

**PREACHING IN THE ARMY CHAPLAINCY: PASTORS IN UNIFORM**

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## **PREFACE:**

While the functions of preaching remain similar to the civilian parish, preaching in the military setting is quite distinctive. The purpose of this thesis will be to answer two questions that I believe are crucial to the future of preaching in the Army chaplaincy. First, what makes preaching in the Army chaplaincy so distinct and unique? Secondly, why is preaching in the Army chaplaincy important? It is my hope that by answering the first question I will have also answered the second question in the process.

It is my thesis that **it is our distinctiveness as proclaimers of God's Word that both defines and validates our importance as chaplains.** We are in essence "pastors in uniform." If we lose our distinction as pastors, priests, and preachers, our role will be no different from that of social worker. There may be occasions when humanitarian and social services are both appropriate and needed. However, these duties should not constitute or define the chaplain's role in its entirety. While, it is true that we are public servants paid by the United States government, chaplains are first servants of the church, endorsed by their respective traditions to provide religious coverage for servicemembers who serve worldwide. It is vitally important that these two seemingly opposing responsibilities are held in healthy tension. The chaplains' first responsibility is to the respective faith traditions that they represent. All chaplains who enter active duty are endorsed by their denominations and serve at the pleasure those denominational bodies. As ordained clergy each chaplain is expected to remain faithful to his or her ordination vows, theological distinctives, and own conscience of ethical behavior.

By law, chaplains are considered noncombatants and do not carry weapons. This understanding is particularly important in times of war. Before entering active duty, it is vitally important that each chaplain must decide as a matter of conscience concerning the question of bearing arms and participating, even indirectly, in a war that involves the killing of others. They must be prepared to be a part of a military action that may bring death and destruction. Whether we agree or disagree with the sending of our troops into a war zone, such as Bosnia or Somalia, Saudi Arabia, Vietnam, or Haiti, the need for religious support still exists. It is imperative that we provide the Word and Sacrament to those who have chosen to serve their country as soldiers. It is not the issue of this paper to address the ethical theories of war, but simply to point out that every chaplain must decide where he or she stands, preferably before entering active duty. This issue has become increasingly complex over the past few years as the United States has become more and more involved in peacekeeping operations such as Somalia, Haiti, and now Bosnia. When is the use of force appropriate, especially when the enforcement of peace will no doubt involve the use of force and possible loss of life?<sup>1</sup> This is a question that all chaplains must answer for themselves according to their own conscience and faith tradition.

In recent years, especially during Vietnam, chaplains have been highly criticized for indirectly participating in wars that have involved the non-Christian behavior of killing.

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<sup>1</sup> In *Wether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved*, Martin Luther "affirms the legitimacy of the legitimacy of the military profession based on the teachings of John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostle Paul, particularly in Romans 13: 1-5 and I Peter 2: 13-14. He identifies it with the divine institution of the sword to punish evil, protect the good, and preserve peace. Luther candidly admits that the military calling can be abused, but the misuse by no means invalidates its legitimacy and function of the office. In summary, then, the soldier's duty is to exercise his or her legitimate and divinely appointed office in the service of God." See, Luther's Works, (American Edition) Volume 46, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967) edited by Robert C. Schultz and Helmut T. Lehman, 90-91, 93-137.

However, it should not be assumed that because a chaplain wears the uniform that he or she automatically endorses war or killing. To my knowledge, there is no chaplain who openly or even indirectly endorses the carnage of war. One only needs to look into the eyes of one who has seen the horrors of war to know that it is an experience that no one wants to repeat. Yes, we must pray for peace. No chaplain wants to see death or destruction, whether at hands of our nation or at the hands of our enemies. Yet, in time of death and destruction, who will be there to administer the sacraments, offer last rites, minister to the wounded, and honor the dead.? Chaplains who are uncertain about their feelings on this issue should not even consider entering active duty. As a chaplain I am not called to “bless the bullets,” but to serve as a “blessing to the soldiers” by providing a ministry of hope, healing, and comfort in the midst of a terrible situation that unfortunately will involve the killing of others. This does not preclude the responsibility of all chaplains must continue to serve as the conscience of the command, challenging and confronting immoral and unethical actions on the battlefield. Even now, as I am typing this introduction, the signs of war litter the Bosnian cities and countryside. The people of Bosnia are crying out for the end of war; all they want is peace. Unit ministry teams, chaplains and chaplain assistants are deployed across the countryside of Bosnia, providing not only assistance in humanitarian efforts, but also administering the Word and Sacrament to soldiers across this war torn land.

They are facing the same hazards, to include land mines and possible outbreaks of hostilities, in an effort to bring peace to a war torn country. We must all pray for peace. Unfortunately, in a world where standing armies are required, peace will only come when our Savior, Jesus Christ, returns. Wherever soldiers deploy, whether in times of war or peace, chaplains will be needed for the proclaiming the Word and Sacrament.

## **INTRODUCTION:**

The views that will be expressed in this thesis will be based on a Protestant theology of preaching and drawn from my own experience as an Army Protestant chaplain. The intent is not to exclude anyone of other faith traditions, but simply to narrow the field of study. The reader will notice throughout the paper that I have purposely included a series of themes that will permeate each chapter. The themes are centered around what I believe to be the pillars of ministry in the chaplaincy: the chaplain as pastor and priest, the ministry of presence, and preaching in the marketplace. These pillars are intricately linked to one another, and each depends on the others for definition, identity, and support.

In chapter one I will attempt to address these distinctions by discussing the various settings and situations as found in the institutional ministry of the military. It is here where the chaplain is a representative of two institutions and fully a member of both, the military and the church. It is not uncommon for these roles to conflict. There are times when the chaplain must speak with a prophetic voice. The chaplain is faced with a difficult decision to render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's or render unto God that which is God's. It is within this "total institution" that the preaching event occurs and the chaplain functions as pastor, priest, and prophet. The chaplain as pastor should first and foremost be a "minister of the word." A predominate theme throughout the Army chaplaincy has been, "To bring people to God and God to people." Is this not the purpose and goal of preaching?

If chaplains are to be effective communicators of God's Word, this distinction must be fully understood. Preaching in the military setting is as diverse as the culture it serves. As an Army chaplain I have preached in muddy fields, drop zones, foxholes, mountaintops, bunkers, mess halls, motor pools, chapels made of canvas and chapels made of stained glass. In many cases, it was the setting and situation that largely determined my methodology and style of preaching. My pulpit has consisted of boxes stacked on top of one another, a jeep hood, or a soldier's sleeping cot.

I have preached in the scorching heat of the desert, the cold winters of Europe, the steamy jungles of Panama, and the drenching rain of Fort Polk, Louisiana. It was there that I learned the depth of common experience and the importance of priestly-listening. For the Army chaplain there is no gap between the pew and the pulpit. In many cases, the chaplain eats, sleeps, and trains with his or her congregation. The congregational setting and the situation will in many cases determined the style, length, theme, or delivery of the sermon. It is in this **pastoral context** that the proclamation of God's Word occurs.

In chapter two I will discuss the distinctive role of pastoral preaching as related to the Army chaplain's "**ministry of presence.**" It is here where the chaplain is most visible as pastor. It is through the ministry of presence that the chaplain gets to know the soldier's needs, hurts, fears, problems, and dreams. That is where the chaplain gains the credibility and authority to speak God's Word. It is in this context that preaching takes on many forms: teaching, encouraging, rebuking, warning, and counseling.

It is in the military setting where marketplace preaching takes place, much like the ministry of Jesus as he walked the roads of Galilee, Judea, Samaria, and the Jordan. It is here that the chaplain learns the military language, symbols, rituals, and culture. The number of possibilities for the function of preaching is limited only by the chaplain's creativity.

In chapter three I will examine the distinctiveness of the military "Collective Protestant Worship Service." The Collective Protestant Worship Service is as divergent as the people it serves. Unlike the civilian church, the Protestant worship service will most likely consist of people from all walks of life, from different cultures, socio-economic backgrounds, and various denominational groups. It is the congregation's shared experience of living in the military that brings them to worship in this particular setting. It is here that chaplain must learn to preach to the "baptized" as well as to the 'unbaptized.' It is in this context that I will discuss the advantages of preaching and teaching from the lectionary, the unity of the word and the sacrament, and pulpit duties.

In chapter four I will briefly discuss the pastoral and ceremonial duties of conducting military funerals, memorial services, and memorial ceremonies, with particular focus on the funeral sermon. This is where the chaplain will receive the greatest scrutiny requiring the greatest need for pastoral sensitivity and wisdom.

## Chapter 1

### The Army Chaplaincy: Pastors In Uniform

The chaplaincy of the United States began officially on July 29, 1775, when the Continental Congress ruled that a chaplain would receive a payment of \$20 per month. From the very beginning chaplains deployed with their units as religious leaders proclaiming the Word of God as “pastors in uniform.” To the soldier, and especially the front-line soldier, chaplains have always been a source of inspiration and strength. The numerous accounts from former prisoners of war have certainly verified the importance of a deep seated faith when everything is stripped away. While serving five years as a prisoner of war in Vietnam, Colonel Nick Rowe stated that, “after being stripped of his family, nation, and dignity, the one pillar that sustained him through the weeks of torture was a deep seated faith in God...He went on to say, that courage was not the absence of fear, but the presence of faith.”<sup>2</sup> This faith enabled Colonel Rowe to retain his hope when all else seemed lost. Does not Paul declare in his letter to the Romans that, “Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God!” (Romans 10:17). How shall they hear unless there is a preacher? Throughout the history of the chaplaincy the task of preaching has always been the same, the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ. For over two hundred years chaplains have looked after the Army’s spiritual welfare, preached God’s Word all over the world, and cared for soldiers in need. One of the many challenges facing chaplains today is having to move from the traditional pulpit in the chapel to the pulpit in the marketplace.

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<sup>2</sup> Comments given at a prayer breakfast by Colonel Rowe to the soldiers of 50th Signal Battalion, Fort Bragg, N.C. in the fall of 1986. Colonel Rowe was later killed by a terrorist while serving as a Military Attaché to the United States Consulate in the Philippines.

The proclamation of God's Word must extend from the chapel to the barracks, to the ranges and the fields, to the homes...to every place and activity that involves the soldier and his family. The challenge facing chaplains today is finding the balance between their spiritual and secular duties. The fundamental crisis confronting chaplains today is the struggle of proclaiming the gospel and at the same time trying to meet the ever increasing social needs of our military. What chaplain has not had the experience of finally sitting down to work on the week's sermon when suddenly a young soldier knocks on the door with a crisis?

In 1973 former Chief of Chaplain Chaplain (Major General) Gerhardt W. Hyatt made this plea for preaching:

Every chaplain in the Army, no matter what his age, should be developing his preaching talent...When people come to church they want to hear something...The content of some of our sermons is insulting to the pew, containing words that don't apply to the needs of the people!<sup>3</sup>

However, it was not until the 80's and 90's that the Chief of Chaplains office began to recognize the need for continuous and consistent training in homiletics. The U.S. Army Chaplaincy Service Support Agency published the following guidance to supervisory chaplains:

Training in homiletics in the Army should begin in the Chaplain Officer Basic Course (*a course which trains new chaplains entering active duty*) and continue through all levels of education as the chaplain advances in responsibility. It should focus on the key role of supervisors in mentoring preachers...Training should feature the best instructional talent in the homiletics field, civilian or military.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Chaplain (Major General) Gerhardt W. Hyatt, "The Chaplain As Pastor" *The Chaplain* (vol. 2, 1973) 7.

<sup>4</sup> See article on "U.S. Army Chaplain Training Strategy in Homiletics," *The Military Chaplain's Review* (Spring, 1992) 21-22.

However, most recently budget cuts have greatly reduced the likelihood of the continuation of such training. It is the opinion of this author, that during the past few years as a result of the Army's budget constraints, a fundamental shift has occurred in the chaplaincy' training emphasis toward our duties as staff officers rather than our duties as pastors. The plain truth is that a chaplain who is truly functioning as a pastor is in essence fulfilling his or her role as staff officer. A true pastor will look to the needs of the institution, where it is hurting, identifying and proposing solutions to the system's commanders. That is why it is extremely important that the chaplain who serves as both pastor and staff officer must fully understand the institution in which he or she serves.

### **The Institutional Ministry of the Chaplaincy**

In years past, the institution of the chaplaincy has always enjoyed the popular support of the nation. Chaplains represented the three major faiths of the nation, namely the Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish traditions. However, during the past few years the chaplaincy has undergone some sweeping changes. In a diverse pluralistic society, religious and non-religious options have competed with one another in the marketplace of human choices and loyalties. As a result of this cultural shift, the chaplaincy has had made some major adjustments in its approach to pluralistic ministry. It stands to reason that as religious pluralism has increased in our society, additional faith groups will seek the same right not only to express their faith, but also to have someone from their faith group minister to their needs.

