

THE MILITARY CHAPLAIN THE FRAMEWORK WITHIN WHICH HE SERVES

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We find in the Apostle Paul a strange and interesting anomaly. To us of a strongly conservative, Biblical background, with our strict adherence to the Word of God there is apt to be found a somewhat rigid, unbending attitude toward worldly people and worldly institutions. This attitude causes us to feel that we should not be contaminated with evil. We are thus unable, sometimes, to open our hearts in true love to those who need us most. As we consider Paul, in the light of this scripture, we realize that in great natures we sometimes meet with a remarkable combination of firmness and yielding. To do a great work in the world a man needs a powerful will, a resolution not easily moved. At the same time that same man here displays a flexibility of disposition and a readiness to adapt himself to different characters and changing circumstances. Without the determination that approaches obstinacy, he will not keep the one aim before him. Without the pliancy needed in dealing with men, he will not be able to secure the aim.

Now here is the anomaly: the same Apostle Paul who said, "this one thing I do" (Phil. 3:13), is here found professing that it was his principle and his practice to "become all things to all men" (I Cor. 9:22). Accustomed in his varied life to dealing with rabbis and philosophers, Paul also delighted in ministering to the rudest barbarian! Note with me three instances of his pliancy: (1) To the Jew he was as a Jew. He openly honored the divine law given to Moses. Upon occasion he acted within that law as when he circumcised Timothy and when he sheared his hair in fulfilling a vow. (2) To those outside the law, the heathen world, Paul became as one of them, indifferent to the many customary observances of his national background. Hear him preaching at the Areopagus at Athens, "And the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent: because he hath appointed a day" (Acts 17:30, 31). (3) To the weak he became as weak, as attested by his statement, "If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh" (I Cor. 8:13).

Though entirely free, with a great liberty Paul made himself a slave for the sake of those whose welfare he sought. He became "all things to all men in order that he might "gain some," "win some," but paramount in his thinking, "for the Gospel's sake." Strange, powerful, magnetic, usable--that was the Apostle Paul. Some may hurl the charge of inconsistency or

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hypocrisy. Yet all must recognize that Paul was eminently usable. The gospel, that great message of redemption is the only thing that matters. Our pride and prejudice must bend before it. Today's Christian worker must adapt himself to the environment in which he lives.

Today's Christian worker recognizes this fact of life if he would find a place of service in the Military Establishment, for it represents a rather strictly controlled framework, a monolithic organization, with set rules, standards of behavior and traditions that must be adjusted to. At this point let us consider these characteristics of the service to which the wise man of God will adapt himself.

SELECTIVE ENTRANCE REQUIREMENTS

The Military Establishment is selective in its entrance requirements. When making my own application for entrance into the service, I was directed to go to Fort MacArthur, California, for an examination. After careful survey and numerous tests and interviews, the medical officer, perhaps noting my slight frame, suggested that I should have lunch and return in the afternoon for final processing and a weight check. Realizing that I had been given a hint, I visited a nearby cafe and ordered a healthy meal. At its conclusion, I ordered a second plate, just to be sure. This unusual behavior was noted by a soldier on the neighboring stool. This worthy man revealed an interest in my appetite and expressed his curiosity, wondering if I had a hollow leg or a tape worm. In guileless innocence I announced to him and to others sitting nearby that I was trying to get into the Army. The enlisted reaction to this statement may be readily appreciated.

The military may be forgiven for its possible laxity in a weight requirement that day. However, throughout that examination and through other interviews and application papers came to realize that the military demands stability, personal integrity, general behavior patterns, not to mention academic achievement, security check and a number of related investigations. The military wanted to know if this applicant could adjust to military life. I wanted to know how he might react in times of crisis and danger. It wanted to know whether this applicant could accept the discipline and the limitations of the life the military chaplaincy would incur. It is no place for the misfit. It is not the dumping ground for the incompetent or the ne'er-do-well. The stakes are too high. Spiritually, morally, mentally, emotionally and physically the military chaplain should be, at least, the average, preferably above the average of the ministers of his denomination. Educationally the military demands college or university training plus the standard seminary training. To men with higher degrees the service offers great opportunity for specialized assignments and opportunity for further advanced schooling.

