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**Spiritual Care at the Dutch Defense Ministry: what if we change it?
Research into the way in which the Defense Ministry balances its self-
defined responsibility to provide spiritual care with the church-state
relationship.**

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Spiritual Care at the Dutch Defense Ministry: what if we change it?

Research into the way in which the Defense Ministry balances its self-defined responsibility to provide spiritual care with the church-state relationship.

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Introduction

In 2014 a research was conducted within the organization of the Ministry of Defense (Defense Ministry) to collect data about the division and scope of spiritual care based on the preferences of the military personnel.¹ This research was commissioned by the Defense Ministry and meant as a periodic evaluation. One of the conclusions of this research was that a relatively large percentage of the military personnel that has visited a spiritual caregiver² indicated not to have a specific preference regarding the caregiver's denomination. Moreover, many spiritual caregivers have indicated that a large portion of their job content is not related to their denomination and that they consider themselves capable to help people of other denominations. That raises the question whether a denominative division is still necessary. Spiritual care provided by public organizations in the Netherlands has been subject to debate and scholarly attention because of its conspicuous position in secular society's separation between church and state. Over time both spiritual caregivers as well as scholars have tried to interpret the value of spiritual care at these secular organizations in new ways that would legitimize this relation. What has not been incorporated enough is a critical analysis of the complexity of this relation that includes the different stakeholders that are contributing to the continuation of a system of which it is unclear if it still fulfills the needs of those for whom it is put in place.

The Defense Ministry requires from its military personnel to operate in violent, or even life-threatening situations. The context and nature of the work can result in existential questions or worldview disorientation.³ Like any other, soldiers have the right of access to religious rites and to religious assembly according to Article 6 of the Dutch Constitution. To be able to see to these needs, the government facilitates spiritual care during missions. The construction that has been put into place to provide for this care leaves us with questions about its efficacy.

Spiritual caregivers have a dual position at the Defense Ministry. On the one hand they are sent by the Missionary Agency of the church they belong to, which means that the spiritual caregivers are required to align the content of their work with the religious content and policy of the organization that sent them. On the other hand, the spiritual caregivers are civil servants employed by the Defense Ministry, which means that they are required to align with the organizational policy of the Defense Ministry. The government is not allowed to interfere with any content-related issues, securing the separation between church and state, and the Missionary Agencies need to be cooperative with the organizational structures of the Defense Ministry.

¹ Ton Bernts, Ruud Ganzevoort, Carlo Leget and Joanna Wojtkowia, *Omvang en verdeling van de geestelijke verzorging in de krijgsmacht vanaf 2016 Report* (Kaski, 2014).

² In this thesis the terms 'spiritual caregiver' and 'spiritual care' is preferred over the other commonly used terms of 'chaplain' and 'pastoral care'. The spiritual care has no roots in a particular (religious) tradition and can therefore be regarded as more inclusive. It is also a closer translation to the Dutch 'geestelijke verzorging'.

³ J.S.J. Hillen, "Ministerieel besluit betreffende 'Functionele Kaders geestelijke verzorging bij Defensie,'" November 28, 2011. Den Haag.

This thesis will examine the way in which the government tries to find a way to balance out its own responsibility to take care of its employees with the religious rights of the individual, while respecting the autonomy and authority of the religious communities. This will be done by exploring the legal and organizational frames in which spiritual care is constituted and their implications for the care that is actually provided. Issues that might arise regarding this construction will be critically evaluated by using scenario analyses. By examining spiritual care at the Defense Ministry, this thesis aims to provide a closer look into the efficacy of the current construction of spiritual care at government institutions that lies embedded in the government's interpretation of the church-state relationship.

We will see that the Dutch system has provided a unique balance between the state's responsibility to guarantee free access to religious and spiritual services in situations of confinement – prisons, military, hospitals – while at the same time maintaining the separation of state and church. I will argue that this construction is ambiguous and contains issues that complicate its adaptability to today's needs. The military context, which involves sending employees on missions, poses a unique challenge to fulfill this responsibility. This, together with the complexity that follows from the cooperative relationship between the government and the religious communities triggers a careful reconsideration of the current construction.

Because the subject of this thesis can be viewed from various angles, it is worth elaborating on the aspects that, due to limited time and resources, are not covered by this thesis. This thesis is not a qualitative research into the job content of spiritual caregivers. For information on the job content I am therefore limited to documents published by spiritual caregivers, other researchers and the personal experiences of the official secretary of the Spiritual Care Services. Furthermore, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to make suggestions for a possible reorganization plan (if deemed necessary), because that would require an in depth, qualitative research into the experiences of the Defense Ministry personnel that point out aspects of improvement. This thesis, however, can function as an exploratory research to indicate the bottlenecks in the organization of spiritual care in public institutions.

1. Locating spiritual care

Spiritual care as defined in this thesis is found in situations where someone might feel the need for spiritual comfort, but where one's confined situation limits normal access. These are places like hospitals, penitentiary institutions, or military missions. What this spiritual care entails might differ in every circumstance and is largely dependent on the needs of the client. It is the situation-dependent nature of the care that makes this phenomenon an interesting topic of research within the study of religion. What are these spiritual needs and what care is offered to see to it? First, this requires a closer look into what we consider to be 'spiritual'.

Religion vs. spirituality

A first step would be to look at 'spirituality' in relation to 'religion'. It is from the mid-twentieth century onwards that in western societies religion and spirituality began to be understood as referring to two different forms of religiousness. Before that, both terms would indicate a belief in supernatural beings and the practices that confirmed it. Today both terms seem to be used both interchangeably and separately, resulting in people identifying, for instance, as atheist and spiritual, Christian but not spiritual, or spiritual and religious.⁴ What is seen as spiritual and as religious varies from one context to another or even within one context from one person to another.

In the study of religion there are two main approaches to the relation between religion and spirituality. The first would be to see them as two distinct concepts that represent two opposing aspects of the same phenomenon. Religion would be more institutional, while spirituality is more individual. In this view religiousness would indicate a person's involvement in religious tradition and organization, and spirituality would be about a person's own beliefs, values and behavior.⁵ This, however, does not mean that a person is either 'spiritual' or 'religious'. Both concepts can overlap. Other possible polarizing understandings can be that of 'belief-based religion' and 'emotional spirituality', 'static religion' and 'dynamic spirituality', and 'substantive religion' and 'functional spirituality'.⁶ The second approach is to see one as a subset of the other (*family resemblance*). Spirituality is considered to be the overarching concept meaning that all religion is spiritual, but not all spirituality is religious. There can be nonreligious spirituality too.⁷ In this sense 'religion' is often perceived as established religions while 'spirituality' is seen as a way to find an orientation in life outside of the established religion, which can still happen in the tradition of that established religion, but might avert the traditional format of church attendance, doctrines and routinized rituals. This can then also lead to individuals or groups combining

⁴ Raymond F. Paloutzian, *Invitation to the Psychology of Religion*, 3rd ed. (New York; London: Guilford Press, 2017), 13.

⁵ Bernard Spilka et al., *The Psychology of Religion: an empirical approach*, 3rd ed. (New York; London: The Guilford Press, 2003), 9.

⁶ Doug Oman, "Defining Religion and Spirituality", in *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, ed. Raymond F. Paloutzian & Crystal L. Park (New York; London: The Guilford Press, 2013), 71.

⁷ Spilka et al., *The Psychology of Religion*, 11.

various aspects of multiple religious and nonreligious traditions to come to a meaning-making system of values and principles themselves. Others would refrain from religious elements and identities entirely and find fulfillment in secular beliefs, but still see themselves as spiritual.⁸

In the Western literature a few terms are used to address the profession of spiritual caregiving or counseling in public organizations. Most common among them is ‘chaplaincy’ or ‘pastoral care’, which have a long history of Christian care, but are now also used to address religious assistance in other traditions and multicultural contexts.⁹ This decision to go with the term ‘spiritual care’ can be seen as a personal preference, but can also be seen as an attempt to incorporate more actively the non-religious spirituality.

To what is considered “sacred”

So, if we take spirituality as this overarching term that can encompass both religious and secular beliefs, what is it that people seek spiritual help for? Understanding what it is that people seek spiritual help for resolves around that what offers them meaning in life. When put differently, we need to look at what people consider to be ‘sacred’ in life. A leading theory of sanctification – ‘making sacred’ – by Pargament and Mahoney (2005) defines it as “the perception of an aspect of life as having divine character and significance”, which occurs when someone perceives an object as being a direct manifestation of their idea of the Divine, as possessing qualities typically associated with the Divine, or both. They argue that ultimately anything can be sanctified. It is not defined what this ‘Divine’ concept entails. It can be theistic (God, jinns and angels) or nontheistic (boundlessness, ultimacy and transcendence). Objects or goals can be ‘made sacred’ and in that way representing something that goes beyond oneself, some sense of ultimate goal or meaning. In this sense objectives suited for sanctification can be limitless.¹⁰ What can be sanctified can differ from one natural environment to another¹¹, to sense of community¹² or family relationships.¹³

It can therefore be argued that everyone has a certain spiritual need, which in content can vary greatly, but are all oriented to a particular goal or meaning that moves beyond ourselves. It is often argued that humans are meaning-making beings. All goals, values, self-definition and senses of purpose

⁸ Paloutzian, *Invitation to the Psychology of Religion*, 12.

