

Preventing the “Neutral” Chaplain?

The Potential Impact of Anti-“Extremism” Policy on Prison Chaplaincy

Andrew J. Todd

To cite this article: Andrew J. Todd (2013) Preventing the “Neutral” Chaplain?, Practical Theology, 6:2, 144-158, DOI: [10.1179/1756073X13Z.0000000006](https://doi.org/10.1179/1756073X13Z.0000000006)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1179/1756073X13Z.0000000006>



Published online: 21 Apr 2015.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 147



View related articles [↗](#)



Citing articles: 2 View citing articles [↗](#)

Preventing the “Neutral” Chaplain? The Potential Impact of Anti-“Extremism” Policy on Prison Chaplaincy

Andrew J. Todd¹

St. Michael’s College
54 Cardiff Road
Llandaff
Cardiff, CF5 2YJ
UK
todday@cf.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

The value and contribution of prison chaplaincy is investigated in seven prisons in England and Wales. The “neutral” chaplain is identified as a key element of the narrative of contemporary chaplaincy co-constructed by chaplains, prisoners and staff. It is argued that the “neutrality” of the chaplain is, in part, aligned with contemporary norms of respecting diversity and offering equality of opportunity. The relationship between the “neutrality” of the prison chaplain and a second public policy frame – preventing “extremism” and “radicalisation” as part of a wider response to terrorism is examined. It is argued that the “Prevent Strategy” is in danger of compromising the perceived “neutrality” of the chaplain, which offers the wrong kind of “security” – confidential “safe” space in which people can be human; rather than the very different desired “safety” of identifying, assessing and minimising the risk of “extremism.”

Keywords: prison, chaplain, multi-faith, pastoral care, neutrality, security, public policy, diversity, equal opportunity, Prevent Agenda, extremism, radicalisation.

Introduction

Prison Chaplaincy in England and Wales has undergone more than a decade of change, which has transformed it from being an Anglican-dominated service, to a multi-faith one. Significant aspects of the change, discussed further below, have included: publication of PSO4550, “The Religion Manual” in 2000; the appointment of a new Chaplain General in 2001, with a brief to help prisons “better meet the needs of a

1. The Revd Dr Andrew Todd is Director of the Cardiff Centre for Chaplaincy Studies, a partnership between St. Michael’s College, Cardiff and Cardiff University.

multi-faith community"; the decision, also in 2001, to appoint full-time Muslim Chaplains;² the appointment of a new Prison Service Chaplaincy Council in 2003; the first ever national conference of 450 chaplains of all faith traditions, also in 2003; and the publication in 2011 of PSI51, "Faith and Pastoral Care for Prisoners" (Ministry of Justice, 2011) to replace PSO4550. This period has seen the development in prisons of multi-faith chaplaincy teams; of multi-faith spaces in addition to historic chapels, including, for example, multi-faith rooms and mosques; and of the multi-faith use of chapels.

Two particular public policy areas have influenced these changes, to different extents. One concerns respect for diversity and the provision of equal opportunity, which includes policy and legislation dating from the 1970s through to the Equality Act 2010.³ The other is focused in the Prevent Strategy,⁴ which is concerned with preventing "violent extremism" and "radicalisation." This paper considers evidence for the impact of both policy areas on the way prison chaplaincy is currently perceived by prisoners, chaplains and other staff. The discussion is rooted in research carried out by the Cardiff Centre for Chaplaincy Studies on behalf of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) into the value and contribution of prison chaplaincy for the lives of prisons and prisoners in England and Wales (Todd and Tipton, 2011). The research involved 48 interviews and five focus groups with prisoners, prison officers, governors and chaplains drawn from a range of world faiths,⁵ in seven prisons in England and Wales. This paper identifies the co-construction of the "neutrality" of the chaplain by these different parties as a positive adaptive response aligned with equal opportunities policy, but as being undermined by policy around preventing "extremism." It

2. The decision to designate Muslim members of prison chaplaincy teams as "Muslim chaplains" (rather than, say, Imam) was taken in 2003 (Gilliat-Ray, 2008: 148–149). This is the current consistent policy, as was confirmed to the author by the current Muslim Faith Advisor to NOMS (National Offender Management Service) in conversation in February 2013. As Gilliat-Ray points out, this has the effect of including Muslim women chaplains on equal terms (2008: 149). It also recognises that the role of Muslim chaplain is wider than that of an Imam. Prisoners and staff, however, do not necessarily follow the policy, and may refer to chaplains as the Imam, as extracts included here demonstrate.

