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Mr. President, Support Chaplains Saying Jesus When Praying  
 by Michael J. Gaynor  
 Dec 22, 2005

Mr. President, America's military chaplaincy predates America's Declaration of Independence. It was authorized by the Continental Congress on July 29, 1775. In the middle of the 19th century some Southern states petitioned Congress to eliminate chaplains as prohibited by the First Amendment's Establishment Clause. Congress rightly rejected the petitions after careful study. In *Katcoff v. Marsh*, 755 F.2d 223 (1985), the Second Circuit Court of Appeals correctly concluded that the government's practice of hiring military chaplains did not violate the First Amendment's ban on religious establishments, based on the need to support military personnel in the free exercise of their religion, and opined that the military's religious program should be "neutral," should limit competition among religious groups, and should leave the practice of religion solely to the individual soldier, "who is free to worship or not as he chooses, without fear of any discipline or stigma."

Before the Civil War, Congress carefully reviewed the history of the First Amendment, cogently explained why the absolute separation of church and state demanded by secular extremists was not constitutionally mandated, and clearly condemned "atheistic apathy."

The Senate Judiciary Committee report explaining the Establishment Clause stated :

"The clause speaks of 'an establishment of religion.' What is meant by that expression? It referred, without doubt, to the establishment which existed in the mother country, its meaning is to be ascertained by ascertaining what that establishment was. It was the connection with the state of a particular religious society, by its endowment, at public expense, in exclusion of, or in preference to, any other, by giving to its members exclusive political rights, and by compelling the attendance of those who rejected its communion upon its worship, or religious observances. These three particulars constituted that union of church and state of which our ancestors were so justly jealous, and against which they so wisely and carefully provided...."

The report further stated that the Founders were "utterly opposed to any constraint upon the rights of conscience" and therefore they opposed the establishment of a religion in the same manner that the church of England was established. But, the Founders "had no fear or jealousy of religion itself, nor did they wish to see us an irreligious people....They did not intend to spread over all the public authorities and the whole public action of the nation the dead and revolting spectacle of 'atheistic apathy.' Not so had the battles of the revolution been fought, and the deliberations of the revolutionary Congress conducted."

A similar House Judiciary Committee report explained that "an establishment of religion" was a term of art with a specific meaning:

"What is an establishment of religion? It must have a creed, defining what a man must believe; it must have rights and ordinances, which believers must observe; it must have ministers of defined qualifications, to teach the doctrines and administer the rites; it must have tests for the submissive, and penalties for the nonconformist. There never was an establishment of religion without all these."

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Mr. President, the notion that military chaplains should refrain from praying in the name of Jesus is on a par with the current Iranian president's absurd assertion that the Holocaust is a fiction. Like the Iranian president's contemptuous and contemptible canard, the claim that military chaplains must not uttering the name of Jesus, lest the government thereby establish Christianity as America's religion, is perverse and pernicious.

On December 21, 2005, The *Washington Times*' Julia Duin reported not only that military chaplains are being told to shy from Jesus, but that one of them is engaged in a hunger strike outside the White House:

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"To pray -- or not to pray -- in Jesus' name is the question plaguing an increasing number of U.S. military chaplains, one of whom began a multiday hunger strike outside the White House yesterday.

"I am a Navy chaplain being fired because I pray in Jesus' name,' said Navy Lt. Gordon Klingenschmitt, who will be holding 6 p.m. prayer vigils daily in Lafayette Park.

"The hunger strike is intended to persuade President Bush to issue an executive order allowing military chaplains to pray according to their individual faith traditions. The American Center for Law and Justice has gathered 173,000 signatures on a petition seeking an executive order.

"Seventy-three members of Congress have joined the request, saying in an Oct. 25 letter to the president, 'In all branches of the military, it is becoming increasingly difficult for Christian chaplains to use the name of Jesus when praying.'

"About 80 percent of U.S. troops are Christian, the legislators wrote, adding that military 'censorship' of chaplains' prayers disenfranchises 'hundreds of thousands of Christian soldiers in the military who look to their chaplains for comfort, inspiration and support.'

"Official military policy allows any sort of prayer, but Lt. Klingenschmitt says that in reality, evangelical Protestant prayers are censored. He cites his training at the Navy Chaplains School in Newport, R.I, where 'they have clipboards and evaluators who evaluate your prayers, and they praise you if you pray just to God,' he said. 'But if you pray in Jesus' name, they counsel you.'

"Muslim, Jewish and Roman Catholic chaplains are likewise told not to pray in the name of Allah, in Hebrew or in the name of the Trinity, he added.

