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Pressed but not Crushed:

How World War II Letter Writers Use the Bible as a Rhetorical Device

A Thesis Submitted to

the Faculty of the University of North Georgia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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To this day World War II is still referred to as “The Great War,” a title that continues to denote the implications it had on modern history. The war that began in 1939 carried profound sociopolitical and moral weight. Winston Churchill himself wrote that “crimes were committed by the Germans under the Hitlerite domination to which they allowed themselves to be subjected which find no equal in scale and wickedness with any that have darkened the record.”¹ Yet even in the belly of human history, some clung to faith. At a time when so many lost their hope in humanity, a time when literature took a cynical shift, some wrote about their beliefs and continued to believe in something bigger than themselves. Included in this group are the family members and soldiers who corresponded with one another throughout the war, reminding each other of the fundamental truths that bound them together and enabled them to keep going.

For some, this reminder came in the form of Bible verses. Letter writers recorded scripture as a way to give comfort, a sense of stability and familiarity, as a way to close the gap of physical distance, as a reminder that good still existed in the world, and as a way to remember whom they had faith in after all. In examining the letters, it is hard to ignore the significance the words of the Bible had for those who chose to include them, but the reasons are slightly more challenging to discover. Why quote the Bible? How did it influence both writer and reader? Does the specific achieved effect vary from letter to letter? After close study, the use of biblical references serves five possible rhetorical purpose for the writers as well as readers: to establish peace in chaos, to find comfort in

¹ Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War* (New York: Time Inc., 1959)

familiarity, to create confidence in morality, to unite family from afar, and to remember the character of God.

The question of quotation is more difficult to answer than it might appear. As Ruth Finnegan, Emeritus Professor at The Open University would answer, “quoting is not just regurgitating chunks of text or keeping them on library shelves but taking them to your own voice and in that act declaring a perspective on them.”² The act of including a verse in a letter places it in a different context than reading the same words in the context of the Bible. The words take on new meaning, made flexible by the rhetorical situation. The words of the writer and the words of the scripture weave themselves together. The text adopts the voice of the writer and the quoted words are no longer separate from the voice of the one quoting.³ They move from their original context and infuse themselves with the speaker’s life and the present moment.

While this sheds light on how to examine these quotes, Finnegan’s later ideas place an interesting weight on the influence of Bible verses in particular. Quoting takes a distant idea, whether distant in age or association, and brings it close. It calls “the external and distant into the immediate moment.”⁴ For those believing in a God during the war, His words, and by extension, His presence, became near and applicable in a present moment as soon as the ink hit the paper. This phenomenon occurred not only for a reader, who permitted the voice of a loved one to narrate ideas into consciousness but also for the writer, who is unable to remain unaffected by the words they call into existence.

² Ruth Finnegan, *Why Do We Quote?: The Culture and History of Quotation* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2013), 263.

³ Finnegan, *Why Do We Quote?*, 263.

⁴ Finnegan, *Why Do We Quote?*, 264.

Reading and writing are interdependent actions, and the first reader of any work is the writer.⁵ Donald M. Murray, a former professor of English at the University of New Hampshire describes it this way in his article “Teaching the Other Self: The Writer’s First Reader”: “The act of writing might be described as a conversation between two workmen muttering to each other at the workbench.”⁶ It becomes a collaboration of the two selves—the reading self and the writing self. The two aspects work together to develop meaning, emphasis, and structure in order to communicate effectively. In this understanding of the relationship between a reader and a writer, a rhetorical device does not affect a reader in isolation but also persuades and influences the writer, who acts as the first reader of the work. It is the writer as the reader that decides that those words in that order create the desired effect, and the reading writer understands this by allowing the words to affect a response in themselves. Studying how scripture influences a reader must account for two readers, the reading writer and the mental conception this writer has of their audience.

This concept extends not only to book writing or speech-making but to writing letters as well. David Barton and Nigel Hall write in their book *Letter Writing as a Social Practice*, letters result in responses. The process of reading and writing them and requires discussion and negotiation of meaning, as other forms of writing do.⁷ Because of this, pertinence demands that the rhetorical strategies of their authors be examined. Barton and Hall express in the first chapter that “the most revealing way of investigating letter writing is to view it as a social practice, examining the texts, the participants, the

⁵ Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford, “Audience Addressed/Audience Invoked: The Role of Audience in Composition Theory and Pedagogy,” *College Composition and Communication* 35, no. 2 (1984): p. 169, <https://doi.org/10.2307/358093>

⁶ Donald M. Murray, “Teaching the Other Self: The Writers First Reader,” *College Composition and Communication* 33, no. 2 (1982): p. 140, <https://doi.org/10.2307/357621>

⁷ David Barton and Nigel Hall, *Letter Writing as a Social Practice* (Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Pub., 2000), 4.

activities and the artefacts in their social contexts.”⁸ Taking their advice to heart, I sought out five different examples of how scripture is used as a rhetorical device in World War II letters in order to organize the majority of these types of letters based on effect. Each letter series required that I discover why the individual I studied might have used that specific Bible verse at that precise moment in time and how that choice might have influenced the intended audience. Four questions guided my research process: (1) Who wrote the letter? (2) What was their relationship with Christianity? (3) What external circumstances might have prompted the use of a particular passage? (4) What effect did the selected scripture have for the reader and writer?

If the goal of rhetoric itself is to convince, to persuade, or to illicit some specific emotional response within a reader, then the purpose of rhetorical devices is not far from this. The device is simply the means a writer uses to evoke this response. The scripture references which appear in these letters have been purposefully included because of the hope they could convey an important sentiment or reminder to a reader during this period in history. It is impossible to conclusively prove the reasons why people wrote what they did or how exactly it impacted their reader, given that these individuals are no longer living and are not able to testify to the intended or achieved effect. Despite this, the context surrounding when the scripture quotation was used can and does provide a convincing argument that the words of the Bible held some measure of influence at crucial junctures in the lives of the people who wrote them and received them.

