The Past, Present and Future — Conversations on the Tensions, Theology and Professionalisation of Chaplaincy

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Abstract

Director General Chaplaincy – Army held a strategic management conference at Mittagong in May 2013 in which he asked participants to look to the past, reflect on the present and explore the future in terms of chaplaincy and its place within Army. Several speakers presented papers that considered issues such as the current and future direction of Army, the historical forces that have shaped, and continue to shape chaplaincy, and the theological journey that exists within Army chaplaincy. The conference participants were then divided into small groups to explore specific aspect of these papers before coming together for a larger plenary discussion. The article that follows is a collation of those discussions that present a basis for the more detailed and specific discussions required to proactively position chaplaincy as a future presence in Army.

In May 2013, as part of the centennial celebrations for the Royal Australian Army Chaplains' Department (RAAChD), Director General Chaplaincy – Army (DGCHAP-A) held a strategic management conference. The aim of the conference was to explore the historical and theological background of chaplaincy, and to consider the contemporary implications of this in terms of the future place of chaplaincy within Army. Dr Michael Gladwin and Rev Dr David Grulke presented four papers in total, two on the history and theological background of chaplaincy, and two on the implications of historical and theological development for the future of chaplaincy. After each dual presentation, small groups took the opportunity to discuss the issues raised. Three groups convened, each with a particular focus. The focus points for these groups included:

- the professionalisation of chaplaincy

- the theological challenges of chaplaincy

- the tensions evident in chaplaincy

This paper is a record of those discussions based on the notes taken by each group.

Professionalisation of chaplaincy

The group tasked with this topic discussed the changes in chaplaincy in a more professionally oriented form of ministry within Army. While the group acknowledged the pressure for a more professional orientation, it affirmed that chaplaincy is a call and not simply a job. Indeed, the group considered that chaplaincy is an art, embedded within the concept of vocation. The group also drew a distinction between profession and vocation, emphasising the need to be professional in one's vocation where professionalism is about being competent and accountable. Chaplains need to demonstrate competence in the way they care for people. However, they also need to be accountable to Defence, Principal Chaplain and their respective denomination for the way they deliver chaplaincy within Army.

There was recognition within the group that structures have changed over the historical journey of Army chaplaincy. The RAAChD has been an evolving element within Defence. The way Army trains chaplains has also changed dramatically over the past century, particularly in recent years with the development of chaplaincy competencies. This is the product of a change in function over time, particularly as other specialists have entered the Army. The group then discussed the need to maintain a relational focus, to ensure that chaplains maintain their image as a safe source of help and support, and the need to ensure that chaplains remain mindful of their own safety in all they do.

Discussion then turned to theological frameworks for chaplaincy. There was some debate over whether chaplaincy is functional or relational, with the group agreeing that it may be a combination of both, with some tension between the functional and relational elements within chaplaincy. The question of ordination also emerged from this conversation. Are chaplains called to a specific ministry and, if so, what does the role to which they are called require of them? The group agreed that recognition of chaplains by the Christian community was essential. The community needs to send chaplains on their military journey with its blessing, endorsement and support for chaplains to bring their church traditions to the Army. They are, after all, representatives of their faith community within Army. However, they also ultimately return to the church, bringing with them the skills and lessons they have learnt from engagement with a secular world. Consequently, a shift towards professionalism enhances ministry, but should not be the ultimate goal.

Chaplaincy must acknowledge that ministry within Army is to ordinary people, and is often much broader than the parish experience. Competencies are, therefore, about being able to do what is required by the people and organisation that chaplains serve. Programs such as Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASSIST) are examples of competencies that help to ensure a professional approach to ministry within Army. Competencies also enhance a professional approach by increasing the ability of chaplains to fulfil their role in a different setting. Such a professionalised approach to chaplaincy also brings with it a freedom that may be absent in a church context. Chaplains no longer need to be leaders, responsible for administering a parish, and can focus instead on core skills relevant to the ministry they perform. Aligning senior levels of chaplaincy with the more administrative liabilities of chaplaincy implies the necessity to acquire new skills, but will free the remaining chaplains to deliver pastoral care and religious ministry.

