

**Bellicose Priests:  
The Wars of the Canadian Catholic Chaplains  
1914-1919**

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It is an old cliché of Canada's warrior lore that ecumenism accompanies combat. Consequently, Canadians sometimes question the sharp distinctions drawn by military and ecclesiastical administrations in the armed forces between Roman Catholic and other denominations. This paper provides at least a partial explanation for historic and present practice. Few Canadians know that from the opening months of the Great War, the padres belonging to every denomination represented overseas accused the Chaplain Service Director of denominationally-biased neglect and abuse. By the end of 1916, it was clear to the chaplains that only one Canadian denomination had the political leverage with the Borden government to do anything about the situation. The Roman Catholic chaplains, in spite of military and ecclesiastical obstacles thrown up by their chaplaincy superiors, conducted a determined campaign to alert home church authorities and mobilize their support. Unravelling the tale of their guerrilla campaign helps account for the continuing dualism of the Canadian military chaplaincy from 1939 to the present day, and also highlights aspects of Canadian church-state relations during the war.

The Canadian military ministry's command and reinforcement controversy also revealed highly-charged tensions within a racially and linguistically-divided Roman Catholic hierarchy, as well as those already dividing Protestant and Catholic Canadians. As English-speaking Roman Catholic churchmen fought to establish a public identity as both Catholics and Canadian nationalists, the chaplaincy – their chaplaincy, as some considered it – became the overseas extension of wartime patriotic as well as pastoral concerns. As a result, occasionally ethnic and linguistic divisions between Canadian Roman Catholics influenced the course of the battle.

While many French-Canadian churchmen felt a profound ambivalence about their co-religionists at the front, the English-speaking Catholics – bishops and padres – in Canada and overseas viewed ministry to their men at the front an opportunity to realize their own growing form of “national gospel” in the postwar period. Such ambitions propelled more than one Canadian Catholic priest in uniform to press to the limits of church and military authority their right to a separate and equal place in the Canadian Expeditionary Force chaplaincy.

By the end of the Great War, at least ninety Canadian Roman Catholic priests had served overseas. Catholic ex-padres, however, wrote memoirs to commemorate and illuminate their colleagues’ sacrifices, not assess ecclesiastical and military decisions made by the founders of the Canadian Chaplain Service.<sup>1</sup> That task was first attempted by Desmond Morton, a military historian, who confirmed their cryptic allusions to administrative controversies caused by Sam Hughes’s establishment of the Service as an inter-denominational organization under an Anglican Director. Canadian historians more often viewed Chaplain Service maladministration as a ridiculous example of the byzantine evolution of the Canadian overseas command, and typical of incompetent, politically-appointed officers.<sup>2</sup> Yet what the twisted tale of padre politics points out to the historian is the leading role played by the Roman Catholic chaplains in working out their own salvation from Canada’s political and military leaders. By their victory significant progress was made, if at the expense of ecumenism, in the professional growth of the entire Canadian military chaplaincy.

Few of the sweating and shouting officers at Valcartier during that first September of the war were thinking about chaplains, until Sam Hughes, Minister of Militia, gathered together thirty-three of the eager clergymen in camp clamouring for appointments. He made R.H. Steacy, rector of Ottawa’s Westboro Anglican parish, Honorary Major and Senior Chaplain of the contingent. Hughes paid little attention to whether or not his newly-minted padres had much military or even pastoral experience. Nor did there seem any need for the Militia Department or church officials to set up detailed command or reinforcement arrangements, for both expected the war

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<sup>1</sup> J.R. O’Gorman, *Soldiers of Christ; Canadian Catholic Chaplains, 1914-1919*, (Toronto: private, 1936), and “Canadian Catholic Chaplains in the Great War,” *Canadian Catholic Historical Association Report, 1939-1940*, pp. 71-84. See also B.J. Murdoch, *The Red Vineyard*, (Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Torch Press, 1928).

<sup>2</sup> Desmond Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), pp. 99, 114-116.

to end by Christmas. The rest of the padres were made Honorary Captains, put under Steacy's command, given a few gruff words of advice from Hughes and sent off to England with the troops. Six of these were Roman Catholic. They left with the blessing of a hierarchy temporarily united by the guns of August. After press reports of German behaviour in Catholic Belgium, Monsignor Bruchesi endorsed the government's dispatch of troops and Father A.E. Burke, editor of Toronto's *Catholic Register* and President of the Catholic Church Extension Society, mingled patriotic utterances with advice to the government not to neglect the spiritual care of the men.<sup>3</sup>

Yet troubles began soon after the Canadian Contingent reached Salisbury Plain. The padres were informed that the British Army allotted only two Catholic chaplains to a Division. Demanding to know how two priests were supposed to shepherd a flock scattered among a formation of about twenty thousand men, Canadian priests and Catholics in the War Office, even Cardinal Bourne of Westminster (senior Catholic ecclesiastic of the British forces) appealed in vain to the Army Council.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, the Canadian priests in Flanders found their peripatetic ministry exhausting, and Canadian soldiers complained in the Catholic press that they had not seen a priest since they arrived at the front. W.T. Workman, a Franciscan ministering to the Canadians at the front, claimed that Anglican padres swarmed at the front while wounded Catholic boys were going without the Sacraments.<sup>5</sup>

Following similar complaints in the British press, the War Office doubled the allotment of priests to a division. Thanks to Ottawa's unwillingness to ship Catholic chaplains not already attached to an overseas battalion, however, the Canadians, were unable to fill all the chaplain vacancies thus made available in their front-line formations, or even in English base camps such as Shorncliffe. There the needs of Canadian hospital units departing for the Mediterranean forced authorities to borrow an Antigonish priest intended for the 5th Brigade and send him off to Salonika, leaving a solitary Catholic padre responsible for every single Roman Catholic soul in a camp of over twelve thousand men.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Catholic Register*, August 13, September 17 and 24, 1914.

