FROM ARMAGEDDON TO BABYLON.

A sociological-religious studies analysis of the decline of the Protestant prison chaplain as an institution with particular reference to the British and New South Wales prisons from the penitentiary to the present time.

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by

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PROLEGOMENA

The reader will note that the language in this thesis, used to denote both the prisoner and the chaplain, is male gender specific, whereas references to clergy ministering within parish settings use the inclusive term ‘clergyperson’. Justification of the use of gender specific language for prisoners and chaplains is required.

The justification, with regard to the prisoner, is as follows. Firstly, a substantial part of the thesis examines the separate system of prisons, in which only males were incarcerated. In more recent historical periods, the thesis examines purpose built maximum security prisons which incarcerate males. The prison population investigated in this thesis is male.

It should not be inferred from the above that women prisoners (and indeed juveniles in detention centres) are considered to be in some way incidental to studies of imprisonment: quite the contrary. The issues associated with the imprisonment of women are extensive and complex. This author is of the opinion that the topic of women in prisons, because of its very complexity, warrants extensive and thorough research. This research has not been attempted in this thesis, which has as its focus the decline of the prison chaplain in the context of male prisons from the separate system to the present day.

The justification with regard to chaplains is as follows. In most of the period under consideration in this thesis, there were no female clergy. The ordination of women is
generally a phenomenon of the third quarter of the twentieth century, and only among some Protestant denominations. At the time of submission of this thesis, the author was aware of no appointment of an ordained woman to the position of chaplain in a male maximum security prison. This situation could, and in the opinion of this author, should, change in the future. However, at the time of submission, the prison chaplains under consideration were male.

Justification is also required for the assumption, implicit in this thesis, that the prison will continue into the future. Justification is indicated, given that the prison has attracted such regular and trenchant criticism for its failure to reform and rehabilitate prisoners and to reduce recidivism (Garland, 1990; 6, 288). This has been the case since the early operations of the penitentiary. It is noted that the much less ambitious goal of ‘risk management’ is now being substituted in some prisons (New South Wales Department of Corrective Services Corporate Plan 2001-2004; 6). Risk management is the targeting of ‘high risk individuals’ for specialised ‘rehabilitative’ programs, within an essentially retributive prison (Garland, 2001; 8, 176). In essence, risk management retains a rhetoric of rehabilitation, but substitutes for the all encompassing, prison wide ideology of rehabilitation, a specifically focussed program for selected individuals.

To justify the assumption of continuance of the contemporary prison into the future, it is salutary to refer to the contributions of David Garland. Garland’s enormous undertaking has been to evaluate and re-conceptualise the sociology of punishment, of which the maximum security prison is but one aspect. Garland argues for punishment to be
considered ‘as a social institution’. This view he contrasts with the what he considers to be the too narrow view of technical penology (Garland, 1990; 277), and the reductionist view of any one particular theoretical perspective on punishment, especially views derived from global theories, such as those of Marxism. Garland advocates a pluralistic, synthesizing approach with regard to the sociology of punishment. Considering the prison from this broad social institution perspective is, in Garland’s opinion, the way to understand how an institution ‘so riven with contradiction, with failure, and self-defeating policies’, manages to survive (Garland, 1990; 277). For Garland, while the prison fails with regard to its more exalted aims of rehabilitation, it succeeds with regard to containing troublesome, or ‘high risk’ individuals. For this ‘success’, the community and government are willing to bear the associated financial and other costs of the frequent use of incarceration. This desire to incarcerate has become ‘an established element in public beliefs, institutional frameworks and social traditions” (Garland, 1990; 290-291). Garland hopes that his ‘punishment as a social institution’ approach, the ‘single master image’ as he terms it (Garland, 1990; 282), may help to challenge and temper some of these taken for granted views. This is debatable, particularly when the experiences of Tony Vinson, Chairperson of the then Corrective Services Commission, are taken into account. Vinson spent several turbulent years at the pinnacle of the command and control structure of the penal system in New South Wales. Vinson was endeavouring to bring about reform, particularly with regard to the prisons. Vinson’s attempts at reform were frustrated. ‘The prison officer’s union was the biggest obstacle preventing us from getting on with the job’ Vinson commented (Vinson, 1981; 55). Vinson’s frustrations produced his resignation, and his book, Wilful Obstruction. These
issues are complex and beyond the scope of this thesis: for its purposes, Garland’s analysis of punishment as a social institution is considered to provide a sound base for the assumption of the continuance of the contemporary prison, an institution which, as Garland notes, has a long history of transforming itself and its operations (Garland, 2001; 14).
PREFACE.

