
The Current and Future Challenges of Australian Army Chaplaincy

Chaplain David

Senior Chaplain Special Operations Command

Abstract

At Director General Chaplaincy – Army’s Strategic Management Conference, at Mittagong in May 2013, Major General Angus Campbell, Deputy Chief of the Army, and Major General Jeff Sengelman, Head of Modernisation and Strategic Planning – Army, were invited to talk about how they saw the state of chaplaincy in Army and the challenges it faced. This article is a reflection on these discussions, which urged chaplaincy to embrace issues such as inclusivity and diversity, and the role of being the voice of ethical and moral reason. The presentations were challenging and provocative, with a clear agenda to invite chaplaincy back into the public discussion on these matters. Chaplains have more to offer than caring for people. They can be a significant voice of influence across all aspects of Army’s focus and capability.

*Whatever is has already been,
and what will be has been before;
and God calls back the past.*¹

The writer of Ecclesiastes reminds the reader of the cyclical nature of time. The entire book offers a critique of humanity and its endeavours, and reminds people that those who ignore the lessons of history are destined to repeat the mistakes of the past. Such a thought resonates with God's history, as can be demonstrated through the ages. Yet secularity, evolution, revolution and even the supposed nihilist's "death of God" cannot seem to shake Jesus' popularity. As Hans Kung says,

*... those time-conscious theologians who always like to ride on the crest of the latest wave, hoping to reach a new shore, have noticed that the wind has changed again: from secularity to religiosity, from publicity to interiority, from action to meditation, from rationality to sensitivity, from the "death of God" to interest in "eternal life".*²

"Are we part of a purposeful historical process? What voice or voices can we be? Where are we going?" These were some of the questions the Senior Chaplaincy Strategic Management Conference (SMC), sought to address at Mittagong, NSW, in May 2013. Defence is undergoing immense change with a new white paper and a strategic reform program looking at options to make the organisation more lean, efficient and effective. Chaplaincy is not immune from this reform program. Chaplains have an opportunity to help shape the future of chaplaincy.³ So what challenges need to be addressed and what opportunities can be pursued?

The Deputy Chief of the Army (DCA), Major General Angus Campbell (now Lieutenant General in charge of "Operation Sovereign Borders"), listed five priorities of the Chief of the Army (CA), Lieutenant General David Morrison. They were:

- Support for operations,
- Recovery of wounded, injured and ill,
- Diversity and inclusion,
- Concepts of amphibious capability, and
- Plan Beersheba: creating similar deployable Brigades.

The DCA focussed the conversation on two of these, "Diversity and Inclusion" and "Recovery of wounded, injured and ill".

In focussing on the issue of gender, cultural diversity and inclusion, the DCA made it clear that the message of being a diverse and inclusion environment was paramount in the mind of the CA. He noted several factors that influenced the future development of Australia's modern Army. These included, the constraints on recruiting, being limited to Australian citizenship and skewed toward male Anglo-Saxon Australians, the associated decline in this pool of recruiting possibilities, and the reality that while 140,000 immigrants enter Australia each year it normally takes up to three generations before this demographic contributes to their national military force.

He then noted the need to increase the female demographic in Army, moving up to, and beyond, ten to twelve per cent (10%-12%) of Army's overall population. To achieve this requires some flexibility, and some trial and error. One example may be the trial of a one-year recruitment plan. Another may be the possibility of recruiting females with a friend, and posting both together to a specific location. The DCA noted that the Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA) were exploring the option of women undertaking air crew training, with both males and females screened through the same aptitude testing to undertake such a career option. Other options to create a more inclusive workforce within Army included ideas such as making career pathways less rigid than they currently are, and creating more options for distance education to increase learning and skill migration possibilities.

The Defence White Paper speaks of regional engagement within the Indo-Pacific and Asia Pacific regions. In ensuring success in this, the Army needed to make in-roads into non-European, Anglo-Saxon, demographics. This means finding ways not to simply recruit beyond this traditional pool, but to find ways to be more engaging into other cultural groups, especially those within the regions referred to within the White Paper. This means a greater appreciation of working together and establishing a habit of cooperation beyond our gender or cultural bias. The DCA suggested Army needed a broader approach to language, including the increase within Army of recruits that speak more than one language. The challenge to get the most out of Army's people means that a mixed approach is required. Such an approach provides for greater diversity of ideas, and the opportunity to glean from these the best ideas for Army's future capability. Research shows that across the workforce, regardless of blue, white or pink-collar industries, organisational diversity produces better performance than monoculture environments. If an organisation is both inclusive and diverse, research suggest an eighty per cent (80%) improvement in overall performance.

