

## **Testing the tiger: Reflecting on military chaplaincy**

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21 July 2009

The sound of a rifle bolt being locked into position is distinctive. From my study adjoining the Linton Camp garrison church, I could hear dozens of them being activated as soldiers were being reacquainted with military life after the summer holidays.

I do not know what it sounds like when a bullet explodes into a human being but some of those soldiers may well find out. The trauma of being involved in armed conflict is well documented, as is the compassion of padres who stand alongside soldiers as bullets fly. For me, there is no argument that all people caught in the insanity of war need a special form of care for the spirit, but is the current model of military chaplaincy the method for the church to pursue in the 21st century?

My year as an army chaplain has changed me. My initial, perhaps naïve, enthusiasm for the job diminished into gnawing anxiety as I struggled to come to grips with issues of institutional power and violence and the apparent collusion of the church and state in maintaining the status quo.

New people in any institution have a unique perspective before they have become overwhelmed by the power dynamics of the structure. They see differently before they have to insulate themselves with the multiple layers of corporate justification needed in order to function within organizational cultures. While I now speak with some hindsight, my observations stem from my first impressions as a new person in the military.

During that year I developed great respect and affection for both chaplains and military personnel who go about their jobs with dedication. My reflections then, are not about individual people; instead they explore my own journey and theological wonderings that emerge from that.

### **Hitchhikers**

As usual, I looked towards my new job with curious enthusiasm, keen to absorb new sights, smells and experiences. On a familiarization visit to the camp, a call came in for a padre to sort out 'hitchhikers' on a gun carriage that had been used for a funeral the day before.

Not being too sure what a hitchhiker was, I dashed off behind one of my new colleagues who was armed with stole, prayerbook and holy water, recently decanted from a plastic milk bottle. The senior chaplain called as we fled, 'make sure they gather around.' Impossible. At our appearance, the previously bustling yard was deserted in seconds. After some liturgical maneuvering with the prayerbook and a generous dousing of water, we pronounced the gun carriage hitchhiker free.

Mary Tagg in *The Jesus Nut*, her PhD thesis on military chaplaincy in New Zealand, says that military chaplains deal with the, 'premeditated death of war which seeks meaning before the act, to allow killing to take place as well as during and after'. She also suggests

that the role is, ‘the work of putting the soldiers in touch with their own spirituality and the recognition of their own mortality and what it means to them.’

There is no doubt that a gun carriage symbolises premeditated death, which is deep at the heart of the military purpose. Was this a ritual recognition of a particular way of seeing the spiritual dimension? Were any soldiers more in touch with their spirituality as a result of our actions? It didn’t feel likely to me, even though all the soldiers seemed to think life could return to normal as soon as the padres had finished. As I walked away I felt a fraud and the first stirrings of a complex, internal conflict were underway.

As I reflected over the following weeks and after officiating at a military funeral, I began to see that there was an unexplored anxiety about death lurking just under the surface. More than that, there was a deep questioning, not necessarily at the cognitive level, about the role of the military in death and consequently the role of each individual member of the military in intentional killing.

Military funerals are tightly controlled ritualistic events devoid of the celebrations of a life well lived that we are experiencing in civilian funerals. This funeral began at home, as the Regimental Sergeant Major dressed the casket with the soldier’s hat and medals. Beforehand, we had rehearsed every move that the pallbearers would make, how many steps would be taken, how the flag would be folded with mechanical precision, how heads would be held.

While I had considerable input into the words used during the service, I recognised that I was something of an automaton in a complex liturgical dance. All movements were rigid and proscribed with the high point being the playing of the Last Post, Bunyan’s admonition to remember them and the explosive rifle volley as the casket left the church to be loaded onto the gun carriage for the last march into the great night.

Although this soldier had died in a normal human way and not as the result of battle, the same ritualistic dance was assumed appropriate, almost as though the repetitive playing out of this rite might hold at bay the chaotic and unpredictable nature of death, especially that which the military might have to be involved in.

