

WAR, THE PROFESSION OF ARMS AND CHRISTIAN ETHICS

Reverend Victor DUBBIN,
Ex-General Chaplain of the British Royal Army

In this paper are presented the following issues: some aspects of the teaching of Jesus; the Early Church; Constantine, Ambrose, Augustine and the formulation of the "Just War" Theory; military ethics today; symptoms of moral deterioration in situations of conflict; root causes relating to the fragmentation of moral authority; the importance of Story and Community – the Christian Community; the importance of Story and Community - the Military Community and indwelling a "Story".

Introduction

If a Christian serves in the Armed Forces, he or she can expect people to ask, "Why did you join the military? Was it part of the family tradition? Was it because it offered a spirit of adventure including excitement and danger? Was it because you felt that by doing so you were helping to make the world a safer place? Or was it simply the best job offer at the time?" However, often someone will ask; "how is your chosen career or vocation consistent with Christian discipleship." They ask this question because they are aware of some aspects of the teaching of Jesus.

This is certainly an important question for any Christian serving in the Armed Forces.

"Can I be a Christian and consider the Armed Forces as a career? Can my vocation be to serve as a sailor, soldier or airman?" Had a Christian posed that question to his fellow disciples in the early days of the Christian Church he would

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most likely have been told that it was not appropriate for a follower of Jesus to serve as a soldier.

Some Aspects of the Teaching of Jesus

There is no record of Jesus giving his disciples any clear teaching on the subject of war or military service. So, in the light of this, we must look within Christ's teaching at those statements that relate to how disciples should react to those who wrong them, or who actually strike them or persecute them.

Certain passages from the Gospels come to mind. These include: "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment. But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.'" Matt. 5:21-22. "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." Matt.5:38-39. "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." Matt.5:43-44.

Also we may recall the occasion when Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. "With that, one of Jesus' companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. 'Put your sword back in its place,' Jesus said to him, 'for all who draw the sword will die by the sword.'" Matt.26:51-52.

Can these be taken as the final lesson or directive on how Christians today are to react when confronted with violence or the threat of violence or whether or not they should join their country's Armed Forces?

There are other passages within the Gospels and New Testament as a whole that do not appear to support a policy of non-resistance. These include: Luke 22:36, "He said to them, But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one." Luke 22:38, "The disciples said, 'See, Lord, here are two swords.' 'That is enough,' He replied." Luke 22:49, "When Jesus' followers saw what was going to happen, they said, 'Lord, should we strike with our swords?'" First, it is obvious that at least two of the disciples carried swords and the question that follows is: If Jesus had been totally opposed to the use of such weapons why did He allow anyone whom He had called to be a disciple to possess one?

I would also draw your attention to the story of the expulsion of the traders from the Temple Courts. In Mark 11:15 we read, "On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling

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there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves.” In the account told by John we have additional information. “So He made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; He scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables.” John 2:15. In both these accounts we witness an occasion when Jesus was so upset with how traders were using the temple courts, His “father’s house,” that He resorted to using physical force to demonstrate His feelings.

In Matt 22:6-8 we read within the context of the parable Jesus told of the wedding feast: “The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. Then he said to his servants, “The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come.”

Also in his prophecies of the “Last Times,” Jesus spoke of the wars of the future. He said that nation would rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom, that there would be wars and rumours of wars, Judaea would be devastated, Jerusalem besieged and taken by the Gentiles and the Temple defiled and destroyed.

Whilst the story of Jesus clearing the traders from the temple courts and His account of violence inflicted by soldiers of the King on those who had refused an invitation to a wedding, may not in themselves be sufficient evidence to support a thesis that Jesus would not prohibit his disciples serving as soldiers, there are several passages within the gospels where Jesus obviously meets soldiers but never passes any negative comment about their chosen career. One passage where Jesus had an opportunity to comment on this matter, but didn’t, is found in Matt. 8:5-13.