⁹ John Klaasen, “Pastoral care and narrative: Towards a narrative pastoral care approach in intercultural communities,” in *In die skriflig : tydskrif van die Gereformeerde Teologiese Vereniging*, 54, no. 1 (Januari 2020), 2.

¹⁰ Kenneth I. Pargament and Annette Mahoney, “THEORY: “Sacred Matters: Sanctification as a Vital Topic for the Psychology of Religion,”” *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 15, no. 3 (2005), 182. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327582ijpr1503_1

¹¹ Paul J. Deal and Gina Magyar-Russel, “Sanctification Theory: Is Nontheistic Sanctification Nontheistic Enough?” *Psychology of religion and spirituality* 10, no. 3 (2018): 244-253, Educational Publishing Foundation.

¹² Christopher Bell et al., “Community Sanctification of Forgiveness,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 42, no. 3 (September 2014): 243-251. Sage Publications.

¹³ Annette Mahoney, Kenneth I. Pargament, Aaron Murray-Swank and Nichole Murray-Swank, “Religion and the sanctification of family relationships,” *Review of Religious Research* 44, no. 3 (March 2003): 220–236. Washington, DC: Religious Research Association.

are directed towards an ultimate concern in which all aspects of life are perceived.¹⁴ But this, of course, does not necessarily have to be spiritual or religious in nature. Charles Taylor, for example, views the categories of ‘belief’ and ‘unbelief’ as simply two (or, actually, many) ways of experiencing spiritual/moral life.¹⁵ The process of sanctification can be interpreted as perceiving any aspect of life in any significant way that places that aspect in a particular ‘sacred’ (thus set aside from ‘ordinary’) position. All human beings are orientated towards a certain idea of what is ultimately true, influenced by their surroundings, to which their actions are based. This where we have to turn our attention to the distinction between ‘spirituality’ and ‘worldview’. The concept of ‘worldview’ has been defined as the fundamental perspective from which a person views every issue in life.¹⁶ It is a label with which to address the fact that every culture or every individual views the world in a particular way that might be contradictory to another culture or individual. The label is broad and therefore widely applicable, including to address one’s religious, spiritual or political views. In the Dutch context the word worldview, *levensbeschouwing* or *levensovertuiging*, is applied broadly in legal, educational and political contexts to create an inclusive environment. For the spiritual care context this has resulted in the Dutch government being the first in the world to offer humanistic spiritual care services in their public organizations.¹⁷

‘The religious’ vs. ‘the secular’

The distinction between religion and spirituality does not only illustrate the situation-dependent nature of the spiritual care, but also the religion-state context in which it takes place. The changing interpretation of what is religion and what is not and the distinction we make between institutional religion and individual spirituality hints to a changing religious landscape, a changing relation between the private and the public, or both. The process of secularism has often been used to describe the changing religious landscape. This model argues that religion becomes less and less relevant in a society where science, rationality and technology are becoming more important. Influential sociologists like Durkheim, Comte and Marx inspired many later sociological theories with the notion that an evolutionary relation exists between religion and science that would translate into a decline of the first in favor of the rise of the latter. Religion would gradually move out of people’s daily perceptions so that religious concepts become replaced by secular interpretations. This would also imply a decline of spiritual needs in a mental health context.

Lately, however, this secularization model is being revisited and being replaced by an observation that reserves a more positive outlook for the future of religion in the world. Religion is not declining, but transforming. It is important to point out the underlying assumptions that shape our notion

¹⁴ Paloutzian, *Psychology of Religion*, 72

¹⁵ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 10.

¹⁶ James Sire, *Naming the Elephant: worldview as a concept* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 24.

¹⁷ “Geestelijke verzorging krijgt gezicht in Pentagon,” Humanistisch Verbond, accessed June 7, 2021, <https://www.humanistischverbond.nl/geestelijke-verzorging-krijgt-gezicht-in-pentagon/>

of what counts as religious and what refers to a decline of such a concept. Charles Taylor in his seminal *Secular Age* among others mentions the “Judeo-Christian tradition” that has influenced our perception of the religious landscape. Where others argue that religion loses its relevance with the rise of science (we no longer need rituals to cure our cattle), Taylor points at the underlying concept that shapes this view on what religion is. An awareness and exchange of these “untoughts” is needed to come to an understanding of religion that more adequately represents reality.¹⁸ One important observation in this is that Christianity has lost its central position in society and had to make way for a plurality of religious traditions instead. Hanegraaff argued that this change in the religious landscape caused a society’s symbolic system, the way in which one views the world, is no longer be embedded in one religion, but instead is translated in secular concepts to accommodate all.¹⁹ A decline in variables such as “A belief in God” or “Attends church at least once a week” is no longer adequate to conclude a decline of religion all together, but would point towards a change in what people consider to be sacred.

Challenging the universality of the ‘religious-secular’ dichotomy, means understanding the dominant secular views on the place of religion in public places in its own historical development. In the case of the Netherlands, the government maintains a neutral approach that does not ban all religious elements out of the secular spheres, but tries to accommodate it by providing equal access. This is in stark contrast with the practice of *laïcité* in France, where a strict separation between church and state is maintained. It is part of a legacy of a policy of religious tolerance in the Netherlands. Nevertheless, the neutrality of this approach continues to be subject to debate, especially in the case of the growing Muslim minority.²⁰

Locating spiritual care in secular society

And what does the debate about the ‘religious-secular’ dichotomy mean for the way in which spiritual care should be viewed? The increase in humanistic and other nonreligious spiritual care raises the question what it is that makes the care ‘spiritual’, or in any way different from other mental care. From a humanistic perspective, Schuhmann et al. tried to offer new building blocks for a more inclusive perspective on spiritual care in secular societies that could transcend all different affiliations from both spiritual caregivers and their clients. Based on the common idea that all people are striving towards the good life, colored by their religious or nonreligious views, spiritual caregivers operating in secular institutions should place the spiritual or existential care of the clients disregarding their specific (religious) views at the center of their profession. This would instigate closer cooperation between the spiritual caregivers of all denominations. We already see that happening in the Netherlands to a certain degree.

¹⁸ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 428.

¹⁹ Wouter J. Hanegraaff, “New Age Spiritualities as Secular Religion: A Historian’s Perspective,” *Social Compass* 46, no. 2 (1999), 151.

²⁰ J. Christopher Soper, Kevin R. den Dulk and Stephen V. Monsma, *The Challenge of Pluralism*, 3rd ed. (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 113.

Pargament and Mahoney argue that the objects that are considered sacred create the situation in which people invest a great deal of their time, energy and resources into these sacred matters. Together with that, or as a result, these sacred matters represent for them a source that they can tap throughout their lives, that can evoke positive and negative emotions and which can have devastating effects when lost.²¹ There is a substantive body of literature dedicated to the relation between religion/spirituality and mental wellbeing. Findings of these researches vary. An overview of research on religion/spirituality and depression, for example, shows that greater religiousness is associated with lower depression and suicide probability. However, this trend would only be slightly over 50%.²²

In the context of spiritual care, as a spiritual actor involved in the support of the mental wellbeing of those in need of help, multiple research has been done into the role and efficiency of spiritual care in mental health settings.²³ Because spiritual caregivers, unlike psychologist, tend not to work according to a particular method of treatment after determining the diagnosis, it is harder to measure the effects that the spiritual care has on the mental health improvement of the patients. Spiritual caregivers in hospital settings, for instance, who happen to be the group receiving most of scholarly attention, feel the need to prove their beneficial contribution to the rest of the medical team or organization to maintain their position. Research on the topic can help to improve the care they provide to their patients and the education for the new spiritual caregivers.²⁴ This attitude towards the value of spiritual help fits into our broader understanding of science that needs evidence-based practices to proof its relevance and where the spiritual dimension of the personal struggle is largely neglected. Even though ‘holistic care’, treating body, mind and spirit, is acknowledged to be beneficial to the caring process, in practice the spirit is frequently excluded.²⁵

Finally, the separation between church and state, and the implied dichotomy of ‘the religious’ and ‘the secular’, also makes the role of spiritual caregivers in a secular society a subject of controversy. Where in the past religious specialists were the only ones concerned with the mental wellbeing (or at least religious sanity) of the patient, today they operate in the margins of this field of expertise. Spiritual caregivers are employed in organizations or facilities where otherwise people have no access to religious support and existential guidance, such as the military, penitentiary institutes, hospitals and nursing homes. Unlike other medical and psychological care, the availability of the spiritual care is mainly depending on the initiative and openness of the patient.

