

IN DEFENSE OF CHAPLAINCY

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Introduction

In his book, *A Peculiar People: The Church as a Culture in a Post-Christian Society* Rodney Clapp picks up on the autobiographical story of Henry Nouwen as he describes a time when he served as a chaplain upon a Holland-America cruise line ship. This story opens the first chapter of the book, “The Church as Unchurched: How Christians Become Useless.” In this story, Nouwen describes how his Captain, during a time of distress, said, “Why don’t you just stay around, this might be the only time I really need you.”¹ Drawing from this story, Clapp goes on to address the issue of how the church has become useless and irrelevant and what he believes the church should do to correct this problem. So, by this portrayal the chaplain is nothing more than a lucky rabbit’s foot that does nothing of real value until there is a crisis. Clapp is not alone in his negative portrayal of the role of the chaplain. In their influential book “Resident Aliens,” Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon critique the ministry of most pastors as “nothing more than a court chaplain, presiding over ceremonies of the culture, a pleasing fixture for rites of passage like weddings and funerals...”² This negative portrayal sees the chaplain as a figurehead that does nothing more than preside over ceremonies. More recently, N.T. Wright uses the term chaplain in this sense, describing chaplaincy as a mere presence... “[getting] alongside people wherever they are, whatever they are doing, and tell them that God loves them and wants them to be happy in their pursuits.”³ Of the above portrayals of chaplaincy ministry, this is perhaps the least objectionable, viewing the chaplain as one who ministers the presence of God. Picking up on the characterization of Clapp and Hauerwas and Willimon and then going even further, Bryan Stone has coined the phrase “chaplain to the state” to describe how, since Constantine, the church has compromised and allowed it’s mission and purpose to become tarnished and subservient to the needs and requirements of the state.⁴ It seems the term “chaplain” is gaining a very negative reputation these days, at least within a segment of academia.

While there may be a kernel of truth in these characterizations of chaplaincy, the purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that the above examples mischaracterize the ministry of a great number of faithful ministers who serve in chaplaincy ministries. For most people chaplaincy is a very unfamiliar field of ministry, and like most things we do not understand, there is a tendency to make assumptions about chaplains and the ministry they perform. Unfortunately, these

¹ Rodney Clapp, *A Peculiar People: The Church as a Culture in a Post-Christian Society*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 16.

² Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 73.

³ NT Wright. *Reading the New Testament Missionally*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B Eerdmans, 2016), 176.

⁴ Bryan Stone. *Evangelism after Pluralism: The Ethics of Christian Witness*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018) 26.

assumptions can be based on inaccurate information or at least inaccurate perceptions. Since we most commonly associate ministry with activity within the context of the local church, what chaplains do is often not viewed as “real” ministry. Chaplains are regularly asked, “So when are you going to come back to the ministry?” As if what they are doing is not ministry! The question most people are really asking is, “When are you going to come back to the ministry of the LOCAL CHURCH?”

Another assumption is that those who enter chaplaincy ministry do so because they are sub-standard ministers in the local church. This may be true in some cases, but we may also want to consider the fact that not everyone is called to ministry in the local church and the gifts and graces of some may simply be better suited to ministry outside of the local church context. A final assumption, and one that will dominate the discussion that follows, is that the chaplain is a “sell-out” to the state (or whatever organization in which they serve) becoming a metaphor for compromise to the institution or the government. Stone represents a segment of academia that has made the word “chaplain” a metaphor for the subjection of the church to the state. He argues that since Constantine, the church has become “chaplain to the state.” While it is beyond the scope of this paper to argue the question of “Constantinian infection” of the church, the goal here is to confront the view that the chaplain is a de facto “sell-out” to whatever institution he or she serves.

This kind of language proves detrimental to a growing field of ministry and does a great disservice to a great number of ministers who are doing tremendous ministry for the kingdom of God. The hope here is to demystify chaplaincy. That is, bring the ministry of chaplains out of the dark and into the light so that all who care to read this might better understand the ministry of the chaplain and use the term in a more positive manner. The following will focus primarily on military chaplaincy. As we will see, the concept of chaplaincy was born out of the military context. However, it is important to note that chaplaincy ministries are growing exponentially in the medical, first responder and corporate environments. Any exclusion of these other forms of chaplaincy ministry below is simply a matter of focus. Hopefully, the reader will be able to easily apply what follows to these other very important fields of chaplaincy ministry.

