



Els Boon, Jan Hoffenaar, Wilco Veltkamp (eds.), ***Met het Woord onder de wapenen. Protestantse geestelijke verzorging in de krijgsmacht vanaf 1914*** (Zoetermeer: Meinema 2017, 187 pp., ISBN 9789021170237).

Military chaplains are contested in their role as servants to the Prince of Peace in an institution of war. Not entirely military, not entirely clergy – and yet completely devoted to the armed forces and the church alike. This edited volume is the first publication addressing the theme in the Dutch Protestant context in a wide variety of periods and debates. The recent interest abroad in military chaplains is not reflected in the Netherlands. Only a few dated works about and written by individual army preachers exist about chaplains in the Dutch armed forces. The only international history of military chaplains, Doris L. Bergen's *The Sword of the Lord* (2004), does not feature Dutch examples. The history of these men and women has been largely neglected in historiography. The present book is an important contribution to this history.

Across the border, military chaplains have definitely captured the interest of historians, who study them mainly from a national perspective. Xavier Boniface, for example, has written about the history of French chaplains from 1914-1962 (2001), as Michael Snape has about the British padres (2008). Patrick Houlihan has included German Catholic chaplains in his study of German and Austrian Catholicism during the Great War (2014). These publications provide much more than institutional histories of the military chaplaincies. The organisation and functioning of these chaplaincies often mirrored relations between church and state and between church and society. Tensions between church and state, as in France during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, complicated the position of French chaplains in the armed forces. On the other hand, the protected status of their German Protestant counterparts, while making the organisation of the chaplaincy strongly hierarchical, also bound the men of the church too closely to the state and state politics. Moreover, the relations between chaplains and soldiers reveal the position of church, traditional faith and alternative beliefs in society. The close bonds between chaplains and soldiers could give chaplains valuable insight into how soldiers did or did not find support and solace in traditional and alternative forms of belief. Accordingly, military chaplains have witnessed ongoing changes in values and beliefs. Finally, chaplains inherently face tensions in their line of work: between their loyalties to the church, the armed forces and the soldiers they serve. Their traditional task of running religious services could clash with the military view of their role

as morale boosters. Their duty to serve these 'two Lords' (God and the state) might lead soldiers to wonder where the true loyalty of their padre lay.

While important themes figure in this edited volume, they could have been scrutinised more explicitly. The authors of the contributions address the history of Dutch Protestant military chaplains both chronologically and thematically. The volume opens with a brief history of the Dutch Protestant chaplaincy from 1815 to 1939 and then progresses through the Second World War, the Dutch Indies, the Cold War and the debate on nuclear weapons to the work of the padres during recent missions in Afghanistan. The articles describe them cycling to battlefronts to visit the troops, gathering and burying the dead and visiting and supporting the wounded and the bereaved families. The contributions follow chaplains to the Dutch Indies, on board navy ships in Korean waters, caught amid tensions between church and state on the question of nuclear weapons and, finally, to Afghanistan, in an article by a military chaplain who served there. They reveal how these padres evolved from instruments safeguarding religious piety and military obedience into more independent, valued 'safe zones' for soldiers to seek support and comfort.

The strongest merit of this volume lies in venturing into all facets of virtually uncharted territory, based on interesting source material. The book offers a thematic overview of Dutch Protestant military chaplains to pave the way toward more advanced studies on this subject, as stated in the introduction. Most articles are short and are not always able to cover their subjects in such detail as one would desire. One article about the padres in the Dutch Indies, for example, addresses the issue of organising a chaplaincy overseas under difficult circumstances: a shortage of preachers, vast distances from the home organisation and tensions between senior chaplains. The interesting moral question as to the actions and purpose of the armed forces in the Indies, however, is addressed only superficially. Comparative study with other overseas chaplaincies (e.g. British) might have added value here. Additional research is necessary, and much work remains to be done. Another article that fails to achieve its full potential is the discussion about nuclear weapons in the 1960s. Although the author asks all the right questions about the tensions between church and state and the limited freedom of expression among chaplains within the military establishment, some more explicit in-depth analyses and comparative studies with debates abroad would have been welcome. Nor does the volume contain a chapter introducing and scrutinising the role and work of military chaplains in general. Although this is covered to some extent in the introduction, a more theoretical chapter introducing the subject through analyses of and comparisons with the historiography on their counterparts abroad would have greatly enhanced this book. A general conclusion addressing these theoretical and analytical questions in the context of the themes covered in this volume might have enabled readers to understand more about the subject and have reinforced

the call of the publication for further action. In addition to strengthening the analytical foundation of the book, it might have conveyed a sense of the specifically Dutch aspects in the ongoing organisation of military chaplaincy.

The present volume does, however, add substantially to the existing literature on these fascinating figures and might through its inspiration and encouragement increase interest and instigate more research and publications on Dutch military chaplains.

Hanneke Takken, Utrecht University