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Does University Christian Chaplaincy Need a Theology?

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Chaplaincy is an institutional norm in most universities in the United Kingdom (UK). Individual chaplains can usually recount stories to illustrate their role positively, churches keep providing funding, and the institutions do not seem to mind their presence. But behind this benign status quo the role and function of chaplains faces a challenge: development and availability of professional counselling services, pressures on church budgets, and changing cultural and political agendas. This paper explores how university chaplaincy has become ubiquitous without an articulated theological underpinning, and why developing robust theology is crucial for future stability and development from the perspectives of chaplains who practise, churches who provide funding, and the secular institutions who host them. It is argued that a key element of any such theology must include confident distinctiveness of faith and engagement with the academic nature of the context.

KEYWORDS chaplaincy, public theology, higher education, multi-faith, mission

Introduction

Christian chaplains are found in nearly all British universities, yet theological paradigms for Christian university chaplaincy are few and unsatisfactory. Chaplaincy has become a regular theme in practical theology, but surprisingly little has been written about its theological foundations. My role as an Anglican university chaplain provides a specific context for this article, but the themes explored resonate across wider contexts of chaplaincy and non-parochial church ministry.

The vast majority of Anglican university chaplains are funded by the church (Church of England Board of Education, 2002) and supported by the institutions with practicalities, such as physical space. This universality and investment of resources might suggest that both church and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have a clear understanding of its nature and purpose. Reality suggests otherwise. Definitions of chaplaincy vary between and within sponsoring bodies and HEIs (Threlfall-Holmes, 2011: 117), views of sponsoring churches are inconsistent

(Baker & Robinson, 2005), and HEIs have a diversity of approaches (Clines, 2008: 39). The way chaplains go about their task depends on individual theology (Legood, 1999: 135) and many write their own job description (Newitt, 2011: 112). Conversations with chaplains reveal a lack of developed theological underpinning for their work, which is reflected in the virtual absence of literature on the subject. The few who have published on theology of HEI chaplaincy bemoan the absence of preceding work (Robinson, 2004; Todd, 2011).

Chaplains are therefore left to negotiate their own path directed by personal theology through an increasingly complex context:

- They are guests in secular institutions with agendas of cohesion, equality, and positive student experience.
- Pastoral care is increasingly specialized and professionalized with many traditional roles of chaplains now provided by other staff.
- Since 9/11 and the 2005 attacks in the UK on the London transport network HEI chaplaincy has been drawn into a political agenda (Threlfall-Holmes and Newitt, 2011a: xiv).¹
- The motivation of external groups wishing to influence impressionable young minds in HEIs is increasingly under scrutiny.
- The role of chaplaincy is misunderstood by Christian organizations advising prospective university students (Stuart, 2002).
- Chaplaincies are now largely “multi-faith”, creating challenges for the language of mission

This article argues that Christian university chaplaincy cannot afford not to develop an articulate theological self-understanding that speaks to both church and HEIs, which will give it security of identity and purpose in a complex and changing context. A presumption of simple benefit or at least lack of harm, fails to acknowledge important aspects of context. This will be done by offering a definition of “theology”, exploring why a theology has not yet been established and elaborating on the necessity of developing one. Theological paradigms proposed so far will be critiqued before then exploring what characteristics would render a theological paradigm adequate and which avenues of further exploration might be fruitful.

What is meant by “a theology”?

Firstly it is important to clarify how the term “theology” is being used here. Whilst there are a myriad of definitions, this article is written from the perspective of Practical Theology. “Theology” is therefore not used purely in relation to doctrine, nor the systematic study of God, faith, or religion to be applied later to context. Indeed this article will argue that the application of isolated aspects of doctrine to justify particular approaches to chaplaincy practice fails to engage with the complexity of the context. “Theology” is used here not to pin down particular practice but to

¹ In 2005 government documents on promoting good relations on campus made no mention of chaplaincy but by 2008 chaplaincy was described as a key partner in government strategy and features strongly in its anti-extremism agenda (Brown, 2013: 52–54).

describe a solid platform on which practice can be developed. It is about articulating character and intention which shape thought and practice, in keeping with a definition of theology as “a set of intellectual and emotional commitments, justified or not, about God and man [sic] which dictates ones beliefs and actions” (Patton, 2005). A helpful reshaping of the question might be: “What is it about the understanding of God within the Christian tradition that gives purpose, meaning, and identity to Christian university chaplaincy?” This requires a bi-directional discourse with an intention of expansion rather than unification (Farley, 1983: 74).

Why has a theology not already been established?

I want to suggest that three key facets of the answer to this question are history, insecurity, and a mutual comfort with the status quo.

