

***The Christian Military Chaplaincy:
An Orwellian Ministry.***

Part Two

A Ministry of the Ministry of Love

As we have previously noted the military chaplaincy, Christian military chaplaincy, represents an immense issue in the Christian Churches, in the Catholic Church. It is so complex in terms of its consequences, its evil consequences, that it is hard to simply wrap your mind around what are its consequences, what are its implications for a Catholic, for a Catholic community. It has often been said by Bishops, "What am I going to do? I have people in my diocese, hundreds of them, thousands of them maybe, who are in the military. Do I leave them without chaplains?" And so the apparent conundrum is set up. "They are in there, I now must give them chaplains because Christians deserve chaplains."

Well, maybe a way of looking at this is, to first examine the negligence of the Bishop. Would these people of his diocese be in the military if he had properly taught from grammar school through high school and in the seminary training of the priest a full and complete understanding of both traditions (small t) in the Catholic Church—ethical traditions? There is the tradition of Jesus' Nonviolent Love of friends and enemies that is original Christianity that dates back 2,000 years. And then there is approximately the 1700 year old tradition of justifying violence and enmity which has its standards which is in the context of Catholic or Christian moral theology, and whose standards are pretty darn strict, and have to be lived or else the killing that goes on in the war is unjust killing—murder—and murder is always intrinsically evil. But there's hardly a person, hardly one, boy or girl, who comes out of Catholic, elementary, primary and secondary school or who has been involved in primary or secondary CCD in his or her parish religious education programs, who has the slightest comprehension of either orthodox ethical Catholic tradition—the Nonviolent Way of Jesus or the just war way introduced by Augustine. They are simply not taught. There is a wave of the hand to Gospel Nonviolence in Catholic teaching by way of teaching anecdotal stories about Dorothy Day or Martin Luther King, perhaps even Gandhi. And that is the sum of what is taught.

As regards Catholic just war tradition, all that is taught is that there is such a thing as just war in the Catholic Church and you have to uphold the standards of it,

period. If anything about the standards are mentioned, all that is said is, "Well, you know, it means you have to have a just cause and has to be instituted by legitimate authority. And you have to use just means, proportional means." That is more or less all that is taught about Christian just war theory.

When information is presented in such a haphazard superficial way, when education takes place in that haphazard superficial way, it is worse than if nothing was said at all because it gives the person the impression that he or she knows something when in fact they do not know it. At least if they did not know it, they could go out and they could look for themselves as adults, e.g., what is this nonviolent tradition in the Church, what is this just war tradition in the Church. But instead they are given these amorphous thoughts on both subjects and left to fend for themselves. This is only because the local Bishop permits this. The Bishop is the teacher in a Catholic diocese and he has the responsibility of teaching the entire ethical tradition of the Church, and teaching it properly to the level of the student that is in front of him or his deputies.

I remember really being so, so sorrowful, so, so, passionately upset after the "War on Grenada," the only war in the history of the United States where there were more medals given out than there were people who participated. A war where hospitals were bombed and there was never a reference whatsoever to just war standards, in war and during war. Nothing! I remember reading the homily of the Bishop for a 19-year old-boy from his diocese who was in the military who was killed in that war. He was brought home to be buried. The Bishop presided at the Mass of the Resurrection for him. And, he gave this homily that was nothing short of disgusting spiritually. He spoke of how this young man gave his life for the freedom, security and defense his country, never once mentioning the fact that this young man had not been given by the Bishop the slightest understanding of the Catholic teaching of Nonviolent Love of friends and enemies or even the Catholic teaching of just war theory. He was a kid, 18 years old, that went in the military and he was dead at 19. How dare the Bishop talk like that. He was just being a patriotic morale booster, trying to make people feel good by focusing on the ephemeral rather than the eternal. If that young man knew the standards of the Catholic Just War Theory, there is a high likelihood he would not have gone to kill people in that war and hence not have been kill. But, his Bishop saw to it that the full Catholic ethical tradition in relationship to war was never presented to him. And, the one who never taught him what he had a right to be taught was now posturing as the moral validator of his death at his funeral.

You know, most of the people that go into the military are kids, 18, 19, 20, 21. You know, there are not a heck of a lot of graduates from Harvard joining the army to fight in Iraq. All you have to do is look at the Michael Moore documentary on Marines recruiting in poor neighborhoods of the country and all the gimmicks and deceit they use to bring kids that have no jobs, no education into the military to be cannon fodder. A Bishop who does not teach those in his care what they must know about Catholic morality and war is just a part of the military recruiting team.

