

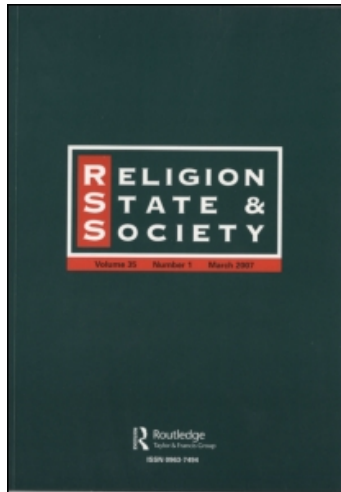
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Oliver Rafferty

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Catholic Chaplains to the British Forces in the First World War

OLIVER RAFFERTY

ABSTRACT

This article outlines the complexities facing the Catholic Church in Britain and Ireland as it sought to minister to Catholic combatants in the First World War. Some of the problems arose because of Catholicism's place in British society as a not wholly trusted minority. Nevertheless as the war continued the government made generous provision for Catholic chaplains quite out of proportion to the number of Catholics engaged in the war. The political tension between Ireland and Britain, exacerbated by the 1916 Rising, contributed to difficulties in recruiting chaplains from Ireland, and the shortage of chaplains was a problem throughout the war years. Nevertheless, the service Catholic chaplains provided made a deep impression on combatants and on general public opinion. Catholic padres were not necessarily any more heroic than those of other denominations, but the fact that Catholic sacramental practice necessitated priests being at the side of dying soldiers and sailors meant that their services were more conspicuously in the front line of action than the ministry of other denominations. The pastoral effectiveness of Catholic priests in the services is attested even by non-Catholic sources, but it is here argued that this effectiveness was in virtue of the needs and desires of Catholic combatants themselves, who had been brought up to view the sacraments administered by a priest as the only sure means to salvation. The difficulties of sacramental administration in the circumstances of total warfare were increased by initially chaotic organisation on the part of the War Office and by internal problems posed for the church by Cardinal Francis Bourne, archbishop of Westminster, who wanted complete control over chaplaincy arrangements. This angered his fellow-bishops, especially the Irish, and provoked Vatican displeasure. The War Office was indifferent to papal intervention because of the perception that the pope was pro-German. Ultimately the experience of the war confirmed for the Catholic Church its role in ministering to those engaged in warfare despite the ambiguities arising from Christ's teaching on the matter of violence.

Introduction

The outbreak of war in 1914 represented a challenge to all the churches in the UK as they sought to respond at a pastoral level to the exigencies of total warfare. The problem was exacerbated when trying to provide spiritual support to soldiers and sailors whose principal task was to forward British war aims of complete victory over the central powers.

For its part the Catholic Church responded with vigour to what it perceived to be the spiritual needs of its members fighting for king and country by the appointment,

for the first time in British history, of large numbers of priests to the forces as chaplains. Its ability to do so was circumscribed by a number of factors, however. The papacy – far from being silent as Hew Strachan claims (2001, p. 1117) – tried, unsuccessfully, to plead for peace among the belligerents. This effort caused resentment among the allies, made the work of chaplains in some instances more difficult and built upon a residual current of anti-Catholicism in British society which, although on the wane, had been part and parcel of British history since the Elizabethan settlement and which had been a central characteristic in the formation of British national identity (Colley, 1992, pp. 44, 209, 344, 348–52).

As the war progressed, and following spirited representation from Catholic authorities, the War Office conceded that Catholics, given the nature of the church's sacramental system, needed proportionately higher numbers of chaplains in order to meet Catholic requirements. The provision of such numbers was not, however, straightforward. A major issue that emerged was the reluctance of Irish priests to volunteer for active service as chaplains – a direct result of Ireland's political problems connected with home rule. This reluctance increased after the 1916 Rising and peaked in 1918, when the church joined with the party of revolution, Sinn Féin, to resist the extension of conscription (imposed on the rest of the UK in 1916) to Ireland.

These national political problems were further complicated by the dynamics of ecclesiastical politics. The archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Francis Bourne, was nominally in charge of the recruitment of chaplains and forwarding the names of volunteers to the War Office. His role was increasingly resented by fellow-bishops, especially the Irish. In an attempt to resolve these tensions the Holy See wanted to nominate an *Episcopus Castrensis*, a bishop to the forces, as early as 1915. Bourne resisted this with all the authority he could muster and when he was finally overruled by Rome in 1917, he still retained responsibility for the navy. Bourne's conduct of affairs prior to 1917 was undoubtedly inefficient and, coupled with army regulations, resulted in chaplains being located in situations both in France and England where they were not always effective or needed.

Despite all these problems it will be argued that, on the whole, Catholic chaplains, partly because of their training¹ but especially because of the expectations of Catholic service personnel, were more effective in the field than their non-Catholic colleagues. Many clergy, both Catholic and Protestant, viewed the war as a judgment of God on a secularised and uncaring generation which had turned its back on Him (Strachan, 2001, p. 1116). Nevertheless most Catholic priests refrained from the general military idea that the role of the chaplain was simply one of reinforcing state ideology or helping to advance Britain's war aims among the troops (Beckett, 2001, p. 285).

The effectiveness of Catholic chaplains was also partly predicated on the fact that the church retained the affections of large sections of the Catholic working class. In Michael Snape's colourful (if somewhat misleading) phrase, Catholicism remained by the time of the First World War a 'religion of the slums' (2002, p. 341). This was certainly not in any meaningful way the case with the Anglican or Nonconformist churches in Britain at that time.² Furthermore in surveying the impact of Catholic mores and practice on Catholic troops, specific devotional and theological ideas such as self-sacrifice as a means of atoning for sin found a ready echo in the experiences of Catholics at the front (Winter and Baggett, 1996, pp. 155, 382). On the surface, at least, Catholicism appeared to resonate more with the sacrifices expected of soldiers and sailors in the European conflagration.

In what follows there is no suggestion that chaplains of other denominations were personally less committed or less exacting in their ministerial duties.

Protestant chaplains ministered assiduously to their charges, some of whom, at least, responded accordingly (Schweitzer, 2003, pp. 104–17). However, with the exception of American troops, given the greater importance of religion in American society as a whole even at that time (Stanley, 2006, p. 597), Protestant soldiers generally had little time for the rituals of organised religion. Nor am I trying to suggest that somehow Catholic chaplains were more heroic in supporting their men in circumstances of extreme danger, and Snape misunderstands contemporary criticism of non-Catholic chaplains in this regard. Although proportionally losses were higher within the Catholic chaplaincy, Snape rightly points out that in total 122 Protestant chaplains were killed in the war, as opposed to 34 Catholic padres (Snape, 2005, p. 34). The point, however, is that because of the nature of Catholic ritual practice, priests were forced to put themselves in positions where they could be killed while administering sacramental absolution and extreme unction. This marks a difference from the mostly non-sacramental ministry of non-Catholic padres and explains why Catholic priests placed themselves with their men wherever the men happened to be located.³

Methodologically I have proceeded by examining a large selection of archival material, ecclesiastical and military, in Britain and Ireland and from the Irish College, Rome. I have also tried to locate the ideas presented here in the context of contemporary Catholic and non-Catholic opinion, and to locate my findings within the framework of the scholarly literature which has grown voluminously in the last 30 years.

The Background

The spiritual welfare of Catholic soldiers and sailors was an issue which came to dominate much of the private and public discourse of British and Irish Catholic churchmen during the 1914–18 war. The role of the Catholic chaplain was paramount to the welfare of Catholic servicemen since only a priest could administer the sacraments. In the Catholic theology then prevalent the sacraments, for those who received them worthily, were the only sure means by which salvation could be attained.⁴ Furthermore when service personnel were in danger of death it was essential for a priest to be on hand to administer the last rites of the church. Within the contemporary Catholic community this was clearly understood and taken for granted (MacDonagh, 1916, pp. 104–05), but outside the narrow parameters of the church Catholic beliefs and practices were often viewed with horror or incomprehension by British society (Norman, 1985, pp. 15–19). In peace time, for the most part, this made no difference to how Catholics interacted with the general social and political mores in which they found themselves. They were a misunderstood and incongruous minority in a largely Protestant, if increasingly religiously indifferent, society. With the coming of war, and the need for ever greater numbers to drive the war machine, Catholics were brought into contact with every level of civilian and military officialdom. Wherever Catholics went, their priests, of necessity, had to follow, so a new relationship between British armed forces and the Catholic Church had to be forged. The War Office came to recognise that priests played a pivotal role in the morale of Catholic soldiers and sailors. This is given visual expression in one of the most poignant paintings of the war artist Fortunino Matania, *The Last Absolution of the Munsters at Rue Du Bois 1915*. The painting shows Fr Francis Gleeson giving a general absolution to the Irish soldiers on their way to Aubers Ridge on 8 May 1915. The regiment having sung the *Te Deum* were absolved of their sins. In the subsequent battle 393 men lost their lives (Johnstone and Hagerty, 1996, p. ii).

In dealing with Catholicism as a social reality in the forces the authorities quickly came to accept that the complement of Catholic priests would have to be out of proportion to the percentage of serving Catholics. As Cardinal Francis Bourne explained to Cardinal John Farley, archbishop of New York: 'Our percentage in the army is never more than 15% and we have never had less than 25% of the chaplains ...' (ARCBF 1). Indeed, as the war progressed the military authorities would express alarm about the relative lack of priests in the services (TNA 1). The idea of a shortage of Catholic chaplains became an almost monotonous refrain,⁵ but by the end of the war there were 651 Catholic chaplains to the British forces (Statistics, 1922, p. 190). While the total number of Catholics in all forces was something over 400,000 (Snape, 2002, p. 325), by the time of the 1918 armistice Catholics accounted for only 7 per cent of fighting men.

