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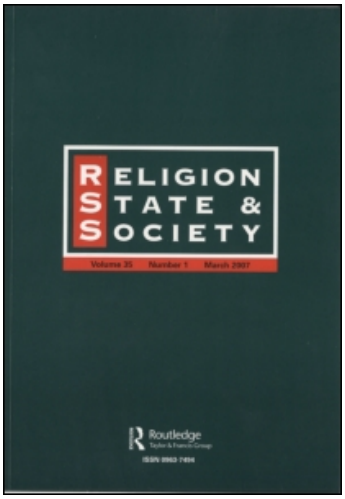

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Joanne Benham Rennick

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Canadian Military Chaplains: Bridging the Gap Between Alienation and Operational Effectiveness in a Pluralistic and Multicultural Context

JOANNE BENHAM RENNICK

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ABSTRACT

Canadian Forces' chaplains are able to negotiate the disparities between institutional goals and the human needs of military personnel through their 'ministry of presence', capacity to operate outside the chain of command, and symbolically 'neutral' rank, to provide meaningful support and pastoral care. This article uses sociological and phenomenological perspectives based on interviews with Christian military chaplains in the Canadian Forces as well as other studies on religion in Canada and religion in late modernity to examine the changing face of religion in Canada, provide an overview of the development of the Canadian Forces' Chaplain Branch, discuss new forms of religious diversity, and finally, examine how Canadian military chaplains today continue to contribute meaningfully to military operations in their ongoing support of human needs. This analysis offers insights into the alienation that can come from working in a modern bureaucratic institution, the challenges of adapting to a religiously diverse environment, and the difficulty of bridging the gap between these two spheres in order to sustain operational effectiveness.

Introduction

Canadian Forces' chaplains are able to negotiate the disparities between institutional goals and the human needs of military personnel through their 'ministry of presence', capacity to operate outside the chain of command, and symbolically 'neutral' rank, to provide meaningful support and pastoral care. Despite the late modern challenges of increasing pluralism and relativism, military chaplains have actually secured their place by becoming important mediators between dehumanising institutional objectives and the basic human needs of military personnel. In this article, using sociological and phenomenological perspectives based on interviews with Christian military chaplains in the Canadian Forces (CF) as well as other studies on religion in Canada and religion in late modernity, I look briefly at the changing face of religion in Canada, provide an overview of the development of the Canadian Forces' Chaplain Branch (CFCB),[1] discuss new forms of religious diversity, and finally, examine how Canadian military chaplains today continue to contribute meaningfully to military operations in their ongoing support of human needs. This analysis offers insights into the challenges of working in a religiously diverse environment and points to religious

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accommodation and integration in Canadian institutions as an area for continued research.

The material presented here is taken from first-hand semi-structured interviews, conversations, email exchanges and participant observation at meetings, conferences and other activities related to military chaplaincy starting in September 2004. It is one facet of a broader study I have conducted on the role that religion plays in the CF. My research has involved a cross-section of regular and reserve force military personnel from the army, navy and air force. Participants included men, women, francophones, anglophones, allophones (those whose first language is neither English nor French), individuals from various ethnic and religious groups, heterosexuals and homosexuals. Moreover, I have sought out personnel from minority groups to gain a broader perspective than the predominant white Christian male point of view (see Benham Rennick, 2011b). The material included in this chapter draws from my interviews with *Christian* chaplains. There are only five non-Christian regular and reserve force chaplains in the CF and to include those voices here would violate ethics requirements[2] governing this research that oblige me to protect participants' identity. Where appropriate, public information related to their experiences appears here and in my other writings on the CF.

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Religion in Canada

While some scholars continue to argue in favour of secularisation, in Canada at least, numerous recent events show that religion continues to be highly significant for many people at the personal, political, sociocultural and economic levels (Brown, 2005; Brunschot, 2006; Friesen, 2006; Gordon, 2006; Jacobs, 2006; Seljak *et al.*, 2007). Reginald Bibby in his ongoing studies of religion in Canada argues that 'three in four people are talking to God at least occasionally [and] ... two in four Canadians think they have actually experienced God's presence' (Bibby, 2002, p. 227). Furthermore, Paul Bramadat and David Seljak argue that among many ethnic groups in Canada 'religious communities provide a vital context in which the concerns of minority groups are expressed' (Bramadat and Seljak, 2005, p. vii). Research on religion in Canada by numerous other scholars supports this position (Banerjee and Coward, 2005; Jantz, 2001; Johnston, 2001; Lemieux and Montminy, 2000, McLellan, 1999; Sullivan, 2003; Tulchinsky, 2001) and implies that religion in Canada, as in other parts of the world, has not waned in significance but has changed in its form and appearance.