The DCA highlighted the need for Chaplaincy's active engagement in the recovery of wounded, injured or ill members of the Army. He went on to say that, this was not to be a single, one off, active engagement, but one, which draws others into a multi-disciplinary approach that cares for Army's people affected by their service. In particular, he noted the Australian statistics of twenty to twenty-five per cent (20%-25%) having some mental health issue in their lifetime and that twelve per cent (12%) of these will be chronic. This is not simply a human tragedy, but has significant economic implications for the nation. As a select population group, Army's over representation in this statistic, given their exposure to trauma and human tragedy commensurable with the scale and intensity of operations, is significant. While addressing this issue requires a multi-agency approach, the DCA called Chaplains to step up and play a significant role in this space. Several agencies are already making in-roads into this recovery process. The Defence Special Needs Support Group can make Chaplains aware of places where support is sometimes slow to respond. Utilising a number of volunteer groups within the community, who have the time and willingness to support Chaplains in their task of assisting recovery and adjustment, are also a possibility. The regional Transitions Support Cell is another group doing great work, and with whom Chaplaincy could align with great effectiveness. The DCA noted that Units do not always advise their people appropriately, and highlighted the missed opportunity of ensuring their people get the right support. The flow on effects of this means that people are not getting the level of support that may help them to pause, prior to making a decision to discharge from the organisation. Chaplains can offer great assistance into this space. The capacity of chaplaincy to connect with the lives of people, and to see where disconnections are taking place, is of vital importance. Embracing a multi-faceted approach in considering and in dealing with problems is a great capability Chaplains bring to Army.

Major General Jeff Sengelman, Head of Modernisation and Strategic Planning – Army (HMSP-A), approached the SMC with a slightly different tact. Noting his concerns over the future and modernisation of Army, with particular focus on *The Army Objective Force 2030*,⁴ HMSP-A questioned the role of ethics and morality in the decision making process of Army's leaders. As warfare seems ever more complex, changing and uncertain, Army's men and women encounter operational environments where they are challenged by difficult questions and dilemmas that they are not fully prepared for. They will be increasingly called upon to make difficult moral and ethical choices that are not easily explained in 'rules of engagement' or in lessons learned during force preparation. These leaders need to know why they are acting the way they do, and making the decisions they

are making. They need to adopt an action-reflection mode of learning behaviour in which their choices are understood and assessed internally. However, this behaviour must always arise out of a fundamental belief that the conduct of warfare involves people. Moral and ethical behaviour is not explained by science or legality, and perhaps is best understood in the way decisions impact people and communities. The current trends in Army indicate that the objectivity of science or the imposition of legal ramifications shapes much of this discussion. Have we gone too far? Have we forgotten that morality and ethical behaviour has a different basis, namely the impacts it has on people themselves? If something is legal, does that make it right? Moral and ethical behaviour must be the foundation in all aspects of what we do as an Army.

HMSP-A indicated that Chaplaincy can have a key role in supporting moral and ethical decision making within the command group provided the relationships, trusts and bonds between Commanders are appropriately established and maintained. He questioned whether being part of a chapel or religious community, and all the various nuances such association entails, was the primary purpose of chaplaincy within the military? Beyond the provision of pastoral advice, Chaplains were once considered an essential part of the command. They were integral to the group of executive officers oriented to advise and support commanders in their decisions. For a number of reasons, this appears to be no longer, or much less, the case. In these days of specialisation, the chaplain is often restricted to pastoral and 'well-being' support, with little valid input to the big decisions of war. Yet historically, Chaplaincy was, and retains the potential, to be integral in helping command reflect on the moral and ethical dimension of various courses of action. As we know from practice, actions must not only be legal they must also be weighed up in terms of the ethical and moral decision-making process. If the Chaplain is not part of the executive leadership team, who is in that space to offer advice to decision makers on such matters? Should this be a domain for chaplaincy within the Australian Defence Force (ADF)? A domain where Chaplains might contribute more intentionally to help commanders with the dispositional and character factors required to make balanced, and ultimately good, decisions.

Having a clear, shared vision of where chaplaincy is going is essential for Chaplaincy. This will help set the conditions for change. In questioning, "how do you make a choice of where to go?" HMSP-A suggested that Chaplains needed to think critically and carefully about the future of their role. They need to establish a vision and goal that is not prescriptive but instrumental in facilitating change.

Change in terms of knowing where to go and setting the goals to achieve this, and change in terms of attitude, balancing moral and ethical decision making, guided by the 'right things'.

In the military sub-cultures of the past, legitimacy and respect had to be earned by the candidate fulfilling the entire selection criterion. The group were tight knit, suspicious of those who had not shared their experiences. They were distrustful of outsiders. Many warriors, selected because of their clear, critical thinking and problem-solving ability, believe they have little choice. Such specious thinking has led to terrible and well documented atrocities. Chaplains can be at the vanguard making sure the Army changes in their mindset – how we fight, being agile and adaptive. For Chaplains to have a legitimate voice in this space, a number of factors need attention. That means building trust over time by understanding, listening and developing mutual respect. The central thing Chaplains bring to the Army is the capacity to build relationships, which become the cornerstone of any trust relationship. As Stephen Covey suggested in *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, people achieve credibility by “ethos, pathos and logos”.⁵ This means effectively using language to convey your message, which in the military context, is the language of war fighting. For Chaplains to be effective in this space they need to be able to offer their unique input within this context.

