



Lecture F: “Ecumenism, inter-faith, the relationship among the different denominations (American perspective)

BGen Patrick J. Dolan

14 September 2011

Manansala B Hall, Sulo Riviera Hotel

Quezon City, Philippines

Lecture Highlights

BGen Patrick J. Dolan’s talk “Multi-Denominational Chaplaincy in the Military of the USA” provides an American perspective on how Catholic chaplains work with counterparts from other faiths within the US military. He made mention of the two types of Churches; churches that focus on the Individual; and churches that focus on the Message.

The founding document of the United States, its declaration of independence which proclaims that all men are created equal and endowed by their creator with inalienable rights life, liberty pursuit of happiness has implication in the recognition of inherent dignity of the individual citizen/soldier. In this connection, the Chaplain’s duty is to connect the military member with God, so the emphasis is not on the chaplain but on the individual (soldier, sailor, airman). In General Dolan’s and other US chaplain’s cases, they can therefore serve someone not from their own religion.

Father Dolan then highlighted the three major responsibilities of chaplains: nurture the living, care for the wounded, honor the dead, In the performance of his work he allotted the following time: 10% - perform church service; 10% - advise the commander and staff; 20% - Logistics & Administrative activities; 30% - Explain up and down the chain of Command (bridge between CO & rank & file) regardless of denomination; and 30% - Empathetic listening to 1) personal concerns (soldiers and their families) 2) Unit concerns

In his experience, the lecturer also narrated the benefits and challenges of working with other faiths. Among its benefits are creation of mutual understanding and teamwork. He was able to gain insights into the perspective another chaplain or soldier from a different faith. It also enriches his own perspective as a Catholic and Christian. Another benefit is that this cooperation also carries over into civilian laity and clergy. – Chaplains serve as conduits of building better understanding between the military and civil society.

On the other hand, working with others from other religions also brings attendant challenges. One is human weaknesses which could be manifested through personal and professional jealousies and exacerbated by religious conflicts and elevated intensity. There are also problems with quotas versus needs and dealing with minority denominations, especially if they don’t have their own chaplains.

For the road ahead, Father Dolan posed two questions on the American experience. One is its applicability to the character of other nations. The second is what common values and characteristics can we build on not only in terms of religions but also of cultures. He also advances points for discussions which deal with how can one nation’s chaplaincy help another without interfering and how does one even ask such a question? Does the



language itself affect how we do that? He ends by posing a Challenge to the AMI to find that central core in enriching the dignity of soldiers

During the Open Forum, the following questions were advanced 1) what your view if the rank of chaplains be removed? 2) In terms of time management, what would be Father Dolan's advice in relation to the MOP Pastoral Plan? 3) In the Philippines chaplains are addressed as Father, Sir by lower ranking chaplains and rank and file soldiers; in this regard would calling him sir make him connect better with soldiers? Father Dolan's answer to the first question is that in the US no because first, every member of the military has rank and second, the purpose of the rank is to use that to help others know what they are supposed to do. The system for promotion for chaplains is also clear and transparent that this minimizes jealousies over promotions. This also gives senior chaplains the obligations to watch over younger chaplains (American and foreign) so that they can navigate their way in the service. He noted though that they do not always know the problems because some cultures want to hide the problem. On the second question, he declined to give specific recommendations because he is not that familiar with the Philippine context but he stated that his ministry's structure is based on frequent deployments but if it is in a permanent camp, he attends more to families. On question 3) In the US case the reference to titles of chaplains are more or less the same. They can be called Chaplain, Father or Sir (Imam, Rabbi in other religions for example). Many of the evangelical soldiers do not call him Father because of the scriptural provision although they can call him Padre. It all depends on the soldier if he or she wants to call Father Dolan by any of the above titles.

The Open Forum also generated exchange of comments between the Speaker and the Audience. One comment states that in Royal Navy, chaplains do not wear rank. They have officer status but the absence of rank breaks down barriers as there is no hierarchy to follow. There is also no jealousy over promotion among chaplains. A German chaplain who also has no rank added that the more important question is not whether he has a rank or not but on how he can communicate better and perform his chaplaincy. He also noted that sometimes rank can be used in an imperious manner even by chaplain. A third comment was the dilemma faced by Catholic chaplains such as the case when the Commander forbids them to mention Jesus Christ. Father Dolan's reply on the rank issue was to refer back to the purpose in the US Army. He also noted that in the US military, egalitarianism is practiced in many ways such as the place in a line is determined by who is first and not by rank. On the prohibition of mentioning Jesus Christ, general Dolan said that this is also a problem in US. Chaplains are under legal attack by lawyers and legal groups so they are threading a fine line of performing chaplaincy while being true to their religion. He adds that there are two approaches to deal with the issue: one is you can pray anyway you want if the gathering is voluntary, but if it is Command directed, he will modify in a generally acceptable to all religions to avoid legal entanglements.