<sup>4</sup> National Archives of Canada [hereafter NAC], Records of the Department of Militia and Defence, Canadian Corps Records, RG9 III B 1, Vol. 393, c-15-1, Chaplain W.T. Workman to Col. MacDonald, War Office, February 6, 1915.

<sup>5</sup> *Catholic Register*, April 29 and May 13, 1915.

<sup>6</sup> NAC, RG9 III A 1, Overseas Minister's Records, Vol. 24, file 7-4-2, Major F.C. Piper to O.C. Shorncliffe, July 29-31, 1915. See also NAC, Militia and Defence, RG9 III B 1, Vol. 600, file c-33-2, Shorncliffe Parades file, W.H. Bayley to Carson,

Canadian regional, ethnic and language divisions also complicated the Catholic padre's ministry, especially in the 2nd Division's 5th Brigade. There the presence of Quebec's 22nd as well as Nova Scotia's 25th Battalion gave C.V. Doyon, the brigade's French-speaking priest, a combined flock of about 1,800 men, or as much work as the rest of the division. In vain he pointed out to authorities that English-speakers (as well as Gaelic-speaking Maritime and Glengarry soldiers) shunned French-Canadian padres.<sup>7</sup> Making matters worse, the remaining two Catholic priests posted to his division were, indeed, French-Canadians. Major William Beattie, the 2nd's – Presbyterian – Senior Chaplain, asked Steacy to produce one or two more priests for each division and at least one English-speaking priest for the 5th Brigade.<sup>8</sup> None, however, were forthcoming from London or Ottawa, even after more soldier complaints appeared in Toronto's *Catholic Register*:

I must say that it is simply rotten the way the English-speaking Catholics are treated here. We are in danger of losing our lives, yet the officials are indifferent to our appeal for at least a chance to make our Easter duty... Other creeds have their ministers here with them, who preach to their following at every opportunity. Now what do these think of us Catholic boys who never see a priest at all? I don't know if this letter will pass the censor, but if it does I and all the Catholic boys here on the firing line would like you to ask the question, 'Why are we not supplied with a priest?'.<sup>9</sup>

Chaplains hoped that such reports would bring the home church to the rescue. But, increasingly distracted by internal divisions over the war, it was in no condition to render aid. While C.J. Doherty of Montreal, Borden's Minister of Justice and the leading Catholic in cabinet, had secured the Quebec church's support, the French-speaking hierarchy was unable to give attention to the overseas complaints because of domestic conflicts over

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August 11, 1915.

<sup>7</sup> NAC, Militia and Defence, Chaplain Service Records, 1914-1921, RG9 III C 15, Vol. 4643, A.L. Sylvestre file, Sylvestre to Steacy, July 5, 16, 28 and October 25, 1915.

<sup>8</sup> NAC, RG9, III B 1, Vol. 1106, file N-2-4, Steacy to D.A.A.G., Pay and Records, September 3, 1915 and reply, September 18, 1915. See also NAC, RG9 III C 15, Vol. 4616, William Beattie file, Beattie to Steacy, November 1, 1915.

<sup>9</sup> *Catholic Register*, September 16, 1915, p. 4.

language, education and conscription.<sup>10</sup> In French Canada, Nationalist laymen denounced the hierarchy's continued endorsement of the war, leading to sullen resistance from many lower clergy, already alienated by the bishops' refusal to intervene in the Ontario educational language controversy.<sup>11</sup> This state of affairs, combined with the low number of Quebec enlistments before the advent of conscription, led to desultory chaplaincy recruitment and little active intervention in the affairs of French-Canadian padres.

The English-speaking hierarchy, on the other hand, led by Archbishops Gauthier, McNeil and Bishop Fallon, spurred on churchmen to demonstrate their loyalty to Canada as a mature Dominion in the British Empire.<sup>12</sup> Echoed by Bishop Morrison of Antigonish, Archbishop Casey of Vancouver and Bishop Sinnot in the West, they joined with Cardinal Bourne in supporting the British cause. McNeil and Fallon actively recruited volunteers for the chaplaincy, while Fallon, in March, 1915, called for conscription.<sup>13</sup> The Irish Catholic communities in cities such as Montreal and Toronto, far from shunning the war effort, contributed men to the overseas contingents, patriotic gifts of money and even voted for Union Government and conscription in 1917.<sup>14</sup> Gauthier stood behind the most outspoken of his Ottawa priests, John J. O'Gorman, who proclaimed it the sacred duty of Canadian Catholics to enlist. Thus, by war's end, two-thirds of the Canadian Catholic chaplains, including O'Gorman, had come from the English-speaking church.<sup>15</sup> O'Gorman was echoed by Burke, whose fire-breathing statements in the *Catholic Register* did nothing to heal internal ecclesiastical breaches but made him a favourite of patriots and Tories.<sup>16</sup> Burke published overseas complaints in the hope that he could embarrass the government into action. No one, except perhaps Archbishop McNeil, foresaw Burke's next attempt to gain oversight of the Catholic

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<sup>10</sup> René Durocher, "Henri Bourassa, Les Évêques et la Guerre de 1914-1919," *Canadian Historical Association Papers*, 1971, pp. 254-269.

<sup>11</sup> Durocher, pp. 261-269.

<sup>12</sup> Mark McGowan, "The De-greening of the Irish: Toronto's Irish Catholic Press, Imperialism, and the Forging of a New Identity, 1887-1914," *Canadian Historical Association Papers*, 1989, pp. 119-122, 139-140.

<sup>13</sup> *Catholic Register*, March 25, 1915.

<sup>14</sup> McGowan, "The De-greening of the Irish," pp. 139-140, and Robin Burns, "The Montreal Irish and the Great War," *Canadian Catholic Historical Studies*, Vol. 52, 1985, pp. 67-81.

