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# Looking Forward by Understanding Backward: A Historical Context for Australian Army Chaplaincy's Future Challenges

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## **Abstract**

Søren Kierkegaard once observed that 'life is lived forward but understood backward'. In this article, I want to do something similar: to look backward into history as an aid to looking forward to future challenges. This article offers some reflections from the perspective of a professional historian, in light of the past, on some potential challenges facing Australian Army chaplaincy. While future Army doctrine and tactical/strategic contexts are important in this discussion, they are not the primary focus. Instead my focus is on historical trends that can inform those in the present who are planning for the future. Historians do not make good prophets, but by taking the long view they can help to rescue us from the 'provincialism of the present'.

The first part of this article sketches an historical context for discussion of Army chaplaincy's efforts to 'look forward'. To that end, it is worth dwelling for a few moments on historical patterns of religious involvement that have

been changing significantly from the 1960s to the present. As we shall see, increasing secularisation, the reconfiguration of religion, the growth of religious pluralism and changes in Australian culture and social structure form the backdrop for the future challenges Army chaplaincy faces. Having sketched the historical context, I will then consider some possible future challenges for Army chaplaincy under some broader themes: secularisation and pluralism; professionalism; caring for souls; recruitment; new roles; leadership and administration; and intellectual foundations. As with my other articles in this journal issue, much of the discussion below is drawn from my history of Australian Army chaplains, *Captains of the soul*, to which I refer the reader for more detailed discussion and references.<sup>1</sup>

A leading sociologist of Australian religion, Gary Bouma, argues that although Australia's religious and spiritual life has 'a healthy future' and that many continuities of practice will remain, there have been — and will continue to be — significant changes. The degree of change, he adds, will reflect:

*the continued influence of the Australian religious institution, the impact of changes in Australian culture and social structure and the responses of Australian religious groups to each other and their changing situation.*<sup>2</sup>

This following discussion will consider evidence for these changes, first in relation to the decline in institutional adherence amid secularisation and increasing religious pluralism, and second, evidence for revitalisation and reconfiguration of Australian religion and spirituality.

A recurring theme in the minutes of chaplains' monthly conferences in Vietnam during the late 1960s was the irregularity of church attendance by Australian soldiers.<sup>3</sup> There were also concerns among the higher command about a correlation between poor church attendance and declining moral standards. An Australian Task Force Vietnam cable in 1966 reported breathlessly that only 10% of soldiers attended religious services. Rates of venereal disease (or 'social disease' as it was euphemistically described at the time) were also alarmingly high.<sup>4</sup> Declining church attendance among troops was a reflection of larger societal shifts with which chaplains had to contend after the 1960s, a decade which historian Ian Breward has described as the 'hinge years' of Australian religious history. Although a few church leaders had sounded warnings about increasing secularism and unbelief, statistics of religious adherence suggested only a 'slow

proportional decline' from 1945 until the 1960s. From then on, however, political, cultural and social pressures led to the dismantling of censorship, loosening of controls on the availability of alcohol and gambling, a decline in prohibitions on sport, entertainment (including television after 1956, which did away with evensong in Anglican churches) and commerce on Sundays, and a significant rise in divorce and numbers of one-parent families. This was compounded by expanding higher education, a new spirit of criticism of political and religious institutions, the pushing of cultural boundaries, greater household affluence with its golden calf of material comfort, commercialised youth culture, and a social climate encouraging rejection of tradition, self-expression and a personal search for truth, over loyal adherence to the denomination of a typical baby-boomer's youth. The result was the erosion of a century-old consensus about the Christian foundations of the religious, social and moral order.<sup>5</sup> Royal Australian Army Chaplains' Department (RAAChD) leaders had observed the beginnings of these changes during the occupation of Japan, but they were becoming more apparent in Vietnam and afterwards.<sup>6</sup>

At the risk of inflicting death by statistics, it is helpful to consider the evidence for decline that has emerged from the hard data-crunching of Australian sociologists and historians in recent decades. In 1961, 88% of Australians described themselves as Christians. In 2011 that figure was 61.1%. In 1961, 0.4% of people self-defined as having 'No Religion', whereas in 2011 that figure was 22.3% (although it should be noted that included in this group are those who might consider themselves 'spiritual' but not 'religious'). Australians have increasingly abandoned religious rites of passage, especially since civil celebrants were introduced in the 1970s for both marriages and funerals. In 1970, for example, 12% of all marriages were conducted without a religious ceremony; in 2007 that figure had jumped to 63%. Some 8% of Australians now attend church on a typical Sunday, about 14% once a month. Catholic attendance has fallen from 50% of Catholics in 1950 to around 14% in 2006. Compared with other Western countries, Australian religious involvement falls somewhere between the relatively devout nations such as the United States and Italy and the low levels of participation found in northern Europe (but it is closer to the latter). Traditional patterns of recruitment and socialisation through schooling have also broken down. Catholics, for example, educate 20% of Australian schoolchildren, and while the majority consider themselves Catholic, many reject the teachings of the church and rarely or never attend Mass.<sup>7</sup>

