CNR-TCRU Postgraduate
Narrative Research Seminars
2018-2019

Tuesday 2\textsuperscript{nd} April

INSIDE STORIES: A PRISON NARRATIVE

Dr Peter Phillips
Honorary Research Associate
School of History, Archaeology and Religion
Cardiff University
PROLOGOMENA: TOWARDS A DEFINITION

The chaplain of the prison and any assistant chaplain shall be a clergyman of the Church of England.
*Prison Act 1952, §4*

Chaplains have such a difficult, contradictory, and essential role behind bars.
*Loïc Wacquant in personal email.*

“We have to touch such men, not with a bargepole, but with a benediction,” he said. “We have to say the word that will save them from hell. We alone are left to deliver them from despair when your human charity deserts them. Go on your own primrose path pardoning all your favourite vices and being generous to your fashionable crimes; and leave us in the darkness, vampires of the night, to console those who really need consolation; who do things really indefensible, things that neither the world nor they themselves can defend; and none but a priest will pardon. Leave us with those who commit the mean and revolting and real crimes; mean as St. Peter when the cock crew, and yet the dawn came.”
*G K Chesterton: The Chief Mourner of Marne.*

“I saw the chaplain and, to be honest, I didn’t like the man. When he came in to see me, he said, “Are you all right?” and I said, “Yes,” and he said, “This is a good prison, good officers, nobody touches you here.” I said, “That’s not what I’ve heard.” He said, “No, no, take it from me. Nobody touches you. I’ve been here for so many years.” His whole attitude was one of *them*, one hundred per cent.
*Nicki Jameson & Eric Allison: A Serious Disturbance.*

The Chaplaincy is committed to serving the needs of prisoners, staff and religious traditions by engaging all human experience. We will work collaboratively, respecting the integrity of each tradition and discipline. We believe that faith and the search for meaning directs and inspires life, and are committed to providing sacred spaces and dedicated teams to deepen and enrich human experience. We contribute to the care of prisoners to enable them to lead law-abiding and useful lives in custody and after release.
*H M Prison Service Chaplaincy Handbook.*
PRELUDE

To come in and bring love and possibly light into a loveless and dark place..... to show that somebody's actually interested in you and I'm interested in you...... on the Segregation Unit [doing the statutory daily visit] - an extreme example certainly - one particular person, very recalcitrant, so much so that he was only allowed to be on “Senior Officer and 3 staff unlock”. Classic case...... I looked through the flap because if he didn’t go and face the back wall they wouldn’t unlock his door, even to give him his food and that’s the level it had got to. As I was doing my round he was told before they opened the door, “Face the back wall.” Even looking over his shoulder was a bit iffy but, “Can I have a word with you?” he said. The staff said, “We’ll not let you go in there.” I was happy to go in, not because I’m particularly a hero but because I don't think he would have attacked me. The staff originally said, “No, we’re not risking it, we daren’t. If anything goes wrong we’re in trouble.” But we did between us arrange that he could. There’s a corridor leading down on to the exercise yard where there's a gate. So we marched him down to sit on a broken chair on one side and me on another broken chair on the other side, him with his hands handcuffed behind his back. He poured out his story, burst into tears, so I had to sort of reach through the bars to wipe them away for him. It's that sort of ministry I think I can do. I can’t remember what it was all about but it made an awful difference to him being able just to tell his story.

ROGER

There have been lots of changes but the basic things we do in ministry to prisoners I think have not changed. We sit down with guys and we listen to them, we advise them, they share with us and, and they want to tell their stories. We did a straw poll recently asking prisoners at Greenwood what they wanted and what they wanted was, “I want somebody to sit down with me and listen to my story.”

And that’s what five hundred of the guys want – I can’t do it physically; it takes too much....too much of my resources really but that’s what we aim to do, is to sit down with guys.

When I came here there was a lot of group work going on by the previous chaplain, very successful group work, but when you ask the men what they wanted: “I want to sit down with you, chaplain. I don’t want to do it in a group. I don’t want to tell my story in a group, as I do in Psychology. I want to be....I want you...” and he wanted me because I’m wearing the black shirt and the white
collar. Because he's not going to do this with everyone and there's those private bits he wanted to share.

I tell this story of a guy, a big guy, he was the size of that door, comes one morning and said, “Can I tell you something?”

“Ah,” I said, “Confidential?”

“Very.”

I said, “Go on then.”

