

“Providing Shepherds for Soldiers: A History of Catholic Military Chaplaincy in the U.S.”
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“On one occasion, an officer was dying – shot in the face – blood pouring out. He wrote on a slip of paper: ‘Chaplain’, and the slip, red with blood, was carried around by a soldier, seeking for a chaplain. It was handed to me. I hurried: the man was conscious – dying fast. ‘Speak to me’ he said ‘of Jesus’. He had been baptized – there was no time to talk of the Church. I talked of the Savior, and of sorrow for sin. The memory of that scene has never been effaced from my mind. I have not doubted the salvation of that soul.”¹ – *Fr. John Ireland, Civil War Chaplain*

The history of Catholic military chaplaincy reaches back to the Roman armies of Constantine, when priests were attached to military troops in order to provide for the spiritual support of soldiers during the journey into battle. From the battles of Christian Rome through the Crusades of the Middle Ages and the post-Reformation wars of fragmented Christendom, till the present, Catholic military chaplaincy has existed in some distinct manner.² This evening, I would like to present the story of Catholic chaplaincy in the United States by first providing an overview of the institutional development; followed by a review of the activity of the military bishops during the wars of the twentieth century; and finally a sampling of the activity of select chaplains.

I. General Overview:

How is it possible that a nation that prides itself on a theoretical and practical separation of Church and State can sponsor, maintain, and provide financial funding for a military chaplaincy? How is it that the military apostolate of the Catholic Church has been able to develop and function

¹ Letter of Archbishop John Ireland to Father Peter P. Cooney, May 24, 1892, as provided in: J.P. SHANNON, “Archbishop Ireland’s Experience as a Civil War Chaplain”, *The Catholic Historical Review*, 39 (1953): 304.

² Regarding the ancient roots of military chaplaincy, see: A.H.M. JONES, “Military Chaplains in the Roman Army”, *Harvard Theological Review*, 46 (1953): 239-240; R.W. MATHISEN, “Emperors, Priests, and Bishops” in D.L. BERGEN, ed., *The Sword of the Lord: Military Chaplains from the First to the Twenty-First Century*, (Notre Dame, 2004), 29-43.

within and alongside a government-sponsored chaplaincy program? The American people are largely a godly-people and as such, the government of the United States has since its founding respected the religious consciousness and transcendental yearnings of its citizenship – matters that surpass the competence of political governance.

General George Washington thought a chaplain essential to the morale of the troops and believed the provision of divine services for soldiers indispensable. Concerned about the moral conduct of the men under his command, Washington wrote to the Governor of Virginia: “The want of a chaplain does, I humbly conceive, reflect dishonor upon the regiment.”³ As his request went unheeded, he wrote once again and argued: “A chaplain for the regiment ought to be provided that we may at least have the show if we are said to want the substance of Godliness.”⁴ During the Civil War, Southerners demanded the service of chaplains among the fighting men, and the Secretary of War (LeRoy Walker) of the Confederate States was clear in his belief that military success would in part be achieved by acknowledging God and associating clergymen with Confederate cause. Secretary Walker reasoned with the Confederate Congress: “Military experience demonstrates the importance (of religion)...to the morality, good order, and general discipline of the army...If we expect God to bless us...we must recognize him in our actions.”⁵ The want of military chaplains during the last decades of the nineteenth century and a peace-time military force that was tainted by morally questionable activity, led to public calls for an increase of chaplains among the troops as moral watchdogs – if not spiritual fathers. General Pershing, the commander of the American Expeditionary Force during World War I, so appreciated the spiritual and moral needs of the troops

³ I. DRAZIN & C.B. CURREY, *For God and Country: The History of the Constitutional Challenge to the Army Chaplaincy*, (Hoboken, 1995), 9.

⁴ DRAZIN & CURREY, 9.

⁵ F.L. HIERONYMUS, *For Now and Forever: The Chaplains of the Confederate States Army*, dissertation (Los Angeles: University of California, 1964), 104.

that he demanded a three-fold increase in the number of chaplains, insisting that the clergymen selected be “of the highest character with reputations well established as sensible, practical, active ministers accustomed to dealing with young men.”⁶ While a pacifist movement and a general ambivalence toward religion prevailed in the U.S. following the Great War, the military establishment increased its appreciation for the chaplaincy – however, the emphasis was placed on the benefit of providing for the spiritual needs of the Armed Forces – not as an end in itself – but as a means of perfecting the nation’s fighting machine. World War II witnessed a return to a more fundamental goal of military chaplaincy as the War Department defined the chaplaincy corps in terms of providing public religious worship and individual spiritual assistance. The experience of the conflict in Vietnam highlighted the chaplaincy as a moral voice with the military establishment. A more contemporary understanding underscores the existence of a government-sponsored chaplaincy as an instrument for providing members of the Armed Forces with the means of freely exercising their rights under the First Amendment. As a divine guarantee of battle success – a means of improving the war machine – the moral consciousness of the military – moral watchdogs or providers of spiritual ministrations – or as a necessary concession to ensure religious expression, a government-sponsored chaplaincy has survived periodic constitutional challenges and has become part of the tradition of the United States military, and is embedded in the Judaeo-Christian American way of life.

II. Overview of Catholic Chaplaincy:

The history of the chaplaincy programs of the U.S. Armed Forces and the institutional history of Catholic military chaplaincy share a common pattern of wartime action and peacetime

⁶ R.J. HONEYWELL, *Chaplains of the U.S. Army*, (Washington, 1958), 170.

reform and development – fueled in large part by the military and ecclesiastical necessities and experiences of the military conflicts of the twentieth century. Common to both is a gradual development reaching back to Colonial America.

