Representing the Moral Warrior:
The Just War Tradition, Military Chaplains, and Moral Leadership[1]

By Daniel M. Bell Jr.

"What the bad man cannot be is a good sailor, or soldier, or airman."[2]

– General Sir John Winthrop Hackett

The just war tradition is a rich resource in the Christian tradition and beyond, from which military chaplains can draw while living out their callings to care for the souls of those in their charge. In contrast with something approximating a fixed doctrine, however, the just war tradition admits of significant variation both historically and practically. In what follows I introduce the practice of just war as an instantiation of a virtue or character ethic and then discuss the implications of this way of conceiving just war for the moral leadership of military chaplains.

While space constraints preclude a robust defense of this way of laying out my argument, briefly stated, my rationale is that a virtue or character ethic best correlates with both Christian living, my own tradition, and the profession of arms. Regarding the latter, Karl Marlantes writes:

> The warrior operates in extreme zones. The more removed a situation like combat gets from everyday life, the less applicable the guidelines get. This is why we must rely so much on character rather than rules when discussing and experiencing extreme situations like war . . . When we meet the next test, we can meet it only with the character we have at the time.[3]

Indeed, although it is not widely recognized within the U.S. military, that institution carries within itself the nascent practice of and potential for a robust virtue ethic. Accordingly, a just war ethic understood in terms of virtue and character is fitting.

I discuss the implications of a virtue-based just war ethic for the exercise of moral leadership for military chaplains. In doing so, I draw upon not only scholarly research but also experience working with the military and with chaplains on just war and ethics – through the military's advanced civilian education program, the Command and General Staff College (where I worked with both Soldiers and instructors on these matters), several denominations judicatories overseeing chaplains, and as a seminary professor for almost twenty years.

Two Visions of Just War

I briefly contrast a virtue or character ethic understanding of just war with a conventional understanding, which I call a "check list" approach.

The conventional understanding of just war is as a kind of public policy check list. It is very much in line with a dominant approach to morality, which is rule centered. Ethics is about knowing the rules and then summoning the will power to obey them. Just war becomes a check list of rules that anyone can use on the eve of war. Character does not matter in this approach. You can be a scoundrel, one with little interest in justice and who has never cared about your neighbor, and yet if you can check off the criteria, you can claim the mantle of a just warrior. Laying this claim requires no training, no formation. What it requires is simply compliance – only memorization and the willpower to obey.

The alternative vision that I want to highlight is just war as an instantiation of character, as an expression of the character of a people. Specifically, it is the extension of the character / virtues that mark the everyday life of a people before, during, and after war. Unjust persons cannot wage just wars. Not because they cannot memorize a check list but because they lack the well-formed judgment and the character to embody and sustain the virtues that the criteria presuppose and point toward. The alternative vision I endorse of just war is one that recognizes how a person is not likely to sustain justice, prudence, honor, courage (physical and moral) in the moral pressure cooker that is war if one has not learned to embody such virtues in one's daily life prior to entering the field of battle.

Leading Moral Warriors

These two visions correspond to two very different ways of conceiving and enacting moral leadership. In what follows, I consider the implications of a virtue-based just war ethic in terms of three challenges / opportunities military chaplains face in exercising moral leadership.

TEACH JUST WAR

For just war to serve as a resource, it needs to be known. Just war needs to be taught systematically and consistently to both Soldiers and chaplains.[4]

When just war is taught, it is frequently resisted and rejected. The value or importance of the tradition is not appreciated. For chaplains to exercise moral leadership they need to not only teach just war but help Soldier's find its value, help Soldiers embrace their identity as moral warriors.

While working with instructors charged with teaching ethics to officers, I was regularly told that just war was irrelevant and that it was ignored in their lessons. The reasoning behind this judgment came through in the comments officers and instructors made regarding just war. For example, one instructor became very agitated when he discerned that if evaluated by the just war tradition, the Indian Wars, Sherman's total war tactics, and World War II were not just. After reaching this conclusion, he dismissed the just war tradition, proclaiming that it was absurd that those wars might not be regarded as moral and just. Another insisted that the Army's doctrinally-stated mission, "Win the nation's wars," did not include any moral caveats. Instructors and chaplains have told me that just war

was irrelevant and so unnecessary because Soldiers were either resigned to being murderers or are okay with killing. Another theme concerned the force protection imperative. Soldiers insisted that pragmatic concerns for Soldier safety trumped ethics. My final example is related to what Robert Jay Lifton calls "doubling," and others have called "fragmentation."[5] That is, how some Soldiers divide their moral selves into distinct personae operating in different realms with disparate moral codes, e.g., being in uniform or out of uniform, in garrison or down range, or the disavowal of moral agency expressed in the sentiment "I was just following orders."[6]

Addressing this resistance and rejection is where the difference made by conceiving of just war as an expression of character instead of as a check list emerges most clearly. The deontological, check list approach largely conceives leadership in terms of reiterating the rules, summoning the willpower for compliance, and perhaps incentivizing such compliance through sanctions. It gives little thought to and certainly does not expect Soldiers to ask why they should comply. Here are the rules: obey. To which Soldiers should respond, "Ours is not to reason why."

In contrast, just war conceived as an expression of character recognizes that obedience and will power are not sufficient. What is desired is not mere compliance but commitment to and the internalization of the values / virtues the tradition embodies and expresses. Waging war in accord with moral parameters is not just something one is ordered to do; it is an expression of who one is, of who one aspires to be as a U.S. Soldier and citizen.

Much more ought to be said about those virtues and their formation, more than the allotted space permits.[7] Let it suffice for the moment to say a word about moving from compliance to commitment – a key shift in moving from a deontological to a character ethic.

Commitment is nurtured in many ways, starting with teaching not only "what" but "why." Understanding why something is done the way it is done – why it is valued – is a crucial component in nurturing the internalization of a moral vision.

The litany of objections to just war (and ethics) identified previously make it clear that many Soldiers (including chaplains) do not appreciate the "why," the value of just war commitments, of which there are many, from the pragmatic to matters of character and identity. For example, many fail to recognize the strategic value of just war / ethics in winning hearts and minds – whether that is a matter of maintaining domestic support or reducing grievances that feed insurgency. Many do not recognize the importance of just war / ethics in preserving hearts and minds, that is, in potentially avoiding moral injury. Moral Soldiers, just warriors, need not see themselves as murders.

Likewise, many Soldiers have a superficial understanding of their mission (one with no moral caveats) and do not see that their calling as professionals (as opposed to mere experts or even public mercenaries) is to the ethical application of force. U.S. Soldiers are called to be moral warriors. Just war and ethics more generally are an instantiation of our identity.

The "why" that is military and national character sheds light on the importance of countering the aforementioned doubling of the self, captured so well in the canard that good garrison Soldiers do not make good combat Soldiers and vice versa. At the heart of character is the Army value of integrity. Integrity is about embodying one's moral commitments consistently within and across the various and diverse roles one inhabits in life. As Alasdair MacIntyre describes it, "To have integrity is to refuse to be . . . one kind of person in one social context, while quite another in other contexts. It is to have set inflexible limits to one's adaptability to the roles that one may be called upon to play."[8] Integrity means maintaining one's moral commitments with the passing of time, in the face of changing situations and circumstances. Integrity – staying true to who they are – is why moral warriors fight the way they do.

OWN MORAL LEADERSHIP

The second challenge concerns chaplains' identity, specifically, owning and asserting chaplains' proper identity as moral leaders.

The challenge here is what I will call, as a catch-all, "ineffective chaplains."[9] It encompasses many things that can be summed up in what William Mahedy calls "chaplain bullshit."[10] It involves chaplains who are more focused on fighting the culture wars than exercising a moral leadership role. Chaplain BS involves chaplains whose first devotion is to their careers and advancement and/or to the role of cheerleader / morale booster / force multiplier. It involves chaplains who lack moral courage – such as the chaplain serving at a military academy who told me he would never pray for enemies in the chapel for fear of backlash. It involves chaplains who so want to "fit in" that they unwittingly compromise their role as chaplain – be it by taking up arms or proffering alcohol and dirty jokes, etc.[11]

Chaplain BS is an indication of a host of issues around chaplain identity. I wish to focus on chaplains owning and asserting their proper identity as moral leaders. Neither chaplains as caretakers of souls (only) nor chaplains as morale boosters / force multipliers is an adequate vision of the calling of chaplaincy, at least from my perspective as a Christian.

Chaplains as moral leaders should tend to souls, and they should encourage persons to persevere in the good. Indeed, good moral leadership requires both soul-care and morale-care. The problem is when these two important tasks are divorced from moral leadership /guidance and so become morally indifferent (souls only) or morally corrupt (hitched to morally unexamined or questionable ends).

Now, obviously, in the face of the aforementioned obstacles reminding Soldiers of the moral foundations of military service and advocating on behalf of moral warriors will require moral courage. Indeed, it may require

significant sacrifice and cost. Ultimately, full moral leadership might require revisiting how chaplains are embedded in the military. It might require an independent chaplaincy, which would ask chaplains to sacrifice the cultural capital that accrues military rank and service.

REPRESENT THE MORAL WARRIOR

The third opportunity in many ways brings the aforementioned challenges / opportunities together insofar as it concerns embracing a different moral vision and practice of moral leadership. Chaplains should represent the moral warrior.

This involves leaving behind a flawed moral vision and concomitant practice of moral leadership. There are three facets to this: a general moral culture, an ethical decision-making model, and a lived focus. Regarding the general moral culture, the military shares a moral ethos with wider modern Western culture, namely, a broadly deontological ethos where ethics are conceived in terms of obligations in the form of rules and principles. Ethics is a matter of information / rules / principles and compliance through willpower. Accordingly, moral leadership becomes largely a matter of promulgating the rules and encouraging / enforcing compliance.

The second facet is that of the dominant ethical decision-making model, and it is fascinating in part for how it undercuts the deontological character of the general ethos. This is the ethical triangle whereby Soldiers are encouraged to run moral decisions through a simplistic three-fold calculus of virtue, rules, and outcomes.[12] While this EDMM is reductionistic to the point of being a caricature, having seen it being

taught and "applied," it is difficult not to conclude that the point of this model is to develop feasible justifications for circumventing moral strictures.

The second facet leads nicely to the third, which is the "on the ground" lived ethic. The mission focus, along with the force protection imperative as a kind of moral sidecar, renders the functioning military ethic basically consequentialist. As Timothy Challans puts it, the warrior ethos is really about a special kind of work ethic, one that centers on mission accomplishment . . . not on moral restraints and law-abidingness."[13] It is a work ethic that can be summed up as "maximize military proficiency."[14]

Chaplains embracing and leading in the formation of just warriors, of warriors who own their moral commitments as an expression of the character of the military and the nation, means leading beyond fostering mere compliance with rules, beyond the sloganeering that drives a work ethic in service to consequentialism. Chaplains can lead by representing the moral warrior.

What I mean can be clarified by way of contrast. Modern deontological and consequentialist visions amount to ethics without representation, that is, they focus on the memorization of and willed compliance with rules or formulas (be it the greatest good for the greatest number or an ethical triangle). Beyond information and will-power, they require little. No wonder ethics training is conceived primarily in terms of PowerPoints and classes.

In contrast, a virtue or character ethic is primarily about representation. It is about modeling, exemplifying, displaying 24/7 the character that Soldiers as moral warriors should inhabit as Soldiers

and citizens. This is to say, moral leadership is first and foremost about living out the virtues.

In this regard, consider how the military uses stories and traditions to nurture the warrior ethos. The military excels at passing on traditions and stories of physical courage. From the visual imagery to the songs and cadences to the stories interspersed in training exercises, Soldiers are immersed in a world filled with models and reminders of forward-leaning, hard-charging physical courage. Chaplains could lead in representing that same physical courage rightly ordered by moral courage.[15] Chaplains could lead in seeing to it that stories, examples, models of moral warriors are interspersed and integrated into training the same way as the stories of physical valor.

And I do mean lead, not just advocate.[16] Chaplains' proximity / access to Soldiers becomes an opening for developing and displaying the commitment (relationships of care), the character and the competence that elicit the trust that enables the strongest leadership. Put a little differently, chaplains may lack command authority, but they may inspire. Especially today, with a postmodern generation that has a diminished respect for positional authority, inspiration is more powerful than positional authority for nurturing commitment and ownership of a moral vision.

Chaplains may not (always) have a voice, they may not (always) have a say in decisions, but they can always represent. Clergy often speak of exercising a ministry of "presence" in situations where words may not avail. Military chaplains may exercise a kind of moral leadership by presence, if their presence – their character – represents the moral traditions that sustain moral warriors.

