

CHAPTER VI  
PLURALISM AND DIVERSITY IN THE SEA SERVICES

*“Tradition is the living faith of the dead. Traditionalism is the dead faith of the living.”<sup>1</sup>*

Jaroslav Pelikan

In the first five chapters of this paper, I discussed the foundational issues from the historical and contemporary sense facing the Navy Chaplain Corps through the Doctor of Ministry project that arose from my experience as a Navy chaplain. In this chapter, I will relate the project to a wider discussion regarding pluralism and diversity.<sup>2</sup> The chapter will follow a basic outline of providing an understanding of diversity and pluralism and the impact and role of civil religion. An understanding of how this relates to the ministry currently undertaken by Navy chaplains will follow. From the onset of this project, the basic premise has been that there is now within the Sea Service a community of faith unlike any other in the history of the Republic. The men and women who have been commissioned to serve as chaplains in the Fleet come from a range of faith groups that would have been incomprehensible to the founders of the Chaplain Corps.

According to Webster’s dictionary, if being diverse is being “different, varied, or dissimilar” and diversity is “the quality, state, fact, or instance of being diverse,” then religious diversity must be understood as being a descriptive term, objectively orientated, that deals with the fact that there is a variety of faith groups and religious beliefs present within a segment of society (such as the military) or within society as a whole. Religious diversity reject the notion of sameness, that is, a “one-size fits all” approach to expressions of faith. One can say that he/she accepts religious diversity accepts the presence of other faith groups, without feeling that his/her own faith is lessened by their presence is embracing religious diversity. My belief is that religious diversity accepts as a basic tenet that the beliefs held by each individual are, in fact, unique. In the last few decades of the twentieth century, the explosive growth in the religious life of USAmerica has posed significant challenges to religious leaders of every stripe and to the

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<sup>1</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *Vindication of Tradition*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984, page 213.

<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of this chapter, diversity and pluralism are understood to be of the religious variety.

secular leaders of the nation. Diversity places numerous demands upon the inter-relationships of people who are coming into ever increasing contact and conflict with their fellow citizens who are people of differing views and beliefs. Navy chaplains who are asked to facilitate the beliefs of this diverse assortment of faith adherents need to understand the others, as well as their own core beliefs. Religious diversity involves persons whose beliefs are not only distinct from the chaplain's beliefs but are coming into increasing conflict with the chaplain and the traditional approaches to military ministry.

It has been argued, albeit incorrectly, that in the early years of the American colonies and continuing into the formative years of the Republic, that there was a unity in our identity. The earliest colonists were comprised mostly of western European stock<sup>3</sup> and held a common sense of "home" and who they were seeking to become in this new land. These early Americans, as the settlers of this new nation were to become known, were unified in their desire to start something new, to break free from the perceived limitation of old Europe and from those many homelands from which they hailed. It was in this recognition that the emphasis on the differences in Europe that the new national motto began to take on increased significance. This motto, "E Pluribus Unum," (Out of many, one) was seen first as a political statement referring to the unity of separate colonies into one nation.<sup>4</sup> The federal system of government was a brilliant means of bringing together an amazing range of colonies, and it helped to hold the regional rivalries at bay.

Many years after the American Revolution of 1776, the Jewish writer Israel Zangwill penned *The Melting Pot*, a play describing the effects that this concept would have upon each wave of immigrants. The hero of the play, uttered what was to become the unofficial mantra of the Republic:

America is God's Crucible, the great Melting-Pot where all the races of Europe are melting and reforming! Here you stand, good folk, with your fifty languages and histories, and your fifty blood hatreds and rivalries. But you won't be going back to that, brothers, for those are the fires of God you've come to – these are the fires of God. A fig for your feuds and vendettas! German

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<sup>3</sup> Many commentators do not appear to consider the presence of the Native American population or that of the African slaves in the discussion of this subject.