In 1775, the Continental Congress established the military chaplaincy and in so doing, made possible the commissioning of the first and only Catholic chaplain of the Revolutionary War – Father Louis Lotbiniere, a French Canadian priest who joined the revolutionary cause despite his bishop's clear mandate that Canadian Catholics have nothing to do with the American cause.⁷ Little is known of his apostolic work, however, as he had alienated himself from his diocesan bishop, he relied upon the \$40.00 a month chaplain salary that the newly-established U.S. government often neglected to provide. His frequent pleas for money characterized him as something of a nuisance. Towards the end of his life, he would write expressing his regret over his association with the revolutionary cause: “Would to God that I had never known (Generals Montgomery and Arnold)...I would not now starve with hunger and cold.”⁸ Father Lotbiniere, a disobedient and suspended priest, traitor to his Quebec home, and friend of Benedict Arnold, holds place in history as the first Catholic priest to have received a commission in the American Army. In the years following the war, the national army was reduced considerably, and its chaplains returned to civilian life. While the strength of the standing Army had begun to increase just prior to the War of 1812 and chaplains were commissioned for service, no Catholic priest served the troops in an official capacity. The same held true during the Mexican War (1846-1848), with the exception of two priests who had received a politically-motivated presidential appointment to accompany the troops and serve in the *capacity* of chaplain. President Polk - anxious to ease the suspicion of the Mexican people

⁷ M. GRIFFIN, “A Canadian Patriot Priest of the Eighteenth Century: Father Lotbiniere, the Chaplain of the ‘Rebel’ Canadians who Joined the American Army during the Revolutionary War”, *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society*, 15 (1904): 69-82.

⁸ M. GRIFFIN, *Catholics and the American Revolution*, (Ridley Park, 1907), 77.

- reasoned that if the Catholic priests in Mexico could be assured that their churches and religion would be secure, the conquest of northern Mexico would be easy, but if the contrary opinion prevailed, resistance to the American forces would be desperate. The President's assessment led him to seek the assistance of Bishop Hughes of New York, who acquired from the Jesuits Fathers John McElroy and Antony Rey. The two, while not duly commissioned chaplains, served for nearly a year. Rey was killed in Mexico – while McElroy reported his pastoral work to have been successful, he noted his diplomatic efforts were a failure.⁹ While the government had made provision, albeit tentative and uncertain, for the presence of clergymen among the nation's soldiers and sailors, there is little to suggest that the young Church in America was proactive in providing for the Catholic faithful engaged in military service prior to the Civil War.

The situation changed, however, when a substantial number of Catholic men enlisted for service during the War Between the States (1861-1865) – bringing the matter of providing for their spiritual care quickly to the attention of the nation's Catholic hierarchy. For the first time, the American bishops began petitioning government officials for an allotment of chaplaincy posts, and began communicating amongst themselves regarding chaplain coverage and priestly faculties. As the Civil War did not bring to the Church an institutional split – as occurred in a number of Protestant denominations – efforts were made by the hierarchy to provide military chaplains to regiments where the presence of a priest would be most useful. It was of no concern if the Catholic soldier was donning a uniform of Union blue or Confederate grey. During the Civil War, the American bishops were confronted with a very practical canonical problem – namely, the provision of priestly faculties for chaplains as they followed their regiment from one diocese into another. Lacking priestly faculties, the chaplains found themselves hindered in their pastoral service. In the summer of 1861,

⁹ B.M. MCENIRY, *American Catholics in the War with Mexico*, dissertation (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1937).

Archbishop Kenrick of Baltimore wrote to the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, seeking a solution. The Congregation responded by means of a rescript issued by Pius IX directing diocesan bishops to provide their priest-chaplains with those faculties deemed appropriate and that such faculties would remain in effect for two months should the chaplain accompany the troops outside of his respective diocese. The rescript provided a practical solution in a manner that sought to make liberal concession for the care of souls while respecting the jurisdiction of each local bishop.¹⁰

Of the nearly, 3,700 clergymen who served as chaplains during the Civil War, approximately 90 priests were duly commissioned – 60 serving with the Union forces and 30 with the Confederate Army. From the ranks of these would come five – Fathers Ireland (St. Paul), Leray (New Orleans), Manucy (Brownsville/Mobile), McMahan (Hartford) and Pellicer (San Antonio) who would be raised to the episcopacy and lead the Church in the United States through the end of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. At least three others members of the American hierarchy have been credited with service in the Civil War – Becker (Wilmington), Gibbons (North Carolina/Baltimore) and Seton Hall's own Father Bernard McQuaid. McQuaid, while serving as the first President of Seton Hall (1856-68), first rector of Immaculate Conception Seminary (1860-62), and all the while remaining pastor of St. Patrick Pro-Cathedral, was moved to set aside his pastoral work in the Archdiocese of Newark in 1864 and accompany the New Jersey Brigade into battle as a volunteer chaplain – during which service he was captured by the Confederates and soon returned to the Hall to take up his presidential responsibilities once again. While McQuaid's motivation for volunteering is unclear, he may not have wanted to be outdone by his assistant at St. Patrick's, Father George

¹⁰ J.M. SMITH, *The Military Ordinariate of the United States of America*, dissertation (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1966), 79-83; M.F. O'MALLEY, *An History of the Development of Catholic Military Chaplaincy in the United States of America: 1775-1991*, dissertation (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 2009), 191-193.

