

# The Chaplain's Place in the Prison Scene

STANLEY PEARCE

IN AN ATTEMPT to give an accurate impression of the Chaplain's place in the prison scene, it will be my endeavour to present, first of all, the historical background, before passing on to consider his integration within the membership of a prison staff in modern conditions, with perhaps a few observations, if I may be allowed, of my own personal interpretation and views.

There is no need to detain you with a surfeit of historical detail. It is sufficient to recognise the root from which we, the Chaplains, stem. From the inception of the prison system and administration under the Prison Commissioners in the latter part of the last century, there were only three persons, apart from the custodial and uniformed staff, responsible for the control and welfare of prisoners. These were the Governor, the Medical Officer and the Chaplain. The roles of the first two were obvious; that of the Chaplain was multifarious. It demanded an evangelical vigour and fervour which assumed that what prisoners needed

most of all, to aid their personal betterment and social adjustment, were moral reproof and spiritual exhortation, together with, as Christian charity might demand, some effort to assist their general education and to encourage the humble acceptance of the general principle that those who have and those who have not could yet live in law-abiding and divinely ordained co-existence.

In a harsh and regimented prison regime, the Chaplain had presented to him, ready made, a situation in which he could shine as an angel amongst demons, the only hope of a frustrated and rebellious, or cowed and subjugated, prison population. It was not difficult for supposed virtue to thrive in this atmosphere.

To-day, the Chaplain has a sterner task to face. His status is not automatically guaranteed to him by the structure of the system. He must be prepared to justify his existence, either in competition or in collaboration with those who have relieved him of many of his

extra-spiritual functions: these include the Tutor Organiser who is now responsible for education; the Welfare Officer whose concern is that of welfare in its widest aspects; also the Assistant Governor who, naturally, finds himself in some complexity of role. Called to be an administrator and having a disciplinary function to perform, he must yet feel, very properly, that he has a welfare interest in those inmates for whom he is responsible. To this array one might add a newcomer to modern therapeutic advance in the person of the psychologist, in whose diagnostic wake follows the psychiatrist. I would not minimise the value of these services, but he would be prepared to admit, I believe, that he possesses no magic-answer to divergent behaviour, the possible solution being dependent upon the co-operation of the patient. This, of course, has always been the difficulty of the Chaplain in his attempts at moral and spiritual reclamation.

It would be unrealistic if the Chaplain were to regard himself as possessing a monopoly in welfare interests and humanitarian attitudes. These, in a real sense, should reside in every member of the staff. The practical problem is of definition of actual function. It would be equally unrealistic if it were demanded of the Chaplain that he should confine his work to purely spiritual activities. There is no such thing as a "purely spiritual activity". Spirit and body

in man are inextricably woven, and in touching the physical and material needs of man one can also utter an unspoken language to his spirit.

What, then, is the Chaplain's function? What is he expected to *do*? By virtue of his office, as an ordained man, a minister of God, he is charged with the responsibility of offering the ministrations of the Church to those inmates who wish to avail themselves of that ministry: that, technically, is the ministry of the Word and Sacraments as in the churches outside, and it is on this pattern that, as far as possible, the Chaplain will conduct services inside prison. He will also organise other activities, from time to time, such as Bible Study Groups, Religious Discussion Groups, and Confirmation Classes in preparation for Confirmation by the Bishop who will make a special visit to the prison for the purpose.

Of the work of the Chaplain's Department in the prison routine, few specific directions are laid down by Prison Rules and Regulations. The Department may consist of a single Chaplain, possibly two in larger prisons, or of a Chaplain and a Church Army captain, as in a number of prisons, including Wakefield. The Church Army as you may know is a Church of England Society, and its Captains and Sisters, as they are called, are commissioned lay-evangelists working in parishes, hostels, prisons, moral welfare and

old folk's homes in this country and in other parts of the world. In the prison routine, then, the Chaplain's Department is expected to see all men on reception and discharge, to keep in daily contact with the hospital and those on punishment. It is represented on most of the prison boards and committees, such as induction, home leave, the pre-release hostel, staff consultative committee, and so on. It is also the responsibility of the Department to arrange the inmates' programme of films and to attend to their booking. This comes under the heading of entertainment, which is still one of the Chaplain's responsibilities. The organisation of the system of Prison Visitors, whereby they are made available to the inmates, also resides with the Chaplain's Department.

At Wakefield the Chaplain has the valuable opportunity of introducing himself to each new batch of inmates as they are formed into groups on the induction wing. This will be followed at a later stage by private interview in the Chaplain's office.

