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# SOUTH AFRICAN OUTLOOK

## The Military Chaplaincy Debate

Registered at the GPO as a newspaper

APRIL 1984

R0.65



*SADF chaplains (as can be seen from the beret badge) at a passing-out parade at Voortrekkerhoogte, 21.3.1979.  
Credits to Rand Daily Mail.*



# SOUTH AFRICAN OUTLOOK

ISSN 0038 2523

Vol 114

No 1354

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APRIL 1984

OUTLOOK ON THE MONTH	50
DEMILITARIZING THE CHAPLAINCY	51
Peter Moll	
WHERE ARE THE PROPHETS?	54
Richard Lippert	
MILITARY CHAPLAINCY SERVICE IN WEST GERMANY	56
EKD Bulletin	

**South Africa Outlook is an Independent Journal dealing with ecumenical and racial affairs which, un-interruptedly since 1870, has sought to place its readers in possession of facts and opinion which bear upon the lives of all the people of the sub-continent. Without allegiance to any political party, but according to what it believes to be Christian standards, it seeks to give information and comment on measures suggested either for the regulation or the advancement of any section of the population, by whomsoever proposed.**

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*Political comment in this issue is written to express the views of South African Outlook by F Wilson, G Hewson, M King and P Moll, PO Box 245, Rondebosch 7700.*

#### Annual Subscription

South Africa	R12.00
African Postal Union countries	R12.50
Overseas Surface Mail	R15.00
Overseas Airmail	
Europe and rest of Africa	R25.00
USA and Far East	R27.50

#### All Subscriptions include General Sales Tax.

Published by Outlook Publications (Pty) Ltd., PO Box 245, Rondebosch 7700, Cape and 247 Lower Main Road, Observatory 7700. Printed by Lovedale Press, PO Lovedale 5702. Typesetting by Latsky, Cape Town.

## Outlook on the Month

### MINISTRY DURING WAR-TIME

Since the SACC's theologically motivated criticism of the military in 1974, the military chaplaincy has been the subject of heated debates by the churches. Arguments rage about details like the Geneva Convention's prescriptions about the chaplain's dress, the officer status of chaplains and their subjection to the Military Discipline Code. All of these are important. But thus far, precious little thinking has been done on the underlying issue of the church's essential purpose vis-a-vis the military. What is that purpose? And having defined it, how will the church achieve it?

Thus far it seems that this purpose has been summed up in military chaplaincy. However, we believe that military chaplaincy is too limited a concept to define the church's mission in this arena. The concept suggests (a) that the church's ministry is essentially a ministry to military personnel, and (b) that this ministry occurs chiefly under military auspices.

But, the church's mission is broader than a ministry to military personnel. The church is placed in the world; it communicates God's love to all people; among its tasks is to witness to the state and all human institutions. Therefore it cannot restrict its ministry solely to military personnel. It must minister to the military system too, by engaging in prophetic criticism of aspects of its activities which fail to measure up to Gospel standards of justice and peace. It may even exercise its prophetic role by questioning the very existence of the military, as churches in Europe are doing in response to the danger of nuclear cataclysm.

The church in South Africa has to do ministry in a war situation. It should minister to soldiers on both sides. It should minister to conscientious objectors, whether they are contemplating the action, leaving the country, or in prison. It should minister to civilians in the military-occupied areas — particularly people who feel themselves oppressed and manipulated by the military. It should concern itself with the difficult position of young black men who for economic reasons are forced to volunteer for service in the army. On no account can the ministry of the church be restricted to ministry under military auspices.

In light of the inadequacy of the concept of military chaplaincy, the church needs to reformulate its purpose with respect to the military. It can no longer afford to confine its ministry within military constraints. It should reformulate its task as that of *full-orbed ministry under war-time conditions*. On this model its chaplains will, as representatives of their churches' concerns about the evils of the war, occupy themselves in an evenhanded fashion with all the needs and suffering arising out of the armed conflict. The chaplains will have to shed military paraphernalia which obscure the church's commitment to justice and peace, like uniform, officer status and rank. Lippert's personal testimony gives a moving account of why he, as a chaplain in Vietnam, felt his entire ministry to be compromised through its intimate association with the war crimes of the US Army. The article about the West German chaplaincy shows that demilitarization is a workable and tested alternative. Peter Moll's article suggests several ways in which the chaplaincy of the South African churches can be demilitarized, and at the same time debunks the myth that the Geneva Conventions require uniformed chaplains.

