

## **Discussion Paper Chaplains and the bearing of firearms**

### *Preamble*

Chaplains have been involved in most major ADF operational deployments within Australia and overseas. In several instances, chaplains have been directed to carry firearms. This is a marked break with historical custom and a number of chaplains have either resisted or refused to comply with such directions. For these chaplains, bearing arms is not merely a matter of individual choice or personal opinion. It involves theological convictions, ecclesiastical discipline and pastoral practise. This paper considers some of these factors. It is indicative rather than conclusive.

### *Introduction*

All Christian ministries are patterned after the words and works of Jesus Christ. Jesus eschewed violence and encouraged non-violence. He said: "Love you enemies and pray for those who hate you". He neither carried a sword nor resorted to force in self-defence. He seemed indifferent to the concerns of others about his personal safety and suffered a violent death at the hands of the Imperial Roman army in 30 CE. There is one reference in the Bible to him fashioning his belt into a whip when he cleared the temple of those he believed were profaning its holy precincts. It appears the custom of the disciples was to carry swords (presumably in self defence against criminals) until Jesus 'disarmed' Peter in the Garden of Gethsemane. There is no mention in either the Acts of the Apostles or the New Testament letters to the Churches of Jesus' followers carrying or using weapons or resisting oppression and persecution by force. This seems to have been the practise of the Apostolic Church. Were Jesus and Paul pacifists? The answer appears to be 'no'. Jesus did not question the right of the state to use force in maintaining civil order. Paul addressed the responsibility of secular rulers to 'wield the sword' to encourage virtue and restrain vice. Jesus distinguished, however, between spiritual and secular imperatives (deeming the latter secondary) while Paul did not sanction Christians taking up the sword on behalf of the state. Elsewhere in the Scriptures, Christians are counselled to be wary of secular authorities as they are frequently eager for ultimate power and absolute obedience. In sum, the Scriptures are equivocal on a range of matters that impinge upon military service. Whether Christians can and ought to take up arms in defence of civil or international order is not a settled question in either the ancient Biblical texts or in contemporary theological debates.

### *Ecclesiastical*

Reconciling the Jesus' teaching on violence with the demands of living within the Roman Empire did not attract very much attention in the Apostolic Church. In fact, there is no evidence of there being any Christian soldiers before 173 CE. The chief objection to entering military service continued to be Christian unwillingness to engage in the mandatory cult of Emperor worship. The response of the Early Church in the second century CE to violence seems to have taken a uniformly pacifist line with Church leaders and, later, bishops virulently denouncing any resort to violence by Christians in response to provocation. The impetus that would radically alter the Church's attitude toward war was a product of its transformed attitude toward the State.

When he ascended to the throne in 306CE, the Roman Emperor Constantine was especially conscious of the dangers confronting the Empire by invasion from without and by the division and weakening morale that followed social decadence from within. After his 'conversion' in 312, the Church appears to have quickly lost its pacifist fervour. In 314, the Council of Arles condemned conscientious objectors that deserted their colours and left military service 'perfectly free and open to Christians'. Athanasius asserted that to 'destroy enemies in war is lawful and worthy of praise'. The Imperial army became a Christian prerogative in 416, the cross became the emblem on the shields of Roman soldiers, and non-Christians were barred from enlisting.

But the Church's position with respect to the state and violence nonetheless required intellectual formalisation. This task fell to Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE) who rejected the use of violence for personal self-defence but affirmed that no Christian ought to fail to resist evil by the effective means that the State alone makes available to him. By the fourth century, the Church had assumed a degree of responsibility for the security of the Empire and essentially abandoned pacifism. What followed was the evolution of a widely accepted code for waging but also containing violent warfare. As a function of having accepted some responsibility for civil affairs, Christians were therefore obliged to render military service although clergy were prohibited from bearing arms.

The principles governing the use of physical force and the waging of war enunciated by St Augustine in the fifth century could, and did, serve the burgeoning Church throughout the Carolingian period and into the Middle Ages as well. In fact, it was strengthened by the foremost moral and social theorist of the medieval period, Saint Thomas Aquinas, and further developed and refined to cope with contemporary circumstances. For its part, the Renaissance did not significantly affect the Church's thinking on war and peace. The only humanist scholar to make any notable contribution was Erasmus who advocated what has become known as 'prudential pacifism' while the reaffirmation of non-violence by Menno Simons (founder of the Mennonites) in this period was a return to the pacifist tradition.

