

Anglo-American Army Chaplaincy in World War I: A Centenary Perspective

By Michael Snape

The history of Anglo-American chaplaincy cooperation is curiously neglected. Since 1900, British and American forces have served together in the Boxer Rebellion, two world wars, the Korean War, Gulf War, and the war on terror, to say nothing of their routine collaboration in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Although histories of 20th-century British and American chaplaincy have multiplied in recent decades, almost all focus on a single national context, an individual service, a specific conflict, and/or a certain religious tradition. However useful in other respects, such selectivity has served to obscure the fundamental connection between British and U.S. Army chaplaincy, especially that which occurred in World War I. If mentioned at all, this collaboration usually receives only a nod of acknowledgment, although Richard Budd has rightly emphasized its formative role in shaping the organization of American chaplaincy.¹

Significantly, and although interoperability has now become something of a buzz term in British and American chaplaincy circles, what has long been neglected or forgotten is that the basic patterns and contours of 20th-century British and U.S. Army chaplaincy emerged from the same roots and challenges posed by the first global war of the 20th century—a war in which, for the first time in their histories, both Great Britain and the United States sent mass citizen armies to fight an industrialized war overseas. This

chapter studies the commonalities between the British and American experiences of the First World War; highlights the religious, cultural, and military similarities between the two nations at that time; and examines the critical role played in creating a new model of U.S. Army chaplaincy, fashioned on British lines, by Charles Henry Brent, the Protestant Episcopal Bishop of Western New York.

To understand the context in which this new model of U.S. Army chaplaincy arose, it is important to grasp some of the key cultural and religious dynamics of the “Anglosphere” in the early 20th century. Despite major governmental differences between Great Britain and the United States (especially, for our purposes, the latter’s Republican constitution and its separation of church and state) and mass immigration from southern, central, and eastern Europe, American society closely resembled its British counterpart in that it was overwhelmingly Christian, predominantly Protestant, and normatively English-speaking. Furthermore, and despite their estrangement from the mother country and their ingrained suspicions of British imperialism, the members of America’s Anglo elite were closely bound to the British Isles by linguistic, cultural, and religious ties. British and American Protestants of British descent shared global missionary horizons, a Puritan moral outlook, denominational links that spanned the Atlantic, and, in the King James Bible of 1611, a standard version of Scripture. Significantly, the President who took the United States to war in 1917 was a Presbyterian who prided himself on his Scottish Covenanter heritage and whose mother had been born in the English border town of Carlisle. His grandfather, Thomas Woodrow, had been its Congregationalist minister.² But there were many indicators of this shared Protestant milieu.

It was instanced, for example, in the Anglo-American majority at the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910; in the prominence of the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) in both countries; and in the trans-Atlantic appeal of evangelists such as Ira David Sankey and Dwight L. Moody and British-born Rodney “Gypsy” Smith. The turn of the 20th century has also been termed “the great age of Episcopocratic supremacy”

in the United States, an age when the Protestant Episcopal Church, an integral part of the worldwide Anglican Communion, sought to realize its vision of being America's *national*, if not established, church.³ Inspired by their church's English heritage, its theological breadth, and its cultural and financial capital, Episcopalian pretensions were underlined by the National Cathedral project in Washington, DC ("a House of Prayer for *All People*," according to its originator, Bishop Henry Yates Satterlee).⁴ An epitome of the English Gothic revival and designed by British architect George Frederick Bodley,⁵ its charter was granted by Congress and signed by (Presbyterian) President Benjamin Harrison in 1893.⁶ Episcopalians envisaged their massive new cathedral as nothing less than "America's Westminster—a great expression of national unity, a burial place for great national heroes."⁷ When its foundation stone was laid in September 1907, Admiral George Dewey and President Theodore Roosevelt (another hero of the Spanish-American War, and an occasional Episcopalian) were present, and the Anglican Bishop of London was at hand to address the concourse of 10,000 worshippers and well-wishers.⁸

These years were also characterized by dwindling strategic tensions between the British Empire and the United States. Despite the War of 1812, the maritime tensions stirred by the American Civil War, and the emergence of the United States as a global naval power, Anglo-American naval tensions were, in the main, notable by their absence. Because of their service across the world, relations between the Royal Navy and U.S. Navy had been cordial for generations. According to Peter Karsten, the typical U.S. Navy officer of the late 19th century was "an Anglophile because he identified with his British colleague in every imaginable way—socially, professionally, ideologically, culturally, historically, and racially."⁹ While a fashionable trans-Atlantic Anglo-Saxonism—famously (or notoriously) expressed in Rudyard Kipling's poem of 1899, "The White Man's Burden: The United States and the Philippine Islands"—played on a common language and shared racial origins, Protestant Christianity, and above all Anglicanism, was a key ingredient of this cultural cement.

Moreover, Episcopalianism was *very much* the keynote religion of America's professional officer corps until the Cold War era. As Michael E. Shay has observed, prior to the First World War "a disproportionate number of Episcopal priests served as Army chaplains,"¹⁰ a situation that also obtained in the U.S. Navy.¹¹ In fact, and despite the notional limitations of the First Amendment, the Protestant Episcopal Church was all but established at West Point and Annapolis: from 1896 to 1959, an unbroken succession of Episcopalian chaplains held office at West Point, their influence enhanced by a system of mandatory chapel attendance for the budding elite of the Regular Army.¹² At Annapolis, where a similar regime obtained for the Navy's officer cadets, such privilege was less blatant, but the prevailing tone was unmistakably Episcopalian.¹³

