

Spiritual and Patriotic Duty: Understanding Why Anglican Clergy Enlisted As Chaplains in World War II

TOM HAMILTON

On 10 September 1939, Canada threw herself into a global conflict known as the Second World War. Throughout the following six years of battle, Canada's newspaper, magazine, and radio journalists almost exclusively reported battles, speculated on military strategy and discussed the personalities and abilities of Allied politicians and military leaders. Since World War II historians have analysed the battles and critiqued the leaders of this crucial era. However, both the journalists (in the Second World War), and the historians (since World War II) have failed to comment adequately on the military personnel who brought the Christian religion to Canada's fighting men and women in World War II.¹

An important, and often neglected, aspect of Canada's war effort was the contribution of the Canadian chaplains (Protestant and Roman Catholic) who ministered to the military personnel of Canada's Army, Navy and Air Force during the Second World War. Beginning with the first troops sent overseas in 1939, to the last returning unit in 1946, Canadian chaplains accompanied and served Canada's military personnel wherever they were ordered to fight. These chaplains were classified according to three different designations – Roman Catholic, The Church of England in Canada (Anglicans) and or Other Denominations (OD). Most Canadian Protestant chaplains were chosen from the four largest denominations in the Dominion – The United Church of Canada, The

Church of England in Canada (Anglicans), The Presbyterian Church in Canada, and Baptists in Canada;² chaplains were also chosen from a few of the smaller Canadian Protestant denominations. The few Jewish Rabbis who ministered as chaplains were included in the Protestant chaplaincy.

One fascinating aspect of the Canadian chaplaincy in the Second World War concerns understanding why Anglican clergy enlisted as chaplains. Most Anglican clergy joined the chaplaincy because of nationalistic and not spiritual or religious factors. However, because these ministers were serving the military in a religious role it is important that their religious beliefs be understood. Furthermore, for many of these clergy, the nationalistic, or patriotic, reasons why they became chaplains have remarkable similarities to their religious beliefs. These similarities are evident following a thorough examination of Anglican chaplains' religious beliefs and their nationalistic reasons for enlistment. Before proceeding with this study a few comments concerning methodology are in order.

The methodology for this study is based mostly on primary research, comprised of thirteen "personal interviews" and fourteen "mailed questionnaires." The questions used in the "personal interviews" and "mailed questionnaires" were identical. While 27 chaplains is only a small part of the more than 228 Anglican chaplains who served Canada's army, air force and navy in World War II, these 27 chaplains are an important historical source because they represent all three branches of the military, including various ranks and locations of service. Concerning secondary sources, a few articles in the magazine, *The Canadian Churchman*, published during the Second World War for Canadian Anglicans, were helpful. There were several limitations inhibiting research on this topic. Firstly, there is the obvious limitation that many of the chaplains who served in the Second World War have died. Secondly, there are very few books that discuss Canadian Protestant chaplains in World War II. The histories and writings that do exist are either institutional histories³ or anecdotal narratives.⁴ While interesting, these writings fail to provide much historiographical insight concerning the enlistment of chaplains in World War II.

This study is one aspect of my thesis entitled, "The Military's Conscience: A Study Of The Canadian Protestant Chaplains Who Served In World War II," recently completed as part of a Master of Divinity degree, under the patient and insightful supervision of Dr. Ian Rennie at Ontario Theological Seminary. In addition to Dr. Rennie I am indebted to Dr. Airhart of Emmanuel College, and Dr. Hayes of Wycliffe College who

oversaw independent graduate research of the United Church and Anglican chaplains in World War II. In my thesis I examined the work of United Church, Anglican, Baptist and Presbyterian chaplains.

The Religious Beliefs of Anglican Chaplains in World War II

Anglican chaplains identified their religious beliefs as liberal, anglo-catholic, traditional, and evangelical. This section will explain how the chaplains' religious beliefs were determined. Then they will be summarized and defined.

To determine the religious beliefs of Anglican chaplains who served in World War II, chaplains interviewed and surveyed by mailed questionnaire were asked the following question.

15. What most closely identifies your theological belief upon entering the war? (please circle one)
- a) liberal
 - b) neo-orthodox
 - c) anglo-catholic
 - d) traditional
 - e) evangelical
 - f) fundamentalist

Briefly explain your definition of the choice you circled.

Table I is a summary of the answers given to question 15.