Recent studies of Gen Y (those born between 1981 and 1995) show that 46% regard themselves as Christian in some sense, though less than half that figure have any kind of church involvement or church affiliation; 17% follow New Age or

alternative spiritualities and 28% have no belief in God or are undecided. It is a sobering fact that the highest level of non-belief is among the university educated and the 15–34 age group — exactly the demographic that is targeted by the Army. Other social changes have had an impact. Women have traditionally outnumbered men in Australian churches, but since entering paid work in larger numbers since the 1960s both men and women under 40 are under-represented in church attendance. From the 1990s, in most non-Catholic denominations, the number of women in pastoral ministry increased at a faster rate than did the number of men.<sup>8</sup> Clearly, there is evidence of religious decline. Yet there are exceptions to this pattern of decline: congregations with a definite evangelical message and theology in Anglican, Baptist and Uniting churches have had success in attracting young families and children. The Pentecostal movement has also been successful. Tapping the *zeitgeist* of informality, immediate experience and welcoming those in the outer suburbs of capital cities with high population growth, young families and second-generation migrants, they have quadrupled in thirty years (though from a low base of 0.3% to 1.1% of the Australian population). They account for one in ten of regular church attenders, now outnumbering churchgoing Anglicans.<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, the evidence for decline has to be set against other important discernible trends. The first is a rise of popular interest in spirituality, especially among young adults, in response to the secularisation of public culture. This is a search for individual religious experience, a desire for 'connectedness' with a larger whole, but nevertheless detached from churches and a notion of 'absolute' religious truth. Their sources are eclectic, diverse and sometimes intellectually shallow, spread internationally by the internet and encompassing eco-spirituality, the teachings and texts of Eastern religions, 'ancient wisdom' of Aboriginal Australians, Celtic spirituality and the New Age movement. New rituals of mourning and commemoration are evident in roadside memorials for vehicle crash victims or the civil quasi-religiosity of Anzac Day observances.<sup>10</sup>

A greater religious pluralism has been given impetus by waves of immigration since the late 1970s from Asia, the Middle East and Africa, which has challenged Australians who seek a secular future for their nation. The proportion of self-identifying Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus rose from 1.4% of the population in 1986 to 6.2% in 2011. Religion can be a powerful source of identity for migrants, for example among Muslim youth. But migrants have also diversified and invigorated ageing Christian congregations, especially among the Roman Catholic Church, which historically has had a strong Irish character. Recent migrants from South-East Asia, the Middle East and Latin America comprise the majority who

attend Mass and send their children to Catholic schools in many suburban parishes of capital cities. Young Asian men are also making up a significant proportion of students for the priesthood.<sup>11</sup>

Also bucking the trend of secularising decline is the expanded roles of older churches in social welfare and education, as well as in public debates involving ethical issues. From the 1990s the Australian government began tendering out welfare commitments to non-government (mostly church-linked agencies). Changed methods of school funding have also encouraged non-government schools, again mostly linked to churches. Religion has come to the forefront of public policy in debates over the management of religious diversity and competition; discussions on the delivery of public policy providing assistance for disadvantaged groups, aged care and education (including school chaplaincy); and the framing of social policy on issues such as embryonic stem cell research, same-sex unions and euthanasia. Churches are expected to contribute to the process of decision-making on these issues. Religion has also assumed greater visibility in the public sphere since the Howard years (1996–2007) with a cottage industry of books and articles studying the influence of various religious groups in the formation of socially conservative policies and the alleged use by politicians — under both Howard and Rudd — of symbols and coded language, ‘dog whistles’ to appeal to conservative Christian voters both on the right and the left. Note, for example, Kevin Rudd’s 2007 article setting out his manifesto on the relationship between Christianity and the political order (compare this with his declaration in May 2013 of support for gay marriage).<sup>12</sup>

At the same time, Australian politics has generally divided along secular rather than religious fault lines (with rare exceptions). Historian Hilary Carey points out that:

*Australians have traditionally eschewed the politicisation of religion, even while recognising that religious difference — between Catholic and Protestant, established Church and dissenter, evangelical and Anglo-Catholic — was one of the most enduring bases of social division and conflict ... In a new century, it remains to be seen if the perceived differences between Muslims and Christians in Australia will be de-politicised as effectively as the differences that formerly divided the ethnic churches of the British Isles.*<sup>13</sup>

Much like Mark Twain’s declaration that rumours of his death were exaggerated, religion is alive and well in twenty-first century Australia. Scholars and journalists now write about the influence of religious groups in politics, an emerging religious

marketplace, and the ways Australians are seeking a sense of the transcendent and exploring new religious movements outside traditional church structures. Cultural historians have begun to address the religious dimensions of Australian life. Gary Bouma sees in Australia a process of reconfiguration rather than simple decline. Defining secularity as a social condition in which 'the religious and spiritual have moved out from the control of religious organisations', Bouma argues that, although mainstream denominations are shrinking so that some bodies previously central to Australian life will become more marginal, there are distinct signs of religious revitalisation and innovation, indicating that 'religion and spirituality will be a significant part of Australia's future'.<sup>14</sup>