“When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. ‘Lord’, he said, ‘my servant lies at home paralysed and in terrible suffering’. Jesus said to him, ‘I will go and heal him’. The centurion replied, ‘Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For me I am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it’. When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, ‘I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth’. Then Jesus said to the centurion, ‘Go! It will be done just as you believed it would’. And his servant was healed at that very hour.”

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In conclusion, there was no specific teaching given by Jesus to His disciples on the subject of war or on whether His disciples could serve as soldiers. When we look at the story of the early Church, however, we discover that, generally, few Christians served in the Army.

The Early Church

There is little doubt that the early Church followed closely the teaching of Jesus with regard to the treatment of one's enemy.

Disapproval of Christians serving in the military is to be found in the writings of the theologian Tertullian and in a number of "church orders" from the third and fourth centuries. These "orders" were documents that gave instructions on such matters as worship, pastoral care as well as ethics. For this reason they serve as a good source for information on how the early Church viewed Christians being members of the military.

Among these "orders," is the "Apostolic Tradition", which dates back to the early third century but parts of which, some scholars believe, stem from the latter part of the second century. In addition there is the Canon of Hippolytus, written in the early part of the fourth century as well as the Apostolic Constitutions that were probably written around the late fourth century.

All of these sources express an opinion on the subject of Christians serving in the military. They all agree that no Christian should enlist voluntarily for military service. However, scholars who specialise in early church history including "Church Orders", trace a development in the Church's thinking over the first four centuries - changes that appear to have helped accommodate those Christians who had joined the army.

Constantine, Ambrose, Augustine and the Formulation of the "Just War" Theory

The conversion of Constantine in the early fourth century marked a turning point in the history of the Church as well as in Europe as a whole. It meant not only an end to the persecution of Christians but also to what might be called a fourth century "Freedom of Religion Act." It also included the financing of new copies of the Bible and the building of churches, especially the basilicas in Rome at the traditional shrines of St Peter and St Paul and in the Holy Land at Bethlehem and the Holy Sepulchre.

In spite of the massive political changes that brought much benefit to the Christian Churches, change in the official thinking of the churches with regard to the disapproval of Christians serving in the military was slow to develop. The first seeds of change were seen, as I pointed out, in the Apostolic Constitutions where

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the guidelines differed from earlier Church Orders in following the teaching of John the Baptist and allowing baptized Christians to join the Army voluntarily.

Once military service was recognised as an acceptable profession for the Christian, theologians and Church leaders began to consider circumstances in which they could take part as combatant soldiers in armed conflict. Thus began the development of the “Just War” theory.

St. Ambrose (340-396 AD) and St. Augustine (354—430 AD) were the first to give a theoretical defence of Christian participation in armed conflict and whilst the “Just War” Theory was largely a Christian philosophy, St. Ambrose and St. Augustine drew upon the work of the Roman philosopher Cicero who lived between 106 BC and 43 BC.

Ambrose, like Cicero, emphasised the importance of justice and called upon soldiers to risk their lives to protect the innocent. He was convinced that Christians, as part of their civil duties, should fight in wars when war was declared by their country for the protection of social order. Like St Paul, who in Romans 13:1-2 wrote, “Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.” Ambrose regarded governmental power as “part of God’s dispensation, even if the ruler is pagan.”¹

Augustine added to the teaching of Ambrose by providing criteria for determining when war may be justly waged, namely, the cause of war must be just, a legitimate political authority must declare the war, and that authority must be rightly motivated in doing so.² “Peace is the desired end of war.” Even unjust wars aim at the “peace with glory” that victory brings.³ Augustine believed that Christian participation in some wars was warranted on biblical grounds. Not only

¹ David L Clough and Brian Stiltner, *Faith and Force* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2007), 51.

David Clough is Director of Studies and teaches ethics and systematic theology at St. John’s College, Durham.

Brian Stiltner is an Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Philosophy at Sacred Heart University, USA.

² David L Clough and Brian Stiltner, *Faith and Force* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2007), 54.

³ Alain Epp Weaver, “Unjust Lies, Just Wars?” *Journal of Religious Ethics*, no. 29 (2001): 54.

Alain Epp Weaver, is the Director of Palestine Programmes for the Mennonite Central Committee and a specialist in Jewish-Christian dialogue.

