



Crossing Swords "Let Us Pray"

"The government cannot tell chaplains how to pray (not even in school) nor exclude chaplains who pray 'the wrong way.'"

Lieutenant Gordon James Klingenschmitt, CHC, U.S. Navy Reserve

At sea, we hear Chaps announce: "Stand by for evening prayer. . . . Let us pray . . . Amen." Thomas Jefferson started this in 1802, defining the chaplain's job "to read prayers at stated periods." He understood that Sailors don't forfeit freedom of religion when they put on their uniforms. The United States doesn't enforce state atheism as the Soviets did. Many Sailors have told me, "Chaps, your evening prayers are one of the last things keeping me alive out here." Skippers who want a healthy, motivated crew should keep the evening prayer alive. Yet no chaplain (and no skipper) can hog the microphone to establish one shipwide religion. Legally, we must take turns and share the prayer, expressing many diverse views.

Chaplains note the tension between allowing free expression and forcing religion on others. I see three logical solutions:

- **Totalitarian Atheism:** Ban religious expression, and ban public prayer (the doctrine of Americans United for Separation of Church and State)
- **Totalitarian Pluralism:** Exclude chaplains who can't pray to a "government god" (Navy doctrine)
- **Democratic Diversity:** Chaplains take turns with lay-leaders, publicly expressing many diverse faiths (Klingenschmitt doctrine)

Totalitarian pluralism is the opposite of democratic diversity. Navy pluralism enforces conformity to one civic religion, but diversity permits equal expression of many views.

Although I prayed "in Jesus' name," readers of this magazine should know that 84 percent of my Sailors agreed that the command chaplain cares for all denominations, regardless of faith or belief. In fact, I risked my career to obtain kosher meals for a Jewish Sailor, who lost 17 pounds when headquarters failed to provide them. I also risked my career to oppose mandatory church quotas im-

posed by pro-gay senior chaplains. And I routinely invited Muslims, Jews, Wiccans, Catholics, and atheist Sailors to teach my religion class. I volunteered for a demotion just to become a chaplain.

Read the Law

In 1860, President Abraham Lincoln appointed three Jewish chaplains, whom Congress gave freedom to *not* pray Christian prayers, with Navy Regulations now enshrined in U.S. Code Title 10 Section 6031: "An officer in the chaplain corps may conduct public worship according to the manner and forms of the church of which he is a member." Chaplains represent their endorsers during prayer. Law requires we obey civilian bishops in sacramental matters, not commanding officers, not senior chaplains.

More recently (in the 1980s), the Chaplain School began teaching "pluralism" lectures, pressuring chaplains to water down their prayers and never pray publicly to Adonai, Allah, Buddha, or Jesus. But everybody "should" pray publicly in exactly the same way. Chaplains now distribute a 1998

memo signed by the Chief of Navy Chaplains suggesting chaplains who pray "in Jesus' name" are incompetent, insensitive, and "ought to exclude themselves from the secular event as the prayer giver." They refer to the Harvard Divinity School's Unitarian Universalist Web site as the official government model.

When I academically resisted, the Chaplain School director labeled me "immature," and the Chief of Chaplains told me, in writing: "Any chaplains' continued insistence on ending public prayers 'in Jesus name' . . . could reasonably tend to denigrate those with different forms of faith."



JOE GROBELSKI / STARS AND STRIPES

Chaplain Klingenschmitt talks about his hunger strike in front of the White House in 2005, calling for the President to issue an order allowing him to pray "in Jesus' name."

(Continues on page page 22)

Copyright © 2007, U.S. Naval Institute, Annapolis, Maryland (410) 268-6110 www.usni.org

Two Navy chaplains cross swords over military prayer first addressed by Lieutenant Steven R. Obert in the December *Proceedings*.

“The prayer is not about imposing one’s belief system on those gathered. To do so is an egregious violation of human dignity.”