"But the Rev. Billy Baugham, executive director of the Greenville, S.C.-based International Conference of Evangelical Chaplain Endorsers, says restrictions on other religious expressions have 'yet to be tested.'

"No Islamic chaplain has been refused to pray in the name of Allah, as far as we know. Neither has a rabbi been rebuked for making references to Hanukkah, and no Catholic priest has been rebuked for referring to the Blessed Virgin Mary.'

"The Navy allows chaplains to pray in the name of Jesus Christ, Allah or any other deity during chapel services, spokeswoman Lt. Erin Bailey said.

"At other public events, 'Navy chaplains are encouraged to be sensitive to the needs of all those present,' she said, 'and may decline an invitation to pray if not able to do so for conscience reasons.'

"Lt. Klingenschmitt has not been formally punished, she added, and there are no plans to take him off active duty.

"However, the lieutenant contends that he may lose his job next month and be evicted from military housing. He says he got in hot water during the summer of 2004 while aboard the USS Anzio for preaching an evangelistic sermon at the funeral of a Catholic sailor in a base chapel. The lieutenant said he was reprimanded by two senior chaplains and, in March, sent ashore to Norfolk.

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" Lt. Klingenschmitt also has fought at other times for the religious rights of non-Christians, having backed a Jewish sailor's bid to get kosher meals and sought to include a Muslim seaman in the rotation of sailors offering the ship's nightly closing prayer.

"The lieutenant is not alone in fighting to pray to Jesus. The Navy is facing two lawsuits, filed in 1999 and 2000, by 50 Christian chaplains, saying the Navy discriminates against evangelical and Pentecostal clerics.

"Mr. Baugham said the 350 chaplains he oversees are concerned about a new set of guidelines issued in August after complaints about Christian evangelism at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs. The Air Force guidelines allow 'a brief, nonsectarian prayer' during military ceremonies 'to add a heightened sense of seriousness or solemnity, not to advance specific religious beliefs.'

"So, to what deity do you address your prayer to?' Mr. Baugham asked. 'No one knows. And who gets to write the prayers? Once the government becomes the approving authority, the poor chaplain is forced to be an agent of the state.'

"Mr. Baugham said he had 'just got a call from an Army chaplain in Iraq who says he'd be hammered if he used Jesus' name. Chaplains are scared to death. They must clear their prayers with their commanders, they can mention Jesus' name at chapel services, but not outside that context.'"

Mr. President, you are the Commander-in-Chief and America is at war with terror. You have the power to order warrantless surveillance for national security purposes. And the power to protect chaplains from punishment for mentioning Jesus.

Mr. President, you and the First Lady just issued a Presidential Christmas message brimming with faith and all about the "reason for the season."

It has been noted that your obviously heartfelt message does NOT state 'I believe . . .' or "Christians hold that . . .", but states as a matter of fact that "[m]ore than 2,000 years ago, a virgin gave birth to a Son, and the God of heaven came to Earth."

When the Commander-in-Chief is sending out that wonderful message, is it not wicked to punish or to inhibit a military chaplain from mentioning Jesus when praying? Or to allow a military chaplain to be punished for doing so, or to be inhibited from doing so?

Set forth below in full is your Christmas 2005 message.

Presidential Message: Christmas 2005

'Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel' which means, God with us. Matthew 1:23

More than 2,000 years ago, a virgin gave birth to a Son, and the God of heaven came to Earth. Mankind had received its Savior, and to those who had dwelled in darkness, the light of hope had come. Each Christmas, we celebrate that first coming anew, and we rejoice in the knowledge that the God who came to Earth that night in Bethlehem is with us still and will remain with us forever.

Christmas is a season of hope and joy, a time to give thanks for the blessing of Christ's birth and for the blessings that surround us every day of the year. We have much to be thankful for in this country, and we have a responsibility to help those in need. Jesus calls us to help others, and acts of kindness toward the less fortunate fulfill the spirit of the Christmas season.

On Christmas, we pray for freedom, justice, and peace on Earth. We remember those who have made the ultimate sacrifice for our country and for our freedom, and we ask for God's blessing on their loved ones. We ask God to watch over all of our men and women in uniform. Many are serving in distant lands, helping to advance the cause of freedom and peace. Our entire Nation is grateful to them and prays for their safe return. Laura and I send our best wishes for a blessed and merry Christmas.

GEORGE W. BUSH

Mr. President, you even used the word Jesus! (And Christ too!)

Military chaplains are entitled to do so too. Whether the military chaplains' Christmas will be merry depends upon you! They need help from you. It's up to you to come through by putting down the secular extremists' attempted coup.

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