Some references are not directly quoted with the book, chapter, and verse listed beside them. I found that some quoted passages of scripture in their letters not knowing

⁸ David Barton and Nigel Hall, *Letter Writing as a Social Practice*, 1.

where it appeared in the Bible, but being somewhat cognizant that it was found somewhere in the pages of scripture. The references to the Bible as a rhetorical device often come in the form of individual quotes or verses from various parts of the Bible. The Bible as a whole, or references to it as a whole work are not what I am considering to be the rhetorical device. Rather, the biblical rhetorical devices are the small sections letter writers pulled from across the Bible and used to communicate a specific emotion, desire, or hope to their reader.

The letters were taken from online archives, like the BBC WW2 People's war archive, and also from individuals who, with the help of scholars and family members, published their letters into book format. As I began compiling notes and research, it appeared as though some of the letters appeared to be similar in rhetorical purpose, which lead to the development of organizational categories in order to explain what the primary result might have been. Based on these categories, I selected the sets of letters that I thought best represented the Bible being used as that rhetorical device. The categories are tentative and will require further research determine if they continue to stand on a much larger scale.

This particular grouping of letters is intended to create a broad spectrum of potential rhetorical purposes. The overarching goal of this snapshot is to provide five different examples all using the same rhetorical device so as to establish five purposes the World War II letters referencing the Bible might have: (1) To establish peace in chaos, (2) To provide comfort though familiarity, (3) To create confidence in morality, (4) To unite family from afar, and (5) To remember the character of God. While I have sorted each series of letters into the categories that most accurately reflected their achieved effect, the

purpose of quotation in general, whether it be of a newspaper headline or Shakespeare, is fluid and resists concrete organization. At times, it can be somewhat subjective.

Importantly, these categories are not rigid, but permeable. Overlap is not only possible but expected. The structure I have designed simply provides placement for the scripture and is in no way intended to confine the reference.

To better establish the quotation, especially in those cases where the reference is not included with the quote, I have chosen to display the passage in the New King James Version (NKJV) translation of the Bible, 1982 edition. In my study, I found that a majority of the biblical references found in World War II letters were in the King James Version (KJV), which continued to be one of the most popular translations of the Bible throughout the 20th century, and was widely acknowledged as the standard English Bible.⁹ In fact, the January 1941 special edition Gideon New Testament and Psalms signed and prologued by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, which was sent to troops during the Great War appeared in the KJV¹⁰. The NKJV retains much of the syntax and word order that the KJV does, but it updates some archaic words to enhance interpretation and readability.¹¹ This option provided the greatest amount of textual clarity while maintaining the essence of the verses these individuals chose to include. All selections of scripture used are first referenced by the individuals studied. Each person had a varying role in the war. Some were civilians, some were generals, and some were chaplains. Some were citizens of the United States, others were from Scotland and Great

⁹ The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, "King James Version," Encyclopædia Britannica (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., October 24, 2017), <https://www.britannica.com/topic/King-James-Version>)

¹⁰ The Gideons International, "Getting God's Word Into The Hands Of Those Who Serve Their Country," The Gideons International (The Gideons International, December 13, 2011), <http://blog.gideons.org/2011/05/gideons-service-testaments-for-military/>)

¹¹ Noa, "Difference Between," Difference Between Similar Terms and Objects (Difference Between, July 28, 2011), <http://www.differencebetween.net/miscellaneous/difference-between-the-kjv-and-the-nkjv/>)

Britain. The scriptures they used not only reflected their views about the war, but also what they believed important to communicate to their reader.

Anne Westlands: Establishing Peace in Chaos

Not much is known about Anne's life except what she revealed in her letters. A civilian living in England during most of the war, her perspective differs from that of the soldiers on the front lines. A majority of the letters that have been preserved are those that she wrote to her daughter, also named Anne but referred to as "Annie", who had married and moved to the United States. Anne's husband had passed away in 1937, only a few years before England joined the war, and she was his second wife¹². In her letters, she mentions her step-daughter, Lysbeth, and her family, as well as her son, Willie, his wife, Pam, their son, Billy, her daughter, Florence, and some additional extended family. She writes about other people often and is ecstatic over every one of her grandchildren, whom she writes about extensively.

Incidentally, the first of her letters are dated in the summer of 1940, a significant period in England's history of World War II. The infamous "Battle of Britain" began July 10th of that year, and from her conversation with Annie, it is evident that the news of this conflict has reached American ears. She writes on July 25th,

I am sorry you have been so troubled about us over here... We are all in this together and the collapse of the European nations has made us all determined to join together in every way to preserve our independence. So far, air raids have not achieved any great success and our RAF are magnificent... So stop worrying

¹² Jennifer Jelley and Diane Middleton, *Scotland and Beyond: The Family of William Runciman* (Australia : Self-published, 2004), 35.

about us and just have faith that we will be all right and if anything does happen to any of us - well, it will still be all right.¹³

She penned these words during a four-month-long stay in Scotland. While she lived in the small town of Blackburn, Lancashire, for the majority of the war, she was born in Haddington, Scotland¹⁴, and many of her family connections and friends continued to remain there. While her long visit in 1940 could have been because of the air-raids, it also might have given her a reason to see old friends and well-loved family members. While offered the chance to come to the United States and live with her daughter for the duration of the war, Anne declined, citing the unpredictability of the seas and financial reasons as the hindrance¹⁵. But even staying in Scotland presented a danger. In Edinburgh, the sirens continued to sound¹⁶ and the day after she left Glasgow, bombs damaged part of the city.¹⁷ The biggest blow for Anne perhaps came on March 3, 1941, when the German Luftwaffe bombed her birthplace and she remained uncertain as to who had fared well and who was not as fortunate.¹⁸ Only a couple weeks later she would express to Annie, “It is impossible to keep writing to everyone you know in bombed areas and we are asked not to wire or use the phone, so we never really know who is safe and who has been injured. That itself keeps you anxious whenever a raid is reported.”¹⁹