Table I. The Theological/Religious Beliefs of Anglican Chaplains in World War II

Theological Belief	Total	Questionnaires	Interviews
a) liberal	3	2	1
b) neo-orthodox	0	-	-
c) anglo-catholic	9	4	5
d) traditional	9	6	3
e) evangelical	5	1	4
f) fundamentalist	0	-	-

Table I indicates that the religious beliefs of Anglican chaplains in World War II may be summarized according to four categories of classification: liberal, anglo-catholic, traditional and evangelical. I made it clear to the chaplains interviewed that liberal was to be understood as liberal / modernist.

The liberal category is somewhat of an anachronism and should be minimized; while liberal elements existed within the religious thinking of some Anglican chaplains it was not a prominent standard of Anglican belief. Because only three chaplains (Bishop, Ongley and Candy) chose liberal as their religious belief, it is doubtful whether this view was widespread amongst Anglican chaplains. Furthermore, two of the three chaplains displayed some skepticism and uncertainty in choosing liberal as their religious belief at the beginning of the war. For instance, Padre Bishop's questionnaire was completed by his wife (due to her husband's illness) and, unsure of her husband's religious belief during World War II, she circled liberal and then placed a question mark beside her response (this was the only questionnaire completed by someone other than the chaplain to whom it was addressed). As well, Padre Ongley circled liberal and instead of explaining his choice simply wrote, "whatever that means." Thirdly, when Padre Candy was asked to state his religious belief he replied, "liberal" and then quoted a few lines from Bob McClure – a former United Church missionary to China with liberal religious views – suggesting that the liberal religious beliefs typical of the United Church had a profound influence on his own religious views.

Before proceeding further several words of caution should be noted. Firstly, absolute conclusions should not be drawn from the previous table because this sampling represents only a small percentage of the total number of Anglican chaplains who served in World War II. Secondly, when the questionnaires were completed, some chaplains circled more than one answer (although their written definitions classified them into one of the three remaining categories). This second point illustrates the difficult process of categorizing chaplains' religious beliefs, and is a reminder that these categories must not be superimposed upon every chaplain. It must be understood that each chaplain may not fit exactly into the definition of one category. In fact, such descriptions as Padre Doidge's "High Church Evangelical" are particularly frustrating for the historian. However, when the chaplains' responses are examined collectively, tentative categories may be created. Thirdly, in order for the historian to create accurate

definitions for each category, chaplains are compelled to try to remember what they believed some fifty years ago. Thus, each category is defined on the basis of a projection many years backward into the past and not on a present reality. For some of the chaplains with alert minds this was not a problem; however, for others travelling back in their minds to the Second World War was an arduous task. Furthermore, over the years the religious beliefs of some chaplains may have altered, without their being aware of the change. Despite all of these shortcomings and cautions, classifying Anglican chaplains into definable categories is possible, and greatly enhances the historical understanding of this subject.

The religious beliefs of Anglican chaplains in World War II may be regarded as anglo-catholic, traditional and evangelical. With the anglo-catholic classification, this group defined itself according to the common beliefs held by Anglican chaplains who shared "High Church" values. Anglo-Catholic chaplains agreed on two principles of belief: adherence to High Church creeds and practices, and obedience to duty and order. Almost without exception, when asked to define anglo-catholic, both principles of belief were given (on a few questionnaires the explanation section was left blank). For instance, Padre Caulfield defined anglo-catholic by stating, "a strong conviction of the worth and necessity of baptism and Holy Communion is fundamental in Christian lifestyle, with a desire that all be done decently and in order." Other anglo-catholics, like Padre A, explained, "the creeds are very important, and the only prayers prayed should come from the prayer book." He went on to state that Anglicanism should have been the only denomination allowed in the Second World War because only in Anglicanism did the troops find the discipline and order needed to win the war. While most anglo-catholic chaplains were not as dogmatic as Padre A, some were equally as provoking. In a provocative combination of adherence to High Church creeds and practices, and obedience to duty and order, Padre B spoke of one belief held by several anglo-catholic chaplains in World War II: "the creeds are not to be believed, they are to be obeyed." Another explanation of anglo-catholic belief is equally thought provoking. During his ministry in Newfoundland and Labrador, Padre Tomkins kept the Eucharist as an important priority in his ministry because "certain people just felt something *mystical* (italics are mine) about the Eucharist services." These observations lead to two conclusions. Firstly, Anglican chaplains who defined themselves as anglo-catholic agreed on the importance of

adherence to High Church creeds and practices, and obedience to duty and order. Secondly, some diversity existed among anglo-catholic, Anglican chaplains depending on which was given greater emphasis, either “adherence to High Church creeds and practices” or “obedience to duty and order.” While some like Padre Stewart, in explaining himself as a “follower of the Oxford Movement,” professed a conservative anglo-catholicism, others like Padre Kerr avowed a much more liberal “first-century” view of anglo-catholicism. Padre Kerr described himself as a “follower of the early Christian Church,” who tried to direct people (using High Church tradition), to a Christ who provided individuals with the power to leave sin behind.