Bouma further identifies a longstanding 'cultural macro-trend from the rational to the experiential and emotional as the dominant forms of authority shaping the ways Australians express their spirituality'.<sup>15</sup> Noting that each of the three forms of authority and transcendence — tradition, reason and experience/emotion (most Christian thinkers would add Scripture to this threefold cord) — plays a role in any period of history, but in each era one form will tend to be more dominant. This transition from rationality to experientialism has had profound implications for Australia's religious and spiritual life: denominations of Christianity that developed a rational approach to the exclusion of tradition and emotion, such as Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Uniting and the Reformed, are experiencing rapid declines in membership and attendance. Presbyterians and Anglicans emphasising rational Protestantism (with the exception of liturgical Anglicans) attracted large congregations and much social and political power prior to the 1960s, but not any more. As we have seen, there is a stronger following among Pentecostals and rational Protestant groups which have adopted certain aspects of Pentecostalism, often along charismatic lines. The Roman Catholic Church after the Second Vatican Council (or Vatican II, 1962–65) opened the hierarchy to reason-based arguments in an unprecedented manner, while maintaining a traditional authority structure. But it has lost many clergy and religious — most in order to marry — and recruitment declined in part due to the diminution of the moral superiority of clergy and religious by Vatican II. Yet, as Bouma points out, there is:

*nothing more experiential than a well-conducted Eucharist. The Catholic Church has maintained a higher degree of balance in the tension between the three forms of authority [tradition, reason and experience] while always retaining traditional authority as its primary and ultimate mode.*<sup>16</sup>

Catholicism in Australia has also maintained its position in Australian society due to post-war immigration of Catholics. Hilliard, however, sounds a note of caution:

*[Bouma's] optimistic assessment may not take sufficient account of the growing number of Australians who have no particular religious or spiritual beliefs and do not engage in religious practices; they will be a major influence in the future. Religion is not disappearing from Australian life but it is becoming more diverse, more fragmented and more a matter of individual choice. In the Australia of the twenty-first century there will be a wider range of religious alternatives than ever before but no common story, no shared faith reinforced by social institutions.<sup>17</sup>*

## Implications and challenges

### Secularisation and pluralism

Given these historical patterns and developments, what are the possible implications for Army chaplaincy? In terms of increasing ethnic and religious diversity, it is worth noting that the social integration of newly arriving migrant groups typically takes decades. It usually takes until a second or third generation for migrants to join their adopted nation's defence forces, so it is possible that increasing diversity within the Australian Defence Force (ADF) will be apparent in the next two decades. However, given the current geopolitical climate and media portrayals of religious fundamentalism dogma mutating into mass terrorism, it remains to be seen how religious groups such as Islam will integrate socially. If chaplaincy for these groups is considered, this raises further questions about who speaks for Islam in Australia, given 'denominational' differences such as those between Sunnis and Shias.

An increasingly pluralised and secularised Australian society may produce senior Army leaders with diminished Christian sympathies or religious beliefs. Their consequent appetite and support for the overtly religious dimensions of chaplaincy (rather than a bland 'lowest common denominator' spirituality) remains to be seen. In such circumstances exemplary leadership and thinking that demonstrates the full range of benefits brought to the Army by uniformed chaplaincy will be needed more than ever.

The combination of declining denominational adherence but continuing spiritual interest also raises the question of how you present Christianity from a denominational perspective to soldiers who have little concept of what *Christianity* is, let alone its denominational shades. At an intellectual level, there is a modest but growing interest at places such as the Royal Military College, Duntroon, in

movements such as the so-called 'New Atheism'. This demands development of a strong theistic apologetic of the kind that chaplains have always presented (for example, the free will defence against theodicies). It is interesting to note that a rigorous apologetic syllabus was developed during the 1960s for the foundational documents and lecture outlines of Commanding Officers' (COs') Hours and Character Guidance.

It seems to me that a tool such as the 'Faith under fire' short course, modelled on the 'Life of Jesus' course developed by the Sydney-based Centre for Public Christianity, is a good example of the kind of apologetic tools necessary for pre-evangelism in a biblically and theologically illiterate culture that has imbibed facile cultural forms of relativism and postmodernism. Another striking feature of 'Faith under fire' is that it is on the one hand an apologetic tool to introduce soldiers, sailors and airmen to the Christian faith; but on the other hand it is cleverly presented and marketed in a language that the Army understands, drawing on concepts that have currency in recent psychological research such as 'spiritual fitness', 'spiritual health' and 'spiritual resilience'. It therefore fits with the Australian Defence Force's (ADF) continuing recognition of both spiritual fitness and a religious faith as crucial factors in members' lives alongside mental, emotional and physical health. As the course website itself suggests, the emphasis is on:

*the importance of an individual's beliefs and the influence this has on character and the capacity to cope with challenges unique to the military environment. Defence service can be a time when people consider who they are, what they believe and stand for. Combat raises important questions about the use of force, self-sacrifice and the threat of death and injury. These issues are of a spiritual concern, relevant to all service men and women.*<sup>18</sup>

The appeal to spiritual fitness might also gain traction in an Australian culture that, as Bouma has pointed out, increasingly relies on the experiential and emotional (rather than the rational) as the dominant form of authority or transcendence.