²¹ Pargament and Mahoney, “Sacred Matters,” 180.

²² Paloutzian, *Invitation to the Psychology of Religion*, 295.

²³ David H. Rosmarin and Harold G. Koenig, ed., *Handbook of Spirituality, Religion, and Mental Health* (London: Academic Press, 2020).

²⁴ George Fitchett, “Making Our Case(s),” *Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy* 17, no. 1–2 (April 2011): 4. United States: Taylor & Francis Group.

²⁵ John Swinton, *Spirituality and Mental Health Care: Rediscovering a 'Forgotten' Dimension* (London: J. Kingsley Publishers, 2001), 42.

Spiritual care in the military context

In the context of the military, spiritual care is mainly focused on the care and support for the soldiers that are in, or just left, a context of war. One of the mental difficulties that has received increasing scholarly attention in the military context of spiritual care is the phenomenon of ‘Moral Injury’ (MI). The term is relatively new and there remains some discussion as to what this phenomenon entails. In many cases MI is linked to the diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder, either as confined to this diagnosis or seen as relating to a common source of traumatic experiences. In the past other terms have been used interchangeably, like ‘moral pain’, ‘spiritual injury’, or ‘soul injury’, to indicate an existential injury caused by a war experience or other traumatic events that have dissected a person’s morality. Up to this day there is no consensus on the definition of MI. One of the first to use the term was Jonathan Shay who defined MI as the perception of injustice as a result of morally wrong action by legitimate authority in a high-stakes situation (i.e. war mission).²⁶ Litz et al. placed the locus on the individual’s own sense of guilt or betrayal after being in a situation of participating or witnessing acts that transgress their own moral values.²⁷ They argued for a holistic approach, defining MI in Sulmasy’s ‘bio-psycho-social-spiritual’ paradigm, meaning that, unlike generally done, the spiritual component of the disorder needs to be taken into an account to be able to grasp its definition.²⁸ What is understood by the term MI indicates the individual’s condition of being conflicted about the moral justice of his/her involvement in particular events that raise questions about its moral righteousness. A gap arises between moral values held and perceived reality. As a result the individual can experience guilt, shame or betrayal. In the military professional context this can lead to a dissonance from, or even disbelief in, the value of the group and/or the mission, which can result in the unreliability of that particular individual.

In a situation of life and death, questions of justice and purpose can arise that might destabilize one’s sense of morality. The spiritual caregiver can function as a guardian of this morality. Schuhmann and Damen used Charles Taylor’s concept of ‘moral space’ and Murdoch’s definition of ‘the Good’ to argue that spiritual caregivers, besides offering guidance in existential questions, must be seen as ‘representing the good’ by offering guidance to all religious and nonreligious individuals as well as a beacon for moral justice in the larger collective and society. The underlying perception is that all humans crave to move as closely possible to what is morally good in order to experience life as meaningful. What is morally good is a perfected and unreachable goal that is an attempt to see reality that is too complex and too far removed from one’s self-centered nature to fully understand.²⁹ To see to the spiritual

²⁶ Timothy J. Hodgson and Lindsay B. Carey, “Moral Injury and Definitional Clarity: Betrayal, Spirituality and the Role of Chaplains,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 56, no. 4 (August 2017): 1212-3.

²⁷ Brett T Litz, Nathan Stein, Eileen Delaney, Leslie Lebowitz, William P Nash, Caroline Silva, and Shira Maguen, “Moral injury and moral repair in war veterans: A preliminary Defense Ministryel and intervention strategy,” *Clinical Psychology Review* 29, no. 8 (December 2009): 695–706. Elsevier. For more definitions see Hodgson and Carey (2017).

²⁸ Hodgson and Carey, “Moral Injury and Definitional Clarity,” 1216.

²⁹ Carmen Schuhmann and Annelieke Damen, “Representing the Good: Spiritual Care in a Secular Age,” *Pastoral Psychol* 67, no. 4 (June 2018): 411. Springer.

needs of everyone, especially in a mission context where only one spiritual caregiver is present, the spiritual caregiver needs be able to help not just the religious affiliated but also the spiritual and/or moral component that is inherent to human functioning.

2. Locating Spiritual Care in the Netherlands

In the Netherlands, spiritual caregivers are active in health care settings (including nursing homes), penitentiary facilities, the military, at home and, since 2019, at police stations. They offer guidance in existential questions as a result of experiencing difficult situations (trauma, illness, loss). Spiritual caregivers are professionals with a higher professional education (hbo) or university degree and additional trainings. Many spiritual caregivers are registered at quality registers and professional associations.³⁰ Spiritual care at the penitentiary facilities and the military is employed and financed by the government. In those cases, spiritual caregivers are employed by the government and obtain the status of civil servant. In other situations, they may also work as self-employed freelancers.³¹

The history of spiritual care at the Defense Ministry

The current organization of spiritual care at the Defense ministry finds its roots in 1914. It was on August 28th 1914, one month after the start of the First World War that by Royal Decree eight protestant preachers (including orthodox and liberal) and four catholic chaplains were appointed in the Dutch armed forces. For the remaining of the war, 25 extra spiritual caregivers of both denominations were added. They were initially there to perform religious rites (i.e. confessions) and support the heavily wounded³², but ultimately they also contributed to the overall morality through recreation, religious education and other support remedying boredom, alcohol abuse and overall dissatisfaction among the men.³³ Directly after the war the institution of spiritual care was formalized with six protestant and four catholic caregivers that would remain in service during peace time, presumably to continue the morality check at the barracks.³⁴ However, a few years later the institution was mostly neglected. This was particularly so for the system of stand-by spiritual caregivers that were active during the war, but no longer so during peace time. When the Second World War began, the extra spiritual caregivers that were necessary in the field, turned out to be untrained and poorly instructed. These negative experiences prompted the Dutch government, to revise the organization of spiritual care at the armed forces. Until then care givers reported to the military commander and provide help as instructed by him. This was now changed fundamentally. Caregivers operated outside the chain of command and reported to the church from which they were sent. These were called Missionary Agency.³⁵

³⁰ Examples are Stichting Kwaliteitsregister Geestelijk Verzorgers (SKGV) and Vereniging van Geestelijke VerZorgers (VGVZ).

³¹ Ryan van Eijk en Sophie van Bijsterveld, "De geestelijk verzorger in het perspectief van de verhouding tussen kerk en staat: noodzaak van heldere verantwoordelijkheden," *Tijdschrift voor Religie, Recht en Beleid* 2021 (12) 2 (publication expected in July 2021).

³² David Claus, "De geestelijke verzorging in het leger te velde 1914-1918," *Militaire Spectator* 183, no. 7 (2014), 349.

³³ David Claus, "Variis Defense Ministryis bene fit," in *Met het Woord onder de wapenen: Protestantse geestelijke verzorging bij de krijgsmacht vanaf 1914*, ed. Els Boon, Jan Hoffenaar and Wilco Veltkamp (Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Meinema, 2016), 24-28.

³⁴ Claus, "De geestelijke verzorging, 1914-1918," 351.

³⁵ Jules Brabers, *Van Pioneers tot Professionals: De dienst humanistisch geestelijke verzorging bij de krijgsmacht (1964-2004)* (Utrecht: De Tijdstroom, 2006), 15-21.

In 1964 the humanist spiritual care was established at the Defense Ministry with the mission to provide spiritual care for the unaffiliated. This was met with a lot of resistant in the parliament and eventually came down to the objective that every man has the freedom to choose his (religious) affiliation.³⁶ The appointment of humanist spiritual caregivers thus led to a revision of the measurement system of the number of appointments per denomination. This and continuing discussion about the exact (financial) relation between religion and state, resulted in a research committee (Commissie Hirsch Ballin) in 1986 that had to bring out an advice for the way forward. The advice was measuring the number of spiritual caregivers by keeping track of the religious affiliation of the military personnel, at that time including conscripts, by letting them sign a form at the beginning of their service. Except for the humanists who saw it as a growing opportunity, there was a lot of resentment for this solution, also in the parliament.³⁷

Eventually in 1991 parliament decided that the number of spiritual caregivers at Defense Ministry should be determined according a 'three-pillared assessment': 1. a needs assessment among military personnel, 2. the size of the Missionary Agencies, and 3. a needs assessment among ex-military personnel who are subject to mobilization in times of crisis. This resulted in spiritual care that was 85% of religious nature and 15% humanist divided over 242 positions in 1991. This changed rapidly, however, with the abolition of conscription in 1996 and the introduction of a professional army. This cut the number of military personnel almost in half and has continuously been reduced in the following years. The number of spiritual caregivers consequentially dropped as well.³⁸

Today

Today, the spiritual caregivers are organized in the Spiritual Care Services at the Defense Ministry and count 141 spiritual caregivers of seven denomination.³⁹ The protestant, catholic and humanist denominations remain the largest and are the ones positions at the various military stations and academies. The other denominations (Jewish, Hindu, Islamic and Buddhist) are stationed in The Hague. The number of caregivers from each denomination is dependent on the number of affiliated soldiers. The growing number of denominations points towards a growing awareness of (religious) diversity within the armed forces in which the government feels obliged to facilitate. It is the main objective of the government to facilitate good proper mental care, including spiritual care to those who desire religious support.⁴⁰ A service that has been provided for over a century must have been subject to changes, both in structure and in content. We have already seen how the organization and position of spiritual care has been subject to debate over the years. Now, we will look at the current organization of spiritual care at the Defense Ministry and issues that we might find regarding its way forward.