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did God command wars in the Old Testament, but John the Baptist and Jesus both failed to call soldiers out of military service, implying at least a tacit acceptance of such work.⁴

Since Ambrose and Augustine took these passages as proof that at least some wars were justifiable, they had to be able to account for those other Biblical texts, referred to earlier, that appeared to prohibit violence. “No Christian”, they said, “should save his own life at the expense of another; yet when other persons than himself are involved in the decision, no Christian ought to fail to resist evil by effective means which the state alone makes available to him.”⁵

This combination of ideas, which seems strange to men today, illustrates, according to Paul Ramsey, that non-resisting love was still the groundwork of reasoning about Christian participation in war. Clough and Stiltner summarise this well: “The soldier outwardly gives physical obedience to the ruler while giving inwardly a spiritual obedience to Christ’s law of love. Augustine counsels the Christian soldier; or indeed, any Christian required to use force, to be ‘prepared’ to love the enemy and to maintain an attitude not of anger and selfishness but of justice and objectivity. So the Christian can continue to love the enemy in combat by distinguishing the sinner from the sin and by directing the use of force toward the sinner’s bad actions.”⁶

Further development of the “Just War” theory from a Christian perspective centres on the work of Thomas Aquinas, 1225-1274. He listed three necessary conditions for a war to be just; sovereign authority, just cause and right intention. The latter had two components, namely, a right intention that aimed at peace as well as the need to avoid a wrong intention. Aquinas wrote, “True religion looks upon as peaceful those wars that are waged not for motives of aggrandisement, or cruelty, but with the object of securing peace, of punishing evil-doers, and of uplifting the good.”⁷ In addition, he taught that it was acceptable for an individual Christian to defend himself or others for whom he was responsible from an attack.⁸

⁴ Alain Epp Weaver, “Unjust Lies, Just Wars?” *Journal of Religious Ethics*, no. 29 (2001): 53.

⁵ Paul Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1950), 172.

⁶ David L Clough and Brian Stiltner, *Faith and Force* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2007), 55.

⁷ James. Turner-Johnson, “Aquinas and Luther on War and Peace,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 31.1 (2003): 8.

⁸ James. Turner- Johnson, “Aquinas and Luther on War and Peace,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 31.1 (2003): 10.

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By the middle of the Seventeenth Century, due to the contributions made by two Spanish theologians Francisco de Vitoria (1486-1546), and Francisco Suarez (1548-1617) as well as by the Dutch Jurist Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), the major elements of the Just War theory that are commonly accepted today, had been completed. The theory has two major components; one relating to the legitimacy of engaging in the war and the other in how the war is be conducted.

In summary this criteria is as follows:

Jus ad Bellum (Just War)

- The war must have a just cause.
- The war must be waged by a legitimate authority.
- The war must be fought with a right intention.
- The war must be a last resort.
- The expected results of the war must be proportionate.
- There must be a reasonable hope of military success.

Jus in Bello (Conduct of War)

- The weapons and acts of fighting must be discriminating: non-combatants may never be intentionally targeted.
- The weapons and acts of fighting must be proportionate.
- All the legal rights of enemy soldiers and civilians must be honoured.⁹

It would be a mistake to suppose that with the development of the “Just War” theory and its acceptance by the churches, that the dilemmas of war and military service faced by individual Christians and the churches had been solved.

Military Ethics Today

Dr. Th.A.van Baarda and Dr. D.E.M. Verweij define Military Ethics as, “An ethic which relates to the nature, content, validity and effect of morals in a military context. As such, military ethics refers to both the conceptual creation of scientific theory, as well as applied ethics including casuistry”.¹⁰ They distinguish five layers of military ethics:

1. Personal value systems.

⁹ David L Clough and Brian Stiltner, *Faith and Force* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2007), 59.

¹⁰ Th.A.van Baarda and D.E.M. Verweij, *Military Ethics* (Leiden.Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2006), 2.

Professor Th.A.van Baarda and Professor D.E. M.Verweij are both associated with the Netherlands Defence Academy.