In the conformist, hierarchical, and close-knit world of the professional officer corps, the influence of these systems was unmistakable, with almost half of America's admirals and generals claiming to be Episcopalians in the decades between the Spanish-American War and World War II.¹⁴ In contrast, in 1916, the Episcopalian share of the national population was in the order of only 1 percent.¹⁵ As the sociologist Morris Janowitz concluded in 1960, the Protestant Episcopal Church "dominated organized military religion" in the United States throughout the first half of the 20th century.¹⁶ On the eve of the First World War, these affinities had found their supreme expression in the person and worldview of Alfred Thayer Mahan—U.S. Navy officer, historian, and maritime strategist. Mahan's reputation as the "Prophet of Sea Power" on both sides of the Atlantic stemmed from his reading of the providential nature and trajectory of national histories, an understanding that was strongly Anglophile in character and deeply influenced by his Episcopalian faith and mindset.¹⁷

In Great Britain, this strong sense of amity and affinity was reflected and reciprocated in organizations such as the Anglo-American League, inaugurated in London in July 1898 to the distant rumblings of the Spanish-American War, and with the archbishops of Canterbury and York in attendance.¹⁸ The objectives of the League were stated in the following terms:

Considering that the peoples of the British Empire and of the United States of America are closely allied in blood, inherit the same literature and laws, hold the same principles of self-government, recognise the same ideals of freedom and humanity in the guidance of their national policy, and are drawn together by strong common interests in many parts of the world, this Meeting is of opinion that every effort should be made in the interests of civilization and peace to secure the most cordial and constant co-operation between the two nations.¹⁹

Subsequently, the strength of such sentiment was reflected in an ostentatious determination to celebrate the end of the War of 1812, as well as a century of peace among Great Britain, Canada, and the United States. Though 1914 is better known for the outbreak of a new European war, it also marked the centenary of the Treaty of Ghent, signed on Christmas Eve 1814, and a flurry of preparatory meetings and commemorative events duly took place in Great Britain and North America.²⁰ Patronized by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the culmination of these celebrations of trans-Atlantic friendship was comprehensively and unexpectedly spoilt by Germany's invasion of Belgium.²¹

This conjunction of British and American concerns and interests had implications for chaplaincy matters long before the outbreak of the First World War. In personal terms, Edmund Pepperell Easterbrook, who was appointed the U.S. Army's second Chief of Chaplains in 1928, had been born in the town of Torquay in Devon, England. He had subsequently emigrated from his native land, trained as a Methodist minister, and served a series of pastorates in New York. A volunteer chaplain with the 2nd New York Infantry Regiment during the Spanish-American War, Easterbrook became a regular Army chaplain in 1900 and succeeded Bishop Charles Henry Brent as the senior chaplain of American forces in Europe.²²

But Britain supplied institutional models as well as individual chaplains. Since the Army did not have a separate corps or even a supervisory chaplain of its own, in the early 1890s its short-lived "Army Chaplains'

Alliance” looked to Britain’s Army Chaplains’ Department, founded by Royal Warrant in 1796, as a pattern to follow.²³ Frustrated by a system that rendered them scattered functionaries of the Adjutant General’s Department, its members were moved by the failure of Congress to enact a bill that would have created a new chaplain corps along British lines.²⁴

While the “benign neglect” of Congress hindered the development of an Army chaplaincy in the 1890s, the acquisition of an overseas empire as a result of the Spanish-American War threw up new parallels with Britain’s chaplaincy systems.²⁵ As Bishop of the Philippine Islands, and like many of his fellow Anglican bishops in British India, Brent’s main responsibility was to his fellow nationals, and to soldiers above all, rather than to the indigenous population.²⁶ Despite his reputation as a missionary, Brent was under no illusion that his primary duties in the Philippines had laid the foundation for his work in the American Expeditionary Forces in Europe. As he wrote to Bishop William Lawrence of Massachusetts in 1918, “I came to France as part of my *real work* as Bishop of the [Philippine Islands]—the continuance of my work in and for the Army.”²⁷

Given the tightly spun webs that bound them to Great Britain and its wider Empire (and especially neighboring Canada), for many Anglophone Protestant Americans the First World War began not on April 6, 1917, but on August 4, 1914. From the outbreak of war in Europe, American volunteers flowed into the ranks of the British and Canadian (as well as French) armies. Among them was Stanley Willis Wood of Kansas City, Missouri, who resigned his commission in the 7th U.S. Infantry in December 1914 to enlist as a private in the British army and who died in Flanders in 1916 serving as an officer in a Canadian infantry battalion.²⁸ Likewise, John Robertson, a Presbyterian minister from West Virginia, joined the British army as a chaplain and served on the Western Front, presumably for what was initially the standard term of 12 months. He then returned to the United States, was commissioned as an Army officer when the United States entered the war, and, by the summer of 1918, had once again returned from Europe to lecture recruits in stateside training camps.²⁹

While the interwar pacifist writer Ray H. Abrams later castigated the Episcopalians as the most vocal supporters of the Allies and America's emerging Preparedness Movement, they were only part of a much larger and influential spectrum of pro-British Protestant sympathizers. As Abrams conceded, "The strong Scotch-Presbyterians and Wesleyan Methodists leaned, naturally, towards Great Britain. . . . The Baptists, Congregationalists, Unitarians, Universalists . . . all with their English origins and backgrounds, retained their sympathies with the mother country."³⁰ Among pro-British clerical activists was C. Seymour Bullock—a Canadian army chaplain, American citizen, and veteran of the Spanish-American War—who recruited sympathetic Americans to Canada's multi-battalion "American Legion."³¹ In fact, and according to the British weekly newspaper the *Graphic*, "There were so many American parsons applying for the position of chaplain with the Legion that it was said that they could have raised a Legion of American ministers."³²

Even against the backdrop of war, the customary exchange of religious news, views, and personnel continued, though now with an inevitable wartime twist. Due partly to British control of trans-Atlantic cable communication, and some deft manipulation of the U.S. press, American church newspapers largely followed their secular counterparts in carrying a preponderance of pro-Allied reportage.³³ As the war unfolded, this included papers such as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Chicago Tribune* printing stories of the exploits of intrepid British and Canadian chaplains. For example, in February 1917 the *Washington Post* reported how no fewer than 450 Germans had been captured by just 18 men of the Dublin Fusiliers—ably assisted by their Roman Catholic chaplain.³⁴ And there was much to report on British and Canadian chaplaincy in general, both before and after the United States entered the war on Good Friday 1917.

