

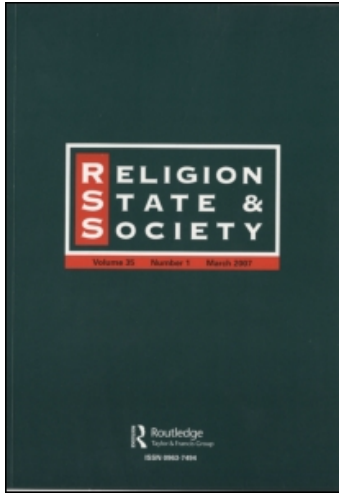
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‘Command and Control’ in the Royal Army Chaplains’ Department: how Changes in the Method of Selecting the Chaplain General of the British Army have Altered the Relationship of the Churches and the Army

PETER HOWSON

ABSTRACT

With the reorganisation of chaplaincy in the British army which followed the experience gained in the First World War, the post of Chaplain General assumed a special importance as administrative head of all chaplains other than Roman Catholic. It quickly became the norm for the holder to be an Anglican. This article looks at how this came to be the case, and then considers how this policy came to be changed in the 1980s when a chaplain from the Church of Scotland was proposed by the army as the next Chaplain General. By then the churches had allowed the structure for discussing policy with the state to atrophy, and the decision was made by the army alone. An attempt by the archbishop of Canterbury to intervene was rejected. The last 20 years have seen further integration of the Royal Army Chaplains’ Department (RACHD) into the army, with the selection of Chaplain General only notified to the churches once it has been made. This change of policy is seen to have implications for the command and control of the chaplains: they are now effectively owned by the army rather than the churches.

Introduction

All organisations require leadership. The larger they grow the more complex becomes the way in which this is exercised through the organisation. In a military context this process is known as ‘command and control’. Policy is formulated and instructions are given to ensure that it is implemented. This happens in all organisations, including churches, albeit under a different name. As a result of different theologies and experiences, ‘command and control’ within each of the British churches has developed in different ways. The aim of this paper is to explore the interface between the military system of command and control and those of the churches, through the work of army chaplains. The focus is on the post of the Chaplain General, the most senior of the chaplains in the British Army. The article will explore the shift in the way that the holder of this office has been appointed over the last century, and the resultant impact on the nature of the post, concluding that the appointment to the highest position in army chaplaincy in Britain is no longer under the control of the churches, nor carried

out in cooperation between the churches and the army, but is now under the control of the army; secular criteria are placed before those that have traditionally been of importance to the British churches.

The Royal Warrant of 1796, which created the Army Chaplains' Department (AChD, and after 1919 RACHD) brought into being a new ecclesiastical body within the UK. It was, after the end of the First World War, eventually to be formed of clergy who belonged to British churches with different understandings of the way authority should be exercised within an ecclesial body. As a department of the army, it belonged to an organisation that by contrast had a clear understanding of a chain of command as the source of authority. Since churches within the British Isles had varying relationships with the state, and ones that changed over time, it was no surprise that Brigadier Smyth in his history of army chaplaincy noted the importance of this relationship within the context of the army (Smyth, 1968, p. xvii). Central to this relationship was the office of Chaplain General. To the army, after 1920, he was the head of the chaplaincy services. For the churches he held an anomalous position. This had been true even in the period when army chaplaincy contained only chaplains from the Church of England. As documents in the National Archives have shown, arguments about the advisability of the Chaplain General being in episcopal orders were a feature of the discussion about the nature and shape of army chaplaincy from the 1860s to the 1920s (TNA 1).

That the problem with the overall direction of army chaplaincy existed in the nineteenth century was illustrated by questions asked in 1888 in the Public Accounts Committee of the House of Commons, and quoted in a recent book on budgetary and management structures within the armed forces (Corbin and Burrows, 2002, p. 10):

Dr Cameron: What are the duties of the Chaplain General?

Mr Knox: He administers the Department; that is to say, he superintends all the clergy of the Church of England.

Dr Cameron: There is nothing analogous in the case of the Roman Catholic or Nonconformist ministers?

Mr Knox: No there is no paid officer. The Department is administered . . . by the Permanent Under Secretary, who is in communication with the chief dignitaries of the two churches, the Roman Catholic and the Presbyterian.

Dr Cameron: There is no chief dignitary of the Presbyterian Church?

Mr Knox: I must confess ignorance as to the details of the Presbyterian Church.

The questioning that followed was of further interest as it revealed that there was another difficulty for the Committee. It had to decide whether accounting for chaplaincy services should be a separate item or included within the expenditure of a unit to which a chaplain was attached. This was an issue still unresolved 120 years later. Whatever decision was made inevitably had implications for the understanding of who had the command and control of chaplains.