³⁶ Brabers, *Van Pioneers tot Professionals*, 48-9.

³⁷ *ibid.* 113-4.

³⁸ *ibid.* 113-5

³⁹ Powerpoint slides by the Diensten Geestelijke Verzorging, received via email.

⁴⁰ Hillen, "Functionele Kaders", 2.

3. Spiritual care in a legal context

Several legal and institutional constructs are relevant with regard to the position of Spiritual Care Services and the caregivers. There is the individual's constitutional right of access to religion (Article 6) and the religious equality to religious services (anti-discrimination, Article 1) that has functioned as the basis of the relation between church and state.⁴¹ And there is the legal position of the individual spiritual caregiver as an employee at the Defense Ministry that is influenced by the organizational construction of Spiritual Care Services that has been instituted.

Church and state: separation and cooperation

The availability of spiritual care in the military is embedded in the first section article 6 of the Constitution that states the freedom to profess one's religion or belief.⁴² The government feels obliged to offer spiritual care to soldiers, because they oblige them to go on missions and limit their freedom of religious practice and assembly in doing so.

The provisions in the Constitution are explicitly vague to make them applicable to a wide range of situations and individual cases. This also means that details as to where the government's responsibility begins and where it ends, is intentionally ambiguous and specifics can only be established through lower level legislation that cannot be in conflict with the Constitution⁴³, or through voluntarily cooperation. Over the past decades there have been several occasions in which demarcations of responsibilities of both governmental bodies and religious institutions were discussed. The Hirsh Ballin-report is an example of that. Today the cooperative relation between church and state regarding spiritual care at the Defense Ministry is governed by the ministerial decision regarding the functional framework of spiritual care at the Defense Ministry.⁴⁴ In this ministerial decision a distinction is made between the responsibilities of the government and the Missionary Agencies. The government is responsible for the organizational frameworks, the Missionary Agencies for the qualification of the spiritual caregivers and the content of their work. This construction is a product of the cooperative relationship between the state and religion.

Missionary Agencies

A Missionary Agency is a collective of religious organization belonging to a particular denomination that functions as a representative of that community, an interlocutor for the government on spiritual and worldview related issues, and providers of spiritual caregivers at government institutions. The relation

⁴¹ Maurits Berger, *Monografie 'Religie'* (Den Haag: Sdu Uitgevers, 2010), 22.

⁴² English translation available:

https://www.denederlandsegrondwet.nl/id/vkugbqvdswwv/artikel_6_vrijheid_van_godsdiensdienst_en

⁴³ This is ensured by Article 120 of the Constitution, stating that judges cannot test content of lower laws and regulations to the content of the Constitution. Legislation at parliament is obliged to make laws in accordance to the Constitution. Here the separation of ruling powers (Trias Politica) lies secured.

⁴⁴ Hillen, "Functionele Kaders"

is built on voluntarily cooperation,⁴⁵ and therefore the initiative can both lay with the government and with the Missionary Agencies to open dialogue on religious issues in the political context.

The position of the Missionary Agencies in relation to the government is ambiguous in the sense that not in all cases the initiative to unite seems to be with the religious communities themselves. When we, for example, look at the genesis of the Muslim Missionary Agency, the Contact Muslims & the Government (Contactorgaan Moslims & de Overheid), as presented on their website, we can extract the unequal power relation between the two. The various Muslim communities tried to unite already in the '90s to be able to look after the needs of the growing number of Muslims at a national level. They were, however, unable to settle into a sustainable agreement.⁴⁶ Then, at the beginning of the 21st century events led to a new incentive to combine voices into one organization, but largely due to practical reasons insinuated by the former prime minister. On matters related to Muslims, the government needed one representative to turn to instead of a gathering of over fifty representatives of all individual communities. In 2004, after a period of negotiation, a collective of Muslim organizations succeeded in uniting into the Contact Muslims & the Government and being formally recognized as Muslim representative and spokesperson by the government.⁴⁷ They claim to represent over 80% of the Muslims in the Netherlands.⁴⁸ On their website they also mention that at the beginning their reach and strength was held back due to being 'too dependent' on the government, which only changed when they got more politically involved on their own initiative by standing up against the legal plans to prohibit ritual slaughter.⁴⁹

The unification process of the Contact Muslims & the Government raises the question to what extent the separation between church and state is fully respected. The government is not allowed to interfere in religious business, but does stimulate organization and places requirements on the size of the community the Missionary Agency needs to represent in order to be considered an interlocutor and supplier of spiritual caregivers at government institutions.⁵⁰ Put differently, the government does have a say in who can be a spiritual caregiver at government institutions and who cannot.

⁴⁵ This becomes clear in the effort to come to a mutual agreement. An example of this is the agreement to reduce church attendance to 30 persons during the COVID-19 pandemic. "Tweede Kamer 10^e vergadering Dinsdag 6 oktober 2020," Plenaire verslagen, Tweedekamer.nl, accessed May 5, 2021, https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/plenaire_verslagen/detail/64232654-8f49-41ac-a1bf-c752b6de334e

⁴⁶ "Voorgeschiedenis," CMO, Accessed May 3, 2021. <http://cmoweb.nl/voorgeschiedenis/>

⁴⁷ "Ontstaansgeschiedenis," CMO, accessed May 3, 2021, <http://cmoweb.nl/ontstaansgeschiedenis/>

⁴⁸ Minister Koolmees, "Beantwoording Kamervragen over voorzitter van moskeekoepel," Documenten, Kamervragen, Rijksoverheid, downloaded May 3 2021 from <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2019/07/23/beantwoording-kamervragen-over-voorzitter-van-moskeekoepel>

⁴⁹ CMO, "Ontstaansgeschiedenis."

⁵⁰ Hillen, "Functionele Kaders", 4.

The Missionary Agency as a supplier of spiritual caregivers at the Defense Ministry

To protect spiritual care from government interference and to safeguard its quality, the Missionary Agency is responsible for the delivery of qualified spiritual caregivers to the Defense Ministry.⁵¹ It is therefore a requirement to be sent by a religious organization that is associated with a Missionary Agency.⁵² Receiving a mission is preceded by an extensive selection procedure. To illustrate, we can follow the protestant procedure as laid out on the website of the committee responsible for qualifying new protestant religious caregivers for the military, as part of the protestant Missionary Agency.

First an application for the position of ‘military pastor’ (krijgsmachtpredikant) is distributed to which potential candidates can apply. Those invited to an interview will have their first interview with a representative from the protestant collective and two serving military pastors who will assess the candidate on the required education and competences. If selected, the candidate is required to receive a mission from the church he or she belongs to. The church decides whether the candidate is suited to receive a mission, and whether the candidate is suited to become a military pastor considering the church’s norms and values. If deemed suitable, the candidate proceeds to a second interview including the head of protestant spiritual care at Defense Ministry. Here the practicalities of becoming a military pastor are discussed and aligned with the demands of the candidate. If these too are in order, all that remains is taking medical, psychological and security tests at the Defense organization. If that too is in order, the candidate can be appointed by the Protestant Spiritual Care Services at the Defense Ministry.⁵³

The selection and appointment is not where the influence of the Missionary Agency ends. According to the statute of the Spiritual Care Services at Defense Ministry⁵⁴, the responsibility of the Missionary Agency continues in the representation of the Head of the denominative service. Each spiritual caregiver mainly works independently, but is held accountable to the Head of the service. In practice, the Heads of services manage the policy and every day decision-making. Furthermore, as an authoritative body and government’s interlocutor, the Missionary Agency can interfere when violations of the church-state relation appear to take place. Here it is the Missionary Agency that can hold the government responsible.

The spiritual caregiver: outside of the chain of command

Lastly, it is worth looking into the legal position of the spiritual caregiver. This legal position is a direct effect of the above mentioned church-state relationship. Like other government employees, spiritual caregivers are under the civil servant laws (their salaries are paid by the government). However, they are

⁵¹ This construction was designed when spiritual care under military command did not turn out to be fruitful during WWII. See Introduction.