Doane, who had served as a commissioned chaplain of the New Jersey Militia for three months in 1861 and is famed to have ministered in the midst of some of the harshest fighting of the war.¹¹

Despite the efforts of the American hierarchy, it would appear that not enough was done to meet the spiritual needs of the Catholic soldier, as a review of Civil War records reveal frequent complaints from commanding officers about the lack of priests. Recalling his own days as a Civil War chaplain, Archbishop Ireland lamented the shortage of priest-chaplains:

Numberless thousands of Catholics scattered through the Army, never saw a priest during the war. No one was near them at (the) moment of death...the chaplains put into the field were a mere handful...Hard to say where the fault was. Priests of course, were scarce enough in the country: but better to have left two parishes to be taken care of by one pastor, and have followed to the field the heroes of the country. One bishop thought it was the business of some other. The misfortune...was that the bishops of the Northern States did not come together, and consider jointly what was the duty of the Church in the emergency.¹²

Whatever the contributing factors, Catholic military chaplaincy during the Civil War suffered from the little attention given to chaplaincy in general by military officials prior to the war, and the absence of an ecclesiastical means by which chaplains might be recruited, appointed and supervised – a lacking the American bishops, Ireland in particular, sought to address as the nineteenth century drew to a close.

The period of relative peace between the end of the Civil War and the start of World War I was an organizational time for both the government's chaplaincy programs and the Church's military apostolate. As chaplains and the military establishment sorted out perennial issues of debate, such as rank, pay, commissions, denominational endorsement, chaplain duties and uniform details, the

¹¹ O'MALLEY, 75-89.

¹² Ireland to Cooney, May 24, 1892, as provided in: SHANNON, 302.

Church's hierarchy addressed matters of chaplain faculties, recruitment and supervision. In the 20-year period from 1888-1908, major advances occurred in U.S. Catholic chaplaincy.¹³

The commissioning of Father Charles Parks, a priest of the Archdiocese of New York, as the first Catholic Navy chaplain in 1888, prompted New York archbishop Michael Corrigan, who previously had served as this University's second President/Rector, to petition the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda regarding priestly faculties for ministry at sea. The Holy See responded by creating a *pagella* of faculties and further granted to the Archbishop of New York supervision over the selection and approval of Catholic Navy chaplains. The authority granted to Corrigan, limited as it was to the Navy chaplaincy, marked the first official step of coordinating the military apostolate in the States.¹⁴ Yet, as important as this act of the Holy See was, a decision made in 1890 by the archbishops of the United States to form an episcopal chaplaincy commission displayed a concerted effort on the part of the U.S. hierarchy to organize and attend to the issues surrounding Catholic chaplaincy.¹⁵

The commission (Gibbons, Corrigan and Ireland) had a two-fold task - to recruit qualified chaplain candidates and to work – often behind the scenes – to obtain chaplaincy posts from politicians and military officials. Stressing the need for priest-chaplains in the Army and Navy given the large number of Catholics in the service, Ireland periodically wrote to his brother bishops seeking candidates, while insisting that proposed priests be of exceptional character. Ireland writes:

¹³ O'MALLEY, 122-137.

¹⁴ SMITH, 90-95; O'MALLEY, 194-195.

¹⁵ O'MALLEY, 123-125.

...those put forward as candidates for chaplaincies ought to be clergymen whose conduct would always be above all reproach, and whose intellectual gifts, cultured manners, and sound common sense would reflect honor on their ministry.¹⁶

Though the fact that at the time of Ireland's writing, one Catholic Army chaplain was in the process of a rather public court marshal proceeding on account of drunkenness surely highlighted the need for careful selection, the insistence that only exceptional priests should be put forth for the chaplaincy would be a consistent theme through World War II, as the bishops were all too aware that a priest-chaplain found pastorally- or morally-wanting would reflect badly upon the Church in the U.S. as it strove for recognition among politicians and the American public. Unimpressed by some of the candidates put forth and insisting that the standard be kept high despite the need, Ireland informed Gibbons that he believed it better "to have no Catholic chaplains, than to inflict the men."¹⁷ At the same time, Gibbons was finding it difficult to secure chaplaincy posts as he ran up against anti-Catholic bias. Writing to Corrigan, he notes: "Our enemies are now very vigilant against us in both the Houses of Congress..."¹⁸

The work of the commission gradually bore fruit, and in 1905 the bishops designated Paulist Father Alexander Doyle (former editor of *The Catholic World*) as the representative of the hierarchy to the government in matters pertaining to the chaplaincy. Three years later (1908), the hierarchy created the Catholic Army and Navy Chaplains' Bureau under Doyle's direction – which, with the assistance of the Department of War, initiated an aggressive recruitment program focused on seminary visitations in hope of educating the nation's future priests regarding the apostolic life and work of Catholic chaplains. As a result of Doyle's work, the Bureau found itself with a waiting list of

¹⁶ ASSOCIATED ARCHIVES OF SAINT MARY'S SEMINARY AND UNIVERSITY (AASMSU): Cardinal Gibbons Collection, Ireland/Commission to Archbishops/Bishops, December 1, 1890.

¹⁷ AASMSU: Cardinal Gibbons Collection, Ireland to Gibbons, January 2, 1891.

¹⁸ ARCHIVES OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF NEW YORK (AANY), Gibbons to Corrigan, January 29, 1895.

suitable candidates. The chaplaincy advances made within the Church's internal structure – and those made within the military establishment – turned out to be providential preparatory steps in light of impending World War.¹⁹

The Congressional declaration of war on Germany in April 1917 brought a reluctant United States and its un-readied military force into the European hostilities. As the number of fighting men quickly increased, demand was placed upon the nation's ecclesial bodies to provide clergymen for service. The initial recruitment and processing of chaplain candidates was the work of the Chaplains' Bureau; however, the Bureau was disbanded in November 1917, when Pope Benedict XV appointed New York auxiliary bishop Patrick Hayes as ordinary/bishop of the Army and Navy Chaplains of the United States. As early as 1915, the Holy See had realized that the war in Europe would by all indications be waged for some time and therefore had adopted a juridical schema by which one bishop from each country engaged in the war was appointed military ordinary.²⁰ Of note, Hayes was not the first choice. Gibbons had initially nominated for the post the newly-installed bishop of Charleston, William T. Russell (1916-1927), who previously had served as Gibbons' representative in Washington. However, Russell was not inclined to accept, as he believed the work of the military bishop would involve "petty detail work...and settling...the many complaints of the chaplains."²¹ Though he reconsidered when assured the office held a bit more prestige, the Board of Archbishops had already found a suitable candidate in Hayes. The appointment of Hayes serves as the official creation of the military vicariate in the United States.²² As Kelly, Hayes' biographer, observed, the new Chaplain-Bishop had been entrusted with "a jurisdiction over all of America's soldier priests (and military faithful) fighting for their democracy that Christ's kingdom might remain intact on this

¹⁹ O'MALLEY, 135-138.