¹³ Anne Westlands, “WW2 People's War - Mother's Letters - 2,” ed. Stuart Wilson, BBC (BBC, November 3, 2004), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/26/a3219626.shtml>

¹⁴ “Anne Watson Hadden,” WikiTree (Alan Runciman, September 6, 2018), <https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Hadden-181>

¹⁵ Anne Westlands, “WW2 People's War - Mother's Letters - 2

¹⁶ Anne Westlands, “WW2 People's War - Mother's Letters - 4,” ed. Stuart Wilson, BBC (BBC, November 3, 2004), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/41/a3219941.shtml>

¹⁷ Anne Westlands, “WW2 People's War - Mother's Letters - 5,” ed. Stuart Wilson, BBC (BBC, November 3, 2004), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/02/a3220002.shtml>

¹⁸ The Scotsman, “The Night the Nazis Bombed Haddington,” Lifestyle (The Scotsman , March 2, 2011), <https://www.scotsman.com/lifestyle-2-15039/the-night-the-nazis-bombed-haddington-1-1492305>

¹⁹ Anne Westlands, “WW2 People's War - Mother's Letters - 9,” ed. Stuart Wilson, BBC (BBC, November 3, 2004), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/84/a3225584.shtml>

Despite this, Anne maintained a positive attitude in her letters, showing a strength and resolve that matched that of the general population of England at the time. Her sixth letter in the series, written on December 1, 1940, included scripture for the first time.

There was a talk after the news. No name was given but the speaker said that our attitude towards the war and bombing had changed during the year and to him it seemed as if a toughening of the spirit took place, just as new tissue and skin formed over a wound. I had not thought of it like that but believe it is so, as we are not afraid now as we were when, at the outbreak of war, we expected to be bombed out of existence within a few weeks. "Fear not, for I am with you" saith the Lord.²⁰

The passage she references is Isaiah 41:10, which says,

Fear not, for I am with you;

Be not dismayed, for I am your God.

I will strengthen you,

Yes, I will help you,

I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.²¹

One might expect that those living in an uncertain time filled with the possibility of imminent bombings would choose to recall a comforting passage about God's presence. Anne writes to tell her daughter that her fears are dissipating, and the reason is found in the pages of Isaiah. In all ten of her preserved letters to Annie, this is the only time she quotes the Bible. The Scotland Presbyterian and Protestant Church Records from 1736-

²⁰ Anne Westlands, "WW2 People's War - Mother's Letters - 6," ed. Stuart Wilson, BBC (BBC, November 3, 2004), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/57/a3220057.shtml>

²¹ *The Bible: the New King James Version, The Bible: the New King James Version* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1984)

1990 include an entry on October 15, 1893, when Anne's daughter, Annie, was baptized²². The baptism of her other children is also recorded. One source cites her birthplace as Haddington parish in Scotland. Whether she was strongly religious is unable to be determined; however, it is clear that she knew Christian literature and had contact with the church after the birth of her children, believing it important to have them all baptized.

The letters to her from her daughter Annie have not been discovered yet, so it is difficult to say if her daughter had any religious leanings. Regardless of this fact, the quotation of scripture in this instance carried the knowledge that Annie would understand the meaning and purpose, even if she did not imbue it with personal religious meaning. While no record of Annie's plea to her mother to leave England and live with their family exists, it is obvious given Anne's response that Annie worried about her mother's safety. In nearly every letter, there is a reference to the air-raids occurring in towns and cities around where Anne lived. Annie, living an ocean away and relying on letters as the primary form of communication with her mother, had no way of knowing from day to day if her mother was well.

Anne's primary purpose in mentioning the passage seems to be in drawing parallels between the toughening of the British spirit, the healing of a scab, the departure of fear, and the presence of the Lord. Not only are these ideas significant to her, but they are intended to be significant to Annie. This letter arrives almost exactly a year before the United States entered World War II, and Annie, living in the U.S. as a Scottish

²² Scotland Presbyterian & Protestant Church Records, 1736-1990, FamilySearch, FamilySearch (FamilySearch, August 21, 2019), <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:QL42-P7S6>

immigrant²³, was likely more concerned about the British perspective on the war than the American view. Perhaps more significant is that the words of Isaiah were not only relevant for Anne, dwelling in a war zone, but were important for Annie, living far away from her family and concerned about their welfare. This passage is designed to persuade Annie to think of God's presence as continually with her mother, strengthening her in both spirit and resolve. The thought of a mighty protector promising to watch over His people is not only comforting for those amid a battle but for those with loved ones in the thick of it as well. Both Anne and Annie sought to draw peace from the watch-care of a loving God.