<sup>4</sup> Diana L. Eck, *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation*, San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001, page 29.

and Frenchmen, Irishmen and Englishmen, Jews and Russians – into the Crucible with you all! God is making the Americans!<sup>5</sup>

This idea of a melting pot was the belief that in USAmerica, it mattered little where your ancestors were from, what work they performed, or in what manner they prayed (or not, as the case may be). It was to persist in many circles to the early years of the twenty-first century. It would have shocked Zangwill to read the USAmericans persist in 2005 to claim identity and affiliation with places across the oceans. The imagining into being of a people is not as simple as declaring it to be so. “It is clear that the most powerful mapping of the world and its boundaries is done not by armies, but by the power of the imagination which creates and bears for us a sense of we – national, religious, cultural, multicultural.”<sup>6</sup>

The English Empire became the colonial power in the predominate position in North America in the years leading up to the American War of Independence in 1776. As a result, the English language became the de facto official language of the new republic. Those who came to this country had the choice of adapting to this new language or not being able to take full advantage of the benefits the society was willing to share with them. A typical pattern would be that adult immigrants from lands outside of the British Isles knew little English, but their children were quickly able to learn to acquire the new tongue outside of the home. By the third generation, the native language had given way to the dominate culture and English would become the language of both home and public spheres.

Some of these new citizens had been motivated by religious reasons for their choice to come to America. These people were typically Christian of one variety or another. So that even the differences in style and polity were transcended by the same root faith that was shared by all. Even those who were not Christian, and this typically meant the small Jewish population, was understood to have at least a shared from of reference which served to unite the nation. As with the English language of the majority, the near total hegemony of Protestant Christianity<sup>7</sup> resulted in a de facto national religion that manifested itself in every area of communal life. Those who

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<sup>5</sup> Diana L. Eck. (2001). *A New Religious America: How a “Christian Country” Has Become the World’s Most Religiously Diverse Nation*, San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, page 55.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., page 226.

<sup>7</sup> At this point in the development of the United States, those who claimed a religious affiliation would have been overwhelmingly Protestant. A term such as “Mainline Protestant” would have had little meaning until much later in the history of the nation.

did not fit the Judeo-Christian<sup>8</sup> mold were not too subtly put to the side. When it came to religious life of the community, to have a faith meant to have the Christian faith. It would appear then that the great experiment had succeeded. We had become one nation out of many states, one people out of many, and our religion was understood to be universal in its depth and breadth.

President George Washington, in a letter to Moses Seixas, Warden of Truro Synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island, states this belief that our perceived unity would tolerate no disruption:

The citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for having given mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy: a policy worthy of imitation. All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it were by the indulgence of one class of people, that another enjoyed the exercises of their inherent natural gifts. For happily the Government of the United States, which gives bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasion their effectual support.<sup>9</sup>

Sadly, this tolerance was never fully embraced by either the population or its leaders. Various forms of intolerance were practiced, and persecutions did in fact occur during the colonial era and continued throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. Religious intolerance was sadly not eradicated simply by the arrival in the “new world.” Bigotry against Roman Catholics, Baptists, Quakers, and Later-Day Saints among other groups bears witness to the reality that not all was well in the melting pot. Despite a checkered record, an amazingly diverse assortment of people now live in USAmerica. Given that fact, what does this do to the religious landscape of today? In this era in which we find ourselves, “We have to take seriously the religious freedom that is part of our constitution. And religious freedom brings religious diversity. Now we have it. We have lots of it.”<sup>10</sup> It cannot be said there was a time when diversity was not present in the public square in terms of religion, ethnicity, or political beliefs. “In colonial America, many religions, not just one or two, quickly came to typify the immigrant’s spiritual life, and much of this diversity emerged between 1690 and 1770.”<sup>11</sup> Neither can it be said there was ever universal acceptance of one form of Christianity or another in

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<sup>8</sup> While this umbrella term was not developed until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is used here to include Jews and all Christians.

<sup>9</sup> George Washington, 1790 manuscript, Library of Congress Manuscript Division, page 154.

<sup>10</sup> WBUR: The Connection. (2 October 2003). “*Bill Moyers in Conversation with Professor Diana Eck*,” <http://www.archives.theconnection.org/archives/2001/060606b.shtml>

<sup>11</sup> Randall Balmer, Butler, Jon, and Wacker, Grant. (2003). *Religion in American Life: A Short History*, New York: Oxford University Press, page 77.