In order to maintain efficiency the services subject their chaplains to a continuing efficiency report system. Through a process of periodic reports and continuous evaluation all chaplains are rated. Men who do not meet the standards are eliminated. In addition to all this, the services require that the applicants be recommended by their denominations to serve. The assumption is that our churches think enough of their people in the military to provide the best of their ministry to meet their spiritual needs.

AUTHORITATIVE STRUCTURE

The Military Establishment is authoritative in its structure. Perkins Hall, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., for many years was the dormitory home for students in the famous Harvard Law School. During the early years of World War II its hallowed corridors were taken over by student chaplains. It was here that the United States Army Chaplain School trained and conditioned young ministers accepted for chaplain duty. Arriving there late at night as a callow recruit, I was tired and dirty after the long train ride. Before retiring I washed out a few clothes and, for want of a better place, hung them out the window to dry! Eager to get acquainted with these strange new surroundings I wandered down the hallway to an open area. It was there that I came face to face, for the first time with that all-important item in military life, the bulletin board. Now "The Board," as it is called, is a fixture in military life. It is present wherever military people are. Upon it are placed all communications between commanders and the commanded. A notice appearing on the board becomes official. A most important rule of life is, "Read the Board." At least once a day everyone pauses before the Board to gather necessary information.

Amid the orders, regulations, etc. on that Board, all unfamiliar to me, I did catch the meaning of one little neatly typed note. It said, "It has come to the attention of the School Commandant that chaplain personnel are hanging their laundry from barracks windows. This practice will be discontinued immediately. By order of the School Commandant. Signed ---." A faint wave of irritation came over me, but was then forgotten in the rush of new experiences. I had met authority, face to face, and had failed to recognize it. Formal introduction and recognition thereof came the following day when the matter was brought definitely to my attention!

It is not by accident that the authoritative stance of the military has come into being. Long generations of experience have taught important lessons. Long ago men learned that to wage war the commander must be given supreme authority and the commanded must obey implicitly. The structure of the military, using the United States Army as an example, provides that the private soldier is a man, truly under authority. With ten or eleven of his companions, he is under the command of a squad leader. He is low man on the totem pole. This squad leader is in direct control of his activities. However, this squad leader, likewise, is a man under authority. He is commanded by a platoon leader, who, in turn, is commanded by a unit commander. Thus the umbrella of command ascends until it eventually culminates in the portals of the White House.

This command structure insures that the desires of the commander are carried out. The commander is assured that, in response to his order, men and material will be at the proper place at the proper time, ready for action. This structure, coupled with the companion tradition of discipline, causes our military forces to be efficient and effective. The chaplain, as a member of the commander's Special Staff, is a part of this authoritarian concept and must be imbued with these traditions in order to be effective. This is a part of the framework. The Chaplain enjoys a place of tremendous prestige and responsibility within the organization. While normally not exercising command, he has access to the command stream. "Through channels" his voice may be heard, even in the distant halls of the Pentagon. His "Staff Study," a paper

which technically analyzes a specific problem with his suggested solution, when submitted in proper form, receives prompt, careful consideration by the entire staff and a specific approval or disapproval from the commander. As a special Staff Member his recommendations are carefully considered. He has access to the best minds within the command or from higher commands for counsel and advice.

Many ministers might say that they could not work under these circumstances, that they would feel constricted and controlled. On the contrary, I have found that the acceptance of this system lends discipline to a man's life. I have learned that within this strange structure of strict command there runs a deep stream of human compassion and concern for men's welfare. Instead of suffocating him, these very controls become bridges to a most effective ministry. The commander feels the tremendous responsibility of his authoritarian position. He is mindful of the needs of his people. He is alert to and responsive to his chaplain's suggestions. He is ready to use his great power to help men in their adversity and folly. Only he and the chaplain know about the compassionate furlough, the hand on the shoulder of an erring man, the midnight visit, the mended marriage. In some cases only the chaplain knows through "privileged communication," the real facts, the tragedy, the heartache. Then only, in his integrity and trustworthiness warrant, his commander will accept his recommendation. I have seen mercy and compassion shown because the chaplain asked for it. I have seen men transported half way around the world because the chaplain recommended it.

