

Saints and sinners: Is a ‘confession’ always kept secret?

It is a classic conundrum in moral theology classes in Catholic seminaries.

A priest is hearing confession from a man who tells the priest that he has, moments earlier, put poison in the wine which the priest will drink when he celebrates mass a few minutes later.

Such is the sanctity of the confessional that a priest is forbidden to divulge anything he has heard in a penitent’s confession. Under no circumstances can he reveal the sin that was confessed to him. He is sworn to silence forever—even after the penitent has died. He must act as though he has never heard what was learned in confession.

That being so, the priest in this story cannot dispose of the poisoned wine. He must keep his appointment to say mass and drink the poison.

This classroom exercise is meant to impress on the future priests the absolute sanctity of the confessional.

Has anything in this poisoned-wine scenario ever been acted out in real life? Probably not. But something happened recently that has caused the church to rethink its position on confession.

A priest, Father Joseph Towle, revealed that 12 years ago a man named Jesus Fornes confessed to him that he had fatally beaten and stabbed a man in a park in the Bronx, N.Y.—a murder for which two of his buddies had been convicted. They were now serving life sentences in prison.

If the priest had come forward and told what he knew, the two innocent men would have gone



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confession (although Towle had granted him absolution), but more in the nature of a heart-to-heart talk. He felt free, therefore, to tell his story to the authorities.

The two convicted men went free. But a controversy erupted.

Some accused the priest of violating his calling by betraying a penitent, the now-deceased killer. Others expressed shock that a man of God would let two innocent men “rot in prison” when he knew the true story of their innocence.

Confession has been in the news on a couple of other fronts.

There is a bill in the Massachusetts legislature that would make it mandatory for clergy to report suspected sex abuse cases to the authorities, although the clergy still will not have to

reveal anything said in confession. That data will remain privileged.

A Boston radio station is being investigated for allegedly playing a recording of a confession made in church. If true, the recording breaks a state law that prohibits eavesdropping.

Some non-Catholic churches have bylaws that protect clergy-penitent communications if the penitent or clergyman has stated that “this is just between you and me” or “this is not to go any further.”

But even with the best of intentions, promises have a way of being forgotten even if they are not deliberately broken. If you have a secret, the strict sealed-lips policy of the Catholic confessional is probably the best way of telling it while making sure it will remain a secret.

Muslim chaplains support troops, U.S. campaign against terrorism

By Sephen Manning

Associated Press Writer

BETHESDA, Md. — One day back in 1979, Qaseem A. Uqdah was in the mess hall line at the Parris Island boot camp when a cook slapped a piece of ham onto his outstretched tray.

A convert to Islam, Uqdah refused to take the pork, which the religion forbids. A Marine drill sergeant noticed and wasn’t happy. He chewed out Uqdah until a Roman Catholic chaplain stepped in and persuaded the sergeant to lay off.

To Uqdah, who now helps select Muslim chaplains for the military, the memory shows how unprepared the armed forces were for Muslims a few decades ago — and how much has changed. Yet the tide of world events has again put Muslim soldiers in an awkward position.

The military now provides packaged

Meals Ready to Eat, or MREs, that meet Muslim diet requirements. Muslim women wearing head coverings serve alongside other soldiers. An Islamic crescent now sits beside the Jewish Star of David and Christian cross at the National Naval Medical Center chapel in Bethesda.

But now Muslims have been called to fight for their country against an enemy that has couched the struggle in terms of Islam vs. the West, and has urged all Muslims to fight as one against the United States.

The situation may be the most delicate for 14 Muslim chaplains in the armed forces, who counsel and minister to 4,000 or more Muslim troops. (Most Muslims in the military are black, with smaller numbers of whites and Arab-Americans).

Many chaplains have responded by echoing the words of Muslim leaders

worldwide, who have condemned the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks as a twisting of Islam — an attempt to use religion to justify the taking of innocent civilians.

While Muslims are encouraged not to fight against each other, Islamic law also has strict guidelines that forbid the killing of noncombatants, said James J. Yee, chaplain at Fort Lewis, an army base outside Tacoma, Wash.

Yee has been busy recently, speaking with soldiers and conducting seminars on Islam in an effort to educate troops on a religion that most Americans know little about.

A Chinese-American and West Point graduate, Yee converted to Islam in college and became a chaplain after spending several years in the Army. Between Fort Lewis and nearby McChord Air Force Base, he ministers to about 150 military personnel and their families.

