

RESEARCH ARTICLES

# Missiological Adaptation as a Framework for Chaplains in Civil-Military Engagement

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Military chaplains serve at the intersection of religion and the state. Chaplain senior leaders, considering this complexity, seek to develop adaptive leaders who synthesize proficiency in both spheres.<sup>1</sup> An ideal of dual fluency guides chaplains in avoiding the common pitfall of underrealized competency in either domain unnecessarily diminishing the overall effectiveness of their ministry. Developing fluency in both arenas has far-reaching implications on the provision of quality religious support and advisement.

Aspiring to integrated literacy across fields where interaction naturally includes elements of tension is not limited to the religion-state junction. Chaplains are positioned for productive participation in the similarly paradoxical civil-military relations space that conjoins “those who serve and the rest of society.”<sup>2</sup> Some chaplains fail to use their unique position to speak prophetically in ways that bring those involved in civil-military debate to a more fruitful understanding—an outcome that directly supports a bedrock principle of Western society undergirding religious freedom: civilian control of the military. The expansion of a validated missiological framework arguably equips military chaplains to use their influence more effectively in the cross-cultural practice of civil-military dialogue by harnessing a why and how derived from religious history. While the roles of missionary and chaplain are not coterminous, missiological adaptation is a potentially useful methodological framework for chaplains in civil-military engagement.

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<sup>1</sup> Department of the Army, Army Techniques Publication 1-05.01: Religious Support and the Operations Process (Washington, DC: Army Publishing Directorate, 2018), 1-18, 1-21, 1-26, 2-8, 2-11, 4-8, 4-12, 4-28, 4-32, C-7, E-1, F-3. Department of the Army, Army Techniques Publication 1-05.03: Religious Support and External Advisement (Washington, DC: Army Publishing Directorate, 2019), B-10. Department of the Army, Army Techniques Publication 1-05.04: Religious Support and Internal Advisement (Washington, DC: Army Publishing Directorate, 2017), 4-1.

<sup>2</sup> Susan Bryant, Brett Swaney, and Heidi Urben, “From Citizen Soldier to Secular Saint: The Societal Implications of Military Exceptionalism,” *Texas National Security Review* 4, no. 2 (2021): 21. <http://dx.doi.org/10.26153/tsw/13199>. Peter D. Feaver, “The Civil-Military Problematic: Huntington, Janowitz, and the Question of Civilian Control,” *Armed Forces & Society* 23, no. 2 (1996): 150. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45347059>.

Christianity has grown over the past two millennia from a small, localized movement on the continent of Asia into a global phenomenon with more followers than any other religion.<sup>3</sup> Recognizing the religious diversity within the military, the process by which Christianity realized such remarkable gains is worthy of study both by readers who are sympathetic to Christianity's historical advances and those espousing other religious identities. Just as military leaders frequently study a wide array of historical figures including some whose actions they might not affirm, investigating this element of religious history may uncover some fresh insights for contemporary chaplain ministry. In that spirit, this article is a qualitative study that engages one contributing factor to Christianity's expansion and aims to answer this question: How does the historical Christian missionary principle of adaptation inform best practices for civil-military engagement by military chaplains? The researcher's methodology will inductively review the principle of adaptation in selected primary and secondary historical sources to propose findings for consideration by current and former chaplains who are positioned to improve awareness around civil-military cooperation in a context that urgently needs such improvement.

## **Adaptation as a Christian Missiologial Principle**

Missiologial adaptation—sometimes called contextualization—is the practice of cultivating cultural fluency for efficient and effective integration into unfamiliar environments. A survey of church history over the last 500 years finds Roman Catholics, specifically the Society of Jesus, at the vanguard of developing adaptation as a philosophy for cross-cultural engagement.<sup>4</sup> Founded by Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556) in 1540, some consider the Jesuits as “the most dynamic religious community of the sixteenth century.”<sup>5</sup> Francis Xavier (1506-1552) was instrumental in forging Jesuit missionary methods. The principle of adaptation, a concept with which he experimented and left the development to his successors, was one of his three pillars.<sup>6</sup> In embracing the importance of adaptation, Xavier granted missionaries “the flexibility to accommodate their strategy to different social structures in a culturally pluralistic world.”<sup>7</sup> A strategy of cultural accommodation presupposes keen cultural literacy.<sup>8</sup> Church historian Samuel Moffett differentiates missional practices like those of Xavier with some of the more odious aspects of

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3 Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, rev. for 2nd ed. by Owen Chadwick (London: Penguin, 1986), 14-15, 473. Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement from the West: A Biography from Birth to Old Age*, ed. Brian Stanley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2023), 4, 236.

