The Prison Chaplain

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ANY EXAMINATION of "role" is fraught with difficulty—in a period of change and in certain respects of uncertainty people are suspicious of the researcher who asks what, to them, are a series of pointless and irksome questions. The prison chaplain is no exception, although those I have interviewed have received me kindly and been of help. Material on the role prescribed and/or chosen is sparse and scattered. It is a subject deserving a much fuller treatment than we have attempted. The published study of Pentonville by Morris makes only a passing mention of the chaplain which some students of penology might see as, in itself, a judgement on his present-day position and importance in the eyes of the sociologist.

I want to examine the ascribed role of the chaplain as laid down by authority and the work as he himself has seen it (i.e. the statements of various prison chaplains); I want to attempt to see this historically and, therefore, I will divide the paper up into three sections arbitrarily demarcated as the 19th century and the development of the role in the 20th century and finally, I want to enter the more controversial field of the present-day and to a lesser degree the future.

Writing in the 1770s, Howard records: "I had pleasure to find a chaplain appointed to most of the county gaols". An Act of 1774 stated that the chaplain shall read morning and evening prayers each Sunday, Good Friday and Christmas, he was also commanded to preach two sermons each Sunday. "And all offenders confined shall attend." The chaplain was also, with the leave of the governor, to visit "any of the offenders, either sick or in health, that may desire or stand in need of his spiritual advice and attendance". He was not, however, allowed to interfere with their work hours. These basically were his duties and over the years were added to—in the 19th century his role and authority was often second only to the governor—he was able to claim respect because he was the expert and his authority rested on his expertise and knowledge.

The 19th century has been seen by historians of one persuasion as Britain's greatest—the century of empire and power. Other historians and critics have condemned it as a century of inhumanity. The Empire

was built on the sufferings of the working classes of Britain. It was essentially a century of *laissez-faire* idealism—the individual was solely responsible for his position. A man shall not eat if he will not work. The Marxist dictum: "From each according to his ability to each according to his need", was not understood as intended and was essentially anathema to 19th century England. The theory of less eligibility influenced the harshness of social provision if such it can be called. The motives for chaplain's entering the Prison Service were several, their attitudes also were several and hence they saw their role as different ways. Some chaplains presented to the prisoner the aloofness and judgemental *milieu* of their age, others tempered it with a concern, be it a concern originated in class conscience or a genuine altruistic interpretation of their gospel. Samuel Butler's *Clergyman* was for some a true image. The Church of England in the 19th century drew its clergy from the upper classes; more heavily than even today the gulf between the prisoner and the priest was wide. (Methodism had, and still did, reveal the depth of the division within England as a whole.) The Church's clergy presented the maternal or paternal aspect of love to their flocks.

At the close of the 18th century the prison hulks were established—each of them had attached a chaplain but they interpreted their duties widely. The chaplain of the *Gannymede* and *Leven* stated before a select committee that he merely conducted services weekly—no other instruction was given the prisoners. He was chaplain of the *Leven* but never went on board! The only education of convicts was by convicts acting as schoolmaster. Quarterman only visited the prisoners if asked to do so by the hulk manager. Branch Johnson, in his work on prison hulks, refers to a clergyman who refused to bury prisoners who had died from cholera until there were several bodies—he remained on ship and officers took the bodies ashore; the chaplain dropped a handkerchief when he reached the words of commitment and the officers, almost a mile away, lowered the body. These are not merely isolated examples as some might accuse—they represent a school and reflect an attitude of the 19th century Church.

Certain of the hulk chaplains spent up to 12 hours a day on board—preaching, teaching, admonishing. For some, life was hard and they were conscientious. Some prisoners were taught to read and to write, for some it was too high an ideal. To learn by rote was a favourite method of teaching. The Catechism was learned by many as were the Articles of Religion. Of what use the latter were is difficult to ascertain and a learned mind alone could attempt an understanding. To use the Church's own Collect: "to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest", might have been before the chaplains' mind. The prisoner might learn but as for the

other aspects I retain a sceptical mind.