Recent statistics on religious affiliation show that religious minority groups in Canada are growing rapidly while the numbers of people in traditional Canadian denominations are growing slowly, remaining stable or dropping. In the Anglican Church of Canada for example, one of the two founding religious traditions of the nation, between 1970 and 2000 Wendy Fletcher notes an 89 per cent drop in youth group involvement, a 75 per cent drop in confirmations and a 54 per cent drop in baptisms and shows that marginally more than 200,000 donors 'alone support the entire infrastructure of the work at all levels of the Anglican Church of Canada' (Fletcher, 2008, p. 151). Future projections for that denomination are particularly bleak but, to varying degrees, this disenchantment can be seen in other mainstream traditions in Canada as well.

Although the majority of Canadians continue to identify themselves as Christians (72 per cent) other groups such as Muslims (2 per cent) show significant increases in their numbers (SC, 2004). The impact of immigration on traditional religion in

Canada between the years 1991 and 2001 is most notable in the steady growth occurring among Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists as well as among Christian sects. Statistics Canada projects that as a result of immigration and high birth rates the Muslim, Hindu and Sikh religions in Canada will have the highest rate of growth of all non-Christian religions between now and 2017, and could eventually account for a much higher percentage of the overall population (Bélanger *et al.*, 2005, p. 19).[3] While the implications of these changes are already being felt throughout Canada in legal battles over rights to religious freedom and religious discrimination (Seljak *et al.*, 2007), the CF has only begun to feel those effects. These changes present a considerable problem for Christian military clerics who are trained to minister to co-believers within a shared system of values and praxis.

A Brief History of the Canadian Forces' Chaplaincy

Historically the CF has been a bastion of Caucasian, male, predominantly Christian, conservatism. During the First World War chaplains were mostly civilian volunteers who, with the strong encouragement of the home churches, enlisted in the rank and file to encourage, minister to, and bury the thousands of boys and men on the battlefield. Along with the typical duties of religious personnel, such as providing religious instruction and administering religious rites, these chaplains participated in many of the field duties. Al Fowler describes their role as 'jack-of-all-trades' who might act as medic, counsellor, negotiator, spiritual guide, cook or commander depending on the circumstances (Fowler, 2006, pp. 33–58). Duff Crerar gives numerous examples of chaplains on the front lines giving out coffee, providing first aid, helping men read and write letters, and boosting morale through shared stories and song (Crerar, 1995). In total 447 clergymen served in the First World War. Of these, the majority were English-speaking Protestants affiliated with the Methodist, Anglican and Presbyterian churches, although small numbers of minority groups were also present among the troops including an African-Canadian battalion, Aboriginal recruits[4] and small numbers of Jews (Crerar, 1995, p. 13).

Within the first few months of combat the clerics' influence was so widely appreciated, both at home and by the troops, that Ottawa allowed volunteer clergy to be recognised as 'camp chaplains' with permission to conduct services, move freely among all enlisted personnel, wear the military uniform and hold honorary commissions (Crerar, 1995, p. 40).[5] On 19 August 1915 Canadian policymakers recognised the chaplains' profound contribution overall by establishing the first Canadian Chaplain Service under a Director of Chaplain Services (Crerar, 2006, p. 26, 1995, p. 45). However it was not until the end of the Second World War, on 9 August 1945, that the chaplains were allotted a permanent presence in the forces in the establishment of the Canadian Chaplain Services Protestant and Roman Catholic. The joint service employed 137 Protestant and 162 Roman Catholic clergymen (DND, 2003a, p. 1.3). As military bases across Canada became thriving communities incorporating living quarters, schools, grocery stores and places of worship in the form of temporary structures sometimes shared by Protestant and Roman Catholic congregations, chaplains during this period added family and marriage counselling to their list of formal duties (DND, 2003a, pp. 1.3–1.4; Morton, 1990, pp. 227–29).

From 1945 to the mid-1990s drastic changes swept across the forces and, subsequently, the chaplaincy, as policymakers imposed cost-cutting measures, closer

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cooperation with the USA and more bureaucratic processes. At the same time, media reporting on the Vietnam War and civil rights clashes were changing Canadian opinions about military activities. In fact, at the 1968 Manitoba Conference of the United Church of Canada (UCC), a group traditionally supportive of Canada's military and its chaplaincy programmes, members argued to remove all UCC ministers from the military and prohibit them from serving in the CF altogether (Fowler, 1996, p. 214). While the conference did not adopt the measure, the fact that it was even debated shows how the climate had changed. Padre Bill Howie, a United Church military chaplain at the time, argued that military involvement need not be an indication of militarism:

> I don't have any difficulty with the ethical questions in regard to the 'war machine' any more than a rural minister would worry about the growing of rye and barley and the likelihood of their being used for booze. ... my people sometimes might have the burden of the necessity of 'war guilt' but they are people with problems and that is why I am here. I minister to people, not to a policy or a machine. Military people need a ministry as does anyone else .... Most chaplains are really pacifists at heart – I know I am .... (Fowler, 1996, p. 213)

In fact, militarism in general had become a problematic ideology for many Canadians. David Bercuson writes that during this era, despite a number of failures,[6] peacekeeping became so integrated in Canadian military operations that civilians 'tended to forget that armies exist to fight wars' (Bercuson, 1996, pp. 58–60). Thus peacekeeping operations provided a tolerable and even commendable alternative to combat operations.