In any discussion of religious plurality in the chaplaincy one must take into consideration other faith groups such as Buddhism and Islam. The Army chaplaincy has most recently brought on active duty the first Muslim chaplain who is currently serving at Fort Bragg, N.C. It is the responsibility of the Chaplains Corps to “provide for the free exercise of religion for all members of the armed services, their dependents, and other authorized persons providing staff support to this end.”<sup>5</sup> The institution of the chaplaincy creates a special environment for pluralism. The context of the chaplaincy is steeped historically as an American public institution where chaplains are held accountable to both the secular and religious sectors of society. It is in this context that the Protestant chaplain must remain sensitive to other faith groups, yet at the same time not losing his or her distinctiveness as pastor to the Christian community. This issue is a proverbial minefield where the Protestant chaplain must carefully step, balancing both the sacred and secular while not compromising one’s church tradition.

In a pluralistic chaplaincy, the desire to be all-inclusive also may run the danger of muting the Christian message to such an extent that its distinctiveness is lost. Even though chaplains are protected by their denomination’s endorsement, the danger still exists whereby the chaplain can become so emeshed in the Army system that they lose sight of the fact that they are first called to be ‘pastors.’ Who defines our call as chaplains, the church or the institution of the Army? What happens when these two institutions disagree?

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<sup>5</sup> U.S. Army Regulation 165-1.

It is in this context of “institutional duality” that the chaplaincy faces the issues of church and state, authority, promotions, and the conflict of roles. The chaplain is constantly faced with the difficult task of juggling the two demanding roles of clergyman and military officer. The dilemma is so overpowering because each role is so consuming. Both roles require tireless dedication, total loyalty, and unique skills. For the chaplain both callings are not without conflict. However, that does not mean that the chaplain as an “insider” cannot be effective as a pastor in uniform.

In his monumental work on the chaplaincy, *The Churches and the Chaplaincy*, Richard G. Hutcheson lists three significant ways that chaplains can affect ministry as ‘shared insiders’ in the total institution of the military: (1) all elements of artificiality are removed between the pastor and parishioner, thus enabling the chaplain to share fully in the conditions in which his or her parishioners live; (2) as a result, the chaplain has a greater awareness of the parishioners needs, thus enhancing pastoral ministry; (3) the chaplain as an ‘insider’ has a ready-made relationship with the unchurched.<sup>6</sup> It stands to reason that the chaplain who stands as “insider” must also at times *speak to* the system as did the prophets of old.

### **Institutional Ministry: Chaplain As Prophet**

The chaplain is not just half-military and half-church, but fully a member of both institutions. This unique status of institutional duality presents both challenges and opportunities to the chaplain who speaks with a prophetic voice. According to Army

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<sup>6</sup> Richard G. Hutcheson Jr., *The Churches and the Chaplaincy* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975) 48-49.

regulations (Army Regulation 165-1), chaplains are “expected to speak with a prophetic voice” and to “confront the command on moral, social, and religious issues.” It is here where the chaplain can best speak with the authority of both the church and the military as an institutional “insider.” The prophetic function of the chaplain is to serve as the moral conscience of the Army speaking as a prophet of the Lord. The chaplain, periodically, must raise the moral banner through his or her lifestyle, speech, sermons, and counseling. It is during the sermon that the chaplain is most visible. Regardless of the risks, the chaplain cannot ignore or neglect this importance aspect of preaching.

It has been my experience that commanders have appreciated the courage and honesty of chaplains who have confronted them with the truth. As an “*insider*” in the institution, the chaplain will be able to speak with credibility and open new avenues of prophetic speech that may not have existed before. General John J. Sheehan, Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic Command, echoed this same message as he admonished chaplains to not lose their prophetic edge:

You're fundamental JOB is to tell us about GOD. You're here to be our spiritual leaders and guides. You're here to tell us WHAT WE NEED TO HEAR...not what we want to hear because we write your fitness reports. But the Chaplain Corps has become so “professional”...you've lost your charisma...your **prophetic edge**...your very reason for being.<sup>7</sup>

It has been argued by some that the roles of staff officer and prophet are not compatible. This warning certainly echoes the danger of some chaplains who become so much a part of the military system that their prophetic voice is silenced.

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<sup>7</sup> Remarks made in a speech by General John J. Sheehan, U.S. Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic Command on 30 October 1995 to Navy Chaplains, Newport, Rhode Island.

For those who must face the dilemma, the advice of G.H. Williams is encouraging:

In the interaction between denomination, command and chaplaincy, it appears that chaplains are required to make almost daily fine tunings, and sometimes major adjustments in the face of competing demands.<sup>8</sup>

The following story graphically illustrates the impact that a chaplain can have if one is willing to speak out and confront the authority of the system and the chain of command:

The year was 1967. The place was Vietnam. Members of a Special Forces unit were on a search and destroy mission deep in an area controlled by the Vietcong. Continually harassed by sniper fire from the elusive enemy, the soldiers were on edge, their nerves raw. The commander's jeep driver, a young soldier well liked by the soldiers went down to the river to get some water. Without warning or mercy a Vietcong soldier rose out of the water and slit his throat. When the chaplain arrived the captured Vietcong was seated cross-legged on the ground. The distraught commander sobbing with grief and rage, held a pistol to his enemy's head. Praying silently, the chaplain approached the commander, "Sir, you can't do this." The commander turned from his prisoner, threw his pistol to the ground, and walked away, sobbing.

This is just one illustration among thousands that could be given, whether one serves in peacetime or in war, the task is still the same--the chaplain who truly speaks the prophetic word must do so as one who stands *under* the Word of God. Stephen Long defines prophetic preaching as "divinely inspired speech and it seeks to recover a faithful word from within the Christian tradition against sinful practices or seeks to discover a necessary word in new situations that threaten the rule of God."<sup>9</sup> In other words, the one who speaks a prophetic voice, is not limited to the battlefield or the unit area; the chaplain must also speak to the chapel community.

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<sup>8</sup> G. H. Williams, "The Chaplaincy of the Armed Forces of the United States of America in Historical and Ecclesiastical Perspective," *Military Chaplains*, ed. Harvey Cox, (New York: American Report Press, 1973), 41.

<sup>9</sup> D. Stephen Long, "Prophetic Preaching," *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, ed. by William H. Willimon and Richard Lischer, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995) 336.

William Willimon states that, “the prophet calls people to trust that God really is involved in their life together, bringing the people to something better and more faithful.”<sup>10</sup> Over the past few years this task has become increasingly difficult because of the erosion of our moral standards in society and the rise of situational ethics. The chaplain is being pulled between the spiritual and the secular. In the midst of ever increasing pressure to be like the rest of the Army, the Army chaplaincy is faced with an identity crisis.

Will the chaplain’s role be relegated to that of a social worker, marriage counselor, or morale officer? Will the proclamation of the gospel fall on deaf ears? Does not the chaplain who serves as both prophet and pastor need to view the Army system as his or her parish? Is it not true that, when the system is hurting, the people in that system are hurting as well? Where is the prophetic voice and from where will it come? If not from the chaplains, who will speak out? With a voice sounding much like a prophet, General Sheehan challenged the Chaplaincy with these stinging remarks:

**My challenge to you is this...rediscover your roots...it’s time to rediscover your spiritual roots...When I call for my chaplain... I’m not looking for a line officer...When I call for my chaplain I’m not looking for a social worker..I’m looking for someone to challenge the community to accept God. It’s time to be the pastor and priest that God has called you to be.** <sup>11</sup>

It’s time for the Army Chaplaincy to rediscover its spiritual roots as prophets, pastors, and priests! The chaplain does not lay aside one’s pastoral concerns when assuming the prophet’s mantle.

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<sup>10</sup> William Willimon, *Preaching About: Conflict in the Local Church*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1987) 55.

<sup>11</sup> A speech delivered to Navy Chaplains on 30 October 1995 at Newport, Rhode Island.

It is the chaplain's pastoral role that will help mold and guide prophetic preaching. It is this author's opinion, that as Chaplains we are first and foremost called to be *pastors to our people*. *May I say it again, it is our role as pastors, that both validates and defines our existence in the Army institution that we have been called to serve.*

### **Institutional Ministry: The Chaplain as Pastor**

In 1973, Chaplain (Major General) Gerhardt W. Hyatt made the following statement as a wake-up call to the chaplaincy: "We need to restudy and learn our role as clergyman in the military. And in my view, there is an honored and historic term which describes our common role. That term is *pastor*."<sup>12</sup> The chaplain who serves as pastor in uniform can best be defined, as one who is a member of the body of Christ, who is called by his or her church and set apart by ordination to proclaim the Word, to administer the sacraments, and to guide and nurture the military community toward a response to God. It is in this military context that the chaplain serves as pastor, in a world that is both secular and sensual, sometimes rough and crude, but life as it is being lived. It is in this context where the chaplain/pastor learns the common experiences of military life, the Army's language, customs, and rituals. No other minister has the opportunity to get so close to his or her congregation. It is here where the greatest necessity for better preaching exists *to know your people*.

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<sup>12</sup> Chaplain (MG) Gerhardt W. Hyatt, "The Chaplain As Pastor," *The Military Chaplain's Review*, (Spring, 1973) 2.

Eugene Peterson, in his book entitled, *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work*, so eloquently expresses this view:

All pastoral work originates in this act of worship...But the work does not terminate an hour later with the pronouncing of the benediction, for pastoral work also accompanies the people as they live out what they have heard and sung and said and believed in worship. Pastoral work takes place between Sundays, between the first and eighth day, between boundaries of creation and resurrection, between Genesis 1 and Revelation 21. Sunday worship, which includes the preaching of the Word, establishes the life of the community of faith in and on the Word of God. But they, the community, are not only sent, but accompanied. Pastoral work begins at the Pulpit, the Font, the Table, and it continues into the hospital room, the family room, the marketplace of life.<sup>13</sup>

It is here where the chaplain, as pastor, guides the flock through the transitions of life. It is through the proclamation of the Word of God that the chaplain teaches and nurtures both the “baptized” and the “unbaptized.” I have found that most commanders simply want their chaplains to be their pastors to love them were they are, to understand their world; and to take care of their soldiers and families.

One battalion commander expressed it best as he admonished his chaplain to, “be with the soldiers...take God’s love to the troops; don’t wait for them to come to the chapel.” This concept of ministry in the chaplaincy has historically been referred to as *the ministry of presence*. The ministry of presence is the foundation of the Army’s concept of pastoral care. It is in this setting that the preaching event occurs and the roles of both pastor and priest are most visible in the military. The ministry of presence with the troops is where the chaplain’s reputation as pastor and priest is first established. If the chaplain fails here, preaching will fall on unresponsive ears.

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<sup>13</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980) 19.

In many cases, pastoral preaching in the military will be determined not only by the chaplain's credibility or the audience's responsiveness, but also by the setting in which it occurs. To this end, the following section of this chapter will be devoted to a discussion of the various settings that one might find in the military and how they affect preaching.

### **Various Military Settings For Preaching**

As mentioned previously, preaching in the military is as diverse as the culture it serves. In many cases, whether one is performing pastoral work in the civilian or military setting, ministry often takes place in the crowded noise of the marketplace where people are constantly searching for a way to cope with life. The chaplain who enters this marketplace in military life will immediately find that his or her daily ministry will often crisscross and intersect people's lives where they both live and work. Is it not the task of preaching to intersect the ordinary and the eternal? As a pastor, the chaplain must be prepared to preach in a variety of settings and situations ranging from harsh field conditions to pristine chapels.

As mentioned in the introduction, each congregation is unique in the fact that they all are comprised of soldiers and families who come from different socio-economic backgrounds, different cultures, different denominations. The military congregation is highly mobile given the transitory nature of the military with its rotation of assignments and real world deployments. The size of the congregation will often vary from two to two-hundred depending on its situation and setting.

The duration of the worship service will be largely determined by the setting in which it occurs, ranging from five minutes in a combat situation to one hour in a garrison chapel

This is where the chaplain as pastor, must constantly be aware of the setting, location, situation, and composition of the audience. In his article on *Preaching in a Military Setting*, Chaplain (LTC) Herbert Strange correctly points out that, “what distinction does exist between military and civilian preaching is bound up primarily in the situation in which the sermon occurs.”<sup>14</sup> For the Army chaplain there is no other setting more rewarding or more challenging than preaching in a field or combat environment. For the chaplain who enters active duty this is the grassroots of ministry and where preaching can have the greatest impact. Preaching in the field or in a combat environment offers challenges that can only be compared to those circuit riders who faced the rugged frontier of the West.

### **Preaching: Field or Combat Setting**

The field and combat environment offers unique and special opportunities for preaching. There are several elements and factors that define field preaching. First and foremost, is a genuine love and concern for the soldier. The field chaplain must convey to the soldiers not only a genuine concern for their welfare, but must also demonstrate that concern by living under the same conditions as the soldiers. If the soldiers are sleeping out in the mud, rain, and cold, the chaplain needs to be there as well. It is especially in this type of setting that soldiers have the greatest difficulty in separating the message from the messenger. The chaplain who is not willing to undergo the same hardships will have a tough time gaining a sympathetic ear.

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<sup>14</sup> Herbert B. Strange, “Military Setting Preaching,” *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, ed. by William H. Willimon and Richard Lischer (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 332-333).