During the first half of the 19th century the Reverend Daniel Nihil served at Millbank Prison as chaplain-governor. The regime was geared to the mission of the chaplain. The secular and the sacred were combined in one person but the tension of role remained. The experiment was a failure and collapsed after 30 years—a failure not to be placed solely at the feet of the governor. In one sense it was an attempt to return to the medieval concept of the secular being confined and controlled by the sacred and it was doomed to failure as was the medieval conception of a theocracy. Once he had been freed from a sacral culture, man would not again be dominated by it even if that culture was a Christian sacral culture. Further, the aims of the 19th century state penology were not Christian in respect of the Church as the accepting mother. The 19th century was the age of reason and a patriarchal, rather than a maternal love, is the dominating ethics of Church and State and the patriarchal love is a mirror of the Old Testament rather than the New Testament. In as much as Christianity is not essentially rational, the rational approach was naive in essence if not in sincerity.

By the middle of the 19th century the duties of the chaplain had increased. The Prison Rules had laid greater burden upon him. Let us attempt to summarise: he shall perform morning and evening prayer each Sunday, public fast days and thanksgiving days; he shall read prayers daily together with portions of scripture, he shall celebrate holy communion at least four times a year; he shall instruct prisoners in religious instruction in classes; "he shall, at stated times, see every prisoner in private, in order to be able to direct his advice and instruction, with reference to the particular character and state of mind of each prisoner, and that under circumstances in which the prisoner is likely to be least reserved, and most open to good influence". He shall visit the sick daily, he shall attend the condemned, he shall see and admonish every prisoner on admission and discharge, he shall pay attention to every prisoner's state of mind; he shall keep a character book, he shall keep a journal of events, he shall distribute books and other educational materials, he shall superintend the schools, he may inspect prisoners' letters and he must make an annual report at this time to the justices at Michaelmas Quarter Sessions "as to the religious and moral instruction of the prisoners with his observations thereon".

The demands laid upon the chaplain were many: "The Rules for Convict Prisons, Parkhurst" lay the same obligations on the chaplain. The governor, deputy governor and officers are commanded to communicate information concerning the moral state of the prisoners. "The chaplain shall hold no other preferment with care of souls, nor

will he be permitted to take pupils. He shall reside in the house provided for him." He is certainly aligned with the Prison Service hierarchy and he was subject only to the control of the Secretary of State for matters in his department. With the governor seen as an administrator he was alone with the doctor in having any professional expertise.

The Church of England in the last century saw its clergy as "ministers" rather than as priests; it was more Protestant than Catholic. This is certainly reflected in its order of priorities of service—H.C. four times a year, morning and evening prayer weekly. Raymond Raines once described Protestantism as a moral teaching and Catholicism as a religion. I do not want to labour the point too far but it does explain to a large degree the emphasis on a teaching ministry rather than a sacramental priesthood. The chaplain in the Prison Service in the 18th century is, in terms of popular sociology, the personification of the gold dust theory. His influence is seen to be for the good—his sermons, his private visits, his guidance within the educational sphere. In terms of "treatment" his role is unique—supplemented later by the visiting ladies and prison visitors and D.P.A.s who are essentially under his control.