Origins of the Chaplaincy

The origin of the word “chapel” dates back in history to St. Martin of Tours. Marculfus (seventh century), tells of St. Martin dividing his military cloak (cappa), giving half to a beggar at the gate of Amiens, then wrapping the other half around his shoulders thus making it a cape (capella). This cape was preserved as a relic and accompanied the Frankish kings in their wars. The tent that sheltered the cape became known as the cappella and the priest that attended the sacred relic as well as attending to the king’s religious needs became known as the cappellanus.⁵ From this etymology are derived the modern words chapel and chaplain. But this story is more

⁵ “Chapel,” Catholic Encyclopedia, last modified March 15, 2014, accessed January 28, 2014, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03574b.htm>.

than “a quaint bit of etymology explaining the origin of the terms.”⁶ This story offers a significant clue to the very nature of chaplaincy ministry. The cappellanus was a member of two institutions simultaneously, first as a priest of the Church and secondly as servant of the King’s army. Chaplains are unique in the military as the only group of officers whose primary identification is with a nonmilitary institution. But they are also unique in the church, as the only large group of the clergy whose vocational identification is with a non-church social institution. The military chaplain has one foot in heaven and the other in a combat boot.

The establishment of chaplains to provide for the spiritual needs of soldiers in the United States dates back to the origins of the United States of America when in 1775 General George Washington proclaimed:

The honorable Continental Congress having been pleased to allow a Chaplain to each Regiment, the Colonels or commanding officers of each Regiment are directed to procure Chaplains accordingly; persons of good characters and exemplary lives – to see that all inferior officers and soldiers pay them a suitable respect and attend carefully upon religious exercises.⁷

Title 10, United States Code (USC), Section 3073 (10 USC 3073), Section 3547 (10 USC 3547), and section 3581 (10 USC 3581), establishes the position of Chaplain in the Army, and, together with regulations promulgated by the Secretary of the Army, prescribes the duties of that position. “This statutory authority requires commanders to furnish facilities and transportation for Chaplains to perform their duties (165-1 2009).”⁸ For much of the U.S. Army’s history the chaplain was not a prominent figure, virtually vanishing between conflicts, then surging when the ranks grew to a substantial fighting force. During the rapid expansion of the Civil War both the North and South issued legislation that established rules for accessioning qualified clergy to become chaplains. On July 17, 1862 Congress issued legislation ensuring that a chaplain must be an ordained minister who must be in “good standing as such...with recommendation for his appointment ...from some authorized ecclesiastical body.”⁹ This legislation recognized not only the need for chaplains to provide for the spiritual needs of soldiers, but also the need to seek assistance from the church to provide qualified clergy to serve as chaplains.

The government of the United States of America has historically sought to provide for the spiritual needs of its soldiers by working with churches of all denominations to care for this diverse population. The diversity of the chaplains, representing the many denominations found within the nation, is reflective of a providing function rather than an attempt to establish any particular form of religion. A look at the chaplain rosters during the American Civil War era

⁶ Richard G. Hutcheson. *The Churches and the Chaplaincy* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), 17.

⁷ Hutcheson, *The Churches and the Chaplaincy*, 23.

⁸ Army Regulation 165-1, *Religious Support: Army Chaplain Corps Activities*. (Washington DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2009), 1.

⁹ John W. Brinsfield, William C. Davis, Benedict Maryniak, James I. Robertson, Jr. *Faith in the Fight: Civil War Chaplains* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2003), 12.

clearly shows that virtually every religious group was represented, though the Methodist church had the largest representation on both sides (Union 38%, Confederate 47%). Not only was there diversity, but there was also a remarkable ecumenical spirit among chaplains that can still be witnessed in the Chaplain Corps today. It is important to note that it was the religious diversity of the American population that created a need for a diverse chaplaincy, and it was the hardships of war that motivated men and women to leave behind issues that divide and focus on what was important and essential to their common Christian faith. One Confederate soldier summed it up well, “It matters not what denomination he be, we only ask for a sensible man, who preaches the Gospel of Christ; let the road be called by any name, so it lead to the True Portal.”¹⁰ During times of stress and privation (such as field training or combat), soldiers are less interested in epistemological correctness in favor of a living, flesh and blood person who suffers with them incarnationally.

