

TWILIGHT OF THE PADRES: THE END OF BRITISH MILITARY CHAPLAINCY IN INDIA

The religious history of the British Indian army might easily be confused with that of the vast majority of Indian soldiers (whether Hindus, Sikhs or Muslims) who served in its ranks over the course of two centuries. However, from the arrival of the first British regiment in India in 1754, the core of the British Indian army was not its native component but its substantial minority of British troops, a fact that was underlined by the trauma of the Indian Mutiny (or Uprising) of 1857-59. Consequently, the religious history of the British Indian army has a strong Christian component, one that involves the British, Indian and Anglo-Indian Christians who served in the ranks of its native regiments, as well as those Britons (and other Europeans) who served in the 'European' regiments of the East India Company and in the crown regiments of the British army before and after the Uprising. Inherited from the East India Company in 1858, for the next nine decades of British rule, the British crown had the responsibility for the religious welfare of its Christian soldiers and civilian servants in India, one that it sought to discharge through a 'formal-civilian' type of chaplaincy that was mainly focused upon the British regiments who garrisoned India. Like their Indian counterparts, these regiments maintained internal security, protected India's North-West Frontier, and contributed to the expeditionary forces that were periodically sent overseas as part of the British Indian army's historic role as the Empire's largest strategic reserve. Such was the size and importance of India's British garrison, which from the early nineteenth century normally ran into tens of thousands of troops, that the historian Correlli Barnett wrote in *Britain and Her Army*:

By 1850 India had become the greatest formative influence on the life, language and legend of the British army, for most British soldiers could expect to serve there, and for a long time. India, with its heat, stinks and noise, its enveloping dust, its glamour and poverty, became the British army's second home- perhaps its first.¹

This chapter explores the last thirty years of the British Indian army and its Christian chaplaincy system, assessing its success and explaining how, for pragmatic political reasons, it remained wedded to a 'formal-civilian' typology, eschewing the 'formal-military' system represented by its counterpart and rival, the Royal Army Chaplains' Department.

Although the history of Christian military chaplaincy to the British Indian army has been neglected, from the mid-eighteenth century it was an important responsibility of the East India Company and its organisation and methods were to have a strong formative influence on British army chaplaincy in general. The formation of the Army Chaplains' Department in 1796 (Royal Army Chaplains' Department from 1919) followed the reorganisation of the East India Company's chaplaincy system in 1788 and the Department's emphasis on brigade (rather than regimental) chaplains for garrisons and field forces closely followed the Indian model. Furthermore, the Department's second Chaplain-General, the dynamic and long-serving John Owen, had served as a Company chaplain in Bengal from 1785 to 1793 and he did much to ensure that his pastoral methods in India (with their strong emphases on hospital visiting and on the distribution of religious literature) were implemented by the new Department. Notwithstanding the drastic reduction of the army's

¹ Barnett, 1970, p. 278.

overall size after Waterloo, the expansion of the British army in India meant that the Company's chaplains could far outnumber the Department's; by 1845, the Department had only six commissioned chaplains whereas the Company's chaplains numbered nearly a hundred. The growth of the British army in India, and of the British cadres of the Company's native and 'European' regiments, meant that Company chaplaincy was increasingly militarised in ethos and in practice. For example, and despite their civilian status, Company chaplains became eligible to receive military decorations after the Second Sikh War of 1848-49. However, it is in the adoption and spread of the term 'padre' that we can most readily discern the long-term influence of Indian chaplaincy on the British army. Sometimes rather fancifully ascribed to the army's experience of the Peninsular War (1808-14), and even to its lengthy occupation of Gibraltar,² its use was emphatically Indian in origin. Originally applied to the Catholic missionary clergy in India,³ by the early 1800s it was also used to denote the Protestant clergymen who were salaried servants of the East India Company. As Henry Shepherd, a former Company chaplain, confirmed as early as 1827, 'PADRE, i.e. Father, is a term invariably applied to the Clergy [in India] by Europeans as well as natives'.⁴

Despite the use of 'Padre' as the customary moniker of the British army chaplain (and, indeed, its subsequent adoption throughout the Anglophone world), few historians have paused to consider the origins of the term or its possible significance for the development of chaplaincy in the British army. Furthermore, and despite the contribution of

² Brophy and Partridge, 1930, p. 148.

³ Polehampton and Stedman Polehampton, 1858, p. 228.

⁴ Shepherd, 1827, pp. 75-6, footnote.

the British military chaplaincy system in India to the development of Indian Christianity, and to Indian Protestantism in particular,⁵ it has received scant attention from historians of the Indian churches. After Independence, it would seem, the role played in fostering native Christianity by the clerical servants of the forces of the occupying power was best ignored or quietly forgotten. Following two previous studies that have dealt, respectively, with military chaplaincy in the East India Company and with the response of its successor, the Indian Ecclesiastical Establishment, to the challenges of the First World War,⁶ it is the purpose of this chapter to examine the demise of a system of ‘formal-civilian’ military chaplaincy that endured for almost two hundred years. In doing so, it will illustrate the jurisdictional jungle in which it was forced to operate, the underlying and ongoing tensions with the Royal Army Chaplains’ Department (an embodiment of the ‘formal-military’ model), and the continuing resilience and efficiency of some of its last representatives.

In combination, Queen Victoria’s Proclamation and the Government of India Act of 1858 transformed the Company’s chaplains into servants of the crown and appointees of the Secretary of State for India. Other than this, little else changed after the shock of the Indian Uprising. Chaplains remained attached to one of the three historic presidencies (Bengal, Madras and Bombay), their conditions of service remained essentially the same, and they continued to be recruited exclusively from the clergy of the established churches of England and Scotland. With the augmentation of India’s British garrison after the Uprising, the clergy of the new Indian Ecclesiastical Establishment also retained their

⁵ Stratton, 1947, pp. 235-6.