Much of the impact of the sermon will be directly related to the chaplains daily commitment to the soldiers. Many of the soldiers who attend worship in the field are those who would never attend a formal worship service in the chapel. Their attendance in many respects will be directly related to the extent that the chaplain is involved in their daily lives. They will come and listen to the chaplain who has gained their respect and friendship. Soldiers come to worship with few facades. Their faith is very pragmatic. They are often dirty, exhausted, homesick; but they come looking to the chaplain for words of strength. I have found that preaching in a field or combat experience demands authenticity, closeness, and friendship.

**Field Sermon: Physical setting**

For example, if an infantry chaplain is conducting a field worship service, a stack of field ration boxes will most likely be the pulpit, over head cover may consist of a camouflage net, and the sermon will be generally devotional and shorter in length. In order to enhance the preaching moment, the chaplain must first consider the location and tactical situation of the unit. The chaplain must consider the danger given the fact that a cluster of soldiers will be gathered together. Beyond the aspect of safety, the chaplain must intentionally try to create an atmosphere of worship. The sermon will most likely consist of “life situation” topics centered around the soldiers needs at the time. In a military combat environment the soldiers actually become the chaplain’s best lectionary. They will naturally provide the context for the scripture text through their life situations. They are normally not aware of this, but the chaplain who is attune to the unit’s situation and needs will have more than enough material for sermon preparation.

Combat troops have a way of being transparent, sharing their deepest fears and concerns. The chaplain's sermon will usually be simple in its construction and delivery, designed to serve as an encouragement to soldiers who are tired and weary. Some of my most rewarding opportunities of preaching have taken place in field worship settings while deployed in the harshest of conditions. It is in this setting where the chaplain as pastor must be particularly aware of the daily needs and problems facing each soldier. When a soldier faces imminent threat of death, the proclamation of the gospel is of crucial importance, and the true value of a chaplain as pastor is most revealed. Combat will test the limits of human endurance and quickly bring soldiers back to the basic essentials of life. It is for this reason that chaplains as pastors must undergo the same rigorous training as other service members, because life-changing ministry will only be limited by a chaplain's own physical and spiritual stamina. Preaching in the field can be one of the most powerful and visible means for reaching out to the spiritual needs of soldiers. This was brought home to me very clearly during my deployment in the Persian Gulf War. We were thousands of miles from home, in a foreign country, surrounded by sand, in a hostile environment with the threat of death all around us. The threat of the unknown terrified us, as Iraq mounted its forces against the Allied Forces on the Saudi Arabian border. The Gulf War became a waiting game as minutes turned into hours, hours turned into days, days into months. Very soon soldiers began to miss home, family, hamburgers, water fountains, movies, girlfriends, and shopping malls. Every time a Scud missile was reported as coming our way, fear gripped our hearts.

It was in this context that I realized the power of God's Word to provide comfort, strength, security, and encouragement in the harshest of conditions. I learned that my sermons needed to be both relevant and simple. I also realized the importance of humor. It helped to break the tension and stress associated with the constant strain of a combat environment. Routinely, I would start a new sermon every Sunday morning, working on it throughout the week. Invariably, I would use the same sermon all week. During the Gulf War I averaged 12-15 sermons a week, eight on Sundays and six or more throughout the week. Time for preparation was at a premium, so I would study while traveling from site to site. I would often spend the night at each location, because it was too dangerous traveling at night. It was during these times that I would listen to the soldiers' problems and celebrations. In constructing my sermon I would try to incorporate slices of their experiences while weaving the scripture text into something that would speak to their need or situation. For example, many of the soldiers would talk about their loneliness. I would find portions of scripture from the Psalms or Job and speak about the feeling of loneliness as experienced by David and Job, yet God did not forsake them. Listen to the words of one chaplain who preached a sermon entitled, *Storm* on 13 January 1991, a week before the war began:

The disciples were afraid. They were caught in a storm in the middle of Sea of Galilee which was notorious for its sudden and violent uprisings. Fear seizes us in times of danger and destruction...Courage is the willingness to act on our faith and conviction. Courage is being afraid and doing it anyway! It took courage for Peter to get out of the boat....It will take courage for us to do our duty in combat. The war clouds are gathering. In the next few days we may face a storm and uncertainty...Like the disciples we will be afraid...Yet, amid the storm and violence, Christ will walk among us with the assurance: "take heart, it is I have no fear (v. 27).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> A sermon preached by Chaplain (MAJ) Ronald Wunsch during the Gulf War.

From this sermon it is quite clear that Chaplain Wunsch knew his soldiers fears, concerns, and needs. I would recommend to any chaplain that one of the greatest sources of sermon preparation in a field or combat environment is simply being a priestly-listener to hear the experiences and life of the soldiers. Place your sermons into their context. It is through this medium of preaching in a field or combat environment that the chaplain has a unique and wonderful opportunity to preach the Word of God with power, authenticity, and conviction.

### **Preaching: Basic Training Setting**

In addition to combat units, the chaplaincy has taken me to training units, where soldiers spend eight to ten weeks of basic training being indoctrinated into Army life. My congregation consisted of mostly younger soldiers, ranging in ages from 18 to 23 year old, single or without families. They were predominantly occupied with getting away from the Drill Sergeant on Sunday morning and getting some much needed sleep. To say the least their attention span was rather short. Therefore, out of necessity my sermons were relatively short and simple. They normally centered around one theme focusing on motivational subjects for the purpose of helping them successfully complete the next eight weeks of training. Additionally, I would try in my sermons to help them realize that, as they faced the hardships of their training, they would also be learning valuable lessons not only about God's providence, but also about their own lives that would prove to be beneficial for many years to come.

My themes mainly centered around hope and perseverance, faith and courage, strength and weakness, temptation and forgiveness, designed to focus on one theme for the purpose of helping them to cope with the stresses and demands of their arduous training. For example, one of my favorite sermons was based on the text where Paul the Apostle declares to the Philippians, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13). My sermon consisted of one single theme that could be easily adapted and applied to the soldiers' situation. My message was simple and direct, "that through Christ's strength they could successfully face and overcome any challenge that they may face during the course of their training." Not only would Christ's strength help them through this phase in their life, but also assist them in every other trial that they may face in life. I would attempt to set the text in its proper context by describing the fact that just as they were facing hardships, Paul was experiencing hardships in prison as well. Perhaps, they too felt as though they were in a prison having lost the freedoms that they once enjoyed in civilian life. I would often share my own experiences of fear, anxiety, the loss of my own freedom and identity, as I went through Basic Training years before. It was the strength of Christ that helped me through and this same Christ will help you as well. Not only did Christ give me strength through basic training, but He has helped me through all the trials and hardships that I have faced in life. In order to speak with authenticity, I felt that it was extremely important for these young soldiers to know that they could identify with one who had been down that same road before. My next assignment would prove to be just as challenging, as my responsibilities took me to a more permanent, family oriented chapel setting.

### **Preaching: Permanent Party Chapel Setting**

It is in this permanent party setting where the chaplain as pastor will best approximate the civilian parish. The liturgy of worship will generally take on the personality of the senior chaplain's faith tradition. Worship service in this setting will be more formal and structured with variations of liturgical and free-church approaches. The text, length, and delivery of the sermon will vary according to the particular faith tradition of the individual chaplain, but historically it will be topical or expository in nature. My sermons generally followed the liturgical calendar year with variations of topical sermons and teaching sermons, along with an occasional series through a book of the Bible. Those who attended worship were generally those who were associated with units represented at that chapel. In addition, to unit responsibilities, a chaplain is often tasked to perform his or her pastoral duties at the chapel where his or her unit is represented. It is here that the preaching event on Sunday morning is intricately linked to the every day life of the unit. It is in this context of pastoral-ministry, that the chaplain's *authority* as both a pastor and preacher is *earned*. Even though the chaplain comes into the military with ecclesiastical authority and military authority, true authority with soldiers will arise out of the day-to-day ministry of presence. It is only when the chaplain has gained the soldiers trust, that soldiers will truly listen to what is proclaimed. In a world of competing voices it is crucial for the chaplain to speak with authority. The chaplain's most important presence is in the field and at work with soldiers. It is only then that the chaplain can speak with authority with the words of a fellow struggler.

Dr. Richard Lischer in his book entitled, *A Theology of Preaching: The Dynamic of the Gospel*, makes the following observation in this regard:

The sermon is the Word of God for a particular time, place, and people... the spoken word has its fullest truth among the people between whom it flourishes, and in the moment at which it happens... The Word of God "fitly spoken" requires a sense of timing. Preaching endeavors to match words with situations, so that the *now* of God's summons finds the *now* in the congregation of listeners.<sup>16</sup>

Without this weekly care of the chaplain's congregation, preaching degenerates into nothing more than "feel nice" psychological sermons that in essence transform no one. The problem with many chaplains is that they busy themselves with doing many things except the proper preparation for preaching. William Willimon voices this concern in his book, *Integrative Preaching: The Pulpit at the Center*, by stating:

Many of us (preachers) would like to be preachers without being pastors--delivering inspiring moral platitudes...without muddying ourselves in the mundane, without listening...Others of us (pastors) would like to be pastors without being preachers--doing good things for good people (social worker), devising the right therapies for our people's sickness (counselor), directing church activities (administer), building bigger and better churches (promotions), without once preaching the truth of the gospel.<sup>17</sup>

For the chaplain who ministers in the marketplace of military life, the relationship between preaching and its pastoral context takes on paramount importance. For the chaplain who desires to serve as a pastor in uniform, each encounter with a soldier will have the potential of becoming an occasion for proclamation. If the chaplain neglects his or her duties as pastor and assumes that someone else will fill the gap, the chaplain will be greatly disappointed and the Army system will suffer as a whole.

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<sup>16</sup> Richard Lischer, *A Theology of Preaching: The Dynamics of the Gospel*, (Durham, N.C.: The Labyrinth Press, 1992), 60-61.

<sup>17</sup> William Willimon, *Integrative Preaching: The Pulpit at the Center* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981),

The chaplain will never know and appreciate the uniqueness of serving as a priest for the community. The two roles are inseparable. One cannot survive without the other. The one who chooses to be a priest must also be willing to serve as a pastor and the one who serves as a pastor must as well serve as a priest. Both are intimately related to the life of the church and the act of preaching. The chaplain's message must encompass both roles that of pastor and priest- in order to be heard properly.

### **Institutional Ministry: The Chaplain as Priest**

It is here where the chaplain performs the sacraments, ordinances, and ministrations of the church according to his or her own faith traditions. The chaplain as priest who lifts the cup of blessing before the people is also the one who will shake hands with the soldier whose wife has just left him. The chaplain who baptizes an infant will also see the pain of a mother who has just lost her baby in childbirth. The chaplain who has handled the scriptures in a muddy field must also touch the shoulder of a grieving soldier who is far away from home. It is in this context that the sermon becomes an act of worship and the gospel is proclaimed in both word and deed.

### **The Military Community and the Chaplain As Priest**

When the chaplain functions as priest, the goal will be to create community. The Army chaplaincy's theme for the Protestants has been "unity in the midst of diversity." It is the sacrament of the Word and Eucharist that has unified us as a community of faith. For the chaplain who serves as a priest, every time the word is proclaimed and the bread and wine are passed an act of worship occurs.

The community of Protestants around the world are formed as community, on Army bases, isolated outposts, muddy fields, and desolate deserts. The sacramental nature of the proclamation event is the presence of the living God moving within the context of His gathered community, wherever that community may gather. In 1992 the United States Army Europe Staff Chaplain's Office conducted a study that announced that 40% of all chaplain-to-soldier contact happens in the weekend public worship. Yet, the fundamental crisis that still confronts chaplains today is the struggle of balancing the call to proclaim the gospel while trying to meet the social needs of people at the same time. The public ministry of the Protestant church, namely the office of Word and Sacrament, exists for the expressed and singular purpose of proclaiming the Gospel. Dr. William Willimon expresses this same concern in his book, *Worship As Pastoral Care*, by stating;

If the pastor neglects his community-forming role, assumes that someone else will do it, and gets sidetracked into being a counselor of individuals, a changer of society in general, or some other similarly individualized task, the pastor will not discover his or her uniqueness and identity as *priest/pastor*.<sup>18</sup>

Willimon goes on to stipulate that, if the church loses its focus on the vows of ordination it will in essence lose its identity in the community. This is precisely the danger that the chaplaincy faces today! In most rites of ordination, the symbols of that office are presented to the candidates for ordination- a stole, a Bible, and a eucharistic chalice/paten. Every chaplain that enters active duty is issued a chaplain's kit for the purpose of fulfilling the sacramental rites of the ordained.

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<sup>18</sup> William Willimon, *Worship As Pastoral Care* (Nashville: Abingdom, 1979) 204.

Each chaplain's kit contains a stole, a Bible, and a eucharistic chalice and paten, thereby, linking the chaplain as priest to the community as a servant of the Word to the community. It is the practice of most major commands that when a senior chaplain passes responsibility to another it is symbolized by the exchanging of the stole. Thus, symbolizing the yoking of the chaplain as priest to Christ, his church, and the military community as the stole is placed on the shoulder's of responsibility. If the Army chaplaincy is to recover its focus of ministry, it must realize that its identity and validity are directly related to the vows of ordination as prophets, priests, pastors, and preachers. In the midst of pluralism and relativism, the need is even greater for voices that will speak with the authority of the church. It is the chaplain who serves as pastor, priest and prophet who will have the greatest opportunity to aid in this recovery of preaching. History has repeatedly taught us that periods of spiritual decay have always been accompanied by a decline in preaching. When preaching brings people into the presence of God and gives meaning to their lives, the church community comes alive. In his book, *Between Two Worlds*, John R. W. Stott voices this same concern, "there is no chance of a recovery of preaching without a prior recovery of conviction. We need to regain our confidence in the truth, relevance and power of the gospel, our convictions about God, the Holy Scriptures, and the Church."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> John R.W. Stott, *The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century: Between Two Worlds*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982) 85.