⁵² The appointment of spiritual caregivers at government institutions by Missionary Agencies is regulated by the ‘1996 regulation regarding the appointment of spiritual caregivers at the Defense Ministry’, <https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0040036/1996-07-01/#Artikel3>

⁵³ “Regelingen,” Kerk en Krijgsmacht, accessed May 6, 2021, <http://www.kerkenkrijgsmacht.nl/index.php/100-algemeen/150-regelingen>

⁵⁴ Statuut betreffende ‘Geestelijke Verzorging bij Defensie’, Utrecht, March 7, 2012.

legally excluded from several regulations that interfere with the ability to do their work freely (content-based they are not accountable to the government).⁵⁵ In addition, because spiritual caregivers are attached to units on military missions (in contrast to other civil servants), they are also partially under the military legislation.⁵⁶ This legal construction is put in place to legally secure the caregiver's position of sanctuary, and places him outside of the chain of command.⁵⁷ This also means that the government cannot fire their spiritual caregivers, other than for logistical reasons. The further employment is dependent on the judgement of the Missionary Agency who is qualified to appoint them.⁵⁸ This places them in a unique position within the Defense organization.

Spiritual caregivers are not the only ones with a confidentiality position. Psychologists and social workers also have this confidentiality clause by law (privacy statement). They, however, do not have the element of sanctuary. This will be further discussed in the next chapter.

⁵⁵ Article 2 §4 Burgerlijk ambtenarenreglement defensie

⁵⁶ Article 1 §5 Algemeen militair ambtenarenreglement

⁵⁷ "Professionele standaard voor geestelijk verzorgers werkzaam in de krijgsmacht 2017-2021," Professionele Standaard, Diensten Geestelijke Verzorging, downloaded Februari 23, 2021, <https://www.dgv.nl/professionele-standaard>, 13

⁵⁸ Regeling aanstelling geestelijk verzorgers, July 1, 1996, accessed June 14, 2021, via <https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0040036/1996-07-01/#Artikel3>

4. The Defense organization

All military personnel are expected to go on a mission at least once in their military career, either on or outside of Dutch territory. A spiritual caregiver accompanies soldiers on their missions and during training. In addition they provide care for military personnel in preparation of a mission or care afterwards. To a lesser extent they are also available to civil personnel, veterans and family and friends of military personnel. The main focus will therefore be on spiritual care for military personnel.

A responsibility towards its employees

The relation between the organization policy and employee wellbeing has been subject to a lot of scholarly attention, not only focused on the integration of employees in the organization⁵⁹, but also the psychological wellbeing of the individual as contributing to the overall performances of the organization.⁶⁰ The Defense Ministry sends its military personnel on missions which are quite demanding, both physically and mentally. The mental wellbeing of the soldiers is an important factor in the success of any military operation. The Defense Ministry recognizes three components that can influence a mission's success. Each component influence the other together build the 'fighting power' of a nation. There is the physical, mental and conceptual component. On the level of the individual soldier, the first implies the physical capabilities to perform. The second includes the individual willpower to execute the mission. And the third constitutes the military frame (strategies, technologies, innovations, experiences) in which the operation is interpreted and executed. The second level is built on trust (responsibility, righteousness, leadership) and is influenced by a soldier's individual perception (cultural, religious, societal background). Changes in the willpower of a soldier can lead to a change in behavior.⁶¹

A soldier showing unexpected behavior is a danger to the success of a mission. A soldier is expected to be able to perform in any given situation. Training in mental resilience is therefore part of the military trainings. In preparation for a mission, the Military Mental Health Care services (MGGZ) provides information and training in stress prevention and works on building a care network among the soldiers to keep an eye out for mental issues among themselves.⁶² During missions and afterwards, a

⁵⁹ Katrina J. Lawson, Andrew J. Noblet and John J. Rodwell, "Promoting employee wellbeing: the relevance of work characteristics and organizational justice," *Health Promotion International* 24, no. 3 (July 2009): 223-33. Lawson et al. researched the impact of organizational justice in the workplace for the perceived wellbeing of the employees.

⁶⁰ Mark Loona, Lilian Otaye-Ebedeb and Jim Stewart, "The paradox of employee psychological well-being practices: an integrative literature review and new directions for research," *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* 30, no. 1 (2019): 156-187. Loona et al. offers a literature review on Human Resources practices and their effectiveness for the organization. The article suggests a shift HR practices are needed to enhance the employee's psychological wellbeing in combination with organizational performances.

⁶¹ C.J. Sellmeijer, ed., *Nederlandse Defensie Doctrine* (Den Haag: Defensiestaf, 2019), 66-73. Downloaded from <https://www.defensie.nl/downloads/publicaties/2019/06/19/herziene-nederlandse-defensie-doctrine-ndd-2019>

⁶² Eduard van Brakel, "Geen andere dokter dan de militaire dokter," Defensie Platform, accessed on June 6th, 2021, <http://www.defensieplatform.nl/2020/10/14/geen-andere-dokter-dan-de-militaire-dokter/>

soldier can seek help of a psychologist on matters of stress through trauma, anxiety and addictions. For minor mental issues the soldier can turn to the corporate social worker or the spiritual caregiver.

The job content of the corporate social worker and the spiritual caregiver overlap, but are not interchangeable. They overlap in their procedures. Their help is noncommittal and generally initiated by the employee. They are both able to guide and advise the employee to make sure he/she get the right help. This can either be by offering short term guidance themselves or a referral to psychological or other kinds of help instead. Both the spiritual caregiver and corporate social worker, as well as the psychologist, have a confidentiality towards the employee to stimulate open dialogue.⁶³ They differ in the scope of their help. The corporate social worker's main focus is work-related issues that influence the employee's wellbeing or vice versa and how to improve the situation. He/she is a point of contact for any conflict on the work floor and urgent communication between family and military on mission.⁶⁴ The spiritual caregiver, on the other hand, is not fundamentally concerned with improving the situation and functioning of the individual, but more occupied with questions regarding the meaning of the situation to the individual's wellbeing.⁶⁵ The help that is offered is done so from a spiritual point of departure and if applicable reasoned from that perspective. Furthermore, the spiritual caregiver is present and visible on the work floor (known as 'zero line care'), which lowers the contact boundaries and allows the spiritual caregiver to observe the working sphere and morale. The spiritual caregiver is therefore also in the position to approach individuals or commanders if the situation benefits from an intervention.⁶⁶

The psychologist, social worker and spiritual caregiver all operate on the same object: the mental wellbeing of the soldier. Each, however, work in their own domain. Where the boundaries lay exactly might come down to the personal preferences of the soldier (except for larger mental problems). The lack of clear work boundaries instigates a questions regarding the exact work content of the spiritual caregiver. The difference between the spiritual caregiver and corporate social worker seems to revolve mainly around the spiritual aspect of the care. This raises the question about the spiritual needs of the military personnel. If these are, for example, denominative specific, to what extent is the Defense Ministry able to see to the needs of them all? Financial and logistical constraints can make it impossible to bring spiritual caregivers from all denominations on a mission.

⁶³ For all help providers professional confidentiality is legally established. Psychological help: Article 88 Wet BIG <https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0006251/2020-07-01#HoofdstukIX>, corporate social worker and spiritual caregiver: privacy statement Article 10 Constitution https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0001840/2018-12-21/#Hoofdstuk1_Artikel10. The right to sanctuary extracted from Article 6 Constitution adds to the confidentiality in the sense that the spiritual caregiver has no responsibility to share information with Defense.

⁶⁴ "Bedrijfsmaatschappelijk werk helpt," Personeelszorg, Defensie.nl, accessed May 9, 2021, <https://www.defensie.nl/onderwerpen/personeelszorg/bmw>

⁶⁵ "Verschil met maatschappelijke en sociaal werker," Verschillen met andere functies, GeestelijkeVerzorging.nl, accessed May 9, 2021, <https://geestelijkeverzorging.nl/verschillen-met-andere-functies/verschil-met-maatschappelijk-en-sociaal-werkers/>

⁶⁶ DGV, "Professionele standaard," 14.

5. Spiritual Care Services

The construction of the Spiritual Care Services is quite unique. The Board that constitutes the spiritual care policy exists of the Heads of every denomination, an independent president and an official secretary. The Heads of services determine the content of the policy and the president tests the policy to the functional frameworks. Every Head of service receives the officer rank of colonel in order to have every denomination represented equally, despite their differences in size.⁶⁷ The making of the policy of the Spiritual Care Services is therefore both a cooperation between the denominations and between the denominations and the Defense organization (represented by the independent president).⁶⁸

This construction is put into place to adhere to the distinct responsibilities of the Defense Ministry and the Missionary Agencies. It secures the independence of the Missionary Agencies regarding the content of the spiritual care. The cooperation on the Board level fosters the embeddedness of the Spiritual Care Services in the rest of the Defense organization. On the individual level, however, the spiritual caregiver operates largely independently, both due to the nature of their work and their position outside of the chain of command.