⁶ Snape, 2007, pp. 357-87; Snape, 2013, pp. 143-67.

military character and preoccupations. In fact, the first British clergyman to win the Victoria Cross was not a member of the Army Chaplains' Department (this did not occur until 1916) but of the Indian Ecclesiastical Establishment, James William Adams earning this award in 1879 while attached to the Kabul Field Force during the Second Afghan War. However, political and financial imperatives ensured that the number of clergy in the Indian Ecclesiastical Establishment did not increase in proportion with the size of the British army in India. While this was in keeping with the Proclamation of 1858, which promised not to further or favour any religion, it also helped to insulate the Government of India from the charges of illicit proselytising that had dogged the Company and its chaplains before 1857. However, the provision of chaplaincy grew by other, less conspicuous, means. The Government of India maintained the practice of employing Catholic priests to minister to Catholic soldiers, eventually engaging some on a full-time basis to serve with Irish regiments. Likewise, by the turn of the new century it was subsidising a new genus of Wesleyan Methodist 'Missionaries to the army in India', whose names even graced the pages of the Indian Army Lists. However, and in an artful piece of public accounting, the costs of these *de facto* chaplains were borne as an 'Ecclesiastical' service item under the heading of 'Military Expenditure', amounting to over £28,000 per annum by 1914.⁷

Despite the creation in December 1914 of a new selection board for Anglican candidates for the Indian Ecclesiastical Establishment,⁸ the First World War exposed some of the chronic weaknesses of India's chaplaincy system. Although experienced Roman Catholic

⁷ *Statistical Abstract*, 1922, p. 68.

⁸ Saunders, 1926, p. 183.

and Wesleyan clergymen were mobilised alongside chaplains of the Indian Ecclesiastical Establishment, and additional acting chaplains recruited from among British missionaries in the subcontinent, India's expeditionary forces could not be sustained by India's limited ecclesiastical resources. Furthermore, the disastrous progress of the campaign in Mesopotamia, and its transfer from Indian to War Office control in 1916, brought Indian chaplains serving in this theatre of war under the control of the Army Chaplains' Department and under the direction of Alfred Charles Eustace Jarvis, the newly appointed Principal Chaplain of the Mesopotamia Expeditionary Force. This development, as we shall see, was to have significant implications for the inter-war years. For Jarvis, the temporary transfer of Indian chaplains to the Department presented the possibility of a unified imperial chaplaincy system after the war; it also led him to the conclusion that Indian chaplains were, as a body, notably inferior to their Departmental equivalents. For an ambitious individual such as Jarvis, a former Wesleyan chaplain who had defected to the Church of England in 1908, and who campaigned unsuccessfully to be made a bishop after becoming Chaplain-General in 1925,⁹ the unification of the two chaplaincy systems remained a key if elusive goal throughout his six years as Chaplain-General.

The coming of peace saw the wholesale reorganisation of the Army Chaplains' Department (dignified by a new 'Royal' prefix, in recognition of its performance during the war years) and the prospect of reform also hovered over the Indian Ecclesiastical Establishment. When Lord Esher's committee submitted its report on the future 'administration and organisation of the Army in India' in 1920, it was clear that it had given

⁹ Snape, 2013, p. 156; Snape, 2008, pp. 265-7.

considerable attention to chaplaincy matters, having 'heard a good deal of evidence on the subject from chaplains of various denominations and from others well qualified to offer advice'. With the Government of India considering 'the formation of a Corps of Army Chaplains in India', the report drew attention to the historic deficiencies of the existing system. These included the place of Anglican and Presbyterian chaplains 'on the civil establishment', and its implications for military control; the conflicting demands of a dual ministry to soldiers and civilians, and the pecuniary disadvantages of chaplains of other denominations (whose pay, it was argued, was 'undoubtedly inadequate for whole-time servants of Government attached to troops and who enjoy no leave or pensionary rights'). The guiding principles for reform recommended by the report were 'Equality of treatment for military chaplains of all denominations', as now practised by the War Office in relation to the Royal Army Chaplains' Department; the maintenance of 'an adequate staff of army chaplains to meet the needs of the various denominations', and 'The organization of an Army Chaplains' Department in India to administer the service so created'. The new Indian Army Chaplains' Department would consist of a permanent cadre of chaplains appointed by the Government of India, duly reinforced by members of the Royal Army Chaplains' Department sent out from Great Britain. The number of chaplains assigned by the latter would be a matter for negotiation between the Government of India and the War Office and, 'as in the case of the Royal Army Medical Corps, Royal Engineers &c', they would undertake tours of five years. During their service in India, they would enjoy the perquisites of permanent members of the Indian Army Chaplains' Department and 'would also be eligible for permanent appointment to that department'. The possibility of drawing on the Royal Army Chaplains' Department in this fashion offered the fourfold benefit of flexibility; of procuring chaplains who were already familiar with army work; of meeting the

Department's ambition of gaining access to India (and to the British army's only 'foreign military stations' where it did not hold sway); and, finally, of ensuring that chaplains were of British stock, 'including men from the Dominions'. This was especially important for Roman Catholics, who were still 'mainly served by priests of other nationalities'. In terms of dual ministry, the report stressed that, wherever there was a sufficient number of British troops, 'a whole-time chaplain should be appointed for army work alone'; in smaller cantonments, a dual ministry could continue, subject to funding from civilian government. There was, the report conceded, the knotty and critical problem of rival jurisdictions. If the new Indian Army Chaplains' Department was placed under the Chaplain-General at the War Office, he would be issuing directions to officers of the Government of India and would run a heightened risk of clashing 'with the various ecclesiastical authorities in India'. More preferable, it was thought, was the appointment of a Principal Chaplain to the headquarters of the Indian army. This was in keeping with the historic precedent of appointing Principal Chaplains to expeditionary forces and would enable much closer liaison with senior ecclesiastical figures in India, 'whose spiritual authority would thus be maintained'.¹⁰

As with so many good ideas, this scheme (by far the most imaginative to date in terms of integrating the two main branches of British army chaplaincy) foundered on the shoals of economic realities. Quite apart from any jurisdictional objections it may have raised, the scheme would have required a greatly enlarged Royal Army Chaplains' Department, a practical impossibility in a context of army reductions and massive post-war retrenchment. Instead, the Department and the Establishment simply resumed their parallel ministries,

¹⁰ *Report*, 1920, pp. 99-100.

albeit with a greater sense of shared history and experience (and the latter, rather curiously, now the responsibility of the Indian Department of Commerce).¹¹ Following the First World War, new Establishment chaplains were able to count any previous service incurred with the Department towards pension and promotion, thus confirming a precedent set after the South African War.¹² The practical justification was self-evident, as the work of both Establishment and Department chaplains remained very much geared towards the needs of the British soldier. As Basil Stratton, who joined the Establishment in 1935, put it:

[T]hough part of their duties consists in ministering to Crown servants in India, for the most part a Chaplain's life is bound up with that of the troops, and such has been the case ever since British troops first landed in India. It is probably in this sphere of work that most Chaplains have experienced their greatest happiness and the feeling that their work has been most rewarded.¹³

Similarly, and as William Ashley-Brown, a wartime recruit to the Establishment and by then a Senior Chaplain, elaborated in 1931, like their cousins in the Department chaplains of the Establishment were 'attached to stations not regiments', they were 'generally employed on the same duties in military stations as are the Chaplains of the [Department]', and they were 'liable at any moment to be sent on active service'. Furthermore, when 'accompanying a force on field service, or at manoeuvres or attached to troops at large concentrations', they held a relative rank that depended on their length of service, ranging from that of

¹¹ Saunders, 1926, p. 182.

¹² Ecclesiastical and Educational Letters from Bengal and India, L/PJ/3/185 (1918), 2178
1918, India Office Records; Saunders, 1926, pp. 187-8.

¹³ Stratton, 1947, p. 236.

captain (for those with less than seven years) to that of colonel (for those with sixteen years or more).¹⁴ Although they did not wear rank or uniform in peacetime, when on active service Establishment chaplains 'put on the rank of their seniority with a uniform (tropical) provided by the nearest Army tailor'.¹⁵

However, it must be stressed that the pay and conditions of Establishment chaplains compared very favourably with those of the Department, and still more with the great majority of missionary clergy in India. By 1931, they were 'ordinarily appointed between the ages of 27 and 34', they served '23 years with 20 years' residence in India', and retired on pensions of £480 per annum, alternative settlements being made for invalids. Their pay began at the equivalent of £550 per annum (well in excess of the £419 15s received by the lowest class of commissioned chaplain in the Department), which could eventually rise to £960 a year. Furthermore, in their fifth year of service they became entitled to an extra £180 per annum 'overseas pay', a sum that rose to £300 after their tenth. In addition to generous leave entitlements, which allowed chaplains and their wives four first-class passages home during their period of service, there were other benefits to consider. As William Ashley-Brown averred, 'A Chaplain finds the climate no more intolerable than does a soldier. Station golf and tennis are cheap. In two stations I have had cheap polo and hunting also. And some of the best Chaplains I have known have also been mighty hunters before the Lord'.¹⁶ Significantly, Ashley-Brown's memoirs of his service as an Establishment

¹⁴ Ashley-Brown, 1931, pp. 539-40.

¹⁵ Stratton Papers, 'Questions for Basil Stratton', Museum of Army Chaplaincy.

¹⁶ Ashley-Brown, 1931, p. 540.

chaplain from 1917 to 1937, with their colourful descriptions of garrison life in Deolali, Poona, Aden and Kirkee, are littered with references to his hunting, sporting, Masonic and antiquarian pursuits;¹⁷ similarly, his Indian servants are described with telling indulgence as 'lovable as children are lovable', but 'with a child's unaccountable naughtiness at times'.¹⁸ If prevented by longstanding regulations from 'engaging in direct missionary work',¹⁹ the Indian Church Measure of 1927 (the Church of England's accompaniment to the Indian Church Act) confined the activities of the chaplain still further. Though officiating in government-maintained churches, chaplains were required to obtain their licenses from diocesan bishops of the Church of India, to submit themselves to their 'episcopal supervision', and, except when ministering to government servants or British residents, they were expected to conform to any rites and rubrics that might be adopted by the Church of India.²⁰ For his part, Ashley-Brown insisted that Christian missionaries enjoyed his full 'moral support' and he was sufficiently embarrassed by his own privileged position to visit the Cowley Fathers' missions in Poona and Bombay on a regular basis 'for Retreats and a moral furbishing'.²¹ Still, and given the role and perquisites of Establishment chaplains, there was an inescapable element of competition between government and missionary work. For example, Basil Stratton transferred to the Establishment after serving for three years as a

¹⁷ Ashley-Brown, 1957, pp. 56-141.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 75.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 81.

²⁰ *Indian Church*, 1927, pp. 7-9.

²¹ Ashley-Brown, 1957, p. 119.

missionary of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, in which capacity he had ministered in northern India and had acted as chaplain to the Bishop of Lucknow.²²

In addition to transferees from the mission fields, the advantages of serving British garrisons in India were not lost on those clergymen who were unable to find a place in the inter-war Department. In 1926, and now Chaplain-General, A.C.E. Jarvis disdainfully observed that the Establishment had accepted three unsuccessful applicants for the Department in the past twelve months.²³ More than a decade later, the Methodist minister J.R. Berry found that a similar lack of opportunity pointed the way to India:

I was accepted as a candidate for the ministry in 1935 with the expressed intention of becoming an Army Chaplain. Leaving college in 1938 I was informed that no chaplains were required at that particular moment but it would be a good apprenticeship for me to go out to India as a civilian minister where my work would mostly be amongst the soldiery.²⁴

Significantly, and although not classed as a government servant or enjoying the same privileges as an Establishment chaplain,²⁵ from the outset Berry was treated as a fully functioning part of the Indian chaplaincy system. On his outward voyage Berry was detailed as duty chaplain on board his troopship and, on arrival at Quetta:

²² *Daily Telegraph*, 18 May 2000.

²³ WO 32/4011, The National Archives.

²⁴ J.R. Berry, 'Chaplain in the Raj, 1938-40', Museum of Army Chaplaincy.

²⁵ Saunders, 1926, p. 183.

The military setup accepted me completely as an Army Chaplain and gave me every possible assistance in every way and, as far as I could see, I was a fully-fledged and recognised chaplain except for the fact that I didn't wear uniform and was paid on a different scale.²⁶

Still, given the growing tide of Indian nationalism, and the sympathetic response which this evoked in liberal and left-wing circles in Britain,²⁷ a ministry of this kind proved rather unfashionable in the inter-war years. With resistance to British rule in India growing, in 1924 the Church of Scotland merged its Committee on Indian Churches with its Committee on Colonial Missions in order to form a new, and more anodyne, Committee on the Church Overseas. This development was decried by the last convenor of the Committee on Indian Churches, who took this as a snub to the church's historic chaplaincy work in India and who told the General Assembly:

[This] marks the close of a practice which has lasted for a hundred years, whereby the work of our Church in India for our Scottish countrymen has received separate consideration... Your chaplains in India have prized this recognition of the distinctive nature and importance of their work, and both among the chaplains and in the Committee there is felt a natural regret at the passing of an old arrangement which was worked so well.²⁸

²⁶ J.R. Berry, 'Chaplain in the Raj, 1938-40', Museum of Army Chaplaincy.