<sup>15</sup> Durocher, p. 256 and O'Gorman, *Soldiers of Christ*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>16</sup> *Catholic Register*, October 22, 1914 and March 5, June 17, 1915.

chaplaincy. During the summer of 1915, while Hughes was overseas on an inspection tour, Burke managed to have himself appointed a chaplain by the Acting Minister of Militia, Senator James Lougheed, and set out for England to see things for himself.

By then, Steacy had negotiated with Hughes a major re-organization of the Canadian chaplaincy. On 19 August, 1915, he was promoted to Honorary Colonel and appointed Director (D.C.S.) of the new Canadian Chaplain Service, with another Anglican, Lt.-Colonel John M. Almond, becoming his Assistant Director at the Canadian Corps. Yet, while other Protestants were promoted to Honorary Majors and appointed Senior Chaplains of front-line Divisions, not one Roman Catholic received such an appointment, leaving them still, as Honorary Captains, subordinate to chaplains of other communions. Steacy also faced a major manpower crisis for, whatever power he wielded overseas, he had no control over his reinforcement pool. Rather than send chaplains as Steacy requested, Hughes expected him to employ those being detached from the nearly two-hundred numbered battalions which were being broken up in England as reinforcements for the Corps.<sup>17</sup> Since almost every unit recruited in Canada had a Protestant majority, this method supplied few Catholic padres. In contrast, just to make sure that dissenters were not disadvantaged, Hughes had often granted extra chaplaincies to units with large Methodist, Presbyterian or Baptist elements.

While Steacy pondered the stream of chaplains – usually of the wrong denomination – arriving unannounced from Canada, Corps officials, camp commandants and Mediterranean hospital commanders demanded more Catholic and Anglican chaplains to fill long-standing vacancies. On Steacy's coded request, Hughes grudgingly sent nine Anglicans in mufti. Both were well aware of how other Canadian denominations would react if they found out, and Steacy delayed asking Hughes for a similar, Catholic draft. Although Hughes eventually sent him a handful of priests during the next year, Steacy's indifference to Catholic needs revealed serious personal disqualifications for his quasiepiscopal post. Although Hughes dubbed Steacy genial and broadminded, his padres, especially Methodist and Catholic, found him a stuffy Churchman. Like many of Hughes's political appointees, the D.C.S. feared and flattered his superiors while holding his own staff and British officers in contempt. Therefore, such well-known Hughes attributes as the drive to promote non-conformist interests in the

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<sup>17</sup> Desmond Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*, pp. xi, 44-45.

chaplaincy, his disdain for Roman Catholics and susceptibility to flattery bulked large in Steacy's planning.<sup>18</sup>

Had Steacy ever felt the inclination to protest his impossible manpower situation, he had no independent and direct links with the Canadian churches (in fact, because of his Anglicanism and Orange Lodge connections, Steacy was considered an enemy by Methodists and Catholics) from which to negotiate with Hughes. When he proposed that Ottawa create a "Chaplain General's branch" in Canada to better manage his reinforcements, Hughes's officials in London coldly informed him that the Minister of Militia "quite properly resented" being given advice on how to run his command. Steacy took the hint.<sup>19</sup>

By then, Almond had warned Steacy that the Catholic padres had grown increasingly bitter at the unfilled vacancies, and more of Father Doyon's complaints appeared in Canada's English-Catholic press.<sup>20</sup> Finally, Corps officers and the British command chaplains stationed an English-speaking priest intended for another post to the 5th Brigade in December, but Steacy, visiting the Corps at the time, angrily vetoed any interference in his command by British officials. Rather than provoke a quarrel over the matter of Dominion autonomy, the British command chaplains acquiesced. A chagrined Almond asked the 2nd Division's other Catholic chaplains to help out Doyon in their spare time. It was the best he could do.

Rather than appeal to the home churches, Steacy tinkered with his overseas personnel, prying loose one or two priests from English camps in hopes that Hughes might send more Catholics overseas to take their places. This failed to appease his impatient priests, who increasingly resented their subordination to Anglicans and non-conformists. Workman, on behalf of the Catholic chaplains at the Corps, petitioned for the appointment of a Catholic Senior Chaplain. Steacy denied the request, arguing that there was no British Army regulation or precedent for an independent Catholic senior chaplaincy. Only if that faith predominated in an entire Canadian Division, would it rate a Catholic Senior Chaplain. Because Steacy refused to make

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<sup>18</sup> Steacy's August, 1916 flowery proposal to Hughes (endorsed by Burke and other supporters) that he be promoted to Major General, appears in the records of J.W. Carson, Hughes's overseas representative. See NAC, RG9 III A 1, Vol. 24, file 7-4-8, Steacy to Hughes, August 3, 1916.

<sup>19</sup> NAC, RG9 III B 1, Vol. 473, 1st Contingent file, Steacy and F.A. Reid to Carson, March 16, 1916 and RG9 III A 1, Vol. 24, file 7-4-2, Carson to Reid and Steacy, March 17, 1916.

<sup>20</sup> *Catholic Register*, September 30, 1915, p. 4.

any concessions to Catholicism which might anger Hughes, the D.C.S. needed a Roman Catholic ally with enough military or ecclesiastical seniority to cow the rebellious field padres. Thus A.E. Burke's arrival in England seemed the timely providence of an ecclesiastic with the prestige and credibility to ease his Catholic burdens. Burke had acquired national stature and some notoriety in Ottawa as a Tory booster of settlement and development ventures, while Pope Pius X, in 1910, confirmed his appointment as head of the Catholic Church Extension Society and editor of *The Catholic Register*. Before the war, however, he had become embroiled in the Ontario French-language schools question, where his public and private statements angered both French and English-speaking Catholics, including Archbishop Gauthier and Bishop Fallon, as well as his own superior, McNeil.<sup>21</sup> Burke had made some powerful enemies within the church by the time he set out for the war, making him a most unlikely candidate for success at the task Steacy wished him to perform.