If shortages of chaplains continued to be problematical, one contributing factor was institutional incompetence and the dreadful disorganisation of the chaplains' department on the part of the War Office. There was also an internal Catholic factor in the shape of Bourne who, for most of the war, was the prelate most directly responsible for recommending priests as chaplains to the War Office. His activities in this respect were resented by some bishops on the English and Scottish bench, but the most intense opposition came from his brother-bishops in Ireland who balked at Bourne's increasing tendency to assume an overlordship of all Catholic church enterprises in the UK. Indeed Bourne himself was to boast to the authorities at Rome about the influence he could exercise in the whole of the British Empire.⁶

The increasingly tense political situation in Ireland, especially after the Easter Rising of 1916, made Irish clergymen more reluctant to volunteer as chaplains in what gradually came to be seen in some circles as England's war of imperial expansion (Denman, 1991, p. 363). The move from qualified support to outright opposition to the war is graphically illustrated by the attitude of Mgr John Hagan of the Irish College, Rome, who would in time come to be seen as a rabid and unreconstructed militant Irish nationalist and Sinn Fein supporter. Even as late as the early months of 1916 Hagan could complain that an article in the English Catholic newspaper *The Tablet* in January of that year which listed the numbers of Catholic chaplains from the British Empire had omitted any mention of Ireland. Hagan ruefully commented 'doubtless because the *Tablet* does not regard Ireland as part of that Empire' (AICR 1).

Despite a residual anti-Catholicism in Britain in the years before, and indeed immediately after, the First World War (Rafferty, 1994, p. 284),⁷ Catholics in the UK responded with alacrity to the call to arms in August 1914 (Anon, 1916, p. 16). Initially there was widespread sympathy for British war aims (Robertson, 1960, p. 125; Boyce, 1993, p. 7) especially when early war propaganda emphasised that Britain's justification for going to war was the defence of small nations, and in particular its treaty obligations to Catholic Belgium (aan de Wiel, 2003, p. 25). The German atrocities committed against Catholic Belgium and the treatment meted out to the cardinal archbishop of Malines-Brussels, Désiré-Joseph Mercier, who was placed under house arrest, also made a deep impression on Catholic communities in Britain and Ireland (Leonard, 1988, p. 7; Jeffrey, 2000, p. 12).

The 'defence of small nations' motif had special resonance in Catholic Ireland where the struggle for home rule had reached a critical stage, with an act having passed through Parliament giving the country a large measure of autonomy within the context of the UK. The enactment was quickly mothballed for the duration of the war. The various Protestant and Catholic private armies, in the shape of the Ulster Volunteer Force and the Irish Volunteers which had almost precipitated a civil war

over home rule, now offered their respective services in the greater interests of nation and empire (Lee, 1990, p. 22; Townshend, 2006, pp. 70–74).

Meanwhile the conclave which met at the Vatican in September 1914 to elect a successor to Pope Pius X, who died on 20 August, was sharply divided along the lines of the belligerent powers (Gwynn, 1941, pp. 19–20; Pollard, 1999, p. 59). The general perception was that the Roman curia, the papal civil service, was pro-German, but the new pope, Benedict XV, made it clear that the policy of the Holy See would be one of strict impartiality, ignoring the pleas from Catholic Austria to bless its arms. Benedict did, however, facilitate changes in Catholic practices which made the work of chaplains easier; though such was his antipathy to the whole progress of war that he would never allow chaplains to present themselves in the Vatican wearing their military uniforms (Falconi, 1967, p. 116). He also tried to broker a peace on at least two occasions, but his efforts were rebuffed by the belligerents with claim and counter-claim that the papacy was partisan (Pollard, 1999, pp. 112 ff.).

So distrusted did Benedict XV become that he was frequently referred to, even by some allied priests, as the ‘Boche Pope’ (Duffy, 2006, p. 333). For British Catholics Benedict’s stand of strict impartiality between the belligerents was a source of irritation and embarrassment (Gallagher, 2010, *passim*). So outrageous did Pope Benedict’s conduct appear that at the end of the war the leading Catholic lay theologian in Britain, Baron Friedrich von Hügel (a man of Austrian extraction who became a naturalised British citizen only in December 1914), wrote that given his wartime record Pope Benedict should abdicate for the good of the church (Falconi, 1967, p. 123). The prevailing anti-papal ethos was further underlined by Italy’s entry into the war in 1915 on the allied side, despite its membership of the ‘Triple Alliance’ with Austria and Germany since 1882 (Stevenson, 2005, pp. 110–11).

The papacy since 1860 had been the implacable enemy of Italian unification (Duggan, 2008, 242 ff.) and under the terms of the Treaty of London in April 1915 Italy successfully secured the exclusion of the Vatican from any postwar peace conference (Duffy, 2006, p. 333).

The papacy therefore, and thus by implication Catholicism in Britain and Ireland, was at best an ambiguous phenomenon in relation to British war intentions. This became particularly manifest in relation to those Irish regiments with a Catholic majority, which by the end of the war were regarded as unreliable in the field (Bowman, 2003, p. 178). Added to this, at the level of the high command, there was some perceivable anti-Catholicism at least in the case of General Haig (Snape, 2002, pp. 329–30).

Prejudice and Ethical Dilemmas: Catholic Attitudes to Militarism and Military Attitudes to Catholicism

Although the more explicit aspects of anti-Catholicism had begun to dissipate in British society, outside Southern Ireland Catholicism remained an object of suspicion. Catholics were still excluded from some of the great offices of state, such as the lord lieutenant of Ireland and the lord chancellorship, and a certain degree of public anti-Catholicism was made manifest in 1908 at the Eucharistic Congress in London. After consultation with the Commonwealth King George V insisted that the coronation oath be amended to remove its more flagrantly anti-Catholic sentiments, but suspicion of the faith continued. As late as 1957 more people expressed dislike for Catholicism than there were Catholics in the general population (Wolffe, 1996, p. 68). The specifically political problems of Ireland in the run-up to the war doubtless kept

anti-Catholic sentiment to the fore, since these problems also exacerbated religious differences.

The general public reserve with regard to Catholicism, and towards Irish Catholics in particular, was illustrated in the British Army by the fact that although the Protestant Ulster Volunteer Force was allowed to combine as the new 36th (Ulster) Division, no such privilege was granted to its Catholic equivalent the Irish Volunteers (Robertson, 1960, p. 125). They were, however, encouraged to join the 16th (Irish) Division but – unlike the Ulstermen – not under their own officers. Indeed the three new Irish infantry divisions were all ‘commanded by Protestant Irish Unionists’ (Magennis and Ó Doibhlin, 2005, p. 31). Even at an operational level explicit anti-Catholic feeling could be exhibited, often by soldiers of Ulster Protestant backgrounds. Henry Bodenham wrote to his cousin, the duke of Norfolk, how his GOC at the Somme had thought of putting up a statue to Our Lady of Victory in a local French church to commemorate the number of Catholics who had perished at his part of the front line. The result of the suggestion was ‘a terrific outburst on the part of the non-Catholics of the division who are all up in arms against it’ (ACA 1).

Protestant Ulstermen were also ‘startled and pained by the wayside shrines they encountered all over the French countryside’ (Boyce, 1993, p.10). Fr H.V. Gill MC, DSO records in his unpublished memoirs that the sentiments expressed by the (Protestant) Ulster Division upon meeting his Irish Catholic regiment before the Somme in 1916 were ‘most uncomplimentary’ (AIJ 1, p.38). There are also instances of Catholics being forced, albeit against official army regulations, to go to regimental church parades, and of having to attend services conducted by Protestant padres in hospital wards. After the Battle of Jutland Vice-Admiral David Beatty, subsequently the first Earl Beatty, refused to allow the chaplain to hold a requiem mass in the dockyard for those who had lost their lives, on the basis of the fact that it would be bad for ‘morale’ (IWMA 1). Further anti-Catholic prejudice was exhibited in the refusal of the military authorities to give a VC to Willie Doyle, despite the well-nigh unanimous opinion of his heroism by all ranks, and men of every denomination who encountered him, and the fact he had been recommended for the honour by his commanding officer, by his brigadier and by General William Bernard Hickie. His biographer wryly concluded that ‘the triple disqualification of being an Irishman, a Catholic and a Jesuit proved insuperable’ (O’Rahilly, 1932, p. 555).

Given this background, Pope Benedict’s well publicised pleas for peace were bound to impact upon Catholic service personnel and chaplains. Fr Francis Woodlock, although he was awarded the Military Cross and was mentioned in dispatches by Sir Douglas Haig, got himself into trouble with fellow-officers in October 1917 by defending the pope’s peace note of August that year. Some accused Woodlock of being treasonably pro-German and although he was subsequently exonerated, there was nonetheless an official military inquiry into his views and conduct (ABPSJ 1). Fr Willie Doyle, despite his utter devotion to his men and the heroism of his sacrifice in the war, was sceptical of much of the British war propaganda. By July 1916 he was convinced that the men engaged in the fighting were utterly sick of the war, and he also believed – perhaps naively – that if officials on both sides could only see what chaplains experienced daily ‘there would soon be a shout for peace at *any price*’ (O’Rahilly, 1932, p. 470, emphasis in original). An English Catholic chaplain could in similar if more despairing tones write ‘War, war, sickening war. My God how long, how long [W]ho can resist a cry of passionate resentment against those in high places who could find no better way of settling the differences of nations than the

letting loose of terrific forces for the slaughter and maiming of millions of men' (MacDonagh, 1915, p. 358).