4 Bani Li, “Becoming All Things to All Men: Lessons from Matteo Ricci and the Rites Controversy,” *Puritan Reformed Journal* 12, no. 1 (2020): 191.

5 R. Po-Chia Hsia, *A Jesuit in the Forbidden City: Matteo Ricci 1552-1610* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 10.

6 Samuel H. Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia. Volume 2: 1500-1900* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005), 70.

7 Moffett, *Christianity in Asia*, 70.

8 Moffett, *Christianity in Asia*, 70.

colonialism to argue that Jesuit methodology “produced the single greatest missionary society the Christian church has ever known” through the combination of “a clear missionary theology” and a peerless “organizational discipline.”<sup>9</sup>

Alessandro Valignano (1539-1606), an Italian Jesuit, masterminded an innovative approach to missions that rejected the conquistador and *tabula rasa* perspectives of his day, called for intercultural engagement through cultural accommodation, and suggested a “multipolar world whose center was no longer Europe.”<sup>10</sup> His ethnographic approach was informed by his personal observations during service in the Far East.<sup>11</sup> Valignano became “convinced that missionaries should learn the language of the country in which they were to work, study its way of life, adapt to the local customs, and respect the local traditions unless they proved repugnant to Christian morality.”<sup>12</sup> To this bold end, he saw the need to recruit Jesuit missionaries with the capacity to adapt culturally and insisted on them learning the local language before entering their country of assignment.<sup>13</sup> Valignano’s conviction was “that in all possible ways, especially in external matters, missionaries and Christians must adapt themselves to local custom and prejudice.”<sup>14</sup> His “model of mission was based on *il modo soave* (the sweet or gentle way), which later became the guideline for the Jesuit missionaries’ profound study of the language, culture, and politics in India, Japan, and China.”<sup>15</sup> So intense was the Society’s advocacy for cultural accommodation that it “became the distinguishing mark of Jesuit missions in Asia for most of the next two centuries.”<sup>16</sup>

The Jesuits’ most renowned practitioner of cultural adaptation was arguably Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), an Italian Jesuit with a knack for languages and science who invested almost half of his life in missionary service to the people of China.<sup>17</sup> Upon arriving in China, Ricci’s devotion “to the serious

9 Moffett, *Christianity in Asia*, 9–10, 70, 154, 228.

10 Jean-Paul Wiest, “Matteo Ricci: Pioneer of Chinese-Western Dialogue and Cultural Exchange,” in *Matteo Ricci: Letters from China: A Revised English Translation with Commentary*, ed. Brendan Gottschall, Francis T. Hannafey, and Simon G. M. Koo (Chicago: The Beijing Center, 2019), 62–63. Paul S. Chung, “Inculturation and the Recognition of the Other: Matteo Ricci’s Legacy in the Christian-Confucian Context,” *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 20, no. 1 (2010): 80. Li, “Becoming All Things,” 193–194. Michela Fontana, *Matteo Ricci: A Jesuit in the Ming Court* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), 27. Neill, *History of Christian Missions*, 133.

11 Mary Laven, *Mission to China: Matteo Ricci and the Jesuit Encounter with the East* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011), 15.

12 Fontana, *Matteo Ricci*, 27. See also Matteo Ricci, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, rev. ed. by Thierry Meynard, trans. Douglas Lancashire and Peter Hu Kuo-chen (Chestnut Hill, MA: Institute of Jesuits, 2016), 2 and Ioannes Antonius Eguren, “El P. Mateo Ricci: Puente Entre La Cultura Oriental y Occidental (1552-1610),” *Estudios Eclesiásticos* 58, no. 226 (1983): 334.