²⁷ James, 1997, p. 523.

²⁸ *Reports*, 1924, pp. 907-8; Thomson, 1947, pp. 87-91.

If Baptist and Congregationalist ministers (collectively represented by a common United Board) began to receive payment for their chaplaincy work in India from 1925,²⁹ the political situation in India defied any prospect of achieving equality between chaplains, and especially of meeting longstanding demands for Methodist army ministers in India to be employed on the same terms as chaplains of the Church of England and the Church of Scotland.³⁰

By this time, the Church of England was also showing symptoms of embarrassment, its 'dearth of candidates for the Indian Ecclesiastical Establishment' being duly noted by the Chaplain-General.³¹ In view of their delicate situation, Anglican Establishment chaplains were keen to plead their usefulness in the context of the new and independent Church of India that came into being in 1930, a reflection of the general trajectory of Indian politics and of the growing need to indigenise Indian Anglicanism and its structures.³² Hence, while noting the great sporting opportunities available to the Indian chaplain in the early 1930s, Ashley-Brown was careful to strike a more altruistic note:

²⁹ *Indian Army List*, January 1942, col. 2256.

³⁰ 'Minutes of the Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force Board', March 1925-October 1932, 23 September 1929, p. 248, and 2 December 1929, p. 261; 'Minutes of the Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force Board', November 1932-January 1945, 22 May 1933, p. 50, Methodist Archives and Research Centre; James, 1997, p. 523.

³¹ WO 32/4011, The National Archives.

³² Mallampalli, 2006, p. 427.

At a time when the political situation is difficult the best qualities are needed and we believe are actually evoked... As a rule [the chaplain] makes Indian friendships delightful to himself and valuable to the cause of a better understanding between Englishmen and Indians. But the great charm of his work is his privilege of serving India and the Indian Church in addition to his military duties. All his co-religionists have a right to be regarded as parishioners unless a local mission has a claim on their allegiance... And in the wider interests of the Diocese the Indian Bishop looks to the Chaplains for help in the knotty problems of organization, administration and sustentation... Though a Chaplain of the Establishment is not permitted to engage in active missionary work, to his great happiness he soon finds himself filling a voluntary but indispensable part in the machinery of a Church which has the apostolic faith that seeks to evangelize 'one fifth of the human race.'³³

Here again, Ashley-Brown spoke from experience, having been recruited while at Poona to serve the diocese of Bombay as its Archdeacon and Vicar General. As he remembered, this involved 'the chairmanship of many tiresome committees and boards necessary to the corporate life of an Indian diocese'. Moreover, his 'technical knowledge as a military chaplain' proved useful to Richard Dyke Acland, the first Bishop of Bombay to be appointed under the auspices of the Church of India.³⁴

³³ Ashley-Brown, 1931, p. 540.

³⁴ Ashley-Brown, 1957, p. 113.

However, not everyone saw the new ecclesiastical dispensation in such positive terms. When it seemed to A.C.E. Jarvis as though the army in India might be in thrall to an Indian church that would be (as he claimed in 1926) 'wholly autonomous', 'free to do as it likes', and designed 'to give expression to the development of the ecclesiastical aspirations of the natives of India', the new Chaplain-General moved to press the competing claims of his own Department. In July 1925, when the details of separation were being discussed between the Metropolitan of India and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Jarvis insisted that 'the spiritual oversight of British troops in India should be made to conform with that obtaining everywhere else except in India, and responsibility transferred to the Royal Army Chaplains' Department'. Faced with the possibility that a new Church of India might seek to create a Chaplains' Department of its own, Jarvis argued that:

In our present Unified system of administration (the product of war and post-war experience) we have the cheapest and most efficient system yet evolved for this important service, and to have an independent Military organism operating in India, uncontrolled from here, would be retrograde... With the organization already in existence it would only be necessary to post a Deputy Chaplain-General to Army Headquarters in India –as the representative of the Chaplain-General- and to transfer such serving Chaplains of the Indian Ecclesiastical Establishment as are approved into the Royal Army Chaplains' Department and to supplement by normal methods as we did in Mesopotamia during the War when I was entrusted with the exactly parallel duty.³⁵

³⁵ WO 32/4011, The National Archives.

In a further memorandum, Jarvis estimated that six headquarters chaplains would be required for this purpose, plus a staff of sixty-five chaplains. He also gave a breezy assurance that this would not involve the War Office in any additional expense as 'It is assumed that the Government of India will admit the financial responsibility, whatever it be, as a legitimate charge against the upkeep of the British Army in India'.³⁶

However, Jarvis' proposals were firmly rejected by the War Office. In July 1926, Sir Herbert Creedy, its Permanent Under Secretary, advised the Secretary of State for War:

However much we may think that the best way of looking after the spiritual welfare of the troops in India is to send them Army Chaplains, we cannot compel the Indian Government to adopt that plan. The C.G. would like to extend his jurisdiction to India, but that is, I fear, not practical politics. I have never heard that we exercised any control over Chaplaincy services in India, and in these 'Nationalist' days, we are hardly likely to get it now... I do not see how we can use the Indian Church Bill as an opportunity for insisting on having our own Chaplains in India. We have never had our own Chaplains in India, and India will certainly not pay for them.³⁷

Although Jarvis continued to write lengthy memoranda urging a united chaplaincy system and warning against the dangers of allowing British troops in India to fall under the sway of 'an autocratic autonomous Church', senior figures at the War Office remained sceptical. In