Using the padre in a shamanistic way to tidy up ‘loose ends’ when the gun carriage is returned to the garage is the final movement in this unexplored dance of death. When I tried to talk to soldiers and padres about this ritual that encompassed so much more than I was aware of on my initial introduction to it, I was unable to get a coherent explanation. There was much shrugging of shoulders and general acceptance that this is what we do and after all, it’s in the Vols, the interminable books of rules that guide every area of military life.

## **Loitering**

Somewhat daunted by my initial gun carriage experience but with interest piqued, I struggled awkwardly into uniform. I eagerly enquired about my daily tasks and was encouraged to ‘loiter with intent’, to be available for any conversation that might emerge so that eventually, I would get ‘repeat business’. In other words, when anyone had a problem they would call for me.

I observed that my extroverted colleagues were excellent loiterers but as an introvert I needed to get more guidance about exactly what it was soldiers thought a padre was for, so I asked everyone I came into contact with. Most people, including some in senior positions, seemed a bit perplexed before coming out with, 'welfare, definitely welfare', or, 'you're counsellors really aren't you', or 'helping people outside the command chain', and the biggie, 'taking lollies on exercise'.

I became despondent. That didn't make sense given that a range of counsellors were available; along with a number of civilians whose job it is to offer welfare services of all kinds. Is the role welfare because it is a fall back position in peacetime now that hardly anyone goes to church? Are chaplains still there in a significantly changed religious landscape, just because they had been carrying out this unexamined role forever?

There is enormous value in a compassionate and open pastoral approach where there is time to sit alongside people to just chew the fat or to offer a more direct intervention into a place of turmoil, but I did wonder if this work termed welfare could, and perhaps should, and even was being done by secular social workers and counsellors. And more than that, if it was considered important for a God person to be involved in this process, what was the point of them being in military uniform and consequently embedded in the system?

### **Bloody sacrifice**

I turned to the worship centre for some inspiration. St Martin's at Linton is the church which Engineers had energetically transported from the Makotuku, rebuilt and then deserted, apart from infrequent baptisms, weddings or funerals. Twice a month a congregation of about 10 -15 gathers, dominated by padres and their extended families, out of a camp population of over 1,000. A weekly Eucharist struggles to get one communicant. St Martin's stands apart from camp central, cold, lonely and generally empty, symbolizing New Zealand societal attitudes to organised religion.

What was I to make of this ritual laden military culture, which seemed to pay only lip service to the presence of Christian priests and ministers; instead using us as social workers and wheeling us out for prayers on parade where the running is made by liturgists who process light armoured vehicles and weaponry instead of crosses, bibles and religious icons?

I thought I'd go to the top. Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury.

"Priesthood...is crucially to do with the service of the space cleared by God; with the holding of a door into a place where a confused humanity is able to move slowly into the room made available, and understand that it is heard in all its variety, emotional turmoil and spiritual uncertainty."

Yes, I think the pastoral process does some of that. Williams goes on to value the role of religious services where clergy are both servants of that cleared space and of their community's need to express a common gratitude to God in a language they all understand and in a time given up to this and nothing else.

How does that fit with prayers on parade I wondered, where dress uniforms, ritual movements, awarding medals and the parading of weaponry seduce us with the idea that attempting to control our world with intentional violence is something to be valued? What was my role to be in that process when the Commanding Officer called on me as the padre to offer prayers? It was hard to believe, despite how hard I tried to convince myself, it was anything other than assuring the gathered troops and the organisation, that God was on their side. Or put another way, there was no challenge from the God person that the idea of training to kill people for a living was in any way a problem.

Blood sacrifice is both dreaded and revered in the military. Every ANZAC Day, the gospel of Mark is plundered to give religious credibility to the idea that physically dying for your mates in the course of armed conflict is to be idolized. This is difficult to address or unravel in the brief public moments offered to military clergy, because of the way the theology of blood sacrifice has become embedded into our culture, quite separated from theological thinking that might help us have a more constructive view of the Easter story.