At the same time, Canadian society was changing in other ways as immigration from non-European countries brought greater religious pluralism and increasing individualism began to noticeably undermine the influence of the traditional religious authorities. Public demands for social justice and equality meant that, as in other areas of Canadian society, law and policy was imposed to protect the rights of marginalised groups including women, homosexuals and visible minorities. Religious minorities would eventually be included too.

Despite the transitions in broader society, CF society is only beginning to feel the effects of the changing demographics. For example, in 2010 the CFCB (regular forces) still remained mostly male (88 per cent) and Protestant (58 per cent). The majority (95 per cent) continue to come from the 'big three' that have traditionally filled the CFCB; that is, Anglicans, Roman Catholics and those groups that form what is now the United Church of Canada. Current CFCB statistics indicate that Roman Catholic chaplains constitute almost 41 per cent of the CFCB even though Roman Catholic personnel are estimated at nearly 49 per cent of the military population.[7] This leadership gap results from the shortage of Roman Catholic priests in Canada, but increasing numbers of Pastoral Associates are filling the need. Anglican priests account for about 21 per cent of all Protestants (Anglican military personnel are estimated at 12 per cent of the CF), and United Church ministers make up the next largest group at nearly 13 per cent (personnel are at just over 10 per cent). The remaining members come from other Christian groups and include two Muslim imams.[8] Table 1 shows the change in religious representation within the regular forces' chaplaincy between 2006 and 2010 on the basis of internal statistics compiled by and sent to me by the CFCB.

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Table 1. Change in religious representation within the regular forces chaplaincy between 2006 and 2010

Tradition	Total 2006	Total 2010	Approximate percentage of the CFCB	
Roman Catholic	80	90	40.9 (43 in 2006)	
Orthodox	0	1	0.4	
Protestant	104	127	57.7 (56.2 in 2006)	Approximate percentage of all Protestants
Anglican Church of Canada	35	47	21.4	37
United Church of Canada	25	28	12.7	22
Baptist	13	19	8.6	14.9
Presbyterian	6	7	5.5	3.2
Lutheran	9	9	3.2	7
Churches of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada	16	17	7.7	13.3
Other Faith Groups				
Aboriginal Spirituality	n/a	0	n/a	
Muslim	1	2	0.9	
Buddhist	0	0	n/a	
Sikh	0	0	n/a	
Pagan	0	0	n/a	
Jewish	0	0	n/a	
Hindu	0	0	n/a	
Total	185	220		

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New Ways of Believing: Pluralism, Diffuse Beliefs, Loss of Moral Consensus

Regardless of their faith or denomination, in both their official and religious capacities military chaplains today represent the CF and all its members at public commemorative events, ramp ceremonies[9] and military funerals. They provide recognition and support to active personnel, veterans and military families. They offer denominational services and pastoral care to members of their own tradition while also trying to encourage and counsel many others with widely varying beliefs. They also give sanction to military objectives through the dedication of ships, the consecration of regimental or squadron colours (military flags) and military parades. Their presence is reminiscent of an earlier era when religion presided in many institutions in Canada. However, the Canadian military is not the same as it was in the 1940s when military chaplaincy was established as a Canadian institution in its own right. At that time church and state were more closely intertwined and special recognition was given to the religious traditions (Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism) most prominent in the country at that time.

Today both the culture and the context are quite different, with increasing diversity, changing ideas about what it means be Canadian, decreasing influence from the churches, legal protection for religious minorities and growing religious pluralism. Nonetheless, Christian military chaplains continue to hold a prominent place in Canadian military activities and continue to minister to military personnel and their families. Now the CFCB is guided by policies in keeping with legal interpretations of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms which guarantees protection for

minority groups (DND, 2008c). Military policies which once ensured conformity and uniformity now accommodate religious pluralism by permitting special privileges for prayer time, and for different dress, hair or meals (Moses *et al.*, 2004; Report, 2006; DND, 2006; Loughlin and Arnold, 2003; Benham Rennick, 2006; English, 2004; Pedersen and Sorensen, 1989; Schein, 1992).[10] The only limitations to these rights are incurred by health and safety regulations relating to operating equipment and the realities of operational duties that may impede one's personal freedoms in a variety of ways.