*This issue of SA Outlook is shorter than usual, on the understanding that the May edition will be a bumper 24 pages on African Literature.*



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# DEMILITARIZING THE CHAPLAINCY

by Peter Moll

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## Introduction

Controversy about military chaplaincy is virtually as old as the institution itself. The American Founding Father and President, James Madison, opposed military chaplaincy on grounds of church-state independence. Shocked by Hitler's brutality, the West German churches would agree to no more than a church-based form of chaplaincy in 1956, which still exists today. Following the inexcusable silence of the chaplaincy about the My Lai massacres by US troops in Vietnam, several churches funded major inquiries into the nature of their chaplaincies in order to secure for them greater freedom to be faithful to their denominations' prophetic witness. These included the United Methodist Church, the United Church of Christ, the American Baptist Church, and the Episcopal Church. That the churches' concern for peace in the nuclear age is still causing controversy is evident from occasional chaplains' resignations and, in West Germany, falling numbers of candidates for the chaplaincy. Recently disagreement about the ends for which the war in Namibia is being fought has sparked sharp controversy about the nature of the South African churches' ministry to military personnel.

## The call for demilitarization

Yet the situation in South Africa is radically different from that of other churches which have wrestled with the problem of war ethics and chaplaincies. Those churches had misgivings about their wars and did not want their chaplaincies to confer a blanket endorsement upon all that their armed forces were doing. But in South Africa three churches have not merely expressed misgivings but have roundly rejected the Defence Force's presence in Namibia. A consensus exists among the Catholic, Methodist and Anglican churches that the SADF occupation of Namibia is an infringement of international law. The Catholic and Anglican churches have further reasoned that the SADF's presence

in Namibia is against the will of the Namibian people and that of the Namibian churches, and is obstructing the progress of that country toward independence. Opposition to the war in these churches has given rise to dissatisfaction with mere tinkering with the existing chaplaincy structure, and has issued in a call for a sweeping demilitarization of the chaplaincy.

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“Before anyone actually speaks or acts in the church, the church has already spoken through its very existence, through its ministries and organizations the church either confesses or denies its central message”

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The Catholic chaplains, among others, feel that the churches' perceptions of the justice or the injustice of a war should never place a damper on its ministry to military personnel. After all, most troops are there by compulsion. The church should provide “maximum ministry” to all its members. The military form of chaplaincy is by far the most effective vehicle of

ministry. Therefore they feel that to demilitarize the chaplaincy would be tantamount to offering ministry selectively – and to denying the Great Commission (Mt. 28 : 19, Acts 1 : 8).

However, this view errs in assuming that ministry is always valid irrespective of the form it takes. It fails to see that the military form of chaplaincy in a military system to whose purposes the church is opposed, could discredit the ministry of the church. Theologically this connection between the form of ministry and its validity follows from two doctrines that all Christians accept: that Christ is Lord of the church, and that Christ is Lord of the world.

First, Christ as Lord of the church is the head of the body of which the church is the earthly form. Since the church draws its life from Christ, all order, ministry and office in the church is legitimated only by its correspondence to the rule of Christ (Moltmann: 293). It is Christ who was victorious over the “elemental spirits of the universe” (Gal. 4 : 3) by the resurrection, and who then “gave gifts to men” (Eph. 4 : 8). Thus Christ's granting of appropriate gifts and the divine call, together with recognition of these by the church, are a sufficient condition of ministry (Manson: 95). No human institution may set further requirements upon the church's ministry without calling into question the Lordship of Christ over the church. Christ's Lordship should be evident in the constitution, order, and administration of the church. Indeed, before anyone actually speaks or acts in the church, the church has already spoken through its very existence; through its ministries and its organizations the church either confesses or denies its central message (cf. Moltmann: 290). Therefore it cannot leave its visible form to the authority of the state.