3. Earlier legislation of particular significance for the right to practise one's beliefs includes: the 1976 Race Relations Act; the 1998 Human Rights Act; the 2000 Race Relations (Amendment) Act; the 2003 Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations.

4. See <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/counter-terrorism/review-of-prevent-strategy/> [accessed 25th November 2012].

5. Interviewees were drawn from the following faith traditions or positions: Anglican, Buddhist, Free Church, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Pagan, Quaker, Roman Catholic, Sikh and 'no faith' (Agnostic/Atheist).

is concluded that the latter of these effects of public policy poses a potential serious risk to the distinctive role and identity of prison chaplaincy.

The Construction of "Neutrality"

One of the key findings of the Cardiff Centre for Chaplaincy Studies' research into prison chaplaincy was that prisoners and prison officers both regarded chaplains as "neutral":

...the various roles, contributions and distinctive value of the prison chaplain seems to rest on a widely held perception that they hold a non-prison, independent, neutral status within prisons. The chaplain is not seen as a part of either the prison management or the regime, and is thus perceived as independent of the establishment. They are there to ameliorate the effects of, rather than impose the strictures of, the regime. Chaplaincy as a service within prison is therefore clearly identified as apart from, rather than aligned with, the discourses of control, discipline and punishment that characterize prison, and tend to be the causes of its greatest pains. (Todd and Tipton, 2011: 33)

It is important to note that the data present perceptions; these represent a shared (although also differentiated) contemporary discourse of chaplaincy. This discourse is rooted in prison chaplaincy practice, but exists in critical relationship with particular conditions, actions and experiences of chaplaincy. Thus, for example, the idea that chaplains can be "neutral" or "independent" stands in juxtaposition with the fact that they are paid by NOMS and have responsibility with other staff for the security of the prison in which they work. Nonetheless it was striking how prevalent perceptions of neutrality were amongst those interviewed, especially prisoners and staff (including prison governors). This prevalence suggests that the discourse constructs a distinctive identity for chaplains, which enables them to work both within the system, and in critical relationship to it. This section of the paper maps the dimensions of this extensive discursive identity; it examines the different aspects of interviewees' perceptions which together construct the narrative of the "neutral" chaplain, and which have grown out of the experience of chaplaincy on which they were reflecting with the interviewers.

The idea of neutrality is explored in the following exchange between an interviewer and a prison officer.

Respondent: A lot of women in here have had dealings with social workers and trained counsellors and those experiences are often bad or ended with children being taken away or various judgments made about their mothering skills or problems that have created distress or pain for the women. When it comes to the chaplains the women seem to see them as more neutral; on a kind of neutral ground that many of us, and other "professionals" aren't.

The contrast here between chaplains and other caring professionals is interesting, not least in the fact that the making of judgements about prisoners is imputed to those who are not chaplains. When pushed the officer expressed neutrality as being on the officer's "side," suggesting that the chaplain can be on the "side" of an officer, or of a prisoner, in the sense of "being there" for either or both. In relation to the wider picture presented by the data, the sense is of chaplains offering attention and time to listen.

"Neutrality" extends to chaplaincy space – the chapel or multi-faith room. Here a prison officer expresses this in the context of talking about the use of the chapel for a variety of programmes, including non-religious programmes relating to reducing re-offending: "I think the chaplaincy space is seen as neutral space and that neutrality is valued by both voluntary staff and prisoners." The interviewer probed the idea of neutrality at work here, eliciting the following response:

I think chaplains are seen as being non-prison. Erm, and people that the offenders can confide in without it necessarily being reported back. I don't mean anything wrong that everybody has to report but I mean the fact that they are seen as not uniform and perhaps even perceived as not employed by the prison even though they are.