Burke soon proved incapable of bringing peace to the Chaplains' Service, becoming instead the storm-centre of Catholic chaplain discontent. From the moment he arrived in England, his actions raised doubts about his status and credibility. Although originally given a regular chaplain's appointment by Senator Lougheed (with the rank of Honorary Major as a concession to his religious rank), Burke persuaded military officers and English reporters that the government, the Apostolic Delegate and the Canadian hierarchy had appointed him supervisor of the Canadian Catholic chaplaincy.<sup>22</sup> He asked Major General J.W. Carson, Hughes's overseas agent, to promote him to the rank of Lt.-Colonel and give him a "roving commission." Mystified, Carson consulted Hughes, who quickly responded, "Burke may not be gazetted a Lt.-Colonel; he would not have been made a Major if I had known."<sup>23</sup> Burke then approached Carson's rival, General J.C. MacDougall, claiming that the Pope had appointed him "Senior R.C. chaplain of all Canadian Contingents." Carson cryptically advised, "Please

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<sup>21</sup> F.A. Walker, *Catholic Education and Politics in Ontario*, (Toronto: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1964, p. 279. See also McGowan, "The Degreening of the Irish," pp. 137-138.

<sup>22</sup> Burke, recently made Apostolic Prothonotary, was wearing the purple stock, *Catholic Register*, August 12, 1915. See J.C. Hopkins, *Canadian Annual Review*, 1915, pp. 207-214, 340 and *Canada*, September 25, November 13, 1915. See also *Canadian Baptist*, August 12, 1915, p. 8.

<sup>23</sup> NAC, RG9 III C 15, Vol. 4618, A.E. Burke file, Confidential Report by Almond to General R.E.W. Turner, May 1, 1917, Carson to Hughes, n.d. and reply September 24, 1915.

be careful concerning Major Burke. Minister much exercised and refuses promotion,” and counselled MacDougall, “I think we can safely let this gentleman pull his own chestnuts out of the fire.”<sup>24</sup>

This, indeed, Burke had already done by travelling to Rome and meeting with the Pope. Although Cardinal Bourne warned Carson that neither the Apostolic Delegate nor the Canadian hierarchy had authorized Burke’s mission, he returned from the Vatican invested with sufficient prestige to intimidate military authorities overseas.<sup>25</sup> After giving a few colourful press interviews and unsolicited advice to Carson on several matters, Burke set up headquarters at the Regent Palace Hotel. He refused to take any posting with the Canadian camps or hospital units, as it would restrict his freedom to roam through the C.E.F. overseas on his inspections.<sup>26</sup> Canadian Catholic authorities tried in vain to stop this confidence trick. Monsignor Stagni (the Apostolic Delegate), and several of the bishops warned chaplains overseas that Burke had no extraordinary authority, and Stagni directly ordered him to stop the charade, but Burke and Steacy ignored their protests.

Steacy was in no mood to alter his deference to the imposter, for Burke proved quite handy at disarming angry chaplain complaints. When the Government sent George Perley, Canadian High Commissioner, to investigate their charge of deficiencies at the front, Burke reassured everyone that the complaints would soon die out and that there was an adequate supply of British chaplains available. To Steacy’s relief, Burke backed him when Hughes himself angrily demanded an explanation for the dissatisfaction overseas.<sup>27</sup> “Of course this will not prevent zealots from writing alarming stories,” Burke wrote, “but they are simply stories.”<sup>28</sup> Although well aware of the general shortage of Canadian Catholic priests

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, Carson to MacDougall, September 27, 28, 1915.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, Carson to Hughes and replies, October 4, 10, 1915. See also *Canada*, November 15, 1915, p. 188.

<sup>26</sup> Desmond Morton, “The Short, Unhappy Life of the 41st Battalion, C.E.F.,” *Queen’s Quarterly*, Vol. 81, 1, 1974, p. 77. See also NAC, RG9 III C 15, Vol. 4618, Burke file, G.A. Wells to Steacy, March 21, 1916.

<sup>27</sup> NAC, RG9 III C 15, Vol. 4618, Burke file, Burke to Steacy, November 15, 1915.

<sup>28</sup> NAC, RG9 III C 15, Vol. 4650, “Perley Correspondence,” Burke to Perley, December 1, 1915. See also Vol. 4618, Burke file, Hughes to MacDougall, December 2, 1915 and Carson to Hughes, December, 1915.

overseas, Burke publicly repudiated accusations that the troops were being neglected at the front and that Catholic chaplains were in short supply.<sup>29</sup>

If it was highly unlikely that Catholic chaplains ever would have accepted Burke's leadership, after such statements it became impossible. To them, Burke had betrayed every Canadian Catholic overseas. Although stymied, they did not give up. Over the winter of 1916, Workman and A.L. Sylvestre (another priest hand-picked by Hughes at Valcartier) contested Burke's legitimacy with Steacy, warning that the entire country would hold him responsible if remedial action was not taken.<sup>30</sup> In spite of his periodic rages over the situation, Hughes still refused to discipline or recall Burke, and in May, 1916 promoted him to Lt.-Colonel (while refusing to honour his growing expense account or sanction his acquisition of a Cuban secretary in a lieutenant's uniform). If the political situation in Ottawa had been more favourable, perhaps Hughes would have curbed Burke's antics, but by mid-1916, so many embarrassing questions were being asked in Ottawa that he could not risk provoking Burke or the many friends he claimed to have. Burke still had his uses. After another florid press statement prompted demands that the publicity-seeking monsignor be disciplined, Carson reassured Steacy that such indiscretion was "one of the things we are apt to wink at."<sup>31</sup>