Ray Dalley: Providing Comfort through Familiarity

A British general in the Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment, Royal Artillery²⁴, Ray Dalley writes his letters to his mother, father, and sibling (referred to as "Bubs" or "Bubbles"). The Anti-Aircraft Regiment was present for some significant moments in the latter part of the conflict of World War II. Most notably, Dalley records his experiences of D-Day, the Liberation of Belgium, and the end of the Great War. His letters seem to indicate that he had served in the war and corresponded with his family before 1944 and 1945 when this series of letters begins. He writes on Christmas Sunday, 1945: "Four years ago I spent the day in hospital in Wales, one year ago I spent it in anxiety as rocket bombs exploded around me in Antwerp, this year I spend it in the same way I did four years

²³ New York Passenger Arrival Lists (Ellis Island), 1892-1924, *FamilySearch, FamilySearch* (FamilySearch, August 21, 2019), <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:J6PS-QT5>

²⁴ Martin Farndale and Basil Perronet Hughes, *History of the Royal Regiment of Artillery: Western Front 1914-18*, illustrated, vol. 4 (London: Royal Artillery Institution, 1986), pg. 90

ago... in a sickroom bed!”²⁵ Dalley’s sentiments about the end of the war are the reflections of a man who lived and served in the war for years at a time. When he records the Liberation of Belgium his comments ring with the emotion of someone who had long waited for the downfall of the Axis powers. “For four long and weary years they had awaited liberation. One year! two years! three years! And now the long-awaited day had come! Ours was the welcome of welcomes! Our own people could be no more enthusiastic.”²⁶

Dalley’s letters, unfortunately, don’t reveal enough about his life and his family to determine much about his life and history outside of the war. They do, however, give insight into his relationship with his family and his feelings towards religious ideas. In September of 1944, Dalley asks his family to remember him to the Vicar and “give [him] thanks for the letter.”²⁷ Helpful as this might be in determining his family’s relationship to the church, his later comments more fully develop this offhanded comment about their Anglican friendships. In December of 1944, he discusses the feeling of attending a church service,

The different atmosphere and surroundings will tend to give you all a ‘break’ from everyday routine...That is why I really did enjoy a Service way back there in England...Surely you have experienced the feeling upon walking back from Church upon Sunday mornings...It is a time to reflect that the world is, indeed, a

²⁵ Ray Dalley, “WW2 People's War - Letters Home - December 1945 - Part One,” ed. Dover District Libraries, BBC (BBC, October 4, 2004), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/42/a3101842.shtml>

²⁶ Ray Dalley, “WW2 People's War - Letters Home - September 1944 - Part Two,” ed. Dover District Libraries, BBC (BBC, October 4, 2004), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/07/a3101707.shtml>

²⁷ Ray Dalley, “WW2 People's War - Letters Home - September 1944 - Part Two

small place; that there must be something that is greater, something that binds us together, even when our presence is no longer there. It is an all-pervading force that can almost be felt. You KNOW that the human era is just a passing flash...²⁸

A year later, Dalley fondly remembers a woman whose kindness made her a mother-figure during the war and writes to his family: “A mothers’ love is universal, and it is fit that you should see the acts of kindness this mother has done. Out of all this misery and suffering...little acts, little kindnesses, they still serve to show that somewhere there is a Person who understands and who consoles...there must be.”²⁹

For Dalley, a constant sentiment of reminiscence is attached to every mention of faith. He doesn’t think of church services in isolation nor the existence of a higher power without connection to his pre-war life and the kindness of his own family. His recollection of scripture occurs in the same context. Incidentally, he includes the same Bible verse twice in his series of letters, both appearing in the same letter. He first credits the reference to Charles Dicken’s *A Christmas Carol*: ““Peace on Earth and goodwill towards men’ ...what a grand time Xmas is indeed. Dickens is superb in the art of expressing that Christmas feeling, his tales of Old London with Scrooge, Fagan, Little Dorrit; they all seem to make one so intimate with those “good old times.”³⁰ The second time he includes the verse is in the introduction to the aforementioned passage about a

²⁸ Ray Dalley, “WW2 People's War - Letters Home - December 1944 - Part One,” ed. Dover District Libraries, BBC (BBC, October 4, 2004), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/98/a3101798.shtml>

²⁹ Ray Dalley, “WW2 People's War - Letters Home - December 1945 - Part Three,” ed. Dover District Libraries, BBC (BBC, October 4, 2004), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/88/a3101888.shtml>

³⁰ Ray Dalley, “WW2 People's War - Letters Home - December 1945 - Part One

mother's kindness proving the existence of a benevolent Person. He simply writes, "Once again I can hear that saying 'Peace on Earth...'"³¹.

The verse in question comes out of the Gospel of Luke 2:14, which says,

Glory to God in the highest,

And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!³²

While Christmas time is an appropriate time to recall this verse, it also illuminates Dalley's two-fold rhetorical purpose. For his family and himself, the inclusion of scripture is an important tie to what is known, familiar, and comfortable. Amid all the unknowns of war and the uncertainty of home, the recognizable passages in the Bible provide a sense of stability, familiarity, and rest, to both reader and writer. The overarching persuasive purpose that this verse holds is that it reminds Dalley's family of his safety and his connection to their Christmas sayings and traditions. They are persuaded to comfort, to breathe in the Christmas spirit even during a war.

Charles E. and Barbara W. Taylor: Creating Confidence in Morality

Charles' story can't be told without including his wife, Barbara. The two corresponded nearly daily during the four years that the United States fought in the war. Their war-time romance has been memorialized in the book *Miss You: The World War II Letters of Barbara Wooddall Taylor and Charles E. Taylor* edited by Barbara Woodall

³¹ Ray Dalley, "WW2 People's War - Letters Home - December 1945 - Part Three," ed. Dover District Libraries, BBC (BBC, October 4, 2004), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/88/a3101888.shtml>

³² *The Bible: the New King James Version, The Bible: the New King James Version* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1984)

Taylor, Charles E. Taylor, their niece, Judy Barrett Litoff, and Judy's colleague, David C. Smith. Their case is a unique one, given that almost every letter is written and responded to by Charles "Charlie" and Barbara "Barbie" and has been saved. Each answer is recorded, making it possible to discern the effect that the words had on the intended audience. Their interaction began in August 1941, after Charlie had volunteered to enlist in the Army. Charlie's cousin, Virginia, set him up with "the prettiest girl in Fairburn," and it was love at first sight for both of them³³. They began dating and eventually had a secret wedding on April 5, 1942, a fact they both kept quiet for nearly 40 years, until the publishing of their letters in 1990. Their "official" wedding, the one which their families attended, was on August 2nd and received a new marriage license dated August 1st, 1942, after burning the old one.