### **Prophet margins: padres and professionalism**

If there is any overriding theme in the administrative evolution of the Chaplains' Department between 1945 and 2013 it is surely one of increasing professionalisation. This process, as we have seen, began in the late 1960s and was followed by the overhaul of the Department's leadership in 1981 [which abolished the Chaplains-General Conference and instituted the Principal Chaplains and Religious Advisory Committee to the Services (RACS) structure]. There was

further restructuring towards a 'divisional' rather than a 'classification' rank system in 1989–90, and the introduction of the specialist officer structure in 2002. An era of part-time chaplains-general working within the paradigms of a volunteer army gave way to a command structure that better mirrored the professional Regular Army that had emerged during the Cold War. Chaplains were given the opportunity to be better led, better integrated with their sending churches and the Army, better organised, better paid, better prepared, better resourced and better trained than ever before. Yet these changes have not been without their challenges.

While the move to a specialist staff structure has generally been welcomed by chaplains and other Army officers, it has not been without criticism. Not surprisingly, increasing professionalism has raised concerns about chaplains being too preoccupied with promotions and service conditions or 'going native' and becoming more 'of the system' than 'in the system'. Some chaplains have also observed that there is a place for the chaplain's traditional 'naiveté' and 'quirkiness', bringing a humanising and prophetic presence within an organisation that has, more than most, the potential to be impersonal and dehumanising.<sup>19</sup> There is also the reality that a Christian minister depends on the empowering and guidance of the Holy Spirit — rather than merely professional competencies — if he or she is help anyone to encounter Christ. Yet at the same time, many chaplains have stressed that the critical issue is not the rank, status or professional standing which is bestowed on the individual. Rather the chaplain's own priestly vocation, character and ability to connect with soldiers are the touchstones of effective uniformed ministry. The able chaplain is the one who can avoid the temptation to 'play the officer' or 'pull rank', although the latter can be useful when the need arises to 'get things done'. It is up to chaplains and their leaders to remember that vocation trumps competency although both are necessary in a professional and highly skilled army. In this sense chaplaincy remains a profoundly incarnational ministry in which chaplains are asked to exhibit the professionalism and competency of those to whom they seek to minister.

### **Clarifying roles**

A related issue is the perennial need to clarify and define the role of the both the Department collectively and the chaplain personally within a continually changing Army. This issue must be understood in the context of increasing secularisation and religious pluralism in Australian society, and the opening of the traditional domain of chaplains — pastoral care and social welfare — to the contributions of specialists from the rising class of 'caring professions' such as psychologists, welfare officers and social workers. A crucial historical development in clarifying

chaplains' roles, as noted in my other article in this journal, was the definition and implementation of senior and coordinating chaplains' roles within the new divisional system since 1989. The roles and competencies of chaplains were further defined within the specialist officer structure in 2003. The fruit of this hard thinking and reforming has been distilled in the most recent incarnations of the doctrinal statements and personnel instructions dealing with the vision, roles and responsibilities of the Department and its Army chaplains. This has culminated in the opening statement of the present Department's charter, in which the emphasis on chaplains' religious role is remarkable. The chaplains' roles have also been clarified in terms of five key areas: *first*, religious ministry; *second*, pastoral care; *third*, training, including character development and character training; *fourth*, advice to commanders and staff on religious, welfare, morale and moral issues; and *finally* administration and management.

A consistent finding of my research has been that the incarnational nature of the chaplain's ministry — of living and sweating with soldiers in their units at home or in patrol bases while on operations — means that the chaplain performs a radically different role from the psychologist and the social worker. Because chaplains are posted to units, ships and formations they experience the impact of incidents and deployments and are, as the submission to the 2002 Specialist Officer Tribunal put it:

*uniquely placed to minister to service personnel in a manner in which welfare workers and psychologists are not. They are on call 24 hours a day and available to Commanders to provide counselling support to members and their families both individually and collectively.*<sup>20</sup>

And just like the families of serving members, the families of many chaplains bear the sacrifices and associated stresses of military service. The relational and spiritually grounded nature of chaplaincy also stands in potential contrast to the clinical distance and humanist assumptions of many psychologists and social workers. Additionally, soldiers and veterans appear more likely to seek spiritual or moral counselling from chaplains rather than from clinicians. Nevertheless, as Baptist padre Carl Aiken has argued, chaplains should conceive their work as part of a holistic and collaborative team approach within a 'care chain of command', while not abdicating parts of their role — such as relationship and bereavement counselling — to other professional groups.<sup>21</sup>