Steven L. Smith

“In Jesus’ Name” is a phrase with profound meaning and theological importance to those of the Christian faith. However, in the military arena, the phrase has become a source of significant controversy. The controversy has been set ablaze by a small number of military chaplains contending that they have been denied—even banned—from using the phrase to close their prayers at military or civil ceremonies. This official prohibition, they argue, violates their conscience and their Constitutional right to pray according to the tenets of their faith.

Not content to allow the Department of Defense and service secretaries to resolve the issue, they have taken their cause to the courts, the national legislative process, and when possible, the press. It is somewhat ironic, however, that Jesus—who gave us The Lord’s Prayer, which does not end in the use of his name—is now at the center of a religious, legal, and legislative battle over the use of his name in formal military ceremonies.

My decision to use inclusive language was a process born of personal study and reflection of my theology and the nature of the institution I served. While I recognize the struggle to be faithful to one’s beliefs, I am also convinced there is sacredness in being respectful to the beliefs of others and honoring the institution. Guiding my decision were two operative truths that I considered compatible with my Baptist heritage: the nature of the profession and the good of the military community.

Institutional Profession

One of the great hallmarks of the nation’s military chaplains has been their steadfastness to decency, understanding, respect, and civility among those they serve. The title “chaplain” is an institutional term depicting

individuals of such a disposition that they rise above cherished religious convictions to maintain what is sacred by ministering to people of all faith persuasions with love and respect. Above all, they do no harm to the soul of others. It is not a calling for all—but it is a noble calling, nonetheless.

Therefore, within the military community, when a chaplain provides an invocation and benediction, it is to solemnize an event and instill the concept of the spiritual, while acknowledging God’s providential dealings in the affairs of humankind. The prayer presents an opportunity to speak of what is sacred to all as well as recognizing the distinctiveness of every faith. The prayer, however, is not about imposing one’s belief system on those gathered. To do so is an egregious violation of human dignity that treats with irreverence the cherished tenets of others by insisting that the petitioner’s faith preference triumphs.

Herein lies the uniqueness of the profession of military service: It is separate and distinct from

civil society. It is a profession with institutional values, codes, ethics, and laws. These distinctive qualities are essential, because the profession operates as a unit—not as an individual. It is hierarchical, not egalitarian. It extols sacrifice and selflessness. It instills unity over self.

Those who swear the oath “to support and defend” will fully lay aside certain rights accorded to fellow citizens. And, as the Supreme Court recognized in *Parker v. Levy*, “the military is, by necessity, a specialized society separate from civilian society. . . . [T]he military has, again by necessity, developed laws and traditions of its own dur-



Chaplain Smith (left) participates in December 2004 Chanukah services with Rabbi Moshe D. Bryski at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in Santa Barbara, California.

(Continues on page 23)

Their memos, lectures, and pressures to censor prayers are totally unconstitutional, according to a Supreme Court decision in 1991, *Lee v. Weisman*. The government cannot tell chaplains how to pray (not even in school) nor exclude chaplains who pray “the wrong way.” But that is exactly what happened to me.

Skipper Directs Chaplain to Pray Jewish Prayers

It is well-documented that my commanding officer punished me (in writing, three times) for quoting “exclusive” Bible verses such as John 3:36 during one optionally attended sermon in the base chapel, when honoring the Christian faith of a deceased member of my flock. Then he pressured me to modify my evening prayers to match his personal religion, saying, “Chaps, your New Testament prayers make something squirm inside me.”

So I offered to stop evening prayer altogether, or take turns and share the microphone: “Let our Muslim Sailor pray to Allah. Let our Jewish Sailor pray in Hebrew. Let our Atheist say ‘good luck.’ And I’ll pray ‘in Jesus’ name’ every fourth turn.”

Proposal denied. The skipper “suggested” only Jewish prayers from the Old Testament. So I compromised for eight months, praying only Psalms. Despite my 84 percent crew approval and after winning six community service awards, my commanding officer still told a board to end my career, writing that I “over-emphasized [my] own faith system” in my sermons and prayers. Ironically, the Jewish Welfare Board and Anti-Defamation League wrote letters in my defense.