He looked straight at me and said, “My dog died last night,” and he burst into tears, and then said, “Outside these walls I can’t tell anyone else that because I’m the boss man here, I’m the leader, I’m the tough guy,” and he broke his heart…you know?

So why did he come to the chaplain? Something very simple but I think a very powerful story of who we are and what we are and how we minister to people, that somebody like that, because he wasn’t a church man or anything, but he wanted to find a place where he could come and share that very special bit of his story with someone and let go, you know. The guys would say, “I can be myself here.”

ADAM

You have asked about the prophetic aspect to ministry........ The classic model is the Old Testament prophets,..... you know Jonah wanting to run the other way and the Lord saying, “Tough, you are a prophet.” So I think that we can find ourselves repeatedly in prophetic situations ........ accepting a vocational call is to acknowledge there are moments when we may be being looked at for a prophetic response and that part of the humility we have to have in Christian ministry is never seeking for those moments but simply praying for the grace to work it out. An easy one, or one which springs to mind, right from my early days in [....]; when I started there they still had slopping out. And there were...... it was very frequent for parcels of excrement wrapped up in toilet paper to be lobbed out into the exercise yards. I think that it was the exercise yard for the hospital wing. One day, a particularly vulnerable prisoner had, and I felt very unfairly, been ordered by one of the staff to go and clean up the exercise yard...... and for a prisoner to be ordered to go and do such demeaning work. The prisoners told me what was going on, and the only response I could think to offer at the time, rather than arguing with staff, I went out on to the exercise yard. He ...... had a spare pair of rubber gloves and I simply said, “I have come to help you.” And then, windows out on to the yard and everyone watching and we got the job done in half the time and the prisoner says, “Thank you very much,” and a lot of shame-faced staff around at the time. So I think that there are sort of prophetic moments which you find yourself in and that is one which has stuck
with me....... it is a part of the erm erm vocation of the prophets always to speak the truth. There are moments when we have to do that and accept the consequences of that.

**DANIEL**

**How far, if at all, you are aware of a different kind of ministry or a different flavour of ministry with somebody who has just picked up a life or an IPP as against somebody who is doing 6 weeks, 6 months, that sort of thing?**

It is completely different, the relationship with them is completely different; they have a completely different view of what lies ahead of them. They often sort of, I suppose, think that until it dawns on them that they are going to spend such a long time in custody and they need to make the most of it. You get a lot of short termers who are, “Well I won’t bother doing that because I am out soon,” and just aren’t thinking, just aren’t in that sort of mode.

I think that actually the prison, the Prison Service and the penal system would benefit from longer sentences with prisoners because if you give them longer sentences then you can work with them. You forget that so many of the guys they’re maybe on the list as a first time offender but actually they have offended loads of times out in the community beforehand before they ever end up in custody.

I remember I did an exercise up here once with a group of about a dozen prisoners and I put up on the OHP screen a list of prisoners. I said, “These are prisoners who have been in here before you and these are their crimes,” and they were like robbery and theft, and “These are all first time offenders. What sort of sentence would they get?” And they were going through the list and, other than the murder, they were saying, “Well these guys they wouldn’t get a custodial for that; why did they get custodial?” I said, “Well actually they were previous prisoners here but they all got the same sentence. Death.” And there was just complete silence and, you know, they just couldn’t believe it. I said, “Yes, these guys stayed in the same cells you are staying in and they were first time offenders, committed these offences and they were executed for them.” How the pendulum has swung from one extreme to the other!

**Did that make an impression on them?** It did; it just all went silent and (they were) quite dumb struck by it because now everything is orientated about, you know, giving somebody a second chance, a third chance, a fourth chance and human rights, all indoctrinated about, you know, human rights and you know it is....
Do I detect a degree of scepticism there? Oh no. I believe in sort of basic human rights but human rights are, well I suppose as a Christian following the scriptures you believe in human responsibility. You don’t think that you have a right to life really because it is a God given gift, it is God who gives and takes away life, and yes.

So human rights have become, I don’t know, well actually my personal view is that we have had up here groups of prisoners and local trainee lawyers who have come in and they spend most of their time talking to the prisoners about their human rights and how great human rights are. And actually if you think about it, it’s lawyers who love human rights because they are the ones that make the money out of it. It is a lawyers’ charter: it is a benevolent fund, so you know it is OK talking about what your rights are but you equally have got to talk about also what people’s responsibilities are.