By then, it was getting harder for Canadian denominational leaders to wink at the reports of maladministration coming from their padres overseas. Methodist, Anglican and Presbyterian officials successively abandoned their complacency and demanded a voice in the chaplaincy decisions previously made for them in Ottawa. In late 1915, Methodists and Presbyterians had formed their own military service committees, though Hughes continued to brush off their most vehement complaints. Were the Catholic bishops as powerless in these matters, Anglicans pointedly asked?<sup>32</sup> They would have been surprised to know that the answer to their rhetorical question was affirmative. Roman Catholics still left chaplaincy matters up to individual

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<sup>29</sup> *Canadian Annual Review, 1915*, p. 340, also NAC, RG9 III C 15, Vol. 4618, Burke file, *Canada Gazette* clipping, "Canadian Chaplaincy," also see Burke to Steacy, September 29, 1915, and RG9 III A 1, Vol. 24, file 7-4-5, Steacy to Hughes, September 23, 1915 and November 29, 1915 reply. See also Steacy to Carson, January 29, and February 16, 1916 reply.

<sup>30</sup> NAC, RG9 III C 15, Vol. 4643, A.L. Sylvestre file, Sylvestre to Steacy, March 24, 1915; also Sylvestre to Steacy, February 17, March 3 and April 12, 1916.

<sup>31</sup> NAC, RG9 III C 15, Vol. 4643, Sylvestre file, Sylvestre to Steacy May 7, 1916, and NAC, RG9 III A 1, Vol. 24, 7-4-1, Carson to Steacy, May 16, 1916.

<sup>32</sup> *Canadian Churchman*, June 15, 1916, p. 383.

bishops. As yet, these had not seen the need to organize a co-ordinated watch on the government. Nor did the hierarchy care to air publicly the details surrounding Burke's self-appointment for the entertainment of other denominations. For as long as communions regarded each other as rivals, the Minister of Militia continued to divide and rule.

Hughes's power to divert or ignore church inquiries also remained potent as long as Burke and Steacy reassured Canadians that the overseas complaints came from ill-informed malcontents. In March, 1916, Bishop Morrison protested to Prime Minister Borden that Steacy and Burke had posted away the Gaelic-speaking priests he had hand-picked for the Nova Scotians of the 25th Battalion. Morrison blamed Burke for abandoning the Maritimers to padre Doyon's left-over ministrations, and threatened to warn his flocks at home of "what to expect" if they enlisted.<sup>33</sup> Such a threat to recruiting prompted cabinet reaction. Again Perley took the matter up with Steacy, who retorted that he was giving Canadian Catholics "just and generous treatment." Steacy assured Morrison that, "not a single Catholic soldier has suffered for spiritual supply, and every single one, whether here or in France, who wants the priest can have him." Burke reassured Steacy that the number of Catholics in the 5th Brigade was not excessive and that its single padre was well able to manage the work, despite the language differences between units.<sup>34</sup> Sneering at Morrison's parochialism, he reassured Prime Minister Borden that, "We have done wonders, I think, since I came over here... in this regard, You know me well enough to believe me when I tell that I would not tolerate for a moment any neglect ... not a single soldier's soul has suffered for want of spiritual assistance."<sup>35</sup>

After further questions from Liberals in the House of Commons, Hughes used Burke's and Steacy's denials to fend off critics. Clearly, in early 1916, initiating remedial action was still impossible for the Catholic as well as the Protestant churches. Without corroboration of the rumours from overseas, Bishops Morrison and Fallon had no basis for their demands to the Government. Equally helpless was the Apostolic Delegate, a visiting ecclesiastical diplomat who, despite his disgust with Burke, tried to avoid charges of interfering in Canadian politics. Naturally, Hughes protected Steacy and Burke from critics. While there was little love lost between the

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<sup>33</sup> NAC, RG9 III C 15, Vol. 4649, Bishop of Antigonish file, Morrison to Borden, March 23, 1916.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 4674, "D.C.S. London-Steacy" file, Steacy to Perley, April 17, 1916, Steacy to Morrison, April 18, 1916 and Burke to Steacy, April 17, 1916.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, Burke to Borden, April 17, 1916.

Minister and his chief chaplains, political expediency required solidarity against churchmen and politicians. Workman, Sylvestre, the Canadian hierarchy – none was able to make any headway as long as Steacy, Burke and Hughes stood by each other.

Nevertheless, during the summer of 1916, Workman and his colleagues stepped up their offensive against the D.C.S. and Burke, appealing directly to higher military authorities and preparing a direct and deafening blast of the trumpet to wake up the home church. Workman demanded that Carson pressure Steacy and Hughes into keeping a long-dormant promise to appoint a Catholic to the Senior Chaplaincy of the new 4th Division. A few weeks later the post was given to a Presbyterian. Hughes offered a few more priests, but Steacy confidently waived the offer, until mounting casualties forced him to reverse his decision. Burke then muddied the water further with a letter to the *Catholic Register* evidently meant to silence home-front critics such as Bishop Morrison. Hughes naturally questioned Steacy's sudden change of heart and Burke's contradiction of his new request.<sup>36</sup> The priests finally arrived in October, long after they were requested.