Let me tell you something, something that's a scientific fact. The human brain is not totally developed until a human being is 24 years old. When people are recruited at 18, 19 years old by the military, whether it be in Catholic schools or whether it be in public schools or whether it be on the television or radio, when people 18 and 19 years old are being recruited and brought into the military, they are people that do not have complete fully developed brains. And the part of the brain that is not developed is that part that can weigh consequences. That is why a couple of years ago All State Insurance Company put out an advertisement for parents concerned about why they were paying extra car insurance for their children until they were 24 years old. Why? The kids were driving the same car on the same streets. They had their licenses.

All State put out this very, very well done advertisement. You can find it on the computer. What it was is a picture of the brain. And in the middle of the brain there was a big black hole drawn like an automobile. The advertisement said, "Why do we charge people between 16 and 24 extra money for insurance as if they had no brains?" And the answer was, they have brains but their brains are not fully developed. And what they were pointing out was *that the section of the brain* that can judge consequences, that will keep a person from darting in and out in traffic, that will keep people from going well over the speed limit, that will keep a person from "playing chicken" in a car, that keeps people from doing all kinds of things that are hazardous driving is underdeveloped at 18,19 or 23.

So All State has to charge 18-14 years old or their parents more money because the statistics are that people at that age group do not use a brain that they do not have! But, these are the people the military goes after via the uniforms, the music, and the glory. And of course they're allowed recruit these youngsters with underdeveloped brains in Catholic schools as well as public schools. This is cooperation in child abuse, straightforward cooperation in child abuse. This is like putting a bag of candy out in the middle of a highway and telling a four-year-old

child child to go out and get it. He or she will go out and get it eventually because of the attraction of the candy and the neurological inability to grasp the possible consequences. They simply do not have the mental competence and experience to understand that if you walk out in that highway you are putting yourself in a position of being run over. Or, able to evaluate the probability of being hit by a car. They just don't understand what's going on or the occasion of serious injury they are placing themselves in.

And so, you come before 18, 19, 20 year olds and you put a carrot out there for them, e.g., the uniform, the glory, learning a trade, college tuition or whatever the case may be, and then after you get them you then tell them to go out on Highway 17 in Afghanistan, which is strewn with IUD and land mines. And of course, Highway 17 is utterly different than the parade down Main Street in Poughkeepsie with the music and the military uniforms. And this is what the Catholic Church, the Christian Churches, the military chaplaincy becomes an arm of, deceiving kids who are easily deceived—because their brains are not fully developed—into partaking in something that they do not and cannot understand at that age. I would ask you, how many Catholic schools, how many Catholic CCD programs, even at the high school level, *even* at the college level, *even* at the seminary level, show kids, apprise students, of the actual realities of war and train the to apply the Catholic Just War Theory and Jesus' teachings of Nonviolent Love of friends and enemies to them. I mean really inform them as educators can do?

The military chaplaincy is integral to that whole process. At the beginning of the Iraq war in 2003, the head of Catholic military chaplains was running around the country recruiting for the war at all kinds of Catholic gatherings. Then when the kids get in there, now listen to this, when Catholics gets into the military, the Catholic chaplains never takes the groups of Catholics who are coming in at that time, never, never takes them, sits them down and says, here is what the just war theory is that has to be adhered to *strictly* in Catholic moral teaching or else you cannot kill a human being because the killing would be unjustified and the act then would be an act of murder.

No, there is no, absolutely no presentation to Catholics coming into the military by the Catholic chaplains or any Christian chaplains regarding the standards of the just war theory. Let alone is Jesus' teaching in the Gospels of Nonviolent Love your friends and enemies allow to enter in the Catholic recruit consciousness and conscience. Catholic chaplains and Christian chaplains are prohibited by the

military from doing this. They are prohibited. So they are double agents. Agents of a warring state first, agents of Christ second. How do you serve those two masters? You can only choose one at a time. So you let the young men and the young women go on and learn how to kill and learn how to maim and learn how to deceive. And not a word, not a word about Catholic or Christian or Jesus' teaching on these matters. And most of these recruits are too young to have a fully developed brain. What kind of chaplaincy is this? What kind of bishop is this, that will let his youngsters, his Catholic youngsters go into that kind of dynamic, that kind of turmoil, that kind of storm without a spiritual map to follow?

The spiritual, moral problems of the military chaplaincy are immense. Therefore, one of the excuses whereby people justify themselves is "It is so immense, what can we do about it, there's so many Catholics in the military!" The answer is, abolish the Catholic/Christian Military Chaplaincy It's the only solution. It serves no purpose that the Church which is to be an extension of Christ in time and space should be trying to serve two masters The only solution is abolish it. But what about all those people who are already in the military, all those Catholics, all those Christians? Fess up to them; tell them what the teachings of Jesus are. Tell them. Tell them the impossible complexity of a human being, being a military chaplain and being a double agent for the state and for Christ, the impossibility of the job and all the compromises, concessions, deceits, evasions that have to be engaged in, in order to carry out that double agency.