13 George H. Dunne, *Generation of Giants: The Story of The Jesuits in China in the Last Decades of the Ming Dynasty*, reprint ed. (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2007), 28. Fontana, *Matteo Ricci*, 27. Wiest, “Matteo Ricci,” 63. Li, “Becoming All Things,” 194. Laven, *Mission to China*, 19.

14 Neill, *History of Christian Missions*, 134–135.

15 Chung, “Matteo Ricci’s Legacy,” 80. See also Laven, *Mission to China*, 18.

16 Moffett, *Christianity in Asia*, 107.

17 Hsia, *Jesuit in the Forbidden City*, 3, 4, 27-29, 142. R. Po-Chia Hsia, *Matteo Ricci and the Catholic Mission to China, 1583-1610: A Short History with Documents* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2016), 21. Laven, *Mission to China*, 34.

study of the Chinese language and culture” was unmatched.<sup>18</sup> He quickly gained a respect for the authority and social rank structures in Ming China, Chinese statecraft, and the important role language mastery played in social mobility.<sup>19</sup> Ricci was convinced that missionaries would have to master the most refined form of the Chinese language and understand the political and cultural institutions if they were to enter China successfully.<sup>20</sup> He feared a lack of mastery would lead to the missionaries being characterized as barbarous, vulgar, and ignorant resulting in a degradation in influence and delegitimization of their candidacy as facilitators of diplomatic dialogue.<sup>21</sup> Ricci incrementally won the respect of Chinese leaders through his formidable intelligence, memory, scientific acumen, ability to foster relationships, and commitment to knowing the intricacies of the Chinese language on a level that eliminated the need for an interpreter.<sup>22</sup>

Once in China, Ricci initially shaved his head and beard and adopted the clothing of a Buddhist monk to communicate his identity as a spiritual leader and better connect with the Chinese population.<sup>23</sup> This decision demonstrated an initial foray “toward external accommodation.”<sup>24</sup> In doing so, historian and sinologist Jonathan Spence argues Ricci “had forfeited the luxury of being an outside observer and had himself entered the ambiguous world of cultural adaptation.”<sup>25</sup> Writing in 1585 to a college friend, Ricci assessed, “I have become a Chinese...in dress, appearance, in ceremonies and in all external things we have become Chinese” and noted some growing relationships resulting from these techniques.<sup>26</sup>

Ricci’s perspective on indigenous clothing changed a few years later, when he realized the diminished social standing of Buddhist clergy in China at that time and the impact resulting prejudice was likely to have on his societal integration.<sup>27</sup> Realizing the counterproductivity of his strategy in engaging social elites, Ricci secured Valignano’s support in November 1594 to doff the

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18 Hsia, *Catholic Mission to China*, 22.

19 Matteo Ricci, Letter to Martino de Fornari and Claudio Acquaviva, February 13, 1583 in Hsia, *Catholic Mission to China*, 53. Matteo Ricci, Letter to Martino de Fornari from Macao, February 13, 1583, trans. Roberto Ribeiro in Gottschall, Hannafey, and Koo, 77–82. Matteo Ricci, Letter to Juan Bautista Roman, September 13, 1584 in Hsia, *Catholic Mission to China*, 55. Sijie Xie, “The Interaction and Clash of Ideas between Matteo Ricci and the Taizhou School,” *Religions* 14, no. 12 (2023): 4.

20 Hsia, *Jesuit in the Forbidden City*, 61, 85.

21 Hsia, *Jesuit in the Forbidden City*, 61–62, 85.

22 Hsia, *Jesuit in the Forbidden City*, 70, 72, 105.

23 Hsia, *Jesuit in the Forbidden City*, 81. Hsia, *Catholic Mission to China*, 23. Xie, “Clash of Ideas,” 4. Laven, *Mission to China*, 19. Chung, “Matteo Ricci’s Legacy,” 81.