Hunger Strike and Court-Martial

Big Navy’s investigation dragged on for nine months, until my hunger strike outside the White House. Suddenly, in two days the Navy surrendered and renewed my contract. One poll showed that 94 percent of Americans supported me (I think the remaining 6 percent were all admirals and senior chaplains). Unimpressed by my popularity, the Chief of Chaplains convinced Secretary of the Navy Donald C. Winter to sign SECNAVINST 1730.7C, mandating that public prayers outside Sunday chapel “should be non-sectarian in nature.”

Equally unimpressed by their new policy, I wore my uniform to pray “in Jesus’ name” outside the White House (refusing media interviews until I changed into civilian clothes), and was court-martialed for protesting in uniform. When the government forbids praying in uniform, is prayer a form of protest? The military judge enforced that new prayer policy against me, ruling “public worship” was only safe inside Sunday chapel, but “worshipping in public” was punishable as a misdemeanor crime if I disobeyed “lawful” orders. I was literally convicted of “worshipping in public” in uniform.

Victory on Capitol Hill

The court-martial verdict appeared in 600 newspapers. Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman John Warner (R-Va.) said on the Senate floor: “I am besieged by telephone, by bloggers, by everything else. . . .” One non-religious newspaper polled its readers with the following question: “Should military chaplains be allowed to lead prayers in Jesus’ name during public events that are not religious services?” 85 percent replied yes, 15 percent said no. More than 300,000 Americans, 35 pro-family organizations, and 75 congressmen petitioned President George W. Bush, who signed the Conference Report to the 2007 Defense Authorization Act: “The conferees direct that the Secretary of the Navy rescind Secretary of the Navy instruction 1730.7C.” My sacrifice purchased others’ freedom. Now the old law from 1860 shines forth, and chaplains are free again to pray “in Jesus’ name” in every setting.

Despite Congress’ rebuke, Navy lawyers still defend that illegal policy in court, as grounds to terminate my 15.5-year career. I’ll forfeit my \$1.8 million pension, and my family will be evicted from military housing because I prayed in Jesus’ name in uniform and quoted the *Bible* at an optional chapel event. The Rutherford Institute represents me in *Klingenschmitt v. Winter*, and 68 evangelical chaplains are suing Navy discriminators.

Conclusion

In closing, I offer three thoughts:

- I believe in good order and discipline. Sailors (and chaplains) should march in formation, salute the flag, and obey lawful orders. But they should never be punished, excluded, censored, or forced to pray to a government god.

- I believe in freedom. The skipper’s key to “order” isn’t totalitarian suppression, but *equal access and equal opportunity for all*.

- Who’s proselytizing whom? When easily offended folks disagreed with my prayers, they were never punished. But when I declined to pray to the skipper’s god, I was punished with the full weight of the U.S. government. Big Navy’s non-sectarian religion was shoved down my throat, not vice-versa.

The Prophet Elijah said to the prophets of Baal: “You call on the name of your god [Baal], and I will call on the name of the Lord [Jehovah], and the God who answers by fire, He is God.” And all the people answered and said, “That is a good idea.”—I Kings 18:24.

Democratic diversity is a good idea. Totalitarian pluralism is a bad idea. Totalitarian atheism is even worse. Let all diverse people pray, publicly, each to their own God, taking turns. *That* is a *great* idea. ✕

Chaplain Klingenschmitt is currently a chapel pastor at Naval Station Norfolk, Virginia. He is a graduate of the U.S. Air Force Academy, holds a master of business administration degree and a master of divinity degree from Regent University, and is working on a Ph.D. in renewal theology from the same institution. He volunteered in September 2002 for a demotion to become a Navy chaplain. Chaplain Klingenschmitt welcomes comments. Send them to: chaplaingate@yahoo.com

ing its long history. . . . and that the rights of men in the armed forces must perforce be conditioned to meet certain overriding demands of discipline and duty." Of course, the laws and interpretation of our laws may change over time, but an enduring element of the military is its cohesiveness and the need to protect it from divisiveness.