The Creation of a Unified Chaplains' Department after the First World War

It was, though, the First World War which created the modern structure of army chaplaincy and ensured that a workable organisation would exist for the remainder of the century. As Michael Snape, the most recent historian of British army chaplaincy,

has shown (Snape, 2008, p. 183), the rapid expansion of the British Army brought a number of challenges to the way chaplaincy was organised. Command and control differed in each of the theatres of the war. Whilst a measure of agreement was reached among the churches as to how they should relate to the state on matters of army chaplaincy, through the creation in 1916 of an Interdenominational Advisory Committee on Army Chaplaincy Services (IAC), civil servants became worried about the future management of army chaplaincy in the postwar world. The debate became focused on the office of Chaplain General. Whilst some of the debate was generated by Anglican views on the suitability of Bishop Taylor Smith, the incumbent at the time, much of it centred on the way that the post exercised only a limited responsibility within the then AChD. Taylor Smith's own appointment as Chaplain General, in 1901, had resulted from a view that it was more important for the post to be filled by someone of episcopal status than by someone with military chaplaincy experience. Since, in his case, the appointment appeared to have been more the result of pressure by the crown, neither church nor army influences counted for much. The situation that existed at the end of the First World War was discussed in a paper that Sir Herbert Creedy, the permanent under-secretary of state in the War Office, produced for the Army Council in 1920. As he commented,

In the Expeditionary Forces which were subsequently sent out to the East, the plan of a single Principal Chaplain for all denominations was retained. In the majority of cases, the Chaplain detailed for this duty happened to belong to the Church of England, and although the Roman Catholics, Presbyterians and Wesleyans were each represented amongst the holders of this office, the Church of England did not raise, in these cases, the difficulty that they had raised in the case of France. (TNA 2, p. 1)

This gave hope that some unified scheme could be arranged. The only alternatives appeared to be either to appoint five Chaplains General, which was judged to be cumbersome and undesirable, or to abolish the office of Chaplain General completely, which was seen as likely to cause a great deal of opposition from the churches. The paper further argued that the new organisation was worth pursuing because army chaplaincies were now seen as a valuable resource. As Creedy noted,

The experience of the war has shown clearly that, given a suitable personnel and an adequate opportunity, the Royal Army Chaplains' Department can make a very much more effective contribution to the well-being and moral [*sic*] of the Army than had before been realised. (TNA 2, p. 2)

The structure that was created meant that from 1920 the Chaplains' Branch in the War Office comprised a Chaplain General and a Deputy Chaplain General who were to be responsible for the administration of chaplains of all churches and faiths except those from the Roman Catholic Church. These latter were to be responsible to a separate but parallel chain of command. The plan was set down as follows:

(3) The military establishment of the Royal Army Chaplains' Department at the War Office shall . . . be under the Chaplain-General to the Forces assisted by a Deputy Chaplain-General and, while necessary by a Staff Chaplain. When the Chaplain-General belongs to the Church of England, the Deputy Chaplain-General shall belong to one of the other Churches. (AO, 1920)

The scheme could not come into operation unless all the others, apart from the Roman Catholic Church which had opted not to be party to it (Johnstone and Hagerty, 1996, p. 188), were prepared to serve under a Chaplain General from the Church of England. The scheme did not make any proposal about the religious affiliation of the Chaplain General. It appeared to be assumed that Bishop Taylor Smith would continue in post until he became eligible for an army pension in 1925. No objections were raised by the other churches, and the Unified Department was duly constituted with Bishop Taylor Smith as Chaplain General and Revd W.S. Jaffray, a Scottish Presbyterian, as Deputy Chaplain General. It was apparent that the churches, with the exception of the Roman Catholic Church, were prepared to cede administrative authority for the sake of increased efficiency in operating within the military context. The plan however, did not set out any detailed responsibilities for either post. There appeared to be the view that, as with chaplains during the war, ordination was a sufficient endorsement of the possession of the gifts and graces necessary to carry out the task.

This willingness to work together within army chaplaincy in the postwar army reinforced another significant change from the pre-1914 situation. It was only after the declaration of war that Wesleyan ministers received War Office commissions as chaplains (*London Gazette*, 27 August 1914). Previously the Wesleyan Conference had refused offers from the War Office, as it saw this as a loss of control over its ministers. By the end of the war this attitude had changed and the Conference of 1919 ratified a decision, recorded in the report of its RN and Army Committee, that Wesleyan ministers would in future serve as commissioned chaplains (WMC, 1919, p. 58).

