

## Great Ruler of the Earth and Skies

*Anne Steele (1717–1778)*

Great Ruler of the earth and skies!  
A word of thy almighty breath  
Can sink the world, or bid it rise;  
Thy smile is life, thy frown is death.

When angry nations rush to arms,  
And rage and noise, and tumult reign,  
And war resounds its dire alarms,  
And slaughter spreads the hostile plain;

Thy sov'reign eye looks calmly down,  
And marks their course, and bounds their pow'r;  
Thy word the angry nations own,  
And noise and war are heard no more.

Then peace returns with balmy wing,  
(Sweet peace! with her what blessings fled!)  
Glad plenty laughs, the valleys sing,  
Reviving commerce lifts her head.

Thou good, and wise, and righteous Lord!  
All move subservient to thy will;  
And peace and war await thy word,  
And thy sublime decrees fulfill.

To thee we pay our grateful songs,  
Thy kind protection still implore:  
O may our hearts, and lives, and tongues,  
Confess thy goodness, and adore!

## ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

### *In the Nick of Time*

#### A Week With Chaplains

*Kevin T. Bauder*

When we think of ministers who have devoted their lives to the Lord's work, we usually think of pastors and missionaries. But there are other ministries that require full-time devotion. For example, Bible and theology professors give sustained attention to the Bible and the system of faith that it teaches. Another ministry that often involves full-time vocation is chaplaincy.

Not all chaplains give themselves exclusively to that task. Some serve in law enforcement, fire departments, hospitals, prisons, and even in the corporate workplace. These chaplains are often paid only part-time. Many volunteer their services without compensation.

Military chaplains, however, must usually devote themselves to that work alone. The exceptions are chaplains who serve in the Reserves or the National Guard, or those who volunteer for auxiliaries such as the Civil Air Patrol (the auxiliary of the United States Air Force). Even Guard and Reserve chaplains know that they can be activated, so they must be prepared to lay aside other interests when assuming their duties as chaplains.

Becoming a military chaplain is not an easy thing. The position requires the equivalent of an accredited Master of Divinity degree. It requires ordination and years of prior ministry experience. Importantly, chaplains must be endorsed by a recognized religious body. The Department of War maintains a list of the agencies that exercise authority to provide these endorsements.

Chaplains serve an important constitutional function. The government provides chaplains to safeguard the First-Amendment rights of military personnel to freedom of worship and spiritual counsel. Consequently, the chaplain stands in a double relationship. On the one hand, chaplains are officers in the armed forces of the United States (though they cannot bear arms or command troops). On the other hand, they represent the religious bodies that have endorsed them. The military cannot require a chaplain to perform a task that the endorsing body finds repugnant to its faith (though specific commanding officers may and do apply pressure).



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Graduates of Central Seminary have served under several endorsing bodies. These include the American Council of Christian Churches, the Associated Gospel Churches, the Foundations Baptist Fellowship International, the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches, and the New Testament Association of Independent Baptist Churches. Of these, more of our former students have served under the Associated Gospel Churches than any other group.

The AGC was founded by William Standridge but reorganized by W. O. H. Garman, who was also instrumental in the early years of the ACCC. The AGC began as a church fellowship, morphed into a mission agency, and ended up as a chaplaincy endorsing body. Most of its chaplains are military (whether active duty, Reserve, or National Guard), but it also endorses chaplains for law enforcement, prisons, and the Civil Air Patrol. It is currently led by Steve Brown, a retired chaplain and Navy captain.

Last week I had the privilege of addressing the AGC's annual meeting near Saint Petersburg, Florida. I delivered a series of six messages on the assigned theme, "Wise as Serpents, Harmless as Doves." I have never felt less adequate to a task. Military chaplains have faced significant challenges in recent years, especially under the Obama and Biden administrations. Some of these challenges have lessened under the current administration—but they have not vanished, and they are likely to return. What could I say that would help these men in the difficult (and perhaps career-ending) choices that they might have to make?

I don't have much experience with the choices that face chaplains, so I did not pretend to offer advice. Rather, I explored biblical examples of godly individuals who had to serve the Lord under leaders that were hostile to their faith. Rather than saying, "Here is what you should do," I simply pointed to what those individuals did and to how their choices affected them. In God's mercy, some of the AGC chaplains seemed to derive benefit from the conversation.

What was probably more important for them was joining with others in the fellowship of the gospel. For biblical chaplains, the chaplaincy can be very lonely. They are often the only Bible-believing chaplain in their particular command. They have no close peers with whom to counsel and to unburden themselves. An event like this conference is opportunity to simply hear the Word, be fed, and fellowship with like-minded colleagues.

If military chaplaincy can be hard, it can also be rewarding. Chaplains spend their days in contact with people who are young, uprooted, whose lives are sometimes in peril, and who often know that they need spiritual help. I heard one chaplain compare his ministry to picking ripe fruit.

Before I spoke on the first evening, Chaplain Brown asked all the former students of Central Seminary to join me on the platform. In a room containing

about fifty chaplains (plus wives and other personnel), seven men came to the front. As I stood with them for a photo, I felt that I had never been more proud to be connected with Central Baptist Theological Seminary.

Even if you attend an independent church, you are probably involved with some kind of ecclesiastical network. The chances are good that the network also has some mechanism for endorsing military chaplains. I encourage you to find out who those chaplains are, and to begin praying for them.

If you are a pastor, your church probably hosts some kind of annual missions conference. My first exposure to military chaplaincy came when my home pastor included a military chaplain in our church's missions conference. I would encourage you to follow this practice every few years.

If you are a young man who his headed for the ministry, I would never discourage you from the pastorate or the mission field. But you might consider volunteer chaplaincy as one part of your overall ministry. And should the Lord lead you into military chaplaincy as a full-time vocation, I can assure you that it is a rewarding way to serve the Lord.



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This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

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