Chaplains differed in their allocation of time to their various tasks. To read merely their annual reports gives some insight into their work. Their character books give some insight into their attempts at offering help, they showed concern for the lack of after-care. They do tend to press for the good of the prisoner and we might today condemn their thesis of separation of prisoners, etc., but their sincerity should not be condemned. They report on the chapels, on services held, on schooling and the moral state of the men. The reports are often similar in content to those of other chaplains and vary very little from year to year. Some show greater initiative than others. Reverend J. W. Horsley stated: "The terms of the Prison Act, in speaking of the scope of the report of the chaplain, are so wide, that it is not actually, though apparently, outside his province to draw attention to the sanitary differences between cells in which there is no such provision. The chaplain, in the course of his duties, spends more of his time and more at a stretch in the cells than other prison officers and, therefore, is in a position to know which kind of cells is most or least malodorous. There is rarely any unpleasantness in the old type of cells furnished with W.C.s but in the newer type in which gutta-percha utensils are provided the contrary is frequently the case. This is a bit of practical experience which would no doubt be opposed to *a priori* theory; but so it is." Horsley was a critic of the prison authorities and his reports made for interesting reading—interesting also is his willingness to criticise and stand up to authority. He was not the only chaplain in this role.

Without dissent chaplains report on the edifying nature of their services. They equate orderliness

with edification and improvement and with reform. They comment on the larger congregations than local parishes! They comment on behaviour. The chapel building for them is a vital part in the redemptive work. Wherein religion is emotional one can perhaps accept their stand, but I see difficulty in the emotional appeal of morning and evening prayer. Father Graham in the *Mirfield Essays* has written deeper on this point and the implications for conversion. He sees a need to involve the whole personality, not merely the intellect. The chaplains also lay great stress on the cellular visits they made. Given the separate system it is not difficult to understand the warmth with which they were greeted. Reverend John Clay provides us with as good an insight into this as any other chaplain. "In his cell he has no temptations from without, and many salutary monitions from within." "Few can conceive the nature of those feelings which bring daily tears from eyes that never wept since childhood. . . ." Active memory collects and brings before him everything that ever happened to him since he was a child; reflection traces painful consequences back to their sinful causes; the sense of sin and sorrow for it succeed; he is directed to Him who bore our sorrows and atoned for sin; then rises up prayer for pardon and *that* is followed by the consolation which answers prayer, and when about to leave the scene of his probation and try the stability of his new impressions he says in a voice which does permit a doubt of sincerity: "By God's help I'll be a different man for the future". Casework? "But the most valuable fruits of a chaplain's labours are those which spring from his private conversations with the prisoners when no third person is present. He has then the most favourable opportunity of bringing the sins of the offender home to his conscience. The advice, exhortation, plain healing and particular application which he feels himself at liberty to use on these occasions would not be well received in the presence of a third party and would not produce the same effect . . . when no one else is present the chaplain is always attended to with patience and respect, and generally with thanks for his advice, even if that advice implies atrocious guilt or directly charges the admonished offender with it. It is in these interviews, if anywhere, that a moral influence is acquired over the mind of the prisoner."

Chaplains also had charge of libraries but were under the visiting justices in this respect. In 1818 the Prison Rules stated: "a library shall be provided in every prison". A departmental report of 1911 stated: "We attach the greatest importance to the chaplain's systematic guidance of the prisoners in his charge in the matter of reading. The mass of prisoners cannot know, and no catalogue can inform them, what is the nature of a book's contents. We strongly recommend that all chaplains should do what we believe the majority do now and make it their

regular practice when visiting prisoners privately in their cells to enquire into and interest themselves in their reading and recommend the books which, from their knowledge of the individual, they believe to be most conducive to his improvement as well as to his recreation". The most popular writers—or those who had most books in prisons were Mrs. Henry Wood, Dickens, Henty, Haggard and Scott. One must make one's own judgements! Chaplains also attempted to assess the reasons for crime and the answers to the problems. They were in a sense criminologists. Today the criminologist, though drawing from many disciplines, does not look to the Church or the "queen of sciences" for help. The books, especially the work of Horsley and Morrison, do show a concern for the criminal and to a large degree an attempted understanding of him. They attempt to help rather than merely condemn.