Perhaps it is not surprising that it has been so embedded, given that the use of force, symbolised by military activity, is one way humans try to bring substance to our species and make ourselves more important than we really are. Whereas the life of Jesus stands in direct contrast to this, minimizing the self as a dominant feature and challenging institutions to resist forcing their 'self' over and above another.

Increasingly, I was uncomfortable with how the institutional violence of the military machine, which intentionally offers blood sacrifice to the God of War and then elevates that to heroic status, fitted with the liturgy of the church where the deep magic of the Eucharistic drama unfolds at its centre. The place where the mysteries of life and death are explored through the story of Christ, the vulnerable anti-hero who offers no resistance to violence.

### **The unadorned truth**

When church attendance falls away the priest is left scrambling to find alternative methods for proclaiming the word (passing on the faith through stories) or presenting the prophetic picture (speaking of the real). One of the ways these tasks can be achieved is to speak out on issues of community concern through alternative channels.

Without trying very hard at all, I had one salutary experience with the chain of command through my attempt to comment on an issue of social change. A colleague had asked me if I would support her as a clergyperson on a television interview about voluntary euthanasia. I agreed to do this and let the Principal Army Chaplain know so that he would not be caught unawares. He checked it out with the PR and legal departments who were relaxed as long as I was not identified as an army chaplain, although they gave no reason for that stance. This suited me very well as my role was to have a theological input and the producers of the programme were happy to make no reference to my current employment. All was going well until the Chief of Army heard of my intention whereupon power was exercised in the most subtle and polite ways to ensure I changed my mind.

The military, like all organisations, has to be concerned about media scrutiny. This generally means that organisations live at the most superficial level, looking for good news

stories that put them in the best light and limiting discussion or expression of anything that appears to question their purpose or activity. When you employ people who value the prophetic role as part of their vocation, this creates some problems.

To get another perspective on the situation I went to my Commanding Officer, a man with over 20 years in the military who was perceptive, interested in all this talk of spirit and with whom I could be honest. After we had enjoyed dissecting the whole saga, he leaned back in his chair and smiled, then laid out for me the reality that soldiering was a 24/7 business and that having a Queen's Commission was a kind of all encompassing vocation, which overrode everything else. He said later that it was a joke but I knew that it wasn't. It was the unadorned truth, lying there on the table, eyeing me quizzically to see what I would do with it.

Thankfully, truth is patient and understanding. It has no need to persuade or push for recognition because it just is, living outside of our attempts to control or suppress it. Once spotted though, the awareness of it irritates and while I didn't know what to do with it at that moment, I could see that there was a direct conflict between my employer's purpose and my understanding of where I had pledged my loyalties when ordained. Caesar and God were at odds here.

Going back to source documents seemed a good idea to help me refocus. I consulted the DFO 65, a military document outlining chaplaincy services. I had a copy of Draft 12 from October 2007 which was yet to be ratified; however, it was very clear.

'Chaplaincy resources of the New Zealand Defense Force (NZDF) exist for the spiritual and pastoral well being of all NZDF personnel and their dependants within New Zealand and overseas.

The Chaplains' role is shaped around influencing the morale of all NZDF personnel in an effort to produce positive spiritual, moral and ethical outcomes in peace, crisis and war. In this context, chaplains seek to develop the faith, values and leadership of all serving personnel to enhance the capability of the NZDF.'

There was the unadorned truth again, staring out from the pages of a military manual. While this document goes on to outline in more detail roles and responsibilities in religious ministry, pastoral care, training, providing advice and administration functions, it was apparent to me that chaplains are not in the service of God but are in the New Zealand Defense Force to enhance the capability of the military machine.

The DFO had not been available to me on entry to the service but even if it had, I have to admit that I may have read it differently, tinged by the first flush of enthusiasm for a new job. I expect I would have glossed over this shy truth as a challenge to be engaged with instead of something which needed help to be brought into the light.

But there it was now. Not a joke. Not to be taken lightly. I was a Christian priest who had made ordination vows to serve God and here I was contradicting those vows by agreeing to be embedded in the military machine and so implicitly supporting its purpose.