The spiritual caregiver in the Defense organization

Before a spiritual caregiver goes on a mission, he or she agrees terms and expectations with the commander of the mission.⁶⁹ Because the embeddedness of the Services relies heavily on this cooperation, each individual spiritual caregiver has the cumulative task to keep this fragile cooperation a success for the pleasant communication and as an authoritative advisory body. An example: due to sanctuary, the spiritual caregiver is a safe place for (military) personnel to discuss personal issues. These can also be work related. If a spiritual caregiver receives multiple complains about one of the officers, he or she is in the position to report this to the commander. For the employees' wellbeing, the commander is then obliged to take note of these complaints. Here it comes down to the personal openness of the commander to trust the spiritual caregiver's opinion. To further illustrate the importance of communication: every new spiritual caregiver receives training in their complicated position. Part of that training is learning how to effectively communicate with commanders.⁷⁰

Besides the religious rites that they perform, the spiritual caregiver actively contributes to the overall mental wellbeing of the soldier. They do so during missions, but also in preparation of or as care after the mission. Their position of sanctuary implies that soldiers can call on them anytime and that they can approach soldiers whenever they deem necessary.

⁶⁷ DGV Powerpoint slides, received via email from G. van der Ende, official secretary DGV

⁶⁸ The policy is presented in the *Professional Standards*

⁶⁹ DGV, *Professionele standaard*, 13.

⁷⁰ DGV, Powerpoint slides.

The person behind the uniform

In a setting where orders are expected to be followed, it is easy to neglect to person behind the uniform. The spiritual caregiver can take on the role of bringing this part to the attention. In my conversation with the official secretary of the Spiritual Care Services, he shared some of his own experiences as a spiritual caregiver that illustrate this. On board of a navy ship a number of soldiers were assigned as shooter troops. After the orders had been given, the spiritual caregiver requested to have a moment with those men and women to discuss what it actually means to be a shooter and to be ordered to shoot at other people. Not to change their minds, but to raise awareness of the seriousness of the job and the effect this can have on the personal mental wellbeing. Eventually, one of them reported to the commander that she was no longer willing to follow the order. This also illustrates the friction that goes with the mandatory cooperation between the spiritual caregiver and those in command of the unit. Naturally, the commander was not pleased, but could not refrain the spiritual caregiver from doing his job.

Those in military training are trained to be able to function in any given circumstance. This requires certain characteristics that compose the military identity. For that matter, military education is unique in its emphasis on personal development. The Spiritual Care Services also contribute to this aspect by organizing multi-day conferences during the initial education program. In addition they offer conferences for military going on a mission, for those returning from a mission and for those leaving the service. Regular thematic conferences are also held, for example about LGBTQ+ in the military or training in mindfulness. Other conferences mainly focus on personal mental resilience and contribution by individuals to the group.⁷¹ During these conferences the perspective shifts from the individual's military contribution to the organization to how the work impacts the individual. Being critical to what it means to be a soldier or officer and being honest about what the impact that the operation can have, can contribute to the individual wellbeing. The conferences on personal development and resilience are part of the job content laid out in the functional framework and is part of the responsibility of the Defense Ministry to take care of its employees. In my conversation with the official secretary of the Services it became clear, however, that the frequency of the conferences outside of the initial education, is dependent on the value that it is given by the commanders of the different defense units. Again, the content is facilitated by the Services, but the logistics remain in the hands of the commanders in charge.

On a mission the religious services function as a place of personal reflection, remembrance and support that can contribute to an individual's mental wellbeing. Multiple testimonies of spiritual caregivers emphasized the value of the weekly moment of 'peace and quiet', whether for religious reasons or not. The services are a moment in which they can escape from the weekly routines (another week has passed), be distracted from chores and think about home.⁷² According to the official secretary

⁷¹ "Memorandum conferenties Beukbergen," DGV op Beukbergen, Beukbergen.nl, downloaded May 21, 2021 from https://beukbergen.nl/DGV_info/

⁷² "Jaarbericht 2020," Protestants, DGV.nl, downloaded May 21, 2021 from <https://www.dgv.nl/index.php/nl/protestants/jaarschrift-2020>

these days the services are more crowded than ten or twenty years ago and the services are religiously diverse. He therefore tailored his services to be open for all, though still working from his own religious background. This open attitude towards other religious background is a requirement of working at the Defense Ministry according to the functional framework, as well as in the professional standard of the Services.

6. Scenarios of change

In the previous chapters we looked into the construction surrounding spiritual care at the Defense Ministry. We have seen that the government feels obliged to offer spiritual care to soldiers, because it obliges them to go on missions and infringes on their freedom of religious practice and assembly in doing so. Whether this rationale is valid or not is a judicial issue not subject to discussion in this thesis. Nor is the question whether or not it is fabricated *post factum* to justify the historic developments that have led to the legal arrangements surrounding spiritual care. In an attempt to meet this objective, an ambiguous construction has been erected that involves a shared responsibility between the government and the Missionary Agencies. The construction revolves around the idea of the separation between church and state. In this construction the government tries to find a way to balance out its own responsibility to take care of its employees with the religious rights of the individual, while respecting the autonomy and authority of the religious communities. Several issues can be identified that result from these arrangements and their practical implementation.

In this chapter we will examine three issues by using scenarios of change. Scenario analyses allow us to think beyond what is given and can help us identify weaknesses in the current system. They are focused on remedying these weaknesses considering all stakeholders involved. This method is often used in a quantitative research to investigate possible risks and determine effects of possible futures. Scenario analyses are used to:

- explore to what extent our choices today can shape the future and to what extent we will need to adapt to those parts of the future that we do not shape;
- promote an informed discussion among stakeholders about the future;
- analyze various conditions causing vulnerabilities and opportunities for possible scenarios; and
- focus on formulating policies that are robust and/or flexible under different scenarios.⁷³

We will be using scenario analyses as a tool to reason through the effects that changes in the current construction will have on the issues identified. Three types of scenario analysis are commonly used. Predictive scenarios (what will happen?), explorative scenarios (what could happen?) and normative scenarios (how can a specific scenario be realized?).⁷⁴ Because we want to know to what extent the issues can be resolved, we will be using normative scenarios.

Issue 1: The separation of church and state

The separation of church and state is embedded in the Constitution in Article 6. It does not allow the government to interfere in religious affairs of citizens, including soldiers. At the same time, the government distilled a certain responsibility from this article in regard to the availability of religion it

⁷³ Sondoss Elsawah, “Scenario processes for socio-environmental systems analysis of futures: A review of recent efforts and a salient research agenda for supporting decision making,” *Science of the Total Environment* 729 (2020), 2. Elsevier.

⁷⁴ *ibid.* 3

should provide to those who are involuntarily secluded, including military personnel on missions. At the Defense Ministry, some standards had to be defined, in order to be able to make sure that proper spiritual care is provided. The government not being able to interfere, Missionary Agencies have been introduced as suppliers of spiritual caregivers and supervisors of the content of their work.

The Missionary Agencies' existence, however, is ambiguous. The establishment of the Muslim Missionary Agency, for example, gives reasons to believe that the initiative to unite did not entirely belong to the Muslim communities themselves. Moreover, the government sets requirements as to the size of and diversity within the community that the Missionary Agency represents, in order to be considered a political interlocutor and spiritual care-supplier.⁷⁵ This also means that religious communities not represented by the Missionary Agencies cannot provide spiritual caregivers at the Defense Ministry. Beyond that, the government has put in place the functional framework in which, from an organizational standpoint, the spiritual caregiver needs to be able to operate. This includes, for example, the practicality of being able and willing to provide spiritual care to those outside of one's own denomination.⁷⁶ It can be argued that the government, as the provider of that framework, is actively framing the church-state relationship, and therefore interfering in the religious affairs of citizens.

Issue 2: The of employment of spiritual caregivers

The current construction of spiritual care at the Defense Ministry resulted in a peculiar position of the spiritual caregiver within the Defense organization. Spiritual caregivers are employed by the Defense Ministry, but only by approval of the Missionary Agencies. If the approval by the Missionary Agency is revoked, the spiritual caregiver is fired by the Defense Ministry.⁷⁷ This leaves spiritual caregivers in a vulnerable position that no other employee endures. This particular construction is one of the practical implications put in place by the government to protect the separation of church and state. This separation means that the government cannot end the work relationship with the spiritual caregiver other than on grounds that fall within the organizational framework, for instance when a reorganization causes the Defense Ministry to reduce the number of spiritual caregivers.⁷⁸ The quality of the care and the job performance of the caregiver is not determined by Ministry, but by the Missionary Agency. This also means that the when the caregiver's personal conviction are no longer aligned with that of the Missionary Agency, the approval might be revoked. As a result the caregiver will be fired by the Defense Ministry. That makes the religious convictions of the caregiver reason for the continuation of the employment at the Defense Ministry.

⁷⁵ Hillen, "Functionele Kaders," 4.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

⁷⁷ Regeling aanstelling geestelijk verzorgers, July 1, 1996

⁷⁸ Article 116 Burgerlijk ambtenarenreglement defensie. The spiritual caregiver is not excluded from this article, as stated in article 2 §4.