This perspective evokes a number of the connections to other constructions of the chaplain's role, that expand the picture of "neutrality," including being "non-prison," offering confidentiality, being not in uniform.

The image of the chaplain being "not prison" is expanded by one of the prison governors interviewed: "I value the chaplain as the person sat there who is not uniformed and thus doesn't appear a part of the system. Indeed any system! They are sat there with some degree of independence, I suppose."

Inherent in the idea of the chaplain being "not prison" is the perception that they are different from other prison staff. The strongest contrast presented within the research data, and already alluded to, was between chaplains and prison officers – chaplains are "just not officers." One officer expressed it thus:

Prison officers are not there to put an arm around a crying prisoner; it is not what we are or what we do; it undermines our primary role in prison to ensure safety through the control and discipline of the regime. Let the chaplain be their friend; we can't afford friendships, and certainly can't afford to ever be seen as a "soft touch."

As the research report to NOMS observed:

Although clearly these represent stereotypes of each role, in that there are many officers who counsel and support, and chaplains who control

and discipline; these mythologies of prison officer as the one who controls prisoners and the chaplain as the one who befriends them were commonly drawn on across participant groups, to make sense of each role. They therefore present as important tools for sustaining, shaping and understanding the particularity of each. (Todd and Tipton, 2011: 26)

Chaplains being non-judgemental in comparison with other professionals was noted above. The data suggest that the chaplain's non-judgemental approach is particularly seen in relation to a strong perception that chaplaincy is not about proselytisation. As one prisoner put it, "they don't push God onto anybody." Another prisoner connects this with support given to prisoners: "I think they are not there to enforce their beliefs upon you but to support you as best they can." In brief, humanitarian support is seen to be enabled by chaplains not setting out to convert people. Further, the perception on the part of all concerned was that this represented a change from previous chaplaincy practice. This is articulated by one chaplain: "I think the prison chaplain has changed in that we are no longer here to preach or convert but to help them, to make them happier, to help solve their issues." Whether or not the practice of chaplaincy in this respect has changed over time, the perception of change has the appearance of a strong enabling discourse, reinforcing the perception of chaplains being approachable and willing to listen openly to prisoners' concerns.

As hinted at above, the single most cogent interpretation of the "neutrality" of the chaplain, is that it expresses their ability, while employed by the system, to be independent within it. This can be extrapolated from the difference between chaplains and officers, as one prison officer put it:

The most important role is that [chaplains are] totally independent. You know, obviously there's the security side of it and they might have to report stuff but the fact that prisoners can approach them and talk to them about anything or everything and it is, you know, not someone in black and white that they're talking to.

This contributes to a distinct ambiguity around the location of chaplaincy within the system. The officer just quoted, in a response to the interviewer's question about what chaplains might be independent from, said, "Well, they are kind of in-betweeners." The report to NOMS concluded that chaplains are, to an extent, "counter-cultural" within the system:

We therefore suggest that the distinctiveness of the service chaplaincy provides lies in the fact that it is perceived as dissociated from the discourses of the institution it serves, and as such is considered, and thus valued, as counter-cultural – countering many of the attendant pains of imprisonment... In that sense, the prison chaplain could be viewed as

acting as a counter-cultural agent and tool of the contemporary prison service – employed by, yet in many ways set in opposition to many of its characteristic discourses. This frees the chaplain from being associated with the pain and loss of liberty of imprisonment, allowing them to maintain a unique...position. (Todd and Tipton, 2011: 33)

The key contribution of the construction of chaplaincy as “neutral,” frequently evidenced in interviewees’ responses, is to underpin the way in which chaplains and chaplaincy spaces also represent “safe” locations for prisoners and others, in which they can speak to someone who can be trusted (cf. Liebling (2012: 46–47)), and in which they can “breathe.” This complex of perspectives is captured, to a degree, by a prisoner:

I find that when I am at my lowest ebb or when I have situations that I am not comfortable speaking to the screws or cons about because of trust issues with cons and insensitivity with officers; I always know that there is someone in the chapel I can talk to.

Chaplaincy is an alternative domain, within the prison, but perceived as apart from it; and apart from the rigours of the system and its officers; offering a “safe” space to deal with the impact of “security” on the prison and the prisoner.