²⁰ SMITH, 106; O'Malley, 181.

²¹ AASMSU: Sulpician Collection, Russell to Dyer, July 23, 1917.

²² O'MALLEY, 183-186.

earth. He was the only man in America (until that time) to have enjoyed the position. It had in it a suggestion of the reach of the Papacy.”²³ In order to manage the work before him, Hayes immediately saw to the appointment of chancery officials and dispatched a letter to his priest-chaplains, he wrote:

You will observe, my beloved son, that the Vicar of Christ has deigned to establish between us a cooperate and spiritual relationship, which imposes mutual duties and obligations...May I say for myself that all that I am by office and authority, and all that I have of health, time and energy are pledged herewith to our devoted chaplains, and to our brave soldiers and sailors with the Colors...

Conscious of the fact that the establishment of the military vicariate incorporated the chaplains into an ecclesiastical reality that was new to them in practice, if not in theory, Hayes took care to remind his chaplains of the obedience due him as their proper superior:

The reverence and obedience that you have ever shown and given your own beloved Ordinary at home will be likewise now due to me, even more so – I venture to say – because of war’s grim and ugly conditions...²⁴

With the appointment of a military bishop empowered to exercise proper ecclesiastical jurisdiction²⁵ – gone were the days when just two years earlier, Army chaplain Msgr. George Waring – a priest of New York whom Hayes would name his military chancellor – could observe, albeit with some regret, that the military chaplain “has not the direct supervision of his ecclesiastical superiors...(and as such)...The Church does not bother with him so long as he keeps out of trouble, and the Government will not bother him either, if he does his work in a satisfactory matter.”²⁶

²³ J.B. KELLY, *Cardinal Hayes: One of Ourselves*, (New York, 1940), 99.

²⁴ ARCHIVES CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA (ACUA): National Catholic War Council Collection, Hayes to Chaplains, April 15, 1918.

²⁵ O’MALLEY, 191-200.

²⁶ G. WARING, “The Chaplain in the United States Army”, *The Ecclesiastical Review*, 52 (1915): 289.

At the time of Hayes' appointment, some 80 priests were serving with the Army and Navy; by war's end, just over 1,000 priests had served in some capacity as chaplains. Impressive as that number was, and despite media claims that no Catholic soldier was without the comfort of priestly ministrations, more priests were desperately needed. Msgr. James Connolly, a New York priest with experience as a Navy chaplain during the Spanish-American War, served as Bishop Hayes' Overseas Vicar General. Stationed in Paris, Connolly would send monthly reports to Hayes – always presenting the need for more priests:

...we must have a large number of priests to cover the ground...I could fill this letter with one sentence: Send us all the priests you can...The demand...simply cannot be described. I am receiving letters from all parts where our men are stationed and I have only one answer to give them – we have no priests...The situation is simply desperate as far as the spiritual needs of the men are concerned...and there are cases where men have died without the administration of a priest.²⁷

The situation was a frustrating one for Hayes, who wrote that he was “almost forced to beg on my knees, priests from the Bishops...I hope that with more enlightened minds the Hierarchy might realize the severe test that is now confronting us.”²⁸ The bishops did eventually respond generously to Hayes' persistent pleas; however, an exhortation from the U.S. papal representative Archbishop Bonzano, rather than enlightened minds, was the reason. Bonzano had sent a terse telegram to every bishop demanding their cooperation.²⁹ Though the need for priests was quickly met, the war was also quickly coming to an end.

Soon after the war, Hayes, who had succeeded to the archbishopric of New York, petitioned the Holy See to be relieved of his duties as military bishop. His request was denied.³⁰ Instead, he was

²⁷ AANY, Connolly to Hayes, May 2, 1918.

²⁸ AANY, Hayes to Connolly, June 4, 1918.

²⁹ O'MALLEY, 207-208.

³⁰ O'MALLEY, 229-230.

directed to ensure a constant supply of chaplains and to strengthen the military apostolate in order to safeguard the faith of Catholic servicemen. During the 1920s, the number of priest-chaplains was woefully insufficient. Finding the situation unacceptable, the Holy See formed a commission in 1929 consisting of five U.S. bishops – Bishop Thomas Walsh of Newark among them, to aid in the recruitment of priests. The commission was successful.³¹

Though there was speculation that the military vicariate might be moved to the nation's capital – for practicality and as a matter of prestige – the successor to Cardinal Hayes, Archbishop Francis Spellman, was named military vicar in 1939, shortly after being appointed to New York – continuing a 20-year association between the office of the archbishop of New York and the office of military vicar.³² The role of military vicar suited well the Catholic-American patriot whose desire to serve as military chaplain during World War I never materialized. Spellman would marshal the military chaplaincy through World War II, the Korean War and the first half of the conflict in Vietnam.

Catholic chaplains were constantly in demand during World War II, and Spellman sent monthly pleas for chaplain candidates to the American hierarchy, who were generally supportive in providing priest. 3,200 commissioned Catholic chaplains and some 1,700 auxiliary priest-chaplains were in the service of Catholics of the Armed Forces on V-J Day.³³ The same, however, cannot be said regarding the Korean and Vietnam wars. Despite the pleas Spellman made to the bishops – appealing to their sense of justice and pastoral solicitude – noting that the fighting men were in fact faithful of their local dioceses – in both conflicts, the vicariate fell significantly short – only 1,000 serving in Korea³⁴ and 970 in Vietnam.³⁵ The military vicar put the blame squarely at the feet of his

³¹ O'MALLEY, 232-233.