Ronald J. Allen, in his book, *The Teaching Sermon*, states: “that the preacher must provide a distinctive message through which the church can make sense of itself and the world. The sermon must articulate a coherent vision of the gospel that offers good news to the listeners and provides norms by which to measure the issues of life.”<sup>20</sup> The military is a close knit society with it’s own internal rules and regulations by virtue of it’s institutional nature. It is a life system in which each part affects and is affected by the other parts of that system. When a crisis or a major deployment occurs the whole community is affected, it is here where the community needs chaplains who will faithfully proclaim the gospel of Christ.

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<sup>20</sup> Ronald J. Allen, *The Teaching Sermon*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995) 19.

## Chapter 2

### Pastoral Preaching in the Army Chaplaincy

The chaplain who preaches on Sunday is only repeating what he or she does as pastor throughout the week through the priestly ministry of presence. It is in the marketplace of military life that the chaplain is most visible as pastor. Pastoral preaching is the uniting of two worlds where the hearer hears the Word of God from both the past and the present. First and foremost, pastoral preaching helps people discover God's grace and purpose for their lives. It has been my experience that military people are especially attracted to preaching that is both pragmatic and goal-oriented. Only the preacher who has first served as their pastor can know and effectively speak to his or her congregation.<sup>21</sup> In like manner, only the chaplain who has first served as pastor can authentically know and speak to soldiers. Dr. James Cleland, former Army Chaplain and beloved dean of Duke Chapel called this, "painting the Word with local color...the preacher must really know his congregation."<sup>22</sup> Willimon in his article entitled, "*Pastoral Care and Preaching*", states that "every time the preached message confronts and forms personal need in the light of the gospel, pastoral care occurs."<sup>23</sup>

Willimon goes on to say in his book, *Worship as Pastoral Care*, "that the pastor is charged with seeing--in all aspects of pastoral care--individual lives within the context of

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<sup>21</sup> William Willimon, *Integrative Preaching*, 22.

<sup>22</sup> James Cleland, *The True and Lively Word* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954), 73-74. Also see, James Cleland, *Preaching to Be Understood*. (Nashville: Abindgon Press, 1965. Dr. Cleland calls this type of pastoral preaching "bifocal preaching" whereby the preacher conducts exegesis through the eyes of the scripture and the people's needs.

<sup>23</sup> William Willimon, "Pastoral Care and Preaching," *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*. ed. by William Willimon and Richard Lischer (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 361.

the whole; to bear the burden of the community.”<sup>24</sup> The chaplain who serves as pastor is one who lives among the congregation and sees through their eyes their fears, hurts, concerns, dreams, and hopes. This is where the chaplain will best learn the heart and soul of the congregation. Arthur L. Teikmanis voiced this same concern in his book, *Preaching and Pastoral Care*: “The preacher who has done his pastoral work diligently, knows that his congregation is a people troubled about many things. The preacher who has been around his parish knows that most people do not wear their hearts on their sleeves. Some people laugh to conceal tears. Others boast to hide their inferiority’s; some come with hidden guilt, anger, frustration, loneliness, and despair.”<sup>25</sup>

For the military parishioner the fear of war and deployment is never very far away. The chaplain is faced with being a pastor to a community that constantly lives in an environment where life is extremely fragile. When confronting life’s most serious problems, the majority of people, even Christians, are not always conscious of God’s power and presence. The preeminent resource to address these difficulties is the proclaimed and written Word of God. The chaplain’s unique contribution as pastor is the message of God’s love in Christ whose presence is made possible through the preaching of the Word and Sacrament. A chaplain who does not share the gospel merely duplicates the work of other helping professions. It is the proclamation of God’s Word that makes our profession unique and distinct.

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<sup>24</sup> Willimon, *Worship As Pastoral Care*, 202.

<sup>25</sup> Arthur L. Teikmanis, *Preaching and Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), 19.

In the battle for identity the chaplaincy must first and foremost be seen as pastors and proclaimers of God's Word. The first expectation of soldiers is that the chaplain will be a *pastor*. Former Chief of Chaplains (Major General) Patrick Hessian voiced his concern for preaching as he described his experience in Vietnam:

You have to really believe that the Sacraments that you are administering are real and meaningful...you have to believe the Word you are preaching is spiritually power packed. You have to demonstrate by the way you think and behave that you trust God and believe He's in charge. First, be God's person, then be present.<sup>26</sup>

If the chaplain is to speak with words that will transform, the words must arise out of a personal relationship with God, the Holy Scriptures and the day to day contact with parishioners. Time and time again I have seen chaplains who never leave their chapel offices and their preaching shows it. Some are not willing to do the necessary pastoral work that it takes to be effective preachers and pastors. If the chaplain fails here, he or she will be speaking to deaf ears. As an 'insider' in the military system it is vitally important to know your people.

**If pastoral preaching is to be effective, the chaplain must thoroughly understand this distinctive of military ministry thoroughly.** The pastoral sermon must live where the soldiers live, with their stories and struggles, touch the earth and breathe the same air they breathe. If the soldiers sense that the chaplain does not care about them as individuals, neither will they care what the chaplain has to say on Sunday.

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<sup>26</sup> Patrick Hessian, quoted by Gordon Schweitzer, "*Handbook for Chaplain Ministry in the 1990's*", D.Min. San Francisco Theological Seminary, 1986, Appendix A, p. 19.

It is in this context that marketplace preaching is formed- going where the people are, going where they live, learning their language and building the bridges of relationships. The chaplain must learn that the proclamation of God's Word can occur much like the ministry of Jesus in the most unorthodox of places.

### **Marketplace Preaching in the Military**

When the chaplain steps out of the chapel and enters the workplace, it is in this pastoral context that *marketplace preaching* occurs. It is in the marketplace of life where Jesus did most of his preaching. The chaplaincy has long recognized that true worship is not confined to a building or specific location, but worship takes place wherever the people of God gather. The Army chaplain, more than any other minister, has the opportunity to rub elbows with his or her parishioners on a daily basis. As Willimon, points out, "people will make themselves available to pastors who have made themselves available to people...people will listen to preachers who demonstrate that they have listened to their people"<sup>27</sup> Without an emphasis on the preaching office, the chaplain's role in some cases could be relegated to that of a social worker, marriage counselor, or family support coordinator. Although these functions are important, they do not define our roles as pastors and priests. It is the preaching office, the proclamation of the gospel, that sets us apart as chaplains and defines who we are. Therefore it is vital that pastoral preaching occur in the context of pastoral care in the marketplace of life.

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<sup>27</sup> Willimon, "Pastoral Care and Preaching," 363.

## Marketplace Preaching of Jesus

The preaching of Jesus rings with the imagery Judean life. Jesus compared the kingdom to the seed of a sower, to the grain of a mustard seed, to leaven, to hidden treasure, to a pearl of great price, and to a fishing net full of fish (Matthew 13). The kingdom of God is marked by a celebration of a wedding feast (Mark 2:10, by new cloth (Mark 2:21), and by new wine in old wineskins (Mark 2: 23-28). Jesus preaching was permeated with ordinary stories about ordinary people. Bernard Brandon Scott, in his article entitled, "*Jesus as Preacher*," states that "Jesus most common form of preaching was dinner conversation, although the Gospels picture Jesus preaching in a variety of situations...The most likely situation for Jesus preaching was probably table fellowship, which forms the context for many Gospel scenes."<sup>28</sup> Most frequently, the Gospels portray Jesus as preaching among the crowds of the poor, the sick, the outcast, the hurting, the oppressed of society, the marketplaces of life.

The preaching of Jesus was couched in the language of ordinary people, not scholastic, rabbinical terminology. Jesus spoke to his followers of the salt of the earth: and the loss of its savor. He talked to them about candles, light hid under baskets, and a lighted city on a hill. He shared images of lilies of the field, treasures in heaven, specks of sand in the eye. He told them about fathers providing food for their children and foolish builders who construct houses on sandy foundations. His sermons were full of fresh, down to earth, illustrative words from the marketplaces of their daily lives.

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<sup>28</sup> Bernard Brandon Scott, "Jesus As Preacher," *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, 279.

And this is precisely where chaplains are called to go as prophets, pastors, and priests, proclaiming God's Word in the *marketplace of military life*. Barbara Brown-Taylor states it so eloquently in her book, *The Preaching Life*, "God does not call us once but many times. There are calls to faith and calls to ordination, but in between there are calls to particular communities and calls to particular tasks within them, calls into and out of relationships as well as calls to seek God wherever God may be found...only as we continue to listen to the language of our lives."<sup>29</sup> Life is the best teacher. The chaplain who is attuned to life in the marketplace will best be able to recognize those teachable and preachable moments. As Fred Craddock points out, "Any subject that bears upon life bears upon preaching."<sup>30</sup> He goes on to say that "No day passes without an opportunity to tell a story, talk with children, converse with the elderly, discuss with friends, tell a joke, give directions to a traveler, describe a scene, or share feelings."<sup>31</sup> In like manner, the chaplain who preaches **from** the marketplace of life will have no need of inventing illustrations. For no day will pass without an opportunity to talk to a soldier, share a cup of coffee, go on a road march, eat in the mess hall, visit the sick, and console the hurting.

The beauty of marketplace preaching is not limited by space, time, location, or architecture. Preaching in the marketplace emphasizes the fact that the message of Christ is portable. Marketplace preaching will take you to the streets. As a chaplain, I have preached in the strangest of locations: adventure training, mountain climbing, white water rafting, canoeing, prayer breakfasts, spiritual weekend retreats, and family outings.

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<sup>29</sup> Barbara Brown-Taylor, *The Preaching Life*, (Boston: Cowley Publications, 1993) 23-24.

<sup>30</sup> Fred Craddock, *Preaching*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985) 20.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

While serving with the 82nd Airborne Division, I found myself on numerous occasions sharing the gospel as we prepared for airborne operations and rapid deployments. More than just looking for a good luck charm, soldiers were truly searching for meaning and significance in their lives. One battalion commander in a letter to his chaplain put it this way:

I want you to be seen, I want our troops to know you are with them and available to help them. Perhaps some of the troops can even translate that into the realization that God's presence is always with them. I want them to see you on marches, at physical training, on the weapons ranges, in the vehicles, in the mess halls, in the clubs, as well as in the chapel. There will be times when participating in training, especially field training in the rain and cold mud, it will be unpleasant. That is when our young soldiers will need you the most. Take God's message to the troops; don't wait for them in the chapel.<sup>32</sup>

Barbara Brown-Taylor echoes this same message, "God reaches out to us in countless ways through the material things of our lives: there are altars everywhere with sacraments just waiting to be discovered and celebrated."<sup>33</sup> The chaplain who practices the "ministry of presence" will have no lack of preaching material. Taylor goes on to say, "What they forget is that scripture was first put into our hands not as a *prescription for life* but as a *description* of it,...Consequently, the best sermons are those that begin with life, telling stories that have the ring of truth and suggesting the ways in which God's word addresses the often perplexing truths of our lives."<sup>34</sup> In his book entitled *Marketplace Preaching*, Calvin Miller challenges today's preachers to preach in the spirit of the marketplace and once again take risks that will reach people where they are.

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<sup>32</sup> Colonel Quay C. Snyder, "Chaplains Review," *Department of the Army Pamphlet 165-20*, 8.

<sup>33</sup> Barbara Brown-Taylor, *The Preaching Life*, 35.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

Miller states that marketplace preaching, "is a call to get outside the walls and find out once again what people are talking about and what their interests and needs really are."<sup>35</sup> He goes on to advocate that the preachers of today must live symbolically outside the church in order to once again learn the language of the marketplace.<sup>36</sup> Today's chaplain as well must learn the language of not only the military but also the language of the marketplace. Today's Army is predominantly made up of the "Boomer generation" and the "Buster generation," both identified as spanning the birth years from 1943 to 1981. It is not an accident that these two recognizable generations were born in spans of about 22 years each. Strauss and Howe, the current authorities on this type of research, believe that each successive generation has its own group personality.<sup>37</sup> If chaplains are to reach these generations with the Word of God, it is imperative that they understand the characteristics of each generation. For example, research shows that the "Baby Boomers" are generally more competitive, career oriented, and less likely to attend the traditional worship service. On the other hand, the "Busters" are less competitive, more likely a product of fractured families, more conservative in terms of their values, have either no or little religious training, and are more visually oriented than their predecessors. In order to speak to these generations, today's chaplain may to adapt or change his or her preaching style. This may require the chaplain to re-orient and re-evaluate his or her whole concept of preaching.

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<sup>35</sup> Calvin Miller, *Marketplace Preaching: How to Return the Sermon to Where It Belongs*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995) 19.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> William Strauss and Neil Howe, *Generations: The History of Americas Future, 1584 to 2069*, (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1991) 325.