By then the Corps priests were on the road to mutiny. As Steacy ignored even Almond's warnings, Workman contacted the British Army's Catholic Principal Chaplain in France, A.P. Rawlinson, who challenged through British channels the Canadians' subordination of Catholic chaplains to Protestants. Steacy responded to War Office queries with another lecture on British interference in Canadian affairs. He stated to both British and Canadian authorities that he would never grant concessions which might in Canada be seen as favours to Catholics. They already had nine priests in the Canadian Corps, while the Presbyterians, with many more soldiers in the ranks, had only six ministers. If any more Catholic padres were appointed, he argued, he would have to add even more Protestant chaplains to be fair to the other denominations. To Catholic critics, such reasoning was a particularly invidious pretext for denying their pastoral needs. Steacy told headquarters that Catholic priests at Corps were satisfactorily managed by the Anglican A.D.C.S. and that he would not put

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<sup>36</sup> *Catholic Register*, May 26, 1916. Burke addressed two further reassuring letters to Bishop Morrison, NAC, RG9 III C 15, Vol. 4618, Burke file, Burke to Morrison, June 15, 22, 1916.

the Canadians over establishment, even if the War Office, Almond, the Corps Commander and the British Principal Chaplain disagreed.<sup>37</sup>

Now the Corps Roman Catholic chaplains took matters into their own hands. J.J. O’Gorman, recently transferred to the 3rd Brigade, led a padres’ revolt. The thirty year-old Ottawa priest was perhaps the most likely chaplain to do so, given his connections with the English-speaking hierarchy at home. A graduate of Bishop Fallon’s *alma mater*, the University of Ottawa, he had several years’ post-graduate study in Paris, Bonn, Munich and Rome before returning to Ottawa’s Blessed Sacrament Church in 1913. Cherubic in appearance but with the temperament of a bulldog, his outspoken sympathies with Irish agitation for Dominion status and the cause of English-only separate schools in Ontario attracted the attention of Archbishop Gauthier and Bishop Fallon, who regarded him as an exceptionally promising cleric. O’Gorman called on Burke to act on the front-line shortages: “This is not a favour we ask but a right we demand... Are you with us or against us?”<sup>38</sup> After looking over Almond’s correspondence with the D.C.S. on Catholic grievances, Workman and O’Gorman presented Steacy with an ultimatum: he had until the end of June to provide the Corps priests with their own Senior Chaplain and the extra padres which were required. O’Gorman warned Steacy that there were other ways for chaplains, when frustrated by military superiors, to obtain redress:

I have, as is my right as a chaplain, kept my ecclesiastical superiors informed on matters concerning the Catholic chaplains.... If, however, you fear that Bishop Fallon has been misinformed by me, I will send him a copy of our entire correspondence, and he will be able to judge for himself.<sup>39</sup>

O’Gorman’s point-blank refusal to obey the Protestant Senior Chaplain of his division then forced a hasty conference with senior officers at Corps headquarters. As a result, Workman was made Corps Catholic senior chaplain: Protestants now had only nominal authority over Catholics.

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<sup>37</sup> NAC, RG9 III C 15, Vol. 4651, “Establishments” file, Almond to Steacy, April 13, 1916, and RG9 III A 1, Vol. 24, file 7-4-5, Steacy to Carson, May 30 and Carson to Workman, May 30, 1916.

<sup>38</sup> NAC, RG9 III C 15, Vol. 4636. J.J. O’Gorman file, O’Gorman to Burke, June 22, 1916.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 4636, J.J. O’Gorman file, O’Gorman to Steacy, June 26, 1916.

Almond and the British then transferred Workman to Corps headquarters, but Steacy protested on the grounds of breach of establishment. Only in August, 1916, despite Steacy's protests, was Workman confirmed by the British in his new post. As a result, Almond, too, identified himself with the Catholics. He warned Steacy that they openly accused him of rank Orange bigotry and were going over his head directly to Hughes. Steacy rebuked Almond for co-operating with the rebels and brushed aside his warnings.<sup>40</sup> He also vaguely threatened Workman not to try anything as "unmilitary" as a direct appeal to the Minister. Workman was outraged:

I regard it as a very serious thing to be cautioned in this matter, principally because ...I am not allowed to forget that the caution falls on my office of Senior Chaplain.... Until now I thought that the one fault of my relations with your office was that of over-frankness. As persistently and forcibly as I respectfully could I have brought to your attention every question that was legitimately yours to deal with. The King's Regulations and Orders provide a perfectly discreet and military manner of communicating with the Higher Powers when the subordinate personnel fails and that manner alone is used by me when I deem fit to communicate with the Honourable the Minister of Militia.<sup>41</sup>

There is no evidence that the Director heeded such warnings.

Workman and O'Gorman now shifted their appeal to Bishop Morrison, blaming Catholic troubles on Steacy's "ultra-Protestant view." Steacy's careless remark to Workman that "the Roman Catholic Church in Canada had an unenviable reputation for getting from the Government anything that it wanted and that he would not be a partner to our obtaining favours over here," had completely discredited him.<sup>42</sup> Then, on 31 July, the twelve Corps priests delivered to Almond a lengthy and vehement petition. They denied Steacy's claim that Catholic troops had received just and generous treatment and described his attitude towards Catholic affairs at the Corps as "simply scandalous." They repudiated Burke, noting how his misleading statements offset their claims.<sup>43</sup> A copy of the petition was sent directly to General

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 4615, Almond file, Almond to Steacy, October 4, 1916 and Steacy to Almond, October 6, 1916.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 4647, Workman file, Workman to Steacy, July 1, 1916.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 4618, Burke file, Workman to Morrison, July 26, 1916.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 4636, O'Gorman file, Catholic Canadian Corps chaplains to Almond, July 31, 1916.

Carson, who naturally demanded an explanation from Steacy. Then word reached England that both the Canadian hierarchy and Prime Minister Borden had received copies of the petition from Workman. While Steacy fumed in London, charging O’Gorman and Workman with insubordination and dishonour, Bishop Morrison demanded a complete investigation of the padres’ chargès by the Prime Minister.