Some of the most colorful stories, especially those from the frontline, arose from what was a wartime revolution in the nature and organization of British army chaplaincy. In 1914, this was a sedate and disjointed affair. Besides the Chaplain-General, who was based at the War Office, the

Army Chaplains' Department consisted of 108 commissioned chaplains representing just three denominations—Anglicans (predominantly), Presbyterians, and Roman Catholics. In addition, there were 45 “Temporary” or “Acting” chaplains who, though not commissioned, were likewise engaged in full-time ministry to the British army.³⁵ In aggregate, their work approximated to a parochial ministry in Regular Army garrisons as far afield as Cairo, Pretoria, and Mauritius. In India, however, British soldiers were the responsibility of a different agency. This was the Indian Ecclesiastical Establishment, a body of full-time government chaplains, including several Anglican bishops, supplemented by paid missionary clergy as the need arose—including a number of American Methodists.³⁶ Britain's part-time soldiers, embodied in the Territorial Force from 1908, had a Chaplains' Department all their own, notionally larger than that of its regular counterpart.³⁷ In peacetime, this ad hoc system was sufficient for the support of a regular army of 250,000 men, plus a similar number of Territorials. It was, however, wholly inadequate to meet the pressures of a global war.

After August 1914, the scale of the challenge saw millions of additional soldiers flood the ranks of the British army—initially volunteers but, after January 1916, and for the first time in British history, conscripts as well. Initially, Britain's composite chaplaincy system struggled to cope: mobilization plans for the regular department went astray; India's slender base of suitable British clergy could not supply its expeditionary forces; Territorial chaplains, so often honorary appointees, stayed at home.³⁸ Furthermore, when they did arrive in Flanders, Gallipoli, East Africa, or Mesopotamia, chaplains were usually banned from the frontline in keeping with the Geneva Convention of 1864—and in the hope of sparing soldiers the dispiriting spectacle of dead and wounded clergy littering the battlefield.³⁹ If this were not enough, at home the churches bickered relentlessly over chaplaincy matters: Catholics, Presbyterians, and Nonconformists versus Anglicans over heated allegations of War Office favoritism, and, among Anglicans themselves, Anglo-Catholics versus Evangelicals over perceived discrimination against Anglo-Catholic candidates and practices.⁴⁰

All of this changed decisively, however, in 1916, with the coming of conscription and the looming prospect of the Somme offensive. Assuming command of the British Expeditionary Force in December 1915, Sir Douglas Haig presided over a transformation of British army chaplaincy on the Western Front. Partly connected to his growing dependence on his headquarters chaplain, a young Presbyterian biblical scholar named George S. Duncan, Haig lectured his commanders (and even eminent churchmen such as the Archbishop of Canterbury)⁴¹ on the critical importance of having “large minded, sympathetic men as Parsons,” chaplains who would spare no effort in preaching and promoting “the *Great Cause* for which we are fighting,” and who would shun any form of sectarian strife. Haig also emphasized the intrinsic morale value of chaplains as providers of organized recreation and amusements and, perhaps more importantly, encouraged the removal of any restrictions on their movements.⁴²

Following this new course, British chaplaincy developed in leaps and bounds—including much higher ratios of chaplains to soldiers, new organizational structures, and new areas of specialization, including a novel ministry to the aviators of the Royal Flying Corps.⁴³ In a powerful testimonial to the importance and diversity of religion in British society, and its significance for the morale of Britain’s new citizen army of conscripts and wartime volunteers, by 1917 no Allied army was making more use of its chaplains than the British. By this stage of the war, a typical British infantry division had an establishment of 17 chaplains, whereas, in the Imperial German Army, a Bavarian division had only 4, and a Prussian division just 2.⁴⁴ In an official dispatch to the War Office on the campaigns of 1917 (a year that saw the grueling battles of Arras, Messines, Third Ypres—Passchendaele—and Cambrai), Haig affirmed the value of his chaplains’ work as “incalculable,”⁴⁵ and he maintained this verdict for the rest of the war.

By November 1918, well over 5,000 commissioned chaplains of the Army Chaplains’ Department, representing no fewer than 11 denominations, had served the 5.7 million soldiers who had passed through the ranks of the British army.⁴⁶ Of these chaplains, 96 had been killed in action or died

of wounds, 91 of them since the summer of 1916.⁴⁷ The department's three Victoria Crosses exceeded the total awarded to many famous infantry regiments, such as the Oxford and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry and the Welsh Guards.⁴⁸ On the Sunday after the Armistice, Haig wrote to Dr. J.M. Simms, the senior non-Anglican chaplain on the Western Front, "Strengthened as I know I and the whole Army have been by the Divine Power, I cannot adequately express the gratitude which I owe to you and all our chaplains for the grand work which they have rendered to our Cause. And to you in particular, my dear Dr. Simms, I thank you with all my heart."⁴⁹ The lessons to be learned from the British experience were clear but, as we shall see, took time to take hold in the American Expeditionary Forces.

The decades preceding the First World War were marked by much-needed progress in the organizational development of U.S. Army chaplaincy. The aftermath of the Spanish-American War and the Philippine Insurrection of 1899–1902 saw the inauguration of Army examining boards for chaplain candidates, the adoption of a system of regimental chaplaincy, an increase in the number of Regular Army chaplains, and the introduction of promotion for meritorious service.⁵⁰ At the same time, and in keeping with the zeitgeist of the Progressive Era, the multiplication of denominational endorsing committees signaled a new interest in chaplaincy matters among the sending churches.⁵¹ In 1913, the newly formed Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America (FCC) created its Washington Committee on Army and Navy Chaplains, a body that served as a key point of contact between the Armed Forces and America's mainstream, English-speaking Protestant churches.⁵² Chaplains themselves also evinced a greater collective consciousness, with the Association of Chaplains of the Military and Naval Forces of the United States being formed in 1912. By the eve of war, and through a series of mergers and rebrandings, this had combined to form the FCC's General Committee on Army and Navy Chaplains.⁵³ However, and despite bureaucratic advances, subsequent experience in France and the United States revealed glaring deficiencies in the organization of Army chaplains and almost insurmountable obstacles to their work on the ground.