The re-thinking of doctrines relating to violence as a consequence of biblical scholarship did not result in peace during the years that followed the Reformation. The terror and destructiveness of the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) evoked a significant pacifist response in some quarters. The founder of the movement known as the Society of Friends (Quakers), George Fox, told Oliver Cromwell in 1654 that he would not fight for the Commonwealth because 'Christ's Kingdom is not of this world; it is peaceable: and all that are in strife, are not of his kingdom'. The pacifism of the Quakers stood alone as the only radical position on war and peace after the Reformation. It is the bridge between the quietistic pacifism of the Reformation sects (the Mennonites, Hutterites, Dunkers and Anabaptists) and the emerging school of non-violent humanist activists during the nineteenth century whose ethical reflections did not rely on Christian convictions.

Along with emerging religious conscientious objection (advocated by the Quakers and some Anabaptists), liberal and rational movements with their origins in the theories of Erasmus and Grotius developed by Rousseau, Kant and Bentham, argued that war was irrational and destructive of the moral, economic and social progress achieved since the start of the industrial revolution. Kant, in particular, produced an optimistic theological liberalism that rooted pacifism in a concept of social evolution and in an ethic that subordinated justice to love. These liberal movements advocated a system of international law and arbitration.

This sentiment was consolidated by the signing of the 1928 (Kellogg-Briand) General Pact for the Renunciation of War in which the parties to the Pact condemned 'recourse to war for the solution of international controversies and renounced it as an instrument of national policy'. The spirit of the Pact was reflected in a resolution passed by the 1930 Lambeth Conference of the Anglican bishops. This was the high tide mark of Anglican opposition to war. The bishops concluded: 'The Christian must condemn war not merely because it is wasteful and ruinous, a cause of untold misery, but far more because it is contrary to the will of God'.

The atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 created a new element in ethical thinking about war. There was now clear evidence that human beings had the capacity to destroy the world and every living creature. The development of new weapons and tactics added fresh dimensions and greater complexity to extant moral and ethical problems. Consequently, between 1945 and 1990, religious reflection tended to concentrate on the just conduct of war (*jus in bello*), prompted by the threat of nuclear warfare, rather than on the justness of resorting to war (*jus ad bello*) which was taken up more by secular theorists. The former group contended that because wars were not fought by just means because of the use or threatened use of NBC weapons, there could not be just wars. But as the threat of nuclear war receded substantially after 1989 and the character of international relations was transformed with the end to the Cold war, religious and humanist ethicists have been obliged to rethink their attitude to violence in the context of intra-state (or civil wars) and the complex array of diplomatic and economic scenarios in which a nation might resort to force or coercion without actually either declaring or conducting what is usually described as 'war'.

This has not hindered the emergence or growth of 'pacifist churches' while the recent Iraq War demonstrated the extent of pacifist feeling in the major Christian denominations in Australia. The Reverend Tim Costello claimed in the *Sydney Morning Herald* ('A churchman cannot serve two masters', 4 June 2003) that the Church was indeed pacifist. In a letter to the editor, this writer took issue with this assertion.

'From the time of St Augustine when the Church properly accepted a share of responsibility for preserving temporal peace and protecting civil order, the majority of Christians have acknowledged that force may be required to restrain evil and restore justice both within a nation and between neighbouring states. The pacifist tradition has always been a minority one. The official formularies of both the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches permit their members to bear arms when directed to do so in pursuit of just ends.

'While resorts to force by either the police or the military are always regrettable, failure to deal with lawlessness and oppression is just as repugnant. In such matters the choice is rarely between good and evil but between bad and worse. The followers of Jesus must, therefore, struggle with the tensions and the obligations created by his reminder that they were in the world but not of it. No one has clean hands.'

While conceding that resorts to force might be necessary, the Church's own life and prophetic calling is to non-violence. To oblige chaplains to bear arms is effectively to presume the settlement of a much-debated question within the Churches. The ADF should seek to avoid this unanticipated outcome.

### *Vocational*

Ministerial authority in the Christian Church is conferred and transmitted by ordination. Although each denomination has a specific rite, the force and effect of ordination is crucial. Clergy are commissioned by the Church to lead, preach, teach, pastor and discipline. This commission is effected through both word and deed. Consequently, at their ordination clergy accept a higher and more rigorous standard of public and private conduct. This is made clear and explicit in St Paul's pastoral letters. Clergy are to commend, proclaim and exemplify the Christian faith through their conduct. They are to be mentors and models of Christian living, and to reflect the commands of God the Father, the obedience of God the Son, and the sanctity of God the Holy Spirit in all they say and do.