Establishment

“The Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”¹¹

The First Amendment of the constitution does two things that impact both the very existence of a military chaplaincy and the way that chaplaincy is conducted. First, it instructs the lawmaking body of the government that they are not to make any law that establishes religion. But, secondly, it affirms the free exercise of religion and prohibits Congress from denying that right. Thus, we have a statement that holds two ideas in tension and balance with one another. From the earliest days of our nation this “establishment” phrase has been used to argue that there should be a separation between the church and the state, often looking to founding father Thomas Jefferson, who speaks of a “wall of separation” between church and state. This becomes the foundation for arguments against a chaplaincy.

From the beginning there have been those who believe that a chaplaincy in the military is a form of governmental establishment of religion. On the surface it would certainly appear to be the case. For there to be a chaplaincy the government must bring ministers into the government (the military) and pay them using taxpayer funds. On the surface, this appears to be anything but separation. In the 1870’s four groups (The Liberal League, The American Secular Union, the Free Thought Federation, and the American Association for the Advancement of Atheism) banded together to create a platform that made several demands. One of those demands was as follows: “We demand that the employment of Chaplains in Congress, State Legislature, the Navy

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 77.

¹¹ "First Amendment". Cornell University Law School Legal Information Institute. Archived from the original on May 3, 2013. Retrieved May 3, 2013. (Institute n.d.) <http://www.webcitation.org/6GLwqnsXK>

and Militia and all institutions supported by the expense of the public, shall be abolished.”¹² Though they were unable to get the issue before the courts at that time, in 1920 the case of *Elliott v. White* (which attempted to stop payment of chaplain salaries out of the federal treasury) did reach the Federal Court of Appeals in the District of Columbia. While this case was dismissed, the effort by like-minded groups continue today in the form of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the Military Religious Freedom Foundation. The effort to remove the chaplaincy from the military as unconstitutional under this separation construct is virtually as old as the chaplaincy itself. What has prevented these groups from getting their way? Quite simply, it is the affirmation in the Constitution of the free exercise of religion.

Courts continue to view the chaplaincy as a fundamental means of providing for the free exercise of religion to the military. In the 1840’s and 1850’s several memorials were submitted to Congress calling for the abolishment of chaplaincies in the Army, Navy, West Point, at Indian stations and in both houses of Congress. These memorials were referred to the House Judiciary Committee for study and report. On January 19, 1853 Senator Badger presented that report which included the following:

The ground on which the petitioners found their prayer is, that the provisions of law under which chaplains are appointed for the army and navy...are in violation of the first amendment of the constitution of the United States...If Congress had passed, or introduced, or should attempt to introduce, in favor of any church, or ecclesiastical association, or system of religious faith, all or any of the obnoxious particulars – endowment at public expense, peculiar privileges to its members, or disadvantages or penalties upon those who should reject its doctrines or belong to other communions – such law would be a “law respecting an establishment of religion,” and therefore, in violation of the constitution. But no law yet passed by Congress is justly liable to such an objection...We have chaplains in the army and navy and in Congress; but these are making no distinction whatever between any of the religions, churches or professions of faith known to the world. Of these, none, by law, is excluded.¹³

The key point of the above statement is that the Senate interpreted the “establishment” clause of the First Amendment as prohibiting any preferential treatment of one church or religious group over another. This issue of non-preferential treatment is critical. Because the chaplaincy does not favor one denomination or religious group over another it is not unconstitutional, or to state it positively, the chaplaincy is constitutional because it is diverse and does not attempt to prefer one denomination or religious group over another.

It is critical to understand that the very existence of the chaplaincy depends on an openness and a refusal to favor one group over another. Later that same year Mr. Meacham of the House Judiciary Committee made the following report:

¹² Greenwood, Charles L. “The Constitutionality of the Military Chaplaincy.” *Church and Society*, (March-April 1974): 29.

¹³ Greenwood, 28.

