

## Call signs

By Charles C. Baldwin

The 1986 movie *Top Gun* introduced us to some amazing fighter pilots — Maverick, Iceman, Goose and Viper. This cast of characters, each with a “call sign,” gave us some insight into the life of Naval aviators and the excitement of air-to-air combat.

Call signs play a very significant role in identifying the role, mission and even the character of the pilot flying the plane. Let me introduce you to some of my pilot friends.

“DCMJ” was a fighter pilot in the A-10 Warthog. He lived next door to me at Myrtle Beach Air Force Base. Our families became good friends. When we deployed to Saudi Arabia in August 1990, James’s wife was pregnant with their first child. I’ll never forget being with James in the command post in Desert Storm on the night his son was born. My wife, Anne, was with his wife, Anna, in the delivery room in the Myrtle Beach hospital while I was keeping James calm “in the desert.” James was courageous in battle and returned home after the war to meet his newborn son. His call sign, “DCMJ,” stood for “Don’t Call Me Jim.”

I met “Splash” at Vance AFB in 2006. Splash was an F/A-18 Naval aviator who was on a joint assignment as the squadron commander of a T-37 training squadron. I went to Vance AFB to speak at the National Prayer Breakfast for the community. The Wing Commander invited me to fly in a T-37 (a two-seater jet) and my pilot was Splash. During our preflight briefing, I asked him how he got his call sign. He told me this incredible story of the time he was taking off in his F/A-18 Hornet



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from an aircraft carrier and the catapult failed. His plane barely made it off the end of the carrier when he ejected. He described his frantic swim under the carrier and making it to the back of the ship. He was rescued and got his new call sign.

“Preacher” was the call sign of another remarkable A-10 pilot I met in Desert Storm. He was an Air Force captain assigned to the 353rd Fighter Squadron, which was part of the large deployment to the conflict. Preacher was awarded the Air Force Cross for his valor in combat when he flew cover for an F-14 pilot who had been shot down behind enemy lines. Preacher was a Christian who lived his sermons every day in his home, his church and on the job. Preacher retired from active duty in 2016: You can “Google” Maj. Gen. Paul Johnson to read more about this great American hero.

Airplanes also have call signs, depending on their flying mission. When I flew the EC-121 on Airborne Command and Control missions, we were “Batcat.” The HH-53 was called “Jolly” — short for the “Super Jolly Green Giant” rescue helicopter. Sometimes, when the mission changed, the call sign changed. When an A-10 flying a strike mission with a call sign “Panther One” was tasked to support a search and rescue mission, his call sign changed to “Sandy One.” That way the rescue team knew who was “on the mission” and what they were supposed to do.

Even chaplains had call signs. When I arrived in Desert Storm with the 354th Fighter Wing from Myrtle Beach AFB, the wing commander assigned call signs to his staff when we used our mobile radios. He said, “I am Beach One. My deputy is Beach Two. Ops officer, Beach Three . . .” He told the security police commander, “You are Cop One”; the Hospital Commander, “Doc One.” He told me, his senior chaplain, “You are Holy One.” I said, “Oh, no sir, there is only one Holy One; I’ll be Holy Two.” So, for the duration of the war, I was “Holy Two.”

Our call signs were helpful in taking care of the needs of the community. The Bible says, “The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.” Ever since the first century, when believers received their new name, the world has been blessed with this family of faith who were not ashamed to be identified as followers of the Christ. They received a new “call sign” that sent them on a mission for the King of Glory.

The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association hosted the World Summit in Defense of Persecuted Christians this past May

in Washington, D.C. Christian leaders — 600 of them — from more than 130 countries came together “to address rising persecution against believers and to proclaim hope in Jesus Christ as the only antidote to human sin.” The Bible says, “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:18) Today we Christians must join together to preach the message of the Cross, to share His love and to pray for those sisters and brothers who are being persecuted because they, like the believers in Antioch, have changed their “call signs” to Christian — follower of Jesus Christ.

“Holy One, this is Holy Two, we bless You and worship Your Holy Name. Please lead us by Your Holy Spirit to spread Your love and message of salvation to a world that desperately needs You. Thank You for Your presence, Your power and Your peace. Holy Two, out!”

P.S.: A bit of feedback from last month’s article, “Wasp in the Cockpit”: A 96-year-old member of my Sunday school class told me, “I know why God made wasps!” She is a master gardener and, years ago, had a bad case of “trigger finger.” While working in the garden, she was stung in the hand by a wasp. Her hand was healed!

Chaplain Charles C. Baldwin (major general, USAF, retired) is an ordained Southern Baptist minister. He and his wife, Anne, have been married for 48 years and have three married children and ten grandchildren. They are members of the First Baptist Church, Charleston, S.C.

## Words matter

By John Parker

Words matter.

I surely hope that no one is still singing “How He Loves” by David Crowder in youth groups and contemporary services any more. I can’t adequately express my shock when I heard that this was a real lyric: “Heaven meets Earth like a sloppy wet kiss.” The next portion is indeed true: “. . . my heart turns violently in my chest.”

Well, my stomach does.

As the priest and pastor of Holy Ascension Orthodox Church, I am well versed (pardon the pun) in what the union of Heaven and Earth looks like — because the Ascension, missed by so many Christians (it so inconveniently always falls on a Thursday, being 40 days from the Sunday of the Resurrection), is the bookend to the Incarnation. With the Conception of Christ (according to the Tradition of the Church, March 25 — nine months from Christmas!), heaven meets earth; with the Nativity of Jesus Christ (December 25), Jesus is born into the world; with His Ascension into heaven, according to the ancient hymn:

*When Thou hadst fulfilled the dispensation for our sake, and didst unite earth*



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*to heaven: Thou didst ascend in glory, O Christ our God, not being parted from those who love Thee, but remaining with them and crying: “I am with you and no one will be against you!”*

Heaven met earth in God’s self-emptying condescension (His conception in the virginal womb of the Ever-Virgin Mary and His Incarnation in the Flesh) and Earth met Heaven (by His bodily Ascension into Heaven).