Put in terms of conventional leadership theory and practice, chaplains are particularly well-situated to exercise leadership "from the middle." Indeed, they are prime candidates to exercise morally courageous followership.[17] This is the case not only because of their unique position in relation to Soldiers and Commanders but also because leadership from the middle / courageous followership is fundamentally about character, about embodying virtues, about representation.

By way of example, allow me to recall Martin of Tours, a figure who looms large in the history of military chaplaincy. When called out on account of his faith, Martin of Tours demanded that he be placed at the front lines of battle, unarmed. As such, he is a paragon of physical and moral courage. Chaplains, unarmed in the midst of battle, represent that same virtue – physical and moral courage – which every Soldier who aspires to be moral warrior would do well to emulate.

Conclusion

This essay began with an epigram about bad men not being good Soldiers. Unfortunately, it is not true. At least, it is not an apodictic truth. Whether it is true or not depends on the moral vision, or lack thereof, that animates a people and its military. By doctrine, by the best that we as Americans say about ourselves, by the best to which we aspire and achieve, US Soldiers are not mere experts. They are not public mercenaries. They are professionals bound by a moral vision; they are moral warriors.

Chaplains can steward this moral foundation and lead in moral formation – inspiring commitment, ownership, embodiment of the virtues that constitute the character of a moral warrior. And they can do this by drawing on the wisdom of religious traditions, especially where that wisdom intersects with the moral foundations of the military, as it does in the case of the just war tradition.

Admittedly, this stewardship and this leadership are not easy because they are not unconstrained. Leadership from the middle is never easy. To exercise these opportunities – to represent virtue in garrison and down range – requires physical and moral courage. It requires selfless service and sacrifice. Yet chaplains should not be alone in shouldering these challenges and reaching for these opportunities. Chaplains and civilians both have roles to play. Indeed, chaplains need their religious communities for the formation and support to carry out their calling, their mission, and religious communities need chaplains for the same reasons. Only working together, in a shared mission, can we make Hackett's claim a reality.[18]

Daniel M. Bell Jr. is an ordained United Methodist and professor theology and ethics who teaches at The Ecumenical Institute of St Mary's University in Baltimore, MD. For almost two decades he taught at the Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary in Columbia, SC and for several years served as The Gen. Hugh Shelton Distinguished Visiting Professor of Ethics, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Ft Leavenworth, KS. He is author of *Liberation Theology After the End of History* (2001), *Just War as Christian Discipleship* (2009), *Economy of Desire: Christianity and Capitalism in a Postmodern World* (2012), and *Divinations: Theopolitics in an Age of Terror* (2017).

NOTES

1 An expanded version of this paper was first presented in a scholarly working group as part of the The Care of Souls, The Ethics of War, and the Wisdom of Sacred Communities Conference, Duke University, Durham, NC, November 2022.

2 John Winthrop Hackett, "The Military in the Service of the State," USAF Harmon Memorial Lecture #13 (1970), https://www.usafa.edu/app/uploads/Harmon13.pdf.

3 Karl Marlantes, *What It Is Like to Go To War* (New York: Atlantic Monthly, 2011), 60, 107. See also Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995).

4 This teaching must be pervasive, iterative, developmental, at echelon, for both enlisted and officer. Teach it at enlisted basic training (there is a chaplain at every basic training battalion) and teach it at all levels of enlisted Professional Military Education and Sergeants Major Academy. Chaplains should teach it at all Basic Officer Leadership Courses and all branches' Captain's Career Courses. But it must be required at Intermediate Level Education, the Army War College, and especially at Capstone for General Officers – in short, across all Professional Military Education.

5 See Robert J. Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (NY: Basic, 1986), 418ff. Paul Berghaus and Nathan Cartagena use the language of fragmentation in their "Developing Good Soldiers: The Problem with Fragmentation within the Army," *Journal of Military Ethics* 12.4 (2013): 287-303.

6 An insightful treatment on the issue of obeying orders from a virtue/character perspective is offered by Mark Osiel, *Obeying Orders: Atrocity, Military Discipline and the Law of War* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2002).

7 My book, *Just War as Christian Discipleship: Recentering the Tradition in the Church rather than the State* (Brazos, 2009) treats just war from a virtue / character ethic perspective. See also my Ekklesia Project pamphlet "Just War as Christian Discipleship," https://www.ekklesiaproject.org/pamphlets/just-war-as-christian-discipleship.

8 Alasdair MacIntyre, "Social Structures and their Threats to Moral Agency," *Philosophy* 74.289 (1999): 317.

9 This is not necessarily or primarily an indictment of individual chaplains. It has much to do with the failures of churches and perhaps with the way military chaplaincy itself is structured.

10 William Mahedy, *Out of the Night, the Spiritual Journey of Vietnam Vets* (Knoxville, TN: Greyhound, 2005 [1986]), 145ff. Mahedy focuses on chaplains who refused to see and speak the truth, who were blind to the sin involved in war, who were wrapped up in civil religion.

11 I am not suggesting that chaplains cannot and should not fit in. The question is *how* to do that in manner that maintains one's integrity as a chaplain.

12 See Department of the Army, *Army Leadership and the Profession (ADP 6-22)* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2019), 3-38, 4-41.

13 Timothy Challans, *Awakening Warrior: Revolution in the Ethics of Warfare* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 11. Roger Wertheimer summarizes this work ethic in terms of "maximizing military proficiency" in "The Morality of Military Education" in *Empowering our Military Conscience: Transforming Just War Theory and Military Moral Education*, ed. Roger Werthheimer (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 159ff.

14 Wertheimer, "Military Education," 167ff.

15 Physical courage not ordered by moral courage is not a virtue but a vice, a *simulacra* perhaps better called rashness or viciousness. More charitably, one might recognize it as a kind of defective courage.

16 By advocacy, I mean talking about and exhorting others to act morally. By leadership, I mean inspiring people to commit to something and act accordingly.

17 See, for example, Ira Chaleff, *The Courageous Follower: Standing Up to and for Our Leaders* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2009).

18 Thanks to Larry Dabeck for (years of) insight and advice on these matters as well as John Jensen for comments on a draft of this essay. I am grateful, as well, for Adam Tietje's insightful assistance in revising this essay for publication.

Legal Religion: Judicial Discourse and the Historical Underpinnings of the First Amendment

By Chaplain (Major) Patrick G. Stefan

The First Amendment of the American Constitution protects only those practices that are religious in nature; however, it nowhere defines what makes a practice religious. That question is left up to the courts. And because the United States was founded on the inalienable right of religious practice, the definition of religion is an academic exercise with significant impact on lived reality. The definition of religion determines how people within the American political sphere can or cannot act when their religious practice bumps up against laws of general applicability. American religious practice is intimately connected with religion in definition. In this article, I contend that how legal agencies define religion largely determines how individuals governed by those agencies practice religion.

The lack of a Constitutional definition of religion creates a seemingly never-ending dilemma for legal agencies: a practice must be religious to be Constitutionally protected, yet by defining what makes a practice religious the government steps into what scholars call the establishment trap because the demarcation of boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable religion is an exercise in the establishment of orthodoxy.[1] That is, once legally acceptable religion is defined, unacceptable religion is also defined. This dilemma is referred to in the study of religion as the impossibility of religious freedom: religion must be defined to be protected, but in defining religion it is also established. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Supreme Court dabbled in attempts to define without establishing, only to give up in 1973, leaving the remaining rulings in place.[2]

The assumption model is generally sufficient for everyday life – we know religion when we see it. Cases that challenge the assumption model often arise in the Army through the religious accommodation process. Commanders and lawyers must determine whether a practice is religious to warrant the approval of accommodation. I argue that a belief in a transcendent reality should be a requirement for a belief or practice to be considered religious.[3] I propose two different lenses for defining religion in the American context: a legal perspective of religion and a theoretical perspective of religion. These lenses are distinct but may overlap. Legal religion is protectable based on the precedent of case-law interpretations of the First Amendment of the Constitution. Theoretical religion is studied in the academy, especially in religion, anthropology, and sociology departments. All legal religion can also be observed through the theoretical lens, but not all theoretical religion qualifies as legal.[4]

The purpose of drawing this distinction between theoretical study and legal clarity is to understand what the First Amendment protects. To that end, a basic historical understanding of theoretical religion is important. The academic study of religion is a product of the Protestant Reformation, which in turn shaped the emergence of the categories of world religions in the context of the early twentieth century German Protestant universities.[5] This history provides the backdrop for the purpose and meaning of the First Amendment.

My distinction between theoretical religion and legal religion emerges from the lines drawn in the majority opinion *Kennedy v. Bremerton School District*, 2022.[6] In Justice Neil Gorsuch's majority opinion, the Court's reliance on *Lemon v. Kurtzman* 403 U.S. 602 (1971) was based on an "ahistorical [and] atextual" approach to discerning Establishment Clause violations. Instead, in the words of *Kennedy v. Bremerton*, the "Court has instructed that the Establishment Clause must be interpreted by 'reference to historical practices and understandings.'"[7] The legal precedent set by the most recent Supreme Court reading of the First Amendment requires attention be given to the historical question of what the Framers were seeking to protect. Given the reality that the Establishment Clause and Free Exercise Clause exist in the same amendment, it stands to reason that just as the former requires a reference to

historical understandings, so too does the latter. To de-historicize the Free Exercise Clause in adjudicating matters of religious freedom is to act contrary to the current Supreme Court's logic.[8]

I suggest that a robust understanding of legal religion allows agencies broadly, and the Army specifically, to adjudicate on the protection of religious freedom in keeping with the most recent Supreme Court ruling in *Kennedy v. Bremerton School District*. I draw on the critique of religion's genealogy to show that the First Amendment's "historical practices and understandings" necessarily contain two elements for legal religion: belief and transcendence. I argue that like the Establishment Clause, what is legally protectable as a religious practice (contra a mere philosophical idea) under the Free Exercise Clause can also be "interpreted by 'reference to historical practices and understandings.'"[9]

What is Religion?

Religion has certain characteristics that distinguish it from philosophy, for example, ritual, architecture, or music. But must a religion have all these characteristics to be called religion or just some of them? And if it needs only some: which ones are vital, and which are expendable? These types of questions permeate the study and classification of religion in an endless stream of monographs, articles, and books.[10] Scholars identify a given phenomenon in the world and decide whether it is religious, often going down rabbit-trails of post-transcendent religion, civil religion, and many others. Some even discard the word religion altogether.[11] Meanwhile, as scholars contest the viability of religion as a category worth keeping, the average churchgoer, lawyer, or politician joins along with Justice Potter Stewart's statement about pornography: I know it

when I see it. There is a significant gap in legal definitions of religion. The First Amendment, as it concerns religious protection, protects only religious beliefs and practices; however, it nowhere defines what makes something religious, it merely assumes it. My aim is to attempt to fill that gap by drawing on the insight of the majority opinion of *Kennedy v. Bremerton School District* (2022).

Benson Saler's work on classifying religion is helpful for understanding how "historical practices and understandings" might be understood and interpreted today. Saler sharpens Ludwig Wittgenstein's account of family resemblances with prototype theory. Wittgenstein suggests that certain social phenomena can be compared based on family resemblances, i.e., one or more feature in common. From this, we can begin to construct the family of religion. The family of religion would quickly become too broad to be useful. Saler builds on this to suggest that there are better and worse exemplars of the family. For example, in studying the family of fruit one might say that apples or oranges are better examples than corn kernels, and thus deem them prototypes. Saler contends that religion should be conceptualized in graded form "on the model of 'tall person' or 'rich person.'"[12] Building on Saler, I suggest that the definition of legal religion must consider the Western construction of the category of religion as a prototype because of the legal precedent set by *Kennedy v. Bremerton* and its continued relevance considering the makeup of the Court. I am not proposing that religion entails transcendence or belief in the context of religious theory and study. Instead, I suggest that this prototype both informed the work of the Framers and might also guide government agencies as they craft policy.[13]

For a matter to be protected under the Free Exercise Clause, an individual must demonstrate that their religious practice is (1) sincere, (2) being burdened, and (3) religious in nature.[14] My focus is on the last requirement: a matter only warrants protection under the Free Exercise Clause—and by extension, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA)—if that matter is religious. The Framers considered a clause protecting matters of conscience (as distinct from religion) but ultimately decided against it. For the Framers, practices stemming from religious expression are protected in a way that those stemming from conscience are not.[15] The deliberate decision to not protect matters of conscience informs my historical inquiry to identify the characteristics of the Framers' prototype of religion and why it deserved protection in the first place.