Other Anglican chaplains chose traditional as the term that best described their religious beliefs when their chaplaincy work began in World War II. One traditional Anglican chaplain, Padre Peglar, stated that the traditional creeds of the church were the best description of his theology. Another chaplain, Padre Harrison, defined traditional simply as “the Book of Common Prayer.” This view was reiterated by Padre Flagg when he describes traditional as “guided by the teaching and principles set out in the Book of Common Prayer.” After initial observations are made it appears that traditional Anglican chaplains identified with a theology steeped in the traditions of the Anglican Church. However, when this religious category is examined more closely, its foundational principles are not only religious but reactionary also.

The explanations provided by several traditional Anglican chaplains suggests that some chose “traditional” because it appeared to be a moderate position avoiding any association with liberalism or evangelicalism (often regarded as synonymous with fundamentalism) – each perceived as extreme views. While Padre Cleverdon described traditional as “not fundamentalist and against the garb of High Church,” Padre Owen included in his explanation, “. . . [My beliefs were] not John Robinson – God is dead, nor did I have much use for charismatics.” Stated in a straight forward manner Padre Graven supplied this definition of traditional, “I love the Anglican Church but not the extreme positions.” In addition, Padre Doidge’s understanding of traditional involved “great respect for the church’s sacramental emphasis and teaching, but also great respect for the preaching of the Gospel and personal ministry to persons.” The explanations provided by these chaplains testifies, firstly, that those who defined their religious belief as traditional were, at least in part, reacting against

certain aspects of anglo-catholicism and evangelicalism. While some like Padres Cleverdon, Owen and Graven reacted negatively, others such as Padre Doidge responded positively. Instead of stating what he opposed in anglo-catholicism and evangelicalism, he used it to define his theology. Secondly, perhaps the Book of Common Prayer was so frequently used by traditional Anglicans because it represented a balance between anglo-catholic and evangelical belief. In summary, it would appear that much of the basis of the traditional classification is not a different religious belief, but rather a reactionary expression against the worst extremes of, or in support of the best aspects of, anglo-catholicism and evangelicalism. Furthermore, with no foundationally religious principles or beliefs in and of itself, traditional Anglican chaplains were more likely to change their beliefs in the direction of anglo-catholicism or evangelicalism depending on a particular religious aspect or belief. Thus, it is quite difficult to define, absolutely, the religious belief of those chaplains calling themselves traditional Anglican chaplains.

Evangelicals occupy the final classification. In belief, evangelical Anglican chaplains rooted their religious belief in the doctrines of the Protestant Reformation. This view emphasized a personal experience of Christ practically displayed in the everyday life. This notion of belief and practice is evident in the descriptions supplied by evangelical Anglican chaplains defining their understanding of evangelical. On the one hand, Padre Smyth's words, "the Bible must be accepted as the Word of God, and justification by faith alone is important," reiterated the importance of a religious belief steeped in the theology of the reformation. On the other hand, Padre Daisley reflected the practical, personal dimensions of his faith when he described evangelical as ". . . fulfilling the Lord's command to go and preach the Good News, calling men to accept Christ and accept His promise, 'Lo I am with you always.'" While Padre Daisley's evangelistic enthusiasm apparently was not indicative of all evangelical Anglican chaplains, most evangelicals believed it important to share their religious beliefs with others if the opportunity presented itself. One chaplain who expressed this view was Padre Phillips. He wrote, "evangelical meant preaching the Word as best one could and living as a Christian. I did not proselytize, I preferred troops to approach me. However, if circumstances were such, I would try to present the Gospel to them." It is interesting that Padre Phillips spoke of handing out "Christian Tracts" and being quite evangelistic during his summer work in Northern Ontario before the war.

When asked why he did not continue in evangelistic work as a chaplain he shook his head and replied that he didn't know. In summary, evangelical Anglican chaplains adhered to the religious beliefs of the Protestant Reformation, and believed in sharing their faith in a manner without an overwhelming evangelistic emphasis.

B. The Nationalistic Beliefs of Anglican Chaplains in World War II

In accepting the role of chaplain in World War II, Anglican clergymen became military personnel. A variety of nationalistic factors were responsible for causing these Christian ministers to leave the freedom of parish ministry and agree to practise their priestly duties within the restrictions of Canada's Armed Forces. Furthermore, the nationalistic reasons supplied by Anglican chaplains have remarkable similarities to their religious beliefs.