From that time on, the inmate knows that the Chaplain is ready and willing to see him and to share any difficulty or problem he may have. It is important that the Chaplain shall be readily accessible to those who would seek spiritual counsel and advice. But it is rarely that a man who is not a convinced Christian will seek the solution of

a spiritual problem (as such) in isolation from a practical concern over some domestic or material difficulty. In an atmosphere of understanding and personal interest, an inmate may be helped to come to terms with himself and his environment. It may be that he will begin to discover a new respect for his own potential worth and value on the basis of the Christian belief in God as one of life's fundamental realities. This, indeed, may involve a new orientation which bears within it the seeds of self-fulfilment, not only in himself, but in his social attitudes and relationships.

In this regard the Chaplain sees himself as fulfilling his part in the implementation of Rule 6 of Prison Rules, which reminds us that "the aim and object of the training and treatment of convicted prisoners shall be to encourage in them the will to live a good and useful life on discharge, and to fit them to do so". It will be noted that the Rule speaks in terms, not only of usefulness, but of the quality and virtue of goodness.

Even those without religious or denominational loyalties might, perhaps, be expected to welcome and accept the Chaplain's contribution towards the achievement of this common goal and purpose. In this regard, I believe, most Chaplains would gratefully acknowledge that they are the recipients of considerable support and encouragement. This, for the most part, has been my happy experience over a

period of nearly ten years in the Prison Service, at Wakefield. But we must be realistic and recognise that the acceptance, or otherwise, of the specialist activity of the Chaplain depends very much upon personal and deep-seated pre-conceptions. Chaplains, therefore, can be vulnerable to the unhelpful attitude of those who have a distaste of the absolute and possess no theory of human personality.

In practice, the Chaplain's position and standing within a prison present certain features. He is dependent upon the goodwill of those with whom he works to give substance and relevance to the reality of what he has to offer. He needs lines of communication, which are practical and real, with the inmate population. He needs also a design of prison programme which will give scope for those activities which are generally described as "spiritual". In other words, the Chaplain needs, on the part of the prison Staff from the Governor downwards, to be consciously and deliberately integrated into the prison scene and working day, as a relevant partner, not only with other specialist officers, but with the discipline staff.

Here the Chaplain must be prepared to accept a challenge. The question as to whether or not he is so integrated may depend largely upon his own attitude and abilities. The Chaplain hopes for acceptance, but cannot demand it. In this he must be seen as being in a weaker

position than that of any other member of the staff. His activities are *less* defined, and his *actual* function as a staff unit is not predetermined merely because he is an ordained man with the title of Chaplain. In fact, the system does not demand his integration for its effective working. Although he has statutory authority for his place on the prison staff, this has by no means assured the preservation of his old historical status as No. 3 for the prison keys, and even at Wakefield, by contrast with the situation existing within my memory and experience, the Chaplain's keys are now No. 12! This is not a complaint. It is an indication of a trend, a shift of emphasis. It certainly emphasises the challenge. Sentimental theory and hard practice are not necessarily identical in their effects, and I believe that there is a current of opinion within the modern theory of therapeutic treatment which would regard the Chaplain, not so much as essential or necessary, but as a conciliatory concession to the "establishment".

So, then, let us return to the matter of the challenge this situation brings to the Chaplain. His role must be enacted within the prison scene which is essentially a disciplinary one, in the sense that a prison imposes necessary restriction on an inmate's social liberties and freedom of self-expression. Those restrictions are for social security in the widest sense, and for the internal ordering and regulation of prison life, which shall ensure its

smooth running and also equality of treatment. In this kind of situation, which must necessarily present many contrasts with the liberties and enjoyments of life outside, the Chaplain may falsely envisage himself as the humanitarian in an otherwise inhuman system. He may rush around, with false sentimentality, and with personal enthusiasms of a dangerously independent kind, to temper the wind for the shorn lamb, and with the implication that divine love and compassion are to be recognised, if not in active disregard of prison rules and regulations, nevertheless, in the subversive suggestion that prison discipline is basically evil: that he is "for them" (on the side of the inmates) and against the "set-up". This is an attitude which Chaplains (and, if I may say so, Prison Visitors) must resist. When the Chaplain, in his somewhat exclusive and independent position, is seen to recognise this situation he may hope to win confidence from a staff who are charged with a very responsible and imposed discipline themselves. We abuse the system if we set up our own personal interpretations of what should, or should not, be done. Only within defined limits is this possible.

This situation the Chaplain must uphold with the inmates in their own interests and as part of their training. We do not claim that the system is perfect or that it cannot be improved. This, along constitutional lines, we are continually trying to do. It is part of the Chap-

lain's task with inmates to encourage the acceptance of the system as a self-imposed discipline, with moral and spiritual values attached. We do a disservice to them and to our cause by "whitewashing" the situation in which they are placed, by pretending that it is not self-imposed, or by suggesting that those who are charged with their custody have no regard for the basic humanities.