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2. Ethics of the Military Profession.
3. Ethics of particular professions within the military, such as medical doctors, lawyers, chaplains, etc.
4. Organisational ethics, which sets standards for both the military organisation as well as its personnel.
5. Political ethics, which set standards of propriety under which circumstances units of the Armed Forces may be sent on a mission by the political leadership.¹¹

I intend to comment briefly on the first of these five categories, namely, the personal value systems including the ethical standards set by the military for their personnel. I am convinced that the approach adopted in understanding the role of narrative, story and story telling within the Christian Community can be used effectively by the Armed Services to sustain their ethos, as well as to provide the sailor, soldier and airman with a personal moral compass that reflects the direction in which the Service Community wishes to move.

You will recall the media reports, going back as far as 2005, of charges of brutality by members of American and British Armed Forces against prisoners in Iraq. Those disturbing and shameful reports showing photographs and giving details of some of the disgraceful activities that took place in Abu Ghraib prison as well as in certain Basra detention centres have increased awareness of the importance of ethics and led to additional training in the subject.

Symptoms of Moral Deterioration in Situations of Conflict

One of the British Army's most senior officers, Sir Graeme Lamb, was quoted in the Sunday Telegraph, dated August 22, 2005, as saying that the allegations of prisoner abuse against soldiers could fatally undermine the British Army. "We are in very real danger of losing our place in society as a highly respected British institution ... which today stands virtually alone in the eyes of this and many other nations." General Lamb, who had himself commanded troops in Iraq, is reported to have said, "The officers and men under our command did not live up to the standard we expected of them. Those who failed were empowered when they should not have been, were left unsupervised when we probably knew they should not have been." One reason for this situation, he claimed, was because the British Army was being forced to recruit soldiers from a "morally corrupt and dysfunctional" society, where young men idolize foul-mouthed footballers. He remarked that many recruits were "cocky and arrogant and brought up on a diet of

¹¹. Th.A.van Baarda and D.E.M. Verweij, *Military Ethics* (Leiden.Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2006), 2.

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football brats and binge drinking ... who are not educated in and able to recognize self-discipline."

The General's comments raise a number of very important points. The failure of some soldiers and officers to live up to the high moral standards expected by their leaders does not lie entirely with the Army but with a society that has failed to equip young men and women with the moral values and principles necessary to become responsible citizens as well as responsible soldiers.

Society needs to reflect on this and invest seriously in the moral education and character development of its young men and women, who when they are given the task of fighting wars, killing the enemy and, if necessary, giving their own lives for the sake of some just cause that they, their commanders, their government and nation believe in, will not behave in a manner unbecoming to the Army of which they are members.

Not surprisingly, the unethical behaviour of a small minority of American and British personnel has been studied and examined in some considerable depth and both the British and the American Armed Forces have since re-emphasised the importance of training in ethics and have examined their respective training programmes.

To issue an 'Aide Memoire' to all soldiers on Core Values and revisit the subject of ethics training within the British Army was, in my opinion, not a knee-jerk reaction to the regrettable incidents that took place in Iraq some four or five years ago. In fact, in the late 1990's, the Army deliberately set about putting more and more emphasis on one component of their military doctrine, namely, "The Moral component of Fighting Power."

Part of my contribution at that time was an attempt to make the senior generals aware of the moral background from which they were recruiting and training their young personnel. We were living, and still are, in a society in which moral authority has become seriously fragmented. We were, and still are, part of a society in which there is considerable evidence of a serious erosion of personal responsibility. In addition, we were conscious, and still are, of the emphasis being placed on human rights without any equivalent emphasis being paid to developing the sense of personal responsibility.

I became convinced that the challenges facing us then, as now, were not only the immediate challenges such as those relating to lapses in the moral behaviour of troops on operations, but also the much deeper philosophical challenges that shaped, and continue to shape, the society from which the soldiers are recruited.