³² O'MALLEY, 247-250.

³³ O'MALLEY, 268-276.

³⁴ O'MALLEY, 324-330.

brother bishops, as he wrote in frustration: “I realize the tragic nature of the situation and it is beyond my ability to bring the tragedy of non-cooperation more forcefully to the attention of those responsible (bishops).”³⁶ One non-Catholic soldier fighting in Korea lamented: “I never thought I would see the day when the Catholic Church failed to provide for her men in the Army.”³⁷ As the need was desperate in both conflicts, it was not unusual for priests who were emotionally and physically able to volunteer for a second tour of duty.

Characteristic of Spellman’s nearly 30-year tenure as military vicar are the pastoral visitations he made to the troops overseas.³⁸ These visits – which during WWII some speculated were spy missions³⁹ – and others saw as “war-mongering” during the Korean and Vietnam conflicts – reached beyond denominational divides. As Spellman sought to bring the consolation of the faith – wrapped as it was in an intense patriotism – to the Armed Forces engaged in battle, he became the face of U.S. military chaplaincy, and an example of the peaceful co-existence of the tenets of Christian faith, military defense and American ideals. Recounting the many trips he had taken, Spellman observed: My heart is filled with deep gratitude to God for granting me the grace and priceless privilege of sharing my life with our boys stationed so far from home and bringing Christ to them. Faith in God, loyalty to their country and service to their fellowmen is the creed of America’s God-revering, fair-minded, freedom loving boys.⁴⁰

American military chaplaincy matured significantly as an institution within the Armed Forces during and following the Second World War, and Catholic chaplains, who were well-represented in

³⁵ O’MALLEY, 366-370.

³⁶ ARCHIVES OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF MILITARY SERVICES (AAMS), Nern to Griffin, September 5, 1953 (handwritten notation of Spellman to Griffin).

³⁷ AAMS, Nern to Griffin (quotation within), September 5, 1953.

³⁸ O’MALLEY, 276-292; 330-336; 370-374.

³⁹ J. COONEY, *The American Pope: The Life and Times of Francis Cardinal Spellman*, (New York, 1984), 111-145; O’MALLEY, 282-283.

⁴⁰ *New York Times*, “Spellman Praises Soldiers in Korea”, January 19, 1953.

leadership positions at the time, contributed to the process. Maturation likewise occurred within the military vicariate during the Spellman years. Both the chaplaincy corps and the military vicariate shifted focus during the years between World War II and the Korean War and beyond - from a ministry to soldiers to a ministry to military personnel and their families.⁴¹ In 1951, the Holy See issued its general norms for military vicariates - *Sollemne semper*. The norms envisioned a chaplaincy beyond the immediate spiritual needs of the soldier in battle – providing, as far as possible, comprehensive pastoral care characteristic of a civilian Catholic parish community. However, as a result of Spellman’s exceptional attentiveness, the vicariate’s institutional life and pastoral programming had already developed to such an extent that only minor modifications were required.⁴²

The association that Spellman had created in the American mind among the chaplaincy, the Catholic Church and the U.S. Armed Forces became a challenge for Archbishop Terrence Cooke when he assumed responsibility for the Archdiocese of New York and the military vicariate in 1968. In the face of increasing discontentment among Americans regarding U.S. involvement in Vietnam and a growing pacifist movement, Cooke was continually confronted with providing a justification for his role as military vicar, the presence of priests in a morally questionable war, and the participation of Catholics in the Armed Forces.⁴³ Publically, in May 1971, the 12,000-member National Association of Catholic Laymen called upon Cooke to strip the chaplaincy of Catholic priests in light of (as they saw it) the failure of chaplains to denounce the immoral nature of the Vietnam conflict.⁴⁴ One month later, Cooke would be confronted with a symbolically forceful denunciation of his role as military vicar during an ordination ceremony at Fordham University. As

⁴¹ O’MALLEY, 320-324.

⁴² O’MALLEY, 347-355.

⁴³ O’MALLEY, 394-402.

⁴⁴ *New York Times*, “Chaplains’ Role Questioned Because They Support War”, June 21, 1971.

the Cardinal approached the newly-ordained to offer the customary sign of peace, two (Fathers Meyer and O'Rourke) refused the gesture, announced their unwillingness to make peace with war (personified in Cooke) and called for his resignation as vicar. In response, Cooke offered an explanation of his role and the pastoral mission of the military vicariate – after which, with arms outstretched he once again offered the sign of peace to his brothers – once accepted, the other refused.⁴⁵

The very notion of a government-sponsored military chaplaincy came under scrutiny during and following Vietnam. In 1979, the chaplaincy faced its most serious constitutional challenge. Two Harvard law students, Joel Katcoff and Allen Wieder, filed a suit maintaining that the present form of the Army chaplaincy violated the establishment clause of the First Amendment. Though the constitutionality of the chaplaincy had been challenged in the past – first in 1818 – none of the previous challenges survived to formal legal proceedings. Given the social climate of the time, the challenge did not come as a surprise to Cooke and his chancery staff, who had requested legal counsel on the matter as early as 1973. Though the military vicariate and other church-endorsing agencies were willing to offer assistance by filing amicus briefs with the court, government counsel believed that the involvement of religious groups might be perceived as an improper wedding of Church and State. The case, which lasted just over five years, was finally decided by the U.S. Court of Appeals in January 1985.⁴⁶

Pastorally, in the tradition of Spellman, Cooke continued pastoral visits to the troops overseas, and in keeping with the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, he sought to enhance the pastoral outreach of the military vicariate further and create a sense of “church” among the Catholic

⁴⁵ *New York Times*, “Chaplains’ Role Questioned Because They Support War”, June 21, 1971; “Terence Cardinal Cooke: A Calm Voice In An Age Of Upheaval”, October 7, 1983.