A chaplain visitor was appointed in 1896. His first report is made in 1897–8. He visited each prison and interviewed each chaplain and schoolmaster. He was concerned with all aspects of the chaplain's work. He comments on the services: "The influences of a bright and orderly service are not infrequently seen in the quiet conduct of the prisoners during the remainder of the day. Reports for misconduct in chapels are in several prisons practically unknown". There had been the admission of part-time clergy and this was praised. When Reverend Horsley invited visiting clergy he received a reprimand about which he was not slow to complain. There had also been several missions on prisons. He speaks of the schools in a praiseworthy fashion: "If they happen to be excluded from the class for any misconduct in the prison they regard it as a punishment". Adults are slow to learn, many "seem incapable of learning". "The libraries are one of the greatest privileges of the prisoner."

The number of lady visitors had increased and their work was much appreciated. The social work of the 19th century is so often based on association—good is catching and the middle class possesses all good. Such a belief still has prevalence today. British social work is today just freeing itself from "the amateur *par excellence*" beliefs of the 19th century. The Prison Service, one feels, is slower than other professional social work agencies although it is making a progress and it is a progress which is challenging the prison chaplain. It is interesting that the writing of Alexander Paterson on borstals is still one of the more lonely papers with official sanction on their work. We read in chaplains' reports: "The majority of D.P.A.S. have applied for the certificate of efficiency under the conditions of the new scheme which the Commissioners have drawn up and in a few exceptions where they have not been abreast of the requirements of that scheme have either reconstituted themselves or changed and extended their methods of dealing with the discharged prisoners of

whose interests they have taken the care".

The appointment of the chaplain visitor brings us to the close of the 19th century. Any division is in a sense arbitrary. Briefly, what of the prisoners' attitudes? Report after report refers to grateful letters of thanks from prisoners to the chaplain for the help given. It would be impossible to quote the numbers, impossible to judge the sincerity. The chaplain visitor's first report refers to the many letters: "The spontaneous character of the letters is an indication that the chaplain's labours are not always perfunctory, unfruitful or forgotten". Horsley, after reference to one letter of thanks states: "This is certainly different to the pervading idea that governors and doctors are necessities and valuable but chaplains merely concessions to popular prejudice and external ignorance". It is an extreme view but of interest that a chaplain should state it in his annual report. He no doubt had justification for his thoughts.

Oscar Wilde in *De Profundis* wrote: "The prison chaplains are entirely useless. They are in a class, well meaning but foolish, indeed silly men. They are of no help to any prisoner. Once every six weeks or so a key turns in the lock of one's cell door and the chaplain enters. One stands of course, at attention. He asks one whether one has been reading the Bible. One answers 'Yes' or 'No' as the case may be. He then quotes a few texts and goes out and locks the door. Sometimes he leaves a tract".

"All through the history of punishment runs the curious fact that practically the only people displaying a genuine interest in the criminal's lot are those driven by the spirit of a religious mission" (J. V. Bennet, Director, U.S. Bureau of Prisons). In English penal history the Gladstone Committee on Reform is an outstanding, if not the outstanding landmark. It comes at the end of a century which had been punitively minded. Reformation had been seen only in terms of deterrence which itself is an incomplete theory of punishment or reform. It deters only the captive and not necessarily him.

It is difficult to attribute to any one person praise for bringing into being the Gladstone Committee. The 1880s were a time relatively free from criticism but the following decade was one highly critical of the prison regime. Dr. Morrison, chaplain of Wandsworth played a leading role in the reform. Lord Maldone wrote to him saying: "You are the real instrument in bringing about a very great change for the better". Ruggles Brise was of the same opinion. Morrison wrote a series of articles relating to official statistics. Du Cane dismissed him for his action and the *Daily Chronicle* published a series of articles by him. The articles were an indictment of the state of the British prisons and their failure. Morrison had fought openly at the cost of his position for a more humane prison service—he, like others before, notably Clay, had attempted to bring compassion and acceptance to the prisoner. The

chaplains had represented to a degree a view of man which of itself was justification for their existence. This is not to say that within the service there were no chaplains who were other than mouthpieces of officialdom or that Wilde's uncomplimentary view is untrue.