It follows that the prescription of the armed forces that the chaplain be a full member of the military, and accept its pay, discipline and uniform is an untheological requirement for ministry. When the church



willingly submits to such an alien requirement, it does violence to its witness that Christ is its sole Lord.

Second, Christ is Lord of the world. The Resurrected One was victorious over the "cosmos" (John 16 : 33), and so, even though the world is under the power of the Evil One (1 John 5 : 19), the church does not abandon the world. It attempts to "make disciples of all nations" (Mt. 28 : 19) in its evangelistic task. It tries to help the downtrodden, the neglected and the distressed in its diaconal task. Finally it recognizes that distress is often caused by the impersonal working of political and economic systems; thus the church has a prophetic task of Christian social criticism and Christian action (Barth: 893).

In South Africa, the English-language churches have, as part of their prophetic task, declared apartheid to be unchristian and its theological justification a heresy. Several of them have questioned the role of the military in defending a social system

"It would be ridiculous that a church be forced into compromised forms of ministry by a professedly Christian state – one whose constitution guarantees the freedom of religion and professes allegiance to the Christian God"

which has injustice at its root. They have expressed their disquiet at the disproportionately high defence component in the state budget, the growing influence of the military in the higher reaches of government, and allegations of destabilization operations by the SADF in neighbouring states. Finally, the MCSA, the CPSA, and the Catholic Church have called for an end to South Africa's illegal occupation of Namibia. Thus those churches believe that they have a prophetic task of witnessing to the military by expressing their conviction of what social righteousness should entail in the military context.

Now a military chaplain is identified with the armed forces by what I shall call "military symbolism" – uniform, rank, security clearance, and participation in military procedure like saluting and parades. These factors, in the opinion of many, would lend religious legitimacy to the armed forces; they would cover the armed forces with an aura of religious respectability, which would belie the church's prophetic criticism of the armed forces. The military chaplain's presence is a statement that military life is compatible with the obligations of Christian faith. Perhaps unwittingly, the military chaplain provides the armed forces with a moral underpinning which undercuts the church's moral convictions about the purposes of the military.

Perhaps more importantly, military chaplaincy typically makes a substantial contribution to military efficiency by way of raising morale. Again, this may be unintentional, although the SADF Orders on Religion of 1970 and 1978 (which, curiously, are confidential documents) make it abundantly clear that morale-raising is one of the tasks of the chaplain. Armies world-wide have not been slow to make good use of the morale-boosting capabilities of their chaplaincies. For instance, the US Army defence in the famous suit about the constitutionality of the chaplaincy was that the chaplaincy "raises the morale and increases the effectiveness of our fighting force" (The constitutionality suit: 48). Even as a by-product, so important a contribution to the efficiency of the armed forces is intolerable to a church which opposes the war.

Thus it can be argued that the military chaplaincy's participation in military symbolism and its contribution to efficiency undermine the church's witness to the military. It follows that the MCSA, the CPSA and the Catholic Church have reasons, arising from the theology of ministry, to demilitarize their chaplaincies.

**The process of demilitarization**

However, the organizational aspects of demilitarization are daunting. What would happen if the military flatly refused to entertain new forms of ministry? Could the financial resources be found to underwrite an extensive church-based ministry? Could civilian ministers operate safely in the operational area? Could church officials explain their new stance to their white membership without massive defection? These difficulties must be faced squarely. However, the pain and dislocation that institutional change generates should not inhibit careful consideration of the profound reasons of principle that call for change.

The church should start by informing the military, the public and its own members of its principles of ministry. Then it should compile a statement of intention, detailing how those principles may be enacted in

reality. Finally, the church should embark on a series of concrete steps toward demilitarization. Here follows a suggested statement of principles and a statement of intention.

"The church cannot leave its visible form to the authority of the state"

∴ reference to some of legal use

**Statement of principles**

1. The ministry of the chaplaincy should both express and remain true to the Gospel in its fullness.
2. It must ensure that the pastoral and prophetic witness of the church is not compromised.
3. The chaplaincy should not be unduly controlled by the military in a way which undermines the freedom of the church to present the breadth and richness of its teaching in regard to the implications of the Gospel in this situation of conflict.
4. The chaplaincy should not allow the ministry of the church to be used to give legitimacy to an unjust cause.
5. The chaplaincy should be responsible to the local church, and come under the authority of the local church leadership.