⁴⁶ DRAZIN AND CURREY, 197-203; O’MALLEY, 412-415.

communities on military bases. Just weeks before his death in October 1983, Cooke wrote to his chaplains:

Many people do not know as I have come to know, the special sacrifice you make in bringing the love of Jesus into the lives of so many who reach out to you...Sometimes your flock is far from home, very young and confused...For these your title of Father, assumes a very special significance, a significance not always appreciated in other priestly apostolates...I rejoice that...I am able to serve God's People in the Military Vicariate in sickness as I have in health...⁴⁷

Cooke's death brought an end to the nearly 70-year link between the Archdiocese of New York and the military apostolate of the Church. Since the mid-1970s, the Holy See had considered it appropriate to separate the two ecclesial realities, given the growth of the military apostolate. In 1984, the Holy See issued the apostolic letter *Apostolica Sedes*, which decreed the separation of the office of military vicar from the office of the archbishop of New York. In an historic day in the life of U.S. Catholic chaplaincy, Cooke's New York successor, Archbishop John O'Connor (a former rear admiral of the Navy and auxiliary bishop of the Military Vicariate – reportedly not in favor the separation), turned over canonical possession of the vicariate to the newly-appointed military vicar, Archbishop Joseph Ryan, on March 25, 1985.⁴⁸ During Archbishop Ryan's tenure, which concluded in 1991, he worked closely with the Holy See towards creating a proper juridical configuration for the military apostolate as he sought to reconstitute the military vicariate – in practice and spirit – along the lines of a diocesan church – as envisioned in the 1987 apostolic constitution *Spirituali militum curae*, which provided new norms for the governance of military ordinariates throughout the world.⁴⁹ The Archdiocese for the Military Services, as it is popularly known today (albeit, only in an

⁴⁷ AAMS, Cooke to Chaplains, September 30, 1983.

⁴⁸ O'MALLEY, 416-421.

⁴⁹ O'MALLEY, 426-435.

analogous manner), serves a portion of the People of God – that is, 1.5 million Catholics associated with the Armed Forces through the ministry of the nearly 600 Catholic chaplains of the Army, Navy and Air Force.

Apostolic Experiences of Chaplains:

Numerous are the stories of the selfless pastoral work and heroic actions of chaplains. There are, of course, a few less than edifying stories. By way of example, Army chaplain Father Franz Feinler of Sioux Falls was tried and found guilty of treason and spying for the Germans during World War I.⁵⁰ And through the years, a few were reprimanded for moral lapses. However, most chaplains placed themselves at the service of the fighting men – Catholic and non-Catholic alike – and did so with few exceptions in a noble and selfless manner.

During war, the great amount of the priest-chaplains' time was occupied with hearing confessions and tending to the spiritual needs of the sick and dying. The time devoted to this work not only was beneficial to the soldiers but also was a source of consolation to their families. As Father John Mitty (later Archbishop of San Francisco), stationed stateside during WWI, observed: "I was constantly swamped by letters from mothers and wives and sisters and sweethearts to be sure and see that their loved ones received the sacraments before departure."⁵¹ It has been reported that soldiers would stand in lines as long as the mess-line, waiting their turn to go to confession to New York priest Father Francis Duffy of the NY 69th, perhaps the most celebrated chaplain of the Great War – not only because he was always in the thick of battle right alongside the men but for his

⁵⁰ *New York Times*, "Army Chaplain Suspected As Pro-German", March 5, 1918; "Capt. Feinler On Trial", March 13, 1918; "Chaplain Disloyal, Soldiers Testify", April 15, 1918; "Deserter Faces Death", May 11, 1918; "President Pardons Franz J. Feinler", June 29, 1921; R.T. CONLEY, "Priest, Chaplain, Solider...Spy?" in J. LINCK AND R. KUPKE, eds., *Building the Church in America*, (Washington, 1999); O'MALLEY, 224.

⁵¹ M. WILLIAMS, *American Catholics in the War: National Catholic War Council: 1917-1921*, (New York, 1921), 251.

dedicated priestly service.⁵² If you have ever purchased theater tickets in Times Square, you have surely seen the bronze statue raised in his honor in 1938.⁵³ While chaplains could have recourse to general absolution – and many did just before battle – the majority preferred to hear individual confessions whenever possible. World War II Army chaplain Fr. Clarence Hagan (Louisville) chose to hear confession for hours on end in the cold winter one Christmas Eve because, as he put it: “it is better for the men.”⁵⁴

The official post for chaplains during battle was at the battalion aid station, the collecting station, the hospital, or in the case of Navy chaplains, sick bay. Yet, how best to provide the last rites to the wounded and dying was a major concern for priest-chaplains and a much-debated subject during World War II.⁵⁵ For its part, the military vicariate left the matter to the conscience of each chaplain: “We take it for granted that every priest will act according to conscience, and will be where conscience tells him to be when his men are in the greatest danger.”⁵⁶ Many believed their place was in the thick of battle, and some would meet their death while administering the sacraments.

During World War II: Hearing the wounded calling for help after an enemy air attack, Father Peter Bonner (Philadelphia) moved from slit trench to slit trench, imparting absolution and anointing the wounded until he was struck by a bullet and died instantaneously.⁵⁷ Redemptorist Father Lawrence Lynch was killed in Okinawa, having run out to the aid of the wounded before the enemy artillery had ceased.⁵⁸ From a wooded area on the Philippine Islands, Father Lynch heard a wounded soldier calling out for help. Ignoring warnings that he should not attempt to get to the area

⁵² *New York Times*, “Father Duffy Dead: Won Fame in War”, June 27, 1932; “Father Duffy Mourned By Throng”, June 29, 1932.