USAmerica. In colonial New York for example, where the governor, Thomas Dongan, himself a Catholic, commenting upon the apathy and religious variety present in the colony, in 1683, noted that there are “of all sorts of opinion there are some, and the most part (are) none at all”<sup>12</sup>

The sixty reflections found in this project<sup>13</sup> bear witness to the belief, first uttered more than three hundred years ago by Governor Dongan, that in this place at least there is room for diversity of thought, belief, and practice.

Diversity, as I understand it then, may be understood in the context of USAmerica as being the state of “E Pluribus Unum,” with the exception being that has been made “one” is the realization that we are not alone in our pursuit of the divine. A study of diversity in USAmerica reveals that there has always been a diverse assortment of people, be it in the realms of politics, ethnicity, or religion. The challenge then is how to move from mere acknowledgement that my neighbors are different from me to the realization that in order to become one with my neighbors, I must actively engage with them. And that engagement leads us to the discussion of pluralism.

How does pluralism differ from diversity? “Diversity itself is not pluralism. Pluralism requires... that we engage with that diversity.”<sup>14</sup> Along with diversity, pluralism is a term that is widely used and misunderstood. It is an interpretive term, value-oriented, that addresses the appropriate ways that faith adherents understand and practice their own faith while interacting those of other faiths (or no faith) in a secular or institutional settings. It is an amazingly complex and elusive term with as many definitions as can be imagined. For the purposes of this project, pluralism, as defined by Webster’s, is “the existence within a nation or society of groups distinctive in ethnic origin, cultural patterns, religion, or the like. A policy of favoring the preservation of such groups within a given nation or society.” When applied to the area of religion, pluralism is expressed in the belief that there is more than one religion that applies the same basic benefits to adherents of all religions. Pluralism is not, however, to be confused with universalism, the attempt to create a “one-size-fits-all” belief system. Religious pluralism accepts as a given that each person approaches the common need for interaction with the Divine from

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<sup>12</sup> Randall Balmer, Butler, Jon, and Wacker, Grant. (2003). *Religion in American Life: A Short History*, New York: Oxford University Press, page 77.

<sup>13</sup> Appendix A, Faith Reflections, page 95.

<sup>14</sup> WBUR: The Connection. (2 October 2003). “*Bill Moyers in Conversation with Professor Diana Eck*,” <http://www.archives.theconnection.org/archives/2001/060606b.shtml>

different vantage points. The benefit of holding this understanding of religious pluralism is that each religion is seen as contributing to the pure ideal of each tradition, namely, to offer to the believer the benefits of that system.

But to say that pluralism is not diversity misses the mark because “pluralism is but one of several responses to diversity and cultural modernity. It is an interpretation of plurality, an evaluation of religious and cultural diversity. And finally, it is the ability to make a home for oneself and one’s neighbors in that multifaceted reality.”<sup>15</sup> Robert Bellah and others have correctly demonstrated that there was never a time when the Divine’s favor shone brighter on the inhabitants of USAmerica than those of other lands. But the belief among the citizens of this land was that God favored “us” because we were not “them,” and while this was the prevailing belief for a sizable portion of USAmerica’s history, it is no longer the only voice that is heard in the public square.<sup>16</sup>

For today’s Navy chaplain, this means that there are certain givens that must be accepted. It means that everyone, even those (especially those) who do not hold the chaplain’s own faith tradition to heart is entitled to the benefits of religious liberty. This means that a chaplain who accepts the tenets of religious pluralism believes that to facilitate the religious needs of others is of equal importance to facilitating the needs of the members of the chaplain’s own particular faith group or tradition. Indeed, it is my position that one cannot function as a responsible chaplain in the Sea Services without having come to terms with the reality of both religious diversity and religious pluralism. “Sentient people in the modern world simply have to face the fact that there are many religious perspectives, great and small, which arise from with and express lived human experiences.”<sup>17</sup> In other words, although an individual is entitled to hold a particular worldview, i.e., religion, that person may not deny the existence, and indeed the validity of other worldviews in the lives of other people. There is a fear among some Navy chaplains that to embrace this new-fangled notion of pluralism means to abandon all faith and belief.

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<sup>15</sup> Diana L. Eck. (2003). *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras*, Boston: Beacon Press, page 191.

<sup>16</sup> William R. Hutchison. (2003). *Religious Pluralism in America: The Contentious History of a Founding Ideal*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, page 234.