Other chaplains reflected on the fact that the horror of war 'ruthlessly extirpates' the 'noble qualities in the human soul . . . pity, compassion, kindness, affection, love' and that it was a fortunate man who recovered these qualities (IWMA 2). Indicating that a lack of compassion for the suffering of others was part and parcel of warfare, another chaplain described how one German soldier was so badly wounded that it was decided not to take him to a field hospital. He lay in the trench 'in his death agony, while all around him, quite unmoved, our men continued their preparations for supper So at length he died a lonely pathetic figure. He was just twenty years old' (Devas, 1919, p. 177).

While at the start of the war a number of Irish bishops strongly excoriated German militarism (*Irish Catholic Directory*, 1916, p. 503), as time went on there was a growing unease about the methods of 'modern' warfare used by all belligerents. This unease militated against wholehearted support for the war effort. In his pastoral letter for Advent 1917 Cardinal Michael Logue, archbishop of Armagh, could speak of the 'waste' of young life in the shape of war dead 'which will cripple the countries engaged [in the war] for generations' and 'all this with very little tangible result' (*The Irish Catholic*, 1 December 1917). More than a year earlier Logue had written of the 'greatest and most destructive war in the history of the world, [which] seems to have stirred up to their lowest depths the worst and most depraved practices which render the horrors of war in the past comparatively mild by contrast' (AAA 1).

It would be wrong, however, to suggest that all Catholic clergy took the same attitude. Some chaplains would subsequently write memoirs to disparage the idea that war was somehow avoidable in the conduct of human affairs (Day, 1930, pp. 7–8). A well-known London Jesuit, Fr Bernard Vaughan, said to be a favourite of the royal family, gave an address at the Mansion House in January 1916 in which he declared that it was the business of the British Army 'to keep on killing Germans' (Martindale, 1923, p. 196), provoking a veritable avalanche of protests from many Catholics for what was a clearly unchristian sentiment. In terms of engagement in the field there is sufficient evidence to suggest that Catholic chaplains did their best to impress upon the troops the need to avoid demonising the enemy at the level of the individual German soldier.

In general, Catholic clergy were reluctant to engage in public debate about the justice of Britain's war aims (Wilkinson, 1978, p. 2), and in 1915 Cardinal Bourne forbade chaplains to write letters or send any communications to newspapers (AIJ 2: CHP1/30 (13)). Rarely did official Catholic clerical opinion on the war reach the bellicose rhetoric of those such as Henry Wace, dean of Canterbury, who said of the Germans that they were not merely a political foe 'but a moral outlaw from Christian civilisation' (Hoover, 1989, p. 4). The same cannot be said, however, of the views of some aristocratic Catholic laymen (Aspden, 2002, p. 79).

The Demand for More Chaplains

In the early years of the twentieth century Catholic soldiery was not an especially significant element within the British armed forces and this was reflected in the provision of Catholic padres. At the beginning of hostilities there were, in total, only 16 Catholic chaplains in the army and one land-based priest attached to the navy. Indeed, the lack of Catholic chaplains in the navy and the fact that they were forbidden to accompany sailors at sea was a long-standing grievance, at least so far as

the Irish hierarchy was concerned (Callan, 1986, p. 100). The principle of regular Catholic chaplains for the forces had been conceded in the light of the Crimean War, although the practice was earlier allowed by the East India Company at a time when Irish Catholics made up a large proportion of the enlisted men in the army (Knight, 1996, p. 17).

Lord Kitchener was not disposed to raise the number of Catholic chaplains (DAA 1, p. 3) and when the British Expeditionary Force was sent to France it was accompanied by only twelve priests (*Irish Catholic Directory*, 1915, p. 538). In an exchange in the House of Commons between Lord Edmund Talbot, a prominent English Catholic, and Harold Tennant, the under-secretary of state for war, it emerged that the official view of the War Office was that French priests could assist with spiritual ministrations to English-speaking Catholic soldiers (Johnstone and Hagerty, 1996, p. 86). This raised a howl of protest especially from Ireland and from serving soldiers themselves.⁸ In the first place some of the essential sacraments such as confession necessitated that the priest should understand English, and furthermore the Irish hierarchy objected that the anti-clerical nature of French society made the official practice of Catholicism difficult. The bishops pointed to the French law that patients in hospitals, including field hospitals, could only see a priest when they had signed a printed document stating that they wished to be attended by a clergyman (*Irish Catholic Directory*, 1915, p. 550). Cardinal Logue wrote to the newspapers in October 1914 decrying the shortage of chaplains, the fact that they were not allowed to go to the front, and the lamentable state of affairs whereby soldiers went to their deaths without the consolations of religion. He remarked that the 'spiritual destitution of the fleet is worse still' (*The Irish Catholic*, 24 October 1914). The following year Logue depicted the plight of mortally wounded Irish soldiers: 'in their dying hour there is nothing they crave so much as the presence of a priest'; and ominously added, 'Dying Irishmen ... were denied a Chaplain by the country for which they were giving up their lives' (*Irish Catholic Directory*, 1915, p. 485).

There now began a systematic campaign by the Catholic Church and Catholic politicians to ensure that sufficient chaplains were provided to the forces.⁹ Logue declared that it was essential that 'every pressure should be brought to bear on the War Office till there are enough priests both at the front and in the [field] hospitals' (AAS, 2). The most vociferous voice raised in the demand for extra chaplains and their positioning at the front came from *The Irish Catholic* newspaper, with support from the Irish bishops. The editor of the paper telegraphed the prime minister and the secretary of state for war demanding both an increase in chaplain numbers and the practice, as in the Boer War, of permitting the chaplains to be with the men at all times. When his telegrams elicited no response he made a public statement to the effect that

Catholic Ireland is bound to look after the spiritual safety of her own soldiers, and is quite entitled to demand that they shall not be condemned to die without the benefit of clergy. If Mr Asquith and Lord Kitchener want to see recruits in this country, they should ... return to the South African precedent. (*The Tablet*, 26 September 1914)

Although Catholic chaplains were allowed at the front by December 1914, much depended on the attitude of the commanding officer as to whether or not priests could go the trenches. One disgruntled chaplain complained to his sister as late as the autumn of 1915 that his commanding officer would not allow him in the front line on the grounds that he would 'only be in the way' (ABPSJ 2). By the following month he

had persuaded his superior officer to allow him to minister at the front. The situation in the navy was much bleaker. Here the circumstances were complicated by the fact that the commander-in-chief – having misunderstood a directive from the authorities – forbade Catholic priests to conduct services on board ships (TNA 2). By February 1915 John Redmond, leader of the Irish National Party in the House of Commons, had written to Winston Churchill (then first sea lord) that although he was reluctant to raise the matter in the Commons, the fact remained that a lack of action in providing Catholic chaplains was ‘doing great mischief’ in Ireland. By February 1915 he again wrote that ‘I need not point out to you how this matter may react on recruiting, not only for the Navy, but for the Army in Ireland, if the impression is left that Catholic sailors are not properly attended to’ (TNA 3). This followed a resolution of the Irish bishops in January 1915 to the effect that Catholics wounded in the fleet had no opportunity to see a chaplain for months before ‘they were confronted with death’ (*Irish Catholic Directory*, 1916, p. 485). It is clear that consideration of the effects of this adverse publicity on Irish Catholic recruitment caused the War Office to take action in the matter. From the military point of view there were a number of complications. So far as the navy was concerned, fewer than ten per cent of its ratings were Catholic. If the Admiralty was seen to give favourable treatment apropos of chaplaincy provision to Catholics, the navy would be bound to face criticism from Nonconformists and even from the ministers of the established church. Ultimately R.R. Scott, the secretary of the Admiralty, urged Churchill to make a concession to Catholic demands on the grounds that ‘to Roman Catholics – and especially to those sick and dying – the attendance of a Priest of their own faith is of crucial importance’. If Protestants objected, ‘The answer would be that Roman Catholic Priests are employed afloat for reasons which are not applicable to other denominations; and that given the necessity for their employment, it is obviously right and proper to use them so far as may be convenient with Service requirements’ (TNA 4).

The obstacle faced by Catholics lobbying for an increase in the number of chaplains and flexibility in deploying them was not so much anti-Catholic prejudice as widespread ignorance of the Catholic sacramental system. This, as we have seen, is heavily labour-intensive and necessitates easy and frequent access to a priest, especially when an individual is in danger of death. In such circumstances Catholic clergy, unlike their Protestant counterparts, have very specific ritual duties in administering absolution, extreme unction and, if possible, *viaticum* (the final holy communion before death). Even when goodnatured non-Catholic officers wanted to facilitate Catholic chaplains, their understanding of Catholic praxis was hopelessly inaccurate. One bemused priest wrote that a ‘charming young officer’ said he would ensure his Catholic men knew of the times for mass and confession but wanted clarity on how much the men would have to pay for confession (ABPSJ 3).

Time and again in the course of the war Catholic clergy would emphasise that their primary role was spiritual,¹⁰ and that the other functions which the military authorities expected chaplains to perform – such as boosting morale – were a secondary consideration.¹¹ Neither did the men expect their chaplain to be ‘a society entertainer or a vendor of buns and cigarettes’, as one priest testifies (Plater, 1919, p. 140). By contrast, in a number of instances Anglican clergy conceded that their opportunities for spiritual ministry were virtually nonexistent (Purcell, 1965, p. 77). Furthermore, in the early stages of the war Anglicans and Nonconformist clergy, unlike their Catholic counterparts, made – with some notable exceptions (see Snape, 2008, pp. 217–18) – little attempt to position themselves in the line of battle.¹² Some even argued that the chaplain had no role there (Smyth, 1968, p. 167). This created a

widely perceived impression that Church of England padres had been ordered not to go to the front, which was to have profound impact on the men in the trenches and caused soldiers to make unfavourable comparisons between Catholic and Protestant chaplains throughout the conflict (Leonard, 1988, p. 10).