Few religious leaders can point to tolerance as a historical feature of their tradition's worldview – least of all Christianity with its unfortunate legacy of crusades and colonial evangelism. Nonetheless, the CFCB is striving to be more open to other ways of believing by changing its own policies and traditions that prioritise one approach over another. For example, the original CFCB motto *In Hoc Signo Vinces* (in this sign you shall conquer), inherited from the British military chaplaincy, recalled a period of military conquest in the Roman Empire. As the CFCB became more sensitive to the growing diversity in the ranks, recognised the resentment many people still feel towards oppressive religio-military conquests, and planned to include more faith groups in its ministry, it worked to identify an inclusive yet meaningful new motto to be shared by all faith groups that might eventually be employed in the CFCB. In 2006 the new motto *Vocatio ad Servitium* (called to serve) was adopted to point the way to a more open and inclusive model of ministry. At the same time the branch hymn was changed from the militaristic *Onward Christian Soldiers* to the less assertive *Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee*. While neither of these changes was universally appreciated within the CFCB, Canadian law, broader military policies and CFCB leadership ensured that they were established and enforced.[11]

Although CF chaplain training does provide education to help chaplains adapt to their unorthodox environment, chaplains face a threefold challenge in carrying out traditional religious ministry: increasing pluralism, deinstitutionalised beliefs and the loss of moral consensus. In the light of the increasing religious pluralism which comes from immigration and conversion, scholars who document the persistence of religion highlight the deinstitutionalised and highly subjective forms which it may now take in the developed West. Pierre Bourdieu differentiates between an 'objectivated' state that can be directly observed in practices, institutions and objects and a 'subjectivated' state that is internal and self-reflexive (Bourdieu *et al.*, 1985, pp. 3–6). In the latter framework self-identifying associations, values and behaviours orient people's actions as opposed to being inspired by the praxis occurring in their environment. Others agree that even as people are abandoning traditional religion, many have developed new, highly individualised, privatised and subjectivated ways of experiencing religion (Wuthnow, 1998; Roof, 1999). Grace Davie describes this approach to religion as 'believing without belonging' (Davie, 1994) and both she and Danièle Hervieu-Léger argue that religious 'ways of being' are continually reshaped and reformed in the face of social influences that now extend beyond traditional options to more individual and privatised forms (Davie, 1996; Hervieu-Léger, 2000).

These diffuse forms of belief make the Canada Census category 'no religion' – at 16 per cent the second-largest reporting category after Christianity – problematic on a number of levels. The Census gives respondents the option of writing in the name of a specific religious group or selecting 'no religion'. However, it does not give respondents an opportunity to define what they mean by 'no religion'. While one individual may want to indicate 'atheism', another may mean 'religious syncretism', and another may want to indicate 'personal beliefs that don't fit into a succinct

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category'. This lack of clarity has been frustrating to scholars of religion in Canada and continues to be a matter of debate. A number of studies on religion in Canada show that for many people religion occurs in a subjectivated state that does not fit neatly into one ascribed category (Bibby, 2002; Bramadat and Seljak, 2008; Seljak and Benham Rennick, 2007). In fact the religious milieu of North America has become something of a 'spiritual marketplace' (similar to the economic marketplace), offering endless religious ideas, options and practices to be selected or rejected by religious 'consumers' according to personal interests and goals (Roof, 1999; Wuthnow, 1998; Stark and Finke, 2000).

Within these groups, the notions of individualised self-development and transformation find their zenith (Beckford, 1984; Roof, 1999; Wuthnow, 1998). Roof argues that people in this marketplace, mainly those who identify themselves as 'spiritual but not religious', constitute a 'quest culture' wherein traditional theological doctrines have given way to much vaguer beliefs. These people paradoxically distance themselves from organised religion even though many of them continue to participate in traditional religious communities. However, unlike traditional forms of religion where the religious authority controls, or at least strongly influences, the focus of the group, in the subjective model the individual assumes responsibility for identifying and pursuing interests and concerns that stem from his or her own religious point of view.

The third major challenge that Canadian military chaplains face in their obligation to meet the spiritual needs of all personnel is that, as on beliefs, there is no longer consensus on values. Conservative values that used to inform corporate notions of right and wrong have been strongly challenged by minority groups demanding recognition, justice and personal autonomy. An obvious example is the right of homosexuals, banned from military service until 1992, to participate legally in the CF (Jackson, 2003, p. 4). Gays and lesbians today participate in every area of the military, including the chaplaincy. Other examples include changing perspectives on the role of women, marriage and divorce, alternative family arrangements and the roles women can play in the military (for example combat roles, submarine duty). Whereas at one time military culture may have been a fairly homogenous, conservative and masculine environment, in Canada today it is obligated by law to accept different values and lifestyles.

