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THE 'JESUS NUT' :

A STUDY OF NEW ZEALAND MILITARY CHAPLAINCY

by

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the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

Since the earliest days of the Christian Church, ordained ministers and priests have accompanied soldiers into battle. The religious presence in the war machine has been the subject of many debates, particularly those involving the conflict of ethics presented by the representatives of a gospel of peace and love participating in a profession of violence and killing.

New Zealand is a secular country with a relatively well-developed system of secular pastoral care services. However the New Zealand Defence Force continues to request the churches' involvement in the military and those churches which respond continue to participate in work which appears contrary to their teaching. This study examines the relationship of church and military. It investigates the place of the church in the New Zealand Defence Force through an examination of the appropriate literature and other relevant information, and an empirical survey of the work and views of current, and some retired, chaplains.

The global military scenario has changed in recent years with the development of war technology. The New Zealand military focus is now largely directed towards policing New Zealand's economic zone and the preservation of independence of smaller neighbouring island states, while its active service role is one of participation in international peace-enforcement and peacekeeping. This thesis considers these changes and looks at the possible effects they may have on the future of military chaplaincy within the secular, multicultural context of the New Zealand state. The study concludes with a rationale for the presence of the Christian Church in the New Zealand Defence Force and presents issues which the current chaplaincy-providing churches need to consider if they wish to continue to provide effective chaplaincy for the military.

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Mary Tagg
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INTRODUCTION

The New Zealand Army Journal of July 1989 contains a story which serves as an analogy for the religious ministry in the military which is the subject of this study:

For some unknown reason, military helicopter crewmen seem to delight in pointing out to their not so enthusiastic passengers, a particular part of their vehicle's anatomy. This device, so one is told, serves to stop the main rotor blade from unfixing itself from the drive shaft. Actually the picture is a little more graphic than that. Remember that the main rotor is the bit which holds the helicopter up in the air, and in one sense, the body of the aircraft hangs off it. Thus this clever device supposedly prevents the body from separating from the blades and, (along with the bodies of the occupants), falling suddenly to earth. They call it the 'Jesus Nut'.

The writer continues:

...Generations of application have established the military structure...that greater entity which is the sum of spirit, professionalism, commitment and so on. However we would all acknowledge that the component parts are people...Where, then, is the 'Jesus Nut' for the Military structure? Where is that article of faith? (Caltrom 1989)

This study sets out to examine the 'Jesus Nut' of the New Zealand Defence Force (hereafter NZDF): the New Zealand military chaplaincy. As the 'Jesus Nut', the chaplaincy does not hold the NZDF together structurally or physically, but in terms of spirituality, values and ideology the chaplaincy contextualises and humanises the military. Without such a humanising influence, the military becomes an impersonal and brutalising machine. The difference between military brutality and military assistance can be seen today in the differing effects of the Indonesian militia and the UN military peacekeeping forces on the population of East Timor. So the purpose of the study is to examine the relevance of religious ministry in the present armed services, how it operates, and what particular value

this ministry has for the military in the context of the secular New Zealand state.

Interest in New Zealand military chaplaincy originated from two previous studies of New Zealand chaplains, the first of which examines the work of chaplains in World War II.¹ The second study is based on the diary of a New Zealand prisoner of war padre in the prison camps of Italy and Germany.² From these two pieces of research the question arose as to why New Zealand, which is a secular state with no constitutionally designated official church-state relationship, should have clergy working within its defence forces.

Some countries, such as the United Kingdom and Germany, do have an official church-state concordat. This means that the presence of clergy in the military has political relevance. But in the United States and Australia, as in New Zealand, there is no official church-state relationship, yet still in both countries there are, as in New Zealand, clergy working within the military. Why are clergy needed as part of the military? What particular function does the church serve in an institution which trains its personnel in the work of killing and violent death? This study is an examination of present New Zealand military chaplaincy, the 'Jesus nut', to ascertain its place in the NZDF and its value to both military and church.