The Period of Anglican Supremacy

When in 1925 Bishop Taylor Smith retired, a discussion ensued among the churches as to the most suitable person to be Chaplain General. In correspondence between the Wesleyan Methodist Church and the Church of Scotland a difference of opinion emerged. The latter recorded a desire that a Presbyterian chaplain should be appointed. The Wesleyan Naval, Army and Air Force Board (also known as the Wesleyan Forces Board) disagreed, believing that an Anglican should hold the post. The Church of Scotland Committee on Chaplains believed that the Revd W.S. Jaffray was an experienced Presbyterian chaplain and Deputy Chaplain General, and would thus make an ideal Chaplain General. In order to obtain support for their candidate the Church of Scotland Committee wrote to the Wesleyan Forces Board, floating the idea that the time was ripe for a Presbyterian to become Chaplain General. After due consideration the Wesleyan Board wrote back that they could not agree to the suggestion, on the grounds ‘... that the interests of the Royal Army Chaplains’ Department are best served by the continuance of a Church of England Chaplain as Chaplain General ...’ (UMJRL 1). This decision would have long-term consequences for army chaplaincy. It effectively ended discussion for the next 60 years as to whether anyone from outside the Church of England could serve as Chaplain General.

Dow, writing of the involvement of the Church of Scotland in the army in the years before the Second World War (MAC 1, p. 158), commented that the plan was thwarted by the requirement for Mr Jaffray to retire on the grounds of his age. The lack of other suitable candidates and the near impossibility for Presbyterians to spend enough time in the army to gain sufficient experience meant that, in his analysis, the Presbyterians had in effect ‘... tacitly yielded any claim to the post of Chaplain General ...’ in the years between the wars. It does not seem to have occurred to him

that the Church of Scotland might have supported a proposal to appoint a Chaplain General from any other denomination. He pointed out that the Church of Scotland did gain one concession. It was agreed that a Presbyterian chaplain should hold the post of Deputy Chaplain General at every alternate appointment. This appeared to have been a misreading of a dispute that broke out following the first quinquennial review, in 1928, of the establishment figures for the RACHD. The main report had summarised the position of appointment to the most senior posts as follows:

8. It was an understanding on which the Presbyterian and Non-Conformist churches accepted the scheme, that when the Chaplain-General belongs to the Church of England, the Deputy Chaplain-General shall belong to one of the other Churches, and that in filling the higher appointments regard should be had to the desirability of all Churches being represented if they can furnish suitably qualified chaplains. (TNA 3)

Underlying the Committee's recommendations about the establishment for Class 1 Chaplains, the most senior posts below those of Chaplain General and Deputy Chaplain General, was however an assumption that it would be likely that the Chaplain General would usually be an Anglican. This can be seen in the statement '...during the period in which it falls to them [Presbyterians] to fill the office of Deputy Chaplain-General'. It was also stated that '... the post of Assistant Chaplain-General in Scotland [a Class 1 Chaplain] must be regarded as permanently allotted to the Presbyterians, and that, no doubt, is quite right'.

All the church representatives on the IAC, except for Professor D.M. Kay who represented the Presbyterian churches, signed the report. He submitted a dissentient report that objected to the distribution of Class 1 Chaplains between denominations. He proposed an alternative scheme. What is of particular interest is that it was based on the premise '... Chaplain General – Church of England – only and always'. As the War Office documents show, he then went further and proposed a scheme whereby there would be a 16-year rotation of the post of Deputy Chaplain General between Presbyterians (eight years), Wesleyans (four years), and United Board (four years). Professor Kay's report was supported by a *Statement on Behalf of the Church of Scotland and the Presbyterians* that drew attention to what was felt to be the misconceptions that lay behind the administrative arrangements. One passage was particularly revealing:

This divergence from strict arithmetical entitlement should not be regarded as a gift from the Church of England to other denominations; in Scottish Regiments it is a gift to the Church of England. The provision for the needs of minorities is a necessary condition of unification and the consequent concession should be equitably, and not arbitrarily, shared among the smaller denominations. (TNA 3)

It was the Presbyterian view that became the norm. At no point in the discussions was there any discussion as to whether appointments should be made on the basis of personal qualities rather than of denominational affiliation.

The Revd A.C.E. Jarvis became Chaplain General in 1925, following the eventual retirement of Bishop Taylor Smith, and held the post until 1931. He was followed by a series of Anglicans until a minister of the Church of Scotland was appointed in 1986. The quality of those who were appointed varied. The need to find a replacement, in

1944, for the Revd C.D. Symons resulted in a series of moves that ended with the Revd Canon F. Llewellyn Hughes, Field Marshal Montgomery's preferred candidate, being promoted. The man he replaced was not considered to have been effective. One chaplain (Haldane-Stevenson), who described his memories of the RACHD during the Second World War, recorded the following comment on Symons: 'The Bishop of St Albans remarked that he would not make him a Rural Dean of his most rural deanery' (Haldane-Stevenson, 1994, p. 1). Haldane-Stevenson's final comment on Symons was that 'he was just not up to the job'. Smyth in the official history of the RACHD (Smyth, 1968, p. 310) attributes Symons' retirement before the end of the term of his appointment as owing to 'ill-health'.