STRICT DISCIPLINE

The Military Establishment is strict in its discipline. Closely connected with the authoritarian stance of the military, is its strictness of discipline. This is another of the parts of the framework into which the minister must fit if he desires to serve God in the military. Please let me recount a painful early experience which helped me to recognize that I was undisciplined and needed the training in this area that is a part of military life.

Soon after Pearl Harbor, I visited an Army Camp set up on the outskirts of Long Beach, California, to speak to the unit chaplain about the service. Approaching the camp across a field, I noted the signs announcing that this was a military reservation. Seeing a sentry at his post I decided to inquire of him as to where the chaplain could be found. As I approached, he called out for me to halt. Wishing to speak to him face to face, I kept walking, announcing my desires. Again he ordered me to halt, this time placing his weapon, bayonet attached, at the ready position. Only when I was close to being impaled upon that blade did I awake to the fact that the man meant business! This experience became a disciplinary factor to me. By this thoughtlessness I became an illustration of the why of military discipline. I was endangering the security of that camp, incidentally endangering my own life.

Military philosophy is built upon the idea that the authority of the commander is complemented by the complete obedience of the command. Generations of experience have demonstrated that a tight, disciplined organization is effective, that men's lives are saved, battles won, the peace secured when men exercise discipline. The Military Code of Justice, with its strict rules and severe penalties seems an offence to many. Yet they have proven over

and over to be effective. The stress upon strict obedience, respect for superiors, the wearing of the uniform and carefulness concerning security matters may seem somewhat meaningless to the average civilian. However, in the concept of the military man, with his concern about national integrity, the welfare of our nation, the enemies he knows are intent upon destroying us, the matter of a disciplined life is of supreme importance. Such seemingly small things as the rendering of the salute, the "Yes, sir" and the "No, sir," the trim hair cut, the shined shoes, the immediate and direct reaction to a suggestion or a request are evidences of a disciplined life, a life that is dedicated to the protection of our country.

After the recent Army-Navy football game, one of the cadet football players was interviewed by a nationally known sports announcer. I could not help noticing the cadet's polite straightforward "Yes, sir" and "No, sir" answers to the questions. In an age when our young people are noted for their careless dress, slovenly appearance and absence even of the rudimentary courtesy, such a personal presence was refreshing. To the young minister who may be considering service with the military, let me say this: if you do not appreciate a well planned regimen of life; if you do not take pride in your appearance; if you are incapable of quick and cheerful compliance to orders; if you can't get up in the morning--then you would not be happy in that capacity.

A DEMANDING REGIMEN

The Military Establishment is demanding in its regimen. We were taught in seminary that a pastor should, without fail, spend at least four hours per day in his study, that he should read many books, that he should keep himself abreast of world affairs and be aware of the situation in his immediate community. We were also taught that the pastor should be a model husband, that his children should reveal ideal parental supervision. It was impressed upon us that our personal affairs should be kept under control. In the military situation, while there are times for family recreation, there is usually a regimen of duty that requires the utmost of toughness and determination. I wish to speak of three things encountered within the framework of military life that take a great toll upon the resources of the military chaplain and his family.

I speak first of the unusual demands placed upon the chaplain's time. Whether we realize it or not, most of us are conditioned by the "forty-hour week," which, some say, may be further shrunk to thirty-six or fewer hours. We are living in a leisure-minded world. The usual demands upon the time of a chaplain in the military are similar to those usually experienced in the civilian pastorate. Of course there are the usual requirements for study and planning, with normal calling responsibilities. These are just the beginning. In a training situation, especially with new recruits, there is a heavy visitation schedule. Since these young men have very recently been moved out of home life into this new environment, they are anxious for personal interviews and help in the solution of problems which seem very important to them. Consequently there will be a heavy demand for counseling service. The Character Guidance Program with its endless classes added to the heavy orientation program are time consuming. Chaplains in this busy round of activity discover that there is little time for home and family. In a field situation the chaplain must remain away from home for the duration, sometimes days or weeks. There is the usual round of inspections, command visits, coordination with civilian groups, etc.