Clearly the kind of diversity that comes from religious pluralism, diffuse beliefs and loss of moral consensus makes conventional forms of religious ministry difficult and requires a distinct openness to other points of view, if not relativism. For the mostly Christian Canadian military chaplains the changing form and focus of religion as well as different values and personal beliefs have the potential to put their own religious beliefs and values at odds with their professional obligations to serve and support the religious and spiritual needs of all military personnel.

Operational Effectiveness and Human Relationships

Canadian military chaplains are obligated both by the CFCB and by Canadian law to 'accommodate the fundamental religious requirements of [CF] members' (DND, 2003c), which includes offering opportunities for religious worship, performing the Christian sacraments, visiting the sick and those in prison, offering pastoral counselling and crisis intervention, and advising on moral and ethical matters. At the same time, the chaplaincy's goal is 'to be an operationally relevant Chaplaincy that supports and cares for all CF personnel and their families, wherever they live and serve, empowering them spiritually and morally to meet the demands of military service' (DND, 2008a). This means that chaplains must simultaneously fill two very

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distinct roles. One requires them to be fully committed to their religious vocation and the other to their professional employer. Clearly the different priorities of these two worlds create profound challenges to retaining any integrity in either capacity. However, the CFCB has developed an approach that facilitates these disparate expectations by blending the privileges of the chaplains' post – their 'ministry of presence,' their capacity to operate outside the chain of command and their symbolically 'neutral' rank – to secure their place. Coincidentally the effect of this approach is to mark chaplains as advocates able to mediate between dehumanising institutional objectives and basic human needs of military personnel.[12]

The phrase 'ministry of presence' is used widely in Christian traditions and pastoral care circles. Canadian military chaplains attempt to establish a rapport with personnel that eventually leads to a relationship of trust from which they are able to provide psychosocial and religious support. The *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, a handbook for chaplains and other professionals in ministerial and counselling roles, defines the 'ministry of presence' as

> A form of servanthood characterized by suffering, alongside of and with the hurt and oppressed. Ministry of presence in the pastoral office means vulnerability to and participation in the life-world of those served. This view of pastoral care is grounded in the authorization to forgive sins and so to release the neighbor from the power of brokenness and bondage. (Hunter, 1990, p. 950)

The elements of presence, rapport and trust innate in this definition stand in stark contrast to the results-oriented, planned activity of military bureaucracy (Benham Rennick, 2005a). For Christian chaplains in the CF, their own religious vocation to loving and serving others is essential for helping them move beyond the differences of values and belief that separate them from the personnel who seek their care. One Protestant chaplain described the role to me this way:

> The chaplains talk about the 'ministry of presence'. If that's true, then our very presence is to be a ministry – like a sanctuary – that safe place where a person can feel [protected]. [In that case,] their perspective on religion doesn't really matter. It's all about mine! I have to look to my faith to let me do this job. You can't let this job just be about getting a paycheque and still care deeply about people.

In order to be present to personnel who no longer attend chapels and are not comfortable with traditional religion, some chaplains may be intentional about their presence outside the stereotypically religious environments. One Anglican chaplain told me 'I do a lot of what I call loitering with intent – that is, I make myself available, I hang around where people can see me and where it would be easy for them to approach me if they want.'

At the same time, chaplains recognise that they are distinctly different, and even potentially a little unnerving, to military personnel who have reservations about formal religion. After all, chaplains are seen in public wearing coloured robes, singing songs of praise to an invisible God, giving blessings, and marking rites of passage such as life and death. These distinctly mystical activities mark chaplains as different no matter how present they try to be. A senior chaplain who has served on numerous missions explained it this way: 'It's pretty clear that soldiers see chaplains as some

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kind of mystical religious person. I know [our Muslim chaplain] experiences this too. They don't really get what we do, but they know we're there to take care of them.' That perception of being alike and yet different because of their vocation crosses denominational boundaries, goes beyond the basic aspect of being a counsellor, and distinctly sets them apart from all the other 'rational' roles in the CF.

Along with their intentional engagement with personnel and their distinction as 'holy people', chaplains have a considerable advantage for being present to personnel through their unusual ability to side-step the chain of command. Although chaplains receive a commission that marks them as senior officers (starting at the rank of captain or naval lieutenant), gives an indication of their training and experience, identifies their career progress within the branch and gives them the respect and deference of junior members, they do not command military units. Instead, their commission is to serve the spiritual needs of military personnel according to their civilian vocation but with deference to military objectives. As one chaplain told me, 'There is a tradition of understanding that the chaplain takes on the same rank as whoever he or she is talking to.'