**Statement of intention**

In order both to express and safeguard the above principles, the present form of chaplaincy should be changed along the following lines:

1. Chaplains should not remain permanently in this ministry. A limited term of office will help to ensure that the chaplaincy remains free of undue influence by the perceptions, policies and ethos of the SADF.
2. Chaplains should be directly responsible to the leadership of the local church. This will ensure a form of chaplaincy more in keeping with the church's understanding of ministry and authority within the Body of Christ.
3. Chaplains should not wear the uniform of the SADF. The wearing of the uniform manifestly identifies the chaplain with the SADF and its cause.
4. The chaplaincy should be demilitarized. This is the best way to safeguard what has been agreed to in the Statement of Principles.

**Concrete steps towards demilitarization**

Issuing statements of principle and intention could be the start of a process of negotiation with the military. The initiation of dialogue with the military will itself be warmly applauded by a significant con-



stituency within the church who have noticed the contradiction between retention of military chaplaincy and an anti-war stance. Negotiation and dialogue are, then, the pre-condition for taking concrete steps toward demilitarization. The situation is one of nothing ventured, nothing gained. Only when the negotiations are over will the churches have a clear idea of their ability or otherwise to persuade the military to accept their chosen style of ministry. It would be abdication of responsibility for the churches neither to state their position nor to initiate negotiations, merely because they suspect that the military will not entertain their requests. In any case it would be ridiculous that a church be forced into compromised forms of ministry by a professedly Christian state – one whose constitution guarantees freedom of religion and professes allegiance to the Christian God. Let us now examine some concrete steps that can be taken.

### 1. *Alternative uniform*

The possibility of an alternative uniform could be considered with a view to satisfying SADF requirements in the operational area. For instance, the Friends Ambulance Unit wore a civilian khaki uniform which carried no military insignia (Davies: 12, 14). Another alternative is the selection of a type of "Red Cross" uniform. As is explained in the Appendix, there is no legal barrier to prevent the church from

which could serve as an alternative to the S.A. Chaplains' Service conferences which are normally run by DRC ministers. They could provide a much-needed alternative to military propaganda by running courses for recruits prior to their entering the military. They could minister to conscientious objectors in a variety of ways – visits to prison, writing letters, running seminars, helping them compile their dossiers for presentation to the Board for Religious Objection, etc. They could help young men find employment after army service, or after community service, or after imprisonment. They could help alleviate the difficulties that recruits suffer, arising from dislocation, transience, and sudden removal from their mode of life.

### 3. *Church-based chaplaincy within South Africa*

Church-based chaplaincy can be arranged with relative ease within the borders of South Africa, through limited-term and part-time chaplaincy. Limited-term chaplaincy could serve as a bridgehead to fully church-based chaplaincy. There are good reasons, even during peacetime, for having chaplains do limited terms in the armed forces, because full integration can lead – as indeed it can in any secular institution! – to vested interests and ideological acquiescence. Several of the US church commissions recommended limited-term chaplaincy, and in West Ger-

### 4. *Ministry in the operational area*

Ministry in the operational area can be catered for by a triple strategy of peer group ministry, national service chaplaincy, and church-based ministry. Since national servicemen have to be in the army anyway, their exercise of ministry as laity might not connote church sanction to the same degree as a military chaplaincy would, because, in the theology of many churches, parishioners do not represent the church in the special and visible way that a minister or priest does. An Anglican bishop recently suggested to the author that peer-group ministry is probably the most effective form of ministry available.

The extension of the current National Service chaplaincy, as an interim measure, can be accomplished without structural changes, but steps would have to be taken to ensure their independence from military and DRC control. This would entail renegotiation of the form of the current three-week chaplaincy course which is run by DRC ministers who, for example, present lectures on "National service refusal", "Religious Preparedness" (for what? one might ask), "Psychological Warfare", and "Revolutionary Warfare". National Service chaplains' use of rank (currently two pip lieutenant) would have to be revised.

A church-based ministry could be run in the larger bases near towns in Namibia – e.g. at Grootfontein and Oshakati. Prior understanding may have to be reached with the Namibian churches to enable South African ministers to do this.