Two clauses of the Constitution are relied on by the memorialists....One of these is the sixth article, that “no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.” If the whole section were quoted, we apprehend that no one could suppose it intended to apply to the appointment of chaplains...[the whole article is here quoted]...Everyone must perceive that this refers to a class of persons entirely distinct from chaplains. Another article supposed to be violated is article 1st of Amendments: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion.” Does our present practice violate that article? What is an establishment of religion? It must have a creed defining what a man must believe; it must have a rite and ordinances, which believers must observe; it must have ministers of defined qualifications, to teach the doctrines and administer the rite; it must have tests for the submissive and penalties for the non-conformist. There never was an established religion without all these. Is there now, or has there ever been, anything of this in the appointment of chaplains in Congress or army or navy? ...We presume that all will grant that it is proper to appoint physicians and surgeons in the army and navy. The power to appoint chaplains is just the same, because neither are expressly named, but are appointed under the general authority to organize the army and navy, and we deem the one as truly a matter of necessity as the other...The navy have still stronger claims than the army for the supply of chaplains...If you do not afford them the means of religious service while at sea, the Sabbath is, to all intents and purposes, annihilated, and we do not allow the crews the free exercise of religion.¹⁴

Though a rather lengthy quote, it provides some very important direction for us. First, it provides four criteria by which we can determine the establishment of religion. Second, it argues that chaplains provide a need for the military that is comparable to the lawyer or the surgeon. The congress appoints these special staff officers to provide specialized professional support to the military that requires credentials that are beyond the scope of the military or the government to provide.¹⁵ All three of these professions (lawyer, doctor, and minister) must be trained and validated by a system that is beyond the scope of the government but are still needed by the government. Lastly, it affirms that the Chaplain Corps is necessary in order to provide Service Members their constitutional right to the free exercise of religion.

¹⁴ Greenwood, 29.

¹⁵ As recently as December 10, 2019 The U.S. House and Senate Armed Services Committees released the Conference Report for the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2020, which included Collins’ amendment to protect religious liberty for all chaplains serving in our military. The Collins amendment guarantees that “the church—not state—is the sole determiner of whether a chaplain is qualified to represent his or her religion.” For more information: <https://dougcollins.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/collins-amendment-protect-religious-liberty-military-chaplains-included>

The Nature of the Chaplain

Given the above discussion on the creation of the chaplaincy, it seems there still remains one key point, the chaplain does serve two masters. The chaplain is both a servant of the church and of the institution. Most denominations have endorsing agents whose job it is to ensure that clergy are representatives in good standing with the denomination or religious organization that they represent. Due to the First Amendment, the State has no authority to credential or ordain clergy – it must look to the church to do this work and provide qualified clergy to provide ministry to military personnel. So, a chaplain may be an officer in the military but his or her credentialing comes from the church. A chaplain who loses this credentialing or endorsement will also lose his commission in the military, he becomes useless to the military regardless of his military bearing or standing. So, the chaplain is a soldier, employed by the State but “on loan” from the church. So yes, there is an undeniable duality to the nature and role of the chaplain. This duality may be viewed by some as a compromise, or worse, a “sellout.” Chaplains are employees of the institution. Military chaplains are commissioned officers who go through much of the same training, professional development, and promotions system as other military officers. But there are a few important exceptions.

The first distinction is that the military created a separate branch of service just for the chaplaincy. In fact, the Chaplain Branch is one of the oldest branches in the military. This is the legacy of our first President, George Washington, who established a chaplaincy to not only care for the religious needs of soldiers (that is, provide worship) but also to serve as a moral influence within the unit. As part of the chaplain branch, the chaplain wears a distinct insignia that identifies him or her as such. That insignia is a direct reflection of the chaplain’s religious endorsement. For the Christian, the insignia is a cross. For a Jew, the tablets. For the Muslim, a crescent. These religious symbols and the status of “chaplain” take precedence over rank. Exceptions to Army Regulation AR 670-1 “Wear and Appearance of Army Uniforms and Insignia” are made for the chaplain, ensuring that their distinctive religious symbol is visible. Headgear is the most prominent example. Rather than rank, the chaplain will wear his or her distinctive religious symbol on headgear.

Additionally, chaplains are always addressed by branch rather than by rank. It would be very odd to address an infantry captain as “Infantry Jones” but the chaplain is always addressed as “Chaplain Jones.” Why? To emphasize the distinct religious role and function of the chaplain. Above and beyond all other things, the chaplain serves a distinct role as an ambassador of his or her religious organization. In written correspondence the rank of the chaplain is always put in brackets, emphasizing its secondary place in importance. For example, rather than writing “Captain Jeff Spangler” a chaplain would write “Chaplain (Captain) Jeff Spangler.” This is true all the way to the highest ranks of the Chaplain Corps. Additionally, chaplains who attain the rank of general officer also maintain their branch distinctiveness even though all other general officers remove their branch identifier. The word “general” means general, that is, they are no longer beholden to their initial branch of service (infantry, artillery, military police, etc...), but the chaplain always wears the distinctive religious symbol. While all other general officer flags are red, the chaplain general officer flag is purple, yet another distinction.