⁵³ *New York Times*, “Times Square Unveils Statue of Duffy”, May 3, 1937.

⁵⁴ AAMS, Circular Newsletter to Chaplains, No. 41, February 10, 1945.

⁵⁵ O’MALLEY, 294-296.

⁵⁶ AAMS, Circular Newsletter to Chaplains, No. 41, February 10, 1945.

⁵⁷ AAMS, Circular Newsletter to Chaplains, No. 39, October 1, 1944.

⁵⁸ AAMS, Circular Newsletter to Chaplains, No. 44, June 26, 1945.

because of snipers, Carmelite Father Aquinas Colgan set out. Shot once in the shoulder as he entered the woods, Colgan continued. Upon reaching the man, Colgan was killed by a round of machinegun fire. When his body was later retrieved, he was found embracing the soldier he had tried to save.⁵⁹ Franciscan Father Dominic Ternan was ministering to a fallen soldier when he was shot in the back by a sniper who continued to riddle Father Ternan's body with bullets as he lay dead.⁶⁰

Newark priest and alumnus of this Seminary, Father John Washington was on the *Dorchester* in February 1943 when the ship was torpedoed by a German submarine in the North Atlantic shortly after midnight. The story is well-known: Washington, along with three other chaplains (two Protestant, one Jewish), sought to assist and quiet the men as the ship began to sink and the life rafts and jackets dwindled in supply. As the deck was clearing, four soldiers appeared in search of life jackets. With none remaining except those worn by the chaplains, the chaplains gave their jackets to the young men. As the life rafts drifted away, the four chaplains were seen kneeling in prayer on the deck as they went down with the ship. The "Four Chaplains" have since become synonymous with the self-sacrifice, patriotism and religious traditions of our nation.⁶¹

The story of Jesuit Father Joseph O'Callahan and his heroic actions on board the *Franklin* is equally well-known. During an offensive operation in the Pacific off the coast of Japan, the ship had fallen victim to a Japanese air assault, which took the lives of nearly 1,000 men. Many of those who survived owe their lives to the actions of Father O'Callahan. In recognition, President Truman presented the priest with the Congressional Medal of Honor:

For conspicuous gallantry...at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty...to aid his men...Lt. Commander O'Callahan groped his way through smoking corridors to the open flight

⁵⁹ AAMS, Circular Newsletter to Chaplains, No. 44, June 26, 1945.

⁶⁰ AANY, Smith to Spellman, September 15, 1944.

⁶¹ D. KURZMAN, *No Greater Glory: The Four Immortal Chaplains and the Sinking of the Dorchester in World War II*, (New York, 2004).

deck and into the midst of violently exploding bombs...With the ship rocked by incessant explosions, with debris and fragments raining down and fires raging in ever-increasing fury, he ministered to the wounded and dying, comforting and encouraging men of all faiths; he directed the fire-fighting crews into the blazing inferno on the flight deck;...continuing his efforts despite searing, suffocating smoke which forced (other) men to fall back...(and)...Serving with courage, fortitude and deep spiritual strength...O'Callahan inspired the...officers and men of the *Franklin* to fight heroically and with profound faith in the face of almost certain death...⁶²

Father O'Callahan holds the distinction of being the first chaplain of any demonization to have received the Congressional Medal of Honor since the Civil War. To date, three other priest-chaplains have been so honored.

During the Korean War: Franciscan Father Herman Felhoelter chose to remain behind at a battalion aid station when his unit was being forced to withdraw. There was no time to evacuate the wounded. A medical officer who also remained recounted that as the enemy approached, Felhoelter was attending a man, kneeling down beside him, when there was a burst of fire, and Father was shouting a protest: “Don't, don't,” when he was shot dead and killed with his men.⁶³ Army chaplain Father Emil Kapaun of Wichita was captured when he remained behind with the wounded following a battle in November 1950. The stories recounted by the American prisoners who were with Father Kapaun tell of his tireless efforts to bring solace and relief – both physically and spiritually – to his fellow prisoners, regardless of race or creed. Kapaun's acts of charity made an impression not only on his fellow prisoners but also on his Communist captors. It is said the prison guards “feared his Christ-like image.” Of Kapaun, Captain Robert Burke, who was imprisoned with Kapaun, wrote: he was “...the guy we all rank above our own father...The man of the cloth who

⁶² C.M. DRURY, *History of the Chaplain Corps: United States Navy, 1939-1949*, (Washington, 1950), 201.

⁶³ AAMS, Circular Newsletter to Chaplains, Supplement, August 1950.

treated all men alike, administered the last rites to the dying – Catholic, Protestant and Jewish – because they all wanted Father’s blessing as they left this earth...This is how I remember the finest man I ever knew, the most outstanding priest I’ve ever seen, the hero of heroes ...our beloved Father Kapaun.”⁶⁴

During Vietnam: Army chaplain Father Michael Quealy (Mobile) had decided that the best way to be of service to the wounded was to ride evacuation helicopters into battle areas. “Hearing of a violent battle near the Cambodian border he caught a ride to the area. Spotting one seriously wounded man he crawled to his side under intense fire from three automatic weapons...he knelt and administered last rites and then noticed still another wounded soldier. While knelling by that man’s side...” he was shot dead.⁶⁵ One who had observed Father Quealy’s actions that day characterized him as one of the bravest men he had ever encountered.⁶⁶ During the Tet Offensive at the Imperial Citadel, Father Aloysius McGonigal realized the Marines were without a Catholic chaplain. He left the safety of his post in Saigon to join them.⁶⁷ It was there that he was killed by a bullet to the forehead while ministering to “...a unit that was not his own in a battle he could have missed.”⁶⁸

The stories surrounding the combat deaths of Army chaplain Father Charles Watters and Navy chaplain Father Vincent Capodanno are often repeated, and rightly so. Their courageous pastoral zeal was recognized with the Congressional Medal of Honor. Newark priest Father Watters, a native of Jersey City and alumnus (1953) of this Seminary, was serving a second tour of duty when he was killed in battle. His citation recounts the circumstances surrounding his death. Father Watters rushed

⁶⁴ A. TONNE, *The Story of Chaplain Kapaun: Patriot Priest of the Korean Conflict*, (Emporia, 1954), 190.