Where did Religion Come From?

The concept of religion that was operative in the drafting of the First Amendment was one that was informed by the Protestant Reformation. What the Framers sought to protect was something that generally looked like Protestantism. But why did the Framers choose to protect religion at all? And why did they choose to protect religion, but not other matters of conscience? The history of the development of religion as a category in connection with the rise of the modern nation-state suggests that the protection of religion was intertwined with a political purpose.[16] The modern Western category of religion grew up in a dichotomized house of two kingdoms: church and state, or the religious and the secular.[17] The former is run by God and the latter is run by the government (made up of the people).

The religious wars of post-Reformation Europe demonstrated to the Framers the dangers to a society when religion and state authority come into conflict. For this reason, the Constitution prohibits either establishing a religion (for that is only the business of God who is outside the state) or limiting the free exercise of religion (for those beliefs and laws come from God, not people). Indeed, the very existence of the problem of free exercise assumes a contestation of authority: the state directs one thing, and God (or a power parallel to that filled by the traditional God) directs a contrasting thing. When two laws bump up against each other, the Framers made clear that the laws that transcend the state will win because they exist from an entity outside of and beyond the state's control.[18] Eduardo Penalver suggests that "the Framers probably never considered the issue of defining religion for the First Amendment at all, because they thought the everyday meaning of the term was clear . . . [theism and religion] were, for the Framers, one and the same thing."[19]

Given the expansion of the idea of religion since the drafting of the Constitution, the courts have helpfully clarified that a particular theistic belief is not necessary for something to be classified as religion for the purpose of First Amendment protections.[20] However, they have also noted that for something to be a sincere religious belief, it must occupy a space in the person's life "parallel to that filled by the God of those admittedly qualifying for the exemption."[21] In fact, this statement by the Supreme Court is the last time the Court sought to define what makes a belief religious, and therefore protected under the First Amendment. For reasons unknown (one can speculate that it is due to the

very challenges already experienced in defining religion), from 1973 until the present the Supreme Court has assumed a matter of religion is religious in its First Amendment cases.

Importantly, the RFRA does not seek to define religion either, it also assumes it. In *Employment Division v. Smith*, Justice Antonin Scalia declared that in those instances when the dictates of one's religion (outside of the state) conflict with the laws of general applicability for the state, the dictates of one's religion does not transcend the state's power.[22] In a remarkably bipartisan demonstration of disapproval with the passage of the RFRA, lawmakers made clear that the only time religious dictates do not transcend the state's power are when there is a clear and compelling interest for the government, and even then, it must limit the religious dictate in the least restrictive means to further that compelling government interest. For a matter to fall under the RFRA's scope and definition it must first pass the test of being qualified for First Amendment protections as a religious matter. Once it passes that test, it can fall under the scope of the RFRA and all that needs to be decided by adjudicating authorities is whether there is a burden and if so, is there a compelling government interest, and if so, is the least restrictive means necessary being applied.

I am not arguing that the historical understanding of religion for the Framers in drafting the First Amendment was Protestant-centric (though it was)

therefore only those religions that look in essence like Protestantism warrant protection. Instead, I am saying that based on the Protestant-centric backdrop of the First Amendment, the Framers intended to protect those practices, beliefs, and dictates that stem from a system that transcends, or stands outside of the state. Understanding this historical background should help identify the elements of the prototype of religion to limit what constitutes legal religion. An individual or group cannot simply attach the label religion onto a belief or practice. Instead, for a practice to be religious an individual needs to demonstrate that it stems from a system of belief that finds its source in something that transcends the state. Allowing beliefs and practices that do not transcend the state into the world of religious liberty risks undermining the basic social compact that is required for an organized group of people to function properly.

For the Framers, religious liberty relieves pressure when the dictates of one's religious conviction conflict with the state. The Framers created a path out of conflict. This is just as true in the Army. A Soldier's religious practice is accommodated when they believe that their religious dictates conflict with Army policy. For Soldiers stuck in a moral dilemma between religious requirements and Army authority and policy, commanders can provide a way out of this dilemma through religious accommodation. But when the dictates of one's mere conscience conflict with

the state, the allowance of divergence undermines the harmony necessary for society to function because it makes the individual more authoritative than the state.

Conclusion

From a theory of religion perspective, questions of whether non-transcendent systems and groups qualify as a religion or not, and what their system does to shape cultural understandings of religion can be endlessly examined. However, I argue that the legal definition of religion should be grounded in a family resemblance analysis by introducing a prototype. That prototype should be the one used to frame the First Amendment. It is a well-recognized point in scholarship that the prototype of religion for the Framers was a general idea of Protestant Christianity. The Framers rightly emphasized the importance of protecting the free exercise of religion. In those instances when the dictates of God conflict with those of the state, the state allows the individual to defer to God. A philosophical idea or practice, if not sourced from an entity that transcends the state does not qualify for the same protection. Philosophical ideas and matters of conscience arising from a group or individual member of the state must by necessity defer to the state. But when those dictates or practices come from a source that transcends the state's authority the Framers built in a safety valve to prevent a replication of the religious wars in Europe.

Chaplain (Major) Patrick G. Stefan serves as the Government Affairs and Policy Officer for the Office of the Chief of Chaplains. He holds a PhD from the University of Denver in the Study of Religion with research focusing on continental philosophy and material religion.

1 See Winnifred Sullivan, *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

2 See esp. Torcaso v. Watkins (1960); U.S. v. Seeger (1965); and Wisconsin v. Yoder (1972).

3 This point is made clear in U.S. v. Seeger (1965) where the Court is wrestling with the validity of a conscientious objector's request that does not include belief in the traditional type of God. The Court, in deciding that a belief that comes from a source outside the person that is sincere and "fills the same place as a belief in God in the life of an orthodox religionist, is entitled to exemption," also assumes a relationship between "an avowedly irreligious person or as an atheist."

4 As a disclaimer, I am not speaking from an authoritative legal position. Instead, this article follows the direction of theoretical academic discourse.

5 I acknowledge that the use of the general term "Protestant" flattens a very diverse and complex period of history and that not all Protestant movements thought similarly. However, the general observations of Protestantism that I rely on throughout this article are those that became dominant throughout Europe and the creation of the modern nation-state. My understanding of the relationship between Protestantism and American understanding of religion is heavily dependent on the work of Tamoko Masuzawa in *The Invention of World Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

6 Kennedy v. Bremerton School District is an Establishment Clause case that considers a school employee's public prayers after a sporting event. The school district understood the employee's actions as a violation of the Establishment Clause. The Supreme Court disagreed. In the majority opinion, the Court rejects the use of the "Lemon Test" which was commonly employed to determine Establishment Clause violations. The Lemon Test was a three-part test developed in 1971 following *Lemon v. Kurtzman*. For a law to comply with the Establishment Clause it must have (1) a secular purpose; (2) a predominantly secular effect; and (3) not foster excessive entanglement with the government and religion.

7 In this case, the Court returns to a historical reading of religion in adjudicating Establishment Clause issues, provides "objectivity and predictability to [religious] analysis," and effectively kills the Lemon test. See Daniel L. Chen, "*Kennedy v. Bremerton School District*:

The Final Demise of *Lemon* and the Future of the Establishment Clause," *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy* 21 (2022).

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12 Saler, *Conceptualizing Religion*, xiii.

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Force Management and Organizational Capability in Joint Base Religious Support

By Master Sergeant Eric Tysinger

"Humans are more important than hardware."

– SOF Truth #1

When the 11th Airborne Division re-activated on June 6, 2022, at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson (JBER), it became the Army's only division headquarters without an Army-led garrison for support. Having experienced ten Soldier suicides on JBER alone between 2020-2021 and wrestled for twenty-five years with organizational identity and mission, the decision to resurrect the 11th Airborne Division was a strategy to inject unit cohesion and purpose into the U.S. Army in Alaska.[1] Tragically, members of the U.S. Army Chaplain Corps assigned to the garrison on JBER responsible for addressing identity and purpose through spiritual readiness remain isolated from their fellow Soldiers due to joint base command relationships (COMREL). These Army Chaplains and Religious Affairs Specialists bear an Air Force identity and mission, constraining them from providing religious support and spiritual readiness aligned with the Army Senior Command. The COMREL dichotomy between the operating and generating force on joint bases creates misalignment with the Senior Commander's intent and impairs spiritual readiness task and purpose. The Army Chaplain Corps must align its garrison assets under the Army Senior Commander on joint bases to achieve religious support unity of effort and strengthen spiritual readiness.

Background

Unlike Geographic Combatant Commands (GCCs), the creation of joint bases has a fiscal, rather than operational, purpose.[2] Neither joint base doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, facilities, or policy (DOTMLPF-P) originate or integrate with the Department of Defense's (DOD's) Joint Strategic Planning System (JSPS) construct.[3] Aimed primarily at reducing cost and eliminating redundancy, Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) affected not only real property and funding but also personnel and mission. With the transfer of installation support functions (ISF) on joint bases to the lead service, the Army religious support ISF aligned its priorities and procedures with Air Force operating instructions (OIs) rather than Army regulations (ARs) wherever it was the supported component. Although Joint Publication 3-83, *Religious Affairs in Joint Operations*, describes interoperability authorities and procedures, it does not address joint bases which operate according to Department of Defense Operating Instruction Support Agreements, local Memorandums of Agreement (MOAs) and lead-service doctrine.[4] Additionally, joint basing categorizes Installation

Management Command (IMCOM) Soldiers as Joint Base Integrated (JBI) or Joint Base Supported Component Force Structure (JBSCF) personnel. Local MOAs capture these changes and are co-signed by the Vice Chiefs of Staff of each service component.[5]

In its strategic overview, the BRAC report admits, "No institution will remain successful without adapting to its constantly changing environment. Our armed forces must adapt to changing threats, evolving technology, reconfigured organizational structures, and new strategies."[6] Since the implementation of joint basing in 2009, the U.S. Army in Alaska has undergone significant organizational change in response to an extremely dynamic and challenging operational environment.[7] This level of transformation requires a correlating sustainment response from its power projection platform.

According to the 2022 Joint Base Operating Guidance, a 2012 policy memorandum requiring the Joint Base Partnership Council to review each MOA every three years remains in effect.[8] This process, known as the Joint Management Oversight Structure (JMOS), is a four-tiered accountability architecture to ensure fairness between the services, provide compliance oversight, dispute resolution, and MOA change approval.[9] In the fourteen years since the implementation of joint basing, each of the three Air Force-led joint bases conducted this review only once: Joint Base Langley-Eustis (JBLE)[10] and Joint Base San Antonio (JBSA) between 2011-2012[11] and Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson (JBER) between 2022-2023.[12] While joint base procedures such as periodic MOA revision can serve as useful tools in resolving force management and organizational

capability issues, they can only do so if executed on prescribed timelines and elevated to the appropriate JMOS tier.

Problem

In an information paper from 2020, U.S. Army Alaska (USARAK) made the following observations:

> Joint bases are not truly Joint bases; rather, they are installations where one service is the supporting command (lead) and other organizations are supported commands. JBER administratively functions under Air Force regulations that are not aligned with Army requirements, timelines, [and] priorities…These differences result in gaps and seams that impede Army unit readiness.[13]

The DOTmLPF-P domains described in Army Regulation 71-9, *Warfighting Capabilities Determination*,[14] Army Regulation 71-32, *Force Development and Documentation Consolidated Policies*,[15] and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction 3150.25H, *Joint Lessons Learned Program*, provide the best framework for understanding and addressing these "gaps and seams."[16]

DOCTRINE AND ORGANIZATION

Although JBER recently conducted a comprehensive MOA revision in response to these concerns, it failed to address the affiliation and task organization of JBI Chaplain Corps personnel. Chaplains and Religious Affairs Specialists comprise roughly half of Soldiers assigned to a garrison headquarters.[17] AR 165-1, *Army Chaplain Corps Activities*, defines the roles and responsibilities of Religious Support Offices (RSOs) and their

relationship to the Senior Command Chaplain on the installation.[18] This position, created in April 2020, is now codified in the new AR 165-1 and, as of July 2022, includes the 11th Airborne Division on JBER (although the O6 chaplain in Alaska will now be an IMCOM billet).[19]

In addition to meeting regulatory requirements, the formalized relationship between the RSO and Army Senior Command achieves greater unity of effort, improved leader development, and ensures senior rater equity between the operating and generating force.[20] Without shared identity and organizational alignment however, generating force assets are unable to represent the Army Senior Command, advocate for religious support equities, or provide dedicated spiritual readiness to their fellow Soldiers and Families. Can the Senior Command Chaplain carry this burden alone? If the value of organizational alignment, service culture, and identity for Soldiers were irrelevant, the 11th Airborne Division would not be re-activated today. The point of friction with joint basing in this area is its COMREL.

