problems to the demands we face of our profession.

I tried – I confess – to describe the ideal type of a Christian commander. I know, because I know myself, that you never will meet this type of military commander.

We all are God's children, with all our faith, skills, weaknesses, faults and failing.

The difference is that we have the luck to be conducted by God's one words and messages to guide us.

At the end two words from the holy bible:

“I may walk through valleys as dark as death, but I won't be afraid. You are with me.” (Psalm 23:4) and

“Having a lazy person on the job is like a mouth full of vinegar or smoke in your eyes.” (Proverbs 10:26)

What we have to do is navigating us through the minefields of our life. Maybe we all are willing, but our flesh is weak. Let us pray and hope that the holy Lord will support us, if we are willing to do right!

I thank You for Your attention!