Structure of the thesis

Part 1

To determine the worth of this 'Jesus nut', it is first necessary to look at the design and function of the military structure. It is also important to look at the

¹ Frank Glen (1996) University of Waikato unpublished PhD. thesis: *The New Zealand Army Chaplain at War 2NZE 1939-1945.*

² Mary Tagg (1997) University of Waikato unpublished M.Phil. thesis: *The Prisoner Padre: The Impact of War on a New Zealand Cleric.*

'nut' itself to see the place it has in the military 'helicopter' and how it has come to be incorporated in this machine. Part 1 of this study therefore investigates the development and design of both the NZDF and the NZDF chaplaincy. Chapter one focuses on the origins and history of military chaplaincy from the time of Constantine. Chapter 2 is concerned with the development of the NZDF chaplaincy and chapters 3 and 4 examine the changing roles of the NZDF of today and the structure of the present New Zealand military chaplaincy.

Part 2

It is not possible to determine if a particular piece of machinery is of any use unless one examines the components of that piece to see what they are composed of and how they work. Part 2 of the study examines the chaplains themselves and their work - the material of the nut - and how the chaplains operate to fulfil the required functions. A questionnaire was sent to chaplains and, although not all responded, useful information on their work and opinions was obtained. Part 2 of the study reports the responses to the three sections of the questionnaire and chapter 8 gives relevant material from tapes and papers obtained in interviews with chaplains.

Part 3

The NZDF is currently the subject of public debate as to its future role, organisation and equipment. Thus Part 3 looks at the future of chaplaincy. The function and operation of the nut cannot be modified for an updated machine unless different materials and designs are considered. Some options for future directions of chaplaincy present different possibilities for the work and personnel of chaplaincy in the new NZDF machine.

Part 4

Part 4 explores why and how the military helicopter, the NZDF, will continue to need a 'Jesus Nut'. The issues of

military chaplaincy and the specific relationship of the military and church are examined and the value of religious spirituality in the military is discussed.

Part 5

The conclusions determine what that 'Jesus Nut' must be and do if it is to be 'the article of faith' which will yield appropriate spiritual support to the machine of the NZDF in its future work. A final chapter relates to the survey questionnaire to give comment which may be helpful in structuring future chaplaincy.

Methodology

The thesis combines research of appropriate literature and other information together with an empirical study of chaplains and their work through a questionnaire survey. The relevant discussion is a reflection and investigation of what these together bring out.

Most of the chaplains approached were very willing to contribute their thoughts on chaplaincy and their work in the military. Some, however, expressed concern about their remarks being identified in any way which might lead to their being individually associated with comment that could be seen as critical of either their churches or the military. This is noted in chapter 5 and in order to preserve the chaplains' request for anonymity, quotations made by the chaplains in chapters 5 to 8 are not given under name references.

Appendices

There are four appendices:

Appendix 1 Abbreviations

In military literature it is the practice to use abbreviations rather than full terminology for ranks, status, operations, personnel and organisations. This has been followed herein. But, to assist readers, the full

title is given initially in the text before the military abbreviation is used. A list of the commonly used abbreviations is also given at the end of the study. Unless otherwise specified, the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the Bible has been used.

Appendix 2 Discussion of terms

For the purpose of this study it is useful to clarify and define some of the terms used. There are distinctions in the training and work of counsellors and ministers which create differences in their roles. These differences are considered in the Discussion of Terms.

Appendix 3 Development of social services in New Zealand.

It is also helpful, when considering religious and secular spiritualities, to understand how secular counselling services in New Zealand developed from church pastoral care organisations. New Zealand trends have been influenced by Rogerian non-directive therapy and the work of Rev. Dr David Williams and therefore have a strong spiritual orientation. Appendix 3 gives a brief history of the development of these services and the influences which have shaped them.

Appendix 4 contains notes on the Geneva Conventions which govern the situation of chaplains in war. The Conventions are not given in full, but the notes may be helpful in referring to the situation of chaplains in war.

Bibliography.

Not all the works included in the bibliography are directly referred to in the text. Some are referred to in Appendices. But because this study included researching a range of subject areas such as military, war history, psychology and counselling, and current affairs as well as theology, representative works are included as relevant background.