Before their marriage, both Charlie and Barbara's relationship histories were noteworthy. Charlie recalls that "girl problems" contributed to his decision to drop out of college.³⁴ Barbara, as the "prettiest girl" in the city, often went out on dates. And once she was serious about Charlie, her lack of dating raised the suspicions of her friends and family members. She expresses this to Charlie in a letter dated April 12th, about a week after their secret marriage. "Evie called, and she couldn't believe that I didn't have a date tonite. I told her that I wasn't dating anymore and she just laughed and laughed. Finally, I made her believe me in a mild sort of way, and she said that if I really didn't date

³³ Barbara Wooddall Taylor et al., *Miss You: the World War II Letters of Barbara Wooddall Taylor and Charles E. Taylor* (Atlanta: The University of Georgia Press, 2013), xv.

³⁴ Taylor et al., *Miss You*, xv.

anymore she would know I was married. Dopey, huh?”³⁵ Her parents too, thought it strange and remarked that “for once [they’d] know what it is like to have a daughter.”³⁶

Both worried that the other would be untrue. In a small fiasco just after they began dating, Charlie’s once-serious girlfriend came with him to visit Barbara. Upon learning about their relationship, Barbara writes, “I knew that there was too much competition for me, sooo I made up my mind to forget you. I wouldn’t answer your letters, and I burned yours up as fast as I could read them.”³⁷ Charlie, determined to prove Barbara wrong and convince her that the other girl was a fling in the past, spent time writing lines like, “I am in your hands and you know it. I would not trade a hair off of your head for two [of her] complete”³⁸ and “[She] is completely out of my life as far as I am concerned. You have completely taken her place and built yourself up in my mind and my heart, and no other woman will have a chance at me.”³⁹ As for Barbara, the large number of men interested in her and the decent sum of them she continued to date presented a problem for Charlie. At one point he wrote to Barbara saying,

You tell me how much you love me, but everytime you write, you just came in from a date or you went someplace with someone. You don’t have to make me jealous, ’cause I already am. But where I come from a girl that is in love with someone does not run around as much as you claim to be doing. Yes, I realize that you are there and I am away up here, but I don’t go out like that, I sit.⁴⁰

³⁵ Taylor et al., *Miss You*, 8.

³⁶ Taylor et al., *Miss You*, 10.

³⁷ Taylor et al., *Miss You*, 6.

³⁸ Taylor et al., *Miss You*, 6.

³⁹ Taylor et al., *Miss You*, 7.

⁴⁰ Taylor et al., *Miss You*, 8.

Charlie hailed from Gainesville, Florida, and Barbara from Fairburn, Georgia. Both of them attended college for a stint, Charlie at the University of Florida, and Barbara at North Georgia College, but neither of them graduated with a degree.⁴¹ An active member at Fairburn Baptist Church, Barbara led Sunday School classes, sang in the church choir, and was president of the Young Women’s Auxiliary⁴². From their interactions, it’s clear that the two of them have a background in the church and Christianity. In one of many instances, Barbara sends a letter to Charlie that reads, “Surely if we pray hard and sincerely enough and it is the Will of God, it won’t be very long until we are close to each other again.”⁴³ And later, “I do believe that God answered our prayers and He certainly has been good to us.”⁴⁴ Charlie often makes mention of his faith as well, saying, “I do thank God every day for being good to me.”⁴⁵ And also, “You must have faith in me and in God—when you are worrying you are not keeping faith—remember that. ... I really think that He is watching out for us.”⁴⁶

Surprisingly, only one scripture quotation appears, and it is the Golden Rule. Charlie writes to Barbara on April 25, 1942, shortly after their first marriage, “I’ll tell you now, I will be true to you until I find that you have been untrue to me. I am going by the Golden Rule as much as I can: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”—Shall that be our standard? Darling, you will not ever break my heart, will you?”⁴⁷ Barbara responds by saying, “Yes, I believe in the Golden Rule, and if everyone in the world were living by it right now, we would have a much prettier world to live in and a peaceful one

⁴¹ Taylor et al., *Miss You*, xv.

⁴² Taylor et al., *Miss You*, 9.

⁴³ Taylor et al., *Miss You*, 80.

⁴⁴ Taylor et al., *Miss You*, 82.

⁴⁵ Taylor et al., *Miss You*, 38.

⁴⁶ Taylor et al., *Miss You*, 208.

⁴⁷ Taylor et al., *Miss You*, 37.

too.”⁴⁸ The Golden Rule appears in Matthew 7:12, “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” Both Barbara and Charlie often remind one another to “stay true” and through their letters it is obvious that honesty and marital faithfulness are of utmost importance to them. Throughout the war, while couples were far apart, divorces, break-ups or affairs were not uncommon⁴⁹. On October 1st, Charlie explains,

Don’t you ever think that I don’t trust you—I do. See all I (we) ever hear about over here is all about how untrue the wives and girls back in the states are. Too, there are so many fellows here that have been over for over two years and a lot of them were not married too long before they came over and their wives are crying for divorces, etc. Oh, I guess with so much on a guy’s mind and not knowing how a lot of the girls are acting, it puts one to wondering. You know how the men like to tease each other to pass the time away. I do not worry, but I do like to have you tell me in your letters that all is well. You know that I’d not take anything for you and our love.⁵⁰

For each of them, the remembrance of the Golden Rule called to mind a standard of morality that both of them desired to uphold, and believed should hold others accountable as well. The effect here is to persuade one another to continue to do the right thing. In war-time, a grounding moral point could be difficult to find if clouded by the greys of opinion, greater good, and dehumanization. For both parties, the moral confidence instilled when a standard is agreed upon can be a welcome resolution, especially in times

⁴⁸ Taylor et al., *Miss You*, 40.