One of the current issues within Defence, as a whole, is *Pathway to Change*.⁶ This document sets out the steps the ADF will take to effect cultural change. *Pathway to Change* expresses Defence's cultural intent and describes the standards of behaviour Defence requires of its people. Within the Adaptive Army paradigm, it places the onus on the individual to take responsibility for his/her behaviour, and requires everyone to assist the organisation to live that culture. There is a particular responsibility placed upon leaders to be moral exemplars. *Pathway to Change* accepts the presupposition that there is a problem in Defence, noting that the recent incidents of misconduct are not simply aberrations.

*We should be surprised, angered, embarrassed and saddened – every time there is a revelation about unconscionable behaviour by a member of the Defence community.*⁷

A set of clearly articulated values drives *Pathway to Change*. The acronym PLICIT – Professionalism, Loyalty, Integrity, Courage, Innovation and Team Work, clearly expresses the values that underpin the organisation. Other values expressed within the document are diversity and the values already articulated by each single Service. The end state is to have “a culture that is just, inclusive, reporting and learning.”⁸

Pathway to Change is an example of an institutional response to unacceptable behaviour. It is the result of teaching people how to think through these issues. However, are there flaws inherent within it? While it talks about culture and behaviour, it misses any real discussion on methodology, particularly in terms of reflective practice and the change of behaviour to attitude to character. It lacks a robust discussion on culture, values and ethical thinking, and is silent on how these manifest amidst the change required within a conversation on ethics and values throughout the document. Is there such a thing as an Australian culture? Is it possible to define clearly such a thing in the modern cultural milieu of Australian society? Can such a conversation take place in terms of the Army? If so, then can this be used to improve the *Pathways to Change* document? People act based on the way they think. Individual behaviour derives from our attitudes. Therefore, unacceptable behaviour comes from unacceptable attitudes. Respect, a fundamental attitude, needs to be part of this conversation. However, we also need to define what is normal and acceptable, which is a hard challenge in an environment like Australia, especially when it affirms freedom and diversity in attitudes, behaviour, values, morals and ethics. In this, and the previous discussion by HMSP-A, Chaplains were urged to enter the debate by producing articles and papers for publication that grapple with the dilemmas and changes occurring within Army.

In addressing the Lowy Institute for International Policy on 30 May 2012, General David Hurley, Chief of the Defence Force (CDF) spoke about *The ADF: Set for success*. In his address, he reflected on the past decade of ADF deployments saying no one could have foreseen it would be a time of fighting and deployments, or that we would be back in East Timor and the Solomon Islands. He questioned whether we will relive the “great peace” of the post-Viet Nam period, and suggested that, notwithstanding anything else, we live in a period of “great change and transition.”⁹ General Hurley asks Defence to be more efficient and thoughtful about “the choices we make about the nature of the capabilities that we develop.”¹⁰ The future, he suggests, will be marked by greater economic interdependence, increased levels of communications, and more travel. The consequences of this are greater coastal development, rising urbanisation, and an increased pressure and competition for resources. Furthermore, the impact of natural disasters, disputes over territory, and access to resources consequences will have greater consequences than ever before. Displaced persons, terrorism, piracy and proliferation, will not subside. He flagged multilateral engagement with our regional partners and allies, such as the US, China, Japan, India and Indonesia, involving exercises in the future testing of such

things as Maritime Security, humanitarian assistance, Disaster Relief Operations and Peacekeeping. In particular, there will be a need to provide stability operations in countries experiencing governance challenges. This has consequences for the delivery chaplaincy capability in the future. Chaplains will require skills in delivering services to ADF personnel involved in border protection, disaster relief, and joint or combined exercises. Skills in supporting humanitarian missions and in trauma situations will be required Chaplains respond to emerging situations particularly in our own region. Chaplains will need to earn their place among Army's decision makers, utilising the language of war fighting and establishing trust within the organisations they work. ■

Endnotes

- 1 Ecclesiastes 3:15
- 2 Hans Kung, *On Being a Christian*, (London, UK: Collins, 1977), 134.
- 3 The DCA plans to conduct a review of the delivery of Chaplaincy across Army to determine whether the current basis of posting chaplains most effectively meets the needs of Army.
- 4 Commonwealth of Australia, *The Army Objective Force 2030: Primer*, Land Warfare Development Centre, Australian Army Headquarters, Puckapunyal, 2011.
- 5 Stephen R. Covey, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, (Simon & Schuster Ltd: London, UK, 1999),
- 6 The Defence Committee, Department of Defence, *Pathway to Change*" Commonwealth of Australia, 2012, <http://www.defence.gov.au/pathwaytochange/docs/120410%20Pathway%20to%20Change%20-%20Evolving%20Defence%20Culture%20-%20web%20version.pdf>, accessed 26 Sept 2013.
- 7 Ibid., 9.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 David Hurley, "The ADF: Set For Success", *Australian Defence Force Journal*, Issue No.188, 2012.
- 10 Ibid., 5.