When the United States declared war, almost 150 Army chaplains were on Active duty, half of them National Guard chaplains serving with Federalized units on the Mexican border.⁵⁴ According to the National Defense Act of 1916, which significantly enlarged the Regular Army in face of the increasing threat of war, every infantry, cavalry, artillery, and engineer regiment was to have its own chaplain and a ratio of one chaplain per 1,200 Soldiers was fixed for the coastal artillery.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the United States remained woefully unprepared to wage the kind of war unfolding on the Western Front: as David R. Woodward has unambiguously stated, “The U.S. Army could not have been less prepared to wage war abroad when [President Woodrow] Wilson decided to send an expeditionary force to Europe.”⁵⁶ And this was certainly true of its chaplains, who were without a corps of their own, still controlled by the Adjutant General’s Department, and very much at the mercy of local commanding officers.

They also had no idea what they were heading for. In June 1917—in the wake of the battles of Verdun and the Somme, and just after British engineers had reconfigured Messines Ridge in what was then the greatest man-made explosion in history—Father George J. Waring, a Regular Army chaplain of 13 years standing, author of a chaplain’s manual, and a self-styled “Advocate of Manly Sports for American Soldiers,” expanded on the duties and qualities of a good chaplain for the benefit of the *New York Times*. With what in retrospect seems a chilling naivete, Waring blithely discoursed on the need for friendly, sympathetic, and open-minded chaplains, men who were good at organizing recreations, liaising with neighboring civilian clergy, and visiting the inmates of the post hospital and guardhouse. The article concluded by enthusing, “Chaplain Waring wants to go with American troops to France, if he can be spared from his work on Governors Island [New York]. He was born an Englishman and has relatives in the British Army.”⁵⁷ While Waring does not appear to have joined the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF),⁵⁸ hundreds of his fellow chaplains were not spared the much harsher realities of a wartime ministry in France.

In structural terms, the main problem was the reorganization of the AEF's infantry divisions in July 1917. In order to provide greater staying power when in the line, under General John J. Pershing's General Organization Project, their component regiments were trebled in size to nearly 4,000 men, without any augmentation of their attached chaplains.⁵⁹ In fact, it was not until June 1918 that Congress passed remedial legislation to allow 1 chaplain per 1,200 Soldiers—and even then, according to Pershing, who was very much the cause of the problem, “there was a continuous shortage of chaplains with the fighting units and in the hospitals and camps in the rear areas.”⁶⁰

In terms of practical preparation, a chaplains' school at Fort Monroe, Virginia, opened in March 1918. Though soon relocated to Camp Zachary Taylor, Louisville, Kentucky, in both locations it was hamstrung by the nature of its curriculum. Although the school was hailed by the *New York Times* as a far-sighted venture, in advance of even British training methods,⁶¹ its curriculum majored on such marginal matters as “horseback riding and cavalry drill” and “camp sanitation.” According to one graduate, “The three subjects of study on which most emphasis was laid were international law, military courts procedure, and Army regulations.”⁶² Sketchily prepared, if at all, for the rigors of trench warfare, those Army chaplains who sailed for France joined colleagues who for a considerable time ministered in an organizational vacuum. Many were assigned with scant regard to the size or denominational composition of their units, and there was not even a consolidated list of AEF chaplains. As one of them put it, “Chaplains are assigned with the nonchalance of cavalry remounts.”⁶³ With little supplied by the War Department other than a chaplain's flag and an assembly tent,⁶⁴ as the AEF accumulated “Over There,” its chaplains were also thrown into unequal competition with well-resourced civilian welfare organizations such as the Knights of Columbus, Red Cross, Salvation Army, Jewish Welfare Board, and, above all, the YMCA.⁶⁵ Not only did the YMCA have an active tradition of military work that stretched back to the United States Christian Commission of the Civil War, but most of these organizations

also sent chaplains of their own to France.⁶⁶ To complete the humiliation of Army chaplains, the stateside multiplication of training areas, testing grounds, Army schools, and transit camps fueled the proliferation of rival “camp pastors,” civilian clergymen engaged by their own denominations, and even by commanding officers, to serve the needs of their occupants.⁶⁷

The figure who brought order out of this chaos, gave purpose and cohesion to chaplaincy in the AEF, and thereby laid the foundations of the postwar Chaplain Corps was Bishop Charles Henry Brent. And here it must be emphasized how uniquely placed and qualified Brent was to do this—and how much he drew on British guidance and on British and Canadian methods. In personal terms, Brent’s ministry in the Philippines, and his dealings with senior military and civilian figures as they rotated through the islands, had created an extensive personal network of friendship and acquaintance that went to the very top of the U.S. Army and the AEF. Most significantly, in 1910 Brent had baptized and confirmed Pershing and his wife into the Protestant Episcopal Church.⁶⁸ Consequently, Pershing, who was armed with unprecedented plenipotentiary powers by President Wilson,⁶⁹ readily acknowledged Brent as his “spiritual adviser,” in professional as well as in personal terms.⁷⁰ In fact, and before he went to Europe, Pershing had suggested to Brent in May 1917 that he should “organize the work of the chaplains in the AEF,” a proposal Brent had declined in order to return to the Philippines.⁷¹ Furthermore, Brent’s links with the YMCA, and with the mainstream Protestant world that had gathered for the Edinburgh Missionary Conference, was underlined by his very presence in France at the beginning of 1918.