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Chaplains are what the Department of National Defence manual *Duty With Honour: the Profession of Arms in Canada* refers to as a 'dual professional'. According to this document, dual professionals bring civilian professional expertise to their military duties and are able to provide 'specialized advice and services to the chain of command on issues that relate to the wellbeing of individuals and on collective matters in support of the organization' (DND, 2003b, p. 52). Like other dual professionals such as medical personnel, chaplains have special privileges that give them considerable freedom within the otherwise rigid military hierarchy and set them apart from officers in the system, such as being identified as noncombatants and their ability to bypass the chain of command to interact with personnel of any level of rank.

Military service requires members to subsume their personal needs to sustain the goals of the institution. They do this by training in difficult and uncomfortable circumstances, participating in long and dangerous tours of duty, being exposed to suffering and trauma, and facing other challenges inherent in military service.[13] The result of this demanding lifestyle is that some people suffer from depression and other mental health concerns. Side effects of these include drug and alcohol abuse and even suicide attempts. Depression and mental health concerns in the military are significant, and for those who have served on difficult missions, can be two to three times as high as those found in Canadian civilian populations (DND, 2002; English, 2000).[14] Although CF efforts in the last decade have brought alcohol-related problems to lower than the civilian average, it remains an area of concern for CF officials who put the 'lifetime prevalence of Alcoholism [at] … 8.5% for members of the regular forces and … 8.8% for reservists' (DND, 2002). Similarly, suicide as a response to depression and personal problems remains an area of concern for CF officials, particularly given that suicide is the leading cause of death in Canada for men aged 25–29 and 40–44. Statistics Canada reports that 'about 4% of Regular Force members reported having thoughts of suicide at some point in 2001, and almost 16% had considered it at some point during their lifetime' (Boddam and Ramsay, 2005).[15]

Emile Durkheim (1952) argued that 'altruistic suicide', a form of suicide he discovered to be most common among military personnel, occurs when individuals become so alienated from their own human needs that they are willing to sacrifice themselves in order to preserve the best interests of the group. One such example came to me from a chaplain who gave the scenario of a man who was threatening to kill himself because he could no longer handle the stress of command and was willing to

commit suicide rather than 'letting down his men'. A chaplain based in Québec suggested that the issue of suicide is an even deeper concern in that province because of the loss of values and psycho-spiritual support mechanisms that followed the *laïcisation* of that province during the Quiet Revolution.[16] In fact, the level of suicide in Québec is the highest of any province in Canada (Moore, 1999; CSC, 2006).

Although chaplains receive pastoral care and counselling training that is similar to that of medical professionals and some even work as professional counsellors or psychologists, their role as religious leaders sets them apart from health professionals as a nonstigmatised source of help (Benham Rennick, 2005a). They are not required to keep records of those who seek their counsel and in fact they may maintain absolute confidentiality except in cases where 'there is a reasonable chance that [a person] may pose a threat to others or themselves, when there is indication of abuse of minors, and when ordered by a court of law' to share private information (CFCB, 2003, p. 3.4). The unusual place that chaplains occupy outside military bureaucracy and hierarchy makes the chaplain's office a 'safe place' for personnel to talk about their problems without fear of stigma from their peer group or reprisals that could limit their career. While interactions with health professionals and social workers are regulated, intentional and focused on the objective of identifying a member's ability to meet CF requirements, interactions with the chaplains are private, open-ended, idiosyncratic and 'invisible', allowing them to be at once within and beyond the bureaucratic strictures of the institution. In the potentially alienating military environment, the chaplains' capacity to be accessible to people without implying any ill-health or mental weakness makes them an important alternative to medical forms of psychosocial support.

The hardship and competition implicit in military life can be alienating and impersonal yet, on the other hand, there is much literature attesting to the camaraderie and fellowship present within the military profession that makes it feel more like a family environment than a faceless institution (English, 2004; Pedersen and Sorensen, 1989; Schein, 1992). In fact, the military has aspects of what Ferdinand Toennies has described as *Gemeinschaft* (a community that is a natural and spontaneous outgrowth of family life within an interdependent and bonded group of people) and *Gesellschaft* (a contract-based society formed from the free association of individuals dedicated to personal success) (Toennies, 1963 (1887), p. 65). So while personnel may join the CF for its structure, camaraderie and traditions (Toennies' *Gemeinschaft*), they will also be subject to its rules, authorities and rivalries (*Gesellschaft*).[17] Effective chaplains may be able to bridge the gap between these two environments precisely because they are outside the normal bureaucracy of the military institution and they play a role somewhere between that of an authority figure and that of a peer.