His message to people of all faiths on the American response to the terrorist attacks: “The idea of rooting out people who take innocent civilian lives is agreed on by Muslims and other people alike.”

There are more than 250 religious denominations represented in the U.S. military, said Jack Williamson, head of the National Conference on Ministry to the Armed Forces, an Arlington, Va.-based group that helps civilians become chaplains.

Chaplains are often called on to counsel soldiers whose religious beliefs come into conflict with their military duties, he said.

“The chaplain’s role is to help that person clarify whether it is an authentic religious tenet or conviction, or something that pushes them out of their comfort zone,” he said.

In the case of U.S. military action against an Islamic country, some chap-

lains have sought clarity themselves from outside sources.

Capt. Abdul-Rasheed Muhammad, a Muslim chaplain at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, asked a panel of international Islamic scholars whether Muslims should participate in the strikes on Islamic countries or people.

The religious scholars issued a fatwa, or religious opinion, on Oct. 11, saying it was the duty of all soldiers to fight terrorism. But to Uqdah, who now heads the American Muslim Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs Council, the issue should have been handled within the military. Airing it in public undercut the chain of command, he said.

“This was a pastoral issue. One that should have been answered within the service, and not in the media,” he said.

As head of the Virginia-based council, Uqdah picks and helps train Muslim chaplains. He guides Muslim candidates to seminaries and makes frequent visits to military bases to check up on chaplains and meet with soldiers.

The group also works with the military on issues affecting Muslim troops, such as finding time for them to perform the five daily prayers mandated by Islam.

Both Uqdah and Yee say there has been little backlash against Muslims in the military. The discipline instilled in soldiers, along with the military’s strict penalties for harassment or bigotry, have quelled most anti-Muslim reactions, they said.

That is as it should be, Uqdah said. Muslims in uniform are just as patriotic as anyone else in the military, he said.

“There are Muslim lives that are on the line right now,” Uqdah said. Muslims are packing their gear and “going to fight like all other soldiers.”

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899-2080 or 899-3797
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Worship Service: 10:50 am
Evening Service: 6 pm
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First Baptist Church
Pastor: Bud Chester
Fifth & Center • 899-3450
Sunday: Sunday School: 9:15 am
Morning Worship: 10:30 am
Evening Worship: 6:30 pm
Tuesday: Mens' Prayer Group: 6:00 am
Thursday: Night Bible Study: 7:00 pm

Seventh Day Adventist Church
1160 Cattletrail
Pastor: Arlin Cochran • 785-332-2888
Saturday: Sabbath School: 9:30 am
Worship Service: 11 am



Church of Christ

First Christian Church
(Disciples of Christ)
Pastor: Loren Strait
Eighth & Arcade • 899-5233
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Sunday School: 9:15 a.m.
Activities: Junior High & High School Youth Groups, Adult Bible Study, Choir, Men's and Women's Groups, Devotions Study, Monthly Fellowship
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899-3631
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Sonrise Christian Church
Ninth & Caldwell • 899-5398
Minister: Tony Kafka
Youth Minister: Doug Bean
Sunday: Worship Service: 9:30 am
Sunday School: 10:45 am
Wednesday: Junior/Senior High Meeting: 7 pm
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Wednesday: Confirmation: 6 pm

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United Methodist Church
Pastor: Leonard Cox
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Worship Service: 10:15 am

Goodland Bible Church
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Morning Worship: 11 am
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Wednesday: Call for location

Grace Fellowship Church
104 E. Hwy 24 • 899-6423
Pastor: Bob Snyder • Residence: 899-0134
Sunday: Sunday School: 10 am
Worship Service: 11 am

St. Paul's Episcopal Church
13th & Center
899-2115 or Rectory 899-2114
Priest: Father Charles Schneider
Deacon: Gretchen Talitha
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1200 15th Street • Burlington, CO • (970) 664-2470
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Sunday School: 10:45 am
Priesthood/Relief Society: 11:30 am

Word of Life Foursquare Church
223 E. 10th
899-5250
Pastor: John Coumerilh
Sunday: Worship Celebration & Kids' Church: 10:30 am

United Methodist Church
Brewster:
Pastor:
Worship Service: 10:45 am CST
Sunday School: 9:45 am CST
Winona:
Minister: Rev. Bob Winters
Worship Service: 9 am CST
Sunday School: 10:15 am CST

Iglesia Del Dios Vivo
La Luz Del Mundo
Spanish Speaking Church
Minister: Esteban Ortiz B.
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Sunday: Sunday School: 10 am

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