## Panel beaters of the soul

Historical experience suggests that a significant challenge in the coming decades will be the latent impact of the increased tempo of Army operations over the last two decades. In the post-Vietnam era, in light of lessons learned from the trauma of returning Vietnam veterans, a great deal of work has been done on the psychological effects of deployments.<sup>22</sup> The majority of Vietnam veterans seemed to adjust readily on their return and reintegrate into society, leading stable and productive lives. Yet a significant number reported a high level of restlessness in their careers, personal lives and relationships, especially those who were scarred by their combat experience.<sup>23</sup> In some cases the ill-effects were latent. By 2009 more than 19,000 (of a total of 60,000) veterans were classified as 'totally and permanently incapacitated', of whom 14,000 were suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Common symptoms varied:

*flashbacks, nightmares, anxiety, rage and depression, often associated with alcohol and drug dependence; the social consequences could include divorce and family breakdown, crime, violence, vagrancy, and even suicide.*<sup>24</sup>

One implication is that there will be future health challenges that chaplains will have to help address, such as post-traumatic stress, 'moral injury', or what one chaplain describes as 'spiritual wounds or dents in the soul' for a significant minority of those who have been deployed. Major General John Cantwell, who has written powerfully on the shattering effect of his own PTSD, observes that thousands of Australian men and women sent off to armed conflict or service as peacekeepers will have to deal with 'the mental scars and wounds of things they have seen or done'. PTSD is often undiagnosed or suppressed to maintain a career and avoid stigma, or as part of the 'warrior ethos' which lauds 'mental and physical toughness as vital prerequisites of success in training and combat'.<sup>25</sup> Chaplains are, of course, aware of research predicting that many will seek help several years after they discharge from the Army.<sup>26</sup>

Chaplains have played — and will continue to play — a crucial role in bringing healing to the bodies, the minds and the souls of those who have been exposed to armed conflict, genocide, mass deportation and ethnic cleansing. In a context of increasing professionalism and clinical/therapeutic modes of chaplaincy, relationships with churches will need to be nurtured so that chaplains can remain anchored in their faith tradition and secure in their primary vocation as priests, pastors, ministers or rabbis.

An interesting example of how one chaplain has integrated his church relationship with this therapeutic mode of chaplaincy is the recent initiative of Anglican padre Rob Sutherland. His Churchill Fellowship research into 'spiritual wounds or dents in the soul' had a practical outworking in the first church-based program in Australia for war veterans who are dealing with spiritual wounds. Because coming home was 'one of the biggest struggles for our veterans and their families', Sutherland and his parish responded creatively by running 'Warrior Welcome Home', consisting of a four-day retreat and a welcome home community dinner attended by his local bishop, parliamentarian and over 100 parishioners.<sup>27</sup>

## Recruitment

It hardly bears mentioning that recruitment will remain a major future challenge. An important innovation of the early 1990s was the introduction of the Long Term Schooling scheme.<sup>28</sup> On balance, most chaplains appear to have viewed this innovation as a welcome development. Some observers have suggested, however, that two years has not always been sufficient to enable the 'priestly' vocation to flourish and to subsume the prior 'warrior' ethos and command mindset. Priests drawn from among soldiers will need sufficient time to shed the warrior ethos, while a generally smaller, ageing and increasingly less diverse pool of chaplaincy recruits will require a focus on capability as well as on numbers and retention.<sup>29</sup> It remains to be seen whether the three-year pastoral placements (rather than two years) make a difference.

These recruitment efforts notwithstanding, a chronic shortage of chaplains since the 1990s has become one of the most significant challenges for the RAACHD, particularly for the Roman Catholic, Anglican and Uniting Church communities. In particular, the transition to a specialist officer structure has raised concerns in some quarters about recruitment. The more chaplains are integrated as officers, the more they have to meet various Army requirements for those who serve as officers. A recurring problem has been physical fitness standards because the clergy pool from which the Department recruits chaplains is largely an ageing demographic (the more so among mainline denominations). Even if nominees have been found suitably qualified, medical conditions have in several cases disqualified candidates from chaplaincy. A former Uniting Church RACS representative, Gale Hall, observed that a third of prospective chaplains he nominated were deemed unsuitable on medical grounds, a problem compounded by the fact that the average age of a Queensland Uniting Church minister is now 57 years. By way of contrast, the Baptist and Churches of Christ denominations train more ministers than they can employ. This makes the provision of chaplains anything

but a problem. Indeed, their nominees have been given positions left vacant by denominations struggling to find suitable candidates. In addition, in 2010, a chaplain was commissioned from a Pentecostal denomination with a young demographic, the Australian Christian Churches (formerly the Assemblies of God and best known for its Hillsong mega-church), to serve the needs of Army personnel from that Christian tradition.<sup>30</sup>

If the Army is a young person's game, to what extent should chaplaincy be a young person's game? During the Second World War similar debates emerged concerning age. While some chaplains and officers favoured youth due to the devastating effect on health of service in malarial New Guinea, others observed that they did not want 'glorified sports masters'; moreover, they argued, many soldiers, including senior officers, would not open their hearts to an idealistic young clergyman in his twenties.