Prisons have been a both a curiosity and an interest of mine at various times in my life. On occasions in my childhood I drove with my parents past the prison at Long Bay, in Sydney, New South Wales. It was a frightening, but fascinating place. My gaze was fixed on the grounds of the prison, both hoping and fearing to sight an escapee.

Later, as a tertiary social work student with an interest in the concept of social control, my thoughts were sometimes focused on the prison. However, it was not until the early part of 1993 that I actually entered a prison. I was then in the final year of my ordinand studies. I had elected, in one of the Field Education components of my studies, to spend time in the Chaplaincy Department of the Long Bay prison in Sydney. The experience was a very significant one in that it was to raise difficult, but fascinating questions for me about the role of religion and the clergy in the prison.

During my placement at Long Bay I observed much which strongly suggested that religion and the clergy (chaplains) occupy a peripheral place in the prison system. I was also puzzled by the role of the chaplains, and here I refer to the Protestant chaplains, the only chaplains with whom I had contact. From the perspective of one trained in both social work and theology, it seemed to me that the chaplains were performing many of the same tasks, which one would expect to be performed by the prison welfare staff. In
fact it was with difficulty that I could identify anything distinctively 'religious' in the role of the chaplain who, it seemed to me, functioned as something of a quasi welfare professional. It was also very apparent to me that the chaplains had a low profile in the prison; at Long Bay even the chaplaincy offices were outside the prison walls. The chaplains were like exiles, an image which stayed with me long after my placement in the prison had ended. These observations presented a stark contrast to the centrality of religion and the chaplain in the penitentiary, the fledgling prison of the nineteenth century.

The chapels in the contemporary prisons, some of which I had seen photographs of, were curiosities. The very prominence and size of the chapel in many of the prisons, both in New South Wales and Britain, many of which were built in the nineteenth century, symbolised the decline of religion from its position of centrality. Religion's function in the contemporary operations and theoretical underpinnings of the prison is marginal by comparison with the penitentiary. The prison chapel is now curiously anachronistic, being used extensively for secular purposes, such as the screening of movies, the holding of various meetings, and sometimes for sports. The liturgical and sacramental functions to which the chapels were dedicated are all but absent, at least for the Protestant chaplains.

As an ordinand on placement in the prison, I was particularly interested in the work of the chaplain. The wider church has not been as convinced about the value of the ministry of the chaplain as compared with the value of the ministry of the parish minister. Some
chaplaincy areas create unrest in the church. For instance, military chaplains have been seen by the pacifist elements of the church as acting contrary to what they, the pacifists, believe to be an essential mission of the church, namely the promotion of peace. This, albeit small, section of the church holds the view that the church should have nothing to do with the military. "Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition" is a well-known phrase, which expresses the disapproval directed at military chaplains. The lesser emphasis of the church toward chaplains is typified by the actions of the church hierarchy when funding becomes problematic, as it often has been in recent times of declining congregations and finances. The chaplaincies are always very prominent in considerations for funding cuts, unless they are chaplaincies, which are totally subsidised by the state, as is the case with the military chaplain, or heavily subsidised by the state, as is the case with the prison chaplain.