Workman also had appealed to Hughes, who curtly ordered him to address his complaints to Steacy, his military superior. It was Hughes’s last letter to Workman before the Minister of Militia was dismissed by Robert Borden. Three weeks later, Workman contacted George Perley, the new Overseas Minister of the military forces of Canada. He did not mince words:

What I would especially draw your attention to is the summary and contemptuous answer of Colonel Steacy. Our patience with this man’s bigotry and inefficiency is exhausted, and I would welcome an investigation into the record of his dealings with us. As Roman Catholics we do not care who may be our Administrative head so long as he intends to do us justice.... We are ... in duty bound to see that the members of our church belonging to the Expeditionary Force get that fair treatment which was promised them by the Government.<sup>44</sup>

In spite of the tremendous pressure on him, Steacy refused to give ground, admitting to Bishop Fallon that English-speaking priests were needed but refusing to ask for more. This state of affairs, when at the same time a surplus of Protestant padres was known to exist, was especially galling to Catholics. The 1916 battle over chaplaincies reached a climax in November, when Steacy, in an attempt to stop his non-conformist surplus from skyrocketing, asked Ottawa to cease dispatching chaplains of all denominations. At this the Canadian hierarchy entered the fray. An outraged Fallon wrote to Edward Kemp, the new Minister of Militia and Defence, reminding him that the bishop himself had stopped the Corps chaplains’ petition from appearing in the Canadian Catholic press.<sup>45</sup> Yet Kemp and Perley found Steacy urging that the freeze be upheld, blaming all his problems on Hughes and Romanist malcontents.

Fortunately for the church, a German shell had delivered the required evidence – in the form of J.J. O’Gorman himself – virtually into the laps of

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 4647, Workman file, Workman to Perley, November 23, 1916.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 4629, A.E. Kemp file, Fallon to Kemp, December 22, 1916.

the bishops and Borden's cabinet. The shrapnel which crippled O'Gorman on the Somme forced a long recuperation leave in Ottawa. Thus was Steacy's and Burke's nemesis placed within arm's length of the Borden government. Steacy hoped that he and Burke, by putting on a bold front, might yet hold on to their posts, but by the end of 1916, the situation was entirely different from that of the previous spring. Too many Canadian churchmen now knew the actual extent of the discontent overseas and incontrovertible evidence was now circulated by O'Gorman in Ottawa – to a government that no longer sported Sam Hughes as its Militia Minister.

In the first weeks of 1917, Catholics opened up a two-front offensive against Steacy and Burke. Workman called on Perley, as Overseas Minister of the C.E.F., to dismiss the D.C.S. and his self-appointed assistant. P.M.H. Casgrain, a prominent Canadian priest working at the War Office, added his voice to Workman's. Back in Ottawa, O'Gorman visited C.J. Doherty, who eagerly relayed his memoranda to Perley, Kemp and the Prime Minister.<sup>46</sup> Borden and Kemp (advised by O'Gorman and the Ontario hierarchy) directed Perley to recall Steacy and Burke. Though somewhat intimidated by Burke's ecclesiastical rank and threats of powerful friends at home, Perley reluctantly obeyed, especially as Gauthier and Morrison kept up the pressure on Borden and Kemp.<sup>47</sup>

By then, the A.D.C.S. had struck on the military command front. Steacy never had grasped Almond's point that the front-line work of the Chaplain Service should take priority over rear-echelon ministry. Having seen their difficulties at first hand, Almond and his Protestant senior chaplains were staunch Catholic allies. Almond persuaded General R.E.W. Turner, the new Canadian commander overseas, to audit Steacy's and Burke's administration. As a result, Turner, too, recommended the dismissal of the D.C.S. and his self-appointed Catholic director. Sometime in the first week of February, Perley notified Steacy that his services were no longer needed, and, when he refused a senior position in a re-organized Chaplain Service,

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<sup>46</sup> NAC, MG30, D 20, Vol. 2, J.J. O'Gorman papers, Doherty to O'Gorman, January 13, 1917; also RG9, III A 1, Vol. 104, "Roman Catholics" file, Borden to Perley, Doherty to Perley, January 3, 11 and 17, 1917. See also O'Gorman papers, Vol. 2, Perley to Workman, January 23, 1917.

<sup>47</sup> NAC, MG27, II D 12, George Perley Papers, Vol. 8, file 244, Borden to Perley "from Doherty", January 28, 1917, and Perley to Borden "for Doherty," January 31, 1917. See also NAC, RG9 III A 1, Vol. 104, "Roman Catholics" file, Perley to Doherty, January 27, and Gauthier to Kemp "for Perley" February 1, 1917, also Morrison to Perley, February 12, 1917.

ordered him home.<sup>48</sup> Getting rid of Burke was not as easy while he played on Perley's fear of political repercussions, and claimed that Workman, a British-born monk, was unfit to take his place.<sup>49</sup> In fact, Burke proved to have far more enemies than friends back home, from the Apostolic Delegate to the Archbishops of Toronto and Ottawa, and even Senator Loughheed. "Don't let Burke butt in or spend his time between Picadilly and the Strand," O'Gorman reassured Workman, "the Bishops are sick of Burke."<sup>50</sup> Borden, arriving in England, heard Burke's appeal but backed Almond and Turner, who ordered him home.

Looking for replacements with good Corps records, Perley chose Almond, Workman, and other experienced senior chaplains to replace the old team. By the end of March, Almond had summoned seven Catholic priests from Ottawa and secured Workman's appointment as his Catholic deputy in London. By the time Workman arrived from the front, Almond had already begun the extensive house-cleaning which the Service had needed for so very long. Between February and May, 1917, he straightened out administrative muddles, harmonized denominational discord and implemented personnel policies which solved many of the problems of the old regime. In doing this he was able to count on the government's support and the confidence of the Canadian churches, including (thanks to O'Gorman and Workman) the Roman Catholic.<sup>51</sup> While Almond remained sole head of an inter-denominational Canadian Chaplain Service, Catholics were given an autonomous parallel administration, placed under the working authority of an Assistant Director of their own church, with O'Gorman, through Doherty, enjoying direct access to the cabinet. "You will of course be independent of Almond in all Catholic matters, and will deal officially through Perley with the government," O'Gorman advised Workman, "Catholic Canada looks to you now. You have the authority;

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<sup>48</sup> NAC, George Perley Papers, Vol. 8, file 245, Perley to Borden, February 12, 1917.