POLICY

Joint base dysfunction exists outside of Alaska. In its 2021 audit of joint bases across DOD, the Office of the Inspector General confirmed the following:

> Lead Components at JB Lewis-McChord, JB Anacostia-Bolling, and JB Elmendorf-Richardson did not always meet minimum performance standards or other terms specified in the MOA…Joint base personnel often identified Service-based decisions, operational differences, and a DOD-wide lack of joint base knowledge and operational guidance

as reasons why MOA terms were not met…These factors can also hamper relations on the installation and potentially marginalize the input, needs, and mission of the supported Components.[21]

Despite not operating jointly, the supporting (lead) component still operationally controls (OPCON) JBI or JBSCF personnel from their sister service. Joint bases have no joint manning document, retain the culture of the supporting component, and typically prioritize the mission of the lead service unless the stakeholders use the JMOS process effectively to enforce accountability measures. With only one MOA revision per joint base in fourteen years, little has been done to address this. The relationship between operational units and installation religious support works most effectively when aligned within a service-specific organization and culture. It is only when both services maintain their distinctive identities that equity exists and joint operations can occur.

PERSONNEL

For the past four years, the Army's number one priority was "People First."[22] The focus on warfighting and readiness today still relies on strengthening the Army profession and building cohesive teams.[23] The 11th Airborne Division operationalizes this:

Arctic capability and mission readiness ultimately depend on our greatest resource, our Soldiers. People have been and remain our top priority, with a focus on taking care of Soldiers, Families, and our Army community through leadership and connections. On 6 June 2022, the 11th Airborne Division activation

properly aligned *identity, purpose, and mission* for our soldiers, and the chief of staff of the Army charged us with reestablishing the proud reputation of this storied division. This was a huge missing piece of the puzzle. We improved soldiers' and family members' quality of life by clearing away the previous *"Frankenstein-like" creation that was cobbled together with various patches and units*. The best quality of life program in the Army remains tough, challenging, training as *part of a cohesive unit*—and that must remain foundational [emphasis mine].[24]

Likewise, Army Field Manual 7-22, *Army Holistic Health and Fitness*, describes spiritual readiness in terms of purpose, meaning, and identity.[25] Soldier readiness is directly proportional to the level of connection within a community that shares a common purpose and identity. In the Army, these values are both organizational and spiritual. The Army Chaplain Corps lives at the intersection of both.

While tangible assets such as materiel and facility transfer usually receive the most attention, the center of gravity in joint base religious support is not chapels or funding but identity and mission. Although local MOAs tacitly acknowledge the Army identity of JBI and JBSCF Soldiers as the supported component, Army Chaplain Corps personnel OPCON to a sister service negates this description. Additionally, and in contrast to JBSCF Airmen on Army-led Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM) who retain their organic unit patch, JBI and JBSCF Soldiers on JBLE, JBSA, and JBER wear an Air Force shoulder sleeve insignia. In the case of the Army Support Element on JBER, this happened just prior to the

MOA revision of 2022. My personal communication with JBSCF Religious Affairs Airmen at JBLM on this topic indicate they do not want to operate under the same conditions as the ASE Soldiers on JBER.[26]

JBI and JBSCF Soldiers do not appear on an Air Force manning document and do not count against their numbers but exist on an Army Table of Distribution and Allowances (TDA) with an Army Unit Identification Code (UIC).[27] Neither local MOA nor joint doctrine requires this cross-service identification. For Army Chaplains and Religious Affairs Specialists on Air Force-led joint bases, however, the status quo is assimilation and prioritization rather than partnership and equality.[28]

LEADERSHIP, EDUCATION, AND TRAINING

Impediments to joint operations also exist outside of local MOAs and OIs. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld described the BRAC process as an opportunity to promote jointness in 2005 but the official report from the BRAC commission found the opposite to be true stating, "very few of the hundreds of proposals increased jointness, and some actually decreased or removed joint and cross-service connections…collocation is not synonymous with integration, and transformation is not synonymous with jointness."[29] This is ironic considering BRAC initially prioritized "current and future mission capabilities and the impact on operational readiness of the total force of the Department of Defense, including the impact on joint warfighting, training, and readiness" as the first of eight statutory selection criteria.[30]

According to Major General Brian Eifler, Commanding General of the 11th

Airborne Division, interoperability with joint partners is essential to building capability in the unforgiving environment of the Arctic.[31] Army Senior Commanders have a responsibility to drive the strategic vision for everything from Soldier readiness to power projection.[32] Army Command Policy defines the roles of senior commanders as caring for Soldiers, Families, and Army Career Professionals to enable readiness across the force.[33] Unfortunately, the COMREL between Army Senior Commanders and Army Chaplain Corps personnel in JBI or JBSCF positions on joint bases constrains this.

Solution

In his thesis at the United States Army War College examining the efficacy of garrison religious support in joint operations, Chaplain (Colonel) Michael Brainerd recommends the RSO be task organized under the Army Senior Commander and supervised directly by the Army Senior Chaplain at that location.[34] Such a realignment, Brainerd argues, has the potential to increase chapel funding, solidify organizational identity, create shared purpose, promote common culture, and increase unity of effort. This course of action mirrors the motive and approach of the Army in the re-activation of the 11th Airborne Division.

Brainerd goes on to propose a joint application of this, offering examples of BRAC products such as joint basing and the (at that time) co-located Army, Air Force, and Navy chaplain schools at Fort Jackson, SC. However, in 2014 joint basing was only five years old and already experiencing fractures.[35] The Air Force and Navy chaplain schools then moved back to their original locations in 2017 after it became evident that the training, doctrine, and culture of religious support between the services were not compatible even in a training environment.[36]

Unlike joint basing, the Army Chaplain Corps does participate in the JSPS and recently conducted a proponent-wide Capabilities Based Assessment (CBA) in 2022 as part of the Joint Capabilities Integration and Development System (JCIDS).[37] Although only a small part of the overall force development process, CBAs exist to identify capability gaps and then provide DOTMLPF-P recommendations to address them.[38] The CBA is phase one of a five phase force development process that potentially ends with changes to manning documents and task organization.[39] In preparation to

support MDO in the Army of 2030 and beyond, the Army Chaplain Corps' CBA examined religious support and spiritual readiness within each DOTMLPF-P domain at echelon across active duty and reserve components.[40] In its July 2023 report to Army Futures Command, the Chaplain Corps identified eight capability gaps with proposed solutions, including the Army Senior Chaplain's responsibilities to oversee garrison RSOs and force design updates (FDUs) to the Division Chaplain section.[41] These gaps and proposed solutions tie to an MDO statement which tasks the Army Senior Commander's chaplain with spiritual readiness responsibility during the competition phase on both Army garrisons and joint bases.[42] Although this same report recommends leveraging coordinating instructions as the means to accomplish this for units not organic to the command, a COMREL solution akin to Brainerd's 2014 proposal is more sustainable and enduring. The Chaplain Corps could accomplish this without any changes to MTOE or TDA manning documents by following a precedent already established by the Judge Advocate General (JAG).

The Army JAG Corps has aligned its generating force assets under the Army Senior Commander, even on joint bases, in its consolidated legal office using a doctrinal solution.[43] The Army Chaplain Corps should follow suit and adopt this model. This force management strategy increases the organizational capability of both the Army Senior Command and the garrison RSO, aligns their identity and mission, and uses a systems approach to increase unity of effort. The alignment combines MTOE and TDA assets under the Army Senior Commander by changing task organization and not force structure, all without compromising the garrison or operational mission, but improving the effectiveness of both.[44] This course of action would not affect brigade or battalion UMTs and it empowers Army Chaplain Corps IMCOM personnel to represent Army requirements to the Joint Base Commander and serve on equal footing with their sister service counterparts. The Army Chaplain Corps should integrate operational and generating force COMREL alignment, modeled after the JAG Corps' consolidated legal office, into its DOTMLPF-P solutions as its CBA moves through the force development process. Although Functional Solution Analysis has already occurred, the Army Senior Leader Reference Handbook, *How the Army Runs*, states, "Every process may not always be required before organizational changes are made . . . and the process steps may occur out of sequence."[45] If the Chaplain Corp's CBA is the vehicle to achieve this, doctrine is the driver. This action, supported by strategic endorsement from the Armed Forces Chaplain Board, will provide the joint staffing required for such a transformation and is no cost to the U.S. Army or the U.S. Air Force.[46]

Conclusion

Organizational capability issues require force management solutions. Joint basing is unable to provide senior commanders the dedicated and aligned religious support required to maintain spiritual readiness because it exists independently of the Joint Strategic Planning System. As a result of COMREL dichotomy, Army generating force assets assume a sister service identity in locations where they are the supported component which isolates them from the Army Senior Command, the Army Senior Chaplain, and their fellow Soldiers. This separation constrains the Army Senior Commander's ability to fulfill doctrinal requirements and disables Army garrison Chaplains and Religious Affairs Specialists from effectively representing, engaging, or advocating on the Army's behalf. In response, the Army Chaplain Corps must align its garrison assets under the Army Senior Commander on joint bases to achieve religious support unity of effort and strengthen spiritual readiness.

Master Sergeant Eric Tysinger is currently a student at the United States Army Sergeant Major Academy. He holds a B.A. in Religion from Southern Wesleyan University and is pursuing a Master of Arts in Practical Ministry from Erskine Theological Seminary. Previous assignments include serving as the Master Religious Affairs NCO for the 11th Airborne Division and U.S. Army Alaska (2019-2023) and Senior Religious Affairs NCO for the U.S. Army Support Element on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson (2017-2019). Tysinger and his wife Katrina have one son, Private First Class Kaleb Tysinger.

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Chaplain Pursuit of "Buffered Selves":
Shepherding the Tough in Spirit

By Chaplain (Major) Luke Heibel

An infantry brigade commander reflected on the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan.[1] He confessed to his staff that he struggled with the sobering costs of giving so much for so long with such dubious results. The experience led to public and private soul-searching. This struggle was compounded with daily challenges in the human domain. Problems grew across the formation despite many resources and competent leaders. He observed to his staff, "We used to just go out with the chaplain, get outside and do hard things together. This solved a lot of our problems. Can't we just do that again?"

This Commander's conviction that Soldiers just need to get outside and go do hard things with their chaplain was a catalyst for a brigade Unit Ministry Team (UMT) program called "Tough in Spirit" (TIS). It was implemented in each battalion across the 173rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne). The structure and duration of events varied.[2] But the simple formula "go outside and do hard things with your chaplain" was implemented across the brigade. What follows is one battalion chaplain's reflection on pastoral dynamics operative in TIS events and how those dynamics aim to facilitate spiritual readiness (SR) in a time when many people no longer conceptualize a need for God.

In this paper, I offer three elements of the TIS formula: struggle, content, and process. I frame these elements as an active form of "ministry of presence" (MP). I argue that MP is a form of active pursuit essential to building Soldier SR. Finally, I examine TIS participants through the lens of what philosopher Charles Taylor calls the "buffered self" of our secular age. I draw on Taylor to conceptualize the challenges of ministering

to "buffered selves" and to highlight the importance of events like TIS for creating unique opportunities to both challenge and equip Soldiers.

"Tough in Spirit"

The 173rd Airborne Brigade TIS initiative was a command-directed and unit-supported event. Command support was the most important aspect of this program's success. Endless requirements compete for a unit's limited training time. There is rarely protected time for religious support initiatives. Chaplains learn to nest initiatives into existing training or offer events during evenings or on weekends.

The average TIS cohort was comprised of ten to thirty Soldiers who have different backgrounds, religions, aptitudes, fitness levels, and interest in participating in the program. The twelve-hour TIS program, in my unit, used this structure: 0600 start time followed by ninety minutes of classroom instruction at an off-post location. The classroom training focused on the importance of the spiritual domain for every Soldier. It featured short videos designed to facilitate discussion about Soldiers' worldviews that nested within the Army's definition of SR.[3] Subsequent discussions were designed for sharing personal opinions and spiritual beliefs. The chaplain, as facilitator, worked to persuade TIS participants that the spiritual domain is relevant to everyone, not just the formally religious.[4]

The next phase required an hour-long bus ride to the training location. Upon arrival, Soldiers were provided a big breakfast.

The mealtime included intentional conversation shaped by discussion cards and followed by large group processing. After breakfast, the group transitioned to a long-range movement over rough terrain. The group engaged with one another around participant-driven content at planned intervals along the route. The event concluded with another big meal and more intentional conversation. Lastly, we conducted an after-action review before the bus ride back to base.