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Western society, writes Jonathan Sacks¹², has been “largely formed from two primary influences, ancient Greece and ancient Israel, and it owes their combination and dominance to Christianity, formed in the encounter between these two civilisations.”¹³

Michael Polanyi¹⁴, scientist and philosopher, is quoted as saying, “The past three hundred years have been the most brilliant in human history, but their brilliance was created by the combustion of a thousand years’ deposit of the Christian tradition in the oxygen of Greek rationalism.”¹⁵

In my attempts to paint a background for the senior officers, I wrestled with the question; “Why are things as they are? How can we best understand our situation?” Professor Iain Torrance, then of Aberdeen University and presently the Dean of Princeton Theological Seminary, accepted my invitation to deliver a number of lectures to senior officers at several gatherings. One of those lectures was entitled; “The Fragmentation of Moral Authority and the Cult of Individualism.” Professor Torrance’s lectures stimulated much discussion and thought.

Root Causes relating to the Fragmentation of Moral Authority

Whilst it is not my intention to give a history lesson, it is important for us to appreciate just what has happened over time and I have found the following parable written by the American Philosopher Alasdair Macintyre¹⁶ most helpful. He writes, “Imagine that at some time in the future there is a widespread revolution against science. There is a series of ecological disasters. Science and Technology are blamed. There is public panic. Riots break out. Laboratories are burned down. A new political party comes to power on a wave of anti-scientific feeling and eliminates all science teaching and scientific activity. A century later, the mood

¹². Dr. Jonathan Sacks is the Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth. He is an Honorary Fellow of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge and is well known as a writer and broadcaster.

¹³. Jonathan Sacks, *The Politics of Hope* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1997), 56.

¹⁴. Michael Polanyi, (1891 -1976) was both a Scientist and a Philosopher. He was a Fellow of the Royal Society and a Fellow of Merton College, Oxford. In 1951-52 he delivered the Gifford lectures at Aberdeen University, later to be published in his book ‘Personal Knowledge.’

¹⁵. Lesslie Newbigin , “Truth to Tell,” in *Truth to Tell The Gospel as Public Truth* (United State of America: SPCK, 1991), 20.

¹⁶. Professor Alasdair Macintyre is the O’Brien Senior Research Professor of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame. He is the author of many books and academic papers and is recognised as a key figure in raising interest in virtue ethics.

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subsides. People begin to try to reconstruct what was destroyed, but all they have are fragments of what was once a coherent scientific culture: odd pages from old books, scientific instruments whose use has been forgotten, bits and pieces of information about theories and experiments without the background of knowledge of their context. These pieces are reassembled into a discipline called science. Its terminology and some of its practices resemble science, but the systematic corpus of beliefs, which once underlay them, has gone. There would be no unitary conception of what science was about, what its practices were for, or what the key terms signified. The illusion would persist that science had been recovered; but it would have been lost, and there would be no way of discovering that it had been lost.”¹⁷

This, Macintyre argues, is what actually happened to moral thinking in the 18th Century. This period, known as the Enlightenment, “succeeded in destroying the traditions to which the key terms of morality belonged The words survived like – *good, right, duties, obligation, virtue-* but they became severed from the context that gave them sense.”¹⁸

Two Canadian writers, Middleton¹⁹ and Walsh²⁰ explain this by using interesting and helpful illustrations of the carnival and the circus. Think for a moment about the Circus. Usually there is one central ring and this is where the main performance takes place. In addition to the main performance there are often a number of sideshows which we can view on our way in or out of the Big Top. In fact, most of the side shows are identifiable components of the main programme.

As mentioned earlier in my references to Jonathan Sacks and Michael Polanyi, the main philosophical activity and influences emanating from the “centre ring” that shaped our society for many centuries was Christianity. However, in the 18th Century, at the time of the “Philosophical Enlightenment,” this influence was pushed aside, lost its hold of the centre, and was replaced by philosophy. It was believed that reason alone could and must be able to solve all moral problems and difficulties.

Christian Religion, though important in the past, had caused too many problems and conflicts and there was now a new and better way to approach our world.

¹⁷. Jonathan Sacks, *The Politics of Hope* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1997), 32.

¹⁸. Jonathan Sacks, *The Politics of Hope* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1997), 32.