I have already spoken of some of the ways in which the Chaplain becomes involved with other members of the staff, through boards and committees. Let us now turn to an involvement where his active interest in the welfare of prisoners is shared by other members of the staff. This applies particularly to a modern triangle of mutual interest, and even competitive activity, in the persons of the Chaplain, the Welfare Officer and the Assistant Governor. Their contact with the inmates, if not on identical lines, is at least on similar ones, with consultation and advice, assistance in working through matrimonial or domestic problems, and, in addition, the possible securing of financial or material aid. No one would reasonably contend that the Chaplain should retain a monopoly in this field. As with education, welfare has increased in scope and content, and demands the service of a specialist officer.

Quite naturally, however, the Chaplain is bound to maintain an interest and concern. He is fre-

quently expected by the inmates to be actively involved in their practical problems and difficulties. These are lines of communication which the Chaplain would not like to see closed. Indeed, it may be claimed that there are many particular aspects of "welfare", namely, those affecting marriage and the family, in which his intervention would be appropriate. In a similar way the Assistant Governor may find himself in a situation of some complexity. His lines of communication with the inmate inevitably lead into the field of welfare. Some need is disclosed in the course of an interview in the Assistant Governor's office. How far should he become involved in the active follow-up of such a matter? If he does so, would he, with the Chaplain, be considered as trespassing into the domain of the Welfare Officer? Here at Wakefield the answers to these questions have not yet reached a final conclusion. Perhaps it is as well that they have not, in terms of any clear demarcation of frontiers. We have, however, attempted to deal with the practical difficulty of overlapping and duplication of work, by setting up a welfare registry to record welfare histories of the inmates, and to indicate the interest and intervention of different members of the staff. Certainly, from the practical point of view and in the face of the amount of work to be handled, there is more to be done than can be dealt with by one office.

A further complication, relating to the Chaplain's interest in the

welfare field, arises from the fact that the Church Army maintain from their London Headquarters a special department, that of Prison Welfare (known also as the Prisoners' Families Department) which functions as a valuable and effective auxiliary arm to Chaplains and Church Army Captains working in prisons, making helpful and encouraging contact with the inmates' homes, bringing practical relief with money, clothing or furniture in cases of real hardship, and in appropriate cases defraying the cost of travel for visits where public funds are not available. I believe that at Wakefield we shall work through these overlapping interests with the minimum of difficulty. There is work to be shared to further a common end.

In the larger field of the Chaplain's general involvement with other members of the staff, I would like to suggest that the basis of that involvement resides in the fact that we all together share a common responsibility. It is the responsibility of a personal relationship. It affects the whole staff in relationship with prisoners. It concerns what we do for them, what we hope to achieve in them, what we hope to make of them. That the Chaplain carries this responsibility would scarcely be denied. By virtue of his office he cannot and would not avoid the duty to communicate respect, not for the shame and degradation in an inmate's persisting sub-cultural level of life, but for his potential worth as a human being, a living soul.

Every single human being has a right to feel significant, that he matters, that he has a place under the sun, that he is, in a true sense, important. This support and maintenance of the flow of our natural development is normally supplied by our parents, family, home, teachers, perhaps employers and good friends. All these, in the past, have helped to make *us* feel significant, that we matter, that we count for something. It is because so many of the men in prison have not been able to extract this kind of satisfaction from their environment that they are where they are today. We extract from our environment, for good or ill, values that are projected at us. That process never stands still. When a man is in prison, be it nine months or nine years, his personal significance and the values of human life are still being imparted to him, and because of the closed situation, perhaps even more intensely.

The inmate's social environment is a limited one. His direct contacts are with two groups of people. One is the prisoner group; the other is the staff. What values does he extract from the former? What values *should* he be able to extract from the latter? With regard to the prisoner group, it can hardly be assumed that the true dignity and worth of human life are enhanced. What of the staff? In this challenge the responsibility of the Chaplain

is shared by all members of the staff. The Chaplain personally accepts this responsibility, in trying to impart his recognition of the inmate's value and potential worth in God's sight. His ultimate objective is to help a man (if he will be helped) by word and attitude, to know himself at his real worth—a child of God.

The Chaplain would not expect all members of the staff to speak in those terms, but what contribution do we all make in revealing our respect for human values and the worth and sacredness of a man's personality? There lies the challenge; that we all, according to our several insights and capacities, are called, in the exercise of our particular functions, to show respect for, and to give expression to, the highest assessment of human worth of which we are capable. In that we share the responsibility of a human relationship: we are interdependent: together we can present a system which is coherent and positive.

So, by our efforts to restore or to establish a man's faith in the real meaning and purpose of life, to give back to him a lost confidence in the reality and worth of moral virtue, we may *together* do something positive and constructive to restore the old wastes of broken homes and shattered hopes, and to make even the desert of some hard heart blossom as the rose.

---