## Dueling Mythologies

Humans speak in many different ways, sometimes within the same sentence. By this I mean that we use words to describe concrete, material parts of our lives, ie: words like bread and butter, alongside words that refer to the way we experience life. To create different patterns or effects, we intersperse words or phrases that reach for that layered, more nebulous world, which is beyond our material existence but nevertheless real to us. We can call this God talk, incorporating mythological ideas to try to explain what we lack concrete words for.

During the age of rampant scientism there was little room for mythological talk and so the Western world, so influenced by the Judeo/Christian and Greek mythologies, slowly lost its ability to speak of deep truths through story. Indigenous cultures have never lost the ability to speak mythologically and the renaissance of these cultures gives us all an opportunity to learn to expand our discourse again in more layered and subtle ways.

This change is more complex than we might like to think. In the rush to get over colonising guilt, there is a tendency to fling ourselves on the pendulum of change, quite forgetting that the mythologies we might be absorbing will need investigation and new understanding in the same way as the ones currently out of favour have required.

In 1994, when the New Zealand Army was officially recognized as the tribal entity, Ngati Tumatauenga, it effectively replaced an existing, but waning mythology carried by the army chaplains, with an entirely different one without exploring the implications of that move.

Tumatauenga, is the god of war and mankind from the Maori pantheon of gods. He was one of the offspring of Ranginui (the sky father) and Papatuanuku (the earth mother). His brother Tawhirimatea, the god of the weather, was angry at the separation of his parents and waged war on his other brothers subduing some, but not Tumatauenga who was left to deal with him alone. Tumatauenga took revenge on his faithless brothers by devouring their children and remains at war with Tawhirimatea to this day.

The army says that Ngati Tumatauenga is a people bound together by the ethic of service, military professionalism, common values, traditions and purpose. However, the mythology of Tumatauenga is one that appears to value anger, revenge and violence, one diametrically opposed to the Christian mythology which has as a central feature the challenging of this cycle of repetitive, revengeful violence through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. As a non military colleague pointed out to me, this leaves army chaplains being subtly co-opted into the bondage against which they seek to testify.

This problem of dueling mythologies is not new. The 20th century theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr, struggled to understand the implications of Greek and Christian mythologies working out their place in the psyche of a community. In 'Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic', he has this challenging perspective: "What makes me angry is the way I kowtow the chaplains as I visit the various camps. Here are the ministers of the gospel, just as I am. Just as I they are also, for the moment, priests of the great god Mars. As ministers of the Christian religion I have no particular respect for them. Yet I am overcome by a terrible inferiority complex when I deal with them. Such is the power of the uniform. Like myself, they have mixed the worship of the God of love and the God of battles. But unlike

myself, they have adequate symbols of this double devotion. The little cross on the shoulder is the symbol of their Christian faith. The uniform itself is the symbol of their devotion to the God of battles. It is the uniform and not the cross which impresses me and others. I am impressed even when I know I ought not be."

## **Irrelevance**

I was becoming more and more uncomfortable while my head buzzed with these complicated paradoxes and mysteries. While all this was going on, I had to find some way to construct my day if I had doubts about the efficacy of loitering and leaping over tall buildings to be just as good as the boys was a bit beyond me now.

Seeing as my Engineers were not going to come to church, I figured I would have to take the festivals to them. Operation Easter came complete with palm crosses and Easter eggs while Operation Matariki's popularity probably had more to do with the kumara chip snacks than with the bookmarks about new life!

After a few months though, despite extremely stimulating conversations with my Commanding Officer and struggling to find meaningful work that did not fall into the welfare or counselling areas, I concluded that I was pretty much an irrelevance or, as an Australian colleague put it, in the same category as lawyers and social workers – necessary evils who lived in a la-la land that had no relationship with the real business of soldiering.

That will explain then, why I could not find any mentions of chaplaincy or religion in the NZDF book of doctrine or the army's 'Way of the New Zealand Warrior', although much was made of the value of Ngati Tumatauenga in that particular book. And as a new leadership project rolled out, I noted that there was not even a passing reference to spirituality.