<sup>17</sup> James B. Wiggins, (1996). *In Praise of Religious Diversity*, New York: Routledge, page 39.

Two responses to the request for a definition of pluralism provides examples of this train of thought. The first, from a chaplain of the Pentecostal tradition, states that: I believe strongly that I can have fellowship with any Christian who holds to the historic foundations of orthodox Christianity....I am a strong advocate for social pluralism, but not theological pluralism.”<sup>18</sup> The second, from a Baptist chaplain, offers the view that Although we have these words, they do not really exercise this because Christians are not allowed to exercise their religious beliefs freely. If we are allowed to use the name of Jesus freely like we should, many would convert, and this is what the evil spirits do not want to occur. Nevertheless, the name of the Lord is a strong tower and the righteous runneth unto it and is safe.<sup>19</sup>

The rigidity of these statements of “my way is right and therefore yours must be wrong” is completely out of character with the beliefs enshrined in the civil religion of tolerance and acceptance. “Pluralism... emphatically does not imply ‘lack of all conviction,’ either for historically dominant American faiths or their adherents for the society at large.”<sup>20</sup>

If persons from such diverse cultures as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mohandas Gandhi can articulate that there must be a way for all of us, the global “we” to share this global village, how is it that the chaplains of the U.S. Navy struggle with this concept? As it is stated in a Surah in the Quran, “For each of you we have appointed a law and a way. And if God had willed, He would have made you one people. But He willed it otherwise that He may put you to the test in what He has given you. So vie with one another in good works. Unto God will ye be brought back, and He will inform you about that wherein ye differed.”<sup>21</sup> Putting it another way, “Imagining a wider ‘we’ does not mean leaving our separate communities behind but finding increasingly generative ways of living together as a community of communities. To do this, we

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<sup>18</sup> Appendix B, Pre and Post-test Questions, Question 5 (part 5), Chaplain #1, page 212.

<sup>19</sup> Appendix B, Pre and Post-test Questions, Question 5 (part 5), Chaplain #11, page 212.

<sup>20</sup> William R. Hutchison. (2003). *Religious Pluralism in America: The Contentious History of a Founding Ideal*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, page 234.

<sup>21</sup> Quran-V; 51.

must all imagine together who ‘we’ are.”<sup>22</sup> Perhaps this is the single greatest challenge facing the Chaplain Corps as it moves through the twenty-first century of the Common Era.<sup>23</sup>

It will take imagination to move from a Corps that is recruited solely from the ranks of the Christian churches and in particular, from the denominations that existed in the eighteenth century. It will take imagination for those chaplains who still think of themselves as representatives of the one true faith to become participants in a community where all are served, and all are welcomed. It will take imagination. The only question that remains to be answered is will this imagination be found from within the Corps or will the community we are called and sent to serve imagine a world without chaplains? It is no longer beyond my imagination that “This imagined community is not off in the future in some heavenly place and time, but this place transformed by justice and filled to the brim with peace. The kingdom of God is much wider than the church. It is the Kingdom of God, not the Christian church.”<sup>24</sup> I believe that I can serve the Sea Service community as a Christian and as a naval officer, embracing both a civic and a religious idea of pluralism and diversity.

Having explored the nature of diversity and pluralism, I turn now to the nature of another stream of belief that chaplains must be adept at dealing with, namely, civil religion.<sup>25</sup> I believe that Herberg’s “civic faith,”<sup>26</sup> and Benjamin Franklin’s “publick faith”<sup>27</sup> may be used interchangeably. In the tumultuous years leading up to the formation of the United States, philosophers such as Jean Jacques Rousseau contributed a great deal to the thought processes of the Founders. He coined the term “civil religion” in his treatise “*On the Social Contract*” (1762), saying,

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<sup>22</sup> Diana L. Eck. (2003). *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras*, Boston: Beacon Press, page 238.

<sup>23</sup> Many references can still be found in the Chaplain Corps literature to the “Christian Era,” or dates annotated “A.D.” The term “Common Era” recognizes that not everyone recognizes the formation of a Christian era. Of course the term begs the question, “Common to what or to whom?”

<sup>24</sup> Diana L. Eck. (2003). *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras*, Boston: Beacon Press, page 230.