Accommodation to the political context

Part of the wider context of chaplaincy’s “neutrality” is the prison service’s response to prisoners’ diversity of belief and their right to express those beliefs (cf. Todd 2011). Beckford has pointed out that as early as the 1990s religious groups were deploying an equal rights argument in relation to communication with government about religious provision in prisons (1999b: 64). And Gilliat-Ray argues that Muslims in Britain pressing for new Muslim chaplaincy posts, “was part of a wider process of capacity building, and the creation of opportunities for greater prosperity, equality, and inclusion” (2008: 151).

This area of policy is now driven by the Equality Act 2010, which identifies religion or belief as a “protected characteristic,” although this act draws together earlier anti-discrimination legislation stretching back to the 1976 Race Relations Act.⁶ The legislation establishes the right of a prisoner (as others) to both manifest their belief, and to change it. This has been translated into practice in the prison context for more than a decade via the documentation which sets out how those rights are to be respected and met, in particular PSO4550, “The Religion Manual,”

6. Nine such characteristics are listed: age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership, and pregnancy and maternity.

published in 2000, and its successor published in 2011, PSI51, "Faith and Pastoral Care for Prisoners" (Ministry of Justice, 2011). Amongst other things, such documentation provides for prisoners' attendance at religious services for an hour each week, the supply of religious artefacts and the meeting of dietary requirements associated with different world faiths. These documents have, in turn, accompanied the development of multi-faith chaplaincy teams and spaces in prisons in England and Wales.

Questions of responding to prisoners' rights were significant within the research data, which therefore provides evidence for current prison service thinking at operational level. As one prison governor put it:

I certainly think servicing the religious and cultural needs of different prisoners, as they require, and offering access to different forms of corporate worship and individual prayer and any other requirements of a religion is absolutely essential. And being a typical busy black and white with policy I believe that it is absolutely important that they deliver exactly what it outlines in the religious manual so that we can tick that box.

That this was a matter of political imperative was articulated by another governor:

[Chaplaincy] might change in the way that it is delivered, but I doubt that too because every prison has a church of some kind and to shut a church or Muslim prayer area in prisons would be political suicide. If prison continues to stand for a reflection of the community then it will continue to have healthcare, a social element such as the gym and social time, proper food and, should you wish, a place to practice your faith. Until we no longer consider practising a faith as a fundamental human right then I can't see a chaplaincy not being there.

This section of the paper argues that the re-framing of prison chaplaincy discussed above is aligned with this area of social policy and its impact on prisons. The emergence of this alignment relates not only to obviously religious provision (detailed in PSI51), but also to the wider humanitarian support offered by chaplaincy. So, whereas chaplains have long exercised a pastoral role, they do so now as multi-faith teams. "Statutory duties" can be and are carried out today by chaplains not only of different Christian denomination, rather than by the Anglican chaplain, but also by chaplains of different world faiths; particularly, for example, where the Co-ordinating (or now Managing)⁷ Chaplain is a Muslim.⁸

7. This reflects a recent change of policy by NOMS, which came into effect in April 2013, by which the post of Co-ordinating Chaplain was replaced by that of Managing Chaplain.

8. "Statutory duties" are laid out in the 1952 Prison Act, which specifies that chaplains are to meet all prisoners received into the prison, and are to visit those held in segregation, or in healthcare units, daily.

The research data confirm that, accompanying such changes in practice a subtle transition in perception is taking place. The language of pastoral care, historically Christian, is being adapted within the multi-faith context. It was used in interviews by Muslim and Jewish chaplains, as well as by Christian ones. And the pastoral role is construed by chaplains as inclusive of all who seek it, and as the responsibility of the whole chaplaincy team. As one Muslim Chaplain put it: "So you've got the pastoral side of it where everybody who comes in, whether they're of any faith or none, they're seen by a chaplain."

This appears to have the effect of deflecting attention away from chaplaincy having previously been dominated by one religious tradition – Anglicanism.⁹ This heritage entered into the research data as occasional caricatures of former, male, Anglican chaplains; associated with bicycle clips and a fondness for beer. Today chaplains are from different faiths and offer pastoral care to those of all beliefs. And this is perceived to be different from older Anglican models, and an improvement on them.