It is time for chaplains to move out of their stained glass chapels and move into the streets of military life! It is not a call to forsake the institution of the church, but to enhance the life of the church. F. Dean Lueking reminds us again and again that, “while preaching in every generation should always be grounded in the Word of God, it must remain relational in the marketplace.”<sup>38</sup> You are probably wondering at this point, “What does a marketplace sermon look like? What is the form and style of a marketplace sermon? How is the marketplace sermon different from other traditional sermons?” In this next section I will attempt to address these questions.

### **The Marketplace Sermon: Adapting a Form and Style**

From the outset, it is important to note that the marketplace sermon in many respects is no different from traditional sermon models. Marketplace preaching involves more of an *attitude and mindset* than the mechanics of sermon form and style. The sermon’s shape and form would be largely dictated by the setting and situation in which it occurs. In another generation, this type of sermon might have been called a “life-situation sermon.” Given its similarities to extemporaneous preaching, marketplace preaching is unique in the fact that it calls for the preacher not only preach about the marketplace but to live in the marketplace. A chaplain’s preaching should be drawn from material that is most familiar to his or her audience making use of the world in which they live. For example, while stationed with the infantry, I would often refer to the military exploits of Joshua, Caleb, and King David, stories that my audience could readily relate and compare to their own situation.

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<sup>38</sup> F. Dean Lueking, *The Art of Connecting God and People* (Waco: Word, 1985), 58.

While utilizing infantry language, I would describe the Israelite spies as scouts on a reconnaissance mission. This type of preaching can only take place in the context of the marketplace learning the soldiers language, customs, rituals, and experiences. In spite of the sermon's unorthodox emphasis in the marketplace, Miller does advocate some traditional guidelines of developing the form and style of the sermon. First, Miller stipulates that the sermon should be well-planned, well-rehearsed, and delivered extemporaneously without an extensive manuscript. In this case, no matter the situation or setting, the chaplain will not be tied to the manuscript. In preparing a marketplace sermon the manuscript should only serve as a guide for arranging one's thoughts, ideals, and illustrations. But, when it comes time for the delivery of the sermon, the preacher should only rely on a brief outline on notecards or sticky pads located on the inside of the Bible next to the text. Miller states "that the marketplace sermon should be conversational, casual, approachable, relational, colloquial, and relevant...Always starting where people are, instead of, where you wish they were!"<sup>39</sup> The key factor in preparing a sermon that comes from the marketplace is its focus on colloquial language designed to be both relational and seeker friendly without sacrificing scriptural authority. In referring to preaching and culture, Dr. Lischer makes the following observation:

We must establish a *theologically sound* conception of the listener's world before we can address it. The preacher-as-person lives in this world and ministers to it, but only the pastor-as-theologian can accurately assess the mobility, secularism, and the anxiety of our age. When preaching begins with the contemporary situation, it views that situation through the lens of the eternal gospel...When the preacher projects all history and experience through the eternal prism, the infinite relevance of the gospel itself bridges the distance between the then-and there and the here-and-now.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Calvin Miller, *Marketplace Preaching*, 72-73.

<sup>40</sup> Richard Lischer, *A Theology of Preaching*, 9.

In other words, the task of marketplace preaching is to proclaim the text in such a way as to communicate its truth in a language that the audience can understand. The military is a subculture within a culture with its own distinct language and acronyms. For instance, the military is famous for abbreviating everything; PCS, TDA, TOE, SOP, RSP, EDRE, the TOC, the FEBA, TA-50, and TDY. The meaning of these terms are only important to those who use them. To the outsider they are only letters, but to the soldier they stand for significant aspects of military life. In addition, to the general terms that are referred to across the Army, there are hundreds of abbreviations that are unique to a specific branch or specialty, e.g. Infantry, Air Defense Artillery, the Signal Corps, etc. For the chaplain who enters active duty for the first time this can be quite confusing. If the chaplain is to be an effective communicator of God's Word in the military, the distinctiveness of the Army's language must be clearly understood. The chaplain must learn to talk in a language that will be approachable and relevant. This does not mean that the chaplain must forsake the language of the church, but simply find new ways in communicating its truth, without compromising its authority. This type of preaching will only take place when the chaplain is willing to immerse himself or herself in the scriptural text while at the same time looking through the lenses of life in the marketplace. In forming his own philosophy of preaching, Miller argues that there are ten essential elements of forming a marketplace sermon.

The ten essential elements are: (1) The Mind of the Sermon; (2) The Text of the Sermon; (3) The Apologetic; (4) The Witness of Preaching; (5) The Counsel of the Sermon; (6) The Interest of the Sermon; (7) The Art of the Sermon; (8) The Movement of the Sermon; (9) The Spirit and Life of the Sermon; (10) The Sermon and the Altar.<sup>41</sup> Obviously, any of these principles of formation could easily be adapted and applied to other sermon models. For the purpose of brevity I will not discuss each element in its entirety but only refer to a few essential aspects of marketplace preaching. Miller begins, by issuing a warning that as the preacher enters the marketplace one's worldview must remain anchored to the text of Scripture. As the preacher comes to the text, there are three questions that will define and name the text's purpose in the sermon. Miller quotes Elizabeth Achtemeier in her book, *Preaching from the Old Testament*: "(1) What would my people doubt to be true in this text? (2) What do my people need to know or be reminded of in this text? (3) If this text is true, what kind of world do we live in?"<sup>42</sup> It is a clear call for the preacher not only to immerse oneself in the text of scripture, but also to listen from the pew or from the marketplace of the hearer. But, most importantly, it is a call to insure that the sermon clearly speaks God's Word from the Bible and that it connects with real life. Miller points out that "Sermons, when they come from a marketplace preacher, exists as a call to the world and to the church."<sup>43</sup> The majority of the chaplain's ministry is among the unchurched with little or no religious training.

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<sup>41</sup> Calvin Miller, *Marketplace Preaching*, 126-143.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 128-129. Also see, Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Preaching from the Old Testament*, (Philadelphia: Westminster-John Knox Press, 1989), 54.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 130.

There is no doubt that the gospel will offend, but that does not preclude the possibility of couching the Word of God in such a way as to speak to a particular age, situation, people, and place. In all stages of sermon preparation and delivery the chaplain who proclaims God's Word should continually probe the mind and sphere of the listener's world.<sup>44</sup> It has been noted earlier that the chaplain of today faces a generation of young people who are more visually oriented than previous generations. Therefore, it would make sense that preaching in the marketplace would include the art of telling stories. This is not a new methodology and in recent years several books have been devoted to Narrative Preaching. No preacher has been more vocal than Eugene Lowry. Lowry contends that nothing holds people's attention like stories. Eugene Lowry has said that, "One thing is sure, that life is more like a moving stream, than a pond."<sup>45</sup> Marketplace preaching involves the weaving of two stories in the thread of life, the Bible story and our story. Since Miller advocates a conversational style of speaking, it is natural that he would quote David Buttrick as saying, "sermons are to involve a kind of sequential talking...pacing the sermon with movement with linking blocks of content like a freight train linked with cars to keep all the issues of the sermon in motion."<sup>46</sup> The chaplain who chooses to preach from one single movement or theme will better facilitate the attention span of the young soldier and short circuit the culture-shaped capacity to listen.

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<sup>44</sup> Richard Lischer, *A Theology of Preaching*, 8.

<sup>45</sup> See, Eugene Lowry, *Doing Time in the Pulpit*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 52.

<sup>46</sup> Miller, 139 and David Buttrick, *Homiletic* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 24.

## **Conclusion**

As with all preaching, there would be no sermon without the power of the Holy Spirit giving life to the Word of God and words of the preacher. I am continually amazed at how mysteriously and wonderfully the Holy Spirit moves in those moments when the preacher least expects it. The opportunities and possibilities of marketplace preaching are only limited by the chaplain's own lack of initiative and creativity. If a chaplain is willing to take his or her preaching to the streets, only the Lord will know the countless lives that may be touched in those sacred moments of sharing the good news. A few words of encouragement to a weary soldier might make all the difference in the world. For the chaplain, the preaching of the Word of God is what makes us unique as pastors. Without the power of the Word of God to transform lives and issue glimpses of hope, the chaplain's role as care-giver would be no more effective than other mental health agencies. It is the power of the Word of God given to a dying soldier on a battlefield that testifies to the eternal significance of proclamation. The need for pastoral preaching in the chaplaincy today is most evident. It is the most public act that we do as chaplains. It is a compilation of all that we do as pastors; extending from the chapel to the field, during peacetime and war, from the hospital room to the counseling session, from the mess hall to the rifle range, from the pulpit to the marketplace at work and play. Pastoral preaching is shaped from our daily encounters in the marketplace bringing people to Christ and Christ to the people. Pastoral preaching seeks to comfort, encourage, and inspire devotion, dedication, loyalty, and commitment to Christ. Pastoral preaching will not only speak *to* the people of God, but will also speak *for* the people of God.

Pastoral preaching will not only address the ancient texts of the past, but will also seek to intersect the past with the present. For today's chaplain the challenges of a smaller army, the modern battlefield, and the ever-changing role of the military's mission around the world only further reinforce the need for sound biblical pastoral preaching. The chaplain must be convinced beyond a shadow of doubt that preaching in the marketplace *will* make a difference in the lives of those whom we are called to serve.

## Chapter 3

### The Collective Protestant Worship and the Chaplain

Military people are no different than their civilian counterparts, in the fact that when they come to worship they expect to find God. It is this quest for God that justifies the chaplain's unique place in the military as pastors and priests. If one is to be an effective preacher in the Protestant setting, it is vitally important to have at least a minimal understanding of the broad spectrum of the faith traditions that are represented in the Chaplaincy. As I stated earlier in the introduction, the Collective Protestant Worship in the military is distinct in a variety of ways. Unlike the civilian parish, the Protestant worship service is multi-denominational and pluralistic in nature. It is based on the Christian tradition, but its liturgy is as diverse as the population that it represents. In his article entitled, "*Preaching and Worship: The Twelve Traditions*," Dr. William D. Thompson, expertly spans the centuries and shows how each faith tradition contributed in shaping ministry in the chaplaincy. He moves from century to century briefly noting how each tradition developed and how its patterns of worship and preaching may be best understood by chaplains today.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> William D. Thompson, "Evaluating Chaplaincy Skills in Preaching and Worship: The Twelve Traditions," *The Military Chaplain's Review* (Spring 1992) 23-33. In this article Dr. Thompson lists the following twelve traditions that are most represented in the Army Chaplaincy: (1) Roman Catholic and Orthodox; (2) Lutheran; (3) Anglican (Episcopal); (4) Reformed (Presbyterian); (5) Baptists; (6) Congregationalists; (7) Quaker (influence in worship); (8) Methodist; (9) Christian Church and Disciples of Christ; (10) Pentecostalism; (11) Christian Scientist; (12) Prophetic.

He concludes by stating that “preaching and leading worship in the Protestant setting is no easy task...the diversity of backgrounds, ethnic traditions, theologies, and personal differences complicate it immensely...but if the chaplain can at least recognize and appreciate the rich vastness of the various faith traditions, he or she will be better equipped in conducting a worship service that will speak to such a diverse population.”<sup>48</sup>

Given the variety and diversity of Protestant worship, what is it that brings such a diverse group of people together for worship? It is the common bond of military life that unifies this unique community of faith. It is here where the chaplain preaches to the “churched” as well as the “unchurched.” It is in this context that the chaplain integrates the roles of pastor, priest, and prophet and speaks *for the community of faith*. In contrast to the civilian parish, the military congregation is highly mobile with a higher percentage of the “unchurched.” The issues of deployment, the threat of injury, the threat of war, issues of life and death, and career pressures are never far from their thoughts. The Protestant chaplain must plan and conduct the service with care, being especially sensitive to the various denominations represented. Without violating his or her denominational tradition, the chaplain must be as inclusive as possible with the goal of creating a community where unity will exist in the midst of diversity. It is in this context that the collegiality of chaplains is most important to the creating of community.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid .

It is customary that each chaplain will approach the worship service with his or her own style based on the various elements pastoral experience, seminary training, and personal preference. Either Chaplains will rotate in and out of the pulpit or one chaplain will assume all responsibilities of preaching. This decision will normally reside with the senior chaplain either at the chapel or the installation. The liturgical garments to be worn will most likely be dictated by the chaplain's tradition, unless the supervisory chaplain dictates otherwise. The Lord's Supper is normally observed on the first Sunday of each the month and on special liturgical observances. The chaplain who is assigned the duties of preaching on any given Sunday will either select the scripture text from the lectionary or as part of a thematic topical sermon. Occasionally, the chaplains will preach a series of sermons through a book of the Bible or address current issues of interest. This decision will again reside with the senior chaplain or senior pastor. While trying to accommodate the denominational requirements of each chaplain, the senior chaplain must always keep the needs of the congregation in proper perspective.

### **The Sermon: A Protestant Tradition**

Worship is the corporate act of a community of people coming together in response to faith. Therefore, "faith leads to worship; worship is response to faith; and faith is response to God's Word."<sup>49</sup> It is no secret that the Reformation solidified the centrality of the sermon in the worship service. Martin Luther said that "Preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God...the Church owes its life to the Word and is nourished and preserved by the Word."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Richard M. Spielmann, *History of Christian Worship*, (New York: Seabury Press, 1966), 3.