The TIS model is deceptively simple: get people together, do hard things outdoors, provide some training, eat good food, and talk in an intentional way. How do these simple ingredients foster SR? Soldiers already do some version of these activities every day. Many participate in these common activities and never develop a relationship with God, become resilient, find meaning or purpose, or experience belonging. Inertia, task saturation, exhaustion, apathy, and general entropy see to that. Several key ingredients are required to facilitate fostering Soldier SR: a common struggle, quality content, and a humanizing process. Is the chaplain essential? Yes. TIS is a potentially formative experience. But transformation requires a chaplain who can shape each part and translate MP opportunities into SR gains.

STRUGGLE

Through a common struggle, chaplains work to focus attention, build teams, and strengthen relationships. Our TIS events used a long walk in often frigid temperatures over rough terrain to these ends. War journalist Sebastian Junger observes that forging a "community of sufferers" and a "brotherhood of pain" ironically has positive impacts on mental health.[5] During TIS the struggle provided the occasion for deeper engagement

with others. Junger writes that "adversity often leads people to depend more on one another, and that closeness can produce a kind of nostalgia. . . . What people miss presumably isn't danger or loss but the unity that these things often engender."[6] Positive memories of shared hardship builds teams. I hoped that, at a minimum, my Soldiers would come away from TIS as a stronger team.

In addition to the physical struggle, Soldiers experienced an interpersonal struggle to be vulnerable and the intellectual challenges to think about difficult subjects. Before the long-range movement Soldiers were given a card with a trust-building behavior on it. Along the way each were provided a chance to illustrate the behavior with a personal story. Many Soldiers used this simple practice to share a story that reframed their platoons' understanding of who they are. Many shared personal issues or life stories in a vulnerable, humanizing way. One Soldier said he learned more about his platoon in one day – during TIS – than in the past year.

QUALITY CONTENT

Soldiers assumed TIS would be more indoctrination than education. Discussions of spirituality and religion are frequently divisive. Moreover, many Soldiers lack the vocabulary to have robust spiritual conversations. Soldiers need SR terms and concepts "issued," like mission essential equipment, to assist meaningful dialog. Military hierarchy is also a barrier to conversation. Soldiers need formal permission and encouragement to speak freely.

The TIS training goal was to address spiritual readiness, personal identity, belonging, and moral courage.[7] I provided spiritual terms and concepts during the classroom phase and the long hike

outdoors. Small group discussion, videos, and anecdotal illustrations were used to stimulate thought and empower conversation. Along the way, we considered the difference between spirituality and religion, the nature of suffering, the protective factors of spirituality, and the Army's concern for the spiritual domain. We reflected on why spirituality matters. Additionally, each platoon's leadership was given an opportunity to shape training content to ensure their TIS event addressed known needs.

HUMANIZING PROCESS

The process of Soldiers reflecting in these ways during TIS was aided by natural beauty. Our long-range movements were conducted in rugged but mostly beautiful places. The Army's physical environments are utilitarian. They are designed to be useful, not beautiful. But aesthetics matter. "The medium is the message."[8] Soldiers have brains and souls – but these are routinely subordinated to the physical. Reducing life to the utilitarian and purely physical is inherently dehumanizing. I believe that we are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) and thus have a longing for experiences that address us as embodied souls. We long for transcendence.[9]

We hosted meals in a Bavarian "Gasthaus" featuring traditional German fare (schnitzel, knöedel, grillhaxe, etc.). By paying wise attention to content, environment, and process the chaplain can be combine these elements with quality food to facilitate an experience of the sublime for Soldiers. Military dining, like military architectural design, underwhelms. Simple meals prepared with care set the stage for rich communion. Theologian Norman Wirzba highlights the significance of food for connecting us to God:

Eaters can consume a wide variety of foods and not really savor any of it as God's love made nurture for us. To eat with theological appreciation presupposes reverence for creation as the work of God's hands. It entails spiritual formation in which we allow God the Gardener (Genesis 2:8) to conform us to his image as the one who looks after and provides for creatures. . . .Without this ongoing catechesis we run the risk of reducing the gift of food and the grace of eating to a desecration.[10]

This combination of a humanizing process and pleasing aesthetics is disarming. It can stir a person's soul in ways mere words cannot. The pairing can even lead the jaded participant to be less defensive and more fully present with his peers.[11]

Ministry of Presence

One practice chaplains use during TIS events is the ambiguous sounding "ministry of presence" (MP). MP means being physically present and rooted with Soldiers in places others cannot go. MP can have both active and passive shepherding aspects. MP in a passive sense is participation in the mundane realities of Soldiers' lives: formations, physical training, motor-pool, meetings, exercises, mobilizations, etc. Passive MP is shepherding conducted in the daily grind of a willing, observing presence.[12] It is a form of pursuit rooted in being consistently present and available. A passive MP leads to credibility through effort over time, sharing the unit's story.

An active MP is a form of shepherding patterned on the "shepherd God of Israel" that seeks to know and positively shape other Soldiers.[13] An active MP

gives direction and challenges others. It develops personal knowledge and grows relationships. Chaplains are often an abstraction to their Soldiers. If a chaplain is too passive, he will never become trusted and sought out by his Soldiers. A chaplain must employ an active MP to move from being seen as an abstraction to being seen as a person with trusted and indispensable qualities.

Practicing both active and passive MP are essential pastoral tasks for Chaplains. Nesting effectively into a unit's battle-rhythm, staff functions, and footprint is skilled labor. Information traffic rarely flows in the chaplain's direction without sustained effort and healthy relationships. Passive chaplains are easily marginalized. The presence of adverse organizational and relational dynamics can neutralize a chaplain's effort to integrate. Commanders and their staff ensure information flows consistently through the chain of command as subordinates report up. Chaplains on the other hand – who are expected to know people and unit dynamics – must "work to work."[14] They must actively pursue others. Chaplains must work to know people, work to integrate, and work to learn unit dynamics through proactive engagement. They must earn the privilege to do the spiritual "soul work" that transforms individuals and unit culture. A chaplain's MP is a skillfully curated effort that enables both advisement capabilities and spiritual care.

An Obstacle to Ministry: "Buffered Selves"

Practicing a robust MP allows the chaplain to know Soldiers and fulfill the religious support mission. Yet many Soldiers today don't want or think

they need a chaplain. The demand for spiritual care is muted in our secular age.[15] While many people are open to spirituality – it is nevertheless seen as optional, a mere life-style accessory.[16]

Twenty-first century selves are shaped by a vastly different spiritual landscape than previous generations.[17] Philosopher Charles Taylor accounts for these radical cultural shifts.[18] He notes the human self is no longer conceived of as "porous" or vulnerable to external spiritual authority.[19] In previous eras, the self was commonly understood as vulnerable to spiritual forces and dynamics outside of one's control. Yet, for Taylor,the modern self is insulated from external spiritual realities by a "buffer" that neutralizes the dire need for spiritual connection to God and for God's protection.[20] This accounts for, in Taylor's words, "a very different existential condition."[21] He notes: "As a bounded self I can see the boundary as a buffer, such that the things beyond don't need to 'get to me'… That's the sense to my use of the term 'buffered' here. This self can see itself as invulnerable, as master of the meanings of things for it."[22] Theologian Andrew Root, one of Taylor's key interpreters, outlines several pastoral implications implied by this understanding of the self as buffered: a changed view of personal freedom and the perception of the self as invulnerable.[23] Again, Taylor writes: "The buffered self is essentially the self which is aware of the possibility of disengagement. And disengagement is frequently carried out in relation to one's whole surroundings, natural and social."[24] This phenomenon explains why spirituality often just seems irrelevant to people today.[25] It explains why people think they don't need God.

TIS events engaged Soldiers in conversations that brought identity,

meaning, and purpose to the surface. Many Soldiers responded with atheistic convictions. Others openly scoffed at notions of meaning beyond what is self-created (which is textbook "buffered self" behavior).[26] This is predictable. In our secular context, few ask for guidance that connects identity, purpose, and meaning with God. Thus, Taylor's conception of the buffered self is useful for explaining why many metaphysical answers to Soldiers' questions don't get traction today.

Root observes that the shaping and directing of peoples' inner lives has been the preserve of pastors for centuries. He writes:

> Since [the time of] Augustine [in the fourth century AD] the pastor's job has been to impact, direct, and lead people's inner lives…The pastor is to get deeper than behavior, treading inside the inner world of people's intentions…For the next fifteen hundred years, pastors sketched out for people the need to surrender this inner reality to God.[27]

People's needs seem different today. Root suggests that some "might need a therapist, or financial advisor, or social worker, but not a pastor."[28] Pursuing others is a crucial skill for chaplains to learn. Yet this pastoral skill is challenging work and often ambiguous. Reduced calls for pastoral care don't obviate the chaplain's duty to pursue Soldiers. It does change pastoral dynamics and passive chaplains who expect Soldiers to come to them will be frustrated and largely avoided.

Root observes that one consequence for the buffered self is that "personal encounter with Divine Action has been

locked out of the compound of the self."[29] This makes sense of the reduced demand from Soldiers for guidance on their spiritual lives; they don't experience it as an existential priority. Soldiers today are insulated from spiritual promptings. This insularity is reinforced by powerful technologies.[30] We today are bombarded with information and formed within an "epistemological habitat" that is filled with the noise of endless distractions.[31] These conditions pose a challenge to chaplains whose goal is to connect "God to Soldiers and Soldiers to God."[32] Regardless, chaplains have been adapting to dynamic and formidable ministry conditions since its inception.[33]

Ministry to "Buffered Selves"

Many Soldiers keep their chaplain at a distance. Thus, the best moments of ministry often lie on the far side of a chaplain's pursuit. Like a sniper waiting a long time for a clear shot, chaplains must "go out" (patient MP) before a Soldier "comes in." TIS events facilitated the "proximity principle."[34] They allowed for closer proximity and a robust passive and active MP. TIS events ensured multiple points of meaningful intersection with Soldiers. Yet proximity alone offers no guarantee of ministry success or that Soldiers will accept the chaplain. Nor does it facilitate true spiritual formation.

Proximity itself doesn't prove chaplains are serving as God's ambassador to Soldiers. Once chaplains draw near to Soldiers, however, they have opportunity to minister to the soul. The chaplain's other work only begins after the work it takes to get close. This other work is to generate interest in and facilitate true spiritual formation. The goal is to be God's ambassador to Soldiers.

It involves a willingness to bridge the distances that isolate Soldiers from others, creation, and God.

TIS was not a religious event offering traditional means of grace. However, our TIS events were filled with moments to consider the sacred within the ordinary – in shared struggle, in challenging content, and in a humanizing process. Healthy spiritual formation inevitably involves a "re-sacralizing" process.[35] Re-sacralizing doesn't happen by "re-enchantment" or mere declaration,[36] much less from a long, difficult hike. However, TIS sets conditions for the ordinary to gain more attention and point beyond itself. It is here that Soldiers—those who are "tough in spirit"—need an intentional shepherding presence to direct this enterprise, seeking opportunities to point out Divine action.[37] When these TIS elements align and are well received, the experience facilitates SR.

The TIS initiative was conducted with a Solider population that was spiritually diverse and often conspicuously irreligious. Through TIS, many Soldiers experienced a shift in their existential horizon. They expressed this through a new (or renewed) interest in their spiritual lives. Some even turned to God. Though a minority remained isolated and unimpressed, all were provided a chaplain's active MP. Most Soldiers were very open to participating in a common struggle, engaging meaningful content, and embracing a humanizing process that deepened engagement with their platoon. The process invited buffered selves into dynamic conversations that facilitated reflection on their own SR. And this is why the commander's exhortation to "get outside and go do hard things with the chaplain" remains timely guidance.

Chaplain (Major) Luke Heibel is a Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) minister and a graduate of Westminster Theological Seminary, Richmont Graduate University, and the University of North Carolina at Asheville. His assignments include the 82nd Airborne Division, 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne), 66th Military Intelligence Brigade, and the 173rd Airborne Brigade. He has two combat deployments. He is happily married to his amazing wife Anne and is the proud father of two phenomenal boys – Conrad and Judah.

NOTES

1 Colonel Michael Kloepper, former brigade commander of the 173rd Airborne Brigade.

2 Andrew Efaw, "Tough in Spirit," *Army Engineer Magazine* (Summer 2023): 9-10. Chaplain Burt Snyder conducted multi-day Tough in Spirit events covering up to 30 miles over 48 hours. Creative TIS models were implemented by Chaplains: Gerry Miller, Gabriel Pech, Jack Powell, and Kevin Jones – under the supervision of Chaplain (Major) Joel Payne.