Roman Catholic chaplaincy has felt the shortages most acutely, as indeed has its broader denomination which has struggled in recent decades to attract sufficient numbers of parish priests, let alone priests for service chaplaincy. In 2013 only one-third of available Roman Catholic chaplains' positions had been filled. Since the 1990s senior chaplains have increasingly relied on 'permanent and transitory deacons', who may or may not be commissioned in the ADF, and 'lay pastoral associates' (lay men or women or members of Religious Institutes judged as suitable by the Military Ordinariate) and other clerics or lay pastoral associates acting in a full-time or part-time capacity as members of the Army Reserve.<sup>31</sup> Senior Roman Catholic chaplains have valued the contribution and presence of deacons and lay pastoral assistants, not least laywomen within an Army that has given female soldiers a greater range of roles and a priority in recruitment. Deacons and lay pastoral assistants can do many of the things that priests can do, such as provide pastoral care, counselling and a ministry of presence. Nevertheless, deacons and lay pastoral associates cannot replace a priest who brings to chaplaincy seven years of training, a strong sense of vocational identity and priestly ministry, pastoral experience and the authority to provide for the full sacramental needs of Roman Catholics.

A further flow-on effect of the shortage of priests is fewer opportunities for non-Roman Catholic chaplains to rub shoulders with Roman Catholic priests and therefore fewer possibilities to promote mutual ecumenical understanding. All of this is not helped by the extended lead time (sometimes as lengthy as two years) that it takes to recruit chaplains and the recurring problem of retirement ages.<sup>32</sup>

Although age requirements have been relaxed, chaplains still have to meet the same medical and physical entry requirements applied to all other officer entry pathways.<sup>33</sup> Contracting civilian clergy — on the current British model — might be examined as a possibility for the future if uniformed clergy cannot be recruited.

## New roles

### Women and Army chaplaincy

New roles for chaplains also appear to be emerging. Chaplaincy has provided significant opportunities for ministry to women, as Kaye Ronalds, the first female chaplain in 1992, pointed out at an early stage in her service:

*I have noticed that some of the significant encounters have been with women which have included a domestic violence victim, a single young woman needing to focus her spiritual life and a woman nearing the end of her career who needed to deal with some unfinished grieving. However, I have also met with men for prayer and provided counselling.*<sup>34</sup>

The growing number of women in chaplaincy comes at a time when women are being seen as essential to the ministry of several churches and in the combat support operations so vital to the Army's counterinsurgency doctrine. Women, for example, have accompanied patrols and interacted with local women in Afghanistan. As one officer has observed, '[t]he cultural sensitivities of men searching women in Afghanistan [at checkpoints] cannot be understated'.<sup>35</sup>

### Who cares wins: chaplains and Special Forces

The chaplain's role has become increasingly important among Special Forces soldiers and their families at home, not least because the operational tempo has increased enormously since the Special Air Service's (SAS) deployment to East Timor in 1999. Sadly, so has the number of casualties, a disproportionate number of which have been Special Forces soldiers. This is partly because the units have become, as historian David Horner notes of the SAS, the 'ADF's force of choice'.<sup>36</sup> A 'very small part of the national family ... are doing most of the country's war fighting', remarked Australian Defence Association director Neil James after the recent death of an SAS soldier on his *seventh* deployment to Afghanistan.<sup>37</sup> Special Forces chaplains have argued that 'for every operator they have in the field' there are 'several other people in support who are not as well trained and not as resilient as the shooter'.<sup>38</sup> The need for adequate chaplaincy coverage is clear.

Given the unique characters and skill sets of Special Forces soldiers — Alpha type personalities with extraordinary drive and resilience, both mental and physical — the chaplains who work among them have to be vigorous, highly motivated and conscientious. A degree of physical robustness also helps to make inroads into the Special Forces world. Several Special Forces chaplains have been noted for their physical prowess, whether on the rugby field or in boxing, self-defence or general physical fitness. Padre Keith Wheeler, the SAS's Reserve chaplain from 1999 to 2003, has gone down in SAS folklore for his running. Unbeknown to most SAS soldiers, as a young man Wheeler had run for Australia in two Commonwealth Games and was only the second Western Australian (after Herb Elliott) to run the four-minute mile. Trading on the misconception that 'the Padre would be a slacker', an Executive Officer who knew Wheeler's history told soldiers prior to a cross-country run, 'Everyone who falls in behind the padre will be running the circuit again.' Despite being in his fifties, Wheeler finished close to the front. Most of the soldiers had to run the circuit once more and apparently never again underestimated the padre.<sup>39</sup>

### **A ministry of reconciliation**

There is also a burgeoning literature articulating chaplains' potential role as agents of reconciliation in theatres of operations. 'Chaplains' external ministry of reconciliation', argues Croatian-born Yale theologian and ex-serviceman, Miroslav Volf:

*may be an essential component of the success of an army's peacekeeping mission. After all, ideally military chaplains know the world of religion — they understand religious teachings, rituals, and practices, and they can help create bridges across religious divides. It makes eminent sense to enlist them to do just that.*<sup>40</sup>