<sup>50</sup> O.C. Edwards, "History of Preaching," *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, 204-205.

Therefore, the Church is shaped when the preaching and hearing takes place through the medium of the liturgy. Chaplain Thomas Murray made the following observation in his article entitled, "*The Collective Protestant Worship Service*," "Protestant Worship was rooted within the context of the covenant community where the Word is preached, prayers offered, and the Eucharist is given."<sup>51</sup> From both the Lutheran and Reformed traditions the sermon's purest form is the proclamation of Jesus Christ moving and uniting the community of faith making present the presence of God. For most Protestants the sermon is central to the worship service. It is not a coincidence that the sermon occupies anywhere from a third to a half of the time allotted for worship. As Chaplain Murray points out that in the military there exists "a strong trend among the Protestant community to focus more on fellowship than to the centrality of the pulpit."<sup>52</sup> When preaching is not central, the congregation will gravitate to whatever is popular at the time. The gospel story must be told and distinguished from the competing voices that are telling other stories. This is why preaching is so crucial in the military chapel. It continually reminds the hearers of who and what they are as a community of faith. Karl Barth said it best in his book *Preaching the Gospel*:

To build up the Church means to rebuild each time from foundation to roof. The Church has to be remaking itself continually; continually the orders given have to be accepted, obedience has constantly to be learned again. The Church is a community placed under Revelation and built up by hearing the Word of God, built up by the grace of God in order that it may live.<sup>53</sup>

One of the best ways to accomplish this task is the utilization of the lectionary.

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<sup>51</sup> Thomas Murray, "The Collective Protestant Worship Service," *The Military Chaplain's Review* (Spring, 1992) 35.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>53</sup> Karl Barth, *Preaching the Gospel*, trans. B. E. Hooke (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963) 31.

## **Lectionary Preaching in the Protestant Chapel**

Another week! Another sermon! A week filled with staff meetings, visits to the training areas, the rifle ranges, the motor pool, and frequent interruptions of unscheduled counseling. The chaplain sits in his office wondering, ‘what in the world am I going to preach on this week?’ Whether one is in the civilian parish or military chapel, this weekly demand of proclaiming God’s Word is a never ending task. Whatever method that the chaplain utilizes, the ideas for a sermon never come easily. Such are the hurdles that every parish preacher must face. As mentioned previously, the number of chaplains assigned to a particular military chapel may vary depending on the unit and the size of the congregation. With the variety of denominations represented in the congregation, it is always a challenge for the chaplain to select a passage of scripture or theme that will meet their specific needs. This section will attempt to examine the vital role and advantages of lectionary preaching in the Protestant chapel community.

Given the transient nature and diversity of military congregations, it is vitally important that the selection of preaching texts is made in such a way as to encourage a sense of continuity and identity with the larger community of faith. The preacher should always be a “priestly listener” to the life of the congregation and its culture.<sup>54</sup> Before coming to the text, however, there are a few suppositions that one must bring to the framing of the sermon from the lectionary.

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<sup>54</sup> Leander Keck, *The Bible in the Pulpit* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1978), 61-64.

In his article, "*The Lectionary: Straightjacket or Coat of Many Colors?*," Roger Keller states that "in lectionary preaching, the first assumption is that God actively and continually makes himself known through Jesus Christ to the Church through the scriptures."<sup>55</sup> Secondly, the preacher must assume the witness of scripture is not merely in the past, but is also a present witness to the Church and the risen Christ.<sup>56</sup> As I have alluded to several times throughout the course of this paper, we are living in a time when the church, (to include the chaplaincy) is having to expend a great deal of effort in defining itself and justifying its distinct identity. As Eugene Lowry points out, "Lectionary use participates as an ecclesiological symbol. It not only names but participates in the corporate nature of the church."<sup>57</sup> Lectionary preaching offers the chapel congregation a possibility of learning the scriptures in a systematic manner throughout the course of a Christian year, thereby developing a biblical mentality in the church. Ronald Allen states that "A foundational principle of a lectionary is that its themes, texts, and seasons are constitutive of Christian identity. It portrays the normative Christian vision in several of its dimensions."<sup>58</sup> Instead of the chaplain/preacher picking and choosing his or her way through the Bible, the lectionary guides the journey. Barbara Brown-Taylor in her own captivating way describes this journey "as a path that expands our horizons with regular stops in the Old and New Testaments. Both are given and by accepting both we learn to look to God in everything that comes our way."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Roger R. Keller, "The Lectionary: Straight or Coat of Many Colors?" *The Divinity School Bulletin*, Vol. 44, no. 1, 49.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Eugene L Lowry, *Living With The Lectionary: Preaching Through The Revised Common Lectionary*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992) 31.

<sup>58</sup> Ronald J. Allen, *The Teaching Sermon*, (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1995) 65.

<sup>59</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Preaching Life*, 69.

While one of its benefits from the lectionary is teaching God's people how to read the Bible systematically, preaching can also assist the preacher in preaching more biblically. This is especially important when the military chapel consists of such a variety of traditions and denominations. Lectionary preaching will at least minimize the possibility of a chaplain from preaching only on favorite texts or themes or riding a theological hobbyhorse. Such diversity in sermon material will only result in confusing the congregation and causing discontent. Coordination and cooperation among the chapel staff is essential in avoiding such situations.

In the same way that healthy bodies require a diet made up of the various food groups, a healthy congregation needs a balanced diet of God's Word. Chapel parishioners around the world should be able on any given Sunday to recognize that these are the church's texts for today. The military community needs to realize that they are grafted into the larger Protestant Church, established by Christ and living as a covenant community. Having come from a free-church background, I have been amazed at how the prescribed text for the day speaks at the right moment to the current issues and needs of the congregation. In the course of a year far more human joys and sorrows, hopes and fears will arise out of the biblical text than addressed through simple thematic preaching. In times of crisis the lectionary should serve as a guide, not a shackle. There may be occasions when situations will dictate the necessity of abandoning the lectionary for a Sunday in order to address a particular need or crisis. More often than not, however, the lectionary text will speak with much more power and wisdom than the seemingly obvious text that we would have chosen.

As Roger Keller so aptly puts it “Preaching is not a bucket brigade operation designed to extinguish weekly brush fires. If it becomes this, then the congregation, the pastor, and weekly situations will control the preaching, rather than permitting the Word of God to speak first.”<sup>60</sup> It is my position that preaching from the lectionary in the context of the Christian year is the best way to bring sense, continuity, order, and direction to the Protestant chapel pulpit. The most popular lectionary in the United States, according to Ronald Allen, is the The Revised Common Lectionary (RCL).<sup>61</sup> Allen argues that the lectionary can serve not only as a guide for the preacher but also as a teaching device. He suggests nine advantages to utilizing the lectionary as a tool for teaching from the pulpit: (1) During the major seasonal cycles, the RCL leads the congregation and preacher to texts and themes that are fundamental to the Christian faith; (2) The RCL helps prevent the preacher from focusing on a narrow range of texts and concerns, thereby leaving the congregation theologically deprived; (3) The RCL brings the pastor and congregation face to face with some difficult texts and issues that both would normally avoid; (4) The RCL keeps the Hebrew Bible alive in the consciousness of the congregation, to help it remember its Jewish heritage; (5) The RCL centers on God’s promises. It helps to guide the church in avoiding the trap of undue moralism; (6) The RCL presumes a communal ecclesiology, *which would prove most beneficial in building a sense of community in the military chapel*; (7) The RCL receives its best exposition in the context of the Lord’s Supper; it is optimally designed to be a part of the full pattern of weekly word and sacrament; (8) The RCL symbolizes the unity of the church (9) The RCL offers the

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<sup>60</sup> Roger Keller, “The Lectionary: Straightjacket or Coat of Many Colors?” 53.

<sup>61</sup> The Consultation on Common Texts, *The Revised Common Lectionary* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1992).

preacher practical help in sermon preparation by supplying an immediate place to begin each week. The preacher does not need to fish for a text or topic.<sup>62</sup> Given the fact that chaplains are inherently busy with counseling, endless staff meetings, and numerous deployments, it would stand to reason that the advantages of lectionary preaching far outweigh the traditional mode of thematic text selection. Preaching from the lectionary is easily adaptable to both the liturgical and free-church traditions, because preaching remains biblically based. Preaching from the lectionary is certainly not the only way to preach systematically, although I believe that it is the best option. Let me now turn to a brief examination of preaching a book series.

### **Book Series Preaching**

Again, my main concern for preaching in the Protestant chapel is that the preaching will help foster an atmosphere of identity, unity, continuity, learning, and community. One of the oldest ways of preaching from the pulpit has always been the tried and true continuous reading of the Bible or “book series” sermons. This pattern was especially popular with the Reformers. Preaching in a book series through the Bible offers some distinct advantages: it develops a biblical focused congregation; it provides a planned preaching year with consistent transitions each week; it builds a solid teaching base, which is greatly needed in many of our military congregations; and it encourages a consistency of preaching when various chaplains rotate the pulpit responsibilities.

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<sup>62</sup> Ronald J. Allen, *The Teaching Sermon*, 125-126.

Given the benefits of series preaching, there are a few guidelines that need to be mentioned. First, it would not be wise to preach a series during the summer months, since this is prime time for families relocating to other assignments or taking vacations. Secondly, keep the series fairly short in duration. If it is too long, people will soon get tired and lose interest. Referring to a book series, Ronald Allen comments, "This approach offers distinct teaching benefits. It allows the listeners to encounter a text in depth, live in the world of the text, and let that world become a part of their consciousness...Through systematic exposition the preacher is modeling how to study a book of the Bible."<sup>63</sup>

### **Thematic/Topical "Life Situation" Preaching**

Without a doubt this type of preaching among evangelicals is the most popular of all other methodologies. Most chaplains would agree that a sermon must be biblical and based on God's Word. However, the difference lies in how the text is selected! Some chaplains begin with a **text** from the lectionary or a planned sermon series and then move to the **theme**. Other chaplains depending on their tradition will begin with a **theme** and move toward the **text**. These are typically called "topical/thematic" sermons or "life-situation" sermons made popular by the Harry Emerson Fosdick at Riverside Church in New York City. If this methodology of preaching is utilized, it is vitally important, that the connection to the text is obvious and the theme is congruent with the needs of the congregation. The chaplain must also take great care in insuring that the sermon content is harmonious with the witness of scripture and the Protestant tradition.

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 132.

## **The Teaching Sermon**

As I mentioned earlier, the relationship between the church and culture has changed dramatically over the past few decades. The church's authority no longer has the influence that it once took for granted. The buzzword in the chaplaincy these days is pluralism. In a pluralistic society there are many voices competing to be heard. Ronald Allen argues that, "If the church is to recover from its theological anemia and run in the marathon of contemporary life, it needs to understand its own language and doctrine."<sup>64</sup> This is especially true in the chaplaincy, where sixty percent of the those who are on active duty belong to the generation of seekers who were born between the years 1961 and 1981. Allen proposes that "In a time of competing voices and spiritual quest, a sermon with the qualities of teaching and learning appeals to many people as it brings together their quest and the Christian tradition."<sup>65</sup> The rise of broken homes and moral decay across our nation have spurred a generation of biblical illiterates. The most basic and popular of Bible stories are foreign to them. Many of these young people are coming to military chapels desperately searching for concrete answers to life's problems. This is why each successive generation should learn and relearn the stories, ideas, realities, and truths of the Christian faith. Every Christian needs to know the basic tenets, creeds, and doctrines of his or her particular faith tradition. Periodically, the church needs to be reminded of its heritage, identity, purpose, and reason for being.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 20.

Dr. Lischer echoes this same message when he states that “The church exists for the world, but it renews its identity when it gathers for worship. It speaks in the world, but it learns its ‘distinctive talk’ when its members come together around the word and sacrament. Preaching is the language of the church that accompanies the formation of a new people.”<sup>66</sup> Perhaps, as Allen suggests, “it is time for a resurgence of the teaching sermon in our churches.”<sup>67</sup> It is certainly obvious that all sermons teach in some way. The advantage of a teaching sermon is that it can take on as many forms as the situation dictates. For the chaplain, the teaching sermon has the flexibility not only of serving the chapel, but also of expanding its usage beyond the chapel walls to the marketplace of military life. It is not unusual for military chapels to have a large percentage of the “unchurched” attending the worship services. The chaplain in some cases cannot simply refer to the story of Jacob, or the missionary journeys of Paul, or the gospel stories about Jesus, without having to retell the story in detail. Many of today’s chapel parishioners are largely unfamiliar with Christian speech. Our young people arrive on Sunday morning without a working knowledge of Christianity. They hear the preacher’s words without even the fundamental rudiments of scriptural training. By utilizing the teaching sermon the theological memory of the church is restored, the Bible story is recreated and the Bible once again becomes the congregation’s story.<sup>68</sup> On Sunday morning when the chaplain stands to speak, the sermon in essence becomes the teaching moment. For many in the congregation it will be the only opportunity to hear God’s Word throughout the course of the week.