The continued practice of pastoral care has been realigned, therefore, with the secular norms of respect for diversity and non-discrimination. This also emerges in the data as the view, noted above, shared by many respondents, that chaplains do not force their faith, or God, on people; that they are no longer about conversion or judgement. Prisoners and staff implicitly recognise the perceived tension between being religious and being aligned with the secular norm of inclusivity. The strength of this perception that chaplains do not proselytise, and its location within the wider collection of constructions surrounding the "neutrality" of the chaplain, suggest further that chaplains have played a significant role in this re-contextualisation: involving their positive embrace of multi-faith practice; and their commitment to high quality non-judgemental pastoral care, offered in demanding circumstances, and crucially to any who need it, irrespective of their beliefs.

This reframing involves the ambiguity about the chaplain's location within the prison organisation noted above, which is accompanied by a perceived decrease in status (evidenced in the data) from the days in which the chaplain was one of the top three figures in the hierarchy with the governor and the doctor. But it is precisely that "neutral" ambiguity that enables the religious figure of the chaplain to be accommodated and respected in the public institution of the prison, with its driving norms of respecting diversity and providing equal opportunity

9. For work charting the shift from an Anglican dominance, and evaluation of its extent, see the following publications (Beckford and Gilliat, 1998; Beckford, 1999a; 2007; Beckford et al., 2005; Gilliat-Ray, 2008).

for prisoners to practice their beliefs. And this subtle alignment between chaplaincy and public policy is a positive adaptation, conducive to the distinctive contribution of “safe” spaces highlighted above.

“Neutrality” and the Prevent Strategy

How then does the construct of the “neutrality” of the prison chaplain work in relation to the second policy frame, relating to “preventing violent extremism”? This section argues, and demonstrates from current research, that the primary impact of “Prevent” has been on the development of Muslim chaplaincy, leading to its increased involvement in questions of security. However, within the context of multi-faith teams (discussed above) and their corporate responsibility for co-operating with the prison service’s responsibility for contributing to public security, there are secondary implications for chaplains of all faiths. These implications are also shown to be present in the research data and therefore of real significance for the future of prison chaplaincy as a whole, with the potential to reduce chaplaincy’s independence within the prison system.

The features of the wider context that indicate the Prevent Strategy has reshaped Muslim chaplaincy in particular, include evidence of rapid development in this area between 2001, when the decision was taken to appoint the first full-time Muslim chaplain, and 2009, when there were 198 Muslim chaplains of whom 38 were full-time and a number were co-ordinating chaplains (cf. Gilliat-Ray, 2008). That this is not accounted for solely in relation to the equal treatment of Muslim prisoners is indicated by the fact that, whereas 12% of the prisoner population is Muslim, 20% of chaplains are Muslim. Further indications include the development of the NOMS Extremism Unit, from 2007 onwards, which has a specific brief to work with Muslim chaplains, and to enable them to work, not only with Muslim prisoners, but also with the whole staff body, as is seen in a parliamentary answer of 1st September 2009:

As part of the National Offender Management Service’s programme of work to address the risks associated with violent extremism and radicalisation, a series of briefings, written material, and training events have been delivered at both national and local level to a range of operational and non-operational staff working across prisons and probation, including Muslim chaplains... Muslim chaplains, working as part of the prison’s chaplaincy team, work with the entirety of the prison population, including staff, not just with Muslim prisoners, although figures show that as of March 2009 the Muslim population of the prisons estate stood at 9,930. (House of Commons, 1st September 2009: Column 1771W)

These developments contribute, along with the need to respond to religious diversity, to the growth of a new role for chaplaincy, that of faith and diversity advisor. But especially for Muslim chaplains, the result is a particular role in relation to the perceived risk of "extremism" and "radicalisation." Published research offers a positive evaluation of Muslim prison chaplains in this respect. Thus Gilliat-Ray concludes:

Far from inciting radicalism as some have supposed, those pioneering Muslims most deeply involved in chaplaincy tend to have the essential combination of religious knowledge, faithfulness, resourcefulness, and pragmatism, and their work has been shown to be valuable in combating extremism. (2008: 152)¹⁰

This is echoed in the research considered in this paper, as one prisoner's views confirm:

Prisoner: I therefore find that that can be very helpful, particularly in a prison like this and with radicalisation and all that. I mean, if it wasn't for the Imams then I think this prison would be a lot more radical. I mean I have heard the Imam preach that it is wrong to blow people up and confront men who have or would like to do such things who claim to be Muslim. I think that is very important in prisons like this where new men can be led into groups and situations very quickly and a good Imam can provide a different direction. The Imam is very important, especially in dispersal prisons.