Chaplains also have their secular critics. These critics have questioned the role and function of the chaplain. Hospital chaplains, while they are almost universally accepted by the church, and are in fact funded by the church, have been involved in controversy with secular professionals within some hospitals. These controversies were essentially demarcation disputes, disputes such as the chaplain having a permanent presence, rather than a referral role, in the Accident and Emergency room. I was informed that just such a dispute arose with the social workers at Westmead Hospital, a large teaching hospital in Sydney. The social workers saw the chaplains as encroaching on their professional territory and regarded them as moving outside what was seen as their traditional and legitimate denominational 'religious' role of ministering to practising church members.
This is a big issue for the chaplain, as the adherents of the mainstream Christian denominations are shrinking in number and hence the denominational and religious role is also shrinking.

Prison chaplains were persons of authority and influence at the inception of the modern prison system. By contrast, the contemporary prison chaplain is peripheral to the prison, as well as being peripheral to the church when compared to the parish minister. The chaplain is operating in the prison because the state subsidises the position: it is likely that there would be a significant reduction in the numbers of chaplains were their positions to be reliant on church funding alone. The prison chaplain is a lesser-known clergy of the church. Few parishioners would know the person or work of the prison chaplain. In the journal of the Australian Health and Welfare Chaplains Association, Theology and Society, I have not seen an article about prison chaplaincy, the focus of this journal being heavily skewed toward hospital and health chaplaincy.

Of the traditional, established chaplaincies, the prison chaplain seems to vie with the military chaplain for being the most marginal to the church. This, however, has not always been the case. In the mid-nineteenth century some of the prison chaplains were public figures who were looked to for their opinions about prisons and crime policy. Why is the prison chaplain now so marginal to the prison, and why has there been such a decline from the central position he once occupied? What were the major factors contributing to this decline? How could I approach the study of the decline of the prison
chaplain? These were tantalizing questions. Being preoccupied with other studies at that time, I could not immediately seek answers to these and other questions, tantalizing though they were.

My curiosity about prisons and prison chaplains was aroused again in 1996, when I re-read an article by the noted scholar of the prison, Michael Ignatieff, in Stanley Cohen and Andrew Scull's book, *Social Control and the State*. In his article Ignatieff briefly noted that there were many aspects of the institution of the prison, which are yet to be the subject of thorough research. One such area he suggested as needing research was the decline of the prison chaplain. A literature search was all that was needed to confirm that there was a dearth of scholarly writing on prison chaplaincy. Most important however, and most encouraging for me, was the fact that a scholar of Ignatieff's standing advocated the value of researching an area in which I, as an ordained minister, have a personal and professional interest. Ignatieff did not elaborate on why he thought that the decline of the prison chaplain was a potentially fruitful and/or useful area of research. While I regarded this as somewhat unfortunate, my curiosity had been aroused to the point where I decided that I would pursue this area of research.

My thinking about the prisons had been influenced by both secular and religious thought. In particular, I had been influenced by powerful religious imagery, especially that contained in the stories, parables and metaphors of the religious literature. These stories, parables, and metaphors, drawn particularly from the Bible, have influenced people throughout the centuries in areas such as art, poetry, literature and cinematography, as
well as the traditional ecclesiastical disciplines. For instance, the theologian Volf made superb use of the metaphor of, 'theology as the queen of the sciences', when he analysed the marginalisation of theology in contemporary times. It has been the 'little stories' of religion, to use Brueggemann's term, that have had a deep influence on me, rather than the grand narratives of theologians.

There is also some use of metaphor, religious and secular, in research in the social sciences. It is here that I am indebted again to Michael Ignatieff, who has used metaphor both perceptively and imaginatively in his book entitled The Needs of Strangers. In this book Ignatieff has used metaphors to help drive his social research. In particular, the metaphors constructed from the mad scene of Shakespeare's King Lear guide his analysis of the welfare state. While metaphor has been used extensively and successfully in religious writings for many years, it was encouraging to see the application of metaphor by Ignatieff in social science.