<sup>25</sup> In this chapter, the term “religion” refers to those beliefs and actions of a spiritual nature. “Civil religion” will be the term of choice when describing those beliefs and practices that take place in the public sphere.

<sup>26</sup> University of Colorado Department of Religion, (23 Aug 2003). “*On the Social Contract*,” [https://www.colorado.edu/religious\\_studies/chenus/4820-coldwarculture/readings/civireligion.pdf](https://www.colorado.edu/religious_studies/chenus/4820-coldwarculture/readings/civireligion.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> Randall Balmer, Butler, Jon, and Wacker, Grant. (2003). *Religion in American Life: A Short History*, New York: Oxford University Press, page 173.



There is, therefore, a purely civil profession of faith of which the Sovereign should fix the articles not exactly as religious dogmas, but as social sentiments without which a man cannot be a good citizen or faithful subject... Now that there is and can no longer an exclusive national religion, tolerance should be given to all religions that tolerate others, so long as their dogmas contain nothing contrary to the duties of citizenship.<sup>28</sup>

There is a commonly used term in the vocabulary of USAmerican public discourse known as “separation of church and state” that is addressed in greater detail in chapter seven. For the moment, it may suffice to say that this phrase had led to a popular descriptive fallacy of the essence of the First Amendment. It originated first as a term from a letter of Thomas Jefferson and has been interpreted in ways ranging from faithful to funny. According to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) website, “The right of each and every American to practice his or her own religion, or no religion at all, is among the most fundamental of the freedoms guaranteed by the Bill of Rights.”<sup>29</sup> The Constitution’s framers understood very well that religious liberty could flourish only if the government left religion alone. The free exercise clause of the First Amendment guarantees the right the:

Theory and practice of civil religion waxed and waned throughout the nineteenth century. It proved to be particularly conspicuous in times of war or national stress when the people needed assurance that the Almighty favored their nation. To practice one’s religion free of government interference. The establishment clause requires the separation of church and state. Combined, they ensure religious liberty.<sup>30</sup>

The notion then that there is a rigid wall that can never be breached is incorrect. Rightly understood, the separation doctrine is the result of society’s desire to ensure that there be constitutional guarantees afforded individuals from the compulsion to support a particular faith, in exclusion of all others. The doctrine also has been interpreted to offer guarantees to the various faith groups of the country that the state would take steps to prevent or limit the state’s interference in the exercise of religious liberties and beliefs. In 1967, Robert Bellah published a controversial article in *Daedalus* entitled, “Civil Religion.” He wrote, “What we have, from the earliest years of the republic, is a collection of beliefs, symbols, and rituals with respect to sacred things and institutionalized in a collectivity.” He then added, “American civil religion has its own prophets and its own martyrs; its own sacred events and places; its own solemn rituals and

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<sup>28</sup> Murray, Bruce. “With ‘God on our side’? How American ‘Civil Religion’ permeates society and manifests itself in public life,” page 1. (15 Jul 2003). [http://www.facsnet.org/issues/faith/sherrill\\_indy.php](http://www.facsnet.org/issues/faith/sherrill_indy.php)

<sup>29</sup> American Civil Liberties Union. (12 Oct 2004). <http://www.aclu.org>

<sup>30</sup> Randall Balmer, Butler, Jon, and Wacker, Grant. (2003). *Religion in American Life: A Short History*, New York: Oxford University Press, page 175.

symbols. This religion is concerned that America be a society as perfectly in accord with the will of God as [humans] can make it, and a light to all the nations.”<sup>31</sup>

There are numerous symbols of the USAmerica civil religion because “civil religion hands in the atmosphere like a fine mist.”<sup>32</sup> The concept of civil religion is expressed in culturally shared affirmations expressed in public forums or ceremonies. It cannot be said that these affirmations are unanimously held by all members of society; even civil religion has its atheists. Despite this growingly inclusive and tolerant strain in USAmerican culture, the inclusion (and retention of the phrases, “In God We Trust”<sup>33</sup> on the currency and “One nation under God”<sup>34</sup> in the Pledge of Allegiance indicate that the belief in the USAmerican civil religion requires a formal grounding in the understanding of who God is and what God intends for USAmerica. It is felt by some people that the casual use of such phrases infringes upon the rights of those who do not believe in God and that it cheapens the claim of God’s sovereignty by those who do believe in God.

