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Abstract

In recognition of the serious fragmentation of moral authority felt generally in Western European culture, I propose an approach to the training of military ethics that complements traditional methods. This focuses on the concepts of "story and community" I suggest this approach because it relates to character development as well as to the ethos of a community, both of which are vitally important for the Armed Forces. Moral behaviour is more than behaving according to certain procedures or rules. It has to do with the type of person the soldier or officer is. It has to do with character and virtue as well as with the social context of the community in which a person lives.

Christians are reminded of the role of 'story' and story-telling within the Christian tradition and the proposal is made that these same concepts 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 guide that reflects the direction in which the Service Community wishes to move.

Introduction

In the early years of the 20th Century P.T. Forsyth wrote, "The great problem before civilization is the moral problem. Our crisis is intellectual, no doubt, but it is still more ethical." He went on, "The moral problem is the problem of the hour and of the future. For it is the whole social problem. It is the issue on which civilization depends for its permanence; and yet it is the problem which civilization is least able to solve."

Late in the 20th Century in a book entitled *Public Sector Ethics*, edited by Charles Sampford, Noel Preston and C-A Bois, Stephen D. Potts writes "As we approach the beginning of both a new century and a new millennium, there are increasing signs that ethics in public service is an idea whose time has come."

To support these comments we need only think about the present financial crises facing our World. These crises have not come about solely because of a failure in knowledge of the

financial markets by some bankers and traders, but to a large degree, on their failure to appreciate the importance of ethics in relation to their professional practices.

Regarding military ethics we 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 football brots 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.

Western society, writes Jonathan Sacks, 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."

Michael Polanyi, 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."

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 Macintyre 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 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."

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."

Two Canadian writers, Middleton and Walsh 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.

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."

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."

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."

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." 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." 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?'

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.'"

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."

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."

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.

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 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."

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 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-referencing and self justifying, but having a transcendent reference is the surest guarantor of the moral health of a community." 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 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 for 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."