¹⁹. Richard Middleton is Associate Professor of Biblical Studies at Roberts Wesleyan College with a joint appointment as Associate Professor of Bible and Culture at Northeastern Seminary, both in Rochester New York.

²⁰. Brian J Walsh is presently a Chaplain at Wycliffe College, Toronto.

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Jonathan Sacks poses the question, “When the profession of a faith is no longer needed for citizenship, what else weaves the strands of private lives into the fabric of a shared existence? Nineteenth-century thinkers, with few exceptions, had no doubt. It was the existence of a shared morality.”²¹

The expulsion of Christianity from centre stage in Europe in the eighteenth century to be replaced by philosophical rational thinking is not the end of the story - in fact, the hoped for “common morality” was itself removed from centre stage. It also became fragmented to such a degree that, if we stay with the image of the circus, there is now no influential presence in the main centre ring. All that remains are the sideshows.

“Far from the erosion or even eclipse of religious belief that the Enlightenment so confidently predicted, the Enlightenment itself has been eclipsed, resulting in a veritable smorgasbord of religions and world views for our consumption.”²²

Perhaps the most succinct summary of what has happened over the past two hundred years resulting in what we experience today, is expressed by Jonathan Sacks when he writes, “For centuries Western civilisation had been based on a Judaeo-Christian ethic. That was now being abandoned, systematically, ideologically, and with meticulous thoroughness”²³

Macintyre writes, “We have long assumed, that there are standards of rationality, adequate for the evaluation of rival answers to such questions, equally available, at least in principle, to all persons, whatever traditions they may happen to find themselves in and whether or not they inhabit any tradition”.²⁴ However, this is a false assumption. Reason alone does not solve our complex difficulties – argument is endless – the experts fail to agree.

The conclusion for some, therefore, is that “Ethical action is dependent on indwelling a socially embodied narrative, on membership in a concrete community oriented to a distinctive perspective, heritage and vision of life.”²⁵ It was Macintyre who said, “I can only answer the question, ‘What am I to do?’ if I can answer the prior question, ‘Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?’”²⁶

²¹. Jonathan Sacks, *The Politics of Hope* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1997), 75.

²². J Middleton, Richard. Walsh, *Truth is Stranger Than It Used to Be* (London: SPCK, 1995), 43.

²³. Jonathan Sacks, *The Politics of Hope* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1997), 122.

²⁴. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 393.

²⁵. J Middleton, Richard. Walsh, *Truth is Stranger Than It Used to Be* (London: SPCK, 1995), 68.

²⁶. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Guildford: Biddles Ltd, 1993), 216.

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In the light of this, there has been a suggestion that one way forward is to create “moral communities.” From within such communities there would be “tradition and reason” exercised in the process of making moral decisions. A cautious and qualified suggestion that the Armed Forces could become such a community was made by Professor Torrance.

The Importance of Story and Community – The Christian Community

The Christian life begins with a call to follow Jesus Christ. It is a call to discipleship. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, one comes to believe in Jesus Christ, to have faith in Him as Saviour and Lord and to commit one’s life to Him as a disciple, eager to follow Him and to learn more about this new found relationship. That call, and the commitment that follows, is the beginning of something new. In 2 Cor.5:17 Paul writes, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” But, in addition to this, all believers are initiated into a history, a story that goes back over two thousand years. In some ways, that story, of which they have become a part, is a much bigger story for it has to do with the One through whom all things came into being.

Christian writers often refer to the Bible as a book that tells of the mighty acts of God in history. It can also be understood, I believe, from the perspective of “story.” The Old Testament can be read as a story about a people’s journey with God. Israel is a people formed by a story, and in Deut.6:21-25, we learn how the story was passed on from one generation to another. At the Feast of the Passover the father would tell the youngest present, “We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Before our eyes the Lord sent miraculous signs and wonders – great and terrible– upon Egypt and Pharaoh and his whole household. But He brought us out from there to bring us in and give us the land that He promised on oath to our forefathers. The Lord commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the Lord our God, so that we might always prosper and be kept alive, as is the case today.”