The addition of “under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance in 1954 was part of the effort of some Christians to ensure that their way of life was distinguished from that available to the godless heathens of the eastern bloc. The original pledge (possibly written by the Rev. Francis Bellamy in 1892) was seen as a call to national unity, a means of bringing the teeming masses pouring into the country under one banner. The original pledge stated, “I pledge allegiance to my flag and the Republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.” The change from “my flag” to “the flag of the United States of America” was similarly intended to clarify just which banner we USAmericans were being united under. But it was the changing of the Pledge from “one nation indivisible” to “one nation under God, indivisible...” that took the Pledge from being a simple civil pledge to a pledge for something else entirely. By changing the Pledge in this fashion, the State was able to claim divine favor; and by making this claim, it was able to take on the role of agent of the Deity, thereby elevating itself above the reproach of the average person.

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<sup>31</sup> Bruce Murray, “*With ‘God on our side’? How American ‘Civil Religion’ permeates society and manifests itself in public life,*” page 2. (15 Jul 2003). [http://www.facsnet.org/issues/faith/sherrill\\_indy.php](http://www.facsnet.org/issues/faith/sherrill_indy.php)

<sup>32</sup> Randall Balmer, Butler, Jon, and Wacker, Grant. (2003). *Religion in American Life: A Short History*, New York: Oxford University Press, page 173.

<sup>33</sup> “*In God We Trust,*” (22 Apr 2013). Library of Congress, <https://blogs.loc.gov/law/2013/04/in-god-we-trust/>

<sup>34</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica. (n.d.). “*Pledge of Allegiance*” <https://www.britannica.com/event/Pledge-of-Allegiance-to-the-Flag-of-the-United-States-of-America>

Turning our attention now to the role that Navy chaplains play in the civil religion, we can see immediately a conflict emerging, a conflict which each chaplain must come to terms in order to be taken seriously by the institution. As has already been alluded to in this paper, chaplains in the Sea Services serve two masters, the church, and the State. Both have claims to the allegiance and due diligence of the chaplain, and both are somewhat suspicious of the other. But as a Navy chaplain, I press on, ever clinging to the belief that God's people, wherever they might be found, deserve the reminder of God's presence among them.

The issue of civil religion is observed in every facet of the Navy chaplain's daily work, but never more so than the public ceremonies where the chaplain is called upon to offer a spiritual dimension to the event. At retirements and change of command ceremonies, Navy and Marine Corps anniversaries, and more, the chaplain is seen as the embodiment of more than a religious tradition. He/she is the embodiment of all that is holy, and the presence of the chaplain conveys the approval of the deity upon the event and the institution that sponsored it. Examples of the use and conflicts within the Sea Services regarding civil religions was an anticipated part of the faith journey reflections that were solicited as a part of this project. As agents of the State, the chaplain is charged with the task of acting out the role of religious figure in an institution that by design is non-religious.

Navy chaplains are asked to offer prayers at all manner of occasions, not because the institution demands it, or the event would somehow be incomplete without the prayer. Rather, the prayer is offered as a means of embodying the role attributed to the Divine that was played in the lives and efforts of the Founders. Perhaps the reason that Navy chaplains continue to offer prayers and other ministry in a secular institution is that the belief held by many in contemporary US America that the Founders were devout Christians, while in truth many of those men were anything but Christian in the way the term is used today. "The ideas of individuals like Washington and Jefferson often received was the label of Deism..."<sup>35</sup> is but one example of how the Founders had ideas that likely as not, would not be taken too keenly by many congregations today. Like the Founders before them, today's Navy chaplain is likely to have Christian origins

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<sup>35</sup> Randall Balmer, Butler, Jon, and Wacker, Grant. (2003). *Religion in American Life: A Short History*, New York: Oxford University Press, page 176.

and have been endorsed by a Christian church. And like the Founders before them, today's chaplains are expected to conduct themselves in a spiritual fashion in the public arena.