### 5. *Long-term financial planning*

The financial burdens loom large. But Rome was not built in a day. The church could adopt a long-term staggered programme of change, starting by putting money aside (mainly for a housing programme) for small numbers of chaplains at first. In time numbers of church-financed chaplains could grow, depending on the strength of the church's commitment to civilian ministry and the success of its parallel ministry.

### 6. *Research*

Finally, the church should poll the opinion of its membership. It is at least arguable that this theology of ministry which calls for demilitarization of the chaplaincy commands wide support in the Anglican, Catholic and Methodist churches. This is suggested by the keen debate at church assemblies over the subject since the 1974 call by the SACC at Hammanskraal. The findings of the inquiry could be of great significance for church decision making; if it emerged that only a limited sector of the membership thought the military form of chaplaincy necessary but that most viewed it as a stumbling block or as a fundamental contradiction of the Gospel, then the case for demilitarization would be overwhelming.

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"Perhaps unwittingly, the military chaplain provies the armed forces with a moral underpinning which undercuts the church's moral convictions about the military"

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negotiating with the military to grant these chaplains full protected status in terms of the Geneva Convention.

### 2. *Alternative non-military ministry*

Military disapproval cannot prevent the church from instituting its own alternative non-military ministry to people who are involved in the conflict, at least within the borders of South Africa. All the US church commissions recommended alternative ministry. This ministry would be in a strategic position to help recruits and chaplains come into contact with that sector of their church which perceives the military as in alliance with apartheid. The "parallel chaplains" could provide theological input at retreats for chaplains

many chaplains serve for a maximum of six to eight years. Another alternative is that civilian chaplains be Department of Manpower officials relating to the Defence Force as civilians. For this the SADF has adequate precedent in the secondment of national servicemen to Internal Revenue, the consignment of conscientious objectors to the Department of Manpower, and its use of black civilian workers and white civilian secretaries.

The current chaplaincy arrangement already has a church-based aspect in the form of part-time chaplains. The numbers of these could be extended; the church could grant them supplementary allowances to release them to perform this ministry.



*Chaplains and the Geneva Convention*

For purposes of determining their international legal status, chaplains are subsumed under medical personnel, who are not considered part of the fighting forces, but are designated as "protected personnel". In terms of the Geneva Convention of 1949, chaplains are expected to carry an identity card and wear an armband with the Red Cross (cf. *Final Record*). During the Anglo-Boer War, some chaplains on the British side wore military uniform while others did not, but all used the Red Cross armband (see photograph of chaplains of Natal army, in Watkins). In the event of capture chaplains are not deemed prisoners of war, but will at least benefit by all the provisions of the Geneva Convention relating to prisoners of war. Under capture they can continue to carry out their religious duties, and cannot be compelled to perform any other kind of work (*Courier*: 45f).

To be granted immunity, chaplains must be officially attached to the armed forces. However, this does not necessarily imply the use of military uniform or other accoutrements of military status. Official authorization is what is decisive. "It is quite conceivable", writes International Committee of the Red Cross legal expert Jean de Preux, "that a state might . . . allow in its armed forces religious personnel not subject to the usual constraints" (Letter to Mrs. R. Ferreira, 24.10.1983, in response to an inquiry by the author). As an example of this, the West German chaplaincy is under civilian direction and does not use military uniform or rank, but nevertheless acts within the terms of the Geneva Conventions ("Military chaplaincy service"; and a letter of 20.11.1983 to the author from retired chief chaplain (Dekan) Konrat Weymann).

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## WHERE ARE THE PROPHETS?\*

I'm not sure why I volunteered to go to Vietnam as a Marine chaplain. However, once I was there I was forced to come to grips with the cross on my cap.

When I was a child one of my favourite days of the year was the 4th of July. It wasn't our origin as a country that made the day so impressive, it was the zebras and the cherry bombs, the explosives and the loud noises. I wonder what that said about me and my country.