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

November 1926, Creedy wrote once more to the Secretary of State, arguing that the safeguards provided by the Indian Church Bill 'against unwelcome divergencies of faith and practice by the Indian Church' (a threat raised in part by the ecumenical tendencies of many Indian Protestants)³⁸ were 'reasonably sufficient'. Even if they were not, he underlined some basic points that Jarvis seemed determined to ignore: 'We cannot force India to have R.A.Ch.D. Chaplains, for she pays for the British troops in India and refuses to contemplate any additional expenditure on Chaplains specially ministering to the Army'. When, in December 1926, the Secretary of State received further assurances on the continued appointment of Indian chaplains by the Secretary of State for India, and also on the form of worship to be permitted in government-maintained churches, the Chaplain-General's bid to annex the Indian Ecclesiastical Establishment ended in failure. The Indian Church Act passed, unabridged by Jarvis, in 1927.³⁹

It was indicative of the importance of this issue, as it was symptomatic of the Chaplain-General's tenacity, that he returned to the attack some months before the Act took effect on 1 March 1930. By this time it was a question of religion itself standing endangered, for Jarvis now claimed that the existence of the new church threatened the mechanics and tradition of the British army's compulsory church parade. With the great majority of officers and men identifying themselves as Church of England, Jarvis claimed that '73% of the British troops in India will now have no religious body of their own to which we shall be able to compel them to be marched'. This, Jarvis foresaw, would lead to the abandonment of

³⁸ Mallampalli, 2006, pp. 425-6.

³⁹ WO 32/4011, The National Archives.

church parade altogether given the 'large proportion of the British Army' that would be affected. Once again, however, his superiors were unimpressed by Jarvis' reasoning, the Assistant Under Secretary being advised that:

So far as we can see, under the new regime, the C. of E. officer and soldier in India will continue to attend the same form of service which will, most probably, be performed by the same clergyman in the same church. We cannot see, therefore, that they can have any grounds, religious or otherwise, for refusing to attend Divine Service... Our general feeling, therefore, is that unless C.G. has any special reason for thinking that the Government of India does not intend to carry out its obligations to provide proper spiritual ministrations for British troops in India, we should leave matters alone.⁴⁰

Significantly, Jarvis was not the only senior figure in British army chaplaincy to be concerned by the state of chaplaincy in India during the inter-war years and James Dey, who succeeded William Keatinge as the army's Principal Roman Catholic Chaplain and Bishop to the Forces in April 1935, was swiftly alerted to the chronic problems of Catholic chaplaincy in the Indian context.⁴¹ In December 1935, Dey received an anguished memorandum from Bannu in the North-West Frontier Province which deplored the fearful neglect of Catholic soldiers across the subcontinent. Far from repeating the well-worn, if distinctly dubious,

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Johnstone and Hagerty, 1996, p. 193.

wartime cliché of pious Catholic soldiers flocking to the sacraments,⁴² the memorandum claimed that those who performed their Easter duties represented 'somewhere between 5 & 10' per cent of the whole, and ascribed this to the fact that they had been largely abandoned to the care of foreign missionaries:

The British soldier is shy of foreigners, which is one of the reasons of his taking so little interest in his religion. The foreign priests in India are a most zealous body of men, & though they do their best, their primary job is missionary work and ministering to their own congregation.⁴³

However, £20,000 per annum was being spent by the Government of India 'for the services of Catholic Priests to the troops', much of which was clearly being wasted. According to time-honoured practice, these funds were channelled through the Archbishop of Simla, who disbursed them as he saw fit, with a good deal going to India's heavily garrisoned North-West Frontier Province, where the priests involved in army work at least enjoyed 'a regular salary'. The rest was then distributed 'in the form of capitation grants to priests all over India'. In view of the variable provision that was made for Catholic soldiers, Dey's informant argued that 'The obvious remedy is an establishment of English speaking Army chaplains whose sole duty is ministering to the troops'. However, as this was unlikely under prevailing conditions, it was proposed that a 'Deputy Chaplain of the Forces' be appointed to army headquarters in India 'whose job will be the administration of the Budget grant'. This new staff officer should be 'empowered to tour when and where he pleases and could see that,

⁴² Madigan and Snape, 2013, p. 12.

⁴³ Anon. to Dey, 2 December 1935, Box 21: India, 1935-45, R.A.Ch.D. Archive (Roman Catholic).

so far as possible, the soldier gets full value for the money provided for his spiritual needs [and] would be in a position to answer for the whole of India on Catholic Military matters'.⁴⁴

The abiding problems of Catholic chaplaincy were also stressed in a complaint from Secunderabad, a Mrs. Grace Cox writing to Bishop Dey in December 1936:

India... is a missionary country in which the majority of the Catholic Clergy are foreigners. Outside the Archdiocese of Simla which is manned by English Capuchins, the Diocese of Nellore held by Mill Hill Fathers and Bellary Mission, there are no British priests in India except for a few secular priests temporarily attached to foreign missions working right out in the districts... The Belgian, French, Italian, Indian or Spanish priests who are chaplains to our Catholic soldiers frequently speak English with difficulty [and] cannot minister to and have no interest in the men whose spiritual welfare is in their keeping. These chaplains are all paid by Government but are quite unable to do their work. The result is tragic, our soldiers lapse... The Holy Father calls for indigenous clergy to work among the natives, The Anglicans, Methodists etc. can send out Padres to work in Military stations, and we Catholics leave our soldiers in the hands of foreign priests who cannot speak English.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Cox to Dey, 22 November 1936, Box 21: India, 1935-45, R.A.Ch.D. Archive (Roman Catholic).

While Dey could do little to influence governmental or archiepiscopal policy in India, from 1937 he did at least have one ally among the Indian bishops, namely Thomas Roberts, the new Archbishop of Bombay. An English Jesuit, and apparently related to Field Marshal Lord Roberts, arguably the greatest hero of the British Indian army,⁴⁶ in June 1939 Roberts wrote to Dey:

I hope to take an Indian pilgrimage to Rome and England next year. If it comes off, I may get a chance to discuss the whole matter of Army chaplaincies in India. There can be little doubt that the soldiers are not getting a square deal under the present system of foreign priests for our men out here.⁴⁷

Despite its systemic problems, India's system of military chaplaincy once again lurched into action with the Viceroy's controversial declaration of war in September 1939.⁴⁸ As in previous campaigns, the distribution and responsibilities of India's chaplains meant that surprisingly few were mobilised, even when faced with the growing threat of Japan. By January 1942, and of the seventy-one senior, junior and probationary Anglican chaplains in the old presidency of Bengal, only sixteen were serving overseas; of its six Church of Scotland chaplains, only two had been 'Placed under [the] Defence Department'. In the presidency of Madras, where fifteen Anglican chaplains were stationed, only one, a probationer, was serving overseas; similarly, and of four Church of Scotland chaplains, only one had been mobilised. In Bombay the disparity was even more pronounced; of fourteen

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, O'Carroll to Apostolic Delegate, undated.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, Roberts to Dey, 26 June 1939.