24 Chung, “Matteo Ricci’s Legacy,” 81.

25 Jonathan D. Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1984), 114.

26 Hsia, *Jesuit in the Forbidden City*, 105. Laven, *Mission to China*, 19.

27 Chung, “Matteo Ricci’s Legacy,” 81.

Buddhist attire and replace it with “the long, silk robes and tall four-cornered hats” and longer hair of Confucian scholars.<sup>28</sup> In short order, Ricci found favorable results following the adoption of a Confucian literati persona.<sup>29</sup>

This new identity assisted Ricci in establishing “a foothold in Chinese society” that enabled him to lean into his strengths as an academic rather than a classic preacher.<sup>30</sup> The pace of connection accelerated when he adopted the Chinese name *Li Madou* and assumed the honorific title *Xitai* (meaning “from the Far West”) both of which furthered his engagement with “literati and officials.”<sup>31</sup> Ricci knew that clothing, grooming standards, names, and honorifics would never be sufficient to communicate the newly adopted scholar persona, so he indulged his voracious appetite for studying Chinese books and began translating classic Chinese works into Latin.<sup>32</sup> Through these steps, he honed a cultural fluency that set conditions for productive cross-cultural exchanges of ideas and unprecedented friendship among the inner circle of Chinese elites.<sup>33</sup>

Ricci worked tirelessly to understand and agilely synthesize Confucian ideas—a philosophical approach he saw as “very similar” to Catholic doctrine, devoid of Buddhist beliefs, and dealing only with “virtues and ethics in this life”—with those of Christianity as part of his engagement strategy.<sup>34</sup> If, as Ricci concluded, Confucianism could be rightly regarded “as natural law instead of religion,” then some degree of synthesis would not unduly strain his boundaries of orthodoxy.<sup>35</sup> As he journeyed to advance this integrative initiative, Ricci continued to advocate for the critical importance of cultural fluency. In 1605, he wrote:

[Through] the publication of our books and our participation in their rituals, we have all gained the names of learned and virtuous men, and I hope we will be considered so until the end. This is important, because even though there are many learned men and theologians among us here, none of them has achieved

28 Hsia, *Catholic Mission to China*, 24, 26. Hsia, *Jesuit in the Forbidden City*, 138. Matteo Ricci, Letter to General Claudio Acquaviva, January 17, 1593 in Hsia, *Catholic Mission to China*, 69. Laven, *Mission to China*, 19-20. Xie, “Clash of Ideas,” 5. Justice Anderson, “Medieval and Renaissance Missions (500-1792),” in *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions*, ed. John Mark Terry, Ebbie Smith, and Justice Anderson (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 192. Chung, “Matteo Ricci’s Legacy,” 82.

29 Laven, *Mission to China*, 20.

30 Laven, *Mission to China*, 20. Hsia, *Jesuit in the Forbidden City*, 107.

31 Fontana, *Matteo Ricci*, 68.

32 Hsia, *Catholic Mission to China*, 24, 26. Ricci, Letter to General Claudio Acquaviva, January 17, 1593 in Hsia, *Catholic Mission to China*, 69. Hsia, *Jesuit in the Forbidden City*, 97, 135. Ricci, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, 2. Walls, *The Missionary Movement*, 18.

33 Hsia, *Catholic Mission to China*, 24, 26. Hsia, *Jesuit in the Forbidden City*, 81–82, 85, 97, 107.

34 Hsia, *Catholic Mission to China*, 28. Ricci, Letter to Duarte de Sande, August 29, 1595 in Hsia, *Catholic Mission to China*, 80. Matteo Ricci, *Della Entrada* in Hsia, *Catholic Mission to China*, 85–87. Hsia, *Jesuit in the Forbidden City*, 158.

35 Chung, “Matteo Ricci’s Legacy,” 83.

even a mediocre command of Chinese letters—and knowing our own language without knowing theirs accomplishes nothing.<sup>36</sup>

For Ricci, no cultural gap could be bridged without establishing a beachhead of cultural fluency on the other, less familiar, side.