The Role and Status of Catholic Chaplains

For its part the army tried to clarify the situation as to where chaplains would best serve the interests of soldiers. Major-General H.C. Sutton, deputy adjutant and quartermaster general of the Fourth Army for most of 1916, issued detailed regulations concerning the placement of chaplains. The assistant chaplain general had already regulated the Anglican position but

with regard to chaplains of other denominations – the Army Commander directs them to be posted where they can best serve the wounded. Under no circumstances will they advance with the units to which they are attached, or except in the case of Chaplains allotted to the R.A. units, take up positions other than with a medical unit. (British Army No. A242/40; see ABPSJ 4)

Albert Marrin on the basis of his exhaustive study of the effectiveness of the Church of England in the First World War concludes that in the early years of the war the average Church of England chaplain

would have to ignore the much-publicized standing order against Church of England chaplains going forward of brigade headquarters. Contrast this with the Roman Catholic chaplain, who had better have a good reason for *not* being with his men wherever he was needed. (Marrin, 1975, p. 208, his emphasis).

As late as March 1917, by which time all chaplains were permitted by the army to go to the front, some Protestant clergy were still reluctant to do so. Fr James McCann, an Irish Jesuit, recalled that when he and a group of five others first arrived in France only he and the other Catholic chaplain in the group wanted to go to the trenches. When a senior Anglican chaplain objected to this on the grounds that they had no training for such a mission, McCann's Catholic companion (an English Benedictine) retorted 'I am going up to the front precisely because I am a Catholic priest' (McCann, 1940, p. 373).

Another feature which differentiated Catholic from other chaplains was that Catholics regarded their military rank as subordinate to their priestly status. Furthermore they had probably less opposition to their work from critical or sceptical officers of their own faith, a phenomenon that hampered the ministry of some Anglican and Nonconformist chaplains (Snape, 2008, p. 159). On the other hand it is quite inaccurate to maintain, as some scholars have done, that the reason Catholic chaplains had more rapprochement with the ranks was that many were themselves from working-class backgrounds (Aspden, 2002, p. 116; Wilkinson, 1978, p. 134; Moynihan, 1983, p. 176). The Jesuit and Benedictine orders provided a large proportion of First World War chaplains; these groups are not known for their recruitment among the working classes. As for the generality of Irish priests, they came not from the working classes but from the small farmer class. By contrast, the

general perception of the Catholic priest in English society was that he was not a gentleman (Marrin, 1975, p. 17).

It is, however, true that Cardinal Bourne tried to insist that Catholic chaplains should receive less pay than their Protestant opposite numbers, precisely to avoid the idea that spiritual ministrations should have high social or material rewards (Snape, 2008, p. 194; Leonard, 1988). Fr Willie Doyle even objected to military honours for padres on the grounds that 'he would be a poor specimen of the Lord's Anointed who would do his work for such a thing' (O'Rahilly, 1932, p. 455). This sentiment was echoed by Fr C.B. Warren, an English Catholic chaplain, in the light of his award of an OBE (IWMA 2). In general Catholic chaplains were more willing to share the lot of their men (Plater, 1919, p. 41; Duggan, 1995, p. 172; Harris, 1968, p. 45). One such example is that of Fr Francis M. Browne who mentions how he was 'doing my best to get at my men's hearts by moving among them and living with them' (AIJ 3).

The initial hesitation of the War Office to allow chaplains at the front was based on strategic considerations, but it was also true that the adjutant general's department was simply too hard-pressed to concern itself greatly with the question of chaplains and their placement (Smyth, 1968, p. 157). There was also, relatively speaking, a shortage of transportation and a perception on the part of the high command that chaplains would merely get in the way of the fighting men. Catholic priests, however, wanted to be at the front, not only in the field hospitals but also in the trenches. Of course the original optimism that the war would be quickly over enabled the military authorities to disregard Catholic sensitivities on the issue of the placement of chaplains. When it was clear that the war would be longer and bloodier than anticipated, more serious consideration had to be given to Catholic concerns.

When at the level of command there was a great flexibility in the deployment of chaplains, problems on the ground still remained. Although in general Catholic priests in the forces gave a good account of themselves, in some instances their attempts to minister to their flocks were regarded as 'a damned nuisance'. A chaplain complained how the major of his battery had tried to prevent him from saying mass 'up at the guns' and that the officer in question was 'an obnoxious freak insulting in the matter ... so I told him in very emphatic language what I thought of him. [The] subalterns were greatly pleased' (DAA 5).¹³ In circumstances where priests insisted on carrying out their duties and when they made an obvious effort to devote themselves to their charges such devotion was rewarded by bonds of enduring attachment. Major General Lord Desmond Fitzgerald could say of Fr John Gwynn that he was not only 'universally beloved' but that the Irish Guards owed him 'a debt of gratitude too large ever to be repaid' (AIJ 4).¹⁴ At times chaplains' activities were also inhibited by military regulations and by a tendency, at least at the beginning of the war, to undervalue the importance of chaplains. Nevertheless the War Office came to recognise that priests played a pivotal role in the morale of Catholic soldiers and sailors (as noted above about the painting by the war artist Fortunino Matania).

Pastoral Effectiveness and Catholic Piety

We have seen something of the manner in which the Catholic and Protestant churches estimated the purpose and roles of the chaplains of their respective denominations. The distinctive role of Catholic priests, their effectiveness and the general impact they made on men of all denominations is attested to time and again. Rudyard Kipling for example, though no friend of Catholicism, wrote eloquently of the enormous benefits that the fighting men derived from the presence of their priests in dangerous

situations. He comments on one chaplain, Fr John Gwynn SJ, who was mortally wounded on 11 October 1915:

If there were any blemish in a character so utterly selfless, it was no more than a tendency by servants of his calling, to attach more importance to the administration of the last rites of his Church to a wounded man than to the immediate appearance of the medical officer, and to forget that there are times when Supreme [sic] Unction can be a depressant. *Per Contra*, Absolution at the moment of going over the top, if given with vigour and good cheer ... is a powerful tonic. (Kipling, 1923, vol. 1, p. 118)

Robert Graves, in his well-known and sceptical account of the early years of the war, was also anxious to stress the positive aspect of the role of Catholic chaplains at the front in contrast with Protestant chaplains. Graves records how in one battalion a colonel managed to get rid of four Anglican chaplains in as many months because he considered them useless. He finally applied for a Catholic chaplain ‘alleging a change of faith in the men under his command’. Not only did men of Graves’ acquaintance show no respect for Protestant chaplains, they praised Catholic padres as men who were ‘willing to do what was expected of [them] and more’ (Trout, 2007, p. 144).¹⁵ The effect of this was as Guy Chapman, an Anglican and subsequently professor of history at Leeds, wrote that ‘the Church of Rome sent a man into action spiritually cleaned. The Church of England could only offer you a cigarette’ (Chapman, 1933, p. 58).

Catholic chaplains in the forces were there to respond to the needs of those who sought their spiritual ministrations but they were also duty bound by their calling to ‘seek out the lost’, those who had lapsed from the practice of the faith, who were sometimes referred to as ‘big fish’. This is a recurring trope in the letters and writings of chaplains. The war brought back to faith those who had been estranged from or neglectful of it. Fr William Keary records that ‘it is very desolating to see the number ... of poor fellows who have given up the practice of our holy religion ...’ (ABPSJ 5). Another chaplain thought that the very fact of their experiences of the horror of war made some give up religion. For others it made them more intensely devout (see for example DAA 6).

The mere presence of Catholic chaplains in regiments at the front could have a considerable calming effect on men. At times this was the case even for non-Catholics. One chaplain recorded how in moving up the line just before his largely Scots Presbyterian regiment went ‘over the top’ at the battle of Soissons, 18–22 July 1918, he heard soldiers whispering ‘the padre is with us’. This was the most consoling incident in the whole of his ministerial life (McCann, 1940, p. 416). Major General Sir John Shea of the 30th Division also praised the fact that the presence of the priests ‘helped, in no small degree to raise the tone and spirit of the Division’ (IJA, CHP1/2/ (12), 23 November 1916).

Among the more grisly offices that chaplains of all denominations were called upon to perform was the preparation for death of those condemned to be executed for breaches of military discipline. Some chaplains testify that this was their greatest trial. Seeing how one such individual faced his death having kissed a crucifix just before facing the firing squad, Fr R.H.J. Steurt remarked ‘I ask no better than that I may meet death, when I must, as gallantly as that deserter’ (Day, 1930, p. 170). The change brought upon soldiers who had been prepared for death by a priest could be astonishing. One non-Catholic officer, having seen the transformation in one who was something of a ne’er-do-well, exclaimed ‘Good God, yours is a religion to die in’

(Plater, 1919, p. 126). Sometimes the Catholic chaplain was called upon to minister to non-Catholics in these situations (see DAA 7), and occasionally this resulted in a conversion to Catholicism. Indeed, in general it is estimated that up to 40,000 soldiers converted to Catholicism in the course of the war, and as many as 70,000 in the civilian population (Snape, 2002, p. 336).

One element in the distinctiveness of Catholic spiritual support of military personnel was that Catholic chaplains insisted on keeping themselves apart at a time when other denominations were beginning to cooperate. Catholics refused to take part in joint church parades and to have anything to do with 'ecumenical' services of any kind, and persuaded the army that while in France even destroyed Catholic churches could not be used for services of any denomination other than those of the Roman Catholic Church (see AIJ 5). On the other hand, inevitably in the circumstances of the war Catholic chaplains did come into contact with the clergy of other denominations and some at least found the contact convivial (Schweitzer, 2003, p. 71).