Added to all these duties is the constant stream of letters from families of servicemen, all representing problems and needs. Each of these letters must be answered carefully and courteously. Many of them involve investigation or referral. In a combat situation the chaplain, of course, is away from home and family for long periods of time, deeply and continuously involved with his men. The housing area chaplain with his normal pastoral duties soon finds himself immersed in a program, equally as busy as that of any busy pastor. During one assignment I found myself involved in a situation where eight hours daily were spent in interviews with prisoners, dealing with their needs. These heavy loads are, of course, activities dealing with people. There are people who need the gospel. Here is the richest ministry a man could desire. Opportunities for personal witness for the Lord are multiplied immeasurably. This is the most blessed privilege a chaplain could ask for.

I speak now of heavy demands placed upon the chaplains' spirituality. With the multiplicity of duties, especially those involving spiritual ministry with individuals, there is a constant drain upon a man's spiritual resources. The chaplain is constantly giving of himself. He discovers that often he finds himself giving and giving without the reciprocating experience of being fed and nourished himself. Adequate study and prayer and meditation are often neglected, with resulting coldness, superficiality and professionalism. How can a man force himself to drink deeply at the spiritual well springs if he is harried by pressing duty? I can praise God that often in these times my God has been very gracious, often granting spiritual uplift in unexpected ways and through unexpected moments made available for meditation, study and prayer. Often while in the busiest of times, the Lord has sent a sweet-spirited Christian soldier with whom I have had good fellowship. Sometimes an encouraging letter from home or from the parents of a soldier lent that lift that is so important. It seems that God, during those times will make a half hour with the Word of more rich blessing than a half day under ordinary conditions.

Not the least of the heavy demands of the military are those involving not only the chaplain but family as well. While the service is a stimulating experience for wife and family, there are problems. While there are great educational and travel opportunities, there is a price to pay. While there is the making of a host of interesting friends, there is the hardship also. The even tenor of family life is often shattered by prolonged absences due to field duty or to other things such as schooling or change of station. Often the father must travel alone to the duty, leaving wife and family at home, either to remain separated for the duration or to await availability of housing. The wife, then, must serve both as mother and father for a lonely period. If overseas travel is forthcoming, she is left alone to care for the many details that are involved. She must make her way with the family to the port of embarkation, dispose of the car, get herself and the family aboard the plane or ship and accomplish the travel. Many are the tales that may be told of car trouble, lost children, missing baggage, lost orders and finally husbands who do not show up to welcome arriving families.

The excessive demands and rigors of military life must be considered as a part of the framework within which one lives and works. These hardships are not insurmountable. They often become a source of joy and victory to the man and his family when they really want to

become all things to all men in order to win some. Many a chaplain and his family have found that these things have proved spiritual blessings for they have brought out deep spiritual qualities and taught trust in our Lord.

PRAGMATIC IN ATTITUDE

There are no more saints in the military than there are in civilian life. And there are just as many sinners. There are many deeply spiritual people in the service whose lives have been a great inspiration to me. However, the military establishment is definitely a secular organization. There is no particular sympathy for the spiritual realities that mean so much to us. The service is pragmatic, which means it is full of practical people. It has been discovered by commanders that the man of God in the service has something to contribute. Over the years the spiritual chaplain has worked hard and patiently with the soldier. He has led him to Christ. In turn the soldier has become a changed man. Now he attends to duty and is a responsible person. The commander sees this and is impressed. He reasons that the chaplain accomplishes good among his men. He is therefore a valued member of the staff.

My first commander, Colonel William G. Walters greeted me with these words, "I don't know what you are supposed to do here, Chaplain, but you go ahead and do it and I'll back you." Another commander seemed from the very start to have it in for me. He took our unit to Europe where we faced our first combat during World War II. I tried my best to do my work well, but seemingly to no avail. Soon I learned that his practice was to visit each new battery position as soon as possible after its change of emplacement. Since we were moving through France at a rapid rate, such visits were a strenuous effort. Now I knew what to do. A casual visit to the operations tent, a look at the map, a few minutes listening and a question or two from a friend gave me some map coordinates. When the Colonel arrived at one battery the next day, there was Carter, seated upon an ammunition box visiting with a group of men. The Colonel's initial reaction was to look at me quizzically and ask, "How did YOU get here?" Later reactions were a smile, a shake of the hand and an eventual invitation to his tent to play chess. I was doing my job. The pragmatist saw it and approved.