Chaplains have argued that chaplaincy can have a much greater role in this way than it currently does. 'We're supposed to be subject matter experts in matters of faith, not just Christianity', one points out, 'involving us with the local mullah or imam.' Bob Bishop noted that his liaison with local religious leaders in Iraq could have been exploited far more than it was:

*Command didn't understand the integral nature of religion to the local people and the importance of it. I got up to speak to a group of Iraqi soldiers and before I could get up to speak two independent people, without any organisation, got up and spoke for five minutes each about honoured they were to have the Australian 'man of God' in their presence. I was absolutely*

*blown away. There is great opportunity for connecting and in fact making our job on the ground a lot easier — by building bridges of common mutual understanding to the degree that we can have them. [But in Iraq] there was too much concern that I was a high value political target.*<sup>41</sup>

Clearly a future challenge for Australian Army chaplaincy is to articulate its importance and place in this context of the Army's work.

### **Assessing the RAACHD's leadership structure and administration**

There will always be a tension between promoting the interests of one's own denomination and prioritising a different sort of ministry among increasingly secularised, unchurched members who are completely ignorant of Christianity, let alone denominational nuances. Among some chaplains, especially those from more hierarchical churches such as the Anglican, Lutheran and Roman Catholic churches, there are fears of a watered-down 'common Christianity' that blandly overlooks some of the profound differences in denominational distinctions and doctrinal or sacramental emphases.

Yet leading chaplaincy figures have sometimes encountered difficulty convincing their churches of the importance of chaplaincy to their own church's mission and ministry. The loss of the chaplains-generals' uniform and their officer status has also prompted some RACS members to wonder whether this innovation involved giving away too much that had been valuable. Although RACS members have two-star *status*, the significance of the standing of RACS members has not always been comprehended within military circles where symbolism, rank and uniform hold sway. Despite these concerns, due respect has been the usual experience of most RACS members. Yet there have been times where it has appeared that their actual role within the ADF has not always been understood or appreciated by senior military officers.

Principal Chaplains have observed a preference among Army chiefs to hear one unified voice. 'Rule by committee', observed one RACS member, is foreign to Army command structures. A single leader 'with whom the buck stops' fits better with the Army ethos. This cultural conditioning means that Army chiefs naturally turn to the full-time Principal Chaplain when discussing chaplaincy matters. This is entirely understandable given that the full-time Principal Chaplain is in close proximity at Army Headquarters. Some Principal Chaplains and RACS members have welcomed a move towards a single rotating leader who can advocate for churches and chaplains at the highest levels, a model employed by many foreign

chaplains departments and corps. Others have lamented the diminution of the traditional committee system with its promise of collective wisdom. Yet other Principal Chaplains have identified friction resulting from role confusion when RACS members have intervened in operational matters, mostly posting arrangements and policy functions. Nevertheless, as several have observed, no better alternative structure has yet to be proposed. Their attitude to the RACS and Principal Chaplain's Committee<sup>42</sup> structure appears to chime with Churchill's famous dictum on democracy: 'the worst form of government, except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time'.

### **The intellectual foundations of chaplaincy and war**

Historian Jeffrey Grey argued recently that if the Army is to be able to fulfil its self-proclaimed mission to 'fight smart', it must develop 'the intellectual capacities of the organisation'. Citing the eighteenth-century general and theorist Maurice De Saxe's dictum that 'instead of knowing what to do, soldiers will fall back on doing what they know', Grey asserts that the Australian Army has long been proficient at the tactical level but less so at the higher strategic levels. It therefore needs to devote greater attention to knowing its history and developing the military arts.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, chaplains have often excelled at the 'tactical' level of religious ministry and pastoral care, bringing a profound religious understanding to the intellectual and existential questions of soldiers in barracks, trenches, prisoner of war camps and hootchies. But like the Australian Army, chaplains have been less productive at the higher strategic and doctrinal level of creative theological thinking about chaplaincy.

Several factors are driving the need for greater intellectual engagement. Profound moral and theological issues have been raised by a post-Cold War world in which continuing conflict has been driven by religious fundamentalism, political ideology, ethnic rivalry, socio-economic disparities and mass terrorism, not least since 9/11 and the Bali bombing. Such questions have been given an added urgency in the light of Australia's heavy operational commitments in recent decades. Many have questioned Australia's involvement in the so-called 'war on terror' (now elided to a 'campaign against terror') first in Afghanistan and then in Iraq. The ADF's involvement in peacekeeping, peace enforcement, reconstruction and support to humanitarian activity has been less difficult to justify. Yet even those undertakings, as one Australian chaplain points out, involve 'the use of — or posturing and willingness to use — lethal force as an option, albeit a final option, when other measures are exhausted'.<sup>44</sup>