3 Department of the Army, *Holistic Health and Fitness* (FM 7-22) (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2020), 10-1.

4 Dept. of the Army, *Holistic Health*, 10-2.

5 Sebastian Junger, Tribe: *On Homecoming and Belonging*, (New York: Hatchette, 2016), 52-55.

6 Junger, *Tribe*, 92.

7 Joel Payne, "Supplemental Guidance for 173rd IBCT (A) Sky Soldier *Tough in Spirit* initiative events," official memorandum, August 22, 2022, Caserma Del Din, Italy.

8 Marshall McLuhan, cited in Samuel D. James, *Digital Liturgies: Rediscovering Christian Wisdom in an Online Age* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023), 35.

9 See James' discussion of Ecclesiastes 3:11 in *Digital Liturgies*.

10 Norman Wirzba, *Food and Faith* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), xiii.

11 Arthur Boers, *Living Into Focus: Choosing What Matters in an Age of Distractions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2012), 42-45.

12 Andrew Root, *The Pastor in a Secular Age*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 210-211.

13 Root, *Pastor in a Secular Age*, 156.

14 Department of the Army, *Religious Support and Internal Advisement* (ATP 1-05.04) (Washington DC: Department of the Army, 2017) 2-15, 2-19 – 2-25.

15 This complex phenomenon owes much to the decline of church attendance in recent decades. Jim Davis and Michael Graham document what they say is the greatest religious demographic shift in American history: "More people have left the church in the last twenty-five years than all the new people who became Christians from the First Great Awakening, Second Great Awakening, and Billy Graham crusades combined." See Jim Davis, Michael Graham, and Ryan P. Burge, *The Great De-Churching: Who's Leaving, Why Are They Going, and What Will It Take to Bring Them Back?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2023), 5.

16 Root, Pastor in a Secular Age, 65.

17 Luke Heibel, "Spiritual Readiness in a Secular Age: Embracing the Challenges and Opportunities of Ministry in the Contested Spiritual Domain," *U.S. Army Chaplain Corps Journal* (2021): 30-38.

18 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2007) 25.

19 Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 37-39.

20 Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 38.

21 Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 38.

22 Taylor, A Secular Age, 38. See also Carl Trueman, "Charles Taylor, Psychological Selfhood, and Disenchantment," *Public Discourse*, June 11, 2023, https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2023/06/89211/.

23 Root, *Pastor in a Secular Age*, 69.

24 Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 42.

25 Root, *Pastor in a Secular Age*, 70.

26 Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 38.

27 Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 64-65.

28 Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 78.

29 Root, *Pastor in a Secular Age*, 66.

30 Samuel D. James, *Digital Liturgies*, 53.

31 Samuel D. James, *Digital Liturgies*, 57-58.

32 "Overview of an Army Chaplain," U.S. Army Recruiting Command, accessed January 12, 2024, https://recruiting.army.mil/MRB_ReligiousServices/.

33 Richard M. Budd, *Serving Two Masters: American Military Chaplaincy 1860-1920* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2002) 154-158.

34 Philip Kramer, "The Proximity Principle: Army Chaplains on the Fighting Line in Doctrine and in History," Master of Military Art and Science, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2014, 3-4.

35 Carl Trueman, "The Desecration of Man," *First Things*, January 2024, https://www.firstthings.com/article/2024/01/the-desecration-of-man 01.

36 Trueman, "The Desecration of Man."

37 Root, *Pastor in a Secular Age*, 209.

Sacred Speech in Future Armed Conflict

By Chaplain (Major) Brandon Denning and Chaplain (Major) Daniel Werho

The battlefield of the future will be complex. The wars in Ukraine and Gaza already demonstrate the incredible complexity of war as reflected in the new multidomain operating concept.[1] Chaplains have always provided ministry amidst the trauma, anxiety, uncertainty, and despair of war. The development and deployment of new technologies are adding to the complexity. Multidomain operations introduces further complexity with combined arms employment of space and cyberspace capabilities. Does this mean that the mode of sermon delivery will change? Possibly. However, we contend that chaplains cannot rely on leveraging these emerging technologies to deliver religious support. Instead, we focus on what we know will be constant: the human dimension.[2] We argue that, in future operations, chaplains need to be prepared to use sacred speech that is simple and adaptable for tactical purposes, while still addressing the complexities of the human dimension of war. In this paper, we explore the complexities of the future battlefield and offer a model that navigates these complexities.

The Future Battlefield

Space and cyberspace domains will change the way sacred speech is delivered on the battlefield. Given technological advances and recent experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, one potential solution for chaplains seeking to reach their Soldiers dispersed across a future battlefield might be virtual sermons and worship services. However, FM 3-0 states that "peer threats employ networks of sensors and long-range massed fires that exploit electromagnetic signatures and other detection methods to create high risk for ground forces,

particularly while they are static."[3] For example, a Ukrainian battalion was destroyed by long-range precision rockets shortly after a drone was spotted observing their location.[4] Soldiers will not be able to amass in large groups for any period of time without becoming a target. Instead, Soldiers will be dispersed to prevent detection through hostile air and space assets. At the same time technology will be limited, exploited, and leveraged by both the U.S. and the enemy. Internet connectivity will likely have a limited bandwidth dedicated strictly for current operations. Cell phones will be unusable and if they are used, the results could be deadly.[5] Chaplains cannot expect to rely on technology to deliver sacred speech.

Chaplains need to formulate sacred speech in a condensed and adaptable form. The Army calls this technique the "BLUF" (bottom-line-up-front).The technique is designed to communicate concepts briefly and clearly. In homiletics, this technique is the called "The Big Idea."[6] Using the BLUF or Big Idea technique allows for a variety of sermon structures and provides one central meaning to the sermon. In a large-scale combat operations (LSCO) context, this technique immediately informs the Soldier of the sacred text and main idea. The chaplain must adapt by delivering the conclusion at the beginning of the sacred speech. This is important in the case of an interruption. Then, the Soldier can later reference the sacred text and associate a meaning to it. In other words, the chaplain must structure the sacred speech in a way that it can be presented in full length or abbreviated, if required, without losing meaning. The message can be delivered in-person, or the message might be passed along through formations; possibly delivered by first-line leaders or even designated

Soldiers. On the future battlefield, chaplains will need to be creative in developing means of delivering sacred speech in a way that is tactically sound to avoid putting Soldiers at risk.

There is a complex human element to every decision that must be made in war. War is not just about hardware.[7] Humans have a will to hope, a will to fight, and a will to overcome overwhelming odds. Despite tactical constraints, chaplains still need to address the complex realities of the human dimension of war. This feels like an impossible task in light of the nature of today's realities. Soldiers' lives can change in an instant based on media, social media, politics, propaganda, family realities, and a myriad of other factors. How can chaplains deliver real, relevant, and brief sacred communications to the people in their care who are scattered across the front lines?

Amid chaos and when all the formalities are stripped away, the enduring elements of sacred speech remain. There will be people who want to worship God. There will be a sacred text. And there will be an existential need. If the chaplain is not there to bring these elements together, the Soldiers surely will, even if it is in small group gatherings. The point here is that the existential questions emerge through the experience of war. These questions will ultimately drive Soldiers of faith to a sacred text one way or the other. This means that chaplains must have a solid theology of suffering that speaks with relevance to the existential questions of war.[8] This is the challenge the Corps faces.

In our experience of supervising chaplains, one of the mistakes we witness is the inability to transition to the existential needs of the Army during a

combat scenario. Often the sacred text does not relate to the battlefield context, military language and illustrations are overdone, and the sacred speech is too long. There are some unchanging constants that should be predictable on the battlefield and in the lives of Soldiers. Chaplains should prepare messages that address these constants, such as issues related to stress, grief, trauma, fear, and suffering. Chaplains should also consider Soldiers' physical circumstances such as exhaustion, hunger, and distractions. Yet, on the future battlefield, chaplains may be unable to be present on a regular basis with all their Soldiers.

With that in view, messages should be repeatable to small groups of Soldiers multiple times a week or even within a day. We suggest chaplains consider partnering with Soldiers on the front lines to empower them as lay leaders. Chaplains should consider training and equipping their lay leaders. This
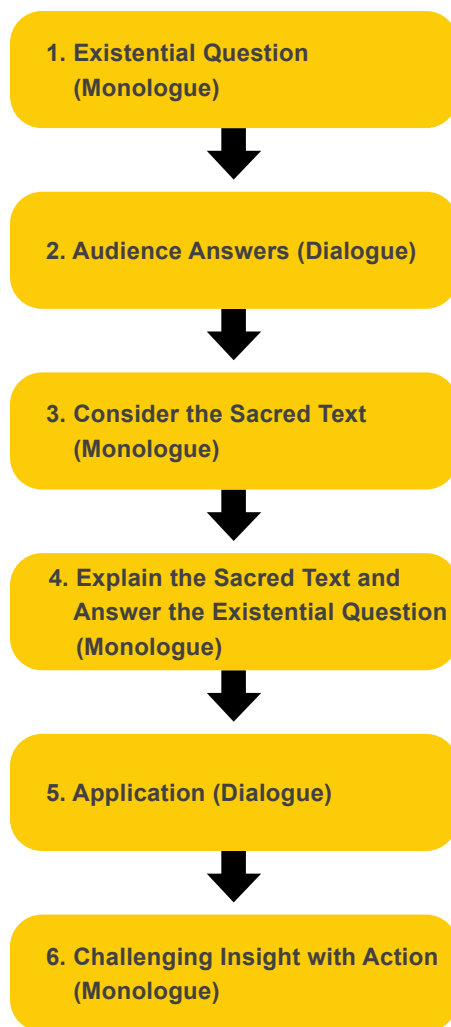
approach may be uncomfortable for some chaplains. However, as a Corps and as individual chaplains we must adjust to the future battlefield where chaplains will be scarce, and survivability will be an operational premium for the command. Like most challenges, this train-the-trainer (T4T) model also presents opportunities. Chaplains can gain relational capital through the training process. Another benefit of this approach is that the chaplain's message will be mediated through the lay leader's experiences on the front lines. After all, the lay leaders will be living side-by-side with their peers on the battlefield.

Regarding content, chaplains serving on the battlefield of the future need an approach to sacred communication that gets straight to the existential questions and draws on sacred texts that answer those questions. Regarding form, chaplains serving on the battlefield of the future need an approach to sacred communication that is teachable and

accessible to everyone. It must be portable and flexible enough to integrate with daily study and be deliverable in various small group settings.

The Conversational Model

To meet the challenges of this battlefield context, we propose The Conversational Model. This model was created and validated by Chaplain Denning in 2010 during Operation Hero Recovery, Afghanistan. Although it has not been tested in LSCO, Operation Hero Recovery was a 72-hour operation that included a mass casualty event. It is a real-world battlefield-tested approach to sacred communication.[9] The Conversational Model is unique in the way it incorporates a hybrid delivery of monologue (explaining the text) combined with a facilitated dialogue all focused on the existential question addressed by the sacred text. Not to be confused with other dialogical approaches,[10] it is not a solely facilitated model where interpretation is the task of the audience. Conversational homiletics is not new in and of itself but the focus, structure, and the elements of delivery for this model are unique. It is important to note that the chaplain does the exegetical work beforehand and can package it to equip front-line leaders when battlefield circulation is limited. What makes this model useful is that it is informal, provides flexibility regarding length, assesses Soldiers' spiritual maturity through discussion, and is repeatable with little effort. For the Soldier, a conversational approach gains and maintains attention, feels collaborative through active participation, and provides practical application. The structure of the Conversational Model provides a logical and linear path. Below is a depiction of this path.

1. Existential Question (Monologue)

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2. Audience Answers (Dialogue)

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3. Consider the Sacred Text (Monologue)

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4. Explain the Sacred Text and Answer the Existential Question (Monologue)

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5. Application (Dialogue)

↓

6. Challenging Insight with Action (Monologue)

1. **Existential Question (Monologue)**: The chaplain or facilitator[11] begins by presenting the main idea of the message as an open-ended existential question. The question brings unity to the entire model and is derived by isolating the subject while determining the theme of the sacred text. The existential question is the BLUF in the form of a question that the sacred text will answer. Thus, even if the message is interrupted, the chaplain can still provide the reference to the sacred text for further study. It is important for the chaplain to study and prepare (exegetical work) because questions might be asked for further clarity. The chaplain is just presenting the question while setting the conditions for it to be answered honestly and openly by the audience. It is not rhetorical in nature and should not be presented as such.