Not all chaplains are able or willing to do this, and the tension that may result when the command of a unit is in conflict with his or her chaplain is something for which new chaplains are woefully unprepared. Typical of these chaplains are the statements offered by one new chaplain to the questions asked in the Phase II website. When asked how they responded to requests from different faith groups, this chaplain boldly stated "I have to share with them what I know. I can't give them anything else. I will direct them in other areas but what and who I am they will get!"<sup>36</sup>

The list of prayers in Appendix D<sup>37</sup> includes historical examples of prayers offered by leaders of the Republic or those in position of authority within the Armed Forces. In each example, the person speaking did so on his or her own volition and in keeping with her or his own understanding of the divine role in the situation being prayed about. Early prayers typically included references to Jesus Christ, a practice that likely would not be considered acceptable by public figures in today's pluralistic culture.

Two examples of prayers by our leaders will illustrate this desire to invoke the name of God or at least to acknowledge its presence in the public's mind. President George Washington, called upon the citizens of the new country to adhere to the benefits that religion could offer the State. Religious people made good citizens. President Washington's prayer for the nation asked of God "...And finally that Thou wilt most graciously be please to dispose of us all to do justice, to love mercy, and to demean ourselves with that charity, humility, and pacific temper of mind that were the characteristics of the Divine Author of our blessed religion, and without the humble imitation of whose example in these things, we can never hope to be a happy nation."<sup>38</sup> It was less a desire that Washington had for the people to become good Christians, but that they would learn the moral lessons that Christianity could share, thus benefiting all of society.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt took the notion of civil religion one step further when he claimed for those in political power the role of arbitrators of what the Divine had in mind, not

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<sup>36</sup> Appendix B, Pre and Post-test Questions, Question 5 (part 5), Chaplain #11, page 212.

<sup>37</sup> Appendix D, Prayer Anthology, page 216.

<sup>38</sup> Appendix D, Prayer Anthology, *Washington's Prayer for the Nation*, page 216.

just for the people of the United States, but also for the entire world: “Endue with the spirit of wisdom those to whom in thy Name we entrust the authority of government, that there may be justice and peace at home, and that, through obedience to thy law, we may show forth thy praise among the nations of the earth.”<sup>39</sup> There can be little doubt that not only had the State assumed the role of God’s agent on earth, but that this assumption of authority would empower the U.S. government to determine how to interpret God’s will and how that will would be enforced.

But is it faith to label all public prayers a tool of the State? Is this a cynical view of prayer, of those human utterances that are earnestly and devoutly offered by persons who just happen to be employees of the State? The skeptic may certainly read official prayers, such as the Sailor’s Prayer of the Marine’s Prayer in this light. It is not possible to determine how many, if any, Sailors and Marines actually know or agree with the prayer that bears their name. And yet, the Sailor who prays “Let me experience courage to accept my share of responsibilities with vigor and enthusiasm. Stay close to me and keep me focused on my goals to do the work of a warrior and be proficient in my daily performance,”<sup>40</sup> or the Marine who asks for God’s blessing and assistance by saying “Give me the will to do the work of a Marine and to accept my share of responsibilities with vigor and enthusiasm,”<sup>41</sup> is asking for more than spiritual comfort, they are asking for the ability to engage in a dangerous task, the killing of the enemy of the State, with a clear mind. And that, if nothing else, is a prayer that requires a certainty of a higher power, that the State may desire but cannot compel.

Most civic functions that a Navy chaplain will be asked to participate in do not utilize the formal prayers that have been passed down across the years, nor are prayers fraught with baggage from another era. Navy chaplains are called upon with regularity to pray in public settings and to do so with a complexity that is simply not present in the civilian church. Because a particular faith group endorses the chaplain, that tradition will no doubt influence the prayers offered by that chaplain. There are essentially two primary areas that a chaplain will be expected to pray in public, those events that are strictly speaking religious, and those that are secular in nature. When praying in a religious service, a chaplain may be expected to pray in a manner consistent with the tenets of the faith group that endorsed him or her. It would be unthinkable for

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<sup>39</sup> Appendix D, Prayer Anthology, *FDR’s Prayer for the Nation*, page 217.

<sup>40</sup> Appendix D, Prayer Anthology, *The Sailor’s Prayer*, page 220.