The position of chaplains and their ecclesiastical leaders in light of just war theory is that political authorities, in the final evaluation, are morally culpable for any decision to go to war (*ius ad bello*). The soldier's legal and moral responsibility is for his or her own just actions on the battlefield (*ius in bello*). Herein lies the enduring relevance of Augustine, Aquinas and Grotius's just war principles on the taking of another human's life in the line of duty: such action is only just if the person killed is an enemy combatant similarly engaged in war, sharing the same risks and responsibilities; and it is just if harm to the innocent — or non-combatants such as prisoners of war or the wounded — is avoided, even if this adds risk for the soldier. Otherwise killing is unjust, illegal and sinful, incurring civil, military and divine judgement. Nevertheless, with a pervasive Army doctrine of counter-insurgency and difficult strategic environments such as Iraq and Afghanistan, where insurgents do not wear military uniforms and where the weapons of choice are roadside Improvised Explosive Devices, long-range sniper rifles and suicide bombers, a commitment to showing restraint and protecting the innocent is an immense challenge.<sup>45</sup> The same could be said of places where Australian soldiers witness atrocities, as in Somalia, Cambodia, Rwanda and East Timor. These are environments in which soldiers desperately require chaplains' help in calibrating their moral compasses.<sup>46</sup> A retired Principal Chaplain with 40 years of chaplaincy experience echoed this sentiment in commenting that all clergy have to do their ethical and moral sums before entering military chaplaincy. But they must never stop doing those moral and ethical sums while engaged in it.<sup>47</sup>

Public discussions of Australia's political and strategic posture are a reflection of chaplains' continuing engagement with the just war tradition as well as the extent to which chaplains have been able to retain a prophetic edge in their ministries. Uniting Church chaplain Kaye Ronalds observed on becoming a chaplain that it was:

*somewhat disconcerting to be part of the establishment. I'm used to being in parish life where the church is separate from the state. A chaplain must keep alert lest one neglects the prophetic role and instead fears to offend the hand that feeds.*<sup>48</sup>

But that prophetic calling is by no means only a public one. As Hugh Begbie has argued, drawing on the terminology of 'retrieval ethics', the 'task of the chaplain is to seek the Christ-like love that retrieves as much good as possible while at the same time striving to minimise harm'. In practical terms this means that a chaplain does not remain silent when in a position to say something that will bring good or reduce harm, whether speaking to a digger or challenging a CO. But the right to

speak has to be earned by integrity of character and a willingness to suffer with soldiers in their darkest hours.<sup>49</sup> Another means of retaining that edge, as some chaplains have observed, is to be a channel to churches of informed opinion on strategic and military decisions, enabling churches to speak truth to power with the nuanced insights of their chaplains.<sup>50</sup> Additionally, the chaplains' role as 'subject matter expert' in religion and as soldier's confidant demands a carefully thought out response, as does the potential role tension of rendering ultimate loyalty to God while in the pay and in the command chain of Caesar's army.

Chaplains have also been able to draw fruitfully on deepening wells of theological reflection emerging from overseas chaplaincy corps. As we saw in my previous article, there is evidence for theological reflection on chaplaincy — particularly from the late 1960s to the mid-1990s — and the emergence of a prophetic voice in both public and private contexts. Yet the public output of theological reflection has been modest since then, despite many chaplains engaging in postgraduate study of chaplaincy and practical theology. There is little recent evidence of a wider or sustained conversation on the theological rationale for chaplaincy and war. A recent request from almost a hundred chaplains for theological papers examining uniformed chaplaincy elicited just six responses.<sup>51</sup> Some have wondered whether the intellectual nettle of chaplaincy has been grasped in the last two decades, fearing within chaplaincy a tendency towards anti-intellectualism or the lazy adoption of a 'naive and crass pragmatism' to justify chaplaincy's continuing existence and role within the Army.<sup>52</sup> There is no doubt that Australian Army chaplains have produced some profound reflection on uniformed ministry and demonstrated a capacity for sustained examination of the pressing moral and ethical problems facing the Army and their own department. The need for this kind of intellectual engagement remains undiminished in a society and an institution that questions the value of institutionalised religion and those who are its official representatives.

Some chaplains have been doing this thinking. But since 1994 there has been no dedicated journal or forum — apart from corps conferences — for the dissemination of these ideas across the RAACHD or within ADF chaplaincy, or from the growing body of literature emerging from overseas chaplaincy corps, not least those in the United States, Britain and Canada. Clearly chaplains need to develop their intellectual capacities and to think deeply and creatively about their vocation and *raison d'être*, so that they can know 'what to do' instead of 'falling back on what they know'. In 1999 the Army resurrected the *Army Journal*. There had not been a dedicated Army publication for scholarly reflection on soldiering for 23 years.

The value of such a forum for Australian Army chaplains — to help anchor chaplains in theologically informed and ecclesiastically grounded vocations within a rapidly changing post-war Army — is obvious. So too is the value of a historically informed perspective on both Army chaplaincy and a changing Australian society. Such a perspective, as Peter Stanley has argued recently, 'will enable the Royal Australian Army Chaplains' Department to enter its second century with a deeper understanding of its past, one that can only benefit its future'.<sup>53</sup> ■

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