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<sup>66</sup> Richard Lischer, *Theology of Preaching*, 78-79.

<sup>67</sup> Ronald J. Allen, *The Teaching Sermon*, 25.

<sup>68</sup> See Robert N. Bellah, *Habits of the Heart* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 152-155.

Allen goes on to say that “when the sermon vitally interprets God and life...the teaching sermon is responding to need...the listener will identify with the message and participate in the sermon.”<sup>69</sup> Willimon echoes this same message by stating that “Christian preaching is also Christian teaching whenever it helps people understand, internalize, and apply God’s Word to their lives.”<sup>70</sup>

### **The Teaching Sermons Style and Delivery**

It is important to point out that the teaching sermon is not so much defined by its form, style, or method, as by its overall purpose. Allen states that “The primary purpose of a teaching sermon is to help the congregation name or rename some aspect of its world experience in terms of the gospel and the church. The teaching sermon is consciously designed to encourage the community to grow in some aspect of Christian awareness or action.”<sup>71</sup> This type of preaching can be redemptive, hope-evoking, and energizing. Thirty years ago, when America was more of a Christian culture, it was possible for the chaplain to prepare sermons that were quite familiar with both officers and enlisted soldiers from a variety of age groups. Most Americans had some background in religious studies and biblical training in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Today, pluralism is a reality constantly knocking on the door of our society. Any common Judeo-Christian understanding of the Bible among our young people has receded into the background of scriptural memory loss. For many soldiers, “no religious preference” has become all too common on their dog tags.

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<sup>69</sup> Ronald J. Allen, *The Teaching Sermon*, 23. See also, Richard F. Ward, *Speaking From the Heart: Preaching with Passion* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992)

<sup>70</sup> William Willimon, *Integrative Preaching*, 70.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

Chaplains today are in the unique position to reach the “baptized” as well as the “unbaptized.” Perhaps, the time is ripe for a resurgence of the teaching sermon in the military chapel, where God continues to call, teach, justify, and sanctify His people.

### **Word and Sacrament**

As important as the preaching event is, worship in today’s chapel should be carefully planned so that the liturgy is unified focusing on both the Word and the Sacrament, each element contributing to the worshipper’s total experience. Richard Lischer reiterates this theme:

Like preaching, worship combines elements of story with pure proclamation. What else is the liturgy but the recital of God’s story from the song of the angels in the *Gloria in excelsis* to the awesome chant of the cherubim and seraphim in the *Scantus* interspersed with kerygmatic interpretation? Worship is often misconceived as a series of special ceremonies which are intended for edification of the individual believer. Yet baptism is not an episode of private initiation but an action involving the entire church. Confession is not a formula for personal remorse but a moment in the ongoing mutual admonition and absolution of the brothers and sisters. Eucharist is not a ritual following the sermon from which one may excuse oneself, but the community’s meal with the risen Lord. Doxology is not a hymn to be sung but a life to be lived. Preaching is not a virtuoso performance but the language of the church that accompanies the laborious formation of a new people.<sup>72</sup>

Liturgy is, as James F. White has noted, “a quintessence of the priesthood of all believers in which the whole priestly community of Christians shares.”<sup>73</sup> More than one good sermon has lost its effectiveness through poorly organized and poorly planned worship.

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<sup>72</sup> Richard Lischer, *A Theology of Preaching*, 79.

<sup>73</sup> James F. White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980, 24.

In his book, *Integrative Preaching*, William Willimon states that “At one time we Protestants saw the sermon as the act of worship; all else in the service was a preliminary to the preaching. But now new patterns of worship within most mainline Protestant denominations as well as renewed understandings of the purpose of Sunday morning have brought things into better balance. The Word and the Sacrament are the two historic foci for Sunday worship.”<sup>74</sup> Chaplains need to focus more attention on achieving this balance of worship in both the word and the sacrament. It is the word of God proclaimed that leads the worshipper to the performative acts of the sacrament. In his article, “*Sacraments and Preaching*,” Arlo Duba states that “In the worship of the church, the sacraments and ordinances are occasions for the demonstration of the enfleshment of the gospel. There the Word is acted out, made visible.”<sup>75</sup> Barbara Brown-Taylor compares worship to a family album, which bears the marks of those who have gone before and have bequeathed to the church as their manual for approaching God.<sup>76</sup> Thus, worship is not only the practice of faith but the actual experiencing of it. When the chaplain functions as pastor and priest, the liturgy itself and experience of worship should function as pastoral care in both word and deed. For the chaplain who carefully plans and conducts worship the possibilities of spiritual renewal in the Protestant community is limitless. James F. White defined worship as “speaking and touching in God’s name.”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> William Willimon, *Integrative Preaching*, 96.

<sup>75</sup> Arlo D. Duba, “Sacraments and Preaching,” *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, 423.

<sup>76</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Preaching Life*, 65.

<sup>77</sup> James F. White, *Introduction To Christian Worship*, 22.

If this is true, then worship does not end with the benediction, but is carried beyond the sanctuary into the streets of life where worshippers live out their lives. Whether worship takes place in the foxhole, or at the wooden altar of the main post chapel, worship is simply how the people of God practice the presence of God in their lives. In his article on liturgy, Chaplain (LTC) Herbert Strange observes the significance of carefully planning worship by stipulating, "the most important aspect of planning worship is the church calendar year. It enables the Protestant community to systematically work through the life of Christ in a liturgical setting...Performing acts of remembrance through the word and sacrament brings the original events back to the present."<sup>78</sup> For the chaplain the sacraments of the church should not be confined to the chapel on Sunday mornings, but extended to the field. Barbara Brown Taylor declares that "no place that is human is too messy for God."<sup>79</sup> This came home to me quite clearly during the Christmas of 1994. My unit had unexpectedly been deployed to Panama as a reactionary force to quell the Cuban riots. We quickly established one of our tents as a chapel and the engineers graciously assisted me in building pews, a cross, and an altar. On Christmas Eve, I scheduled an evening candlelight service which would be conducted around the make-shift camouflage net that served as our Christmas tree. The service was simple, we prayed, heard the Word and prepared for Communion. For a soldier away from home there is no more painful time than the holidays, especially Christmas.

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<sup>78</sup> Herbert Strange, "Liturgics: A Forgotten Art In The Chaplaincy?" *The Military Chaplains Review* (Spring 1992) 43.

<sup>79</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Preaching Life*, 67.

I could see the hurt in their eyes and feel the emptiness of their hearts because I was hurting just as bad. As I lifted the cup to give the blessing I began to cry, then I noticed that these hardened infantry airborne soldiers were crying as well. Suddenly, I realized in that sacred moment that we were being touched by God, that through the sacraments he was visiting us in a special way. For that brief moment we no longer felt so alone, but joined with the body of Christ all over the world, our families, our friends, our loved ones. On Christmas Eve of 1994 in the jungles of Panama I learned that the sacraments are not limited by space or time, but are present wherever God's people gather for worship. When this happens, liturgy is life, the Word becomes flesh in our lives, and the integration that is at the heart of faith itself occurs.<sup>80</sup>

### **Word and Sacrament in Combat**

While serving in the Gulf War, the one thing I quickly learned is that soldiers, without fail, wanted communion at the end of each service. I had the responsibility of providing religious coverage for two air defense artillery battalions, covering a radius of several hundred square miles, so I spent a lot of my time traveling in the desert, going from site to site. At each service, the soldiers were dirty, dusty, smelly, but they came. I shall never forget the feeling of the presence of Christ as I placed the bread into their soiled hands and placed the chalice to their parched lips. The Word and Sacrament was very sacred to them, as sacred as life itself.

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<sup>80</sup> William Willimon, *Integrative Preaching*, 98.

One chaplain who served in Vietnam related a similar experience “There’s something about Communion. They just said the chaplain’s here. All of them came. After the service we served Communion. I blessed the elements and we served them. Each received the elements recalling Christ’s death and resurrection. You just did not have a service in the field without having Communion with it.”<sup>81</sup> Combat ministry involves knowing that each hour has eternal consequences. Especially, in combat the Sacraments are viewed by soldiers as visible signs of God’s presence in their midst. Calvin in his *Institutes* states that “the office of the sacraments is precisely the same as that of the Word of God; which is to present Christ.”<sup>82</sup> The power of God’s visible Word and presence on the battlefield cannot be underestimated. Only God can take simple earthly things like human words, water, bread, and wine, and use them to communicate the transforming hope of the resurrection and bring healing to the soul. This act of worship could very well be a soldier’s last contact with a human being that cares about his or her soul. The following account from Vietnam tellingly illustrates this point: “Chaplain, the birds will be here in ten minutes, but we’ll be ready in five. If you could hold a service in five minutes we want to have one. I would hold the service and give Communion in five minutes. These guys would not get on the choppers until they had Communion. *Always a few would not return.*”(italics mine)<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Testimony given by Chaplain (COL) Roy Mathis.

<sup>82</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 2, trans. John Allen, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1936, bk 4, ch. XIV, p. 593.

<sup>83</sup> A testimony given by Chaplain (COL) Roy Mathis.

## **Conclusion**

Preaching in the military worship setting is as divergent as the congregation that it serves. Whether the chaplain chooses the text from the lectionary, a book of the Bible, a thematic sermon or teaching sermon,-- the requirements of administering the sacraments of the Word are the same in times of peace and war: --dedication, commitment, relevance, preparation, and practice.

## Chapter 4

### Military Funerals and Memorial Ceremonies/Services

It is here where the chaplain will be most visible publicly and receive the closest scrutiny by the chain of command. The chaplain will need to be keenly aware of the special requirements that are dictated by proper military protocol. Honoring the dead in both peacetime and wartime is the very heart and soul of pastoral care ministry. In some cases the failure to perform these observances properly has resulted in what the Army calls a "career killer." There are numerous issues associated with such duties- the grief process, unit cohesiveness, worship service versus ceremony, theological perspectives, and the role of the chaplain. The purpose of this chapter will be to discuss the theological implications and the role of the chaplain as he or she performs pastoral care with a special emphasis on the preparation of the funeral sermon. One of the most difficult duties in the Army chaplaincy is being assigned to Fort Meyer, VA conducting funerals and memorial ceremonies at Arlington National Cemetery. The following chaplain gives his personal account:

During my early months at the cemetery, when I carried a fairly heavy load of funeral assignments, I would have as many as five services per day. Three of those might be interments, requiring only committal services. The other two would begin with funeral services at Fort Meyer's Post Chapel. While still new in this ministry, I stashed away on a shelf under the pulpit a file folder containing a few "tried and true" funeral sermons. Of course I would meet with the deceased next-of-kin before the service, trying to bring some words of comfort and understanding in their time of grief. Even so, the service tended to remain almost standardized and impersonal. Variations were few, nor did they stray far from the material before me.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Thomas M. Warne, "At Arlington Cemetery: The Sermons Came To Life," *The Military Chaplain's Review* (Spring, 1978) 87.

This approach to conducting ministry for Chaplain Warne had taken on the monotony of an assembly line. He began to feel like a doctor who prescribed the same medicine to every patient. Chaplain Warne later recalls that “one day, as if by miraculous intent...the folder of sermons under the pulpit was missing!”<sup>85</sup> To make matters worse, Chaplain Warne discovered that the sermons were missing at the exact moment he was to deliver the message. In the past, Chaplain Warne had perceived the task of preaching as resembling a piece of fabric consisting of two threads weaved together to comprise the sermon the threads of Biblical content and authenticity. However, on this one momentous day, he discovered that a third thread existed the hearer’s input. In that awkward moment, Chaplain Warne learned that his freshest ideas for the sermon were the memories shared with him by the families of the deceased. As he shared that day the deceased families memories, hurts, and the Good News of the gospel, he felt a renewed strength and freedom in his sermons that he had never felt before. No longer were they cookie-cutter sermons designed simply to move families through the production line of life and death. His sermons began to take on a new life and relevance. It goes without saying that the chaplain must first be aware of the grief process. William Willimon in his book, *Worship as Pastoral Care*, cites Arnold Van Gennep who suggests that people who are going through such crises as death go through three rites of passage: separation, transition, and reincorporation.<sup>86</sup> Mourners may move back and forth between various stages for several months, but the funeral service can serve as a beginning of the healing process.

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> William Willimon, *Worship As Pastoral Care*, 102. Also see, Arnold Van Gennep, *Les Rites De Passage* (Paris: Emile Nourry, 1909).

The first step in this healing process is to allow the grieving person to share their feelings openly as a valid and normal responses to death. The chaplain who is sensitive to this can serve as a key figure in encouraging the bereaved to confront death candidly. One way of doing this is to plan the service in such a way as to allow the symbolic acts of worship to serve as affirmations of hope. Willimon suggests that the preacher may want to focus on “the relationship of death to baptism ...because baptism is a reminder of our continuing dependence on God’s love in birth and death.”<sup>87</sup>

It is important for the chaplain to remember that a funeral or memorial service is not only designed for the grieving family, but also for those in the military community who are hurting as well. There is nothing more damaging to a unit’s morale than the death of a fellow soldier and friend. To deny the military community participation in the grief process is to cut off grieving soldiers from their major source of healing. That is why the Army has very clear guidance outlining that “the chaplain shall perform appropriate religious burial services for members of the Army who die in their command...chaplains are responsible for conducting an appropriate memorial ceremony or service as authorized by the commander” (Title 10 U.S.C. 3547, AR 165-1, AR 5-9, TC 16-2). While the religious service is a part of the military funeral, no particular format is prescribed. Chaplains have full freedom in the selection of music and Scripture readings, the sermon text and its content.