An irony in the church's antiecumenical stance was the fact that in army camps both in Britain and France Catholics were at times dependent on the goodwill of the various Protestant denominations for the use of huts¹⁶ in which to hold mass and other services (see AAA 3).¹⁷ In general, however, the effectiveness and role of Catholic chaplains was fed by the piety of Catholic troops, which in itself was based on the way in which Catholics were socialised about their faith. They were brought up on the things of religion, the importance of a sacramental life, the need for prayer, a fear of hell and the necessity of preparation for 'a good death', and all these were magnified and intensified in the crucible of war. As one chaplain explained,

The devotion and preparedness to die of the Leinsters is really touching beyond words. I made a compact with them, that whenever I passed them in the trenches or in the danger zone, they could be sure they were getting Absolution; and now when I pass they salute and lift their caps for a second to show me they remember. (*Letters and Notices*, p. 559)¹⁸

Major Willie Redmond MP, who was killed on the western front in June 1917, records that before one engagement at Guillemont in September 1916, after the general absolution, men of the 16th Irish Division said the rosary together: 'It was most wonderful the effect produced as hundreds and thousands of voices repeated the prayers and recited the words "Pray for us now and at the hour of our death"' (Ryan, 1917, p. 43).

The depth of religious feeling exhibited by many Catholics was a marked feature of Catholic participation in the war (Denman, 1991, p. 361). This was true of both British and German troops. British chaplains and French *curés* alike testified to the piety of German Catholic soldiers. Furthermore it was the German Catholic chaplains who had to bury the dead and give comfort to the wounded of the 2nd Royal Munster Fusiliers after the battle of Etreux in September 1914 (Harris, 1968, p. 35). This communality of religion combined with the experience of fear of death to make the average soldiers less bellicose about victory than many commanding officers. Many of the German prisoners of war taken during the capture of Ginchy at the Somme in September 1916 by the 8th and 9th Dublin Fusiliers were Bavarians 'who, delighted to be captured by fellow Catholics, eagerly surrounded the division's chaplains' (Denman, 1992, p. 99; 1995, p. 98). Even in the absence of a priest there were marked signs of piety. An early engagement involving the Irish Guards at the front witnessed the spectacle of the soldiers kneeling in prayer before attacking the German

positions. An eyewitness claimed that many of the soldiers had ‘a look of absolute joy on their faces’ (*The Tablet*, 3 October 1914). Time and again chaplains testify to this unaffected piety of Catholic soldiers and sailors. Willie Doyle wrote of his experience of saying mass at the front in a hovel of mud and filth and yet the soldiers ‘knelt there and prayed as only our own Irish poor can pray, with a fervour and faith which would touch the heart of any unbeliever’ (O’Rahilly, 1932, p. 473). He also talked of the simple piety which brought ‘crowds of them at all hours to visit the Blessed Sacrament’ (p. 420). Another chaplain, Fr Timothy Keary, testified to the fact that every evening in May 1917 the rosary attracted huge numbers of soldiers ‘all the greater for the very real dangers they have to face’ (ABPSJ 6). Keary died of influenza in France in 1919 and his commanding officer spoke of the priest’s profound influence on the troops. The local *curé* at Calais said that the dead priest’s zeal had so influenced the English Catholic soldiers under his charge that they in turn became splendid examples to the *curé*’s own flock (*Letters and Notices*, 1919, p. 74).

One British officer writing to his sister talked of the fact that while Anglicans had to attend compulsory church parades, which the ‘men hate like poison’, the Catholic padre was worked hard to satisfy the spiritual needs of his ‘fighting parish’. He conducted the rosary every night at the front and had mass every morning to which many went freely. ‘In times of strafing, this intrepid priest goes straight to the front lines and absolves the wounded and dying and [thus] you have a picture of what the Church can mean to men of faith in the midst of sudden death’ (*Letters and Notices*, 1917, p. 61). Another officer, Lieutenant C. Mowlan, a medical officer with the 1st Royal Irish Fusiliers, could write

We had Mass out in the open and it was most gratifying to see the long line of men waiting for confession, and at Mass the devotion with which they attend, and tell the beads of Our Blessed Lady, devotion so dear for many reasons, historical as well as devotional to the heart of Catholic Irishmen. A large crowd attended Holy Communion. (*Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, 6, 1915, p. 360)

Another chaplain took the opportunity which his regiment, the Irish Guards, had of a rest in November 1917 to preach a mission to them. His sermons were on topics such as sin, death and judgment, hell and the passion of Christ. These were delivered over a period of eight days between 5 and 6.15 pm each evening, and followed by confessions. Despite the rather gloomy subject matter, his sermons attracted between 500 and 600 soldiers every night (AIJ 6). Ordinary soldiers could also be surprisingly forthright in instancing examples of piety in their regiments. Sergeant Major Leahy of the 2nd Battalion of the Munster Fusiliers wrote that ‘Prayers more than anything else consoles me, and every fellow is the same, so the war has been the cause of making us almost an army of saints’ (*Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, 6, 1915, p. 356).

Religious practice and the understanding of Catholic teaching were not of a uniformly high order among all troops who identified themselves as Catholics, of course. Michael Snape argues that one contemporary Catholic account (Plater, 1919) reveals large regional variations in soldiers’ understanding of their religion and that ‘Catholics from the South of England (i.e. London)’ especially were ‘ignorant of the rudiments of their faith’ (Snape, 2005, p. 26). Since Snape’s intent is to dispel the ‘unchallenged’ and ‘crude impressions of Catholic chaplaincy’ left by Graves and Chapman (Snape, 2005, p. 85), his findings should be scrutinised carefully – in fact Plater records of southern English Catholics that ‘70% were well instructed in their

religion' (Plater, 1919, p. 36). The point is, however, that even by the most critical judgments Catholic soldiers in general looked for the consolations of religion in a way that their Protestant English or Scottish counterparts did not. The only non-Catholic soldiers who came close to exhibiting the same interest in and expectations of religion were Northern Irish Protestants. Cyril Falls records the astonishment evinced by English officers at the religious fervour of the 36th (Ulster) Division. He explains this by the fact that Ulster was 'one of the few parts of the country wherein the reformed churches had not, by their own admission, lost ground in the last thirty years' (Falls, 1922, p. 16).

By contrast the average English Tommy could make little sense of it all. Graves observes that 'not one soldier in a hundred was inspired by religious feelings of even the crudest sort' (Trout, 2007, p. 139). This is something of an exaggeration, but in estimating the level of interest in religion, and therefore the relative spiritual utility or otherwise of chaplains, we do not simply have to rely on Graves. There are a number of important sources which show that very many – perhaps up to 80 per cent of troops (Cairns, 1919, p. 452) – had no interest in organised religion, and Anglican and other Protestant chaplains repeatedly testify to this lack of interest. The bishop of London tried to explain this by saying that the Church of England was 'entirely out of touch with the world of labour' (Bourchier, 1916, p. 16). G.A. Studdert Kennedy (Woodbine Willie, the most famous and effective of the Anglican chaplains in the war)¹⁹ admitted that for the average 'Tommy' the idea of God 'did not interest him or make any difference to him. In truth he did not really believe in it in any living sense' (Studdert Kennedy, 1918, p. 152). Edward Stuart Talbot, the bishop of Winchester, and the driving force behind the report *The Army and Religion: an Enquiry and its Bearing upon the Religious Life of the Nation* (London, 1919), concluded that the ordinary soldier was simply not interested in Christianity and that the churches had failed him (Stephenson, 1936, pp. 224 and 228). So far as his own church was concerned, he blamed this on 'inertia, want of insight, foresight, and initiative' and the fact that the church had failed to cultivate its sacramental life (Stephenson, 1936, p. 239).

In a similar vein Herbert Gray of the Church of Scotland could write that the majority of men did not profess to be religious, did not respond to the chaplain's ministry and in general 'disliked ministers' (Gray, 1917, pp. 13 and 32), a view shared by Kennedy (MacNutt, 1917, p. 403). On the basis of a survey of some 3000 individuals (chaplains, officers and men) to which one Catholic chaplain responded, Cairns (1919) concluded that the vast majority of men had no 'living touch' with any church, although the report makes a clear differentiation between Protestant and Catholic churches and concedes the claims of Catholic chaplains that 'all their men were vitally connected with their church' (Cairns, 1919, p. 190). The latter is unsustainable as a claim, but what emerges is that soldiers of Catholic backgrounds had, in general, more use for their clergy than their non-Catholic fellow-combatants. Furthermore, as both men and chaplains realised, for Catholics 'a priest is priest. He has no need to make his position or establish his utility by material services' (Plater, 1919, p. 117). They had expectations that the priest would be with them in whatever circumstances they found themselves in.

The lack of interest in religion may also have been true, though to a lesser extent, of the officer class. Despite the fact that some 30 per cent of officers were the sons of clergymen (Marrin, 1975, p. 187) and the fact that senior army officers saw a positive role for religion and the chaplains in the war effort (*Religion and Morale*, 1919, p. 35), there is evidence that many simply left religion behind after school or university days. One disgruntled Catholic chaplain, Fr Joseph Paul, complained that the only

fellow-officer of his mess who had 'a speck of religion' was a Presbyterian major. Paul also commented of another regiment to which he was posted that of 20 officers all labelled Church of England, not one went to any service and most were openly hostile to religion. Nevertheless they were respectful of the Catholic padre: in the Nissen hut he shared with two medical officers who were forever boisterous, as soon as he began to say his breviary they would observe silence until he had finished his prayers (ABPSJ 7). Other chaplains, however, would at times complain of the arrogance, agnosticism and general oafishness of non-Catholic officers in respect of Catholic padres (DAA 8).