Matteo Ricci died in Beijing on May 11, 1610, and, in an unprecedented turn of events, his body was solemnly buried on November 1, 1611 in Zhalan cemetery outside the west gate of Beijing.<sup>37</sup> Ricci holds the honor of being the first non-Chinese person honored with burial inside the Chinese capital on land allocated by an imperial decree.<sup>38</sup> Despite this distinction, Ricci's adaptive methods were the subject of intense debate after his death and remained out of vogue until 1958 when Pope John XXIII decreed in an encyclical, *Princeps Pastorum*, that Ricci should be considered “the model of missionaries.”<sup>39</sup> The Chinese government recently erected a monument, a sundial-shaped fresco, honoring those who had contributed significantly “to the progress of civilization during the several thousand years of Chinese history.”<sup>40</sup> Ricci and Marco Polo (1254-1324) are the only two Westerners depicted on the fresco that remembers Ricci as a “promoter of cultural exchanges.”<sup>41</sup> Around that same time, Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI each validated Ricci's methods. In May 2009, Benedict XVI described Ricci's work to connect the civilizations of Europe and China “as a model of fruitful encounter.”<sup>42</sup>

Pope Francis recognized the historical significance of Ricci's contribution to Christian missions by venerating him on December 17, 2022, stating:

Father Ricci was great not only for what he wrote but because he was a man of encounters, a man of the culture of encounter; a man who went beyond being a foreigner and became a citizen of the world. He was among the first to establish a bridge of friendship between China and the West, implementing a still valid model of inculturation of the Christian message in the Chinese world.<sup>43</sup>

36 Matteo Ricci, Letter to Francesco Pasio, February 15, 1609 in Hsia, *Catholic Mission to China*, 121.

37 Hsia, *Jesuit in the Forbidden City*, xii, 286-287. Ricci, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, 5. “Matteo Ricci, Missionary of Inculturation,” December 19, 2022, <https://www.jesuits.global/2022/12/19/matteo-ricci-missionary-of-inculturation/>. Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, “In Memory of the Venerable Father Matteo Ricci,” <https://www.olmcchurch.org.hk/saints/in-memory-of-venerable-fr-matteo-ricci/>.

38 “Matteo Ricci.”

39 New World Encyclopedia, “Matteo Ricci,” [https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Matteo\\_Ricci/](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Matteo_Ricci/).

40 Junsoo Park, *Confucian Questions to Augustine: Is My Cultivation of Self Your Care of the Soul?* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2020), 9.

41 Wiest, “Matteo Ricci,” 61.

42 Wiest, “Matteo Ricci,” 70.

43 “Matteo Ricci.” “Venerable Father Matteo Ricci.”

Ricci's methods eventually gained widespread approval—especially among those holding a Western perspective—such that modern “missionaries of all persuasions acknowledge the wisdom of accommodation or indigenization.”<sup>44</sup> Morris, a Protestant missiologist, points out that adopting indigenous practices without violating scriptural standards “eventually became normal incarnational practices for missionaries, but those practices were considered strange at the time.”<sup>45</sup>

The varying levels of comfort with missiologial adaptation have frequently been linked to convictions regarding appropriate limits. How far can a religious message be adapted before compromising non-negotiable elements of theology?<sup>46</sup> A common tendency is to normalize one's personal practice, declare those who adapt further as going too far, and accuse those adapting less of failing to do enough.<sup>47</sup> Missiologist Paul Hiebert calls instead for “critical contextualization,” which he proposes as a middle ground between undercontextualization and overcontextualization.<sup>48</sup> The historical accounts of Jesuits missions support a type of critical contextualization that promotes an adaptive engagement posture practiced in congruity with a preservation of theological boundaries. Civil-military relations can be productively understood in light of missiologial adaptation. A brief sketch of the contours of the civil-military gap is necessary.

## Application for Civil-Military Engagement

The international conversation about whether gaps exist between civilians and their militaries first emerged in the United States stemming largely from intellectual sparring between Samuel Huntington and Morris Janowitz in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>49</sup> Huntington assigned paramount importance to the military accomplishing assigned national security requirements while remaining subordinate to “objective civilian control.”<sup>50</sup> He argued that professionalism leading to a politically neutral military was essential for objective control which led him to conclude “the relation of the officer corps

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<sup>44</sup> R. Pierce Beaver, “The History of Mission Strategy,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 12 (Spring 1970): 12–13. Moffett, *Christianity in Asia*, 129.