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 111.

## **The Military Funeral**

The officiating chaplain usually precedes the remains in procession into the chapel and follows the casket in recession. At the cemetery, a ceremonial guard forms, and the military pallbearers bring the casket to the grave. The chaplain officiating then conducts the graveside service. Upon its completion either a volley of muskets or rifles or a salute of cannons is fired. A bugler plays taps, and the United States flag draping the coffin is then folded and presented by the chaplain or designated officer to the next-of-kin. This presentation completes the ceremony, and the honor guard and pall bearers retire. The military funeral is simple, yet conducted with dignity as an expression of honor. It is here that the chaplain serves as both pastor and staff officer. As a pastor, the chaplain is responsible for the proper religious rites and sacraments. As a staff officer the chaplain serves as a representative of the U.S. Army and the chain of command.

The chaplain who officiates the funeral service should remember that, first and foremost, it is an act of Christian worship. It is impossible to anticipate all the settings in which a military funeral may be held. When changes or slight deviations are necessary, it is vitally important for the chaplain to keep in mind the significance of meeting the emotional and spiritual needs of the mourners. Willimon rightly points out that the purpose of a funeral is the same for any service of Christian worship, to worship God.<sup>88</sup> Thus, the funeral provides an opportunity for the grieving family and military community to focus on God and their relationship to God.

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 114.

What greater comfort can we afford a grieving family than a military funeral that points them to God giving them hope in the midst of despair, comfort in the midst of pain, and compassion in the midst of loss. The primary way of communicating this message is through the funeral sermon.

### **Funeral Sermon**

Robert Hughes in his book, *A Trumpet In Darkness: Preaching to Mourners*, states that “funeral preaching is a process of mutual storytelling. The story of death as told by mourners is retold by the preacher in light of the Christ story. That process begins in the funeral home and continues in the pulpit.”<sup>89</sup> Hughes stipulates that a funeral sermon should have at least two essential objectives: (1) To help the mourners to face the reality of death, (2) To assist the bereaved in the discovering the hope of a new life in Christ that is grounded in the death and resurrection of Jesus.<sup>90</sup> Given the emotional condition of the mourners, the chaplain should keep the sermon brief, ten to fifteen minutes at the most. The funeral message should focus on one single theme, like the crisp movement of a parable. The mood and direction of the sermon needs to be established at the beginning and carried throughout the whole message. If done carefully, the sermon’s focus should be reduced to one sentence.

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<sup>89</sup> Robert G. Hughes, *A Trumpet in Darkness: Preaching to Mourners*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985) 22. This is an excellent book, that would prove most beneficial for any chaplain who is entering active duty. Hughes’ practical guide offers some valuable advice in sermon preparation by offering a model for designing funeral sermons.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

For the listener who is grieving, the result should be a unified sermon dedicated to focusing on God with affirmations of faith. Certainly, the objectives of a sermon will help give it shape, content, and form. Hughes quotes H. Grady Davis who defends the position that each sermon must have its own particular form:

There is a right form for each sermon...A right form can never be imposed on any sermon. If it has to be imposed it is not right. The right form derives from the substance of the message itself, is inseparable from the content, becomes one with the content, and gives a feeling of finality to the sermon.<sup>91</sup>

Given this approach, a funeral sermon's shape and structure will most likely be determined by its content and purpose. Essentially, funeral preaching should always involve the sensitive interweaving of four threads or stories: the deceased, the mourners, the church community, and God. The chaplain should deal with death realistically from a biblical perspective as a reminder to the military community of God's love in Christ Jesus. It is important for the chaplain then to move to the good news of the gospel, shifting from reality to hope and focusing on the Christ story. It is here that the chaplain can provide hopeful images, stories with hopeful endings. The firm assurance of comforting words from the pulpit, combined with a pastor's heart of priestly-listening will go far in assisting the grieving family or unit in their healing process.

Admittedly, the funeral has therapeutic purposes; however, the primary focus is our relationship with God. Whatever is done, the funeral sermon must be scripturally based and should balance a sense of genuine loss with a theme of hope in the resurrection of Christ.

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 78. Also see H. Grady Davis, *Design for Preaching* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958), 9.

The chaplain when preparing the funeral sermon should at least consider these three basic questions: (1) What does death mean for the deceased? (2) What does it mean to the bereaved? (3) What does it mean to the rest of the congregation? It is important to keep in mind that each case will differ in the intensity of grief depending on the circumstances and setting of each situation. For example, the trauma of a young soldier who recently died on a parachute jump leaving behind a wife and two children will be quite different from a retired officer who died from cancer at the age of 85. How the chaplain approaches the funeral sermon will certainly differ in both situations. Robert Hughes provides an excellent outline that weaves the three stories of the deceased, the mourners and God. Given the limited time for preparation, the following outline may prove beneficial for the officiating chaplain:

- A. The Reality of Death and Loss
  - 1. Make contact by telling the story of death.
  - 2. Tell the mourners' stories.
    - a. The chaplain's story.
    - b. The congregation's or unit's story
    - c. The family's story.
- B. Hope: The Good News of the Gospel
  - 1. Focus on the Christ story.
  - 2. Employ theological clues.
  - 3. Images of hope are important clues.
  - 4. Picture hopeful endings.
    - a. The story of the deceased.
    - b. The congregation's or unit's story.
    - c. The chaplain's story.
    - d. The family's story.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Rober G. Hughes, *A Trumpet in Darkness*, 95.

This outline could easily be applied to either the funeral sermon or the memorial service sermon.

### **Memorial Service and Memorial Ceremony**

Equally important, if not more visible and volatile than the funeral, is the memorial service or ceremony. From the outset, it is important to first distinguish the differences in both the memorial service and memorial ceremony. The memorial service is religious in its orientation and attendance is voluntary. The memorial ceremony is a command sponsored program with particular focus on the ceremonial and patriotic aspects. As a command program attendance for all the soldiers may be made mandatory, based on the decision of the commander. Although there may be religious aspects to the ceremony, such as Scripture reading and prayer, the homily is normally replaced by eulogies with particular focus on the military tributes and honors for the deceased. For the chaplain who is either advising the commander or given the task to officiate, it is extremely important that he or she understand the differences as stated above. For the purpose of this discussion I will limit my focus on the preparation and delivery of the memorial service sermon.

### **Memorial Service Sermon**

While the functions of the sermon remains the same for both the memorial and funeral worship services, there are a few differences that need to be noted. First, the immediate family may or may not be in attendance depending on the geographical location of the deceased's home state.

In most cases, the deceased's family will have the funeral service in another location far removed from where the soldier was stationed. In such cases, the commander will immediately direct the chaplain to begin preparations for the memorial service. The chaplain's audience will consist of mostly soldiers and friends from the unit or tenant units located in the same locale.

In addition, the chaplain can expect the chain of command to be in attendance. This may include commanders, staff officers, and senior non-commissioned officers from battalion to division level. This is where the chaplain needs to pay particular attention to the length and delivery of the sermon. Most commanders will not interfere when it comes to the content of the sermon, but the chaplain needs to be sensitive to both the commanders' time and the nature of such proceedings. In other words, the focus of the sermon should be directed at helping the soldiers deal with the death of a loved one and not an opportunity for evangelism. It is certainly permissible for the chaplain to direct the audience's attention to God, but it must be done with warmth, and be firm in the articulation of biblical truths with as natural conversational style as possible. It is here that the officiating chaplain must refrain from moralizing or sermonizing. There is no doubt that insensitive and inappropriate sermonizing has soured more than a few commander's attitudes toward chaplains. On the other hand, a well-planned sermon presented professionally and based on a carefully prepared text has proven to be quite beneficial in assisting in the rebuilding of a unit's morale.

## **Memorial Service or Ceremony In A Combat Environment**

The one thing that the Gulf War taught us is that the battlefields of the future will be highly mobile, fast moving, extremely lethal and capable of 24 hour a day operations. This compression of time, as evidenced by the 100 hour war, is perhaps one of the most dramatic changes in the nature of future battles. Actions previously taking months will be accomplished in weeks, weekly actions will only take days, and daily activity will be compressed into hours. Soldiers in an expanded battle zone will not only find it difficult to give emergency treatment to their wounded but will find it necessary to bury their dead on the battlefield.

In combat the chaplains activity in this area of ministry will increase a hundredfold. During a battle, the chaplains primary ministry is to the wounded and dying. Once hostilities have ceased or there is a lull in the battle, it is vitally important that the chaplain immediately honors the dead by conducting a memorial service or ceremony. The chaplain's presence is crucial for the soldiers' grief process. Such rites of passage will provide the surviving soldiers a way of expressing grief as well as an opportunity to say "good bye" to a friend who died on the battlefield. Some soldiers may even feel the need to acknowledge, recognize, and express their own thanks for having survived without feelings of guilt or remorse. When a memorial service or ceremony is conducted in an area of combat operations, the circumstances and/or ceremony will usually dictate the length and structure of the sermon.

The content of a memorial service sermon will vary depending on each unit's needs and the pastoral relationship of the chaplain to that unit. If time allows it is important for the chaplain to spend some time with the soldiers helping them to process their feelings.

The time spent with the soldiers will also provide a valuable resource for sermon preparation. It is amazing how combat soldiers will open up at such depths after only one or two discussions. In combat, troops will provide all the material that a chaplain will need in preparing the content of the memorial message. One chaplain from Vietnam described the importance of the memorial service in the following manner:

In combat many of us survived emotionally because of our relationship to God. Even memorials, as bad as that sounds, were beautiful experiences where we sensed God's presence in a special way. We came together because one of our friends died. It was one of the few times in which you could shed tears and still be a man. It's hard for a soldier to shed tears. Memorial services were important because you had time to really be people for a while. Everybody came. Everyone participated. When we had memorial services in Vietnam we didn't make a distinction between a military exercise or a religious service...I simply preached life in Christ. I preached strongly about his present reality.<sup>93</sup>

Routinely, the memorial services in combat will be brief and simple. The order of service will include: an invocation, scripture reading, message, prayer, silent tribute, and benediction. The sermon will consist of a single theme, much like a funeral sermon, but shorter in length. The sermon may focus on what the soldiers are thinking and feeling, their loss, their emptiness, their guilt, and their anger. Like any worship service the focus would always point to God and how only God can alone meet the soldiers need. In combat, many soldiers who would normally shy away from religious events, will be strangely drawn to a sudden search for God.

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<sup>93</sup> A testimony by a chaplain who served in Vietnam who wishes to remain anonymous.

When soldiers' spiritual resources are tested in the chaos and brutality of war, the chaplain needs to be there as a constant reminder that God is in their midst to sustain them. The memorial service is one way to help facilitate the soldiers' search for meaning and significance by understanding God's presence in both life and death. As a chaplain I have been deeply moved by the sight of hardened airborne infantry soldiers crying openly expressing their devotion for each other as soldiers and friends. As in any act of worship, actions are often more important than words. This is especially true for the chaplain who has the difficult task of conducting a military funeral or memorial service. In many cases the chaplain who is officiating will have less than 24 hours to make the proper arrangements to visit the family and prepare a sermon. Both require delicate planning, preparation, and attention to detail. Whether in times of peace or war, the manner in which the service is conducted will either impede or facilitate the healing process of those to whom the service is directed. Therefore, it is crucial that the chaplain be aggressively involved in the planning and directing of such rites, insuring that each element of the service is both sacramental and patriotic in nature. The funeral or memorial sermon that is carefully planned and biblically based will go far in assisting the bereaved of military loved ones in a time of death and great loss.

### **Conclusion: Pastors In Uniform**

It's tough to be a pastor in somebody else's territory where the secular and sacred merge. But, every day hundreds of chaplains across the Army provide pastoral care in decidedly the strangest places imaginable dusty deserts, muddy fields, helicopter pads, flight lines, mountain-tops, jungles, war zones, cell-blocks, hospital emergency rooms, chapels, foxholes, bunkers, and drop zones. While the functions of preaching remain the same, the situation and setting are quite often unique. But amid the ever fluid changes and mobility, the Word is proclaimed in the midst of the marketplace of military life. The Word is preached under canopies of camouflage, in a chapels made of canvas or with stained glass windows, in chapels lined with the memorials of past wars, forever memorializing the soldiers that fought and died for their country. In my office is a picture that follows me from assignment to assignment. It depicts a soldier kneeling and praying using his weapon as support for a weary body. This picture is very special to me, because it is a constant reminder of why I serve as an Army chaplain. It reminds me that my reason for being is for the express purpose of ministering to the soldier and their families. To proclaim the gospel as pastor, priest, and prophet. As a chaplain, the temptation is always there, amidst the pressures of promotion and advancement, to lose sight of who and what we are about! As chaplains we are, first and foremost, "pastors in uniform." The most important aspect of our ministry as pastors is to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ in both Word and Sacrament. If chaplains are to continue in the proud tradition of serving our nation, the art of preaching must never be relegated to second place status.

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