Another key distinction is the noncombatant status of the chaplain. The role of the chaplain is not direct participation in the violence of combat. Great care is taken to ensure that chaplains minister to the human needs of the soldier and not to do the job of the soldier. The ethics of this can be sticky at times, and some controversial situations have arisen over the years, but the policies make it clear that chaplains do not bear arms and they do not engage in combat. An example of this is that though the Geneva Convention allows a chaplain to carry a defensive weapon, such as a handgun, the policy of the Army Chief of Chaplains forbids a chaplain to “bear arms” of any kind. The reason for this is to ensure there is no confusion about the role of the chaplain in combat. Lastly, it is worth noting that the chaplain does not carry command authority. That is, chaplains never serve as commanders. This is yet another way of preserving the distinctive religious role of the chaplain. Commanders carry a great weight of responsibility and authority, making life and death judgments over those under his or her command. The commander is the ultimate authority who bears the sword on behalf of the state. Therefore, in keeping with the noncombatant role of the chaplain it would be inappropriate for the chaplain to carry this kind of authority.

It is important to highlight all of these distinctives in order to show that while it is true that the chaplain is a part of the institution, great thought and care have been taken over the years to ensure that the distinctive role of the chaplain as a representative of the church is preserved and protected. The chaplain exists to care for the spiritual needs of soldiers, to be an agent and voice of morality, to be an advisor to the commander, and particularly for the Christian chaplain, to be a Christian Witness within the institution they are serving.

Chaplain to the State

Stone, along with those of his mindset, picks up on the dualistic nature of chaplaincy and coins the term that describes the church as “chaplain to the state.” What he means by this is that the church has allowed itself to become a servant to the state. Thus, the church is no longer an independent authority of its own but has surrendered itself to the power of the state. He names Constantine as the source of this subjection. Quoting from John Wesley’s sermon “On Former Times” Stone names the conversion of Constantine the Great as the pivotal event when the church subjected itself to the state and became “chaplain.”

Indeed, Wesley does name Constantine’s favor upon the church as a source of corruption. But if one examines the context, it will become clear that he goes on to say that there has been corruption in the church nearly from the very beginning. What Wesley is arguing is that the “former days” of the church were no better than the present movement of holiness and reform within the church at the time. Nevertheless, we cannot dismiss the fact that Wesley saw the mingling of church and state as more destructive to the church than “all the persecutions she had previously endured.”¹⁶ To describe this corruption, Stone uses the term “chaplain,” and it is this negative use of the term which is objectionable.

¹⁶ Stone, “Evangelism after Pluralism,” 27.

As outlined above, though the chaplain serves within the institution of the state, the roles and responsibilities of the chaplain have been painfully protected and preserved. That is, there is a clear line of separation of powers even within the institution when it comes to the service of the chaplain. The chaplain's presence within the institution is not a *de facto* violation of separation. Therefore, Stone's use of the term "chaplain to the state" is a gross misrepresentation of the role of the chaplain. It is a derogatory term that undermines the sacrifice and service of thousands of ministers who are a faithful Christian witness within the empire. The nature of Constantine's influence and possible corruption or subjugation of the church, must be left to another time. However, it seems that the agenda behind the criticism is to undermine the legitimacy of the Catholic church and Western Christendom that followed. Certainly, there have been faults and failures along the way, and much to critique and correct. However, even an evangelical Protestant can appreciate that there is much to be thankful for when it comes to the heritage of Western Civilization.

Perhaps this sounds like nationalism and civil religion (two great sins for some in liberal academia). While acknowledging some missteps of the past, we might do well to reject the self-loathing that many seem to indulge in these days. The church should speak prophetically to society and take care to put her faith in Christ alone. At the same time, when living in a just society, Christians should participate and be a positive influence. Perhaps we should ask ourselves whether scripture teaches that Christians reject all identities or allegiances outside of the church. Jesus seemed to be just fine with identifying as a Jew (which is a nationality and race as much as it is a religion), and Paul both Jew and Roman citizen. They did not renounce all other allegiances, nor did they command others to do so. It was only when those other identities conflicted or demanded solitary allegiance that Christians had to make a choice. Even then, they did not renounce Roman citizenship, but simply declared a greater and higher allegiance to Christ.