Despite employing chaplains, religious truth seemed to be an irrelevance for the army although apparently this has not always been the case. As Mary Tagg reports, General Montgomery thought that there could be no inspirational leadership unless the commander had a proper sense of religious truth; be prepared to acknowledge it and to lead his troops in the light of that truth. Whether or not we agree with Montgomery's version of religious truth or his methods, it illustrates well the different world in which we now live and move.

## **Reshaping**

Indoctrination beckoned via the seven weeks Specialist Officers Induction Course at Waiouru, our own cold, forbidding desert. This course is designed to give specialist officers, nurses, doctors, psychologists, teachers and chaplains an understanding of the Army's ethos and culture, provide them with basic military skills and introduce them to the competencies of a commissioned officer.

Reading the course documentation, all couched in military language and acronyms which always served to alienate me rather than aid understanding, it dawned on me that while the regular army saw the course as a doddle, I was going to struggle with the complete immersion in military life. I felt that role tension jarring again and my enthusiasm for this

strange life dwindling but, ever optimistic, I packed my car with the enormous amount of gear required to be properly dressed on all military occasions. On arrival in a freezing Waiouru, I was shown to barracks with no heating. The boiler had broken down and remained that way until I left.

When someone new enters the military, the organisation sets about what it calls resocialisation or, as Mr Killology, Dave Grossman puts it, brutalization. Previously an officer in the United States military, Grossman is now a psychologist who explains brutalization as the process of breaking a person down and reshaping them to accept a new set of values that embrace destruction, violence and death as a way of life.

We endured mind-numbing classes which began at 7.30am and sometimes stretched into the evening. We marched in formation from place to place, our rooms were inspected, and we raced to the parade ground for drill before dripping sweat at the gym to ensure we were on the way to meeting the required fitness level. The piece de resistance was to gain competence in the operation of a Steyr, the New Zealand military's choice of rifle.

Under the Geneva Convention, military chaplains are non-combatants and cannot be required to be armed, although may carry a side arm for defensive purposes. Chaplains in New Zealand are trained to handle weapons on the specialist officers' course and for parts of that course they are required to have their weapon constantly with them. Weapons competency is then annually assessed. This is, I was told, so that I could disarm a weapon should I ever come across one that could be a danger to others. The irony of that did make me smile.

Despite the Convention, a strange situation had grown up in New Zealand where chaplains on deployment were sometimes put under considerable pressure to carry a Steyr. Some caved and last year the inevitable happened when a chaplain was responsible for a U.D., an accidental unauthorized discharge of his weapon. No-one was hurt, in fact no-one else was around but he felt duty bound to report it, was quietly court martialled and fined the usual hefty amount.

As the days unfolded on the course, it fascinated me that well educated people exhibited almost total, unquestioning cooperation and showed no resistance to the regime. At a class meeting I made some suggestions about how we could more constructively go about our tasks and still achieve our purpose but conformity had already begun to set in and so I was seen as a problem. Alienation from the group got underway.

## **Capture**

People respond in different ways to what is called the shock of capture and if you have been captured before, it can get messy. As my colleagues back at Linton never failed to remind me, the specialist officers' indoctrination was a walk in the park compared to what troopies go through, however, my psyche did not care about that distinction.

On one level, the orientation course was not overtly structured like a staged capture but when people have no choices about how to run their day, then the feeling of domination is inevitable and that, in its simplest terms, is what Grossman talks about. It's the total



immersion in a way of life contrary to ones own, with no recourse to an outside view and no ability to make choices about that life which enables it to subsume you, change your centre of being, your ethics, your will and your purpose so that you will accept, without question, whatever this new way of life demands of you.

