
Editorial

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It is a great pleasure to write the editorial for the re-establishment of a professional journal for Australian Army Chaplaincy. For many years, due to the energy of a small number of chaplains, the chaplaincy journal, *Intercom*, flourished. Sadly, *Intercom* lapsed and, since then, there has not been a professional journal devoted to military chaplaincy, a gap that was noted in a recent article in the *Australian Defence Force Journal*.¹ The author noted that a search of articles on chaplaincy, including on Australian chaplaincy, produced no articles by Australian chaplains. If we are to remain a relevant and professional capability for the Australian Army we need to reflect in a considered and academically rigorous fashion on both our practice and theology. One of my aims during our in-service training and conferences over the past three years has been to encourage us as a department to move further in this direction. Thanks to the initiative of the Army Chaplaincy Senior Management Conference in May and the willingness of Chaplain David Grulke, we now have the opportunity to relaunch our professional journal.

This journal will be one more avenue for confronting the apparent contradiction between military service and religious faith. That contradiction is very complex. The well-known theological difficulty often called ‘the problem of pain’ is particularly pointed when it comes to participation in armed conflict. How, one can ask, can a good God have anything other than a completely negative attitude to any human being engaged in armed conflict? Yet in Defence chaplaincy we offer the presence

of God in that very activity. Chaplaincy remains the affirmation that God has a place and, I would argue, an essential place in making sense of participation in war and in maintaining the humanity of those called to defend their communities by the use of lethal force.

Chaplaincy has historically proven its worth in all armies and this first edition of the *Australian Army Chaplaincy Journal* is based around articles on the experience of Australian chaplaincy. Why chaplains have always, in some guise or other, accompanied soldiers into battle is not always clearly articulated. However history demonstrates that there is a deep-seated awareness that chaplains are an essential component of any armed force even when there is a relative absence of religious fervour among the members of that force. The idea that there was some golden age in the Australian military when all soldiers were animated by deep religious faith is shown by Michael Gladwin's research to be a comfortable myth. This is not just the case for Australia. The Vietnam-era song *Sky Pilot* is a reminder that, even in the US, there has been ambivalence at times regarding the role of the chaplain. Chaplaincy has always had to deal in a contested and ambivalent space.

The opportunity for chaplains and other contributors to comment on and think through these issues is essential if chaplaincy is to contribute as effectively as possible to the life of the Army. As I hinted above, chaplaincy is about maintaining the humanity of soldiers faced with the evil and, even more confronting, the moral ambiguity that armed conflict entails. The presence and worship of God can appear contradictory to the practice of the art of war, but a sense that there is a transcendent purpose in the confronting of evil by armed force can go far in ensuring the maintenance of the humanity of those engaged in this confrontation. As recent history has shown, it isn't just in armed conflict that soldiers have had to deal with the moral ambiguity and downright evil inherent in living in the world as it really is. The Army has been active in peacekeeping and peace-making operations in which soldiers have had to face enormous moral challenges. There have also been the several occasions in recent years when soldiers have responded to the tragedy of natural disasters. In all these situations chaplains are the ones who are asked either openly or implicitly to make sense of what has the capacity to outrage the moral standards of the soldiers who face these challenges.

The other circumstance that underlines why chaplains are significant actors within the military occurs on ceremonial occasions. While in the face of an increasingly secularising culture there is a push to minimise the religious element in these ceremonies, chaplains are still called on to contribute that unspoken but apparently essential transcendent element in honouring those who died or suffered in the service of their country.

All these elements of military life and the role of chaplains in that life need to be explored critically by each generation of chaplaincy if we are to be as effective as possible in meeting the needs of soldiers who serve in a vocation which will always offer grave challenges to their humanity.

The challenge Australian Army Chaplaincy and indeed Australian Defence Chaplaincy will always confront in maintaining a journal is the small number of chaplains we have and, consequently, the small base for producing articles. However I want to encourage anyone with an interest in chaplaincy and religion and its relevance to the military environment to submit papers for this journal. I noted in the latest *Australian Army Journal* an article on religious diversity in the Australian Defence Force. This is the sort of article I believe would be grist to the mill of the *Australian Army Chaplaincy Journal*. Many chaplains have produced articles during their postgraduate study and I encourage you to consider submitting them for publication. I would also encourage anyone from the wider Army with an interest in chaplaincy and theology to contribute articles.

I trust and anticipate that the *Australian Army Chaplaincy Journal* will be a catalyst for thinking through chaplaincy and religion in the Army in particular and the Australian Defence Force in general. I'm very pleased that we have made a positive beginning and I hope and pray that God will bless this endeavour and that from it will flow theologically and spiritually sound material that will enhance what is already a highly appreciated chaplaincy capability. ■

Endnotes

- 1 *Australian Defence Force Journal*, Issue 191, 2013, p. 23.