Interviewer: Okay, so are you saying that the presence of an Imam actually reduces the possibility of radicalisation?

Prisoner: Without a doubt.

Other published research, however, reveals some traces of more ambivalent attitudes relating to this role of Muslim chaplains. The report of HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2010) on the experience of Muslim prisoners in England and Wales indicates:

The government sees the influence of Muslim chaplains explicitly as a key part of the strategy for minimising extremism in prisons. As the following section on prisoners' views shows, this greater identification with the system had not gone unnoticed by prisoners, and this in turn appeared to limit the effectiveness of chaplains in developing relationships with some prisoners, including those at risk of radicalisation. However, some chaplains themselves felt that they were not trusted by the authorities to address extremism or potential extremism. (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2010: 35)

10. Gilliat-Ray draws on the research of Marranci subsequently published as (Marranci, 2009). Her perspective is in keeping with that of Beckford (2010: 392), although he does not specifically cite the work in prison in his wider evaluation of the way Muslims have contributed to anti-"extremism" work in the UK.

Significantly, the prisoner views referred to in the report indicate that what is compromised is the independence of the Muslim chaplain:

Don't really get on as he is biased – I believe imams are hand picked by the government. Talks are westernised. Information given isn't fully correct. Imam can be a bit funny – scared of getting the sack, sides with officers, he's not independent, linked to staff. (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2010: 36)

Further, against a background of a report which highlights the positive role of chaplaincy at Whitemoor, and a high degree of trust generally between prisoners and chaplains, Liebling records suspicion of some Muslim chaplains from some prisoners, who identified them as "Home Office Imams" and discouraged other prisoners from attending Friday prayers led by these chaplains (Liebling, 2012: 46).

The research on which this paper draws (Todd and Tipton, 2011) expands the picture of how this alignment between chaplaincy and government may have serious consequences for chaplaincy. One of the chaplains interviewed felt that Muslim chaplains were receiving a lot of attention in relation to the "counter-terrorism agenda." She herself was regularly visited by a police intelligence officer, and was happy to report that there was no cause for concern about such issues at the prison where she worked. Her conclusion was that, "I do think that the counter-terrorism agenda has done us no favours."

The complexity of the situation that arises where chaplains contribute to the implementation of the government's Prevent Strategy in prisons, or are perceived to contribute to it, is captured by a particularly significant quote from one of the prison governors interviewed:

The change to the role of the chaplaincy recently has been pushing at the boundary of their role and we have used the chaplaincy team as more a kind of diversity and faith advisors more and more and we are stretching into a world more and more where we use that information to feed into the security world; particularly in this environment we are looking at the searching requirements, inappropriate behaviour, and things that we can monitor.

For example, obviously in terms of the Muslim faith and radicalisation as a topic we are asking the Imams in particular to take on an additional role of offering that advice and the danger with that, and probably the point where we have got to make a judgement is how far they get involved and how their duty to advise us and inform us will negatively impact upon that independent feel of the role which we could lose if we go too far. Allegations thrown back by prisoners, certainly in here, that could neutralise the voice of the Imam is that the challenge that the Imam has become an agent of the State, and they are spies and other analogies that are used to describe government employees and I think this is more a concern at present around the Imams but I think it is relevant to other faiths as well. Losing that neutrality and losing that kind of professional role as

a religious leader is a danger but it is really important for me as a Governor that I get that information and it is important that they are with us on this but I am aware that it is a very fine line that sometimes tips us towards losing the benefits of the role.