Citizens of a just society who perform their civic duties; vote, salute and pledge their flag, sing patriotic songs or even put their national flag up on the platform of their church, are not worshiping their nation, they are participating in the social order to which they belong. As demonstrated above, the importance of separation is in preventing the state from establishing religion. Society needs more Christians to participate in government, not less. It seems that those who so enthusiastically support Christian witness would look favorably on Christian involvement and witness within society. Otherwise, where is the Christian supposed to witness, the church? At home? Exclusively Christian gatherings? So long as the state or institution does not demand loyalties that conflict with those of Christ, the chaplain or any other believer is right to participate and be a Christian witness within society, bringing transformation from the inside out.

Pacifism

One of the factors that drives this "chaplain to the state" position stems from the pacifist influence of John Howard Yoder. Stone clearly believes that pacifism is central to the "ethics of

evangelism”.¹⁷ Pacifism seems to be quite in vogue these days, particularly within certain academic circles. I certainly understand, it does give one a sense of standing on the moral high ground. And, of course, holding to a pacifist perspective would certainly give one reason to be highly suspicious of the morality of those who serve in the military, whatever the capacity. After all, the military is the killing machine of the empire and all who are a part of it must be morally suspect.

First, the historical church has addressed this question to a great level of depth. Out of this grappling we have what is known as Just War Tradition (JWT). It began with St. Augustine and great Christian theologians have added their contributions to this field of study over the centuries. Today, one of the leading scholars of JWT is James Turner Johnson, author of such books as “Just War Tradition and Restraint of War” and “Can Modern War be Just?” Of course, the problem with JWT for many scholars is that it originated out of the Catholic church, which (according to them) has become corrupted by the empire thanks to Constantine. As “chaplain to the state” St. Augustine and the Roman Catholic Church seem to have nothing of any value to add to the subject, especially to a pacifist. But if the reader would please indulge just this one point here. The JWT finds its birth by asking the simple question: “If a person is attacked, does a Christian have a moral responsibility to intervene?” What is the loving response to witnessing a defenseless person being brutally attacked? Would it be loving to piously declare one’s pacifism and walk away? Find your answer to this simple question and the rest is simply a matter of scope (personal or institutional) and proportionality (how much).

Yoder appears to look rather narrowly at scripture. Of course, the teachings of Jesus are central to the Christian ethic. But we also have the instruction of Paul and his practical application of faith in Christ as well as the apostle John and his revelation of Christ, not to mention the entire witness of the Old Testament (unless we want to view scripture from the position that there are two gods, one of the Old Testament and another of the New Testament). To keep this succinct, let’s simply suggest that much of Jesus’ teaching that pacifists use to support their position comes from a disregard of the struggle Jesus had with keeping his teaching on the kingdom of heaven distinct from the zealot insurgency that was quite active – even among his own disciples (i.e. Simon the Zealot). It seems important to consider the possibility that Jesus wanted to make it clear that his movement not be confused with the Maccabean revolts of the past or the current zealot insurgency that was violently seeking to restore the Davidic kingdom at the time. Jesus’ rejection of violence is not a command to pacifism, it is an effort to clearly distinguish the disciple of Jesus from the Zealots who were attempting to use force in order to throw off Roman oppression.

Beyond the gospels, a review of Acts and the expansion of the church to the world of the Gentile raises a trivia question. What was the occupation of the first Gentile to receive the Holy Spirit? A look at Acts 10 reveals that it was in the home of Cornelius the Centurion – a soldier of the Roman Empire. God decided to first pour out His Holy Spirit upon the Gentiles in the household of a Roman soldier. Upon seeing this, Peter baptizes the entire household of Cornelius, a Roman soldier. It’s quite interesting that of all the possibilities that existed, God

¹⁷ Stone, “Evangelism after Pluralism,” 3.

chose a Roman soldier and his family to be the first Gentiles to receive the Holy Spirit. Additionally, it is very instructive that we have no account of Peter, or anyone else, demanding that this soldier abandon his profession either to qualify him for receiving the Holy Spirit or for remaining a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ.