⁴⁸ James, 1997, p. 539.

Anglican and four Church of Scotland chaplains, not one had been mobilised.⁴⁹ Among the fifteen full-time Methodist and six United Board ministers committed to army work in India, the situation was the same.⁵⁰ By this time, however, a number of Establishment chaplains had gone to Africa and to the Middle East with the 4th, 5th, 6th, 8th and 10th Indian Divisions,⁵¹ and some at least viewed their departure with envy. For J.R. Berry, who had initially enjoyed his garrison ministry at Quetta, 'the Aldershot of India', the war brought unbearable frustration. The feared Soviet move against Afghanistan proved illusory and the Methodist authorities were unsympathetic to a young minister who had grown tired of kicking his heels on the North-West Frontier. Under A.J. Revnell, Berry's superintendent and secretary of the Methodists' Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force Board of India, a policy of retention was strictly adhered to.⁵²

[Time] dragged on and so did the war so I put in an application to Delhi to be allowed to return to UK and become a proper Army chaplain. This was immediately turned down and I was summarily informed that 'all civilian chaplains will remain in India for the duration of the war'. Quite frankly I was finding life increasingly difficult. Here was I preaching to young conscript soldiers who were with us merely for training purposes before going into

⁴⁹ *Indian Army List*, January 1942, cols. 2252-5.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, col. 2256.

⁵¹ Stratton, 1947, p. 238.

⁵² 'Minutes of the Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force Board', November 1932-January 1945, 20 May 1941, 347-9, Methodist Archives and Research Centre.

battle. Assuring them that God was with them and would go with them while I stayed behind to look after the shop.⁵³

Eventually, the situation got too much for Berry and he resigned in 1940 after an interview with his commanding officer. Following a brief spell as a private in the British army, he was granted a commission in the rapidly expanding Indian army.⁵⁴

Significantly, the limited capacity of the Indian chaplaincy system to sustain overseas operations was illustrated by the fact that no Establishment chaplains appear to have been available to accompany the 9th and 11th Indian Divisions to Malaya; consequently, none were among the dozens of Department, Royal Air Force, Australian and colonial chaplains captured at the fall of Singapore.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, Japan's Asiatic blitzkrieg, which saw the rapid fall of Hong Kong, Malaya, Singapore and Burma, together with 'the great shortage of Chaplains in India' itself, triggered the recall of all Establishment chaplains in May 1942. Back in India, they were reassigned to training establishments in the interior and to Indian divisions on the Burmese border.⁵⁶ Basil Stratton, for example, who had formerly been the senior chaplain of the 10th Indian Division in Iraq, returned to act as the senior chaplain of Ranchi Military Hospital in Bengal.⁵⁷ This policy at least saw a concentration of experience

⁵³ J.R. Berry, 'Chaplain in the Raj, 1938-40'. Museum of Army Chaplaincy.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Lewis Bryan, 1946, pp. 16-18.

⁵⁶ Stratton, 1977, p. 13.

⁵⁷ *Daily Telegraph*, 18 May 2000.

and expertise. In due course, Stratton became Assistant Chaplain-General of Fourteenth Army on its formation in 1943 and, according to his own historical survey of the Indian Ecclesiastical Establishment, 'Every Indian Division in Burma had at least one I.E.E. Chaplain with it.'⁵⁸ However, the wholesale redeployment of Establishment chaplains also resulted in the Department assuming full responsibility for Indian divisions in the Middle East and the Mediterranean. At El Alamein in November 1942, for example, none of the crack 4th Indian Division's eight chaplains (attached to its five artillery regiments and three British battalions) were members of the Establishment.⁵⁹ Furthermore, one of Stratton's successors as senior chaplain of the 10th Indian Division was the wartime radio celebrity Ronald Selby Wright, the BBC's eponymous 'Radio Padre'.⁶⁰

Ironically, the war compelled the Government of India to take a new interest in the nationality of Catholic priests ministering to British soldiers in India, normally as part-time 'officiating' chaplains.⁶¹ Although it had long been a source of complaint in Catholic circles that many of these clergy were foreigners, from a government point of view the alignments and course of the war put the activities of Italian, French, Spanish and even Irish priests in Indian military stations in a more ominous light. In April 1941, the number of Catholic

⁵⁸ *Ibid*; Stratton, 1977, p. 13.

⁵⁹ Hughes Papers, 'Folder 1- Nominal Roll of Chaplains in 8th Army 1942-44', Museum of Army Chaplaincy.

⁶⁰ Snape, 2008, p. 314.

⁶¹ O'Carroll to Coghlan, 13 September 1945, Box 21: India, 1935-45, R.A.Ch.D. Archive (Roman Catholic).

chaplains in receipt of government payments was cut from fifty-seven to forty-seven; at the same time, a list of twenty stations was produced at which the military authorities required 'ministrations to be provided by Roman Catholic Chaplains of British nationality', locations that included Bombay, Calcutta, Madras and Rawalpindi.⁶² To complicate matters, the outbreak of war with Japan was followed by a massive British military build-up in India. Whereas there had been just over 43,000 British troops in India in September 1939, this number had increased sixfold by 1945.⁶³ Inevitably, these troops were accompanied by an influx of Catholic chaplains belonging to the Department, a fact that resulted in a good deal of clerical infighting. As M.J. O'Carroll, the Department's senior Catholic chaplain in India, conceded in September 1945, 'the jurisdiction of the R.A.Ch.D. in India has been in doubt throughout the war and is still in doubt'. In fact, its Catholic chaplains arguably had no jurisdiction whatsoever in India's military stations or over Indian personnel, and technically they were under the authority of their cantonment chaplains regardless of their civilian status or even their nationality.⁶⁴ Furthermore, concerted attempts by Dey and O'Carroll to persuade the Apostolic Delegate in Bangalore to appoint a vicar delegate (namely Archbishop Roberts) to act on behalf of Dey in 'all matters that come within the scope of the Military Ordinariate' proved unavailing.⁶⁵ Consequently, there was considerable friction

⁶² *Ibid*, India Office to Coghlan, 10 April 1941.