The previous November, Brent had been given a commission by John R. Mott, then General Secretary of the YMCA’s National War Work Council, to go to France to iron out organizational problems in the AEF and to assist in “promoting the work of this Association among the soldiers of America and her Allies.”⁷² Brent was able to accept this commission due to his recent election as Bishop of Western New York, on condition that its diocesan Standing Committee gave him indefinite leave for the duration of

the war.⁷³ If Brent held considerable sway with the YMCA, he also bridged a cultural gap between the AEF and its British and Canadian allies and their supporting chaplaincies. Of Anglo-Canadian parentage and a Canadian by birth, Brent had quietly maintained dual citizenship after taking out his naturalization papers in 1891.⁷⁴ His American nephew, the son of a New Hampshire rector, was, significantly, serving in the Canadian Expeditionary Force.⁷⁵ A fervent Anglophile and interventionist, Brent had strongly backed the Preparedness Movement and, when America finally declared war, had been engaged in a prolonged, morale-boosting visit to Great Britain and to the Allied armies in France.⁷⁶ Last but by no means least, Brent's ecumenical—even interfaith—theology and outlook was broad enough to pursue and realize the task of forging a unified AEF chaplaincy out of a religiously diverse and organizationally incoherent array of U.S. Army chaplains.⁷⁷

But Brent's recasting of American chaplaincy could only be realized in stages. For several months after his return to France in December 1917, and besides his work for the YMCA, Brent's main goals had been "to keep men's idealism alive" in the growing AEF,⁷⁸ and to promote "good will between British and American"—an objective he declared to Major Robert Bacon, former American Ambassador to France and prospective chief of the American Mission at British General Headquarters, during his first visit to AEF headquarters at Chaumont.⁷⁹ And Brent certainly applied himself to his task, delivering a trademark lecture on America and the war to British and Canadian troops on 11 different occasions in late January and early February 1918.⁸⁰ Another lecture, on "The Unity of England and America," captured his personal commitment to the war as well as the common goals of the two nations:

To a man who has nothing but British blood in his veins like myself, even though he be, again like myself, a loyal American citizen, it is a perennial joy to be among those who owe allegiance to the British Empire. Common blood is a powerful tie in itself. But there is

*something still more powerful—loyalty to a common ideal springing out of a common heritage. . . . You and we are one—one in aspiration, one in inspiration, one in purpose.*⁸¹

Brent's message clearly had the intended effect on his British audiences. Harry Blackburne, the senior Anglican chaplain of the British First Army, acclaimed one of Brent's lectures as "superb,"⁸² while another British chaplain wrote to the *Scotsman* newspaper how, on hearing Brent for a second time, "Again the note of encouragement was struck as with the sound of a trumpet . . . many of us were glad to hear the herald of the great Republic, to feel the inspiration of a great soul like Bishop Brent. It lifted our feet a little higher and carried us on till we met those [that is, the Americans] who should help us to put his words into deeds."⁸³ At the end of June, and with Pershing's blessing, Brent even proclaimed this heady message of unity to the combined Anglo-American battle fleet anchored at Scapa Flow in the Orkneys, where he and British Admiral Sir David Beatty "agreed that the unity begun now must last through the coming centuries, binding our nations together."⁸⁴ Brent's work was widely recognized at the time, with Hensley Henson, the Bishop of Hereford, noting in July 1918:

*Mrs. Burgess came to see me. She has been "canteening" in France with the American Army, of which she gives a laudatory account. . . . Bishop Brent's main object, she says, is to minimize the friction between the Americans & the British, & to establish a mutual understanding between them. At first relations were strained by the intolerable bumptiousness of the Transatlanticks [sic], but matters had improved. There was much appearance of religion among the new troops, but whether it will survive, or vanish as in the case of our own men, remains to be seen.*⁸⁵

Brent's sense of Anglo-American convergence also applied to his plans for chaplaincy in the AEF, which were strongly shaped by British and Canadian precedents. In March 1917, and while playing the

pro-Allied tourist, Brent had been hosted by the British Expeditionary Force's (BEF's) Deputy Chaplain-General on the Western Front, Bishop L.H. Gwynne, in civilian life Bishop of Khartoum.⁸⁶ And it was with Gwynne present that Brent and Pershing had first discussed "organizing the chaplains' services" on January 7, 1918. According to Brent, he and Pershing agreed to form a small team of supervisory chaplains, "one of whom should be a [Roman Catholic]." They also resolved to poach "the best men in the Red Cross and the YMCA," while Pershing promised to lobby Washington "for an increase of chaplains—1 to 1,200 men or about 3 to a [regiment] of 3700." (As Brent piously put it, "As the Spiritual Protector of the Army he feels he must do everything to aid their cause."⁸⁷)

Pershing's recollection of the meeting, however, put a much stronger emphasis on Gwynne's contribution: "To assist us in organizing the work of our chaplains, Bishop Gwynne, Deputy Chaplain-General of the British forces, kindly visited us and explained their methods of control and direction of the chaplains' work, and from their system we adopted such features as were applicable to our service."⁸⁸ (Interestingly, Gwynne's account had yet another emphasis, dwelling on Pershing's fixation with venereal disease, a topic that made for an awkward lunch.⁸⁹) The upshot of their meeting was a detailed memorandum composed by Brent elaborating their core conclusions and including a table of organization for the Canadian Chaplain Service, stressing the high proportion of chaplains to soldiers (that is, 1 to 1,000) and the primary role played by its director. The British (who, it was rightly acknowledged, had very much shaped Canadian chaplaincy⁹⁰) were also invoked: Brent's memorandum had been sent to the Chaplain-General in London for "careful consideration," and, in his covering letter, Brent noted that Gwynne had been "of the greatest service from his ripe experience," notably in pressing the need for chaplains to be fully militarized and embedded in army units. He also cited the British experience in emphasizing to Pershing (whom he flattered as "the father of the AEF"), the huge value of a proper chaplaincy system: "[Y]ou should allow no vantage ground to escape you in your

unprecedented opportunity for leadership. It will react—it has already reacted beneficially—on Great Britain.”⁹¹