⁴⁹ George W. Knapp and Gayle E. Knapp, *A Chaplains Duty: Faith and Courage on the Front Line: Letters from WWII: Chaplain George W. Knapp 4th Infantry Division* (Marietta, GA: Deeds Publishing, 2010), 21.

⁵⁰ Taylor et al., *Miss You*, 199.

of war. For Charlie and Barbara, it drove them to establish their faith not only in God but in each other as well.

George W. Knapp: Uniting Family from Afar

Ordained as a minister in 1941, Reverend George W. Knapp decided early-on that though exempt from military service, there was a clear need for ministers overseas and it was his calling to fill it.⁵¹ At 27, he became a chaplain in the war. He left behind his young son, Barry, and his wife, Virginia “Ginia”, pregnant with their second child, Joan, and shipped out to the Eastern Front in January of 1944⁵². He wrote letters to them almost daily until June 14, 1945— his birthday and the day he returned home. Part of the 4th Infantry Division in the United States Army, he was one of fifteen chaplains who ministered to those present on June 6th, 1944, the Invasion of Normandy. His task as a chaplain involved comforting wounded and dying soldiers. At times, the number of casualties could reach about 200 in a single day.⁵³ After their division received orders soon after D-Day to enter combat yet again, Knapp remembers running off to a field and sobbing. At last, he told himself, “Enough of this now. I volunteered for this job. So let's get going.”⁵⁴

He continued bravely for another year. On August 3rd, 1944, Knapp wrote home to his wife with exciting news: “I got a Purple Heart today! I do feel a bit proud of it, Ginia. It came quite a while after I was W.I.A. (wounded in action), because I didn't think I should have it for the slight wound I got...I'm going to send it home to you, I think. Then

⁵¹ George W. Knapp and Gayle E. Knapp, *A Chaplains Duty*, 13.

⁵² George W. Knapp and Gayle E. Knapp, *A Chaplains Duty*, 65.

⁵³ George W. Knapp and Gayle E. Knapp, *A Chaplains Duty*, 1097.

⁵⁴ George W. Knapp and Gayle E. Knapp, *A Chaplains Duty*, 711.

you can wear it if you want to.”⁵⁵ However, the gravity of chaplaincy and the number of men he had seen and served tempered his excitement. He continues, “One thing I know, I sure don’t deserve a Purple Heart as much as some of the brave soldiers I have seen with some of the worst possible wounds.”⁵⁶

His job also included writing letters of consolation to the families of the fallen. Occasionally, the family members would write him letters of thanks in return, some of which are preserved in a book of his war letters, edited by himself and his daughter Judy, called *A Chaplain’s Duty: Letters Home from a WWII Chaplain*. In addition to writing these letters, he also counseled soldiers and conducted worship services. His counseling, his letters, and his services were clear evidence of his religious convictions, and even as he wrestled with the brutality of war, he continued to hold fast to his faith.

He quotes scripture more than once, usually using it in the context of sharing with his wife about how Sunday services went and explaining the theme of his messages. One reference, in particular, presents a rhetorical situation that differs from those previously mentioned. On August 7th, 1944, as the 12th Infantry Regiment battles a German Army intent on reaching the coast of the Atlantic, Knapp shares with his wife about his sermon from the previous Sunday. He writes, “Yesterday was the 9th Sunday after Trinity and the Gospel for the day was about the Prodigal Son, Luke 15:11-24, and I spoke on it.” Luke 15:11-24 is a well-known parable of Jesus, believed to represent the way God responds to those who are far from him.⁵⁷ The full passage is quoted below for reference:

⁵⁵ George W. Knapp and Gayle E. Knapp, *A Chaplains Duty*, 1097.

⁵⁶ George W. Knapp and Gayle E. Knapp, *A Chaplains Duty*, 1097.

⁵⁷ John Piper, “Coming to Yourself and Coming to the Father,” *Desiring God* (Desiring God, August 27, 1995), <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/coming-to-yourself-and-coming-to-the-father>

Then He [Jesus] said: “A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.’ So he divided to them his livelihood. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything.

“But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.’”

“And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

“But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ And they began to be merry.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ *The Bible: the New King James Version, The Bible: the New King James Version* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1984)

Knapp then goes on to relay to Ginia his thoughts about this section in Luke.

One new thought that came to my mind was that the story could have ended in another way, with the father being unforgiving. It would still have been the Parable of the Prodigal Son, as he would still have returned confessing his sins. But then the father would not have been a loving father. So I would rather call it the Parable of the Loving Father because that is what Jesus is teaching mostly, I believe, and the story has to end just exactly as it does in order to be called by that name. I wonder if my idea is any good? I really miss your criticisms, suggestions, and approvals about my sermons. I used to get so much help from your criticisms and suggestions and it meant so much to me whenever you said I had done pretty good with a sermon, etc. I hope you can soon help me that way again!⁵⁹

While still clearly focused on Christian ideas and God's love and forgiveness, the centralized theme also involves family. Even in Knapp's discussion about this passage, he zeros in on the paternal characteristics of God then comments on the helpfulness of his wife's input. This is not the only time that faith and family have appeared together in Knapp's letters. On two occasions he writes about missing Ginia's help in working with the church. The first, on May 4th, 1944, "Remember how you used to give me the dickens for making such a mess of the Sunday bulletin material I worked up for you to cut the stencil? Sure wish you could still be doing that for me!"⁶⁰ And again on May 11th, he recalls, "Whenever Harley plays the organ or I hear someone else playing, I always think of you, Sweetheart, and of how swell you played the organ for our services at

⁵⁹ George W. Knapp and Gayle E. Knapp, *A Chaplains Duty*, 1164.