⁶³ Roy, 2010, pp. 264-5; Jackson, 2006, p. 363.

⁶⁴ O'Carroll to Coghlan, 13 September 1945, Box 21: India, 1935-45, R.A.Ch.D. Archive (Roman Catholic).

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, Dey to the Apostolic Delegate, 17 April 1943; O'Carroll to Apostolic Delegate, undated.

between India's Catholic cantonment chaplains and their brethren in the Department. In fact, in September 1945 O'Carroll complained that the former were 'doing little or nothing more for troops than permitting them to attend Mass in their Churches and attending to urgent sick calls and funerals'.⁶⁶

For the typical Establishment chaplain, however, wartime ministry was a more gruelling affair, as Stratton was at pains to point out:

But here again it was the Chaplains who remained behind in the Garrison Stations that had a tremendous task set before them. Many of them were nearing retirement and had to stay on in stations swollen to four times their pre-war strength. Populations were shifting and so few had the reward of seeing any result of their labours. They were complimented by Government by being gazetted as Honorary Chaplains to the Forces for life. It was the Chaplains who were mobilised, and had the inestimable privilege of serving continuously with a unit or formation on a campaign that had the easier part to play.⁶⁷

However, and as they were technically the civilian parish clergy of their stations, those Establishment chaplains who were mobilised had little or no formal training for their role on active service; according to pre-war convention, they had simply been welcome to attend training exercises.⁶⁸ However, their extensive experience of ministry in India's peacetime garrisons had at least prepared them for the considerable burden of welfare work among

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, O'Carroll to Coghlan, 13 September 1945.

⁶⁷ Stratton, 1977, p. 13.

⁶⁸ Stratton Papers, 'Questions for Basil Stratton', Museum of Army Chaplaincy.

the British soldiers of the allegedly 'forgotten' Fourteenth Army. Serving with the 20th Indian Division, and attached to the 2nd Border Regiment at Imphal, A.H. Rodgers, a probationary chaplain, wrote in March 1944:

The men have only two topics these days- Repatriation and trouble with their wives. They come to me- I feel it is often just a mere longing to talk of home and their loved ones....

Photographs are passed round- 'That's the boy, Padre- he is 9 years old. This is the girl- I've never seen her' and so on.⁶⁹

However, Rodgers' personal diary also reveals an impressive degree of practical adjustment to the misery and horror of jungle warfare on the part of a formally untrained and supposedly civilian chaplain:

[12 February 1944] This bloody jungle gets you down. Can't see five yards ahead and ticks and leeches don't make things any better... Rained all day- had to build up a ditch to keep it out. The camp is just a pool of mud... Time has no meaning at all and I've held so many services lately I don't know when it's Sunday!

Later, and with the Japanese nearing Imphal, Rodgers found himself in the customary position of the chaplain on the battlefield, that of ministering to the wounded, '[13 March] I'm looking after the R.A.P. [Regimental Aid Post] for the present. Not a pleasant sight. Slept in full kit- boots and all.' Furthermore, and as the Japanese/Indian National Army invasion of India was being fought to a standstill, Rodgers used his Easter services to rouse the spirits of his congregation: 'Shenam. Easter Communion 9 a.m.... many present... Morning service in

⁶⁹ 96/38/1, A.H. Rodgers, Imperial War Museum Department of Documents.

[a] quarry. A fighting sermon altho' I felt anything but martial.' Again, and with reference to the chaplain's task of burying the human detritus of battle, in an undated entry from the battle of Imphal Rodgers wrote: 'Picked up a body today and its brains fell out. Back of the head blown away. Went behind a tree and vomited my guts up.' However, perhaps the most remarkable detail of Miller's diary was his admission to the carrying of arms, a widespread practice among Allied chaplains in South-East Asia and the Pacific despite its illegality under the Geneva Convention: '[28 February] Hazell wanted to know why Fraser and I carried arms! If he trotted about up here like us he would do the same. Life is sweet- who does not agree?' During the fighting around Imphal, Rodgers dispatched a Japanese soldier who jumped him during an ambush and learned the value of different kinds of weaponry, observing on 14 March 1944 that 'grenades are good things in [an] emergency'. However, there was a somewhat lighter side to Rodgers' life on active service, one that underlined his place as an accepted and remarkably well integrated chaplain. On 14 October, and now posted to the divisional artillery resting at Yaripok, Rodgers jotted: 'Party in [Sergeants'] Mess. The usual thing- drink, bawdy songs (with apologies to the padre who fled very soon!) Played Sgts at Darts and the [Regimental Sergeant Major] sang *Smiling Thro'*. Perry did the Boogie Woogie!!' Nor were his spiritual functions neglected amidst a welter of secular bonhomie. On 7 November he wrote: 'Services are going well. Padres [sic] Hour is very popular but I'm afraid we don't talk much Theology... Staff Bunny made me a cross and candlesticks for the church out of Jap shell cases. Really excellent work too.'⁷⁰

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

Nor have we reason to suspect that Rodgers' experience was atypical. Surveying their wartime work, Stratton remarked that 'Of the twenty or so I.E.E. Chaplains who had the honour of being mobilised, nearly half appeared in the Honours and Awards Lists, the names of two Chaplains appearing three times.' Furthermore, Stratton testified to a general receptivity towards the chaplain's ministry that was no less evident among British combat troops in Burma than it was in North Africa, the Mediterranean or Northwest Europe:⁷¹

It was the experience of all of us who had this good fortune that on an actual campaign there is a readiness, and at all times almost an eagerness, for men to listen to the message of the Gospel; everyone seems to go all out to help the Padre, and he seems naturally to assume an assured position in the scheme of things. One experience of the writer will show clearly how much the ministrations of the Church were counted on. In an advance of over twelve hundred miles [in 1944-45] lasting thirteen months, not a single Sunday passed without a little house of God complete with Altar, Sanctuary, roof and seating being erected in the middle of the camp of the Headquarters on which he served, and all done with the greatest good will by men of all ranks.⁷²

Stratton's evident popularity with Fourteenth Army Headquarters, it should be emphasised, was not purchased through the craven compliance so often and so glibly laid at the chaplain's door. In fact, during planning for the seaborne invasion of Malaya, a process that anticipated massive casualties comparable to those sustained in similar operations by the Americans in the Pacific:

⁷¹ Snape, 2005, pp. 134-6; Snape, 2008, pp. 335-9.