Every Anglican chaplain who served in the Second World War did so voluntarily. No one forced Anglican clergy to offer their services in the fight against Hitler; joining the Canadian military was the individual decision of each Anglican clergyman. However, when critically examined, several nationalistic factors were quite instrumental in influencing an Anglican priest's decision to become a chaplain.

The Anglican chaplains personally interviewed or contacted through mailed questionnaires were asked two questions regarding their decision to enlist as chaplains in World War II. The questions read as follows:

13. Why did you enlist in the armed forces as a Padre/Chaplain? Please explain.

14. In deciding to enter as Padre/Chaplain which was the greatest motivating factor (please circle one):

- a) to serve a spiritual role
- b) to serve a social/humanitarian role

Please explain.

In response to question 14, all Anglican chaplains (except for one) circled either a), or both a) and b). When asked to explain their choice most provided no statements. However, many of those who provided an explanation of their choice in question 14 stated that they considered both

the spiritual and social/humanitarian roles as inseparably connected, but affirmed the spiritual role as the most important. In response to question 13, the answers provided by chaplains may be classified into three categories. The table below is a helpful summary of their responses.

Table II. The Nationalistic Factors Responsible For Influencing Anglican Clergy To Enlist As Chaplains in World War II

Categories	Nationalism and Patriotism			Total	Spiritual	Other
	A	B	C		Role	Role
Interviews / Questionnaires	I / Q	I / Q	I / Q		I / Q	I / Q
Anglo-Catholic	5 2 ^k	- 1 ^k	- 1	(8 ^k)	- -	- -
Traditional	1 4 ^f	1 -	2 1	(10 ^f)	- 3 ^f	- 1
Evangelical	- 1 ^d	2 -	1 -	(4 ^d)	1 1 ^d	- -

Notes

1. Categories A, B and C are defined in the following manner:
Reasons in Category A include: love of Britain, belief in the necessity to destroy Hitler, and “peer pressure” (pressure from society and friends to enlist in the armed forces.

Reasons in Category B include: family military tradition of serving in the chaplaincy or armed forces.

Reasons in Category C include: advised or challenged to join chaplaincy by Anglican superiors (Bishop etc.), chaplain, or armed forces officer.

2. Special footnotes ^k, ^f and ^d refer to the following chaplains whose answers fit into more than one category: ^k = Padre Kendell, ^f = Padre Flagg, and ^d = Padre Daisley.

3. The three chaplains classified as “liberal” in Table I have been listed as traditional in Table II.

Several interesting observations can be made when Table II is compared to the definitions of the three religious categories (anglo-catholic, traditional and evangelical) summarized in Table I. Firstly, Table II indicates that nationalism and patriotism were very important factors in persuading anglo-catholic Anglican clergy to enter the chaplaincy. When one considers that all of the anglo-catholic Anglican chaplains consulted in this study indicated that their “greatest motivating factor” was to serve a spiritual role, it appears that questions 13 and 14 are contradictory. However, for these chaplains a very strong connection existed between Christianity (the spiritual role) and fighting in a war sanctioned by the ruling authorities (nationalism and patriotism). As categories A, B and C indicate, there were often several different patriotic reasons which compelled anglo-catholics to enlist as chaplains in World War II. The connection between military involvement and Christianity is evident in Padre Kendell’s response to question 13. He remarked, “it [enlisting as a chaplain] was a natural action. Our males had served King and Country for generations.” Apparently, Padre Kendell connected his work as chaplain and his family’s military tradition together. The inseparable connection between “spiritual duty” and “patriotic duty” (as exemplified by Padre Kendell) is not surprising when one remembers that the Church of England has traditionally supported Britain’s wars – at least until the recent Falklands war. Thus, in September 1939 the Church of England wholeheartedly threw its support into defeating the Axis powers. Furthermore, the connection between the “spiritual duty” and “patriotic duty” of Anglicans in Canada is not unusual when one recalls the inseparable tie between Canadian Anglicans and their British counterparts. A tangible example of this tie is apparent as one turns through the pages of *The Canadian Churchman*. Many of the cover articles were written by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Dean of St. Paul’s Cathedral, and other prominent British church leaders.⁵

Anglo-Catholic Anglican chaplains were not the only Anglicans who enlisted as chaplains out of a sense of nationalistic or patriotic conviction; traditional Anglican chaplains also felt compelled to enter the chaplaincy as a responsible act of national duty. However, Table II indicates that several traditional Anglicans volunteered as chaplains exclusively because they felt a responsibility to provide a spiritual role to Canada’s military personnel. Furthermore, Table II attests that, of the three religious categories, traditional Anglicans were the most diverse in their responses.