The question the group then explored was what Army, or the church, or seniors in chaplaincy, expect from chaplains. This developed into a discussion on the way people approach the question of professionalism. Do chaplains see professionalism as an opportunity to fulfil their role in the best possible way? Do they strive for excellence in chaplaincy and consider that a professional approach best supports this? Are chaplains keen to be better trained, more qualified, better organised to conduct a professional chaplaincy within Army? Alternatively, do people view professional chaplaincy as a means to increase their income or further their careers?

This discussion then led to the re-emergence of the question of career or call. If people know God has called them to a specific ministry, then surely they will be keen to do the very best they can. If chaplains continued to apply a model for ministry based on a world view from 1913, they would lose touch not only with the community but possibly also with themselves. The call is the only constant over the course of chaplaincy's hundred-year history. The only way chaplains can maintain a relevant connection to people is through adopting a professional approach that embraces training competence and relevance to the context in which they minister. Careerism is a negative approach to chaplaincy and something that should be avoided at all costs. Yet it becomes evident in chaplaincy, particularly in the way chaplains relate to one another. To whom do chaplains speak of their concerns and issues? There are different answers to this, ranging from the Religious Advisory Committee to the Services (RACS), PRINCHAP, to command and others outside chaplaincy itself. There is a need to establish some clear guidance on this, particularly in terms of how this affects the individual's approach to chaplaincy as a career or a calling. The discussion suggested that a more robust and enunciated code of conduct and ethics, the supervision of chaplains, the place of therapy and counselling, including the effect of these on a chaplain's standing within Army, are all areas that should be addressed and resourced by Army, RAAChD and, in some cases, the individual.

The world has changed, particularly over the past ten years. The new world of Army will force chaplaincy to become more professional, whether chaplains like it or not. Chaplaincy therefore needs to be proactive in the way it operates. It needs to 'get ahead of the game'. There are no options here; chaplaincy must become more professional in the way it ministers. That means taking a serious look at issues such as supervision and self-appraisal. The group acknowledged that some have been better at this than others, and that there is a fear of what supervision means and implies. The fact is, however, that external forces will dictate a more professional approach to the issue of accountability, supervision and self-appraisal. The group acknowledged that chaplaincy has improved in this area, particularly over the past ten years.

The question then asked was whether chaplains needed to be ordained. This was essentially a denominational question. The issue of Catholic pastoral associates was raised and the group noted that this experiment had not proven entirely satisfactory. Discussion of the issue of a robust chaplaincy, one in which the chaplain could operate alone and deal with issues confidently from a personal denominational standing, suggested that lay-pastoral associates had not been as successful as

Catholics had hoped. Deacons also needed better formation, and Catholics had expected too much of them given that they were operating individually. In response, a model has been developed based on Catholic teams, with the priest as moderator, and with an emphasis on mentoring as a model for ministry.

This discussion then raised the issue of formation and training. The group noted that this area has changed dramatically in recent years, with many of the old models of theological education breaking down. Formation, as a key to pastoral development, was distinctly lacking. However, many older clergy, trained under the older models, lack the training to provide solid formation to younger clergy. This presented an unreconciled dichotomy in ministry formation. Such a dichotomy also exists in the way remuneration is determined for chaplains. The Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal struggles to define the way chaplaincy works within its organisational structures and thus to determine levels of remuneration. However, the larger issue is not about pay or academic training relevant to the current pay case, but the formation and shaping of individuals into chaplaincy and ministry. At the heart of this is the representation of chaplaincy of the various denominational and faith traditions, many of which emerge based not on academic learning but on formation. This raises the issue of the in-service scheme, through which people can opt to enter chaplaincy. While people may become theologically qualified, the time restraints do not allow sufficient experience in ministry to shape these individuals. There is a need to understand maturity in ministry, which stands alongside formation and training. While life experience is important, such experience must also been viewed in context as a chaplain's identity is shaped. Chaplains need to develop a sense of being and self in the context of a broader world experience. This raises the issue of age, with older chaplains struggling to gain entry into Army because of medical issues. Army exists in a demographic bubble, as a younger population which requires an older, wiser form of chaplaincy. The group's conversation ended with agreement that there is a need to revisit these tensions and establish more robust criteria and qualifications for the future chaplaincy.