2. **Audience Answers (Dialogue)**: At this point, the chaplain facilitates a discussion around the existential question. The responses that emerge may be unpredictable, so it is important to keep answers focused on the question. During this stage of the model the chaplain listens to the Soldiers' answers and rarely comments. This approach gives the chaplain the opportunity to learn how the existential topic impacts everyone, assisting the chaplain in assessing spiritual needs. Soldiers should be allowed to process and explore their ideas and concepts related to the existential question. The first time the model is used, a chaplain should expect it be uncomfortable, ask follow-up questions to bring clarity to the subject, and help Soldiers to see that this is not just a lecture. Working in this way allows chaplains to show Soldiers that their thoughts are important in understanding how the sacred text addresses real life situations. If Soldiers get off subject, the chaplain kindly asks them to stay on subject and consider revisiting those discussions later. Whatever direction the conversation goes, the chaplain needs to be cautious not to dismiss any answers.

3. **Consider the Sacred Text (Monologue):** Once the chaplain determines it is time, this section serves as a transition to explaining the text in relation to the question. The chaplain explains to the Soldiers why he or she thinks the question is important and related to the scriptural

worldview. The chaplain could speak to his or her own experience or reference a current situation. The key factor in this section is for the chaplain to make a clear transition to considering how the sacred text addresses the existential question. Soldiers should realize that this is the time to listen to the chaplain. Once this is done, the chaplain reads the section of sacred text to setup the next section.

4. **Explain the Scared Text and Answer the Existential Question (Monologue)**: The chaplain explains the sacred text and its historical, cultural, and literary context. This

should be brief and based on the chaplain's exegetical work. With the text and its context in view, the chaplain explains how the sacred text directly answers the question.

5. **Application (Dialogue)**: In this section, the chaplain addresses the application question of "what does this look like today?" The chaplain invites the Soldiers to either participate in an exercise to reinforce the sacred text's answer or to share personal illustrations of how it effects their lives.

6. **Challenging Insight with Action (Monologue)**: This is the conclusion of the sacred speech. It is designed

to transition from insight to action, which could be a variety of next steps. The chaplain provides his or her own action to how the sacred text relates to the existential question.[12] If the message is distributed, this is where lay leaders receive experiential training. Finally, the facilitator provides an action that everyone could take based on the how the sacred text answered the existential question.

A CONVERSATIONAL MODEL EXAMPLE FROM A CHRISTIAN APPROACH

1. **Existential Question (Monologue)**: "What does God expect of us?"

2. **Audience Answers (Dialogue)**: *Facilitation of the answers*.

3. **Consider the Sacred Text (Monologue)**: "We live in a world of expectations. We have expectations from our leaders, spouses, children, maybe our parents. Expectations impact our beliefs, our actions, and how we live our lives. It impacts the way we respond to war and suffering. It seems important to know what God expects of us. I think we can answer this question by looking at Matthew 22:36-39 (NIV)." *Read Text* "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

4. **Explain Sacred Text and Answer the Existential Question (Monologue)**: The chaplain continues the monologue by explaining the context and

providing exposition to answer the existential question. The exegetical work is prepared before the message.

5. **Application (Dialogue)**: "Let's put this concept to a test." After stating this, the chaplain asks for volunteers to give one of the 10 Commandments. As the Soldier gives a commandment, the chaplain asks the others in the group how that commandment fulfills what Jesus said in Matthew 22:36-39. The chaplain may need to help provide a commandment(s) if needed. An example of this is "thou shall not covet" fulfills loving your neighbor as yourself.

6. **Challenging Insight with Action (Monologue)**: "We all need to be careful about loving things more than God. I had a CSM say to his NCOs, 'Love people and use things, don't love things and use people.' God's expectation is for all of us to love Him and love each other.

This model will not work in all contexts, but it may be especially suited for the battlefield of the future.[13] There are several weaknesses that need to be considered. First, the chaplain must manage time during facilitation. Consider setting clear expectations around time to help Soldiers stay focused. Tell Soldiers there can only be a certain number of comments due to time constraints. Also, consider asking the existential question then reference the text in case of interruption or if you know time is limited. Another weakness is that this model does not work well in large groups of Soldiers or with Soldiers who do not know one another. It is also important that the chaplain has an established relationship with the Soldiers.

Keep in mind that as a combat approach, this model is flexible. If time is restricted, all portions of facilitation (parts 2 and 5) can be removed, and the sermon remains monological. If the chaplain has a network of trained front-line leaders who understand this model, the chaplain can simply push out the exegetical work in a packageable format that the front-line leaders can adapt to their Soldiers' context. Imagine a prompt sheet with the existential question and instructions on guiding the conversation with the sacred text and prompts for the monologues. This would look like the example provided above. This makes the model portable, teachable, adaptable, and focused on the BLUF.

Conclusion

The battlefield of the future will be constrained by technology and time. Traditional preaching models may be difficult to deliver or ineffective. The Conversational Model works within the constraints to address the existential questions that emerge in the context of war and suffering.[14] Our approach is simple and adaptable and addresses the complexities of war. The Conversational Model fosters sacred speech that is real, relevant, and brief, regardless of who is delivering it. As the Army continues to train for future operational environments, religious support activities will be increasingly challenging, and their delivery may change. Our hope is that this article serves as a first step in a wider conversation around sacred communication in future armed conflict.

Chaplain (Major) Brandon Denning enlisted in the Infantry in 1996 and became the 453rd Guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. He has a Master of Divinity in Biblical Languages from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and a Master of Arts from Columbia International University with an emphasis in preaching. Brandon deployed with the 82nd Airborne Division in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. He also served at Arlington National Cemetery, The Old Guard, Special Forces, Basic Combat Training, and as the Homiletics Instructor at the U.S. Army Institute for Religious Leadership. He is retiring and returning to the pastorate.

Chaplain (Major) Daniel Werho entered active duty as a chaplain in 2012. He holds a Master of Divinity from Denver Seminary in Pastoral Counseling and a Master of Theology from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Preaching. He served in aviation, signal, and psychological operations units with a combat deployment to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. He currently serves as the Homiletics Instructor at the United States Army Institute of Religious Leadership in Fort Jackson, South Carolina.

NOTES

1 Multidomain operations refers to "the combined arms employment of joint and Army capabilities to create and exploit relative advantages that achieve objectives, defeat enemy forces, and consolidate gains on behalf of joint force commanders." Department of the Army, *Operations* (3-0) (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2022), 1-9.

2 Department of the Army, *Holistic Health and Fitness* (FM 7-22) (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2020).

3 Department of the Army, *Operations*, 1-10.

4 See the case study in *Operations*, 2-9.

5 Rhoda Kwon, "Russia blames its soldiers' cellphone use for missile strike that killed dozens," *NBC News*, last modified January 4, 2023, https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/russia-blames-soldiers-phone-use-ukraine-missile-strike-rcna64187.

6 Homiletics is the art and science of communicating any sacred speech that provides essential elements of religion that can include worship, observances, or religious education. It is deploying practical theology in a way that makes it useful and applicable.

7 Department of the Army, *Operations*.

8 We recommend all chaplains develop a formal theology of suffering through a group process prior to going to war. Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) is one option to work through a theology of suffering, but technical supervisors can also walk a cohort through a process as a part of training for war.

9 After use in combat, Chaplain Denning later noticed that the sacred speech lost authority and significance when defined by Soldier's opinions of the meaning of the text. Most Soldiers were not familiar with inductive study approaches. During his time as the Homiletics instructor at USA-IRL, he worked to refine a useable model for use by any chaplain. Later, Chaplain Werho's combat experience helped emphasize the importance of the existential question in the model.

10 This is not "Dialogue Preaching" as defined by Lucy Atkinson Rose nor is it Doug Pagitt's "Progressive Dialogue." See Lucy Atkinson Rose, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church* (Louisville, KY, Westminster John Knox, 1997) and Doug Pagitt, *Preaching Re-Imagined: The Role of the Sermon in Communities of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005).The sermon does not belong to the audience per se. It is driven by the text and the chaplain's previous exegetical work. The audience participates providing insight and practical illustrations, but the goal is conveying the meaning of the text and preserving the authority of the Scripture.

11 For the sake of simplicity, both the chaplain or the facilitator are referred to as the chaplain for the rest of this explanation.

12 If this message is facilitated by a lay leader, it is important to have the facilitator do some personal reflection on the exegetical work provided by the chaplain.

13 This model is not recommended in a formal congregational setting such as chapel.

14 Examples of existential questions include: What is the meaning of life? What is my purpose? Why am I doing this? Will I be punished for sin? Is there life after death? Why do we suffer? Can people change? Can people really be good? What is wisdom? How do I measure success? Can war be morally justified? What is the difference between killing and murder?

Leading in Gaps:
Intentional Leadership During Times of Military Assignment Transitions

By Chaplain (Major) Peter Robinson and Chaplain (Captain) Marcus A. Marroquin

It was a Friday when I[1] arrived at my very first battalion as a chaplain. After ten years of education, ecclesiastical training, and completing the Chaplain Officer Basic Course, I was ecstatic to begin ministering to Soldiers. I met the executive officer, briefly met the battalion commander, and then settled into my office. On Monday at physical training (PT), I met a concerned company commander who had desperately been trying to get a hold of me. Despite all my excitement and ambition to do a good job, I had not started properly. I failed to communicate with key leaders immediately upon my arrival and did not provide basic contact information to leaders within my unit. To make matters worse, the battalion Commander came up to me after the first formation and asked, "Why weren't they able to get a hold of you?" I made the crucial mistake of assuming I could just settle into my role. It was a relational obstacle I had to face right off the bat. That very morning, I placed a photo of myself and my contact information all around the battalion. I had decided that for my next assignment, I would actively explore ways to better assimilate into a new unit. Transition plans help leaders begin on the right path and open up ministry opportunities.

Chaplain transitions can lead to gaps in pastoral care. Within the Chaplain Corps, opportunities to conduct "left seat—right seat rides" with the outgoing chaplain are scarce. Chaplains may become absorbed in the fast-paced operational environment and form subjective views about their unit's culture, leadership, and command climate. By adopting a phased approach and intentionally planning transitions for assignments, chaplains can enhance their effectiveness and gain a more accurate understanding of the overall context.

In this article on best practices for integrating into a new unit, we present a phased approach to starting a new assignment. Originally designed for command teams and drawing on our experience, we have adapted this approach for use by Unit Ministry Teams (UMTs).

Phase 1: Preparation

Chaplains must be intentional when it comes to their transition into a new assignment, a reality that requires preparation. The preparation phase is key for cultivating situational awareness and integrating with the unit to establish trust. And this all starts before the chaplain arrives.

Many Army leaders assigned to key developmental positions conduct a significant planning phase prior to coming to an organization. Commanders are selected as early as two years prior to taking command. On top of that, they attend pre-command courses at echelon to prepare them. Chaplains do not have that same level of notification nor access to a course intended to help them envision ministry in a new context.

First, to prepare for arrival, it is important to develop situational awareness of the organization. Background information such as task organizational charts, briefings, mission statements, and unit histories all provide valuable insights into the formal aspects of the organization. We recommend inbound chaplains reach out to the current supervisory UMT to gather information about the unit and their mission. We also suggest networking with colleagues and acquaintances to gather their knowledge

about the organization. The goal during this phase is to find valid and relevant information that helps develop a picture of the organization's cultural environment, leadership, command climate, and identifies potential areas where a new chaplain might make a meaningful impact.

Second, soft introductions are an incredible tool to communicate professionalism and open lines of communication. After my first assignment, my brigade chaplain and I talked about how an initial introduction to my next battalion could facilitate a transition. He helped me construct a professional email containing an attached biography and formal letter of introduction. This approach helped me establish good dialogue for a seamless transition. These emails may also include a request to talk on the phone, especially with the current executive officer and supervisory chaplain. This goes a long way to prepare the incoming chaplain for the new assignment. It also empowers the incoming chaplain to enter Phase 2: The First Day.

Phase 2: First Day

The first day marks a chaplain's entrance into their organization, which comes with plenty of threats and opportunities. What the chaplain does—and who they spend time with—on the first day will signal to their people what and who are important to the chaplain. For these reasons, the first day should primarily focus on initiating and gaining trust.