⁶⁰ George W. Knapp and Gayle E. Knapp, *A Chaplains Duty*, 546.

Lenzburg.”⁶¹ His reference to the story of the Prodigal Son comes less than a month after the birth of his daughter on July 16th, and he repeatedly talks about fatherhood and his love for his children. Soon after receiving the news of the birth of Joan, he types these words in a letter: “After getting the cable I thanked God in prayer that our little baby girl had been given to us, and that He had taken care of you, Sweet. I asked Him to continue to bless you and sister and Barry, and to bring us back together soon.”⁶²

For people of faith like Reverend Knapp and Ginia, the recollection of passages of mutual importance was not only a way to express their belief, but also connect in a shared experience. Knapp expresses his thoughts about this group of Bible verses as a way to take Ginia back to the times when, without the barrier of distance, they could discuss the texts of scripture together. The scriptures of a shared faith persuaded unity, and most significantly for the Knapps, the unity of the family. Knapp puts it best in a letter he sent to Ginia a few days before D-Day began:

We all have courage and do not fear the future because we know God will be with us. That same faith helps you and I...through these difficult times of separation. When times seem dark in the future, if they do, I know you will stand firm and calm and serene and happy in your faith and hope...Trusting in that Faith...God will bless us both and may we be willing to receive His will and decision at all times.⁶³

Russell C. Stroup: Remembering the Character of God

⁶¹ George W. Knapp and Gayle E. Knapp, *A Chaplains Duty*, 578.

⁶² George W. Knapp and Gayle E. Knapp, *A Chaplains Duty*, 995.

⁶³ George W. Knapp and Gayle E. Knapp, *A Chaplains Duty*, 660.

As Knapp served as a chaplain in the European theater of the Great War, Reverend Russell C. Stroup held the same occupation in the Pacific theater. Every letter he wrote home to his mother, Emma, his brother, Cranston, or his sister, Margaretta, chronicled the war in hopes of one day sending the collection of letters off for publication. Stroup, even while overseas, managed to send home written articles that his brother, referred to as “Cran,” would then solicit for publication. Impressively, Stroup had several articles published, including some in *Harper’s Magazine*, a church journal, the *Presbyterian Outlook*, the *Christian Science Monitor* and *Newsweek*⁶⁴. His strength in the written word is undeniable, and as many of his contemporaries recognized, his gifting in the spoken word was unparalleled. He wrote home often of those, some of which were high-ranking officers in the military, who commended him not only for his communication abilities but for his talent in persuading and uniting the troops.

A 38-year-old bachelor when he entered the war as a chaplain, Stroup left behind his congregation at First Presbyterian Church in Lynchburg, Virginia.⁶⁵ A pacifist, he often struggled with the morality of war, and even in combat he refused to carry a weapon.⁶⁶ He would write on April 21, 1944,

I have asked myself so many times, 'What am I doing here?' It isn't easy to answer. I love peace so passionately and hate war so utterly. More than a hatred: I am convinced that war is utterly futile and senseless. I see no good in it nor any health coming from it and yet here I am in the midst of it, feeling that it is right for me to be here and that indeed, I could be nowhere else—even though this

⁶⁴ Russell Cartwright Stroup and Richard Cartwright Austin, *Letters from the Pacific: a Combat Chaplain in World War II* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 128, 151.

⁶⁵ Russell Cartwright Stroup and Richard Cartwright Austin, *Letters from the Pacific*, 5.

⁶⁶ Russell Cartwright Stroup and Richard Cartwright Austin, *Letters from the Pacific*, 207.

might cost me my life with all that might mean in heartache and hardship for others. When I try to analyze the reasons I feel this way, it is hard.

There is the challenge of the work. Here are men who need me. One might have a similar ministry at home yet nowhere else could one meet on such intimate terms, so many men in so receptive a frame of mind...Too many of our church men will be veterans. Too many of our families will have been affected...

It will be similar for the Peace movement. When I was active, before, in this movement I appreciated this lack: I could not speak as one having authority for I had never "been there myself." Now I will be able to speak. Since Peace is the cause, above all others, to which I have dedicated myself, any sacrifice is worthwhile to render my efforts more effectual, if I am spared to carry them on...

I must follow the Master: He would be found where mankind is suffering and He would be sharing that suffering.⁶⁷

A risk-taker, Stroup would volunteer himself for front-line operations and, at one point, put himself in harm's way to rescue a wounded soldier. For this encounter, he earned a Bronze Star.⁶⁸ He took his responsibility as a chaplain seriously, and, like Knapp, often received letters from families in the United States who had lost a loved one. He wrote Letters of Consolation with a heavy heart and bore the deep emotional pain his occupation rendered without allowing himself to become desensitized to humanity. Once he even preached a sermon to his soldiers about how spiritually vital it was to remember the value of human life.

⁶⁷ Russell Cartwright Stroup and Richard Cartwright Austin, *Letters from the Pacific*, 42.

⁶⁸ Russell Cartwright Stroup and Richard Cartwright Austin, *Letters from the Pacific*, 201.

I preached today on the Sermon on the Mount: 'Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill: and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of judgment: But I say to you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without cause shall be in danger of the judgment and whosoever shall any to his brother, *Raca*, shall be in danger of the counsel: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire' [Matt. 5:21-22.]