<sup>41</sup> Appendix D, Prayer Anthology, *The Marine’s Prayer*, page 220.

a chaplain to be told to pray a Buddhist prayer in a Jewish service; likewise it would be wrong to be told that a Pentecostal style of prayer was the only one permitted in a general Protestant service. The prayers offered in religious settings, such as funerals, weddings, baptisms, and other services where the chaplain is functioning primarily as an agent of the religious body, are seen as being consistent with the traditions of the community and of the chaplain.

The problem for some chaplains comes about when the chaplain steps away from the role of spiritual leader of a particular faith community or of a particular religion and into the role of public servant. Remembering that chaplains serve a dual purpose in the Navy, that of spiritual representative and staff officer, is key to providing a ministry that is able to function effectively in today's military community. That duality, offering prayer that is both authentic to one's faith and proper in a pluralistic environment, is one to which some chaplains find it impossible to reconcile themselves. These public events, often referred to as command functions, are situations that members of military are required to attend. Unlike a religious service that is conducted by a Navy chaplain where one is allowed to choose to attend or not depending upon the dictates of one's beliefs, a command function is just that: one is commanded to be present. And since to compel attendance at a religious event would be inconsistent with the free exercise of religion, the chaplain must take care that the prayers offered in a civil setting do not cross the line and create a State-sanctioned or imposed religious belief.

Examples of events that a chaplain might be asked to be involved in include change of command ceremonies and retirement ceremonies. When offering a public prayer, some Christian chaplains struggle with how to be inclusive and still retain their theological purity. For these chaplains, to be unable to pray "in Jesus' name" is alien to their understanding of both their call to ministry and their obligation as a minister of the gospel to proclaim the name of Christ at every opportunity. And yet, this phrase is precisely the sort of ending to a prayer that crosses the line from including the Holy in a secular event to imposing a religious belief where it is not warranted. When offering a prayer at an event such as a change of command, retirements, and other command events, the chaplain is given the sacred challenge of invoking the Divine's presence in the ceremony and touching lives that otherwise might never hear the name of the Holy. My understanding of God's call to me as a Christian into this ministry setting includes the sharing of the good news of God's presence to those who are not Christian. I also understand that

my function as a Navy chaplain does not preclude my ministry to non-Christians. Indeed, through prayers that are inclusive and an active ministry of presence, I am able to be effective in ways that would not be possible if I only prayed “in Jesus’ name.”

There is a long-standing practice that provides Navy chaplains with the opportunity to offer a prayer with the crew aboard Navy ships. At one time, the prayer would have been included in a daily prayer service or at the very least, during divine worship on a Sunday. In today’s Navy, when the chaplain steps up to the 1-MC, the shipboard intercom on board ship, to offer the evening prayer, there is tremendous risk and opportunity involved. Risk because this likely is the only time during the day that some members of the crew will hear their chaplain. This is also for many of the crew, the only exposure they will ever have to a religious figure with an intimate knowledge of the people for who the prayer is offered. There is great opportunity in those precious moments when activity aboard a warship pauses just long enough for the padre to offer some word of hope, of encouragement, or of grace to people who experience challenge on a daily basis. Prayers offered at the beginning of a deployment, before the start of operations, on the eve of holidays such a Christmas or Mother’s Day, and at the end of a long voyage can set the tone, alter the mood, and enhance the ability of people to do the challenging work that needs to be done at sea. However, it is also important to keep in mind that prayers do not have to be stuffy to be effective. The chaplain who sees the evening prayer as a chance to preach to those who do not come to chapel services is a chaplain who will do more harm than good. Keep it honest, keep it simple, and have a sense of humor, and the prayer will be heard.

Within moments of the attacks on September 11, 2001, the three chaplains<sup>42</sup> assigned to the Naval Hospital – Camp Lejeune went into action throughout the command providing reassurance of God’s presence in a place suddenly transformed. Ans so, one month later, when I stood before that command at a public ceremony to offer a prayer, I was able to do so as one who had walked among the command speaking the name of the One in whose spirit I know prayed. This is the reality of prayer in the civic arena, one can pray and do so prophetically, powerfully, and compassionately, but only if one has first demonstrated that the words being uttered are not

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<sup>42</sup> I was one of the three chaplains and two enlisted Religious Program Specialists (RP) assigned to the hospital that day.

offered for the first time. Chaplains must be genuine in their public prayers and must always remember that prayers begin long before anyone says, “Let us pray.”