⁷² Stratton, 1947, p. 238.

[Stratton] challenged the suggestion that the many casualties expected on the beaches should be bulldozed aside in order to maintain the morale of those who followed. He declared this to be barbaric and said that he would himself land with the first assault to ensure that those who were killed received Christian burial.⁷³

Stratton reached the pinnacle of his chaplaincy career in 1946 on being appointed Chaplain-General of the new Indian Army Chaplains' Department at the nomination of George Hubback, the Anglican Bishop of Calcutta and *ex officio* Metropolitan of India.⁷⁴ Significantly, plans for the new Department had been presented to the Government of India as early as 1943, but it was not until June 1945 that they were realised.⁷⁵ Some of the foundations for the new Department appear to have been laid at Simla, the seat of India's military administration, at an earlier date. According to Stratton's recollections, the equivalent of an Anglican Chaplain-General had been appointed by the Bishop of Calcutta to oversee the posting of Anglican chaplains. When Department chaplains arrived from overseas, as Assistant Chaplain-General of Fourteenth Army Stratton would 'select those he needed' and the 'CG would then post the others'.⁷⁶ By June 1945, however, and as O'Carroll drily observed, the prospects for the new and denominationally unified Department were already terminal: 'Some members of the Hierarchy have seen all kinds of possibilities here,

⁷³ *Daily Telegraph*, 18 May 2000.

⁷⁴ Stratton Papers, 'Questions for Basil Stratton', Museum of Army Chaplaincy .

⁷⁵ O'Carroll to Coghlan, 13 September 1945, Box 21: India, 1935-45, R.A.Ch.D. Archive (Roman Catholic).

⁷⁶ Stratton Papers, 'Questions for Basil Stratton', Museum of Army Chaplaincy.

but unfortunately the I.A.Ch.D. is a purely wartime measure and will cease to exist on general mobilisation at the latest'.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, and before he left India in 1947, Stratton presided over a Department of about 400 uniformed chaplains, around a quarter of whom were members of the Establishment, and who 'seemed to get on amicably' despite being a mixed body of Anglicans, Catholics and Free Churchmen.⁷⁸

Given that the end of British rule in India was imminent, and the redundancy of the Establishment was assured, as India's Chaplain-General Stratton could do little more for its chaplains than to negotiate acceptable terms of release.⁷⁹ In the event, their pensions were guaranteed by the British government and a scale of compensation was laid down that entitled chaplains (along with other 'civil officers appointed by the Secretary of State', such as officers of the Indian Agricultural, Educational, Forest and Veterinary Services) to a lump sum that ranged from £1,875 for five years of service, to a maximum of £6,000 for sixteen.⁸⁰ Furthermore, Frederick Llewelyn Hughes, a protégé of Field Marshal Montgomery's who had been appointed Chaplain-General in November 1944 and who had visited Stratton in

⁷⁷ O'Carroll to Coghlan, 13 September 1945, Box 21: India, 1935-45, R.A.Ch.D. Archive (Roman Catholic).

⁷⁸ Stratton Papers, 'Questions for Basil Stratton', Museum of Army Chaplaincy; *Indian Army List*, October 1944, cols. 2475-9.

⁷⁹ *Daily Telegraph*, 18 May 2000.

⁸⁰ *India*, 1946, pp. 2 and 6.

India,⁸¹ was on hand to throw some of its former chaplains a professional lifeline, in this case by recruiting them for the Royal Army Chaplains' Department. However, and despite their suitability for a Department that was chronically depleted owing to a post-war exodus of experienced clergy, the essential differences between the two chaplaincy systems surfaced once again. Significantly, the main problem confronting Hughes was the civilian status of Establishment chaplains; consequently, he was forced to impress upon the professional bureaucrats of the War Office:

1. I need as many [Church of England] Chaplains on Short Service Commissions as can be got.
2. These Indian 'windfalls' should not be just thrown away.
3. They will not come into my basket until they know-
 - (a) Do they lose their compensation if they take a Short Service Commission? This is a good lump sum for the younger men and they see no sense in losing it.
 - (b) Do they get increment of pay for their I.A.Ch.D. service? If not, they think they can do better elsewhere. I think the R.A.F. has agreed to grant increment of pay.
 - (c) If they eventually obtain a Permanent Regular Commission, will their past service count for pension?
4. If these points can be cleared up the doubters will decide, and I may get some.

Otherwise, this source of supply will vanish.⁸²

⁸¹ Snape, 2008, pp. 306-9; Stratton Papers, 'Questions for Basil Stratton', Museum of Army Chaplaincy.

⁸² WO 32/12315, The National Archives.

Sadly for Hughes, and possibly given the generosity of its chaplains' terms of release, there is no evidence that the end of the Establishment did anything of significance to alleviate the post-war recruitment problems of the Department, its traditional partner and rival.⁸³

In conclusion, the study of British military chaplaincy in India illustrates that the history of British army chaplaincy should in no way be confused with the history of the Royal Army Chaplains' Department. While demonstrating the diversity of chaplaincy provision in an imperial and global context, it also indicates why it has proved convenient for some forms of chaplaincy to be forgotten. In the case of the Indian Ecclesiastical Establishment, its memory flattered neither the interests of post-colonial Indian Christianity nor the historic claims of the Royal Army Chaplains' Department, whose institutional success has proved to be partly that of longevity. As a system of 'formal-civilian' chaplaincy, the Indian chaplaincy system operated at the intersection of a number of ecclesiastical, military and political jurisdictions and, for much of its later history, was both politically sensitive and potentially controversial. Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that it served its primary beneficiary, namely the British army, very well for the most part, leaving to posterity the very term 'padre'. Although small in number, and doomed to extinction with the end of British rule, the chaplains of the British Indian army deserve much greater recognition in the military and religious historiography of British India and in what has become the rapidly expanding historiography of military chaplaincy.

⁸³ Snape, 2008, p. 343.

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