The theological challenges of chaplaincy

The second group tackled the question of the theological challenges that have confronted chaplaincy and the implications of these for the future. It began by asking whether chaplaincy was shaped by pragmatism or intellectualism. The group's response was that this was probably more of an issue of adherence to

one's faith tradition. There was no appetite for chaplains to become pseudo-psychologists or social workers. In making this distinction, the group identified three elements that make chaplaincy distinct:

- spirituality
- religion
- pastoral care

Spirituality is a fundamental link between one's religious and pastoral practice. Faithfulness to one's religious tradition or denomination is critical to this. The pastoral dimension was also included as it points to a commonality within chaplaincy, arising from an ecumenical context.

The group then raised the question of the existence of an overarching theology that shapes chaplaincy. The group felt that such an overarching theology did not exist, instead leaning towards a concept of unity in diversity. Group members acknowledged that this was difficult to sustain within the Christian tradition, and highlighted the greater challenges of promoting a concept of unity with other faith traditions. The group considered that finding an overarching theological framework would be difficult, with the inclusion of other faith groups making this almost impossible. There was a need to emphasise that chaplains from non-Christian traditions must understand the inclusive nature of the pastoral dimension, including a responsibility to respect the spiritual and religious nuances of the Christian tradition, just as is required of Christian chaplains for other faiths beyond their own. There was a subtle shift in group opinion with members concluding that there may be a common theological voice. This voice speaks of the need for respect for all faith traditions and the recognition that inter-faith is a very different concept to multi-faith.

The conversation then moved to explore other theological challenges facing chaplaincy in the future. Like the first group, this group also observed that the world has changed dramatically over the past ten years, and that even more change will occur in the next ten. Chaplains will be strangers in a new land, with Defence people less overtly religious than they are now. This means that chaplains need to be proactive in identifying gaps in the needs that they will be able to meet in the future, and finding ways to meet these needs within the range of skills they bring to Defence. A key element of this is the lack of formation or depth increasingly apparent in chaplaincy, and the emerging concept that chaplaincy is a career and not a vocation. The separation from a faith community only exacerbates this reality. In order to address this, a more stringent approach

to ensuring high standards of accountability to faith formation and maintenance is required. The group expressed concerns over the short formation time for chaplains including those within the in-service scheme, regarding this as an emerging danger, and raised the question of how this could be alleviated. The risks of such a short formation include lack of fidelity to one's denomination and an inability to appreciate the depth of this connection. There is a real need to avoid the weakening of ties between the chaplain and the sending denomination.

The group was concerned that shallow formation would prevent chaplains fully understanding their place in Army. There is a danger that, without a robust formation process, chaplains will tend to rely on their rank equivalency or status as officers rather than their call. The group observed the danger inherent in chaplains using their rank equivalency in e-mails, address books and role descriptions. Chaplains are 'chaplain' by rank, and there may be a need to define this unilateral rank as a defining of chaplains' place in Army. The group also believed that shallow formation incurred other dangers, such as chaplains relating to specific groups rather than the whole; for example, chaplains relating only to officers or relating only to soldiers, rather than to all ranks. There was also a concern that, without a robust understanding of who the chaplain is, particularly in an ecumenical and organisational context, chaplains may limit their ministry to their particular 'patch'. The very nature of chaplaincy in such a corporate context as Army means that soloists do not fit well; instead, a level of mutual trust and respect in which chaplains work together to deliver a whole ministry approach is required. Without the proper formation, the novice is in danger of missing this broader expression of chaplaincy.