As will be discussed in detail in Chapter One, which deals with methodology, metaphor has its limitations in social investigation. Scholars in this field make no claim for the exactness of metaphor with regard to the entailments of the topic term (principal subject) and the vehicle term (subsidiary subject). For instance, Sallie McFague, a scholar whose work is relied upon in this thesis, writes of the ‘is’ and the ‘is not’ of metaphor. There is always a tension present in metaphor between the topic term and the vehicle term. Inevitably, metaphor as a mode of enquiry will highlight some aspects of a topic while neglecting others. Metaphor shares this with other modes of enquiry. For instance, David
Garland, in commenting on the various modes of enquiry in the sociology of punishment (based around the writers such as Marx, Durkheim and Foucault) states; ‘Each mode of enquiry sets up a particular image of punishment, defining it in a particular way, highlighting some aspects, while inevitably obscuring or neglecting others’ (Garland, 1990; 13). Frank Ankersmit’s commentary on metaphor, referred to in this thesis, makes it clear that the function of metaphor is not exactness, but rather the opening up of new perspectives on a given topic (Ankersmit, 1994; 158): Garland’s superb, summarizing metaphor, of the infliction of punishment by the state upon its citizens as ‘a civil war in minature’, is a good example.

As outlined in Chapter One, following McFague, metaphor is not, and can not, be used as the sole tool for analysis of the institutional domain of the prison. Garland makes clear in his review of the theories grouped within the sociology of punishment, that no one mode of enquiry is sufficient to give a thorough account of punishment, when punishment is viewed as a social institution (Garland, 1990; 279). McFague notes that metaphors are primary level images that need to be grounded, otherwise the analysis ‘wanders in a land of images that, while rich, is chaotic and unilluminated’ (McFague, 1983; 121). To once again cite Ankersmit, among numerous scholars advocating the same point, metaphors are used to open new perspectives.

It is noted that the production of and analysis based upon metaphor can be criticised as being a personalized cogitative process. This is true in the sense of the bringing into being of a novel metaphor, otherwise the metaphor would not be novel and, it could be
argued, would have little capacity to produce new insights. Scholars in the field readily acknowledge this. However, when a metaphor is grounded, or illuminated, to use McFague’s terms, the metaphor enters the public domain and is open to criticism, as with any other mode of enquiry. While acknowledging its limitations, this thesis will use metaphor to open new perspectives on the functions of the Protestant prison chaplain.

Religious writing and imagery have complemented social work education and practice in my personal formation, as well as being influential in my understandings of the world. I therefore determined that their use would be important in any investigation of the prison chaplain, which I was becoming committed to pursue, and that in a formal manner. After further consideration, I decided that, rather than following a conventional path, I would look to religious resources to provide the means of structuring my investigation of the prison chaplain. It seemed very reasonable that some religious concepts could assist in shedding light on the investigation of a religious institution, the chaplaincy. As well, my thinking around my experiences of the prison had already begun to offer some promising concepts by way of metaphor. While the ecclesiastical disciplines I have studied were of little benefit for what I had in mind, particularly the systematic material, "those tedious books that clutter the shelves and minds of ordinands", as the theologian Timothy Radcliffe commented, there were fragments in the literature that were certainly of value. This is a view that some ecclesiastical and religious studies scholars are adopting; that the ecclesiastical disciplines cannot provide a method of social analysis, but can make contributions by way of fragments such as metaphor, if social science practitioners are open to these inputs.
In Hans-Georg Gadamer's terms, my religious education and formation provides, along with my formal training and experiences in social work, much of the pretext I bring to social investigation. Both disciplines would inform my understandings as I investigated the decline of the prison chaplain. So, too, would my experiences in the prison during my ordinand studies. These were very valuable because there is so little written material, of a critical nature, featuring the chaplain of the modern prison.

My desire to investigate this topic finally enticed me toward my present studies at the University of Sydney. My hope is that the thesis will encourage much needed debate in the neglected area of the ministry of the chaplain in public institutions, particularly the prison.
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