

Lesson 5: How do Christians deal with the reality of war?

Many Christians struggle with the question of whether war is right. Some feel the right thing to do is to join the military and fight to defend their country.

For those Christians the military employs chaplains who are priests (and other faith leaders) who help Christians face the reality of war.



UK chaplains in Afghanistan: ordinary priests with an extraordinary flock

With their camouflage Bibles and combat crosses, the forces' 278 chaplains are outsiders in the church and the military



▲ Geoff Withers, a Church of England priest who ministers to the Joint Aviation Group, says: 'I might be regarded as a weirdo but I'm not a stranger.' Photograph: Flight Lieutenant Liz Price/RAF

The Rev James Francis was travelling in an armoured vehicle north of the Bowri desert in [Afghanistan](#), accompanying the Brigade Reconnaissance Force during the stopping and searching of vehicles for insurgents, when a Royal Marine interrupted his chat with a gunner to ask if it was right to kill.

"That was a direct question," says the padre for 30 Commando, "but it's quite normal for these things to occur to people out here and it's vital that when difficult decisions are being made we have direct answers, that as Christians we don't retreat into some kind of holy huddle."

Camp Bastion and other British military bases in Afghanistan hold vigils, overseen by padres such as Francis, to commemorate those who have died. These have come to represent the most formal face of collective worship here, but much of the work of the chaplains is in smaller gatherings, perhaps over a cup of tea.

The men and women are forced to deal with mortality at a far younger age than most of their civilian peers. "For when you need someone to pray with" is the motto for a dedicated military telephone prayer line.

Combat crosses

Wherever UK forces are, padres will be found. They have military and medical training but no weapons. The tools of their trade are camouflage-cover Bibles and they wear combat crosses - small, metallic discs with a punched-out cross - alongside the standard military-issue dogtags bearing their surname, blood type, service number and religion.



What services to military chaplains offer?



How might these be good or helpful for Christian soldiers?