Issue 3: The primary objective is not fully met

The primary objective of the arrangements surrounding spiritual care is to provide soldiers with spiritual care in order to counter the limit to their constitutional freedom of religious practice and assembly. Practical logistic constraints limit the number of caregivers that can be assigned to a mission and as a result not every soldier may receive care from a spiritual caregiver from his or her own affiliation. This means that the primary objective is not met for those soldiers. To still be able to see to the spiritual needs of *all* the soldiers, spiritual care is tailored in such a way that it is general and not-denomination-specific. The question then is to what needs this ‘general spiritual care’ is offering relief.

A number of scenario’s can be designed to verify if the issues stated above can be resolved. Each scenario will be outlined briefly and then discussed to what extent the issues discussed above can be resolved.

Scenario 1: Provide spiritual care to any soldiers by a caregiver from his or her own denomination

In this scenario any soldier on a mission will have access to spiritual care from a caregiver from his or her own denomination. ‘General spiritual care’ is given only to those soldiers that have indicated that they do not adhere to any specific denomination. This requires the logistic constraints to be ignored. The spiritual affiliations of the taskforce selected to carry out the mission must be established and a care giver from each denominations will be assigned to join the mission. This scenario may require additional transportation capacity and other logistic arrangements to be made. Depending on the number of concurrent missions, the number of caregivers required for each denomination may be higher than the number available today. The Missionary Agencies are still in charge of selecting the spiritual caregivers to represent their denomination and the Missionary Agencies jointly supervise the content of the spiritual caregivers.

The impact on the issues discussed above is as follows:

Issue	Resolved	Explanation
1	No	The Missionary Agencies are still required to select spiritual caregivers and supervise their work, so the current organizational structure remains.
2	No	The spiritual caregivers still depend on the Missionary Agency to continue their employment by the Defense Ministry.

3	Partially	This issue is resolved as the Defense Ministry makes sure any denomination present in the taskforce is represented by a spiritual caregiver from that denomination. Any soldier can join a spiritual caregiver of his or her own choosing to practice religion and assemble. However, this applies only to soldiers affiliated with one of the denominations represented by the Missionary Agencies.
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The financial and logistic implications of this scenario may be significant. This may trigger a further discussion as to the extent in which the religious needs of the military personnel is met. In addition, if the religious composition of the taskforce shows that a small minority affiliates with any of the Missionary Agencies, questions may rise about the effectiveness of spiritual caregivers on that particular mission. Soldiers affiliated with any denomination not represented by a Missionary Agency will still not be able to receive the spiritual care they are entitled to.

Scenario 2. Define spiritual care as a professional skill independent of the personal religious affiliation of the caregiver

In this scenario spiritual care is considered to be a professional skill that spiritual caregivers use to provide spiritual care to any soldier regardless of the religious affiliation of the soldier and of the caregiver. This still fits into the vision of the role of the spiritual caregiver by the Defense Ministry as presented in the functional frameworks, where it is stated that spiritual caregivers are appointed “to support the military personnel in their orientation in religion and worldview and the existential and ethical questions that come with it.”⁷⁹ The responsibility to facilitate spiritual care is thus interpreted more generally and not religion-specific. ‘General spiritual care’ is the type of spiritual care given to soldiers and they are instructed to expect that. The denominative division within the Spiritual Care Services is lifted and all spiritual caregivers will be in one delegation. There is no longer a Hindu spiritual caregiver appointed to see to the needs of the Hindu personnel. The spiritual caregiver is appointed, disregarding his affiliation, to see to the spiritual and existential needs of all. This would make the affiliation of the spiritual caregiver a personal aspect that is not on the foreground. Only if the soldier and the caregiver happen to adhere to the same affiliation can any ‘specialized spiritual care’ be given as the caregiver may be authorized to perform religious rituals.

The authority to appoint the spiritual caregivers is transferred from the Missionary Agencies to the Defense Ministry. The caregiver becomes a ‘regular’ civil servant that no longer possesses a distinct legal position. Caregivers are selected solely based on their skill in providing spiritual care and not on their religious affiliation.

The impact on the issues discussed above is as follows:

⁷⁹ Hillen, “Functionele Kaders,” 2. Translated by the author.

Issue	Resolved	Explanation
1	Yes	The Missionary Agencies no longer required to select spiritual caregivers and supervise their work. Churches and religious groups may have a role in defining the content of spiritual care, but they are not required to organize themselves. The spiritual caregiver is no longer required to have received a mission to be employed by the Defense Ministry, therefore also giving the opportunity to non-affiliated caregivers.
2	Yes	The spiritual caregivers are selected based on their skill in providing spiritual care and have no dependency on approval from a Missionary Agency to continue their employment by the Defense Ministry. They can be fired by the Defense Ministry if they do not meet the professional standards. The Defense Ministry can be involved in the content of their work and can therefore encourage better alignment in the broader Defense organization.
3	Yes	This is issue is resolved as the soldiers can only expect to receive 'general spiritual care'. Any spiritual caregiver on a mission can do that, so no logistic constraints apply. Any soldier still assemble with fellow soldiers to practice religion and if a spiritual caregiver from the same denomination happens to be on the mission, he or she can join too. In this way being on a mission constitutes no infringement on religious freedom and assembly.

Having received a mission from one of the religious organizations affiliated with a Missionary Agency is no longer a requirement to be appointed as spiritual caregiver at the Defense Ministry. This means that the Missionary Agencies are no longer involved in spiritual care at the Defense Ministry and the church state relation is no longer pose an issue in the context of spiritual care. At the moment, spiritual care at the Defense Ministry exposes a tilted relationship between the government and the religious communities. The government interferes in the religious right of free assembly by posing requirements as to who is allowed to be employed as spiritual caregiver at the Defense Ministry. The requirement is to be sent by one of the government-approved Missionary Agencies. To be politically acknowledged as a Missionary Agency, the government requires the agency to represent a substantial size and degree of diversity of the religious community. This also means that any religious organization that refuses to associate with and represented by the Missionary Agency, are therefore denied the possibility to supply spiritual caregivers to the military.

A similar construction has recently been installed at the police department. In order to see to the existential questions that may arise due to the nature of the police work, the police department initiated the employment of spiritual caregivers. The primary objective here is to be able to offer support in existential questions and moral and mental resilience of the police men and women.⁸⁰ To realize this they chose for a construction more similar to the health care system. Instead of seeking a cooperative relation directly with the Missionary Agencies, they used the expertise of the VGVZ association that sees to the professional qualifications of the associated spiritual caregivers. To guarantee the diversity in religious and worldview-based background, the denominative division as used* by the VGVZ is used. The primal objective designs a ‘general spiritual care’. If requested, the police organization can provide worldview-specific spiritual care by either referring to colleagues or call on extern spiritual caregivers (associated with the VGVZ).⁸¹ In this construction the Missionary Agencies are not involved directly in the spiritual care service, but only as a requirement of the VGVZ to be associated. The VGVZ, however, also allows for unaffiliated caregivers.⁸² The VGVZ is a professional association and not a religious or worldview affiliated organization. It represents all spiritual caregivers based on their professional competences.⁸³

Scenario 3. Change the objective: provide only mental care to soldiers

In this scenario providing spiritual care to soldiers is no longer considered to be an obligation of the government. Like any other employer the Defense Ministry is required to take care of its employees and provide proper care in times of danger and stress, including mental care. Soldiers are instructed to expect mental care and not spiritual care. This type of care is provided by professional such as corporate social workers and psychologists and they will be trained specifically to deal with of Moral Injury and similar war-related traumas.

Spiritual care is left to existing churches and congregations. They may feel the need to make specialized personnel available to soldiers to help them deal with Moral Injury and other war-related traumas, but the government has no role in facilitating that.

The impact on the issues discussed above is as follows:

Issue	Resolved	Explanation
1	Yes	Spiritual caregivers are replaced by mental caregivers and the Missionary Agencies are therefore no longer required to select spiritual caregivers or

⁸⁰ “Implementatieplan geestelijke verzorging,” Politie, accessed June 11, 2021,

<https://www.politie.nl/binaries/content/assets/politie/nieuws/2019/00-km/implementatieplan-geestelijke-verzorging-externe-communicatie.pdf>

⁸¹ *ibid.*

⁸² “SING (Institutioneel Niet Gezonden),” VGVZ.nl, accessed June 11, 2021, <https://vgvz.nl/sectoren/sing-institutioneel-niet-gezonden/>

⁸³ Van Eijk and Van Bijsterveld, “De geestelijk verzorger in het perspectief.”

		supervise their work. The interference by the government into religious matters no longer takes place.
2	Yes	The caregivers are selected by the Defense Ministry based on their skill in providing mental care and have no dependency on approval from a Missionary Agency to continue their employment by the Defense Ministry. They can be fired by the Ministry if they do not meet the professional standards.
3	No	The soldiers are no longer offered religious support and access during missions in the form of a spiritual caregiver/religious specialist. If requested, support can be offered in the form of time and space that can be made available to facilitate the religious needs to perform rites or assemble during missions to not infringe on the right to freely confess one's religion. However, it is not possible to allow the military personnel to seek out the support of a religious specialist.