There is no suggestion here that on a personal level Catholic chaplains were better as men, or as representatives of Christianity, or more heroic compared with their Protestant counterparts. Not all those who served as chaplains did so with distinction. There are at least 15 cases of priests being dismissed for drunkenness (ARCBF 2) and at least in one instance a court martial for sodomy, although the case against the priest concerned was declared 'not proven' and he was discharged from the army to avoid further scandal (DAA 9, p. 10). Others did not take their duties seriously and were accused by fellow-priests of neglect of the soldiers or simply laziness (see IWMA 3 for some details). Such failures were common to all denominations. One Church of England padre was sentenced to prison for 'immoral conduct' with a man (*The Manchester Guardian*, 13 June 1918) and Cairns concludes that the 'black sheep among the parsons' coupled with 'superficialism' and 'insincerity' were in the army hindrances to religion 'greater than we realise' (Cairns, 1919, p. 209). The pastoral effectiveness of Catholic chaplains did not so much depend on their character or goodness or personal worthiness but rather on their ability to supply what many Catholic soldiers expected of them: the administration of the sacraments and to be with them 'in times of danger' (Plater, 1919, p. 109).

Many chaplains did exhibit heroism in the execution of their duties and, as we have seen, more than 30 gave their lives in the service of fellow-Catholics. The first of these was Fr William Finn at Gallipoli in the spring of 1915 who was shot while leaving a ship carrying troops. His commander advised him not to attempt to land, but he insisted that his place had to be with his men. Although gravely wounded he managed to get to the beachhead, and to minister to fallen soldiers until he was finally killed by shrapnel (*The Tablet*, 12 June 1915).

Organisational Problems

Although it might be expected that the War Office was, to say the least, underprepared to deal with a large influx of Catholics into the forces at the beginning of the war, church procedures themselves were scarcely designed to facilitate effective chaplaincy work, or the sustained practice of Catholicism, in the circumstances of total war. Gradually the church began to amend some of its procedures. Soldiers were dispensed from the need to abstain from eating meat on Wednesdays and Fridays, although there is evidence that some soldiers, especially Irishmen, could not bring themselves to eat meat on the proscribed days, since they had been taught from childhood that such a thing was a serious sin. The Holy See allowed priests to say mass anywhere, even in the open, 'provided there was no danger of irreverence' (*Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, 6, 1915, p. 437). Chaplains were given general faculties to hear confessions anywhere without having to have permission of the local bishop, and furthermore general absolution without the need to make individual confession was introduced. It was stressed, however, in the latter case that should the soldiers concerned survive an engagement they were obliged to make confession in the normal way at the next

opportunity (*Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, 6, 1915, p. 436). The rules of fasting before holy communion were also abandoned for the duration of the conflict. At the same time there were clear limits to the flexibility that the church was prepared to concede even in the face of the war. The pope would not allow mass to be said in the afternoon or evening, priests could only say one mass on weekdays and two on Sundays, and they had to have a full mass kit complete with altar stone,²⁰ which contained the relics of saints (see ARCBF 3).

This concern for the minutiae of ecclesial practice was, however, small beer compared to the near shambolic state that attended Catholic chaplaincy structure for almost the entire length of the conflict.²¹ The disorganisation took two forms: the first related to the War Office and the second was an internal matter for the Catholic Church and concerned the role that Cardinal Bourne played in relation to the appointment of chaplains. One of the issues stemmed from precisely this double jurisdiction, one military and the other ecclesiastical.

Initially the structure of the military chaplains' department was fairly rudimentary. An Irish Presbyterian minister, Dr J.M. Simms, subsequently Unionist MP for North Down, was appointed principal chaplain for the whole of the British Expeditionary Force (Smyth, 1968, p. 156). After the retreat from Mons it was clear that the structure would have to be rationalised and that more chaplains were needed. By the following year the Church of England objected to the new structure whereby its padres might find themselves under the command of a Nonconformist, and thus from July 1915 the chaplaincy department had two branches: the Church of England and the non-Church of England departments (Smyth, 1968, p. 163). In each English army division there were nine Anglican chaplains, with four each for the Catholics and Nonconformists. In Irish divisions the numbers were reversed, and a similar denominational sensitivity was shown for Welsh and Scottish divisions (War Office, 1917, p. 3).

It is clear that some Catholic chaplains derided these arrangements. Fr P.J. Oddie, an Oratorian priest, declared that the system was 'hopeless'. He further denounced the non-Catholic padres as 'those lazy, heretical chaplains who do no work' and declared that 'the *fighting* troops realize that the priest is the only chaplain who is worth anything at all ...' (DAA 11).²² This doubtless exaggerated and uncharitable judgment has, as we have seen, some basis in reality and is attested to even by Protestant sources (Marrin, 1975, p. 205). So far as the actual deployment of chaplains was concerned, it quickly became clear that they were not well distributed.²³ This was true both at the front²⁴ and in England where historically troops were looked after by the local parish priest. Now chaplains were appointed to barracks where they were clearly not needed.²⁵ There were also demands from Irish regiments that they should be supplied only with Irish priests since the English just did not understand them.²⁶ Equally the War Office booklet outlining the duties of Catholic chaplains forcefully observed: 'Men have been heard to complain bitterly that the Chaplain with the Irish Regiments in a Brigade never troubles about anyone else. If he does not do the work nobody else will' (War Office, 1917, p. 10).

By contrast English priests who served with Irish regiments could speak highly of the men and indeed acknowledged that English criticism which implied Ireland did not do enough in the war was 'tragically unjust' (Devas, 1919, p. x). Other chaplains regretted that the Catholic Church did not opt in 1915 for the same sort of arrangement that the Anglicans had insisted on, in other words a separate structure within the army headed by a bishop who would not only be responsible for recruiting chaplains but who would have some sense concerning the dispersal of priests

(DDA 1). Some resented the fact that their superior officers were Calvinists who had little or no understanding of the role of priests, or who were overtly opposed to the Catholic Church. For its part the army tended to take the view that ‘as long as the wounded were looked after in hospital, the dead buried and an occasional service held’ nothing more could be expected from the padres of whatever denomination (Smyth, 1968, p. 157).

The most authoritative voice from outside the UK denouncing the perceived lack of organisation of Catholic affairs in the military was that of Henry W. Cleary, bishop of Auckland, who spent six months in 1916–17 with New Zealand troops in England and at the front line in France. Cleary wrote of the ‘lamentable failure of Cardinal Bourne and his military secretary to manage the Catholic Army Chaplains’ (DDA 2). Bishop Cleary also placed his animadversions before the relevant Vatican authorities. In a long report castigating Bourne’s mismanagement he quoted one Catholic lieutenant who

complained that men were going to their deaths convinced they would go to hell because they had not been reconciled to God by a priest. The Lieutenant prays that for every soul lost in that way, God would ‘send the soul of a bishop and a priest to keep them company’. Terrible words but capable of being expressed only by one who is granted real faith and great love of the sacraments. (ARCBF 4)²⁷

When Cardinal Gaetano de Lai of the Vatican’s Consistorial Congregation drew Bourne’s attention to Cleary’s report, Bourne retorted that Cleary was simply out of his mind (ARCBF 5). But what exactly were Bourne’s responsibilities, and how did he acquire them?

In 1903 Bourne (as bishop of Southwark) was appointed, following his lobbying for the post, the delegate of the Holy See for the British Army. This was a position he retained having been translated to the Archbishopric of Westminster later that year.²⁸ Already from 1900 the archbishop of Westminster had responsibility for the navy. In 1906 the Vatican confirmed all these arrangements (DAA 16). All this made sense and was perfectly rational when the number of Catholic chaplains to the forces was relatively small. With the coming of war it was impossible for a busy diocesan bishop to oversee day-to-day affairs, and so Bourne appointed Mgr Manuel Bidwell as his secretary for military affairs and Bidwell did most of the routine work. Bourne nevertheless retained overall authority and it was on his recommendation to the War Office that individual priests were commissioned into the army as military chaplains. Bourne took certain aspects of his duties seriously. His visits to naval dockyards and to troops at the front and his hosting of grand-scale religious services in his cathedral throughout the war (Olmeadow, vol. 2, 1944, p. 108) demonstrate a commitment to Catholic service personnel and to the war effort which was beyond mere routine. The war for Bourne was ‘a very noble cause’ (AAW 1).

From the beginning of the war, however, there were constant and sustained complaints about Bourne’s handling of affairs. Initially there was some suggestion that Bourne was concerned only to promote priests from his own diocese as chaplains (AAS 4). In general, though, the complaints tended to imply that Bourne and the structures he had put in place were unable to cope with the complexities of matching priests with troops. Inevitably the authorities at the Vatican became embroiled in mounting claims and counter-claims about Bourne and chaplaincy provision. There were attempts as early as 1915 to appoint an *Episcopus Castrensis*, in other words a bishop who would act as chaplain general to the forces and who would be responsible

for the recruitment and placement of chaplains.²⁹ Bourne resisted such a suggestion with all his might. He could boast to the Vatican that his conduct of chaplaincy affairs was such that 'one has increased chaplains from 20 to 400' and that this 'has clearly thrown into relief the value of the effectiveness of the arrangements made in 1903' (ARCBF 7). Furthermore Bourne argued that a Catholic chaplain general, because he would be a military subordinate, would be subject to military red tape from which Bourne was free. He also argued that the Nonconformist chaplains were 'persuaded that only the Card[inal] A[rch]b[ishop] of West[minster] can effectively resist the oppressions of the Anglicans' (DAA 17). Eventually, after much wrangling and in opposition to Bourne's wishes (he even threatened to resign his archbishopric), the Vatican appointed William Keatinge in its terms as chaplain general (*Episcopus Castrensis*) to the army in November 1917. Bourne, however, continued to retain responsibilities for the navy.