What of the 20th century? The present-day situation is one of change for society in general as much as for its institutions. The Church is seriously considering its own role in society and individual clergy are considering their role within secular and sacred society. The Prison Service itself is undergoing change and reform. It is considering, to some degree, the roles of its members; it is fast incorporating specialists into its work which rule one of the service states (1964) as: "The purpose of the training and treatment of convicted prisoners shall be to encourage and assist them to lead a good and useful life".

What of the chaplain's assigned role? We base this on the standing orders as issued in 1933. The chaplain shall attend the prison daily and conduct prescribed services; he shall interview all receptions and discharges; he shall daily visit the sick and those under punishment, he shall read the burial service at funerals. What has gone is his duty with reference to the state of mind of a prisoner. This is a big change worth expanding.

This is, I feel, important—the chaplain has lost the prescribed concern for an area that today many social workers of different skills are trying for with their differing expertise. It has, I feel, implications for the chaplains' claim to be concerned with the "whole man" which I look at later.

Each Sunday a C. of E. service shall be held in the morning which is compulsory. The governor can grant a leave of absence. An afternoon service is voluntary for the prisoners. Concerts of sacred music can replace the afternoon service but not more than one per month! If a prisoner is ill-behaved in chapel the governor can bar him from chapel for one month. The chaplain is to be informed. During the week there is to be one service which is voluntary. "If the service is held during labour hours the shops will, unless there are special reasons against doing so, be closed during the service and prisoners not attending will return to or remain in their cells if they are not employed on urgent work" (rule 410 2 (a)). The Prison Service today is more economically motivated as chaplains would bear out.

The chaplain statutorily has to present a report annually to the Commissioners. They are allowed cell and pass keys. (If the number of the key signifies importance then it is interesting to note that the chaplain's key, once No. 3, is now often No. 12). The chaplain keeps a book of occurrences and holds classes for religious instruction as he decides.

Rule 418 states: "A prisoner who, on admission, declares himself to be of no religious persuasion may be visited for the purpose of moral assistance or guidance by some person of repute approved by the

Commissioners for that purpose". How far the humanist association has entered the moral field is answered by reference to official approvals. Morality in the Prison Service is still Christian.

Section XIII of the rules concerns itself with religious instruction, education, voluntary workers. The chaplain has oversight of these. A study of prison visitors would, I feel, reveal the predominance of regular church attenders. Over the century very little has in fact changed in his described role. He had free access to the man under sentence of death when capital punishment was on the statute books. The chaplain had to be in attendance at the execution. "A condemned prisoner will be specially informed by the governor that he will have the option of attending divine service in the chapel or not as he wishes."

The second world war forced Britain to consider her state and a coalition government offered the people in the guise of the Beveridge Report a more perfect society. In the post-war years a Labour government began an experiment in several provisions for the sick and unemployed. The Poor Law was abolished in statute. Social considerations became of prime importance and there developed a professionalism in the social services. Then Britain was harried into an era of change as comparable with that of the years of reformation in the 16th and 17th centuries. She began to move in the direction of a nuclear society, her old values were changing and are changing. The values and ethics of her political parties have changed. The Conservatives are changing from an agrarian party to a business party and changing is its paternal religious image. The Church itself is in a period of reformation for Rome Vatican II for the Anglican Communion the challenges of Woolwich and of greater impact such theologians as Paul Tillich with Protestantism have forced consideration of doctrine, of role and means of approaching the people.

It is against this change in society and in Church and in prisons that the chaplain now works. Bryan Wilson in *Religion and Secular Society* states: "The clergy most fully represent religion and of this they are themselves accurately aware. Some understanding of the religious profession is an essential to an understanding of religion itself and particularly so in the secular society where they are more than ever before perhaps its embodiment. In a society which is highly professionalised and which no longer expects to discover (amateur) saints any more than it believes in amateur clinicians the role of the clergy becomes more distinctive within religious institutions and becomes more specifically and more circumscribedly religious".