I was part of all that was Americana. I was a football and track star; I had the lead in two school plays and was a student body president. I was all the "right" things. I attended a good liberal arts church college and a Lutheran seminary founded by hard working Swedish immigrants. And of course I believed that my government was moral and responsible. So I found myself, after three years in a New Orleans parish, volunteering for Vietnam despite some reservations I had as a Christian clergyman about the war.

My first impression of Vietnam was that of a very beautiful country, a place of tranquillity and peace. I had an initial sense of well-being. There was a road outside of Da Nang that reminded me of a small country road near Hollister, California. Eucalyptus and palm trees, small vegetable farms, and mountains in the background. But most of all there were trees - trees so majestic and beautiful that I thought only a mad man could conceive of defoliation.

It was difficult for me to realise that people were being destroyed. I couldn't imagine that the land was being made into a moonscape. And sometimes I had to remind myself that my little son, Timothy, was not behind a palm tree or that my wife was really safe 9 000 miles away. I had to tell myself, constantly at first, that what was happening was the real thing - not coke or uncola or motorcycles or dreams or hidden persuaders. It was the real thing! People were dying on both sides.

And so I found myself in the midst of young men and older men and weeping widows and fatherless children and I kept hearing over and over

again, "An honourable and just peace is all we seek." And my only response to that was, "Mr. President, do you now have or have you ever had dysentery?"

Before going into battle a vacuum is churning, cotton mouth creeps up on you, your mind begins to go blank, you're not hungry or thirsty; sex, politics, and even religion becomes irrelevant. It's as though you are preparing yourself to be no-thing.

We participated in more than our share of all the things a Marine infantry battalion would experience. We went on search and destroy missions, had our firefights, used our artillery with discretion, and bombed with caution. We said that for public consumption, but many times we just killed! I remember vividly the day we bombed a North Vietnamese hospital complex back in the mountains while I watched from about a mile away. I didn't like it at all! My resistance had set in and I began to die that day.

I remember Christmas and how I cried when I got the pictures of my wife and child - and how I went off and did that by myself because I was supposed to be "strong". And most poignant of all was the song we sang that day: "Peace on earth good will toward men." I died a little more that day.

Did I mention to you about good old American know-how? Most of the Viet Cong captives were tight-lipped when it came to getting information from them. So we introduced them to our German Shepherds. And if that didn't make them talk, we would take them up to 1 000 feet in our helicopter and make some very overt gestures. If they still refused to talk, they would be pushed out (always taking some South Vietnamese along for the dirty work). After all, don't we believe that for the Oriental life is cheap?

Then for expediency we would resettle the settlers who were resettled from the resettlement village of last year's resettlement. From our point of view it was acceptable because a little more disease and starvation and dreadful living conditions didn't hurt them.

\*Reprinted from *Military Chaplaincy Proposal* by Project for Review of the Military Chaplaincy (Denver: 1982)



They were used to it. They would get their burned-out huts, cratered fields, and bombed dikes just as soon as the war ended. "Why can't you Vietnamese understand that?" And so the garbage dumps in that beautiful country of Vietnam began to dot the countryside like American junkyards. The people would fight with the rats and dogs for dirty garbage. Isn't it wonderful to be free?

Even that which was most sacred to the Vietnamese was desecrated by us. A beautiful shrine which I was told probably dated back at least 600 years was taken over by our battalion. A Buddhist priest and two older men begged us not to desecrate their sacred grounds.

"Get their asses out of here," was our reply. We drove tanks and trucks and jeeps and amtracs right over their sacred ground. Then to show them how much we loved them, we dug latrines in their ancestral burial plots. I recall a remark a Marine once made to me: "These damn people ain't got no couth." That's really what he said! I was dying fast now.

But most of all I remember some small children that stood in back of me one morning as I was having communion services for one of our line companies. They watched me in utter fascination. They were beautiful, brown-skinned children. Suddenly we were ordered out of the area. An hour later I witnessed saturation bombing of an area about a mile away. To my horror, I was told it was the village we had just left. Beautiful brown-skinned children, what colour is your skin now? And at that moment I cried . . . very hard.

I needed to forget so I went into another hamlet to play priest. They touched me and talked about me because I was the first holy man they had seen in a long time. But I really wondered what they thought about the Jesus I carried in my heart. Was I a sheep in wolf's clothing or a wolf in sheep's clothing? And right there it hit me. I didn't know who I was. I was almost dead now.