<sup>45</sup> Mike Morris, “The R. J. Willingham Era, 1893-1914,” in *Make Disciples of All Nations: A History of Southern Baptist International Missions*, ed. John D. Massey, Mike Morris, and W. Madison Grace, II (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2021), 134.

<sup>46</sup> Moffett, *Christianity in Asia*, 22, 212.

<sup>47</sup> M. David Sills, “Paul and Contextualization,” in *Paul's Missionary Methods: In His Time and Ours*, ed. Robert L. Plummer and John Mark Terry (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 198.

<sup>48</sup> Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiologial Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 75–92.

<sup>49</sup> Lindsey A. Hines, Rachael Gribble, Simon Wessely, Christopher Dandeker, and Nicola T. Fear, “Are the Armed Forces Understood and Supported by the Public? A View from the United Kingdom,” *Armed Forces & Society* 41, no. 4 (2015): 692. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X14559975>. See also Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory of Politics and Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957); Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait* (New York: Free, 1960); and Feaver, “The Civil-Military Problematique,” 149–178.

<sup>50</sup> Huntington, *Soldier and the State*, 189–192, 260–263. Feaver, “The Civil-Military Problematique,” 160. See also Ronald R. Krebs, Robert Ralston, and Aaron Rapport, “No Right to Be Wrong: What Americans Think about Civil-Military Relations,” *Perspectives on Politics* 21, no. 2 (2023): 620. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592721000013>.

to the state” should be “the principle focus of civil-military relations.”<sup>51</sup> While Huntington embraced ideal models, Janowitz’s realism could be seen in his view of military service as merely an occupation, not a profession; preference for civilian control primarily through societal pressure, not processes initiated by institutions or states; and call for even greater civilian oversight of the military.<sup>52</sup> Whereas the American military, over time, made Huntington’s theory “the centerpiece of their training on civil-military relations,” the Janowitzian tradition is “responsible for the bulk of scholarship on American civil-military relations.”<sup>53</sup> These differing perspectives frequently present in a body of literature on civil-military relations that sometimes lacks consensus. A robust body of scholarship is needed that responds to the pressures resulting in a shift in ideals from a citizen-soldier archetype to a distinct warrior caste.

For example, political scientist Patricia Shields reflects from her vantage point as an editor of a journal that regularly engages the subject and bemoans what she assesses to be a limited body of substantive research investigating current American civil-military relations.<sup>54</sup> Another political scientist, Peter Feaver, questions whether a “civil-military dilemma” even exists.<sup>55</sup> Other contemporary scholars contend that a civil-military gap does exist by highlighting the dearth of shared experiences between those who have served and those who have not.<sup>56</sup> Recent studies suggest that unequal burden sharing of national defense among the American populace is leading to a growing sense of isolation and military exceptionalism among service members.<sup>57</sup> Taken together, some scholars suggest these factors undergird the problematic shift from a citizen-soldier archetype to the emergence of a distinct warrior caste.<sup>58</sup> The framework of missiologial adaptation and a cultivated acumen in religion-state matters posture chaplains to respond to these challenges. Facilitating exchanges of ideas between military and civilian leaders on civil-military interaction seems to be a space in which military chaplains are positioned for positive contribution.

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51 Feaver, “The Civil-Military Problematique,” 158, 160.

52 Feaver, “The Civil-Military Problematique,” 165-66.

53 Feaver, “The Civil-Military Problematique,” 157-58. See also Risa Brooks, “The Paradoxes of Huntingtonian Professionalism,” in *Reconsidering American Civil-Military Relations: The Military, Society, Politics and Modern War*, ed. Lionel Beehner, Risa Brooks, and Daniel Maurer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 17.

54 Patricia M. Shields, “How Afghanistan Influenced the Content of Armed Forces & Society: An Editor’s Reflection,” *Armed Forces & Society* 49, no. 4 (2023): 901. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X221088024>.