The conversation then shifted to suggest that a more robust process of supervision and reporting is required. The group suggested that DGCHAP-A should speak at command, and pre-command courses, and highlight the importance of truthful, honest and robust reporting on chaplains. This should extend to encouraging senior Army officers to write critical reports where this is not already occurring.

The group then returned to the theological questions of a single unified theological framework for chaplaincy. While such a framework may not be possible, there is a need for a focused discussion on understanding and respecting the differences that do exist. In the absence of a unified theological framework, a unified methodology which engages diverse traditions may prove achievable. Chaplaincy must exist within a diversity of tradition and this is its greatest difficulty. This is already evident within the Christian denominational traditions and it is further complicated when other faith traditions are added to the mix. The danger in trying

to find common ground is that what is already strong within any tradition will be diluted. Instead, the main issue must be unity in diversity, which is actually a New Testament principle. Chaplains fail when they expect, assume, or interpret the theology of others. For this reason, greater exposure to other traditions is an essential part of chaplaincy. Such exposure develops appreciation and understanding, and avoids the diluting of one's own faith tradition. The group noted that, in other countries, there are greater limitations on the freedom to overtly express one's theological tradition and, in some cases, legislation imposes such restrictions. Australia's development and need to survive has shaped many attitudes concerning faith and the theological frameworks that govern them, prompting the development of a different approach in this nation's context. However, we need to be wary that political correctness imposes a world view, which it attempts to reinforce through legislative means. Chaplaincy needs to deal with this in the light of theological diversity.

This raised the issue of multi-faith chaplaincy within Army. What is new is not always better; it often merely changes the complexity of the existing environment. The notion that one can overlay the current models of pastoral care and religious ministry onto other faith traditions beyond the Christian context is erroneous. The specific shape of the current model for Army chaplaincy is the Christian tradition, which takes a unique approach to pastoral care and religious practice, differing from that of other faith traditions. In particular, Christian pastoral care is based on the authority of the Christian tradition, expressed in unique denominational nuances. How Christians understand chaplaincy therefore, is fundamentally different to the way it is understood by other faith traditions. The group discussed whether, given the current climate, other faith traditions should be invited to undertake a more specialist role in chaplaincy. The concept shared was a more generic centralised model, which could be detached as required, rather than the traditional unit-embedded role currently employed within Army. The conversation then ventured into how other armies employ chaplains, particularly those from other faith traditions. In some cases, general service officers assume the role of religious overseer as part of their extra-regimental duties. Australia's context is not mono-cultural as is the case with some of these groups and, rather than rely on an army of subsistence, it has a voluntary standing army which responds to the wishes of the government. The context, both cultural and intentional by design, raises many unanswered questions on the place of a multi-faith chaplaincy in the Australian Army. Within such a debate, there was some speculation as to whether this was a genuine issue or one advocated by those with no religious affiliation. The question of religious affiliation remained unanswered, with a closing comment

that the statistics appear to indicate, somewhat surprisingly, that those not directly affiliated with a faith tradition tend to send their children to Christian schools for religious purposes. Perhaps the religious undercurrent has not disappeared, just shifted to new places yet to be uncovered within the Australian social milieu.

The tensions evident in chaplaincy

The third discussion group took a deliberative approach, discussing the tensions evident in chaplaincy and offering ways to manage these. They began by exploring the tensions that surround the additional element a chaplain brings to military service, namely his/her role as a minister, pastor or priest. The theological distinctions evident in this terminology are themselves a source of tension, particularly when it comes to the ecclesiology between sacramental-hierarchical and Free Church structures. Also discussed were the issues of status that emerge in these distinctions and the level of authority individual chaplains hold according to their tradition. The disparity in educational levels was also noted as a source of tension, with concerns expressed over a second-class role assigned to chaplains due to educational standards. In order to deal with these tensions, the group advocated a need for awareness in chaplaincy concerning terminology, and an increased understanding of how various ecclesiastical traditions make decisions. There was a general consensus that greater respect among chaplains was required, and the emphasis for chaplaincy should be vocational not career oriented. There was an expressed hope that the new chaplaincy pay case might begin to address some of these issues.