### **The turning**

One night, I awoke from the deepest sleep I had had in a week. My new electric blanket, a futile attempt to keep me warm in this freezing and what I perceived as a hostile environment, was soaked. Wide awake and utterly miserable, I cursed this latest failing of my body coming as it did, hard on the heels of endless tiredness, incessant crying, debilitating vomiting and diarrhoea and the chronic pain associated with an inadequately diagnosed injury. Without any recourse to rocket science, I decided my body was trying to tell me something as it struggled to maintain equilibrium with my spirit in the long days full of barking, bossing and bracing up.

Up on the firing range a couple of days later as I faced the targets with my instructor reciting the liturgy of rifle drill, I started to cry; great body wrenching sobs from the unfathomable depths of my being. The emotion cascaded through me until I was left helpless and cringing on the ground clutching my rifle like a baby.

It wasn't that I couldn't shoot. I could. Although slow at dismantling and reassembling my weapon, I had been one of the best shots in our simulation centre run through, something to do with patience and the ability to control my breathing. It did cross my mind that panting babies into the world and caring for small children could be an excellent training ground for snipers.

A kind and patient Warrant Officer whose name I never knew, eventually got me off the range and out of the gaze of my course mates who, by then, had become somewhat embarrassed by my failure to be one of the team.

That evening, after many phone calls back to base, still not too clear about what was going on for me internally but with survival instinct on full alert and still cradling that Steyr like a baby, I whispered a quiet 'No Ma'am', politely refusing the Major's directive to enter the field phase in the morning. I was returned to my unit after a paltry two weeks of my course labeled, 'did not complete'.

The soldiers in my unit were highly amused by this and teased me mercilessly but they weren't at all bothered by it. Soldiers are very tolerant of chaplains, I suspect more concerned that they know how to listen and be compassionate than whether or not they can shoot well beside them.

I settled back into the workplace leaving others to get agitated about what to do with this chaplain who wasn't completing the required competencies. While those machinations chugged on, I set about preparing for a presentation on my initial experiences of chaplaincy that I'd been asked to give to the national chaplains' conference in September.

This earlier request by the Principal Defense Chaplain now became an oasis as I continued my reading, research and reflection on the military, army chaplaincy and my experience of it. However, the most disturbing part of this research was to find that almost no theological wondering had been done about military chaplaincy in New Zealand, although a number of historical and academic pieces had been produced.

One afternoon as I was outlining my conference presentation to my Commanding Officer, he offered to be part of it and so presented his views and questions about military chaplaincy to my colleagues, alongside me. My reflections were still fairly raw and I suspect our joint presentation was not quite what the Principal Chaplain had in mind when he first asked me to speak. Nevertheless, we were graciously heard and parts resonated with some of my colleagues, although there were still no signs that anyone wanted to think theologically about the hard questions.

The next day, a series of events meant that my CO was transferred out of the unit and the one person who had daily identified with the struggle of my journey in the military was gone. In late December, still confused, ambivalent and uncertain about what it all meant but feeling as though I lacked the support I needed to carry on, I decided to accept another school chaplain's role and left the military.

### **Making meaning**

I suppose I could just leave it at that and write it off as one more life experience but as I said at the beginning, this experience has changed me. It has been like an epiphany where my eyes were opened anew to the way the world is constructed, how frightening that it is for us and how hard it is to challenge, ensuring that we remain quietly compliant.

Although we might wish that we could compartmentalise our lives, drawing lines under anything painful that we do not want to acknowledge is impossible. For it is struggling with the pain of existence, sometimes repetitively in a variety of settings, that can help us understand the multi dimensional nature of humanity.

It took months of confused reflection about my specialist officers' course experience until I began to understand that capture by the military was never going to be an option. In trying to reshape me and make me its own, the army grazed the 40 year old wound I had as a result of being captured and brutalized as a young teenager.

Much of the trauma that young people experience as a result of brutalization is because they are not yet spiritually resilient, or put another way, not integrated beings. Their values still belong to their parents or, in the case of teenagers, they are sorting through the great seething mass of possibilities on offer. When attacked, victims can end up operating at a survival level, always looking for a safe haven, which can result in bargaining or colluding with their attackers. Until that phase is over, which may take decades, the long slow process of building a sound spiritual base is unable to unfold. By drawing that understanding through my army experience, I was able to see chaplaincy in an interesting new light.