⁶⁵ R. VENZKE, *Confidence in Battle, Inspiration in Peace: The United States Army Chaplaincy, 1945-1975*, (Washington, 1977), 150.

⁶⁶ H.F. ACKERMANN, *He Was Always There: The U.S. Army Chaplain Ministry in the Vietnam Conflict*, (Washington, 1989), 186.

⁶⁷ ACKERMANN, 186-187; Venzke, 156-157.

⁶⁸ *The Washington Post*, “Priest Fought Way to Battle, Died There”, February 21, 1968.

to the front to aid the wounded and administer the last rites to the dying. Spotting a wounded paratrooper standing in shock in the field of fire, Chaplain Watters ran forward, picked up the man on his shoulders, and carried him to safety...As the American unit rushed forward, Watters was again seen in the front, caring for another wounded man; when they were pushed back, the chaplain was seen between the lines recovering two more fallen comrades. The battalion was forced to pull back...Despite efforts to restrain him, Watters dashed out three more times to recover wounded men. Finally, while distributing food and water to those still fighting and helping medics bandage the wounded, Chaplain Watters was also killed.⁶⁹

Like Father Watters, Father Vincent Capodanno was serving an extended tour of duty when he was killed on the battlefield. His actions on the day of his death are representative of the dedication Father Capadanno embodied daily in his anxious desire to be of service to his men. Fellow Navy chaplain, Father David Casazza of the Archdiocese of Newark, remarked of Capadanno: "He was a hungry man. Hungry to be with the troops. Hungry for more time to seek out the lonely Marine, more time to visit with the sacred boy, more time to explain things to a confused platoon leader."⁷⁰ The actions of Father Capadanno on the day he was killed are recounted in the citation that accompanied his Medal of Honor:

Disregarding the intense enemy small-arms, automatic weapons, and mortar fire, he moved about the battlefield administering last rites...When an exploding mortar round inflicted painful multiple wounds to his arms and legs, and severed a portion of his right hand, he steadfastly refused all medical aid. Instead...with calm and vigor (he) continued to move about the battlefield...Upon encountering a wounded corpsman in the direct line of fire of an enemy machine gunner...Lt.

⁶⁹ VENZKE, 155.

⁷⁰ H.L. BERGSMAN, *Chaplains with Marines in Vietnam: 1962-1971*, (Washington, 1985), 151.

Capodanno rushed a daring attempt to aid and assist the mortally wounded corpsman. At that instant, only inches from his goal he was struck down by a burst of machine gun fire.

The effect and witness of Capodanno's ministry have not faded, as is evidenced in the testimonies of those who knew him and the numerous civil, military and ecclesiastical buildings and monuments dedicated to his memory. His cause for canonization was opened in 2006.⁷¹

A final chaplain story: The chaplains were often edified by the service rendered by their fellow chaplains – Catholic and non-Catholic. Naturally, especially during war, priest-chaplains took advantage of chance encounters with one another to enjoy priestly fraternity and often to have recourse to the Sacrament of Confession. One such encounter during World War I was recalled in a letter to Bishop Hayes from Father William Davitt of the Diocese of Springfield. Father Davitt writes:

My work brought me in contact with a fine priest last week. His name is Father Colman O'Flaherty (Sioux Falls)...I knew him only a few hours, but in that short time I learned to love (this brother priest of mine). Let me tell you about our meeting and our parting. I met him in a village a few kilometers from the line...we talked a few moments...and then we both went to confession. Chance meetings of priest with priest are golden opportunities on the battlefield. Absolutions given and with a final 'God bless you', we parted ... About dusk I returned...One of my boys...broke into tears as he told me the story...a shell had exploded and killed the good Father. I cannot help but think, Bishop, that God brought us together a few hours before...I have been through a lot...but nothing has made a greater impression on me than my meeting and parting with Father O'Flaherty. *Requiescat in pace.*⁷²

⁷¹ D. L. MODE, *The Grunt Padre: The Service and Sacrifice of Father Vincent Robert Capodanno, Vietnam 1966-1967*, (Oak Lawn, 2000).

⁷² WILLIAMS, 287.

Twenty-five days after this encounter, in the morning of November 11, 1918, 90 minutes before the 11.00 cease fire, Father Davitt, while retrieving the regimental colors, was struck dead by a fragment from a German shell.⁷³

Conclusion:

The military chaplaincy as constituted in the United States simultaneously serves the interest of both the Church and the State. Though distinct entities, the presence of a government-sponsored chaplaincy has for over 200 years enabled the Catholic Church to carry out its military apostolate in an unhindered and undiminished manner. Since the start of the twentieth century, both chaplaincies have matured and obtained sure foundation side-by-side. Both have moved in their own proper sphere; with direct and indirect influence one upon the other, from providing basic spiritual ministrations to battlefield soldiers, to a comprehensive ministerial program for the personnel of the Armed Forces and their dependents. Through a series of government-issued general orders and regulations and Roman-dispatched constitutions and decrees, military chaplaincy has expanded its scope of pastoral care and the individuals it embraces. Yet not lost, and perhaps still very much at the heart of military chaplaincy, there remains the simple shared desire of the Church and State to provide shepherds for soldiers – who in time of battle might seek the consolation of faith and call out by spoken word, by a gesture or by means of a scribbled word on a blood-stained slip of paper: Chaplain.

⁷³ AANY, Connolly to Hayes, December 25, 1918.