In his history of the RACHD Smyth also wrote that the appointment of the Revd Canon F.L. Hughes '... caused a great sensation in the Department'. He was at the time nominally vicar of Mansfield, having been a chaplain to a territorial unit mobilised in 1939. His meteoric rise through the ranks of the RACHD owed everything to his having been selected as Assistant Chaplain General for the Eighth Army in Egypt by its then new commander, General B.L. Montgomery (Ranfurly, 1995, p. 187). In September 1944 Montgomery was in correspondence with the secretary of state for war, Sir James Grigg, about the vacancy that had occurred in the leadership of the RACHD. Montgomery was not reticent about putting forward Hughes as a likely candidate. His views on the contribution of the existing senior management of the RACHD, as recorded by his biographer, were equally forthright:

Inspiration and guidance must come from above, and at present nothing happens in that line as far as the Chaplain-General's Dept. is concerned; I would say that it is completely out of touch with the practical realities of the battlefronts. The new Chaplain-General should have been through the mill in this war (Hamilton, 1986, p. 118)

Hamilton further records that Grigg wrote back to say that the choice was between Hughes and the then bishop of Maidstone. Even as the battle of Arnhem was being fought, Montgomery found time to lobby for Hughes over the bishop, who he believed '... would be quite useless' (LP 1). There may have been some confusion in Montgomery's mind about what was being proposed for the bishop of Maidstone. He was to become the first Anglican 'Bishop to the Forces', representing the archbishop of Canterbury in matters to do with Anglicans in the forces. There is no evidence that he had been thought of as a possible Chaplain General. Indeed after the 1920 arrangement it would be hard to see how the other churches would have agreed to such a move, even had they been asked. To help ensure that Hughes would be appointed Montgomery arranged for him to meet the archbishop of Canterbury. In due course Hughes was appointed as Chaplain General. In 1951 Hughes in turn retired. Smyth (1968, p. 311) quoted the editorial in the RACHD *Journal* for July 1951 that commented 'He has probably done more for the spiritual life of the Army than anyone else in the whole history of the Department.' But then chaplains can be given to hyperbole, even about their colleagues!

Haldane-Stevenson was critical of the appointment of Hughes as Chaplain General. Whilst he regarded him as a man of excellence and 'an outstanding leader', he did not regard him as an administrator. In his view, 'In 1944, after five years of inept rule, what the Department needed was organising flair, a CG with a clear grasp of what needed doing, and the ability to implement his vision' (Haldane-Stevenson, 1994, p. 6).

One thing did not appear to have been in doubt: the man chosen to replace Symons, and in his turn Llewellyn Hughes, would be an Anglican. Less clear was what qualities were needed for the post, or who should decide what they were to be.

The general acceptance that the Chaplain General would always be an Anglican was also obvious from a passage in a book that set out to explain the nature of army chaplaincy and that was written by a then recently retired Deputy Chaplain General: 'It is an unwritten principle that whilst the Church of England remains the State Church of the realm, the Chaplain-General shall be a priest of the Church of England' (Brumwell, 1943, p. 33). He was not alone in assuming that the Chaplain General must necessarily always be from the Church of England. When the Revd T.B. Stewart Thompson delivered the Baird Lectures in 1947, on the theme of the chaplain in the Church of Scotland, he devoted one lecture to the work of the military chaplain. Having served as an army chaplain he might have been expected to speak with some authority when he declared that '(The) Chaplain-General is always chosen from the Church of England. He has, as a second-in-command, a Deputy Chaplain-General, who looks after the interests of all non-Anglicans' (Stewart Thompson, n.d., p. 65). Both appeared to be ignorant of the 1920 agreement that required no such thing. Much later, Loudon (1996) took the view that the arrangement had been used as a means of denying the post to Roman Catholics. With a fine disregard for history he commented: 'In a country where it is still forbidden for either the Sovereign or the Prime Minister to be a Roman Catholic, though not a logical necessity it is not surprising that a Roman Catholic is also forbidden the leadership of chaplaincy in the Army' (Loudon, 1996, p. 29). He had conveniently ignored the refusal by the Roman Catholic Church to join the scheme that created the Unified Department at the end of the First World War. The Roman Catholic hierarchy did not rescind that position until the early years of the twenty-first century, when a new scheme of 'all souls ministry' was agreed without reference to religious affiliation (*The Tablet*, 5 September 2009, p. 35). Until they did so it remained impossible for a Roman Catholic to take overall responsibility for the Unified Department whilst Roman Catholic chaplains remained outside it. Although the separateness to which the Roman Catholics clung throughout the period excluded a Roman Catholic Chaplain General, it did not require the position to be held by an Anglican.