For its part the War Office had no particular objection to the idea of a chaplain general for Catholics, provided the title was not used, as this would lead to confusion with the chief Church of England chaplain. It is also clear, however, that elements within the War Office were quite happy to keep the arrangement with Bourne. They found him malleable and not too demanding, and therefore wanted to keep on good terms with him. Their informal position was to support Bourne and to resist what was regarded as the 'importunate part of the Irish demands' with regard to chaplaincy provision (TNA 6). However, even the government came to recognise that one of the main problems with Bourne's administration of affairs was that he too jealously guarded what he took to be his prerogatives in chaplaincy matters. In particular he flatly refused to give to the Irish bishops any meaningful role in chaplaincy affairs. Sir Reginald Brade, secretary at the War Office, conceded that this was 'the real difficulty' (TNA 7).

The prospect of the appointment of Keatinge as the military ordinary, although welcomed by Cardinal Logue (DDA 3), was resented by Bourne and he made little effort to facilitate Keatinge's work. Even the War Office treated him with some hostility (ARCBF 8). He told Bishop Amigo that the 'spirit' of the army was directed to 'preventing Catholics getting too much power' (DAA 18). In the event the new arrangement, coming so late in the war since Keatinge did not take up his duties until March 1918, did little to change the culture of institutional inertia and disorganisation which prevailed in the chaplains' department.

The Irish Dimension

The tensions that arose between the Irish bishops and Bourne over the appointment of priests to the forces surfaced only as time went on. Initially Logue took the view that it was irrelevant who appointed the chaplains provided priests were made available 'to give the sacraments to the poor wounded and dying soldiers' (AAS 5). Although later in the war Bourne would complain of the lack of Irish chaplains, he initially asked Logue to nominate only eight priests of whom just four were appointed to the ranks.

Throughout the war Logue's consistent policy was to encourage clergy to join up, even if this meant that the home missions would suffer (*The Irish Catholic*, 20 March 1917). Not all Irish prelates or priests took the same view. Archbishop William Walsh of Dublin was a more detached observer of the war effort. An avowed Irish nationalist, he was very careful to refuse the authorities permission to use any of his publicly stated anti-German sentiments for propaganda purposes (AICR 2). The Diocese of Limerick, headed by Bishop Edward O'Dwyer, a man of distinctly Sinn

Fein tastes, contributed no priests as chaplains. The vice-rector of the Irish College in Rome, Mgr John Hagan, whom Bourne described as ‘an implacable enemy of England’, argued that the chaplains issue ought to be principally a question for the English Catholic Church since it had proportionately more priests than Ireland (AICR 3). Hagan was, however, more astute when he warned the Holy See in the early stages of the war that there would be trouble over the chaplaincy issue if Bourne had too much authority since ‘our Irish bishops are and always have been . . . suspicious of any step that would imply the remotest of subjection [to] or dependence’ on the archbishop of Westminster (AICR 4). At the very least the Irish bishops wanted the right to appoint Irish priests to Irish regiments without any deference to Cardinal Bourne (AAA 4).

The perception grew that the Irish church provided less than its fair share of military chaplains. Ernest Oldmeadow would subsequently claim that by Easter 1915 the Diocese of Westminster alone had provided more chaplains than the whole of Ireland (Oldmeadow, vol. 2, 1944, p. 119). The Irish reacted strongly to such suggestions. When the rector of the Irish College in Rome tried to refute the idea by writing to Bourne asking for the number of serving Irish priests, Bourne refused to release the figures on the basis that it was a matter of War Office intelligence and therefore confidential (Boyle, 2008, p. 234). One element in Irish distrust was the fact that by December 1914 Britain had opened a diplomatic mission at the Vatican. The person in Rome most responsible for prompting the mission was the Englishman Cardinal Aidan Gasquet.³⁰ He was deeply distrusted by the Irish in Rome, who thought that the whole mission represented an anti-Irish cabal (Leslie, 1953, p. 218).³¹ For his part Gasquet did circulate at the Vatican an ‘*allegato*’ signed by many leading Irish laymen in 1917 saying that the Irish hierarchy was not doing enough to provide priests for the forces. This of course fitted in with Bourne’s allegations. The document itself was, however, sent to all members of the Irish hierarchy so there was no element of subterfuge in Gasquet’s activities and the document occasioned a spirited refutation from Logue, but the extent of the complaints about the lack of Irish effort to provide chaplains are too widespread to be easily undermined, and although Logue can perhaps be exonerated from any intimations of unconcern the same cannot be said for all Irish bishops. The fact is, however, that in response to the ‘*allegato*’ Logue and the two episcopal secretaries of the Standing Committee of the Irish Bishops’ Conference issued a fresh appeal to priests to join the forces as chaplains (DAA 21).

The events surrounding the 1916 Rising and the subsequent executions of 15 of its leaders caused many of the younger clergy to turn away definitively from any sympathy with Britain or with the war. For Irish men and priests involved in the war there was a range of reactions to the attempted revolution. Some expressed great bitterness at this ‘stab in the back’ (Leonard, 1996, p. 263); others thought that the Rising made no difference to the job they were doing (AIJ 1, pp. 57–58). Some still maintained that the war was not simply Britain’s conflict but a war also for Ireland (Callan, 1986, pp. 109–10), but by 1918 Irish public opinion, this time supported by the church, took a definite turn against sympathy for the war, or at least the conduct of government policy in relation to it. Following the German offensive beginning in March 1918, which ‘broke’ the Fifth Army, there was an imperative need to raise more fighting men. The government decided that Ireland, which had been exempt from the Conscription Act of 1916, should now be subjected to military draft (Ward, 1974, p. 110). The government made the initial mistake of not exempting the clergy from conscription and the ecclesiastical hierarchy denounced the Military Services Bill as an outrage on the ‘clergy and people of Ireland’ (Ó Fiaich, 1968, p. 353). It proved

impossible to implement the measure but the prime minister, Lloyd George, and the Irish Unionist leader, Sir Edward Carson, both denounced what they took to be the Irish bishops' challenge to the supremacy of Parliament.

The political disputes in Ireland and the intra-ecclesiastical struggles in Rome and elsewhere were far removed from the daily horrors that chaplains faced throughout the war. The experience of wading through trenches, filled not just with mud and vermin but also with the bodies of the dead, left profound scars (O' Rahilly, 1932, p. 445). For some priests it was all too much. Two left the ministry to marry (most unusual at that time), at least one gave up his faith and three others, upon release from the army, disappeared and were never heard of again (Johnstone and Hagerty, 1996, p. 173). Some could cope during the war only by accommodating themselves to the full trappings of military life. It was said of Fr Stephen Rawlinson, the most senior Catholic chaplain in France for most of the war, that he never wore his clerical collar and that he was so determined to appear 'non-denominational' that many, even of his fellow-chaplains, never realised that he was a Catholic priest (DDA 4).

Conclusions

Catholic chaplains in the course of the First World War faced a variety of complex pastoral and organisational problems. At the personal level the spiritual needs of individuals varied. There is some suggestion that among Catholics there were differences as between Ireland and Britain with regard to the attitude to chaplains and this was compounded by Irish politics. There was also, even within Britain, regional variation in regard to the practice of Catholicism. There is also evidence from all denominations that those who joined the forces as volunteers had more use for organised religion than those who were subsequently conscripted (Plater, 1919, pp. 41–42; Cairns, 1919, p. 189).

As has been suggested, there were continuing vestiges of anti-Catholicism in British society at the outbreak of the war, but such elements did not prove insuperable to the workings of army chaplains. Indeed Catholic priests such as Fr C.C. Martindale SJ could, perhaps in a moment of spiritual romanticism, comment on the 'Catholicizing influences in our armies [which] have been powerful and far reaching' (*The Tablet*, 6 October 1917). Early hesitations about Catholicism as a moral and religious force, as seen in the attitudes of some commanders such as General Haig, quickly gave way to accommodation by the War Office in the provision of Catholic chaplains. In general the work the chaplains did was well regarded and often favourably compared to that of non-Catholics. The outpouring of postwar memoirs and reflections testifies time and again to the perception that not only did Catholic chaplains meet the need of combatants but that conversely many of the efforts of Protestant chaplains did not resonate with many at the front or at home. Richard Schweitzer remarks in this connection: 'The contents of books that criticize the [Protestant] chaplaincy and the Church are sufficiently uniform to constitute a genre' (Schweitzer, 2003, p. 68).

This is not to say that Catholic priests in every case were up to the mark, but their effectiveness was not dependent on themselves, their personal gifts or their character, but on what the Catholic service personnel perceived as their role as dispenser of the sacraments. Albert Marrin's attitude is a reasonable summary of the encounter between soldiers and the churches in the war when he comments on the 'full extent of the failure of the Churches in the army (all the Churches that is, with the possible exception of the Roman Catholic [Church]) . . .' (Marrin, 1975, p. 203).

There is no attempt here to gloss over the internal problems which the Catholic Church faced in dealing with its obligations to those under arms. Nationalist Catholic Ireland's traditional animosity to British imperial interest overshadowed its concern for the spiritual welfare of its sons dying at the front. The unfair and unjust allegation that Pope Benedict XV was pro-German made it difficult at times for individual chaplains to gain acceptance among certain sections of the army, but Cardinal Bourne's concern for his own role, bordering on megalomania, was probably more of a direct hindrance to good chaplaincy provision than ambiguous papal dispositions.

The experience of the First World War did have lasting implications for how the Catholic Church saw its relationship with the British forces. This was particularly true of ecclesiastical organisation. The military bishop became a permanent feature of the structure of Catholic chaplaincy provision. When Bourne died his successor Cardinal Arthur Hinsley delegated the archbishop of Westminster's Royal Navy role to the *Episcopus Castrensis*, although the anomaly was not fully regularised until the 1950s (Johnstone and Hagerty, 1996, p. 309). The work of chaplains and the expectations of Catholic servicemen and servicewomen remained a constant; the main task of the chaplain was to offer the sacramental consolations of Catholicism to the faithful in the services.