#### *Demands of the cross*

A Roman Catholic, a religious order priest, a sensitive guy and a good friend, he perceived and felt this whole tragedy much earlier and deeper than I. He resigned his commission and left the priesthood. "I've been lied to, cheated, prostituted, and destroyed. I'm almost dead, but not quite. Therefore, I say unto you, take your war and stick it!" Good for you, my friend. It took me a little longer. I was dead for an awful long time.

In order to come alive I admitted, finally, that I was part of this tragedy and helped make it possible. I could no

longer hide behind my chaplain's non-combatant status. I could no longer hide behind the cross on my cap and claim exemption from the raging debate, as if I were somehow above it all. I was a part of the war-making machinery of the United States, make no doubt about that! When I came to that conclusion, I became alive. Finally I made a choice between the demands of the government and the demands of the cross. It was a radical choice. It was deep, and it cut to the very core of my being. Nevertheless, I made it and I chose to live with the cross.

I say all this as one who was not an outside observer, I was there, with the infantry; a part of the heaviest fighting of the war during 1968. I earned my combat action ribbon, my bronze star, and my purple heart. I earned the six unit awards my outfit received and I wore them proudly. I still have some difficulty with the malaria I have and sometimes small shrapnel pieces still work their way through the skin on my neck and back. And I have no reason to doubt my effectiveness as a good combat Marine chaplain.

But I chose to put all that away. Incongruencies arose and I could not put them away neatly . . . or at all! That cross came to represent forces in this world that crush and destroy and maim and cripple. Too long Christianity has, by direct action or by its silence, given sanction to governments who are repressive and are plundering and destroying God's creation. The God of Abraham and Isaiah and Jesus is a God of liberation, not a God of repression and destruction. He is the God who frees his people from oppression and bondage; he is the God who brings release to captives and sets at liberty those who are oppressed. I lost my identity because I truly believed this but had attached myself to forces which had unleashed destruction and plundering. My cross no longer represented (except within myself but not by my actions) a practical and theoretical framework out of which the God of love operated through me as a clergyman and a military officer. Operationally and theologically, the military uniform, and the cross on it, became a contradiction. To speak of the God of Love as one who liberates became impossible with the restraints of the military uniform.

It became clear to me after three years in the military that the chaplain was merely an extension of the government and not of the gospel. Though in theory the chaplain was free to say and be what he wanted to be, in practice it was impossible. And the reason was that the chaplain had been manipulated into a position of believing he was free to be the prophet as well as priest, that he was under no restraints to temper

what he felt must be said. These manipulations were sometimes direct; and sometimes they were so subtle one hardly knew he was being had. I am talking about fitness reports for officers, about reassignment, about promotions, about career opportunities, about the subtleties of being ostracized for positions taken that were "not in the interests of the military community."

I recall in the spring of 1970 my outrage from the pulpit at El Toro Marine Air Base in Southern California concerning the invasion of Cambodia. A month later at a chaplain's meeting I was told that the base chaplain had decided to utilize two or three chaplains regularly instead of rotating weekly among all the chaplains as they had done previously. For the remaining six months I was there I was not assigned to be preacher or liturgist again. I cannot accuse; I cannot point my finger. But I do wonder.

It is fashionable these days to talk about pacifism from within the rank and file of the military chaplains. It is almost as if a contest were going on to see who can "outpacify" whom. I personally have a lot of difficulty with that because I do not see or hear anything that would bear that out. And I hear a lot about the duty of the chaplain, who is a Christian minister, to preach not only the resurrection but to preach "prophetically" when need be. Where are the prophets? Who is speaking out? Where was the chaplain of Charlie Company at My Lai? What chaplain spoke out from his pulpit in moral outrage about the saturation bombing during the Christmas holidays? Where are the chaplains of the USS Kitty Hawk and the USS Constellation? They should be at the very center of the racial controversy.) Where are the prophets we hear about in today's military chaplaincy? I know they are there. I personally know men who are morally outraged, who want to speak out but they don't. And so I ask why?