All ADF Chaplains are ordained clergy. Their authority to minister in the ADF is derived from the Church that endorsed their nomination. The ADF does not engage or employ 'lay' chaplains. There are sound theological and practical reasons for this. As clergy, ADF chaplains are obliged by their ordination vows to minister to the needs of all people, irrespective of nationality, ethnicity or politics. They are also called to proclaim reconciliation between all human beings in the light of Christ's redemptive death. Clergy are to exemplify the 'peace beyond all understanding' that is to be found in Christ and to avoid anything which would alienate a believer from membership of Christ's body - the Church - or a penitent from the grace and mercy of God mediated through Word and Sacrament. Although chaplains wear service clothing and are publicly identified with the nation, a particular service, and a specific unit, none of these affiliations creates a barrier between the priest and people like the bearing of arms.

Throughout history, clergy have been exempt from military service while clergy exercising pastoral oversight of military personnel have not carried firearms. This was deemed inconsistent with their special calling and their ordination vows. The Commonwealth *Defence Act* specifically excludes clergy and theological students from military service during conscription. Most clergy become chaplains on the understanding that they will not be required to bear arms. This is set out in the various Chaplaincy Defence Instructions and should not be overlooked or set aside in any operational setting.

As ordinary citizens, clergy have the natural right to protect themselves. This is not contested. But in the performance of their official duties as chaplains licensed by the church and employed by the ADF, the clergy have a different status. They are no longer ordinary citizens. They are first and foremost chaplains who represent Christ and his Church within the ADF and the wider world. They never cease to become representatives and ambassadors for the specific community of faith in which they were ordained. This status should not be confused or obscured by any formal requirement for chaplains to carry firearms.

### *Pastoral*

As Christian ministers motivated by a different personal and social ethic, chaplains are expected to live out the ideals and hopes of the Christian faith. Chaplains accept this and sailors, soldiers and airmen expect it of them. The chaplain is meant to be different, sometimes to be above certain conduct and at other times to stand aside while certain things are being done. In a unit in which every person is armed, there is need for an unarmed person to bring a radically different moral perspective to bear, especially when the use of force is discretionary. To carry a firearm might be seen as legitimising the business of killing.

Christian moral philosophy holds that killing is wrong although it might be justifiable in the conduct of war or in self-defence. For clergy to wear, and possibly to use a firearm, would be to convey a message that is inconsistent with Biblical teaching. A firearm used for self-defence can also become an offensive weapon. There are many instances in Australian military history when unarmed chaplains have felt the temptation to join 'the fighting'. A chaplain's capacity to hear a confession or to pastorally care for a soldier, sailor and airman who had taken another person's life in combat might also be impaired were they to be complicit in the delivery of force or the taking of life. This can and ought to be avoided.

### *Conclusion*

While the Church might accept that resorts to force are necessary or even justified in pursuit of morally legitimate political ends, it remains committed to their pursuit by non-violent means. To bear arms is to profess and express a common cause that the Church cannot embrace. The view of the RACS is expressed in these terms:

the bearing of arms by chaplains in the performance of their ministerial duties is generally inconsistent with the vocational ethos of ordained ministry;

RACS commends any policy or action that provides for the personal safety of chaplains in areas of operations and which obviates the need for chaplains to carry firearms;

RACS honours the decision of any ADF chaplain not to bear arms; and

RACS believes that chaplains should not be directed or required to bear arms in the course of their duties.

These conclusions are based on theological principles that ought to be respected by all commanders and reflected in the operational orders developed for all overseas missions.

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Anglican Bishop to the ADF

2 September 2003

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## **RACS Resolution**

Bishop Frame's paper was distributed for consideration at the September 2003 Meeting. The Chair expressed appreciation to Bishop Frame for his contribution. After some discussion the conclusion of this paper was re-crafted to express the following:

- a. The bearing of arms by Chaplains in the performance of their ministerial duties is generally inconsistent with the vocation ethos of ordained ministry.
- b. RACS requests the development and implementation of policies and rules that provide for the personal safety of Chaplains in areas of operations and obviate the need for Chaplains to carry firearms.
- c. RACS respects the decision of any ADF Chaplain not to bear arms but recognises that some chaplains may take up arms in critical situations.

These conclusions are based on theological principles that ought to be respected by all commanders and reflected in the operational orders developed for all overseas missions.

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Chaplains wishing to apprise themselves of current ADF Policy with respect to the bearing of arms on operations may direct their inquiries to the Office of the Anglican Bishop to the Defence Force.