The acceptance that the Chaplain General would be an Anglican was clear in correspondence between the War Office, and subsequently the Ministry of Defence, and Lambeth Palace (LP 2). In 1963 the permanent under-secretary at the War Office wrote to the archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey. Sir Arthur Drew contacted the archbishop about an extension to the appointment of Ivan Neill as Chaplain General. The letter, which does not appear to have been copied to any other denominational head, sought the support of the archbishop for a further two years to be added to the time Ivan Neill had to serve. The reason given was '... that none of the others have more than one year in the present rank' (LP 3). It seems correct to assume that 'the others' were all Anglicans. When the extension was nearly completed Sir Arthur Drew wrote again to the archbishop of Canterbury. In his letter he suggested that '... John Youens, an Anglican, should become Chaplain General for four years, a period which follows the pattern established with Neill'. The archbishop replied in the affirmative: 'I do not think that a better choice could be made and I shall be most happy to agree to his appointment.' Once again the correspondence does not appear to have been copied to anyone else. There was apparently no need to involve any denomination other than the Church of England in the selection of a Chaplain General. This view was reinforced by similar letters to the archbishop about the

appointments to the offices of Chaplain to the Fleet and Chaplain in Chief Royal Air Force. The difference was that the structure of the chaplaincies to those services during the 1960s definitely precluded anyone other than Anglicans filling those posts. By the time that John Youens had been Chaplain General for the four years, Sir Arthur Drew was again of the opinion that there was no obvious successor. Accordingly he wrote to the archbishop in August 1969 to seek support for an extension in post. As he commented, '... there is not at present an obvious successor in the desired age group with the necessary experience' (LP 4). The question of what the necessary experience was, and how it might be obtained, was not raised. The archbishop was away and the letter was forwarded to the bishop of Croydon as the archbishop's Episcopal Representative for the Forces, so that advice could be given on his return. The bishop of Croydon wrote a note to the archbishop giving enthusiastic support to an extension for John Youens. On his return the archbishop wrote to Sir Arthur Drew in a similar vein (LP 5). There is little reason to doubt that the archbishop of Canterbury was the only person routinely contacted about the suitability of chaplains to be appointed as Chaplain General. Neill has given an insight into the ill-advised methods that could be used in dealing with the appointment of a Chaplain General (Neill, 2000, p. 58). He commented that when he came into office there was a sense of unrest amongst the Assistant Chaplains General. He discovered that this was as a result of his predecessor, the Revd Victor Pike, having informed all of them, although presumably only the Anglicans, that 'each would be the next CG'.

The Appointment of a Non-Anglican as Chaplain General

The method used to appoint the Chaplain General came into the public arena in the 1980s. What followed showed that the churches had, in effect, lost any control over the appointment of the Chaplain General. It was now apparently the responsibility of the army authorities alone to decide who would hold the office. It was no longer to be agreed in a correspondence between the permanent under-secretary in the Ministry of Defence and the archbishop of Canterbury. Not only was a new culture of transparency in appointments coming into force, there had been specific questions about the method of the appointment of the Chaplain General. These had been raised from the floor of the 1982 General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. The Church of Scotland then received letters from the secretaries of the Methodist Forces Board and the United Board suggesting that there be a joint approach to the second permanent under-secretary in the Ministry of Defence to request that the churches be consulted on the appointment. The members of the Committee on Chaplains of the Church of Scotland were not, at that moment, of the opinion that any change was necessary. They noted that 'the matter was fully discussed and it was agreed that as far as the Church of Scotland is concerned it should adhere to the present arrangements which have worked well over the years, and which in the view of the Committee should be continued' (CSCC 1).

It was resolved that the secretary should reply to the other boards in those terms. The decision was not taken lightly. It was recorded that the secretary had consulted the minutes from the 1920s and drew attention to the agreement reached then that as the Church of England was the dominant denomination in the army it was appropriate that the Chaplain General be chosen from amongst the Anglican chaplains. No mention was made of the suggestion that had been made in 1924 that the successor to Bishop Taylor Smith be a Presbyterian. The minute did note that 'there was no bar to a Church of Scotland chaplain being the Chaplain General'.

With the Church of Scotland and the Methodist Church both having been prepared to accept an interpretation of the 1920 agreement in such a way as to restrict the appointment of a Chaplain General to an Anglican, it was no surprise that Anglican chaplains appeared to regard the post as theirs by right. However, as the Ven. W.F. Johnston approached the end of his appointment as Chaplain General, it became apparent to the Number 1 Selection Board of the army that the most suitable candidate to succeed him was the Revd James Harkness, a non-Anglican and a minister of the Church of Scotland. The initial discussion about the appointment of Harkness as Chaplain General was summarised in a loose minute from the chief of the General Staff (MOD 3). The subject had been raised earlier within the Ministry of Defence (MOD) by the second permanent under-secretary in a memo of 4 October 1984. As Mr Harkness was not an Anglican the former methods of appointment would not work and the scene was set for a possible crisis. No discussion appears to have been initiated with the churches, either by the army authorities or by senior civil servants, before the selection was made.