Also, in the New Testament, we know that the Christian Faith began, not with a creedal statement, but with stories about Jesus that were later to be recorded in the Gospels. These stories were handed on from one person to another, from one generation to another and today aspects of those stories remain the essence of Christian sacramental worship. In 1 Cor.11:23, Paul writes, “For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way, after supper He took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.’”

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The Importance of Story and Community - The Military Community.

When a soldier joins the army and begins to serve with his or her regiment or Corps he is not only becoming part of a community but is initiated into a history. He becomes part of a story. During his years and months of service he is shaped by that story and the story impacts on his values and character. It is within such a story-shaped community that values and loyalties are formed. The core values for the British Army are courage, loyalty, discipline, selfless service, integrity and respect for others. Stanley Hauerwas states,

“- The moral life is not simply a matter of decision governed by publicly defensible principles and rules; we can only act in the world we see, a seeing partially determined by the kind of beings we have become through the stories we have learned and embodied in our life plan.”²⁷

Similarly, Charlotte Linde writes: “Part of becoming a member of any institution, formal or informal, is learning to tell the stories of that institution, and learning to tell one’s own stories in a way coherent with those of that group. Part of what one needs to know to be a member is what the stories of the group are, what events in the past are judged to have relevance to the present, what values the stories exemplify, and when it is appropriate to tell them. This is one very important way that people actually take on the values of the institution as their own. It is this participatory process which makes stories particularly effective as a way of transmitting social knowledge, because the hearer comes to participate in the construction of the story, and thus comes to have a stake in it.”²⁸

Indwelling a ‘Story’

Lesslie Newbigin, in a number of his books, talks about indwelling a story. This is more than *knowing* or *telling* a story. One may study the main aspects of the Christian Faith, including Church history, to a level that qualifies the person to teach others what the Christian faith is about, its beliefs and practices, whilst at the same time being an atheist. Such a person does not indwell the story as does a Christian. It is simply impossible for them to do so. They study the Christian story from outside, looking at it from within the framework of another story.

Lesslie Newbigin writes, “To be human is to be part of a story, and to understand oneself is to understand the story.

My life, like that of any other Christian, becomes part of a much larger ongoing story of God’s people, His Church. It is not only the story of an individual but that of the community of Christ’s followers. It is within this community that

²⁷ Stanley Hauerwas (1986) *Vision and Virtue*, p. 69

²⁸ *Journal of Knowledge Management*, Vol. 5 Number 2 (2001) pp. 160-171.

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one worships God and learns about His love for the World. It is also a story from within which we can draw help and insight to be better people than if we had been trying to cope on our own. It is a story within which traditions and customs have been developed, and from which both the community and individuals can seek insights into the ethical aspects of important and serious issues.

However, much as I appreciate being part of the ongoing Christian story, I am conscious that from within it there are serious disagreements relating to such issues as Church Government and Confessional Creeds as well as to some social issues including War and military service.

If we understand “vocation” to be one’s calling in life then for the Christian, the primary calling is to love God and one’s neighbour. However, the Christian must also ask how his or her chosen career or vocation is consistent with Christian discipleship.

If a Christian serves in the Armed Forces, he can expect people to ask, “Why did you join the military? Was it part of the family tradition? Was it because it offered a spirit of adventure including excitement and danger? Was it because you felt that by doing so you were helping to make the world a safer place? Or was it simply the best job offer at the time?” The most important question one must ask oneself is, “Can I be a Christian and consider the Armed Forces as a career? Can my vocation be to serve as a sailor, soldier or airman?” Had a Christian posed that question to his fellow disciples in the early days of the Christian Church he would have been told that it was not appropriate for a follower of Jesus to serve as a soldier. But, with time, the situation changed and today it has become more and more acceptable for Christians to serve in the military. Nevertheless, the question whether a Christian can serve in the military has never really gone away and we find that in the Sixteenth Century, Martin Luther, the great reformer, wrote a paper entitled, “Whether Soldiers too can be Saved?”