The facets of this extract that are particularly relevant to this paper are as follows. First, the governor identifies the emerging chaplaincy role (implicitly shared by all chaplains) of "faith and diversity advisor," but also connects this with the specific question of security. The implication is that religious behaviour may compromise security, and therefore needs to be monitored, with the support of chaplains. Secondly, the governor identifies the more specific role of Muslim chaplains providing information in connection with "radicalisation," confirming its significance at the operational level. Thirdly, there is a recognition that this kind of chaplaincy involvement may affect, and indeed compromise, the chaplain's role. Prisoners may regard chaplains, and Muslim chaplains in particular, as government agents, or as "spies" (cf. Liebling, 2012: 46). Fourthly, the danger to chaplaincy (and, as the governor says, including for chaplains of other faiths than Islam) is that it may lose its "neutrality" (cf. HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2010: 35–36). This articulates clearly the seriousness of this agenda for prisons, including chaplaincy; the need for chaplains to negotiate this area with care; and the perceived risk that to be drawn too far into this political arena will compromise the independence not only of the Muslim chaplain, but of chaplains of all faiths.

Although this remains a worst-case scenario at present, nonetheless, it is clear that a role of monitoring religious and other behaviour of prisoners, in the interests of minimising the risk of "extremism" or "radicalisation," takes chaplaincy in a rather different direction from the role aligned with diversity and equal opportunity policy. The Prevent Strategy may require chaplains not just to show that in their non-judgemental approach they promote an alternative to an "extremist" approach to religion; nor yet just to provide impartial advice to help prison staff understand religion in its complexity; but to become part of the hard edge of current security concerns.

Neutrality, safety and security

It is the argument of this paper that such a role not only offers a challenge to chaplaincy, but is in danger of undermining the role that prison chaplains have developed during the last decade, as they embraced working in multi-faith teams.

That latter chaplaincy role pivots on the provision of high quality humanitarian care for prisoners and staff, articulated by chaplains as multi-faith, inclusive "pastoral care." That core function depends on

a co-constructed narrative of chaplaincy, which enables chaplains to create “safe” spaces, with boundaries of “trust” and “confidentiality.” This is perceived to be a “neutral” space in which chaplains can give due regard to the humanity of the prisoner (or staff member), because they have negotiated a degree of “independence” within the system. This enables them to be “on the side” of the person who seeks their support, whoever they are. It further enables chaplains of different faiths to exercise a pastoral role which they can root in their own faith tradition and sense of vocation, even if that is less visible to others; under-emphasised as part of the construction of a further narrative strand which is about chaplains not imposing their faith on others. Such an understanding of the chaplain’s role is accommodated to expectations of offering care to those of all beliefs, and it is accompanied by the more obviously “religious” provision of opportunities and resources to enable those of different faiths to practise their beliefs.

Crucially however, the role, and especially the humanitarian core function, depends on the ambiguity of the chaplain’s position within the prison hierarchy, and on the critical distance between the chaplain and other prison employees. As expressed by interviewees, the chaplain has a different relation to security policy than the prison officer. For the latter, security is a primary concern; for the former, security is an aspect of ensuring that prisons are places where people’s humanity is safeguarded. Correspondingly, chaplains may be seen as something of a security risk, because they are closer to prisoners than other staff (Todd and Tipton, 2011: 34). Indeed it might be suggested that in creating “safe” spaces in which people can be human (rather than, for example, being identified by their offence) chaplaincy offers an alternative, counter-cultural kind of “security.”

The other role discussed above, in which the chaplain becomes a monitor of religious or other behaviour which might be identified as “extremism,” or as having the potential for promoting “radicalisation,” clearly cuts across the major narrative of the chaplain as “neutral.” If such a role were to become more prominent, it would align chaplains much more closely with the prison service’s, and government’s, understanding of security, and would undermine the trust that is vital to chaplains offering alternative safe spaces. This danger is recognised by the governor quoted. That such a trajectory is possible, or even likely, is underlined by Beckford’s judgement about the way in which religion is currently recruited by government:

In short, the shift in British policy since 2001 has been from a multicultural celebration of diversity for its own sake to a determination to harness diversity to the tasks of stemming violent extremism and of cementing social cohesion. This comes close to being a form of *state corporatism*, that

is, a close partnership between state and faith communities by means of which the state tries to co-opt the leaders of religious and ethnic communities in return for enhancing their legitimacy. (Beckford, 2010: 393)

What might be lost for prison chaplaincy in the process is captured in the following extract from an interview with a prison officer:

I often think of [the prison chaplain] as the ears of the prison. You know, the part of the prison that is more or less purely there to listen to, rather than watch prisoners. I think we are the eyes and the hands, the governors the brain but the chaplains – they are the ears.