It is an interesting coincidence that diversity was a significant characteristic of traditional Anglican chaplains' religious beliefs and nationalistic views.

The reasons for enlistment given by evangelical Anglican chaplains appear to contradict the religious findings of the previous section. Because of their evangelical beliefs one might expect many evangelical Anglicans to include some reference to "spiritual or pastoral role" as part of the reason for their enlistment. However, the majority of evangelical Anglican chaplains stated that they joined the chaplaincy because of nationalistic motivations. Thus, apparently, a strong sense of nationalism was intrinsically shared by all Anglican chaplains, and not exclusively anglo-catholics or anglo-catholic minded traditionals, although the largest concentration of nationalistic motivation was found in Anglican chaplains inclined towards anglo-catholicism.

One should be cautious in drawing conclusions based upon Table II. To be truly accurate a much larger sampling of chaplains should be gathered. As well, Table II represents the nationalistic views of chaplains when they began their chaplaincy work. These views were not static but were subject to dynamic changes. For instance, as a chaplain experienced the London Blitz of 1940 or sadly observed the devastation of the French people by the Nazi military machine, his views concerning the connection between church and state, or his long family military tradition (strong reasons for enlisting), may have diminished, and his sense of the conflict as a "Just War" may have become a resolute conviction.

In conclusion, it is evident that the reasons why Anglican clergy enlisted as chaplains in World War II are found in a careful examination of their nationalistic views. However, these views were not held in isolation; in many instances the religious beliefs of Anglican chaplains had remarkable similarities to their nationalistic views. Apart from the connection with nationalistic views, understanding the chaplains' religious beliefs is essential because their military responsibility, first and foremost, was religious. Furthermore, while Anglican chaplains adhered to liberal, anglo-catholic, traditional and evangelical religious beliefs, their nationalistic or patriotic views included such aspects as the connection between church and state, a strong family military tradition, the influence of religious or military officials, and so forth. Finally, this study of the religious beliefs and nationalistic views of Anglican chaplains is by no means an end in itself. This paper is only one aspect of the larger

historiographical study of the important work of Anglican chaplains – including their tasks, problems, encounters with death and dying situations, and successes and failures, all of which were essential aspects of the service provided by Anglican chaplains in the Second World War.

Endnotes

1. Walter T. Steven notes that, despite its many volumes, the author of the “official history” of the Canadian Army (i.e., See *The Canadian Army At War, The Canadians in Britain 1939-1944*, No. 1) allocated only four and a half lines of writing to describe the organization and work of the Canadian Chaplain Service (*In This Sign* [Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1948], p. 32).
2. In World War II Canadian Baptist chaplains were appointed from six Baptist denominations in Canada (the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec, the United Baptist Convention of the Maritimes, the Baptist Union of Western Canada, which in 1944 joined to form the Baptist Federation of Canada; the Union of Regular Baptist Churches of Ontario and Quebec, the Fellowship of Independent Baptist Churches of Canada, which in 1953 joined to form the Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches in Canada; and the Ontario Baptist Association [German], part of the North American Baptist Conference).
3. For a study featuring chaplaincy work in the Air Force see Minton C. Johnston, *Sky Pilots in Blue: A Presentation of the Organization and Work of the Protestant Chaplaincy Service of the R.C.A.F.* (Ottawa: DH/NDHQ photocopy, nd); in the Army, see Steven, *In This Sign* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1948); and in the Navy, see Waldo E. Smith *The Navy Chaplain and His Parish* (Ottawa: The Queen’s Printer, 1967).
4. Two biographical or autobiographical books written by or about Anglican chaplains in World War II include, George Anderson Wells, *The Fighting Bishop* (Toronto: Cardwell House, 1971), and Rev. Canon Minto Swan, *Props, Bars and Pulpits, or Minto’s Minutes* (Kingston: Hanson & Edgar Printers, 1961).
5. See for example, the Archbishop of Canterbury, “The Sources of Our Strength,” *The Canadian Churchman*, 24 April 1941; the Archbishop of Canterbury, “Channels of Living Energy,” *The Canadian Churchman*, 14 May 1942, 307-8; Dr. Matthews (Dean of St. Paul’s Cathedral), “Things

To Come," *The Canadian Churchman* 3 June 1943, 339-40; and Rev. Dr. Leonard Hodgson, "We Anglicans Are One," *The Canadian Churchman*, 16 September 1943, 509.

