



## Reflections for My Student-Aged Self

22 January 2023

Lieutenant General Sir Andrew Graham

*Judges 7: 1–18    Luke 10: 25–37*

When John Summers invited me to come and speak this evening his riding instructions were broadly ‘talk about something you might say to your younger self’.

My theme is encapsulated in this short poem by the Victorian poet, failed undergraduate and ‘wastrel’, Adam Lindsay Gordon:

Question not, but live and labour  
Until one’s work is done,  
Helping every feeble neighbour,  
Seeking help from none;

Life is only froth and bubble,  
Two things stand like stone,  
Kindness in another’s trouble,  
Courage in one’s own.

I arrived at Trinity shortly after completing my initial three weeks training at Sandhurst where I had just had my first introduction to the thinking that lay behind the motto of the RMA – serve to lead – and of the expectations that the army had of its people. An early discussion had been about the question what is service? Lord Grey of Falloden – ‘Discussion without definition is useless’.

In the dictionary service is *doing something for someone*. I note that the definition does not say *for a price or some sort of reward, recompense or return*. So true service implies an element of self-sacrifice and selflessness; giving away something of value to the recipient without return.

The actions of the Samaritan in picking up the traveller at the side of the road – a wounded traveller whom the privileged, elite and intelligentsia had ignored – and tending to him at his own expense in terms of time, effort, disruption to travel arrangements certainly falls squarely into the definitional bracket.

Certainly in the army the strength and cohesion of the fire team, section, platoon or gun crew is governed in considerable part by the will power, contribution and commitment of every man and woman to the team, and especially to serve the other members of the team. That means that the strong, the fit, the experienced, clever and skilful helping and encouraging and serving the less strong, less fit, less experienced, less clever and less skilful ... and being prepared to be helped and encouraged by others in their turn. Service to others in

quiet times of preparation and in busy times, in good times and tough; and since military organisations have leaders and commanders the quality of the leadership and example provided by that designated or appointed commander is itself a form of service to the unit, entity or institution.

In 1915 an army chaplain, the Revd Philip Byard Clayton, was sent to serve in France. Known universally as 'Tubby' he was instructed to set up some sort of rest house for the troops. Tubby would no doubt have come across the Revd Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy in the course of his time in France. In the foreword to his hard-hitting book of essays, *The Hardest Part*, Studdert Kennedy – known colloquially as 'Woodbine Willie' for his habit of going everywhere with a knapsack of cigarettes on his shoulder – writes, 'When a chaplain joins a battalion no one says a word to him about God, but everyone asks him, in a thousand different ways, "What is God like?" His success or failure as a chaplain really depends on the answer he gives by word and deed. The answer by deed is the more important.'

During the Great War the issue of sustaining morale in the most testing, demoralising of circumstances revolutionised the role of chaplains and chaplaincy. Military commanders became more and more convinced that the spiritual and material comforts that the service of chaplains could bring was a crucial and sustaining force for the morale of citizen soldiers. Field Marshal Haig wrote in his diary 'no one could do more than a chaplain to sustain morale and explain what we are fighting for ... a good chaplain is as valuable as a good general'.

Selflessness and comradeship are at the heart of a good padre's approach and work – their service. He or she is someone who takes a share of the soul-searching and hardship that the individual experiences and then, through quiet and thoughtful, appropriate words, or well-judged silence, or action, helps worried people make some sense of the world around them in order that they can continue to face the world and do their duty.

It is all pretty timeless. A private soldier wrote home in 1918 of his battalion padre: 'He was always with us. He was always in the front line.' In 2003 a non-church-going young trooper asked whether the padre was coming with them. The answer, 'of course', perhaps exemplifies the truism that at times of the greatest confusion and uncertainty, stress, challenge, worry or difficulty the time of greatest spiritual need is likely to coincide with the time of greatest pastoral need. And to come right up to date and away from soldiering I note that the Dean of Chapel drew attention in the most recent Annual Record to the role that chaplains here at Trinity played during the lockdown period in helping to build and sustain resilience, and encourage fortitude.