The implication is that eyes and hands control and constrain, whereas the chaplain's ears offer non-judgemental support. The more chaplains are required to monitor behaviour, as part of the outworking of the Prevent Strategy, the more their gaze will be directed at prisoners not so much as human beings, but as potential threats to security; and their ears will be less trusted.

Bibliography

- Barker, E. (ed.) 2008. *The Centrality of Religion in Social Life: Essays in honour of James A. Beckford*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Beckford, J. 1999a. "Rational Choice Theory and prison chaplaincy: the chaplain's dilemma." *British Journal of Sociology* 50(4): 671–685. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/000713199358590>
- Beckford, J. 1999b. "The Management of Religious Diversity in England and Wales with Special Reference to Prison Chaplaincy." *International Journal on Multicultural Societies (IJMS)* 1(2): 55–66.
- Beckford, J. 2007. "Prison Chaplaincy in England and Wales: from Anglican brokerage to a multi-faith approach." In Koenig and de Guchteneire, 2007: 267–282.
- Beckford, J. 2010. "The Uses of Religion in Public Institutions: The Case of Prisons." In Molendijk et al., 2010: 381–401.
- Beckford, J. and Gilliat, S. 1998. *Religion in Prison: Equal Rites in Multi-Faith Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511520815>
- Beckford, J., Joly, D. and Khosrokhavar, F. 2005. *Muslims in Prison: challenge and change in Britain and France*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/9780230501300>
- Gilliat-Ray, S. 2008. "From 'Visiting Minister' to 'Muslim Chaplain': The growth of Muslim chaplaincy in Britain, 1970–2007." In Barker, 2008: 145–157.
- Koenig, M. and de Guchteneire, P. (eds.) 2007. *Democracy and Human Rights in Multicultural Societies*. Aldershot/Burlington VT: Ashgate.
- HM Chief Inspector of Prisons. 2010. "Muslim prisoners' experiences: A thematic review." Available at: <http://socialwelfare.bl.uk/subject-areas/services-client-groups/adult-offenders/hminspectorateofprisons/muslim10.aspx>. [Accessed 23rd February 2013.]
- Liebling, A. 2012. "An exploration of staff-prisoner relationships at HMP Whitemoor: 12 Years On." Ministry of Justice. Available at: <http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/research-and-analysis/moj/an-exploration-of-staff-prisoner-relationships-at-hmp-whitemoor-12-years-on>. [Accessed 30th November 2012.]

- Marranci, G. 2009. *Faith, Ideology and Fear: Muslim Identities Within and Beyond Prisons*. London and New York: Continuum Books.
- Ministry of Justice. 2011. "Faith and Pastoral Care for Prisoners." National Offender Management Service, PSI 51/2011. <http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/offenders/psipso/psi-2011/psi-51-2011-faith-pastoralcare.doc> [Accessed 14th April 2013.]
- Molendijk, A., Beaumont, J. and Jedan, C. (eds.) 2010. *Exploring the Postsecular: The Religious, the Political and the Urban*. Leiden/Boston MA: Brill.
- Threlfall-Holmes, M. and Newitt, M. (eds.), *Being a Chaplain*. London: SPCK.
- Todd, A. 2011. "Responding to Diversity: Chaplaincy in a Multi-Faith Context." In Threlfall-Holmes and Newitt, 2011: 89–102
- Todd, A. and Tipton, L. 2011. "The Role and Contribution of a Multi-Faith Prison Chaplaincy to the Contemporary Prison Service." Report to the National Offender Management Service. Available at: <http://www.stmichaels.ac.uk/chaplaincy-studies-research-activity.php>.