The initial MOD response was to extend the appointment of the Ven. W.F. Johnston by a year, until December 1986, to buy time in which to avoid disagreement over this apparent change of policy. This allowed an opportunity for discussions with the ecclesiastical and legal authorities to see whether the appointment was consistent with the constitution of the RACHD. That this was necessary is shown in correspondence between the archbishop of Canterbury and the moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in the summer of 1985, made available by the MOD as a result of a request under the Freedom of Information Act. Whilst the archbishop did not claim any veto over appointments made by the Number 1 Board, he did feel constrained to point out that

I make no claim that it would be constitutionally impossible for the Chaplain General to be other than a chaplain of the Church of England. Nevertheless, it is the case that the Senior Chaplains of all three Armed Services have always (so far as I know) been chaplains of the Church of England, and this custom is assumed in our Canon Law. (MOD 1)

The archbishop went on to set out the difficulties that he believed would exist if a non-Anglican were appointed. They were

That the Chaplain General would not have the direct accountability to the Archbishop of Canterbury which he has hitherto had by reason of the legal ceremony of licensing him for this ministry;

that the Church of England chaplains would thereby lose their representation on General Synod, the Chaplain general having heretofore constitutionally held an ex-officio seat in the Convocation of Canterbury and House of Clergy;

that the Church of England chaplains have been recruited with the expectation of working under an Anglican Chaplain General;

that there is an expectation among a very considerable majority of service people that the Anglican liturgy will predominate on official religious occasions;

and that such an appointment would have implications for the Church of England in other areas, such as the Navy, the Air Force, and the Prison Service. (MOD 1)

Despite the somewhat weak nature of each of the arguments taken individually, the archbishop felt that together they amounted to a strong enough case for him to declare that he could not cede the general point without more discussion. He commented

May I add one last word? When I was approached about the possibility of a Church of Scotland chaplain being chosen to be Chaplain General, I said that I would agree to this as an exceptional measure. But the Army Board made it clear that they wanted a permanent freedom to appoint the Chaplain General from the whole range of chaplains in the United Branch. At the same time it became clear that these proposals were known to a number of the chaplains themselves and considerable anxiety was being expressed, at least on the part of the Anglicans. Accordingly, I felt I must advise that there should be no change in the long-standing custom until the matter had been investigated more thoroughly. (MOD 1)

The moderator was not convinced. He went to see to John Belloch, the second permanent under-secretary, to discuss the appointment of the Chaplain General. In a subsequent letter, dated 3 September 1985, Belloch wrote to the moderator noting that the moderator had apparently altered the Church of Scotland's position, which was now that the appointment should go to the best man irrespective of denomination. He was able to indicate to the moderator in this letter that when the Army Board finally made a decision about the next Chaplain General, a Church of Scotland candidate would be able to be considered. This same view was conveyed, in a letter dated 10 January 1986, to Bishop Gordon who was acting as the archbishop of Canterbury's Episcopal Representative.

The appointment was finally made at a meeting of Number 1 Board in January 1986. The matter was seen as sufficiently sensitive that briefing notes were prepared for both the queen and the prime minister. As a minute from the chief of the General Staff (25 February 1986) to the secretary of state summarising the situation showed, 'HM The Queen informed me that she hoped "the appointment would go to the best man".' The chief of the General Staff also decided that the information should be communicated to each of the church representatives who made up the IAC. However no meeting of the advisory committee was convened. Thus no discussion took place either of the potential candidates or of the reasons for a change being made to the previous procedure. The churches appear to have accepted that the Ministry of Defence was entitled to tell them who would be Chaplain General. Bishop Gordon responded on 21 March 1986, indicating that the archbishop of Canterbury did not wish to oppose the choice of the Army Board. He did convey two further concerns felt at Lambeth. The first was that there should be a thorough review of the structure of the Chaplains' Department and the way in which the more senior appointments were made. The second related to the appointment of an Anglican as Deputy Chaplain General at the same meeting of Number 1 Board, but without any consultation with Lambeth.

The Archbishop notes that the Army Board wishes to appoint the Reverend Tom Robinson to the post of Deputy Chaplain General. He has heard good reports of Tom Robinson and he appreciates that the question of appointing an Anglican as Deputy Chaplain General has not previously arisen.

Nevertheless, the Archbishop hopes you may be willing to supply him with some information about Tom Robinson and others who have been in the running for the appointment, and to indicate some of the reasons for the Board's choice. (MOD 2)

The Ministry of Defence was unwilling to concede to the archbishop's requests. The second permanent under-secretary wrote to the secretary of state on 7 April 1986 setting out the view, shared by himself and the chief of the General Staff, that the archbishop had no case. The archbishop did not press the point. The Church of England thus ceded the right to involvement in the appointment of who should be the most senior of its chaplains in the army, whether or not he also held the office of Chaplain General.