As the American buildup gathered pace (of the 2 million Doughboys who arrived in France in America’s 19 months of war, three-quarters arrived in its last 6 months),⁹² Brent’s memorandum on the reconstruction of American chaplaincy was gradually implemented. On February 21, Pershing told him that he would ask Washington to commission him as a chaplain with the rank of major and have him designated “H.Q. Chaplain.”⁹³ Although Brent therefore relinquished his work with the YMCA, it was not until the beginning of July that he received his commission as “Major and Chaplain,”⁹⁴ a process delayed by Pershing’s attempt to raise his bid to a lieutenant-colonelcy.⁹⁵ Nevertheless, the projected transformation of AEF chaplaincy continued. On February 7, a conference “on reconstruction plans” took place attended by Brent, some fellow U.S. chaplains, the YMCA, a British Church Army commissioner, and Harry Blackburne.⁹⁶ In March, Brent presided at a meeting of what he later called “the Board on Chaplains’ Organization,” discussing their respective contributions with senior representatives of the YMCA and the Red Cross.⁹⁷ On May 1, 1918, Paragraph VIII of Pershing’s General Order 66 finally established an AEF “Chaplains’ Office, under the supervision of the Adjutant General,”⁹⁸ and, on May 10, the AEF newspaper *Stars and Stripes* published Brent’s report on its new chaplaincy arrangements.

Stressing the imminent increase in chaplains and insisting that “It does not require any extended argument to justify the movement to organize the chaplains into a corps with a central office at [General Headquarters],” Brent explained that the new Chaplains’ Office (often also termed, rather confusingly, a “permanent Board of Chaplains”) would comprise three members (two Protestants and a Roman Catholic), one of them the senior chaplain. Ultimately, its responsibility would be to “conserve, coordinate, and use to best advantage all the religious effort that is being put forth in the AEF,” including that of the Red Cross, YMCA, and Knights of Columbus. Besides ensuring the right of its Soldiers to exercise their religion freely, in

addition to the mandate of the First Amendment, the driving reason for the new dispensation was claimed to be “that the chaplain has emerged from the obscurity of rather an anomalous adjunct of the Army into one of the most honoured [*sic*] and essential agencies in the military establishment. He is capable of giving a morale that no one else can, and in heroism and virility he has been found second to none.”⁹⁹

As Brent laid the foundations of a “chaplains corps,” as Pershing had termed it from the outset,¹⁰⁰ he continued to be guided by British models. The elaboration of a hierarchy of senior Army, corps, divisional, and base chaplains followed the British pattern,¹⁰¹ as did the opening of the AEF’s own chaplains’ school,¹⁰² and, from October 1918, the publication of a chaplains’ bulletin.¹⁰³ Even Brent’s role as the instigator of the controversial, Army-wide regulation of May 1918 that banned the wearing of rank insignia by chaplains was inspired by British precedents (for, as Brent explained in *Stars and Stripes*, “In the British navy, for instance, chaplains have no rank” and in the U.S. Army, “The uniform mode of address, according to law, is ‘Chaplain,’ unless the familiar and affectionate title of ‘Padre’ displaces it, as it frequently does in both the English and American armies”).¹⁰⁴

But there was also practical cooperation, especially as the AEF entered the fray in earnest from May 1918. (The first Doughboys entered the line in October 1917, suffered their first combat casualties in November, and by March 1918 had sustained fewer than 200 combat fatalities on the Western Front: unsurprisingly, a contemporary quip ran that AEF stood for “After Everything’s Finished.”¹⁰⁵) Sometimes, this collaboration was decidedly trivial, as when Bishop Gwynne’s staff chaplain, B.G. O’Rorke,¹⁰⁶ wrote to Brent in February 1918 advising him of the aid available from the Church of England’s Guild of Church Needlecraft.¹⁰⁷ However, it could also have much deeper ramifications, especially where British and American units served alongside each other or (in the case of several American divisions, and despite Pershing’s resistance) under British command. In April 1918, and with Germany’s spring offensive in full swing, on hearing that American troops were to support the British First Army during the desperate Battle of

the Lys, Blackburne wrote to Brent offering to “help your Chaplains in any way at all.”¹⁰⁸ Brent’s reply betrayed the chaotic state of AEF chaplaincy at that point: “Thank you for your kind offer. I have no doubt you will be able to be of great service to our Chaplains when our troops are stationed in your area. I have not yet received any notification of their arrival. As soon as I do I shall try and get you in touch with such Chaplains as there may be.”¹⁰⁹

By the autumn of 1918, and with the AEF now fully committed to the Allied counter-offensives, this practical interaction was commonplace. As Blackburne wrote:

*An American Division [the 78th] has been attached to [First] Army to be taught its job, and the Army Commander [Sir Henry Sinclair Horne] has told us all to get in touch with our various opposite numbers and help them in any way we can. I at once got hold of their Senior Chaplain, [Stewart M.] Robinson, a Presbyterian, and brought him here to lunch. He is such a nice man, and most anxious to hear exactly what our chaplains do, and where they live. He has asked me to go and speak to a gathering of all his chaplains; they don't seem to bother much about their denominational differences.*¹¹⁰

Hence, and “so that they might be with some of our very best chaplains,” Blackburne arranged for the chaplains of the 78th to be placed with their British equivalents for a few days, a scheme Robinson thought to be of “the greatest help to them all.”¹¹¹ That September, and now plainly treated as an equal, Robinson also attended an ecumenical conference of British First Army chaplains.¹¹²

By this time, the likelihood that British chaplains might become directly responsible for American personnel, especially in British military hospitals in France and Great Britain, was such that on September 12 Britain’s Army Council issued an instruction directing them to take full responsibility for American troops where necessary, and emphasizing that, unlike British practice, “attendance at religious services on the part of American troops is voluntary, not compulsory.”¹¹³ Although this may

have led one American chaplain to complain of being elbowed aside by his British counterparts in “English Rest camps” in France,¹¹⁴ according to another, William D. Bratton, who worked between the 28 hospitals in London that treated American patients, “The co-operation of the British was excellent”—with the famous church of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, Trafalgar Square, being used for Thanksgiving Day services in 1918.¹¹⁵ He also remarked that “The British Hospitals were always neat, clean and attractive, and the nurses seemed especially attentive to American patients.”¹¹⁶