Of course, as John and the chaplains here will agree, a sense of humour helps. An elderly chaplain was sent on a drill course for chaplains at Sandhurst. The first morning on parade the Scots Guards Drill Sergeant addressed them respectfully: "Reverend Sirs, when I read my Bible I read that two disciples ran to the empty tomb, one outrunning the other, but the second entered the tomb. There was the tomb, empty, with the grave clothes neatly folded on the side, the head cloth was in a separate place also neatly folded. Now, Reverend Sirs, I have taken the liberty of going round your rooms this morning and all I can say is that you are a disgrace to your master."

Back to Tubby and his task. He decided to steer away from the traditional church club; rather to set up an everyman's house. It was named Talbot House, but soldiers being soldiers it very soon became known by its initials TH, and then, in the radio signaller's parlance of the day, as TOC H. The club opened on 15 December 1915 and ran for the rest of the war.

After the war Tubby started a membership organisation which committed itself to the service of others. To join you had to answer one simple question: 'What is service?' To which the answer was: 'It is the rent we pay for our room on earth'.

Whether or not he meant rent paid to God – he was a churchman after all – I am not sure. And in a way I rather hope not, since that might have allowed non-believers to decide that the notion of rent did not apply to them and with it drop the obligation of service for others.

I think that Tubby was onto something. It was certainly good enough for The Proclaimers in their song Sunshine on Leith: 'While I'm worth my room on this Earth I will be with you'.

First of all, when you owe or pay rent you are renting something tangible. In this case it is the privilege of life and having a place on earth.

Second, you pay rent to someone for something. So if not to God, then it must be to your fellow human beings, to society, to the other inhabitants of this planet, to the world at large.

Third, it is about personal obligation and responsibility. You cannot offset it because you are wealthy, or pass it someone else to pay it for you, or buy yourself out of it, delegate it or abrogate it.

I said earlier that the motto at RMA Sandhurst is 'serve to lead'. The implication is that for leaders in all walks of life, not just military ones, and for leaders at every level service and leadership balance off one another; two sides of the same coin. Neither is a right, both are an obligation; neither is or should be transactional and neither can be delegated or sidestepped as inconvenient.

It is not too much of a stretch to suggest that one of the obligations that goes with the territory of having been educated at places like Sandhurst and Trinity, or actually of being educated pretty much anywhere, is that of being prepared to set and take a lead, not by barking orders and commands or by having expectations of position and rank and status commensurate with your academic achievement, but through the standards, example and selfless, unflinching service that you demonstrate every day – who you are and what your obligations and responsibilities to others written or unwritten may be, not what you are or what rank or position you hold.

John's direction, as I said, was to speak about something I might say to my younger self. First of all I would draw my younger self's attention first to Tubby Clayton's proposition that service is the rent you pay for your room on this earth with all that that means for how you approach life and people in all of its and their many and varied dimensions. And then I would point him to the timeless sentiments of that short poem by Adam Lindsay Gordon, Question Not: helping every feeble neighbour or better still love thy neighbour ... or try very hard to do so regardless of circumstance, rank, wealth, position; kindness in another's trouble; showing courage in one's own – though I part company with him about seeking help from none.

The monument to the 51st Highland Division at Beaumont Hamel depicts CSGT Rowan of the Gordon Highlanders. The monument was sculpted by George Henry Paulin, a relation of Professor Roger Paulin of this parish. It bears the slogan at the base 'la's a bhlaire math na cairdean' which translates as 'friends are good on the day of struggle'.

I would certainly introduce my younger self to that slogan – and explain that if that talented, adventurous but restless man had understood that truth he might have been better able to handle the dark and self-destructive forces which lead him ultimately to take his own life.

Finally, I would advise that self-same younger self to do what they can to mitigate the risk that the arc of personal obligation and responsibility which underpins the concept of service becomes dangerously narrow. There will be lots of reasons and events and changes that

contribute, none of them bad in themselves, but the cumulative effect on how society looks, behaves and thinks of itself and how individuals living in that society see their responsibilities and obligations to others begin and end may be unfortunate and debilitating as the obligations of citizenship and the concept of community responsibility risk becoming irrevocably weakened. Perhaps, more simply, I would urge my younger self to be more the committed and unselfish Samaritan than the stand-offish Levite or judgemental passer-by.