My view is that military chaplaincy is like a brutalized teenager, having been captured by Caesar; in military terms, the profession of arms. It is submissive, its Spirit and Christian

message undermined by the joint forces of Caesar using the usual power tactics to dominate, its own inattention to theological development and the disinterest of the wider church in exploring their role in this centuries old dysfunctional relationship.

One of the cleverest tactics in disabling chaplains is through making them Defense Force employees, putting them in uniform and giving them officer rank. By doing this, however hard they try, chaplains are almost indistinguishable from everyone else and subject to the same domestic trivia as all soldiers: pay debates, promotion squabbles and disciplinary procedures. This limits anyone's ability to critique their employer and is especially difficult when your employer values conformity and unquestioning obedience. Disabling chaplains in this way suggests to me that the group is inherently dangerous to the organisation if allowed to operate on the loose.

Caesar, the state, the organisation, the institution, is symbolically the holder of power in any community or the defender of the status quo. The military operates at one extreme end of that continuum of power where their job is to apply the maximum amount of force on the enemy. Anything else, marching bands, flood relief and I daresay, peacekeeping, is a distraction for when there is no enemy.

A clergy person's calling is different; to sit at the opposite end of that continuum of violence, where vulnerability, woundedness and the beauty of brokenness are valued. Our hero is grounded in his tradition but counter-cultural, questioning institutional violence with the ultimate challenge of non-violent vulnerability.

That then, is the danger to Caesar. If chaplains are faithful to this ultimate truth which stands outside any organisation's power, they will always be at odds with the military, unable to enhance the capability of the NZDF, which raises the question of where chaplains need to work from in order to be congruent.

Dr Frank Glen, previously a military and police chaplain highlighted some of these difficulties in his post-doctoral dissertation on the German military. He explains that after World War II, Germany substantially revamped its chaplaincy service and now, instead of being military employees, chaplains work for the church, have no rank and only wear uniform on deployment or exercise.

There are obvious differences for us in New Zealand, as Germany has a state church, but I can see the value in this model as a way to separate the individual chaplain, and the chaplaincy service from the inevitability of being captured by principalities and powers diametrically opposed to the Christian story. Instead, negotiations about what the military wants from chaplaincy could be carried out at an organisational level where the issues that I am raising could be talked through before contracts are signed.

For anything to change though, would require a great deal of soul searching within the churches that support military chaplaincy in New Zealand, for this relationship of church and state runs deep within our psyche, right back to Constantine's institutionalisation of the early church.

Many of the early Christians believed that violence of any sort was wrong but this did not last. In 410, when Rome was facing defeat at the hands of the Visigoths, non-Christians in the Roman Empire saw Rome's vulnerability as being partly due to the reluctance of Christians to fight. It seems that, as a result, Augustine's theory of a Just War was devised to ensure Christians could salve their consciences and contribute to state sanctioned violence. They have been doing this ever since, apart from conscientious objectors who have paid dearly for their stand.

To address the issue of military chaplaincy is to face up to more than change management in one form of ministry. For military chaplaincy is potentially a much more complex beast than it first appears to be. My sense is, that it is bound into a symbolic partnership that has to do with the dynamics of power and the exercise of force in our world. Put another way, society expects the military to do what it cannot do itself and what is an impossible job. That is, the holding back of the forces of darkness and destruction that are first found as our shadow within and which we then turn into external enemies.

On the day I closed my study door and walked away from the military, I smiled as I noticed again one of the many posters saying "no to inter-personal violence", which plaster the public noticeboards around Linton Camp. We can be amused at the irony. But to think again about military chaplaincy is to explore our own role in the perpetuation of violence by the unthinking provision of service to the state.

To begin to explore this is to take a tiger by the tail, to hear it roar and feel the rip of its claws. Frightening in its strength and intensity, which is exactly how institutional power operates, to ensure we remain quiet, compliant and disassociated from our true being.

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