ESTHER

I mean the thing that you do get occasionally is people fall on your neck and burst into tears because I had a bloke who did that, and he was on reception and he was unusually, I think that he was probably principal carer for his little boy of 2 or 2½, and the previous night had been the first night that he had spent apart from him. And he was a big tough looking bloke with the vest and muscles you know, close cropped hair and all the rest of it, and I was in his cell with, obviously, the door open, but I was in his cell and so I suppose in a way it’s a little moment of sort of private space and he started telling me and he just fell on my neck. And he cried on my shoulder because I was a woman and he could do that; there was nobody else he could have done it to. He wasn’t going to go and tell any of the male officers, I mean what do you do, you can’t say, “Oh, get off.”

IMOGEN

I don’t have a problem with the prisoners..... As far as the officers go, I also don’t, but I think that if I was, if I got upset easily, you know, because they will make remarks and things like that you know if I was very PC as it were or worried then I suppose I could get upset by some of the things that they say. But I just let it go over my head and...Yes, can I ask what sort of things they do say? Well you know it is like erm... Not word for word obviously. No I mean it is like erm I am trying to think now........ A description would do. Yes, I am just, well it is like, “Are you allowed to have sex being a vicar?” type of thing. You know, and those kind of things as a woman and unfortunately we had a female chaplain here who had a relationship with one of the inmates and that comes up as well.
You know..... I...... and one thing that is very different as well, I will not go into an inmate’s pad, I won’t go into a cell unless I really know them and obviously I do, double lock the door and that, whereas the guys are more happy to go into somebody’s pad and you know sit on their on the bed and have a conversation whereas I don’t feel comfortable and I will take them out and go into another room. A, for my own safety obviously, but also I am very aware of prison officers and obviously because one chaplain has already been done for.... Erm... you know .... abusing her authority. I wouldn’t want anybody putting any SIRs in about me. And that can be difficult because ..... like I had one young guy who was on the SORI course and he had been abused as a child and he had also been a rent boy and he erm divulged this to me and there was issues that he had been abused by his step father, or his mum’s boyfriend, and he wanted to tell his mum this. So I had spent quite a number of times talking to him and I felt quite vulnerable because obviously I couldn’t share with the staff what I was talking about; however they kept saying, “Are you going to see him again?” And I didn’t like that, you know; I used to log it and I used to tell our guys, “Look I am talking to him about this but he only wanted to talk to me,” so of course he would ask for Imogen, he wouldn’t ask for the other chaplains. So in that way it worked negatively because I thought the officers were thinking hmm, whereas they wouldn't probably bother quite so much if one of the guys spent a lot of time with one person. But I can understand why, you know at the end of the day it is all security and, you know, I made sure that I was sat in an office with a window so they could see me at all times and I would tell them that I was going in. So I met all the criteria but I over compensated because I am a woman.

JEANETTE

I don’t embarrass very easily. I’ve sold condom machines, you know? Actually I never sold one; I had them on my list but I never managed to shift one, not for want of trying. Actually what I find is that staff tell some story or they’ll be effing and blinding and they’ll go “Oops, sorry, sorry.” And I say, “What are you saying sorry for?” And they say, “I wouldn’t have said that if I’d known you were there.” And I always say the same thing: “Ah, I live in hope of hearing something I’ve never heard before.” Yesterday, one of the governors, he was going to tell this story, joke “But I can’t tell it with you here in the room.” “Oh, why ever not?” “No,” he said, “I wouldn’t be comfortable because it’s got swearing in it.” I said, “You should go and spend some time in a vestry,” (laughter) but I find that quite charming in its nod towards respect.
**NARRATIVE TEMPLATE**  (Cortazzi 1993, 44-49, 54)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRUCTURE</th>
<th>QUESTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>What was this about?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>Who? What? When? Where?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complication</td>
<td>Then what happened?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>So what?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Result</td>
<td>What finally happened?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coda</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**LEXICAL SIGNALS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRUCTURE</th>
<th>LEXICAL SIGNALS – TYPICAL WORDS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Situation</td>
<td>situation, circumstance, time, place, person, (use of present and past tenses).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem</td>
<td>problem, drawback, need, requirement, concern, bad, awkward, risk, hard, difficulty, crisis, change, accident.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solution</td>
<td>solution, answer, remedy, cope, suggestion, overcome, improvement, iron out, prevent, develop, tackle, treat, help, implement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>success, failure, better, worse, reduce, control, benefit, enable, delighted, excellent, pleased, disappointed, thorough, great enjoyment, blessing, understand, super, welcome, neat, nice, okay, happy, does wonders, blossom, develop, come on.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>