The Prison Service has increased its staff professionisms. There are welfare officers and there are assistant governors concerned with casework and who are trained for this work. The chaplain is not a caseworker professionally today. One chaplain in an interview stated: "The chaplain is now free to be

chaplain. He will be much happier as a sincere chaplain than a sham welfare officer". And yet to acknowledge this is very difficult for a chaplain. (His work within the religious sphere is very difficult and very intangible for him to see at times and perhaps for this reason he seeks the areas of work—official committees.) The Church of England's report on prison chaplains stated: "He will not be worried overmuch about his status or the degree of official recognition afforded him so long as he can have reasonable opportunity of being in personal contact with his men". If he starts off with a too clearly defined objective, whether it is the serving of a man's penitence, Church membership or his conversion—he might easily fail.

Throughout the 19th century, the chaplain was in actuality concerned with casework; it was his own department in particular so within the silent system. He led also in many instances the humanitarian movement. He was concerned in certain instances with MAN. In the present-day other specialists are concerned with casework with welfare with MAN. The chaplain is no longer alone, he is one among many. His religious sphere is difficult of definition at one extreme (one rarely mentioned by chaplains) prayer and at the other a concern with "the whole man". The latter is a difficult concept but one the Church is constantly speaking of—its vagueness gives the chaplain tremendous scope. Lady Taylor on 20/7 April speaking to the prison chaplaincies council stated: "but I have never yet discovered what the spiritual things are. The chaplain of all people, perhaps uniquely so, is the person who is interested in the whole man and not in one department of him".

"Our concern is the whole man." The more one reads of chaplains' statements on their work and role the more one sees this statement. So often they reiterate the 19th century position, they state we are in a period of change and the challenge this is to them; and so often they see this as their opportunity to assert a professionalism and so often they assert a concern for the whole man. Perhaps this is to be their justification and work area for the future, but others must surely ask for definition and if the answer is of itself the Christian doctrine of man, further questions must still be asked. Claims to lead the professional team of social workers are bound to be denied to a clergy not trained in the social field. The Church, however, has much to contribute to the discipline of the social sciences. Father Biestik in his book *The Casework Relationship*, enumerates seven principles: individualisation, purposeful expression of feeling, controlled emotional involvement, acceptance, the non-judgemental attitude, self determination, confidentially. Of these I would put acceptance in the forefront and the Church has a great deal of use to say on this for its God has accepted of man the rejection of acceptance. Man is always the concern of the Church —his condition is its condition, his

life of concern but in Christ his salvation assured. To the priest the communion service (the Mass) is the displaying to the world the love of God the displaying of victory in the face of evil. How many chaplains today, given their beliefs, are content with a religious role. Are they afraid of its intangibility? Their acceptance of such a role would, I suggest, bring an understanding from others, a respect of their claims and a full role in the Prison Service; a role not merely priestly in a sacerdotal field but a role dealing with men in their humanity and human condition which only a priest can do. Perhaps he needs a new faith in his gospel. A gospel that accepts when others cannot and surely his new role must be within the field of prayer, of acceptance, of patience, of pastoral ministry. How far his present hierarchal position is of value can at least be questioned. How far he needs a greater freedom from his prescribed role can be questioned. How far he can continue to discuss his problems in isolation of the Church without seeking discussion with other professional fields needs his urgent attention.

"NO EASY ROAD"

In the last issue of this Journal it was announced that a review of this book would appear in the next number. We regret this is not possible as the book is not yet published.

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QUOTATIONS

Results from last issues' competition will be published in the next issue of the PRISON SERVICE JOURNAL. Late entries will be welcomed.

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BOOKS RECEIVED

Prison by Michael Woolf, published by Eyre and Spottiswoode, will be reviewed in a later issue.

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