The group then opened the discussion on tensions over role — essentially whether the chaplain is priest/minister or psychologist. There was recognition that professional groups, such as mental health professionals, and other elements within Army, are challenging the traditional role of chaplaincy, and in some cases superseding the chaplain's roles. Ab-initio courses for chaplains represent an important transitional step into the military, and are the primary place to explore many of these tensions. Such courses should clearly define the roles and responsibilities of chaplains. In addition, the chaplain's vocational calling should be shaped through retreats. The view of chaplaincy as a vocation or calling was highlighted as the key delineation between chaplains and other mental health, or human resource-focused professions. The group also considered the absence of a journal, such as *Intercom*, as creating a vacuum, denying chaplains a forum for sharing ideas and learning from others. The group then suggested reviving the *Anastasis* forum to allow people to read about the chaplaincy experiences of others.

The practice of chaplaincy became the focus for the next discussion. The group noted that the concept of 'loitering with intent' was uninspiring, and that such a methodology was even more difficult in Reserve chaplaincy. Often this occurred when a lack of resources or a poor appreciation of the chaplain's role was evident. The group noted the very clear role of chaplains at the Army Recruit Training Centre, with its structured and rigid program, of which character development forms an integral part. This contrasted with units in which Commanding Officers' hours have all but disappeared and Commanders are not sure what to do with their chaplain. An emphasis on gently mentoring new chaplains into their role through programs such as 'Exercise Good Shepherd' was seen as an important means to address some of these tensions. Redefining the chaplain as a specialist part of the command group and clearly articulating this in Army policy and doctrine such as the *Chaplain's Handbook* is critical to reasserting the role of the chaplain in the unit. This could be re-emphasised and restated at command and pre-command courses, coupled with an induction process by coordinating chaplains for new commanders within their area. The larger group reaffirmed, however, the deep appreciation and affection of command for chaplaincy, and suggested that what really needed addressing was the disconnect in communication between chaplains and commanders.

The necessity to provide denominational ministry and the tensions this causes emerged within the discussion, and created wider angst in the larger representation at the conference. The group noted that, having a dedicated denominationally aligned position in Afghanistan has caused some tensions and difficulties, particularly in relation to the other chaplaincy positions. Perceived inflexibility also caused tension with commanders. The group acknowledged the importance of offering a sacramental ministry to deployed members, particularly in high tempo operations with the potential for a large number of casualties. The collective opinion was that a more robust memorandum of understanding/agreement (MOU/A) should be in place for all future operational contingencies to provide clear guidelines on how such ministry could occur. Inbuilt within this MOU should be a review process to determine whether the original conditions that created the need still exist. The larger group noted that the issue over positions within operational deployments was not related to denominational tensions. Rather, it reflected a lack of planning and a further lack of appreciation of the need to raise issues before they surface as problems. Confusing poor planning with potential denominational tension trivialises the larger issues and potentially overlooks the need for chaplaincy to embrace a healthy approach to denominational or other faith tensions.

This raised issues of numbers and paucity, with particular reference to the Catholic denominational group. The group acknowledged that there were insufficient numbers of priests and those who have entered chaplaincy appear

randomly posted across Army. The solution of using pastoral assistants as non-ordained chaplains, and deacons also raised some concerns within the group. The possibility of more lateral transfers to fill this gap, with the benefit of fast-tracked naturalisation, was offered as one solution. Increased use of local civilian clergy and non-uniformed priests was also a potential solution, as was the extension of age for Reserve chaplains.