In addition to the testimony of Acts, Paul's statement in Romans 13:4 reads, "For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer." In this passage, Paul is very clear that believers are to obey the laws of the Empire in which they live, that the Empire is God's servant to do good (we could add specifically: to provide order and protection, roads, commerce, etc.), and that as a matter of conscience the believer should obey the laws of the Empire and pay taxes (something that Jesus himself taught as each of the synoptic writers attest: "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's..."). But here is a subtlety that is important to address here. Paul clearly tells us that the "one in authority" – that is, the representative of the Empire – is God's servant to do good, but also that this same servant can be an agent of wrath to bring punishment by the sword. This is what one from the JWT would call, "right authority." There are certain people who may rightly and justly bear the sword and take life. So, it seems that God is okay with Roman soldiers coming to faith, and as we read of Paul's journeys, particularly after his arrest and journey to Rome for trial, he is witnessing to authorities of the Empire all along the way. So, what happens when the "one in authority" becomes a believer? The responsibilities of the one in authority does not change. He must protect, he must defend, he must execute justice. Paul never seems to grudge this God-given duty and responsibility, even if that person is a believer. I think this is a good time to make a modern application. What about our law enforcement officers? Should modern believers shy away from serving the empire as law enforcement officers who bear arms, and on rare occasion may be called upon to use deadly force? Are all believers to withdraw from public office and shy away from serving the empire in which they live? It seems that the Gospel is not about withdrawing from society and letting it decline but rather to engage in society and transform it from the inside out. Perhaps the church needs more believers serving the empire, not less.

Next, look at the Jesus of Revelation. Yes, this is a look to the future, but nevertheless, orthodox Christianity teaches that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8)." So, if it is in Jesus' nature to forgive, to turn the other cheek and give his own life, it is also in his nature to administer justice. Revelation 19 depicts Jesus as the rider of the white horse, who rides into battle against the beast, the kings of the earth and their armies. Verse 21 tells us that the rider on the horse kills these armies and all the birds gorge themselves on their flesh. Well, that's pretty disturbing! Perhaps we can debate about how we are to interpret apocalyptic literature and whether or not this is metaphorical imagery, but perhaps we should consider scholars such as N.T. Wright who are very keen on the notion that scripture teaches us that God intends to quite literally establish a new heaven and a new earth.¹⁸ And, in this case, evil must be judged and destroyed – and it will have to be done by the righteous. Let us

¹⁸ N. T. Wright. *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*. (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2008).

remember that God did establish a kingdom on earth – Israel. God himself fought as a warrior to help establish that kingdom, and he authorized authorities to wage war and execute justice on His behalf. So, to sum up, unless we want to advocate that the Bible depicts multiple gods who ordered conflicting commands, we may want to re-think our notions of pacifism as a Christian teaching.

Lastly, it may be helpful to look to the Manual statement of the Church of the Nazarene addressing this issue:

922. War and Military Service. The Church of the Nazarene believes that the ideal world condition is that of peace and that it is the full obligation of the Christian Church to use its influence to seek such means as will enable the nations of the earth to be at peace and to devote all of its agencies for the propagation of the message of peace. However, we realize that we are living in a world where evil forces and philosophies are actively in conflict with these Christian ideals and that there may arise such international emergencies as will require a nation to resort to war in defense of its ideals, its freedom, and its existence.

While thus committed to the cause of peace, the Church of the Nazarene recognizes that the supreme allegiance of the Christian is due to God, and therefore it does not endeavor to bind the conscience of its members relative to participation in military service in case of war, although it does believe that the individual Christian as a citizen is bound to give service to his or her own nation in all ways that are compatible with the Christian faith and the Christian way of life.

We also recognize that, as an outgrowth of the Christian teaching and of the Christian desire for peace on earth, there are among our membership individuals who have conscientious objection to certain forms of military service. Therefore, the Church of the Nazarene claims for conscientious objectors within its membership the same exemptions and considerations regarding military service as are accorded members of recognized noncombatant religious organizations.