It wasn't an easy message to bring out here, but thought it was needed and I made it as strong as I could. I want desperately that these men shall return home with as few spiritual scars as is possible under the circumstances—for their own sake in the days of peace, and for the future that they must build on a sure foundation. They will be better soldiers if they can hear this message, and certainly better men back home.⁶⁹

Stroup's nephew, Richard, with Stroup's aid, eventually compiled and published a book of his war letters entitled *Letters from the Pacific: A Combat Chaplain in World War II*. After this section Richard comments, "Knowing Stroup, I can imagine him preaching that it is not the killing we are required to do that endangers our souls so much as hatred for the enemy, the anger that we allow to well up within us, and fear that blocks humane actions."⁷⁰ Reading Stroup's comments against hell-fire sermons sheds additional light on his thought processes,⁷¹ and supports Richard's interpretation of the true theme of the sermon.

⁶⁹ Russell Cartwright Stroup and Richard Cartwright Austin, *Letters from the Pacific*, 60.

⁷⁰ Russell Cartwright Stroup and Richard Cartwright Austin, *Letters from the Pacific*, 60.

⁷¹ Russell Cartwright Stroup and Richard Cartwright Austin, *Letters from the Pacific*, 134.

Of all the individuals I studied, Stroup's letters contained the most references to scripture, and from a greater variety of locations in the Bible than anyone else. Many of these instances can be categorized in the four sections already discussed, but some seem to create yet another pattern of thought. For Stroup, the idea of God appears to be a personal acquaintance as opposed to a distant being.

Scripture references serve as a reminder of the personhood of God and present an opportunity to intimately know God's character. Stroup appears to understand this aspect of a Biblical text, and in his letter on April 22, 1944, writes to his family about a recent church service:

At ten o'clock we all gathered on the forward deck, under the sky with the sea all around us, and worshiped God. The sailors were particularly thankful for the service since it had been a long time since most of them had the opportunity. I talked from John 3:16 ['For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.'] I stressed the fact that in a world of hate there is a God of Love, in a world of greed there is a God who Gave, in a world of bigotry there is a God whose salvation extends to "whosoever believeth," in a world of skepticism there is a God who calls us to believe, and in a world where death is everywhere there is a God who gives us eternal life through Christ.⁷²

Stroup came from a Christian family. His father was a Methodist minister until dying in a car crash in 1914, and his mother was a Methodist evangelist⁷³, but, as Stroup eyed publication in the future, he wrote not only to remind his family of God's character but

⁷² Russell Cartwright Stroup and Richard Cartwright Austin, *Letters from the Pacific*, 44.

⁷³ Russell Cartwright Stroup and Richard Cartwright Austin, *Letters from the Pacific*, 2.

anyone who might later read his letters. His deeply religious family, likely familiar with John 3:16, did not need a refresher on the reference, meaning, and application, but his insistence on adding it provided him with a record of his sermon and a sermon to whoever read the letter. Stroup emphasized that the attributes of God were unlike those seen of men in a war. His presentation of the Gospel of Christianity in this segment clearly illustrated the characteristics of God and persuaded people of a Higher Good that existed and acted in the present world.

His goal, even in preaching, was not merely evangelistic persuasion, as his mother's career had been, but to set an example and speak from experience. He believed he had walked with a God who embodied love, generosity, inclusivity, faith, and life and imbued the qualities in his life as well. Even to his family, Stroup's purpose and effect are to persuade all readers that there is a God and though he loves all and is close to all, he remains uncorrupted by the ugliness of human nature. This same God then calls humanity to be like him in this regard. As Stroup would explain it himself,

We argue with men about the truth of God, and their minds are closed against us. We threaten men with the wrath of God, and their wills stubbornly resist. But it is the Love Unknown that breaketh every barrier down; for God came in Christ not to change men's minds or to break their wills but to touch their heart. He is in Christ, loving the world unto himself...⁷⁴

Conclusions

⁷⁴ Russell Cartwright Stroup and Richard Cartwright Austin, *Letters from the Pacific*, 135.

The stories of five individuals fixed in time by fading letters on a page record the highs and lows of living in the tumult of the Second World War. All from diverse Christian backgrounds, they found commonality in the words of the Holy Bible, using this text as an anchor for their beliefs. For Anne and Annie as civilians living during the air-raids in Europe and Scotland, the promises of Isaiah about the strength and presence of God provided a measure of peace in uncertainty. For Ray Dalley, the familiar choruses of Christmas verses filled reader and writer with the quality of comfort and rest, a reminder of simpler, happier times. Charlie and Barbara spoke of the Golden Rule, begged one another to faithfulness, and called upon Biblical morality to provide the confidence that they, as well as others, could aspire to do good. Reverend Knapp, scribed verses about family and the warmth that comes with close familial connection and the hope of a joyful return. Reverend Stroup held high the banner of the generosity and love of God in scripture, proclaiming the unchangeable nature of God to himself, his family, his division, and anyone else— that God was always good, even when circumstances were not.

Their writings and the influence they had on their individual lives as well as their families back home continue to reverberate to this day. For them, quoting the Bible brought what was distant close and transformed the unreachable unto the tangible, not only for them but for their audience as well. It remains to be seen if these five categories can encompass the rhetorical purposes of quoting the Bible in any context, not only in World War II letters. For those who would choose to embark on the quest of examining scripture quotations to discover this, they may find as President Franklin D. Roosevelt would write it in the front of a New Testament, that “It is a fountain of strength and

now, as always, an aid in attaining the highest aspirations of the human soul.”⁷⁵ The five mentioned here certainly thought so.

⁷⁵ Museum of the Bible, “FDR Soldier's Bible,” Museum of the Bible (Museum of the Bible), accessed November 5, 2019, <https://www.museumofthebible.org/book/minutes/275>

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