The difficulty in employing a multi-faith chaplaincy model raised some interesting discussion in the group. The lack of an Imam, or any Islamic representation, along with the absence of 'clerical' people from other faiths will be an ongoing concern in the future of Army chaplaincy. Currently Christians and Jews are the only faith groups represented in Army; however, the Deputy Chief of Army noted that Army's Islamic population is increasing. This also raised other issues such as gender diversity and a shift away from the more traditional Anglo-Saxon male demographic evident in Army. The way other faiths could be included in Army raised all sorts of questions, but the collective opinion suggested that an MOU/A should be developed to accommodate the changes required. Chaplaincy needs to be mindful of the changing face of Army, and needs to accommodate and appropriately resource other faith groups to allow them to practise their faith tradition. The concept of introducing 'clerical' people from other faiths as specialists called in as required, but not necessarily in uniform, was considered as a first step toward introducing other faith chaplaincy to Army.

Concerns also surfaced over the posting cycle. The group felt that there was no real posting plan or appropriate career progression for Army chaplains. They considered that a disconnect existed between placing the right people in the right units within the right situation to enable a more rounded and complete experience in Army chaplaincy. The perception was that no-one was really in charge of a chaplain's career, as there seemed to be no stated purpose or articulated endpoint. One way to address this would be the employment of a dedicated public servant to advise the Principal Chaplain's Committee on chaplaincy needs. There was a feeling that postings and career progression required more deliberate and careful attention by someone specifically dedicated to this task. The group recognised the need to identify senior and experienced chaplains for higher level tasks, and suggested a dual posting cycle in which the positions requiring seniority and experience are filled first, followed by a more general posting plot for the remaining chaplains. Associated with much of this was the concern that communication within the Chaplain's Department was poor, and a monthly communiqué was offered as a way to address this.

The group then began a more general conversation which built on previous discussions relating to ministry in a multi-faith and increasingly secular context. The existence of denominational tension, evident in chaplaincy at times, is a sub-set of a much larger issue, namely, the trend toward secularisation. Australian society has shifted dramatically from predominantly Christian non-worshippers to a society that is increasingly secular. Secularisation is becoming an aggressive force within the Australian social psyche. This absence of any religious affiliation could be fertile ground for ministry and the Gospel. It may provide opportunities for an incarnational connection with people who have no contact with any form of faith. Those ignorant or ambivalent to faith, or who consciously choose to believe in nothing, pose a greater threat to religious belief than those who have no faith convictions whatsoever. The more proactive aggressive secularist has already rejected faith as a possibility. This raised the issue of proselytisation and evangelism, and the need to better understand the distinction between these terms. More importantly, the way in which this occurs in chaplaincy, and the methods employed within a growing secular environment, require more attention. The looming issue for chaplaincy, however, is the prospect of these secularists rising in seniority and becoming the power-brokers and decision-makers of the future. Where will their interest and focus lie, and how will chaplaincy fit into this new world view? Will the current affection for and appreciation of chaplaincy continue once these people gain a level of critical mass in the halls of power?

Conclusion

The various group conversations at the strategic management conference raised far more questions than they answered. At times, the discussion saw relational tensions surface and, with the grace of God, resolve themselves in a spirit of Christian love and unity. While not all attending the conference agreed with everything recorded in this paper, there was a spirit of listening to one another and a passion to find a common way forward. The challenges that face chaplaincy in the future are very different to those that shaped its past. The one point of consensus was that more research, reading, conversation and exploration of the issues that face chaplaincy is desperately needed for chaplaincy to position itself as a valued capability and presence in Army in the future. To that end, DGCHAP-A has launched the *Australian Army Chaplaincy Journal* with the clear concept of providing a forum for this discussion that engages chaplaincy, the Army, the Australian Defence Force and the wider Australian community. People are encouraged to reflect more on the issues raised in this paper and to write articles addressing them in the context of the future of chaplaincy in Army. ■