55 Feaver, “The Civil-Military Problematique,” 150.

56 Bryant, Swaney, and Urben, “Secular Saint,” 12. Eliot A Cohen, “The Unequal Dialogue: The Theory and Reality of Civil-Military Relations and the Use of Force,” in *Soldiers and Civilians: The Civil-Military Gap and American National Security*, ed. Peter D. Feaver and Richard H. Kohn (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 430.

57 Bryant, Swaney, and Urben, “Secular Saint,” 9-24.

58 Bryant, Swaney, and Urben, “Secular Saint,” 9-24.



Some parallels are immediately observable between U.S. military chaplaincy praxis and Ricci's model of adaptive practice. U.S. military chaplains are commissioned officers who wear the uniforms, use the same support services (e.g., dining facilities, housing, etc.), and deploy in support of the same missions. These norms set conditions for the growth of meaningful relationships through shared hardships. Chaplains must be religious leaders in their respective tradition and simultaneously conversant in military doctrine. Yet Ricci's model pushes further by beckoning listeners beyond mere cultural familiarity to the higher standard of zealous cross-cultural literacy. Chaplains who accept the challenge of adaptive thinkers like Ricci stand to contribute to productive dialogue at scale.

The service of military chaplains has historically been marked by a profound love of God and country. Likewise, the servanthood and sacrifice that Ricci and other missionaries have exhibited while employing missiologial adaptation functions as a reminder that dual cultural fluency is best fueled by genuine love for those on all sides of any cultural gap. As many cross-cultural ministers have strived for mastery through immersion that equipped them to think seamlessly in both spheres, chaplains do well to harness selfless love as their motivation to understand the language, culture, habits, values, literature, and trending viewpoints within the field of civil-military relations. Through literary fluency regarding the academy's treatment of civilian-military topics, military chaplains can more clearly discover their place in positively impacting civil-military relations through internal and external engagements. A foremost role for chaplains could be exposing the urgent threat to basic principles (e.g., religious freedom) linked to the seductive growth of military exceptionalism that undermines objective civilian control. In the way Ricci came to love the Chinese people and respect their authority structures, advocacy for healthy conceptions of civil-military authority presents a pathway for chaplains to utilize statecraft in important conversations about how society is best protected by and from its military strength.<sup>59</sup>

The development of chaplains who are ready to wade into civil-military discourse invites consideration of an intellectual lodestar: Valignano's emphasis on recruiting candidates with the capacity for cultural adaptation. Recruiting with an eye for adaptive capacity increases the likelihood of future chaplains effectively educating their formations on the value of civilian control of the military and mitigating external concerns regarding the military constituting an active threat to the civilian population—especially among some civilian religious leaders, congregants, and academics. Preparation continues through Professional Military Education and graduate-level curricula that increases literacy on the topic of civil-military relations. These

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<sup>59</sup> Feaver, "The Civil-Military Problematique," 154.

processes equip practitioners to participate in Officer Professional Development and moral leadership training at the unit level that engage assumptions and best practices for maximizing military readiness and objective civilian control.<sup>60</sup> If adaptive capacity is understood to be “the resilience of people and the capacity of systems to engage in problem-defining and problem-solving work in the midst of adaptive pressures and the resulting disequilibrium,” then celebrating demonstrated adaptive capacity in decisions regarding retention, promotion, assignment selection, and recognition reinforces the priority of essential adaptive competence.<sup>61</sup>

Current and former chaplains who publish and present associated research to military as well as civilian audiences demonstrate Ricci’s commitment to translate ideas in both directions between European and Chinese readers. In doing so, they contribute to mutual understanding. These modes of knowledge distribution could help reduce the isolation felt by many service members and veterans, articulate the importance of increased equity in sharing the responsibility of military duty across society, and reinforce the historic ideal of the citizen-soldier model.<sup>62</sup> Theologian Leslie Pollard’s suggestion that practitioners of missiologial adaptation should find cultural mentors dovetails with Ricci’s experience at each stage of his professional development.<sup>63</sup> Current and former chaplains benefit from the regular influence of leadership perspectives originating externally as well as internally to the military community. An important source of cultural mentorship accessible to current chaplains exists through the intentional development of civilian clergy networks. Just as religious leaders without military experience can help chaplains appreciate the civilian landscape and vice versa, leveraging the latent fluency of former chaplains provides an avenue to trustworthy counsel and critical support capabilities during crises to include the specter of large-scale combat operations.