Community Good

It is my conviction that what is lacking in the current debate over the use of "in Jesus' name" is a sense of conscience for the good of the community, not just the individual. When the Apostle Paul was arguing his rights according to the Law of Moses before the Corinthian Church, he wrote that he and his co-laborers did not claim that right to benefit their purpose or alleviate their hardship. Furthermore, without indifference to men and women of diverse faiths he wrote, "I have become all things to all men." His commitment to civility and respect toward others, regardless of their religious convictions, is an example to follow.

As a nation, we do acknowledge and pay homage to God. God's name is inscribed on national monuments, government buildings, and our currency. The founding fathers considered Him the source of inalienable rights. Citizens and politicians alike reference His name in public writings and speeches. And, throughout the history of our nation, His name has been invoked in solemn prayers from the powerless to the powerful. Yet, this God is not identified; other than by which our own conscience provides a name. And that is the splendor of America.

As citizens of this great country, we extol the rights of the individual, but they ought to be balanced with caution about excessive individualism and its potential harm. Those advocating for a ruling on their legal right to use a sectarian closure to prayer beg the question as to whose agenda is being pushed forward and for what purpose. Is individual freedom supplanting the good of the community? And by "good of the community," I mean the moral good that is able to lift all community members to a divine realm and—for just a moment—instill the concept of the eternal, duty, humility, and selflessness.

Civility

In part, public ceremonial prayer is about civility. And whether civility is defined as "the act of showing regard for others," "polite remarks used in formal conversation," or a "courteous act or utterance" the intent is the same—it refers to an individual who puts community and others above self. In the religious realm, it is about living a life of faith without being dogmatic or pretentious.

During my tour at the Navy Warfare Development Command in Newport, Rhode Island, I was a guest instructor on Navy Doctrine at the Naval Chaplains'

School. Much to my surprise and dismay, the single most consistent question that arose was about the use of "in Jesus' name" at military and civic ceremonies. Since I too had struggled with this, though long before I entered the Navy, I wanted to provide a stimulus for their decision-making process.

The best way I knew was to ask a question, which was simply: "How wide do you want to cast your net?" I contended that by invoking the name of a specific God they limited the ability of their audience to fully join them in the solemn act of prayer. If, however, they used non-sectarian language, they included many more in their part of the ceremony, thereby opening the door for others to say, "Amen." The question also had a moral aspect, as well. Could individual conscience, with its deep-rooted convictions, willingly decide for the greater good of the audience? Could fervent religious convictions, with their accompanying theological absolutism, be willfully laid aside to serve the religious rights of all? Might humility reign?

A Final Thought

There was an occasion when the late Vice Admiral James B. Stockdale asked me to read *The Warriors* by J. Glenn Gray. He requested that I pay special attention to Gray's distinction between friendship and comradeship. Leading up to his discussion on friendship and comradeship, Gray cited Jesus' comment that "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Gray then followed Jesus' thought with a question: "What meaning has friendship for warriors?" He answered it with a thoughtful examination, essentially contending that there is a moment when warriors become conscious of the fact that, "I am part of you, and you are part of me." Warriors, therefore, see themselves in another and recognize that friendship is about a level of human interrelatedness and connectedness not fully known before.

Essentially, this is a spiritual aspect of friendship that comes by way of a quickening of the soul under dire conditions. Yet, would not a chaplain by virtue of his or her spiritual discipline come to a similar conclusion that humankind is irrevocably bound, thereby producing a greater sense of human interrelatedness and connectedness? If this is so, then I am convinced a chaplain would willfully cast the net as wide as possible, thereby fulfilling the Apostle Paul's admonition: "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." ✕

Dr. Smith is a retired Navy chaplain (1984-2006), endorsed by the Southern Baptist Convention. He served on three different classes of ships, completed two Fleet Marine Force tours, and while assigned to the Navy Warfare Development Command he wrote *NWP 1-05*, and contributed to *JP 1-05* and the Air Land Sea Application (ALSA) publication on detainee operations. He received his Ed.D. from the University of San Diego and lives in southern Arizona.