Of course a central question remains: why did the priests go war? Why in the circumstances of conflict did they volunteer as chaplains? This is a perennial issue in the church: why should men of God who preach the gospel of peace facilitate at a spiritual level individuals who will kill others in violation of the fifth commandment and the clear injunctions of Christ to 'turn the other cheek'? In Catholic theological terms it was so as to be the church, to be Christ, to the men who at any moment could be called from this world to the next. They spent their time in the line in doing what only they could do: administering the sacraments of the church, and in doing so, helping the combatants to, in some way, find God even in the midst of horror and carnage. Michael Moynihan in surveying the war writing of six chaplains, five Anglican and one Catholic, says that only in the writings of the latter is there a 'constant awareness of the presence of God' (Moynihan, 1983, p. 180). The chaplains not only sought to ease the passage of the dying from this world but they also sought, by letters, to bring comfort to those left behind.³² Fr Willie Doyle in one such letter could tell a woman whose brother was killed in action on 17 August 1917

He received absolution from me immediately before the action began, so that you need have no anxiety about his salvation. I have prayed for him everyday since he was killed, though I fancy that God has already rewarded him for the heroic sacrifice he made in laying down his life in such a glorious cause. (AIJ 9)

Despite the ambiguities inherent in the final phrase, Doyle's letter neatly summarises how priests saw their activity in the war and gives some insight into the motivation for most priests who acted as chaplains in the First World War.

The impact of the work of Catholic chaplains on their co-religionists in the ranks was given further elucidation by Doyle in his comments on an observation by an English non-Catholic colonel, who had witnessed the Irish at the battle of Messines on 7 June 1917. The colonel had remarked 'My God, what soldiers [:] they fear neither man nor the devil'. Doyle wrote:

Why should they? They had made their peace with God. He had given them His own Sacred Body to eat that morning, and they were going now to face

death, as only Irish Catholic lads can do, confident of victory and cheered by the thought that the reward of heaven was theirs. (Moynihan, 1983, p. 195)

From the context it is clear that the victory Doyle had in mind was, in theological terms, the victory over sin and death brought by Christ. The function of Doyle and those like him was to relieve the anxieties concerning their salvation of those who took part in one of the greatest blood-lettings the world has known. To assure those in the services that in the midst of the terrors of war God, at least, had not abandoned them.

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Notes

- 1 Even Anglican clergy conceded this point and were determined that after the war preparation for ordination would have to be more rigorous and more pastorally orientated (Revd P.C.T. Crick in MacNutt, 1917, p. 366).
- 2 This is made clear by a string of contemporary publications regretting Protestant inability to make more impact on the working classes. See for example Kennedy (1918), MacNutt (1917), Cairns (1919) and Gray (1917). These trends had been apparent for decades (see Moore, 1988; Parsons, 1988).
- 3 This is attested time and again. See for example the account by a Church of Ireland officer in Cooper (1918, pp. 63–64, 220).
- 4 The clear teaching of the Council of Trent, for example, is that the sacraments are ‘necessary for salvation’ and for anyone who denies this ‘let him be anathema’. See ‘First Decree on the Sacraments’ in Tanner (1990, p. 684).
- 5 See AAA 2, pleading for more Irish chaplains and DAA 2, in which Rawlinson records that the army alone is short of 80 chaplains at the western front. In March 1916 it was estimated that the army was 100 Catholic chaplains short: DAA 3.
- 6 DAA 4. Here Cardinal Gasquet complains that Bourne wants to ‘increase *his* position in regard to England & in fact the B[ritish] Empire. He would wish to be a kind of authority over all the Empire.’ Emphasis in original.
- 7 Indeed King George V refused to attend a mass in Westminster Cathedral organised by the duke of Norfolk in November 1915 to pray for dead British Catholic soldiers. The king’s reasoning was clearly anti-Catholic in nature and when the duke sought clarification of George V’s position the king’s secretary wrote that the refusal was on grounds of ‘general principle’. See ACA 2.
- 8 AAS 1. D. Gainford St Lawrence, who had four sons at the front, wrote to Bishop Peter Amigo: ‘I think it is the greatest scandal [...] all the soldiers who died without the sacraments’.
- 9 By the end of the war Catholic priests accounted for almost 22 per cent of the total number of chaplains (651 out of a total of 3475). This was far in excess of the percentage of Catholics serving in the armed forces, estimated at that stage to be only 7 per cent, but illustrates the success of Catholic lobbying in defence of their views on the spiritual ministrations to combatants. Even so, as we shall see, there were repeated protests throughout the war years

- that there were insufficient chaplains and that the Catholic community as a whole was not pulling its weight in the war effort. See Statistics (1922, p. 190).
- 10 Even Schweitzer (2003, p. 72), who gives a very positive account of the activities of Protestant chaplains, concedes that Catholic priests, unlike most of their Protestant confreres, saw their roles in primarily spiritual terms.
 - 11 One officer in the Irish Guards did, however, find that the mere threat to write to a soldier's parish priest in Ireland was a sufficient deterrent in the case of most minor violations of army discipline (Dooley, 1995, p. 46).
 - 12 Michael Snape (2005, p. 91) observes that there is 'widespread evidence that Anglican chaplains were reluctant to remain in the rear by the end of 1915'. He produces no evidence for this assertion, however; not even a footnote.
 - 13 Fr Stephen Rawlinson, the recipient of this letter, was the Catholic assistant to the principal chaplain at the GHQ of the BEF in France. In that capacity he received a vast correspondence from the chaplains serving in the front line, from those stationed in the UK and from their religious superiors.
 - 14 Fr Nolan, the recipient of this letter, was the provincial superior of all the Irish Jesuits in the war years. It was he who decided who from among the Irish Jesuits should go to the forces as chaplains.
 - 15 Wilkinson (1978, p. 110) warns of the danger of taking Graves at face value. All Graves' references to Anglican chaplains are derisive although he always praises Catholics. Wilkinson believes that this is in virtue of the fact that Graves' grandfather was the Anglican bishop of Limerick and that in later life he was reacting against his background. Equally Brian Bond (2002, p. 31) points out that in 1930 Graves admitted that he spiced up his book to produce a bestseller in order to make money.
 - 16 These huts were built by the respective denominations and by the YMCA for recreational purposes and served as a focus for some chaplaincy activity. Catholics had fewer such constructions and hence the need to use Protestant facilities for services.
 - 17 In his letter of 18 January 1918 (AAA 3) Fr Edward O'Connor, a chaplain with the 5/6 Royal Scots, complained bitterly that there were no Catholic huts in France and he had always to depend on the generosity of Protestants, who in turn 'cannot understand how it is that we cannot return [especially in France] their past favours to us'.
 - 18 The author here is Fr Denis Doyle who was killed on 19 August 1916. He is not to be confused with the better-known Irish Jesuit Fr Willie Doyle.
 - 19 His superiors however thought him 'mad' (Marrin, 1975, p. 207).
 - 20 From the second year of the war the army gave each priest an allowance of £10 to equip himself with the requisites for mass, including a portable altar.
 - 21 The disorganisation was on all fronts. Fr Tom Moddie wrote of the 'utter inadequacy & chaotic state of our chaplains department' in Egypt (DAA 10).
 - 22 Although Oddie's sentiments were denounced as 'offensive' and 'scandalous' (DAA 12), his writings about the life of the Catholic chaplain in the trenches, for example *My Parish*, were widely circulated for propaganda purposes (see DAA 13).
 - 23 In a certain sense this issue was never satisfactorily resolved. Even in the last stages of the war Fr T.F. Maguire could write that 'all the arrangements for R.C. chaplains, as far as my experience goes, are not in anyway business like' (DAA 14).
 - 24 Fr Thomas Ferrign, a Scottish priest with the 56th Division, complained that he was attached to an English regiment in which there were very few Catholics (DAA 15).
 - 25 There are too many instances of this to go into detail here. When bishops drew this problem to the attention of Cardinal Bourne his military secretary replied that it was a matter for the War Office. See for example AAS 3.
 - 26 There are a number of letters on this point. See AIJ 6, 7, 8.
 - 27 This is a copy of the original report, which is in Italian, and is in the Vatican archives. It is undated but is probably from the early summer of 1917 when Cleary is known to have been in Rome. He told Archbishop Walsh that he drew up the report at the specific request of the Holy See (DDA 2).

- 28 There is some suggestion that the initiative in this matter may have come from the secretary of state for war (TNA 5: Guy Fleetwood Wilson, the author of this letter to Bourne, was assistant under-secretary at the War Office from 1898 until 1908).
- 29 Indeed Cardinal de Lai wrote to Bourne to inform him that the Consistorial Congregation at the Vatican, 'having heard the opinions of many interested parties', had decided that the best thing to do was to appoint a bishop to the forces (ARCBF 6).
- 30 Boyle makes the preposterous claim that Gasquet circulated ideas in Rome that were inimical to the Irish war effort with respect to chaplains (Boyle, 2008, p. 238). He also maintains that Gasquet colluded with Bourne to 'force the Vatican into making a definitive judgment in favour of Westminster' in the chaplains affair. In fact Gasquet was quite sceptical of Bourne's claims and attitudes. The two men did not get on well together and Bourne's near paranoid suspicions led him to believe that Gasquet had actually tried to prevent his appointment as archbishop of Westminster in 1903. Gasquet was also convinced that Bourne 'really is at the root of the Irish opposition in this matter' (DAA 19).
- 31 It is clear from a series of letters between Fr W.H. Kirwan and the Irish leader John Redmond in November 1918 that the Irish were kept completely in the dark about the establishment of the diplomatic mission (DAA 20).
- 32 One commentator has argued that the manner in which chaplains wrote to the relations of the fallen tacitly and unwittingly helped 'sustain support for the war effort' (Dooley, 1995, p. 189).

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