When an organism is attacked, two things happen. Either it counter attacks and beats off the germ or the disease or whatever it is that is destroying it. Or it excises the part that has been diseased or contaminated. Because I believe the military and its mission to be antithetical to the gospel of Christ, it is incongruent to believe that the military can exist side by side with the prophetic ministry of the Christian. Therefore, they must be separated from each other. Otherwise the prophetic gospel will not be heard over the noise of guns and bombs taking life faster than we can give it.

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# MILITARY CHAPLAINCY SERVICE IN WEST GERMANY\*

On the 27th February 1957 in Bonn an agreement concerning the establishment of a Protestant Military Chaplaincy Service in the Federal Republic of Germany was signed by the then Chancellor, Dr. Konrad Adenauer, and the Chairman of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany, Bishop Dr. Otto Dibelius. An attempt to set up a similar service for the soldiers of the People's Army of the German Democratic Republic had failed because the East German Government had rejected the idea.

The agreement on the chaplaincy service for the armed forces of the Federal Republic has been in force for almost 25 years now. It guarantees the full independence of the church in this area of pastoral care. A German military chaplain is released from regular service for six or eight years, after which period he normally resumes his ministry in the civilian church. During his chaplaincy he does not wear a uniform, nor does he hold any military rank, thus differing very much from his counterparts in other countries. He does not serve under a given commanding officer, but is "ordered to a special partnership" with him. This means that he is independent of government directives as far as his ministry is concerned. The working relationship between chaplain and commanding officer is governed by the principle of mutual trust and respect for the specific responsibilities of the partner.

The independence of the church from the state in this area is also expressed in the structure of responsibility for the Military Chaplaincy service. The main ministry of the Military Bishop is in his church, and he supervises the chaplaincy service in addition to his normal duties. Unlike the military chaplains, therefore, he is not paid by the Government; yet he bears full responsibility for the ministry of the church to soldiers. Similarly, the Military Superintendent, who is the superior of all military chaplains, is subject to the authority of the Bishop in church affairs.

Thus there is no such thing as a military church in Germany. Soldiers and their families do not cease to be members of the

civilian church during their service. As members of the forces they merely constitute a special area of ministry for which the military chaplain is responsible. This guarantees a close link between soldiers and the civilian churches.

Seven chaplaincy posts have been created to cater for soldiers stationed abroad, in El Paso, Texas/USA, Washington/USA, Decimomannu, Sardinia/Italy, Fontainebleau/France, SHAPE near Brussels/Belgium, Brunssum/Netherlands and Budel/Netherlands.

Apart from general pastoral care, the day-to-day service of a military chaplain consists of three main areas: worship services, classes in Christian ethics, and soldiers' retreats.

Military chaplains often accompany the soldiers to their training areas, and can also be found on Federal Navy vessels and on Air Force bases in Germany and abroad. They conduct open-air services and make their contribution to the general welfare of the soldiers.

Two-hour classes in Christian ethics, modelled on the "character guidance lessons" held in the American forces, are attended by soldiers once a month as part of their duties. The idea is that the soldiers should discuss fundamental ethical problems affecting their lives in general, and their military service in particular, with the chaplain. How can the service of a soldier be reconciled with the commandment to love one's enemies? God wants life to be protected and expects His children to do what they can to prevent killing. How does this affect the role of the soldier in a modern army?

These and other problems form the subject matter for frank discussions between military chaplains and soldiers.

As the time for the monthly classes in Christian ethics is rather limited, soldiers are given the opportunity of going into things in greater depth during retreats. These usually last several days, and the soldiers are granted special leave for this purpose. Every year about 30 000 soldiers and members of their families take part in these retreats.

In its 25-year history the Military Chaplaincy Service has proved its worth to such an extent that neither the Government nor the church has any plans to change its structure or its work.

\*Reprinted from EKD Bulletin 3 (September 1981)

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*The Editorial Staff of South African Outlook regard the matter of the form of the church's ministry to military personnel as one of vital importance. We invite our readers to respond. Criticism, suggestions and discussion in (if possible, brief!) letters will be most welcome.*

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**Collection Number: AG1977**

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**PUBLISHER:**

*Publisher:- Historical Papers Research Archive*

*Location:- Johannesburg*

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