The response of some members of the RACHD over the appointment of a non-Anglican as Chaplain General was described by Loudon (1996). A Roman Catholic chaplain who was serving as staff chaplain to the Principal Roman Catholic Chaplain (Army) at the time of the appointment, and who was later to serve as Principal Chaplain himself, he was aware of some of the feelings among Anglican chaplains. He commented:

On the retirement of The Venerable Archdeacon Frank Johnson in 1986, past precedent was overturned by the appointment by the Army Board of The Reverend James Harkness, a Minister of the Church of Scotland, significantly also an Established Church. Few if any questioned James Harkness's competence – he was after all Deputy Chaplain General – but considerable misgivings were expressed over the appointment by the Church of England establishment both inside and outside the army, who criticised what they saw as an encroachment on a tried and tested, equitable historical practice. It was reported that the Bishop of the Forces addressed a meeting of Church of England chaplains and stated that the appointment of the Reverend Harkness should be opposed at every turn, for, unless some protests were registered 'they would be offering the appointment to a Roman Catholic next!' (Louden, 1996, p. 27)

Some unrest amongst Anglican chaplains was perhaps to have been expected. They had come to regard the position as only ever able to be held by an Anglican. More importantly, the change appeared to have been made unilaterally by the army authorities.

It might be thought, as Loudon had argued, that the appointment was restricted to clergy from an established or national church, in which case Harkness was suitably qualified, whereas had he been a Baptist minister he would not have been. In fact since Harkness was already serving as the Deputy Chaplain General, and his promotion allowed a Deputy Chaplain General to be selected from amongst the ranks of Church of England chaplains, the protocols laid down in the Creedy report in 1920 were followed. The Creedy agreement only became invalid either when both Chaplain General and Deputy Chaplain General came from the Church of England, or when neither did.

This change of denominational background for the Chaplain General did not lead to any increase in involvement of the churches in the choice of his successors. The Revd C.R.W. Gilbert was secretary of the Methodist Forces Board at the time of the appointment of Harkness as Chaplain General. He commented of the process, in a letter to the author, dated 28 October 2003,

It came as a pleasant surprise to most of us when Jim Harkness was appointed. Although I had heard reliable rumours this was to happen I was never officially consulted beforehand and as far as I know neither were any of the other non-Anglican Church representatives. Perhaps it was assumed, for obvious reasons, that our support would be taken for granted. (CPA 1)

It is of interest that Mr Gilbert has no memory of being asked his opinion. Whatever the obvious merits of any individual, in his letter Mr Gilbert chose to ignore the principle involved. What happened in 1985 was in sharp contrast to the experience of 1925 when the various church committees had commented on the suitability of a successor to Bishop Taylor Smith as Chaplain General. Although Mr Gilbert indicated that he would have supported Harkness as eminently suitable, the Methodist Church was not asked to comment on whether the position should be held by anyone other than an Anglican. The Church of Scotland also recorded, in a minute of its Committee on Chaplains held on 22 October 1986, that it had merely been notified of the decision in a letter from the second permanent under-secretary. This represented a change: the appointment of senior members of the RChD now involved no discussion with any of the churches. It was an important shift in authority away from the churches and to the army.

Post-1986: The Appointment of the Chaplain General as an Army Decision

The appointment of the Revd J. Harkness and those of his successors raised two questions. Who had the responsibility for adjudging a man suitable for the appointment, and on what basis was that judgment to be made? The importance of these questions can be seen from the decision that was taken as to a replacement for Harkness as Chaplain General. To maintain the Creedy arrangements the only possible candidates were the then Deputy Chaplain General, an Anglican, and any suitable chaplains from the other non-Anglican denominations, less of course the Roman Catholics. No other candidate from the Church of England could have been appointed without breaking the terms of the agreement. It is of relevance to the discussion about suitability that the appointment was not given to the Deputy Chaplain General, but to the Revd Dr V. Dobbin, a minister from the Presbyterian Church of Ireland. The issue resurfaced when Dr Dobbin retired. The decision made was to appoint the Revd J. Blackburn, an Anglican and at that time serving as the Deputy Chaplain General, as the new Chaplain General, and to find someone from the other part of the Unified Department to fill the vacancy of Deputy Chaplain General thus created. In each case the appointment appeared to have been made by the appropriate committee of the Army Board without any formal involvement by any of the sending churches.