When chaplains commit to mastering practices like those exemplified by Ricci and other paragons of missiologial adaptation, they posture themselves to work more productively toward civil-military harmony; however, given the popularity of adaptive leadership, a distinction must be drawn here between the adaptation modeled by Ricci and the notion of adaptation on which Ronald Heifetz based adaptive leadership theory.<sup>64</sup> Adaptive leadership

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<sup>60</sup> Department of the Army, Pamphlet 165-19: Moral Leadership (Washington, DC: Army Publishing Directorate, 2020).

<sup>61</sup> Ronald A. Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2009), 89. See also Tod Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015), 89–91, 126.

<sup>62</sup> Bryant, Swaney, and Urban, “Secular Saint,” 11-12, 22.

<sup>63</sup> Leslie N. Pollard, “Paul: Principles for Leadership and Contextualization,” in *Servants and Friends: A Biblical Theology of Leadership*, ed. Skip Bell (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2014), 315.

<sup>64</sup> See Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1994); Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2002); and Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, *Adaptive Leadership*.

theory proposes an insightful typology that divides problems into three categories of escalating complexity: technical problems and two types of adaptive problems.<sup>65</sup> The theory places leader behaviors in relationship with the work of individuals in the situations they face and suggests that defining and solving tough problems frequently necessitates “a change in values, beliefs, or behavior.”<sup>66</sup> The expectation that values will often have to evolve to tackle tough problems is a distinguishing component of progress within the framework of adaptive leadership theory.<sup>67</sup> Unlike Ricci’s concept of adaptation, Heifetz’s approach operates untethered from a static point of theological reference and calls for all parties to be willing to adjust their values, beliefs, and behavior to reach the priority: equilibrium. Ricci’s unwillingness to compromise on the boundaries of orthodoxy as he understood them while expressing a willingness to adapt in myriad other ways arguably represents a more theologically consistent concept of adaptation—one ready to foster productive conversation while respecting the limits of core religious convictions. In this way, missiologial adaptation has the capacity to enhance chaplain ministry in numerous settings at echelon, and civil-military dialogue appears to be a topic teeming with potential for application.<sup>68</sup>

## Conclusion

Christian missiologial adaptation reflects a history of extraordinary fruitfulness when engagement methods are contextualized to the existing cultural setting and provides a framework for chaplains engaging in civil-military exchange. Further study is needed to explore how chaplains can engage domestic audiences that are external to the military on civil-military matters in ways that are compliant with the Posse Comitatus Act.<sup>69</sup> Religious leaders from different traditions will rightly emphasize the importance of their own theological foundations in the use of adaptive practices. These sincere beliefs and practices do not undermine the intrinsic value of the adaptive techniques themselves—strategies that chaplains can employ to nurture balance in civil-military relations and, thereby, gift their nation with “a great advantage in the search for security.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Heifetz, *Leadership*, 8, 71-76.

<sup>66</sup> Heifetz, *Leadership*, 22-25. Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 9th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2022), 285, 299-300.

<sup>67</sup> Heifetz, *Leadership*, 26, 34-35. Joseph Mathew, “Persistent Pioneers: Training Leaders for Mission to Unreached People Groups through India’s Light the World Missions,” D.I.S. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2020, 16–17.

<sup>68</sup> Northouse, *Leadership*, 285.

<sup>69</sup> See Department of the Army, Army Techniques Publication 3-57.80: Civil-Military Engagement (Washington, DC: Army Publishing Directorate, 2013) and Joint Staff, Joint Publication 3-57: Civil-Military Operations (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2018).

<sup>70</sup> Huntington, *Soldier and the State*, 2.



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