Nevertheless, the Armistice found Brent’s reconstruction of AEF chaplaincy still incomplete, and major problems yet unresolved. Away from the battlefield, and much to the embarrassment of Bishop Gwynne and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Brent had enjoyed little success in persuading the British, let alone the French, to participate in a concerted, inter-Allied crackdown on prostitution and venereal disease—a topic of almost obsessive interest to General Pershing.¹¹⁷ In organizational terms, there was confusion over whether chaplains of newly arrived divisions were subject to the direction of senior base chaplains as they waited to go to the front.¹¹⁸ In more practical terms, lack of dedicated transport remained a bugbear, and as late as the autumn of 1918 denominational endorsing committees were scrambling to supply their chaplains with cars and motorcycles.¹¹⁹ Finally, and despite Brent’s insistence that “our first duty is to those about to die,”¹²⁰ in its haste to provide for the AEF’s combat divisions his Chaplains’ Office had apparently forgotten the aviators of the Air Service.¹²¹

At times, it even seemed on the ground as if no progress was being made. Writing in August 1918, Samuel Arthur Devan, Baptist chaplain of the 58th U.S. Artillery, had scant reason to be thankful. Ministering to a regiment that was 50 percent Protestant, 40 percent Catholic, and 10 percent Jewish, Devan had the local assistance of a female YMCA secretary and a Knights of Columbus chaplain, but even such “valued aides” could not overcome his sense of toiling like a Hebrew slave: “No transportation, no training, no office, no corps, no rank, no funds [he complained]. ‘Here is no straw and no clay—now, go and make bricks!’ they command.”¹²² Given

these gaps and tensions, one division chaplain stated succinctly, “In my judgment the overseas organization of the chaplains was positively necessary and on the whole was satisfactory. . . . The organization was obviously experimental up to the time of its dissolution but it was headed on right lines.”¹²³ Arguably the greatest proof of its success was the performance of American chaplains on the frontline. For example, the history of the 78th Division, published in 1921, stated that “during the heavy ARGONNE fighting our Chaplains were in the thick of it for weeks at a time, overlooking sleep and food in their work of spiritual and temporal aid.”¹²⁴

Rightly conscious of the religious needs of an Army in which faith was one of very few common denominators (one camp survey showed the presence of 74 creeds among 31,079 officers and men, but only “81 atheists and infidels”),¹²⁵ in his much-publicized final report of September 1919, Pershing (like Haig) was effusive about the performance of his chaplains: “Chaplains, as never before, became the moral and spiritual leaders of their organizations, and established a high standard of active usefulness in religious work that made for patriotism, discipline and unselfish devotion to duty.”¹²⁶ In contrast, and as he later reflected, before the war chaplains had been treated as little more than “handy men who were detailed to write up boards of survey or operate libraries.”¹²⁷ In other words, the developmental trajectory of chaplaincy in the U.S. Army had very much followed the British precedent.

Nevertheless, in his own final report of April 1919, Brent made no mention of the sustained guidance provided by the British in particular. Even for a Canadian-born Episcopalian of strongly pro-British views, in the afterglow of victory such an admission may have taken candor too far—especially as Brent was honored by several Allied governments for his personal contribution to victory, honors that included a Distinguished Service Medal awarded in May 1919.¹²⁸ Still, the importance and legacy of this early and formative phase of Anglo-American chaplaincy cooperation cannot be gainsaid. With Pershing’s support and British mentoring, Brent had taken the organization, cooperation, and training of U.S. Army chaplains

to new heights and, in the supremely challenging context of America's first campaign in Europe, had realized the vision of an independent chaplains' "corps" in a multi-religious force that numbered nearly 2 million men by November 1918.¹²⁹

In combination with the continued and sustained efforts of lobbyists at home—military and civilian, Protestant and Catholic—the permanent remodeling of U.S. Army chaplaincy was finally achieved through the National Defense Act of 1920.¹³⁰ Although it refrained from actually using the term *corps* and did not replicate the three-man "board" of Brent's office in France, the act permanently established the Office of Chief of Chaplains in Washington, answerable not to the Adjutant General but to the Army's Chief of Staff. Apart from checking the credentials of chaplain candidates, the duties of the chief were essentially those that Brent had performed in the AEF, namely "the general co-ordination and supervision of the work of chaplains in the army."¹³¹

In World War II, and with their chaplaincy systems proven and matured, there was much less need or scope for the kind of Anglo-American chaplaincy cooperation witnessed in Europe in 1918. In fact, and despite serving together in several theaters of war, there is a telling lack of evidence for Anglo-American chaplaincy cooperation between 1941 and 1945. Basically, both the U.S. Army Chaplain Corps and the Royal Army Chaplains' Department revived and refined the methods and models they had inherited from the First World War. There were, of course, limited exchanges. Albert E. Basil, a maverick British army commando chaplain, earned celebrity and a Silver Star serving with U.S. Army Rangers in North Africa.¹³² Likewise, prior to D-Day, such was the shortage of American chaplains in German prisoner of war (POW) camps that the care of American POWs was largely the responsibility of captive British padres. As U.S. Army chaplain Eugene L. Daniel remembered, in April 1945 they even predominated at Stalag 7-A's memorial service for President Franklin D. Roosevelt.¹³³

Still, their somewhat divergent trajectories after the First World War should not be allowed to obscure the legacy of those fruitful months of

collaboration on the Western Front in 1918. Born of shared religious beliefs, moral values, and personal connections, a new pattern of American chaplaincy was developed that in the next half century would go on to shape chaplaincy in the armies of some of America's closest allies—including the Philippines, South Korea, and South Vietnam.¹³⁴ Although lost to even historians of British and American army chaplaincy, a century after its conclusion it is necessary and timely to remind ourselves that these are historically connected institutions, whose modern expressions lie rooted and intertwined in the common and unprecedented challenges of the First World War.