At the institutional level chaplains can identify and help to resolve issues that could harm morale and thereby decrease efficiency. On the personal level chaplains can assist people to overcome personal problems that can leave them feeling isolated and alienated. In a lecture presented at the University of Victoria, retired navy chaplain Al Fowler stated that

> A good superior officer will rely on insights from the padre. These can act as a barometer to the morale of the unit. The chaplain plays an integral role in this context and bridges some of these tensions by assisting the CO to fulfil his or her military obligations while also speaking on behalf of the personnel. (Benham Rennick, 2005b)

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Not surprisingly, those in authority positions may experience even greater feelings of isolation and alienation because others are relying on them to lead. Lieutenant Colonel Christian Mercier, commandant of the Canadian Forces' Leadership and Recruit School in St Jean, explained during an address given at the 2006 Annual Chaplain's Retreat how

> Commanders make decisions that can change or end people's lives – sometimes they make mistakes and there is no one for them to turn to. We call this 'the loneliness of leadership' and one's best efforts are not always good enough. COs need chaplain support and encouragement, because you are the only one who can stay close and offer guidance to us at times like these. (Mercier, 2006)

Max Weber argued that the regulated, efficiency-oriented nature of modern bureaucracies would ultimately alienate and enslave people (Weber, 1958, p. 181). Indeed, each person in the military is governed by rank, duty and military policies that can make him or her feel more utilitarian than human. However, in their capacity to circumvent the chain of command, offer people a transcendent perspective, and engage personnel for the express purpose of knowing and being known to them, military chaplains have found a way to circumvent the constricting and depersonalised nature of military bureaucracy even in a religiously and morally diverse context. They, like those they serve, are functionaries within the system. At the same time, however, unlike CF personnel, their religious role places them beyond the system. The effect of this paradoxical role is that chaplains are able to negotiate the system while also transcending it, not just for their own sake, but as a means for helping members balance institutional demands and innate human needs. This ability makes them an important mediator between the alienating and isolating aspects of the modern bureaucracy and the comforting and familiar elements of natural human relationships.

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Conclusion

Canadian military chaplains are expected to conform to operational and bureaucratic military objectives, uphold the integrity of the religious organisation they represent, and provide support for the psycho-spiritual needs of all military personnel. Their job entails the tricky business of negotiating the landscape between pastoral care and the process of military action. In their mission to 'support and enhance the operational effectiveness of the Canadian Forces by contributing to the moral and spiritual well-being of the members of the CF and their families' (DND, 2008b), they are expected to bridge the gap between the often-alienating bureaucratic aims of the military and the human needs of military personnel.

More than ever, Canada's military forces have the hallmarks of what military scholars refer to as the 'postmodern military': greater gender integration, greater religious and ethnic diversity, more involvement of reserve forces' personnel, a higher number of non-combat missions and greater involvement with civilian populations while on humanitarian aid and peacekeeping tours of duty (Moskos *et al*., 1999). Late modern trends towards pluralism, shifting identities and greater individualism have significant consequences for CF members and the military institution. While many traditional forms of religion persist – and others are lost – chaplains are continuously challenged to meet the religious and spiritual needs of all groups.

An example of how difficult this role can be is evident in the seemingly straightforward aspect of community that may previously have been gained through weekly religious services. Indeed chaplains today continue to deliver religious services according to their denominational formulae, but they must always be open to including others both within and outside chapel spaces. The integration of a Muslim prayer room within the Christian chapel space at the Royal Military College in Kingston Ontario is a prominent example. Similarly, in public religious ceremonies, chaplains are expected to be as inclusive as possible and frequently collaborate with other religious leaders or modify religious language. Naturally such scenarios run the risk of, at best, satisfying only a few and, at worst, pleasing no one. Furthermore, the direction such activities take lies very much with the individual chaplain who is free to carry out his or her duties with significant autonomy insofar as they uphold branch or denominational obligations and offer assistance to those outside that tradition. Therefore while a Protestant chapel service will take on the denominational style of the leading chaplain, that same individual is also expected to facilitate the spiritual needs of a pagan, a Jew, a Hindu or an atheist as those needs arise.

The Department of National Defence describes military chaplains today as essential to the overall operational effectiveness of the forces through their support of the needs of its members (DND, 2008b). Even as they remain partially outside the military system, they contribute to the overall efficiency of military objectives. They do this as dual professionals who use their civilian vocation to facilitate the establishment and maintenance of military socio-cultural norms and values, offering guidance and direction in moral and ethical matters, as well as intervening to resolve tensions within a unit and between personnel.[18] Furthermore, they help people remain effective in their roles by giving personnel virtually the only opportunity for non stigmatised counsel and consolation in the face of personal and job-related stress and hardship. Their ability to address the personal and individual needs of members while also contributing to institutional goals makes them unique intermediaries within military society.