This scenario challenges the idea that the spiritual caregiver offers care that is unique to their profession and which would be fall in neglect when they would be replaced by other forms of mental care. Research would have to show in what way the care exactly contributes to the overall wellbeing of the soldier.

Discussion

Using scenario analyses allows us to shed light on the bottlenecks of the organization of spiritual care at the Defense Ministry. The three issues raised in this analyses cover fundamental issues that would require fundamental changes in the spiritual care organization in order to be resolved. These scenarios can hopefully trigger further discussion into the legal and political relation between church and state and to what extent it should be considered that the implications of that relation should be regarded as fitting. The case of spiritual care at the Ministry of Defense offers a good example of an implication of that relation and the way in which it seems to be limited by its own construction.

The first issue requires us to critically evaluate the relationship between the government and the Missionary Agencies, especially the role that has been assigned to the Missionary Agencies. The fact that the Missionary Agencies have such a prominent role in the Spiritual Care Services at the Defense Ministry, makes it difficult to review the efficacy of the care. To estimate to what extent the care that is provided is still seeing to the needs of the military personnel, the Missionary Agencies would have to initiate an examination of their own work content and overall relevance. Even the smallest hint that their work might not be effective, might jeopardize their authority and will therefore most likely be avoided. As a result the existing construction is kept in place. At the same time, the government is actively contributing to this construction by requiring having received a mission to be able to apply for a position

at the Defense Ministry. In this way the government is not only continuing the involvement of the Missionary Agencies, but also infringing on the opportunity for other caregivers to be able to offer support to the spiritual needs of soldiers.

In order to be able to estimate the efficacy of the spiritual care and allow for eventual changes, the work relationship between the Missionary Agencies and the Defense Ministry at the level of the Board of the Spiritual Care Services should be avoided. Either by removing them from the immediate influence in the Spiritual Care Services, in, for example, a construction that has recently been introduced at the police department. This will require a fundamental change in the current relationship and agreements between the religious communities and the government. Or by no longer offering spiritual care as a service within the Defense Ministry. This solution would probably instigate further discussion regarding the responsibility of the government to provide the care. It would also be likely that the Defense Ministry would prefer to have the services as part of their organization, because of the necessity to provide good mental care to maximize the success of the military missions.

The second issue follows from the first issue. As long as the involvement of Missionary Agencies in the Spiritual Care Services continues, the spiritual caregiver will remain in his ambiguous legal position. Only when approval of the Missionary Agency is no longer required and the separation of responsibilities within the Spiritual Care Services are lifted, will the spiritual caregiver lose its dual position. In that way the spiritual caregiver can only be fired when the Defense Ministry has reasons to do so. According to Article 1 of the Constitution this cannot be on the grounds of religious affiliation. This creates situation in which the spiritual caregivers are only evaluated on their job performances.

The third issue touches upon the question to what needs spiritual care is offering relief. Spiritual care is structured denominative-specific as a result of a history of care originally provided by the religious specialists form a specific denomination to someone adhering to that denomination. To be able to care for a population that has grown religiously and culturally diverse, the Spiritual Care Services have grown into a service providing care from seven different denominations. However, during missions the number of spiritual caregivers is limited. Due to financial and logistic constraints this has been accepted and spiritual care has grown into 'general spiritual care' to be able to see to the needs of all. The fact that it should not matter which spiritual caregiver is providing the care and therefore everyone is able to receive the same care, seems to be reason enough to continue the current construction. Even when that means not every soldier is receiving the spiritual care it would prefer. This does not necessarily pose a problem. As long as soldiers are content with the care that they receive, there is no reason to change it. It does, however, raise questions regarding the needs that soldiers need help for. And whether this requires the ambiguities of issue 1 and 2.

As we have seen in the first chapter, spiritual caregivers that work in a multidisciplinary team with other (mental) care providers, feel obliged to underline the relevance of their work. It has been argued that the spiritual caregiver can offer the care to the holistic care that is otherwise neglected in the evidence-based approaches taken by other medical specialists. In the chapter about the Spiritual Care

Service we can find a similar pattern. The spiritual caregiver focusses a lot of his work on the person behind the uniform by organizing interventions, personal development conferences and being present at the work place. Especially the last aspect is what distinguishes their work from that of a psychologist or social worker. Here it is the spiritual caregiver's position outside of the military rank that allows him to be 'present' without the needing the permission of those in command.

This raises the question to what extent the relevance of their work can be considered of religious nature, or can rather be considered a byproduct of an organizational structure brought into existence with the manifestation of the cooperative relation between the government and the Missionary Agencies during the Second World War. It would have to show whether the 'traditional' construction of spiritual care is still in line with the spiritual needs of the personnel, or, put differently, if this construction still benefits the spiritual care that might have changed over time to see to the spiritual needs of the military personnel.

Conclusion and suggestions for further research

The organization of spiritual care at the Defense Ministry shows us how the relationship between church and state can result in an ambiguous organizational structure that does not serve the initial purpose, but is perpetuated nonetheless. The original purpose was to safeguard freedom of religion and philosophy by providing access to religious service for those who are sent on a mission and cannot visit their regular place of worship as a result. The actual organizational structure has led to Spiritual Care Services being only partially embedded in the Defense Ministry, which can complicate the connection with the actual needs of the military. A complicated church-state-relationship is maintained by the co-operation between the government and the Missionary Agencies, which is both used to limit certain areas where the government cannot interfere – the content of the work of the spiritual caregivers - and to make sure certain responsibilities – the employment of the spiritual caregivers - can be shared. The establishment of the Missionary Agencies is therefore both a means for the government to maintain the separation of church and state and a means to exercise influence. By maintaining prerequisites for the establishment of a Missionary Agency, the government is operating in a grey area, because it is in fact interfering in the organization of religious life. This is allowed (*'gedoogd'*) in the interest of being able to provide the Defense Ministry with spiritual caregivers.

One result of this ambiguous construction is the dual position of spiritual caregivers as a government employee, but reporting only to the Missionary Agency. As a result they are only formally embedded in the Defense Organization and dependent on their own initiatives and the willingness of regular employees to work with them. Their position outside the formal military hierarchy only adds to this ambiguity. At the same time, this position contributes to the uniqueness of the job as a confidant for the soldiers.

A recurring question in all contexts of spiritual care is the question which care the spiritual caregivers actually give. We have seen that there has been a shift toward 'general spiritual care' as a result of the fact that not every denomination is represented on every mission. That means that not everyone's religious needs can be addressed and this in turn leads to the assumption that the spiritual caregivers provide not necessarily spiritual care, but rather mental care and the additional ability to perform certain religious rituals. The spiritual caregivers' position outside the regular military hierarchy, their availability on the ground and their non-medical approach can make it easier for military personnel to seek their help about personal and life questions.

Suggestions for further research

During my research several questions have come up that require further research, that can give us a better understanding of spiritual care at the Defense Ministry and the relation between church and state. First, a clear insight into the actual spiritual needs of the military is currently lacking. This is required in order to be able to establish what type of issues and questions the soldiers need help with. A better understanding of the mental health of its employees can help give the Defense Ministry a better view of

the impact of the work on the employees and the types of problems that occur during missions and during regular work. Because of the dangerous and sometimes life-threatening nature of the situations the Defense Ministry puts its employees in, the care for mental health is a priority. In addition, research into the spiritual needs of the military can be used as a case for research into spirituality, philosophy of life and religious experience in society in general. In this thesis and in the 2014 report that estimated the current size and division of spiritual care at the Defense Ministry⁸⁴, the question was raised what the benefits are of the denominative distribution that Spiritual Care Services maintains. A better understanding of the spiritual needs of the military can help answer that question from a requirements point of view. It can also help gain a better understanding of other issues specific to the armed forces, such as Moral Injury, conscientious objections and diversity.

Secondly, research is required into the actual work content of the spiritual caregivers. Only when we have a better understanding of what they actually do and the extent to which they fulfill the needs of the military, can meaningful suggestions be made regarding the future of spiritual care at the Defense Ministry, the way it should be organized and the actual position of the caregiver with regard to the military hierarchy. The 2014 report already stated that such a review was required and a plan had already been made. This review was never done, because the Defense Ministry is not permitted to investigate the content of the work of Spiritual Care Services. Only the Missionary Agencies can instigate such a review or at least their co-operation is required.

Lastly, research is required into the origin of the Missionary Agencies and the way they function. The Missionary Agencies may have been established as a way to guarantee the separation of church and state, but it appears that by accepting conditions they have increasingly become instruments of the government. A clear understanding of the exact nature of the relationship between the Missionary Agencies and the Government requires further research.

⁸⁴ Bernts et al., *Omvang en verdeling van de geestelijke verzorging*, 41.

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