Robert Jay Lifton was a psychiatrist during the Korean War. He later became a full professor of psychiatry for decades at Harvard University. He did years and years of research into the chaplaincy and the psychiatric profession in war. He wrote a book, *Home From the War*. Well worth anyone's time to read and read thoroughly, including the bishops and the priest and the ministers and the deacons that have any interest in being authentic, *authentic* in their pastoral care of people. Here is an excerpt, somewhat lengthy, but it's an excerpt from this book *Home From the War*, by Robert Jay Lifton. The book is the product of tens of thousands of interviews with people who have been in war and who have come back. Here is what Lifton writes:

“Within their diffuse anger, that all I can do is describe as ironic rage, the veterans reserve a special tone to describe two categories of people they encountered in the military: chaplains and “shrinks.”

The very mention of a military chaplain quickly brought forth smirks, jibes, and the kind of uneasy laughter suggested by the half-conscious witticism, “Those chaplains—oh my God!” With bitter enthusiasm, they gave endless examples of chaplains blessing the troops, their mission, their guns, their killing. As one of the men put it, “Whatever we were doing . . . murder . . . atrocities . . . God was *always* on our side.” The men also pointed to the chaplain’s, even more direct role in promoting false witness. One man spoke especially bitterly of, “The chaplain's continuing bullshit” which he went on to illustrate what he meant by recalling a death of a close buddy followed by a funeral service in the company. The homily was nothing more than a pep talk that urged the soldiers in the name of the one who had been killed, to “kill more of them” (meaning the enemy). When this man finally went to the chaplain, he was overwrought with anger at what he had just heard, almost to the point of beating up the chaplain. He was “near psychotic disassociation.” He yelled out to the chaplain, *‘What kind of sin do I have to commit—how far along the path of evil that you the representative of God are leading me do I have to go before I can get you, the spiritual counselor to listen to what the seriousness of my problem is.’*

The veterans were trying to say that the only thing worse than being ordered by military authorities to participate in the absurd evil of war is to have that evil rationalized and justified by the guardians of their spirit. Chaplains thus fulfill the function of helping men adjust to committing war crimes while lending their spiritual authority to the overall project of war.”

I know that there can be all kinds of responses to Lifton, which would read, "Oh, I got this help from a chaplain, I got that help from a chaplain." In combat, the problem is this, listen: the chaplain is the last line of protection of the immortal soul of the person. War can destroy the body, and even if it does not destroy the body, it can do something far, far worse. It can destroy the inside of a person, the psyche, the soul of a person. And that's where the chaplain comes in. He is supposed to be the protector of that in the name of Jesus Christ, not the agent of destruction of both body and soul of those in his care. We know the truth. We have a term for it, PTSD, post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD. It is epidemic. We have 22 suicides of veterans a day. God knows how many others there are that are not reported as such. We have hospitals filled to the brim with people who have become un-functional psychologically and spiritually and live in total misery as the result of the effects of war.

And then we have the back alleys and the streets of the big cities, the homeless shelters. Men and women whose minds and spirits and psyches and souls were torn apart by the reality of what they had gone into with the support of their Church under the name of Jesus Christ. And when they got there, they knew as sure as the hand in front of them that this was not of God, this was not of Jesus. But the only help they got from the chaplain was, “Buck up, don't be a coward. Don't be a sissy. Pull yourself together. Get back out there and do your duty for country and God.” If the Christian Chaplains were doing what they were ordained to do, instead of what they swore themselves into the military to do would there even be such a thing as a PTSD epidemic?

The author of *Tales of South Pacific*, from which the musical *South Pacific* came, James Michener, reported on the first time in the Second World War that he actually killed a person. He says that when the Japanese soldier came over the top of his dugout and he killed him as he was trained to do, he vomited all over himself. Instantly at the deepest part of him, he says, he felt he had betrayed everything that he was. That is just not his experience; that is the experience of millions and millions and millions of people on all sides of war. The military chaplain is the last possible protector of the spirit of the person, the mind of the person, the soul of the person from being destroyed for life. Instead he performs a liturgy that validates the micro-acts of war that soldiers do or are about to do. As are, by the way, the chaplains on the other side of the battle line.

The military chaplaincy is an immense human problem, an immense spiritual problem and an immense moral problem for the Churches. It is toying with salvation of one and all. There is no way to gradually get out of it. It is wrong from the beginning as the just war is wrong from the beginning and it should be and must be eliminated because it is participation in clear evil by the standards of Jesus. For the most part it leads astray young men and women that have no idea what they are getting into and/or what they are in. It does not, and is forbidden by the military, to teach what Jesus about violence and enmity. It does not even teach what the institutional church teaches about the mega-violence and the mega-enmity of war.

-Emmanuel Charles McCarthy