<sup>49</sup> NAC, George Perley Papers, Vol. 8, file 244, Borden to Perley, January 28, 1917 and Burke to Perley, February 2, 1917; also Perley to Borden, January 31, February 1, 3, 1917. O'Gorman reassured Workman, "Burke's objections to you are amusing, and unintentionally complimentary, for you were baptized a Catholic if not by a Catholic and formally became a Catholic before the age of reason. Burke himself was a pagan for about a week! You are as much a Canadian as the majority of Canadians overseas," NAC, RG9 III c 15, Vol. 4643, J.J. O'Gorman file, O'Gorman to Workman, March 24, 1917.

<sup>50</sup> NAC, RG9 III C 15, Vol. 4636, O'Gorman file, O'Gorman to Workman, February 28, 1917.

<sup>51</sup> *Catholic Register*, March 15, 1917.

don't be afraid to exercise it. Doherty and me will look to you in all things concerning the chaplains.”<sup>52</sup> The long fight was won.

Throughout the rest of the war, Catholic affairs in the Chaplain Service gradually were brought back to an even keel. Workman's presence facilitated Almond's dealing with Catholic chaplains, for he could leave such sensitive matters to his able and tough-minded Assistant. Nevertheless, the equity brought about neither resulted in nor was intended to lead to the blending of ministries. While mutual respect and toleration characterized the two branches of administration under Workman and Almond, at neither the levels of command or padres in the field were ecumenism the result. Protestant padres who suggested joint communions or services in the field were politely rebuffed by Catholic padres and senior chaplains. Protestant chaplains who were suspected of trying to win over Catholic soldiers had their knuckles rapped severely.<sup>53</sup> Both Almond and Workman went to great lengths to prevent any incidents which could be interpreted as cross-proselytism, and quickly repudiated any accusations of such which were made back in Canada.<sup>54</sup>

In 1918, the Chaplain Service also secured the full support of denominational authorities on the home front. Realizing that much of Steacy's ineffectiveness had lain in his lack of a strong political base from which to deal with army and government officials, Almond courted home church leaders. Reassuring them that the government and the chaplains were doing a fine job overseas, Almond brought denominational leaders, including Fallon and Gauthier, overseas to visit the troops, meet with their chaplains and tour the Canadian front.<sup>55</sup> Thus Fallon and other denominational leaders returned to Canada virtually commissioned by the Chaplain Service to back Almond's recommendations. When Ottawa appointed William Beattie D.C.S. of a Service branch in Canada, it was to O'Gorman and the Ontario hierarchy that the Union Government turned for a candidate to serve as Beattie's Catholic Deputy. Significantly, it selected an English-speaking veteran of 1914, A.L. Sylvestre. As O'Gorman

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<sup>52</sup> NAC, RG9 III C 15, Vol. 4636, O'Gorman file, O'Gorman to Workman, February 28, 1917.

<sup>53</sup> NAC, RG9 III C 15, Vol. 4617, A. Bischlager file, Workman to Beattie, March 21, 1917.

<sup>54</sup> NAC, RG9 III C 15, Vol. 4622, W.H. Emsley file, Workman press release to D. Jones, editor of the *Pembroke Observer*, July, 1918, and NAC, RG9 III A 1, Vol. 75, Rev. J.A. MacDonald to E. Kemp, Feb. 1, 1917, and Workman to Almond, and Almond to Perley, same dates.

<sup>55</sup> *Catholic Register*, August 22, September 19, 1918.

commented to Workman, “A Frenchman will ruin us – the French anti-war, anti-enlist campaign being more than the country can stand.”<sup>56</sup> While bilingual, Sylvestre had proven his patriotism. In order to appease French-speaking churchmen, Bishop Emard of Valleyfield was nominated bishop, or *episcopus castrensis*, of the church’s military work.

By war's end, the Chaplain Service had been healed. During the last campaigns, the new leaders and Ottawa kept a steady supply of priestly reinforcements moving overseas, and looked back with satisfaction on their work at war’s end. Yet the memories of the Great War never faded in memories of Catholic ex-chaplains or churchmen in the twenty-year armistice that followed. In 1939, Catholic authorities requested that their chaplains serve in a separate and distinct chaplains’ branch, under the control of Bishop Nelligan. The Liberal government of Mackenzie King willingly complied, and in the 1940 federal election, Ernest Lapointe pointed out to Quebecers how much better this system was than that used by the hated Tories in the Great War.<sup>57</sup> In the light of their bitter experience of the opening years of that war, one can understand why Catholic authorities considering the military chaplaincy in 1939, found a double meaning in the phrase, “Never again.”

Reconstructing the Great War battles of the English-speaking Roman Catholic chaplains yields some useful insights into the war-time strategy and status of that component of their home church. Because of government anxiety over recruiting, and because of the indigenous nationalism of the English-speaking church, Ontario and Maritime bishops acquired enhanced influence as valued allies of the federal government. This gave them strategic leverage when the their chaplains sought redress. Because the participation of the English-speaking church was fundamental to justifying the war as a national crusade, both its hierarchy and the government were forced to heed and act on the behalf of their agents at the front – the Catholic chaplains. Finally, their form of war-time ecumenism – the spontaneous commonality of Protestants such as Almond and Catholics like Workman and O’Gorman, rarely achieved by home churchmen on their own, remains a remarkable legacy of the padres who went to war.

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<sup>56</sup> NAC, RG9 III C 15, Vol. 4636, O’Gorman file, O’Gorman to Workman, July 30, 1917.

<sup>57</sup> J. Granatstein, *Canada's War*, Toronto: (Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 88. W.T. Steven, *In This Sign*, (Toronto: Ryerson, 1948), pp. 20-21. See also T. Sinclair Faulkner, “For Christian Civilization: the Churches and Canada’s War Effort, 1939-1942,” Ph.D. thesis, University of Chicago, 1975, pp. 87ff.