So long as the Army Board remained within the accepted constraints of the Creedy agreement there was at least some understanding of what constituted suitable qualifications. When in 2004 a Methodist was appointed Chaplain General with a Church of Scotland chaplain as the Deputy Chaplain General, a new situation had arisen. Under such circumstances religious affiliation lost any significance. The churches might be expected to have asked, although apparently they did not, what criteria were to be used. A subsidiary question would then be whether these posts were restricted to ordained chaplains, or even to Christians. It is worth noting that, even under the Creedy arrangements, which applied to all the religious groups with chaplains then serving in the army (except the Roman Catholics who had opted out), it would theoretically have been possible to have appointed a rabbi to these offices.

The procedure for the appointments to the posts of Chaplain General and Deputy Chaplain General was set out in a Ministry of Defence (Chaplains (Army)) document of 1 February 1989. It was to be as follows for the Chaplain General:

1. Existing CG is invited by MS [military secretary] to recommend a successor after consultation with AG [adjutant general].

2. MS seeks No. 1 Board preference and then submits to 2nd PUS [permanent under secretary].
3. 2nd PUS consults the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop to HM Forces, on the acceptability of No. 1 Board preference. 2nd PUS submits recommendation to the S of S [secretary of state].
4. Given S of S's agreement, 2nd PUS requests the Defence Services Secretary to seek the Queen's informal approval.
5. Given the Queen's informal approval, 2nd PUS notifies the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop to HM Forces and MS notifies incoming CG and publishes the appointment within the Army. 2nd PUS also notifies the Interdenominational Advisory Committee on the Army Chaplaincy Services:

Methodist Church
Senior Jewish Chaplain to HM Forces
Church of Scotland
Presbyterian Church in Ireland
Baptist Church
United Reformed Church
RC Bishop-in-Ordinary to HM Forces
Presbyterian Church in Wales.

6. CG informs incoming CG then all RACHD personnel.
7. Press announcement if appropriate.
8. Letters of appointment, then posting orders, published. (MOD 4)

The phrasing of the document suggests that after the events of 1986 an extra section was added to Paragraph 5. Nothing else explains the special position that was still retained by the archbishop of Canterbury despite the appointment being available to a chaplain from any church represented within the Unified Department. The reference to the Interdenominational Advisory Committee on Army Chaplaincy Services (IAC) is of interest. As has been noted, this was created during the First World War as the mechanism by which all the churches, and the Jewish community, might enter into discussion with the military authorities on matters of concern to either party. Membership did not include any serving military chaplains, although the Chaplain General might be 'in attendance'. Equally important was that the chair was a senior civil servant from the War Office. With the abolition of the War Office this function migrated to the Ministry of Defence. The same was true of the oversight of the Chaplain General with the creation of the Ministry of Defence (Chaplains (Army)). Unlike chaplains in the other two services, members of the RACHD were not placed directly under the authority of the principal personnel officer for the service. The origins of the IAC have been charted in a thesis (Thompson, 1990, p. 333ff.), whilst its demise is discussed in my own thesis (Howson, 2006, p. 138). Despite the reference to it in 1989 that I have just quoted (MOD 4), it had not met since 10 May 1968. The last published official reference to it was in the Army List of spring 1972.

Conclusion

The gradual loss of ecclesiastical authority over British army chaplaincy is well illustrated by the forces at play in the appointment of the Chaplain General as the head of the RACHD. The relatively infrequent need to find a replacement (there were

12 holders of the office in the twentieth century) meant that important changes of influence can be easily seen. The second half of the century saw both the disappearance of the mechanism by which the churches were able to discuss their involvement with the army and the replacement of it by an assumption of power over chaplaincy matters by the military. The result of this has been that administrative competence would seem to have become the most important quality in the selection of the Chaplain General. On what other basis could an increasingly secular society make its choice? Whether such a person would have the pastoral skills and religious experience to be effective was apparently of no concern, and no longer something on which the churches were expected to be able to comment.

As Mowatt and Swinton (2005) have pointed out, with reference to hospital chaplains, the increasingly secular world in which all chaplaincy operates poses questions for members of faith communities that need to be answered. This is especially true for the Christian church:

With the current emphasis on generic, non-denominational spiritual care, chaplains are potentially in a compromised situation where they will be required to minimise their Christian credentials in order to meet the criteria for a spiritually non-partisan service. What then will be the basis for the profession of chaplaincy? (Mowatt and Swinton, 2005, p. 1)

The ability to appoint those who will share in the framing and owning of those criteria, as the heads of chaplaincy services, thus provides an important lever in determining what the response will be. This is undoubtedly true in the case of the RACHD and the appointment of the Chaplain General. With no mechanism to allow faith groups to share in the making of the appointment, it will be interesting to see how this service develops over the coming years. The danger for chaplains is that without strong leadership, which has the confidence of the churches, they will no longer be able to walk the tightrope between the sacred and secular worlds; they will become the morale officers that they too often have been accused of being in the past.

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