David Crowder’s lyrics are irresponsible and adolescent. Maybe that was his market, but it is terrible theology.

A theological principle worth considering is “Prayer shapes believing” — the simplified English version of the Latin *Lex orandi, lex credendi*: the rule of prayer is the rule of belief. In very simple terms: The words you say to and about God must be true. Another principle, not so ancient is, “He who sings prays twice.”

But what are you singing? One of the heresiarchs of the Ante-Nicene era (the first four centuries of the church) was Arius, a priest whose false teachings (heresies!) he put to sing-able ditties — catchy little tunes sure to stick.

One of them had the lyric, “there was a time when he was not.” This referred to a false belief that Jesus was somehow created (begotten by the Father before He was incarnate in the flesh) and not co-eternal with His Father and the Holy Spirit.

If you sing, say, or believe, that “there was a time when Jesus was not,” then you are not a Christian — that is simply not a Christian teaching.

“Heaven meets earth like a sloppy, wet kiss” isn’t so earth-shatteringly wrong; it is just terribly back-seatish and misses the truly profound mystery of the depth of God’s love for us, confusing it for a seventh-grade hook-up. That is vile.

Words matter. And if words matter, then words about the Word incarnate matter. Recently, I attended a service at which the well-known “Onward Christian Soldiers” was sung. I honestly wonder, being immersed in the Orthodox Christian Tradition, where so many of the hymns predate common Protestant hymnals and contemporary worship songs by a minimum of 500 years, but often closer to 1000 years (yes, 1000), if folks sing these hymns anymore.

I was dumbfounded

to see this verse: “Like a mighty army moves the church of God; Brothers, we are treading where the saints have trod. We are not divided, all one body we, One in hope and doctrine, one in charity.”

“We are not divided, all one body we, One in hope and doctrine, one in charity.”

Really? Not divided? There was in 1054 a division known as the Great Schism. “The Huge Division.” The Protestant Reformation fractured the Roman Catholic Church, beginning formally in 1517 so brutally that today, there are more varying Methodists among Methodists and Anglicans among Anglicans and Presbyterians among Presbyterians and Baptists among Baptists (to name a few) than there were separated groups in the entire first millennium of Christianity.

These (Anglicans among Anglicans, Baptists among Baptists, etc.) among themselves are divided and have diverse, often mutually exclusive doctrines; this not to mention how these groups differ from on another in their teachings (Anglicans to Baptists, Methodists to Presbyterians, for example) and one step further, how all of these differ from the inherited doctrines of the

first millennium of Christianity.

Sorry, it is patently false to say (or sing) “not divided” and “one in doctrine”; and if it is patently false to say, then saying (or singing it) makes one either a blissful liar, or a bold one.

Christian hymns and prayers must be accurate — not rosy and not sentimental. If you and I are going to sing some words, they should not only be true, since Jesus is the Truth, they should also be worthy of the Lord, since He is also worthy, according to the Scriptures.

If my essay is blunt, or rant-like — hold it against me as a thorn in your side and a rabble-rouser, but please, know what the Truth is about Jesus and refuse to sing other things about Him. Words matter. A rose by any other name may indeed smell just as sweet, but a non-incarnate Jesus is not God; and one who makes your stomach flutter like middle-school truth-or-dare is not the King of Kings and Lord of Lords — because that is not Love.

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## Now is the time for full restoration

By Debbie Martinez

God did not mean for you to stay on the page of shame or on the page of regret, bitterness or resentment. Your divorce is but one chapter in your book of life so turn the page and move into the destiny God has in store for you.

During my dark days of divorce, I decided I could let my divorce destroy my future or change it for the better. I set my sails towards the sunrise and let the sun set behind me as I made divorce my purpose. My pain became the catalyst to help others through theirs. Divorce is a discovery process. You are trying to figure everything out, discover yourself and your purpose but don’t forget: God already knew you were going to walk down this path and He also knew how He was going



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Debbie Martinez.

to use it to shape you into the person He has planned for you. Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we

are God’s handiwork created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Divorce brings out the worst in people, even those you considered your friends. Don’t let what people say about you shape you; let God shape you. You may have made mistakes and people only see what is on the outside but God sees what is on the inside and He knows the work He is doing in you. Stand strong in your faith knowing that He is in control.

So many times people will come to me and can’t seem to let go of the mistakes they made in their marriage and they walk around with all that shame and guilt. What you did is not who you are. Ask forgiveness and move on. You cannot control if the other person forgives you or what they tell their friends

about you but know that God has forgiven you and he will make this crooked path straight if only you keep looking to Him for strength and wisdom.

It is not only what others think and say about you — but what you think about yourself that is hurtful. Be mindful of your thoughts during this time. The Bible says in 1 Peter 5:8, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”

There is nothing more the devil would like than to take this opportunity and use it against you. Don’t let the devil magnify your negative thoughts about yourself or your situation. King Solomon spoke of the importance of controlling ones thoughts. It is not the situation that will cause us pain but the way we choose to view it. Shake

off the cloak of darkness the devil is trying to put on your shoulders and turn to God with praise, knowing that He is holding your hand until this time passes and you are restored.

Remember Luke 1:37, “For with God nothing shall be impossible.”

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