Arriving at a new unit requires intentional preparation. Michael Watkins, founder of Genesis Advisers and a corporate consultant, suggests that joining a new organization is akin to an organ

transplant, and the new employee is the new organ. If chaplains fail to thoughtfully adapt to the new situation, the organizational immune system may attack and reject them.[2] As welcome as most chaplains are at any unit, they still face challenges in transition. Without proper awareness of the situation, a chaplain's good intentions could be attacked by the unit's immune system. For example, attacks could come through marginalization. This is evident when an individual is not recognized within the unit, is not sought out as the primary resource for addressing Soldier concerns, is excluded from leadership consultations, and is ultimately not trusted.

A key task for any new chaplain is building and maintaining trust. As General Stanley McChrystal quotes: "Great teams consist of individuals who have learned to trust each other. Over time, they have discovered each other's strengths and weaknesses, enabling them to play as a coordinated whole."[3] New chaplains should hit the ground running by building trust. Chaplains establish trust by purposefully spending time with their people, engaging with the organization's leaders, and reflecting on their interactions. A purposeful approach and reflection establish trust.

Impressions and assessments begin immediately, for both a new chaplain and for those they are meeting. We recommend a new chaplain prioritizes meeting with the Religious Affairs Specialist. This shows respect, a team approach, and enables the chaplain to begin to lay out and get feedback on the initial integration plan. How a chaplain honors that relationship signals to the Religious Affairs Specialist and the rest of the organization the value the chaplain places on enlisted leadership. A chaplain's ability to prioritize and empower their

Religious Affairs Specialist reflects how they value and integrate NCO leadership across the whole unit. When the Unit Ministry Team functions as a team, ministry multiplies. If a new chaplain is assigned to an installation where they in-process the installation prior to coming to their assigned unit, meeting with the Religious Affairs Specialist before the first day in the office can provide time for meetings to be set up for the first day ahead of time.

Other people new chaplains choose to meet on the first day should be focused on building key partnerships in the new unit. A good rule of thumb is that the people who know Soldiers best are the senior NCOs. For instance, at a TRADOC assignment, that may mean the Senior Drill Sergeants. For most other assignments, this means the first sergeants. Having a one-on-one with each first sergeant on the first day communicates that you prioritize soldier care and will be engaged with the Soldiers. An intentional plan from day one will set the chaplain up to enter the next phase: the Initial Assessment.

Phase 3: Initial Assessment

In *The First 90 Days*, Watkins suggests assessing and leading an organization is like preparing for a long sailing trip:

> First, you need to be clear on whether your destination (the mission and goals) and your route (the strategy) are the right ones. Then you can figure out which boat you need (the structure), how to outfit it (the processes), and which mix of crew members is best (the skill bases). Throughout the journey, you keep an eye out for reefs that are not on the charts.[4]

This phase encompasses the first 30 days and prioritizes reflection and assessment. As tempting as it may be to speed up this phase, it takes time just like preparing for a long sailing trip. The more experience a chaplain has, the more tempting it is to quickly make changes based on past failures and successes. However, without fully understanding the operational environment and the personalities involved, we can find ourselves committing malpractice and losing credibility with our "educated" assumptions. By speeding through transition, chaplains may not see the reefs that can cause them to crash and sink. For instance, this might involve assuming that a Chaplain Moral Leadership Training that was effective in a previous unit will automatically work well in the new unit. However, it is essential to engage with the Religious Affairs Specialist and unit leadership to determine the most suitable processes for the new context.

The bulk of the work here involves face-to-face meetings with stakeholders. Stakeholders are the interconnected offices and people that make up the larger picture of how the organization functions. It is about understanding what values and priorities make up the whole organization. Meeting with and assessing each section and command's leadership will help the chaplain have a better understanding of the whole organizational picture. Stakeholders can be both external and internal. Examples of internal stakeholders are the senior NCO population, the chaplain's command team and leaders at one level down, as well as staff sections, special staff, Soldier and Family Readiness Groups, and Civilian staff. External stakeholders are UMT peers across the installation, contracted ministry coordinators, behavioral health,

military family life counselors, financial counselors, societies, and regimental associations, and even food banks. For instance, as a chaplain in the First Infantry Division, being a member of the Society of the First Infantry Division and taking the time to talk with their president has opened an increased understanding of the history and lineage of the First Infantry Division and has even helped to explain why the First Infantry Division has such a strong tie with its local community.

During the initial meetings with these stakeholders, a new chaplain needs to determine their priorities and how often they need to touch base with the stakeholders. Chaplains need to make sure they have a purpose in their meetings and start to understand the stakeholders' impact on the Soldiers in the unit. For instance, my second assignment was an AIT battalion in a joint base environment with an Air Force Wing command. We were a tenant unit and the only Army battalion for one hundred and fifty-eight miles. Our stakeholders were distinct from our brigade, which was seven hundred miles away. I decided to break up the stakeholders by weeks. I dedicated the first week to the drill sergeant populations, senior chaplains on base, and my technical chain. In the second week, I met with the instructors and cadre. I dedicated the third week to the Air Force resources and offices. In the fourth week, I met with the community partners. Throughout the first month, I met continually with the battalion staff and battalion leadership.

The initial assessment is an incredible time for introductions and relationship building. New chaplains can build their unit's credibility with every handshake and partnership they build. Many stakeholders may have wanted to come

by or be a part of the effort but have not gotten around to it. When this is done intentionally, chaplains can multiply their efforts in caring for people and advising their commander. With a solid knowledge base of the organization and the key stakeholders, the next phase of Organizational Alignment and Team Building will yield better results.

Phase 4: Organizational Alignment and Team Building

This phase is focused on alignment, team building, and nesting the UMT's efforts with the unit and the commander's intent. This phase will take around 30 days, concluding around the 60-day mark. This phase requires constant effort and reflection because the alignment and team-building phase of the transition model necessitates re-establishing our core competencies in the context of our units and clearly communicating our purpose to the team. This step is crucial to operationalizing religious support in any environment. By fostering alignment and team building, a chaplain establishes their leadership of both the UMT and their role as the commander's advisor. This phase can be accomplished in six steps.

Step 1: Review and develop organizational alignment. How a chaplain assesses whether the UMT is organizationally aligned impacts what they can do for their people. The commander's goals and instructions, along with the unit's METL and its known or expected missions and objectives can help shape a chaplain's vision. Examine how effectively the unit shares the overall vision from the top down. The degree of alignment required may vary based on the distance from the desired state. Chaplains can make needed

changes more easily if they are patient and flexible and can set the tone with their UMT. We recommend choosing a creative venue to take the team to talk about vision, mission, goals, and objectives. Chaplains need to talk to their people, learn the history of the team, programs, and missions, and dream about what they can do together.

Step 2: Establishing Key Milestones. Chaplains should be clear with their team and leadership about what they are learning and establish clear milestones. They should determine the resource requirements for goals and how feasible it would be to accomplish them as a team.

Step 3: Secure quick wins and short-term victories. Chaplains shouldn't underestimate the value of showing up on time and being prepared. Chaplains can secure quick wins, ranging from having computer access to acquiring resources that seemed inaccessible for the previous team.

Step 4: Consider discontinuing established rhythms. This phase does not include making changes to the battle rhythms or programs. Rather, it requires the UMT to lay the groundwork for why some things may need to change. Some established programs can assist the UMT in maintaining its presence and provide a framework to achieve rapid wins by upgrading existing processes. Chaplains may abandon programs that have lost their effectiveness. At the same time chaplains should be slow to eliminate programs and rhythms too early and jeopardize needed continuity.

Step 5: Build the team. We recommend chaplains spend time understanding their part in developing their subordinates and their personal and career goals.

This may be a time where chaplains evaluate if team members are in the right position or if there is bandwidth to make personnel changes.

Step 6: Create a sense of urgency. The UMT provides a unique and specific resource in any operational environment. Urgency reminds the team of that role. Chaplains can create urgency in three ways: by ensuring the UMT sticks to the essentials, i.e., providing religious support and advising the commander, by advocating for the needs of the unit and their families, and by staying true to their calling. As chaplains have these discussions, their vision for ministry in their new context will start to unfold into specific and measurable objectives.

A Reflection on Phases 1–4

After phase four, we recommend chaplains conclude their assessment and start actioning their vision for the rest of the time they serve in that unit. In addition to intentionally transitioning through each phase we suggest, a new chaplain will benefit from using Army systems and planning as well. For instance, spending time utilizing the Army Design Methodology during each phase could help to address and identify some new areas of priority and provide opportunities for creative strategy and processes. Prior to proceeding to Phase Five, new chaplains can help ensure the unit is aware of the unique contributions of the UMT.

Here is a crucial but overlooked point: chaplains need to go back to the basics, assess the condition of their main product, and make it excellent. If the main thing is not excellent, then no other factor will compensate for its ineffectiveness.

For the Army, the main thing is the ability to fight and win our nation's wars. For the UMT, it is our core competencies: "nurture the living, care for the wounded, and honor the fallen."[5] We suggest chaplains maintain focus on their vision for the main thing, ministering to Soldiers in the darkest of hours. That leads us into Phase 5: Establish Culture and Ministry Rhythms.

Phase 5: Establish Culture and Ministry Rhythms

Culture and rhythms help guide the team, improve the health of the organization, and balance all the responsibilities of the team. As chaplains delve into the history and mission of the unit, it may seem that the organization has forgotten or lost its vision for the good work they have done and the opportunity to contribute to our nation's defense. New chaplains have an opportunity to reinvigorate the wider unit culture by utilizing existing slogans, key historical moments, or unique experiences in the unit (airborne operations, air assault operations, riding in tanks, etc.). We recommend incorporating these into the chaplain's vision for ministry. In this phase, new chaplains can also establish ministry rhythms. This might mean maintaining, adding, or removing existing meetings, programs, or daily practices. Chaplains may benefit from explicitly integrating the vision and mission into the reasons these rhythms are changing or staying the same. Culture and rhythms need to be regularly assessed, which leads to Phase 6: Sustaining.

Phase 6: Sustaining

Chaplains can reap the benefits of an intentional transition process in

phase six. This phase consists of two congruent efforts. The first is cultivating the systems and relationships created that help the UMT function effectively in the unit. The second is looking ahead to facilitate the next transition. Feedback is key for ongoing assessment. We suggest chaplains seek out feedback from their Religious Affairs Specialist, their leadership, other key figures in their organization, and their supervisory chaplain. Chaplains need not fear making changes as they go because an idea failed, or they didn't anticipate something in their initial assessment. Chaplains can align the change with the vision and mission and try again. Finally, it is never too early to start preparing the organization for the next leader. If chaplains keep this in mind, it gives them a big-picture perspective that pays dividends to the UMTs, unit leadership, and Soldiers that follow in their footsteps.

Conclusion

In the Army, transitions occur constantly. Transition periods present risks but also offer valuable opportunities. When the UMT approaches transitions with intentionality, both the chaplain and the gaining unit stand to gain. Too often, chaplains approach transitions with haste and surprise, as if they had no idea they were leaving or heading to a new assignment. While updated and thoughtful continuity books can be very helpful, they are not the only tool available for assignment transition. Above, we explored several ways to promote healthy transition and integration with a new unit. Approaching the transition with intentionality opens opportunities for ministry and care.

As an accompaniment to this article, Chaplain Marroquin developed a Chaplain Transition Handbook. It can be found using the following QR code.

Chaplain (Major) Peter Robinson is the Deputy Division Chaplain for First Infantry Division in Fort Riley, KS. His civilian education includes BA, Mid-America Nazarene University; MA, Nazarene Theological Seminary; MDiv, Liberty Theological Seminary; MoS, Army Command and Staff College; DMin, Erskine Seminary. He was born in Idaho Falls, ID. He is married to his wife of 20 years, Kim. They have three children, love Waffle House, and living life together.

Chaplain (Captain) Marcus A. Marroquin is currently a student at the United States Army Institute of Religious Leadership. Chaplain Marroquin pastored in Austin, TX from 2012 to 2018 until entering active duty, with assignment at the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) and the 344th Military Intelligence Battalion. He studied International Relations at Texas State University and holds an MDiv from Liberty Theological Seminary. He is married to his wife Hilary and has four children, Mila, Brooks, Silas, and Jovie.

NOTES

1 Chaplain Marroquin.

2 Michael Watkins, *The First 90 Days: Proven Strategies for Getting Up to Speed Faster and Smarter* (Boston: Harvard Business Review, 2023).

3 Amy C. Edmondson, *Teaming: How Organizations Learn, Innovate, and Compete in the Knowledge Economy* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 11 as quoted in Stanley McChrystal, Tantum Collins, David Silverman, and Chris Fussell, *Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World* (London: Portfolio Penguin, 2015), 98.

4 Watkins, *First 90 Days*, 145.

5 Department of the Army, *Army Chaplain Corps Activities (AR 165-1)* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2024), 2-4.