The military places great stress upon knowing the job. Hard work, attention to detail, giving of one's self in service brings respect, sometimes grudging admiration and finally, great friendships with surprisingly captivating people. At one installation I was given the thankless job of serving as Chapel Property and Funds Officer, with care and supervision of thirty chapels and about a million dollars' worth of property. Discovering that property records were completely inaccurate and that the entire operation was irregular, I learned property procedure, compiled an accurate record of every item and submitted a recommendation for a new method of handling property. The Supply Officer's only comment was, "I never saw a chaplain just like you before." However, not long after that there was suddenly made available to the chaplain the sum of \$13,000 which I quickly invested in equipment and good literature for our Sunday Schools.

The Military Establishment gives to the chaplain an enviable place of respect and prestige. The history of the chaplain goes back to antiquity for its beginnings, possibly starting

with the chanting and incantation of a medicine man over a war band. Its Christian connotation stems from the days of Saint Martin, Bishop of Tours, cir. 370-397 A.D. The "Cappellan" was the custodian of Saint Martin's Cloak, which was thought to have supernatural powers. Throughout history military forces have had religious leaders accompanying them during their campaigns. Only in recent years has the chaplain come to be closely involved with a spiritual program and given the opportunities he now enjoys.

The recognition and esteem enjoyed by the chaplain are great assets in his spiritual ministry. There is no warmer experience than to report for duty at a new station and be enthusiastically welcomed. Regardless of his rank the chaplain is received in all circles. He is one officer who is able to be closely associated with all ranks. He has instant honor and respect, only losing them through his own folly. His words are listened to. He is often asked to represent the commander at official functions. He serves on the staff of his commander. With this happy acceptance and esteem the chaplain naturally holds a place of influence and trust. The United States has an Army Task Force in Northern Italy with the mission of cooperating with the Italian forces in the defence against communism along the soft underbelly of Europe. One thorny problem has been that of the plight of American servicemen who run afoul of Italian law. During the early sixties these unfortunate fellows were often thrown into Italian jails and held incommunicado, sometimes for long periods of time. One concession the Italians made--they would permit a military chaplain to visit these men. This recognition enabled the chaplain to perform unusual spiritual and humane service in a time of serious need.

Often the chaplain is called upon to deal with serious problems involving moral lapses or personality problems, often among highly placed people. Often he is able to perform important liaison service with civilian communities. There is a familiar adage which goes like this: "Those chaplain crosses will get you into places none of the rest can go." It was the chaplain who was asked to go to the swanky Los Angeles hotel and break the news to a military wife that her husband had been jailed for embezzlement, settle the hotel bill, take charge of the brand new car and bring the family back to the installation. It was the chaplain who awakened his own wife in the wee small hours to visit a home where a wife was being beaten. It was the chaplain who sat with a broken-spirited senior officer who had been relieved of his command and reduced in rank.

Within the framework of the military there lies a strange, different, highly specialized life. The man who feels called to this service must respect and recognize its traditions and peculiarities. He must anticipate the special problems and perils of service life. He and his family must expect dislocation, discomfort and a life far different from that within the confines of a loyal Brethren-type congregation. Yet, within that strange environment there are untold opportunities and special satisfactions. The issues of life and death in this ministry seem to be more sudden and brutal and real and poignant. The people he will serve, with their special frustrations, will be open to the gospel. They are usually very frank and realistic. Thousands of unattached men will listen when someone befriends them and pours into their ears the story of salvation. Children are everywhere, open and waiting for Sunday School, Good News Clubs or Child Evangelism ministry. If a man will have the courage to respect the framework of the military and work within it he will find a great Macedonia calling, "Come over and help us!"