Notes

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² Barry Hankins, *Woodrow Wilson: Ruling Elder, Spiritual President* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 198–200.

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⁴ Don S. Armentrout and Robert Boak Slocum, eds., *An Episcopal Dictionary of the Church* (New York: Church Publishing, 2000), 75.

⁵ R. Andrew Bittner, *Building Washington National Cathedral* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2015), 13.

⁶ Konolige and Konolige, *Power of Their Glory*, 359; “Timeline,” Washington National Cathedral, available at <<http://cathedral.org/history/timeline/>>.

⁷ Konolige and Konolige, *Power of Their Glory*, 359.

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¹⁵ *Religious Bodies 1916: Part II; Separate Denominations—History, Description, and Statistics* (Washington, DC: Bureau of the Census, 1919), 618; Bureau of

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¹⁷ Suzanne Geissler, *God and Sea Power: The Influence of Religion on Alfred Thayer Mahan* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2015), 96–129.

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¹⁹ Lambeth Palace Library, Frederick Temple Papers, MS 52, f 40.

²⁰ *The Financial Times*, November 28, 1913, 6.

²¹ *The Times*, May 5, 1913, 7.

²² Stover, *Up from Handymen*, 114, 163, 221; Robert L. Gushwa, *The Best and Worst of Times: The United States Army Chaplaincy 1920–1945* (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Chaplains, 1977), 11.

²³ Budd, *Serving Two Masters*, 88; Stover, *Up from Handymen*, 76–77.

²⁴ Stover, *Up from Handymen*, 75–76.

²⁵ Budd, *Serving Two Masters*, 90.

²⁶ Michael Snape, “The First World War and the Chaplains of British India,” in *The Clergy in Khaki: New Perspectives on British Army Chaplaincy in the First World War*, ed. Michael Snape and Edward Madigan (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2013), 159; Lambeth Palace Library, Davidson Papers (hereafter Davidson Papers), MS 97, f13.

²⁷ Library of Congress, Charles Henry Brent Papers (hereafter Brent Papers), Box 15, Brent to Bishop Lawrence, March 20, 1918. Emphasis added.

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- ³⁶ Snape, “First World War,” 143–146.
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- ³⁹ Snape, *Royal Army Chaplains’ Department*, 216–219.
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- ⁵² Drury, *History*, 144–145.
- ⁵³ Budd, *Serving Two Masters*, 103–104; Stover, *Up from Handymen*, 208.
- ⁵⁴ Jorgensen, *Service of Chaplains*, 16–17; Alexander F. Barnes, “On the Border: The National Guard Mobilizes for War in 1916,” U.S. Army Official Home Page,

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⁸³ *The Scotsman*, May 27, 1918, 5.

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⁸⁵ Durham Cathedral Library, Bishop Henson Papers, Journals, HH 23, July 28, 1918.

⁸⁶ Davidson Papers, MS 379, Brent to Davidson, March 19, 1917, ff 75–78.

⁸⁷ Brent Papers, Box 3, Diaries, January 7, 1918.

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⁹² Ayres, *War with Germany*, 37.

⁹³ Brent Papers, Box 3, Diaries, February 21, 1918, February 27, 1918.

⁹⁴ Brent Papers, Box 15, Brent to E.C. Carter, May 21, 1918; Box 3, Diaries, July 1, 1918.

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⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, March 7, 1918; NARA RG 247 WW1, Box 5, Final Report of the Senior Chaplain, A.E.F. to The Adjutant General, April 26, 1919, 2.

⁹⁸ NARA RG 247 WW1, Box 5, "History of Chaplains' Organization," 2.

⁹⁹ *Stars and Stripes*, May 10, 1918, 2.

¹⁰⁰ NARA RG 247 WW1, Box 4, copies of telegrams on chaplains' affairs, Cablegram No. 508, January 18, 1918.

¹⁰¹ NARA RG 247 WW1, Box 5, "The GHQ Chaplains' Office," July 1918, 1.

¹⁰² Brent Papers, Box 14, Brent to Bishop Lawrence, February 13, 1918. Of the enclosed (now missing) memorandum by the "head of the Chaplain's Training School in Ripon," Yorkshire, Brent wrote, "I have seen enough of things to know that if we do not have properly organized schools of this sort, we are bound to get into all sorts of difficulties in the event of the war being prolonged."

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¹⁰⁶ Howson, *Muddling Through*, 62.

¹⁰⁷ Brent Papers, Box 14, O'Rorke to Brent, February 22, 1918.

¹⁰⁸ Brent Papers, Box 15, Blackburne to Brent, April 20, 1918.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, Brent to Blackburne, April 27, 1918.

¹¹⁰ Blackburne, *This Also Happened*, 168.

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- ¹³⁰ Stover, *Up from Handymen*, 221–224; Honeywell, *Chaplains*, 199–201; Jorgensen, *Service of Chaplains*, 48.
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- ¹³² Michael D. Hull, “Father Albert of the Rangers,” *Latin Mass* 18, no. 1 (2009), 18–23.
- ¹³³ Eugene L. Daniel, *In the Presence of Mine Enemies: An American Chaplain in World War II German Prison Camps* (Charlotte, NC: Eugene L. Daniel, 1985), 47–48, 70, 74–75, 81, 98–99.
- ¹³⁴ Honeywell, *Chaplains*, 213, 331–332; Vladimir Tikhonov, “South Korean Military Chaplaincy in the 1950s–70s: Religion as Ideology?” in *Military Chaplaincy in an Era of Religious Pluralism: Military-Religious Nexus in Asia, Europe, and USA*, ed. Torkel Brekke and Vladimir Tikhonov (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2017), 233–234; Venzke, *Confidence in Battle*, 167.