CF chaplains will continue to have to adapt to the new demands of late modernity as they attempt to meet a greater variety of religious and spiritual needs among personnel, integrate a greater diversity of religious leaders into the branch, adapt to the demands of a changing operational environment and seek ways and opportunities to overcome the lack of religious knowledge that is quickly becoming the norm among Canadian young people but which retains critical importance for military personnel deployed to regions of the world where religious values are paramount. Moreover, as military operations become increasingly complex and diversity within the CF increases, chaplains may find themselves further challenged to maintain the balance between their religious vocational and their military professional roles. Moreover, issues such as inclusivity and openness to difference, the challenges of dealing with their own stress while supporting others and finding themselves at once inside and outside the cultural milieu, as well as the recognition that they cannot resolve all the problems people bring to them, will continue to challenge military chaplains well into the future and warrant ongoing attention and scholarly research.

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Notes

1 For a more thorough discussion of the development of the CFCB, see Benham Rennick (2010).
2 Ethics clearance for this project was given by the University of Waterloo's Office of Human Research Ethics (OHRE) and the Canadian Forces' Directorate of Human Resources Research and Evaluation (DHRRE).

3 Seljak notes that by ignoring Chinese religions the statistics in this report are too low for some groups and that by basing the projections on young people in these groups remaining affiliated with the religion some of the numbers are too high (Seljak *et al.*, 2007).
4 The Department of Defence uses the term 'Aboriginal' to include First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples, and that is how I have used it throughout this article.
5 These privileges remain significant aspects of the modern-day 'ministry of presence'.
6 Morton (1990) explains that Canadian peacekeepers had been 'beaten and threatened' in the Congo, that they remained in Cyprus only because they had become a part of that country's economy, that they were expelled from Egypt, and that they returned from 'hopeless circumstances' in Vietnam after only 120 days.
7 Unfortunately, the CF does not compile statistics on the religious affiliation of its members, so these data are lacking. However, statistics show that 79 per cent of enlisted personnel come from the regions of Canada that have predominantly Christian populations (see SC, 2007). Thirty-five per cent of enlisted personnel come from Ontario, 21 per cent from Québec, 12 per cent from Nova Scotia, 11 per cent from Alberta, 8 per cent from British Columbia and 7 per cent the remaining provinces combined (the final 6 per cent come from outside Canada). In Ontario, 66 per cent of the population is either Roman Catholic or Protestant (33 per cent each), while in Québec, 83 per cent of the population identifies as Roman Catholic. In Nova Scotia, 86 per cent of the population belongs to Christian denominations (49 per cent Protestant and 37 per cent Roman Catholic), and in Alberta, 65 per cent are Christian (39 per cent Protestant and 26 per cent Roman Catholic). For further statistics on military personnel by province, see SC (2007).
8 There are three Jewish rabbis in the reserve forces but none in the regular forces. Note that the data on chaplains is in regular flux as a result of ongoing recruitment and attrition: these numbers are approximates given to me by the Canadian Forces' Chaplain Branch in 2010.
9 A ramp ceremony is the formal event during which a flag-draped container bearing the body of a soldier who has been killed in operations is loaded on a transport plane to be flown home for funeral services.
10 Policies do not necessarily ensure practice, of course, and personnel from religious minorities that I interviewed gave a number of examples of neglect of and open defiance to military policies on religious accommodation. Chaplains also provided examples of having to intercede to sustain the rights of a CF member to get appropriate meals or time off for prayers. For examples, see Benham Rennick (2009b, pp. 40–43).
11 For more about the discussion surrounding the change of motto and hymn, see Benham Rennick (2010).
12 For further discussion about how individual chaplains meet, or fail to meet, the demands of such a model, see Benham Rennick (2010).
13 A relevant related issue is the question of members' values and conflicts of conscience about military operations. I address this topic briefly in Benham Rennick (2005a) and I examine it more directly in Benham Rennick (2009a) and Benham Rennick (2011a, forthcoming).
14 Statistics Canada surveys show that in civilian society depression occurs in approximately one in four people over a one-year period. According to the Canadian Forces 2002 supplement of the Statistics Canada community health survey, mental health issues include: depression, alcoholism, social phobias, post-traumatic stress disorder, panic disorders and generalised anxiety disorders. Since this survey was conducted in 2002, the CF has made strenuous efforts to combat mental health issues. One result is that there is greater awareness that these problems exist and there are more resources for care; and in the case of alcoholism at least CF personnel now rank lower than the national average (DND, 2002).
15 Overall statistics on Canadian suicides are based on successful suicide and put the rate at 15 per 100,000. The Canadian Mental Health Association states that 'Men commit suicide at a rate four times higher than that of women. ... Women, however, make 3 to 4 times more suicide attempts than men do, and women are hospitalized in general hospitals for attempted suicide at 1.5 times the rate of men' (CMHA, 2006).
16 For more on this topic, see Seljak (2001).

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17 When imbalances develop between these two, abuse, neglect and betrayal can occur. See for example Bercuson (1996), Razack (2004) and Winslow (1997).
18 For a more thorough discussion of these topics see Benham Rennick (2011b, forthcoming).

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