The Church of the Nazarene, through its general secretary, shall set up a register whereon those persons who supply evidence of being members of the Church of the Nazarene may record their convictions as conscientious objectors.¹⁹

In keeping with her tradition of keeping a “middle way” the Church of the Nazarene acknowledges and approves of military service while also respecting the conscience of those who classify as “conscientious objectors.” One must be careful not to confuse a conscientious objector (one who feels personally constrained from taking human life) with a pacifist (one who believes all taking of human life is morally wrong). The Manual statement is not supportive of a

¹⁹ Section 922, “War and Military Service,” in *Manual, 2017-2021: History, Constitution, Government, Sacraments, and Rituals*, Church of the Nazarene online (official) edition (accessed 12/20/2019) <http://2017.manual.nazarene.org/paragraph/p922/>

pacifist position, but merely provides support for a conscientious objector. Perhaps a brief way to clarify this distinction is by using the case of the recent movie based on the life Desmond Doss, “Hacksaw Ridge.”²⁰ Doss was not a pacifist. He did not have an issue with the necessity of war and did not believe war and violence were unjustifiable, he merely believed that he could not violate his conscience by personally engaging in the taking of human life. Doss was a conscientious objector, not a pacifist. In a similar way, the Church of the Nazarene does not take a pacifist position but offers support to the conscientious objector.

The “Useless” Chaplain

Before closing, perhaps we should go back to the source of all this discussion about chaplaincy and re-examine the experience of Henry Nouwen. It would be a gross misrepresentation to confuse Nouwen’s personal feelings of inadequacy with an objective judgment of uselessness of chaplaincy ministries. Without a doubt, many chaplains have experienced similar situations with their commanders. Some commanders have “no use” for their chaplain. These are the type of commanders who either do not understand the role of the chaplain or dislike the idea that the institution requires them to have a chaplain. In either case, usually the commander’s attitude is manifested as “just stay out of the way!” A metaphor that one senior chaplain used for this phenomenon is that the chaplain is like a “firetruck” – he or she has little value until there is an emergency.

The reality, however, is that regardless of how the commander may or may not value the role of the chaplain, a faithful chaplain is performing tremendous ministry every day whether it is recognized or appreciated by the commander or not. Regardless of one’s stance regarding evangelism within a pluralistic environment, the chaplain, by virtue of the nature of the calling, is, in fact, an agent of change and transformation within the institution. How can a true and authentic representative of Christ be anything less? Though soldiers may spend the vast majority of their time training and preparing for a comparative fraction of time in combat, the chaplain is always engaged in actual ministry whether the unit is training or not. Even during training exercises real life happens; real casualties, real marital issues, real spiritual crisis, real ethical and moral decisions to be made, and real worship – and the chaplain is there to minister Christ’s word and presence in the midst of it all. So, while the chaplain might identify closely with Father Mulcahy, of the popular USA sitcom *M*A*S*H*, who feels inadequate and useless amidst all the pain and suffering of a combat hospital, the reality is that the chaplain brings the intangible, incarnate presence of God into the midst of it all.²¹ We would do well not to take Nouwen’s transparency in his experience as a chaplain too far. Our feelings are often far from reality, especially within the unquantifiable realm of the spiritual.

²⁰ “Desmond Doss,” created by Mel Gibson, in *Hacksaw Ridge*, written by Robert Schenkkan and Andrew Knight, Cross Creek Pictures, Summit Entertainment and Demarest Films, 2017.

²¹ “Father John Patrick Francis Mulcahy,” created by Larry Gelbart and Gene Reynolds, in *M*A*S*H* the TV series written by Larry Gelbart, CBS, 1972-1983, recurring character seasons 1–4, regular character seasons 5–11.

In summary, we would do well to be careful not to malign the vocation of thousands of ministers simply for the sake of coining a phrase or illustrating a negative dimension of ministry. Certainly, the nature of chaplaincy is dualistic, serving two masters, one secular and the other sacred. Rather than maligning chaplains, perhaps we should remember that the kingdom of heaven was always designed to be an “inside-out” kingdom, not a “come-out” kingdom. That is, the kingdom of heaven is about transforming the lives of men and women, regardless of where they live or what their social status happens to be. The kingdom of heaven exists within the empire, wherever it may be found – witnessing, proclaiming, converting and transforming lives. We need Christian soldiers, police, governors, and even Christian politicians because as these people live out the kingdom and wrestle with the challenges before them the empire is transformed and remade so that God’s will might truly be done on earth as it is in heaven. Chaplains bring the kingdom of heaven into the empire, as faithful witness, as prophets who speak truth to power, and as evangelists who proclaim the good news of the gospel and lead men and women to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. As John Wesley stated so clearly in his sermon “On Former Times,” the church has and always will struggle with corruption and abuse. So, as we wrestle with the various issues and challenges of the church, let’s take care not to malign those who are literally serving at the front lines of ministry.

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