Luther, like Augustine before him, as well as many other eminent Christian scholars who lived before and after the Reformation have concluded that a Christian is justified in undertaking military service. Why? “Because he is performing an essential service for the good of the society. Properly used, the military protects a sphere of civil life within which a relatively peaceful existence is possible.”²⁹

The subjects of war and military service for the Christian have been part of the story of the Christian community for centuries. How much easier it would have

²⁹ Martin .L. Cook, “Soldiering,” *The Christian Century* 118 (July 2001): 22.

Martin Cook is Professor of Philosophy and Deputy Departmental Head at the United States Air Force Academy.

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been if Jesus had given his followers clear directives on these issues! Without those directives, Christians can only reflect theologically on the story of which they are a part and make a balanced judgement for themselves. My own feeling is that, until the end of time when Christ returns, this dilemma will remain and all Christians, pacifist and non-pacifist alike, must pray, “God be merciful to me a sinner.”

By indwelling their respective stories, be that the Christian community, the Armed Forces or any other organisation, individuals acquire the desired values that are beneficial to the life of their organisation, an organisation shaped by an ongoing story.

The dangers of teaching core values from another framework are obvious. Loyalty, discipline and courage, three of the Army’s core values are also values shared with terrorist groups or criminal gangs. The terrorist certainly believes in discipline. He will not get drunk on a Saturday night and tell those around him in the pub what his terrorist cell plans to do the following week. He also believes in loyalty and knows that to achieve his objectives of destruction and suffering he will need courage.

Naturally, the Army has adopted Core Values for very different reasons from those of the terrorist. It aims to be a good and moral community, but there are obvious pitfalls that need to be avoided. The instructor, presenting his lesson on the core value of loyalty, may leave the class room convinced that all the soldiers in attendance understand the importance of loyalty. The soldiers may indeed understand but, sometime in the future, they may limit its application to a small four-man section. If the section, during an operation, behaves in an immoral way by beating up innocent civilians, a soldier may show loyalty to the other section members rather than to his Regiment or the Army. How can this and similar difficulties be addressed? Or, in other words, how do you keep good communities good?

This very question was raised by Professor Iain Torrance in his lectures on, “Ethics and the Military Community.” His response was, “Not being self-referring and self justifying, but having a transcendent reference is the surest guarantor of the moral health of a community.”³⁰ For the Christian living within the community of the Church, that reference point is God, who is the author of the story of which he or she is a part. It may be more difficult for the Army to articulate within its doctrine what its transcendent reference point is, but to recognise the importance of seeking such a point is vital. In a sense the section members need to refer to a point

³⁰ Torrance, Iain. *Ethics and the Military Community*. (1998): 26. Strategic and Combat Studies Institute.

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outside their immediate formation, the Company or the Regiment. Even the Regiment must look to the Division or the Army as a whole and the Army to the Government.

My life, like that of the reader, is the product of a number of stories. For not only am I part of the Christian story, but I have also been part of a number of other stories all of which have impacted on and contributed to the type of person I am. How I see the world around me and understand what is happening within it, whether it is regarding political matters, economic, social or domestic matters, depends on the framework of belief I adopt. If I look at the world from within the Christian story, I see that God, and not powerful nations, rules the world and that nothing is exempt from the Lordship of Christ. I see a story that has a beginning, a purpose and an end. If one adopts a different story framework, the same issues will probably be understood differently.

Conclusion

In addition to any official class room presentation on ethics training there will be many occasions including official ceremonies that are well suited to telling or retelling the story of which the sailor, soldier or airman is a part. I am not suggesting that all Service Personnel are taught hundreds of years of military history but that aspects of respective histories should be used to highlight the moral values that contribute to the desired ethos of the Service. In addition to the positive aspects of the 'story' much can be gained from considering those occasions when obviously sound moral values were eroded. Those occasions can be set against the current situation and discussed in such a way that mistakes of a similar nature are unlikely happen again.

Anyone who indwells the Christian story is well equipped to foster and develop this method of training and is in a position to introduce the idea so clearly stated by Stanley Hauerwas, that "I am able to recognise myself in the story I have learned to make my own."³¹



³¹ Hauerwas Stanley, *A Community of Character*. (1981): 149. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.