History

The discipline of theology has developed alongside the evolution of higher education. It is only with development in the last 30 years of the bidirectional hermeneutic of practical theology (PT) that there has been a platform on which the theology which is sought could reasonably sit (Miller-McLemore, 2012: 66). However, despite the rise of PT, a theology of university chaplaincy has still not been established. Two contributing factors may be that chaplaincy is a relatively small, niche field of ministry, and the lack of a forum for publication (unlike hospital chaplaincy, there is no professional journal and book publication requires full and broad development of work).

The development of HEI chaplaincy was begun by a peculiarity of university history and perpetuated by post-war Church strategy. The original Oxford and Cambridge colleges were Church foundations with chapels at their heart, inevitably requiring chaplains to organize services and give spiritual and moral guidance to students, mirroring a small parish. University College London was the first to break the mould, champion secularism, allow non-Anglicans to attend, and dispense with chaplains. Despite the increasing secularization of HEIs and radically changed context that ensued there has been a persistent commitment to a 1954 General Synod resolution that there should be a full-time Anglican chaplain in every university in England. In 1952 there were eight chaplaincies outside Oxford and Cambridge; there are now 320 employed HEI chaplains in England and Wales (Threlfall-Holmes & Newitt, 2011a: xiv). A wide plurality of institutional culture has developed as higher education has expanded, alongside diversity in chaplaincy practice. No rationale for the persistent expansion of chaplaincy has been documented but it is imaginable that the Anglican Church presupposed its place at the heart of the establishment, including major social institutions. Secular institutions were concerned about accusations of discrimination if they refused chaplains. A broad acceptance of the concept of all humans having “spiritual needs” which should be catered for within the university developed, and the more recent equality and diversity agenda strengthened the foothold for chaplaincy.

Insecurity

The identity of university chaplaincy has been challenged by two significant recent developments in the Higher Education: specialist student support services, and the recognition that attendance to religious needs must be multi-faith.

Counselling services are now well-developed professional services requiring specific training and defined therapeutic approaches, with a standing in society as the most appropriate frontline support for emotional difficulties. HEIs also now employ a raft of other academic and pastoral support staff. Whilst showing recognition of the value of traditional chaplaincy functions, chaplains are no longer necessary to fulfil these roles. The identity of chaplaincy is undermined and chaplains are left searching for unattended niches of pastoral need they can satisfy to avoid becoming simply the professional “nice-guy”. Paradoxically, rather than becoming an opportunity for theological reflection and consideration of purpose, this has led to a reluctance to engage with theology.

The multi-faith agenda has become a norm but the composition of chaplaincy teams lags a long way behind, largely due to a lack of sponsoring organizations within other faiths. This raises challenging questions of whether it is either possible or desirable to maintain a distinctive Christian identity as chaplains either work alongside colleagues of other faiths or offer support to students of other faiths themselves. Even the possibility of “no” being the answer to either question unlocks the potential for rejection of the role of Christian chaplains, making avoidance of the questions attractive for both chaplains and church.

Comfort in the status quo

The lack of a clear theology allows individual chaplains to do their own thing, institutions to make what they will of chaplaincy, and churches to believe they are fulfilling an agenda of mission without too much scrutiny.

HEI chaplains have been described as being in a liminal place, marginal to and marginalized from traditional church ministry (Threlfall-Holmes & Newitt, 2011a: xv). There is a sense that they are misunderstood, exiles fleeing the oppression of the church, isolated from the mainstream in a wilderness ministry, yet at the cutting edge (Lack, 2013; Moody, 1999: 16). Chaplaincy has sometimes been seen as a place of security, protected from too much outside scrutiny, suitable for those unable to cope with “real ministry” in a parish. Significant church reports read as unsubstantiated defensive justification of their existence by contributing HEI chaplains (Church of England Board of Education, 2002: ix). If theology is developed, scrutiny of practice with potential challenge to the role either by institutions or church becomes a risk.

HEIs have further interest in remaining vague about the purpose and role of chaplains. HEIs are heterogeneous and chaplains mould their work to satisfy the institution (Church of England Board of Education, 2002: viii). Institutions can assign chaplaincy to a subset of equality, diversity, and cohesion (Baker & Robinson, 2005; Todd, 2011: 92), an embellishment of student support services which enhances marketability and student satisfaction, or a “religious affairs office” (Brown, 2013: 68). A coherent theology might render chaplains less malleable to

institutional agendas, or institutions being uncomfortable with chaplaincy as envisaged by the Church.

The lack of articulated theology is therefore a natural historic progression benefiting the interests of the church (no one wants to be seen to be rejecting a potential opportunity for mission), chaplains (who are free to practise as they see fit), and HEIs (seen to be engaging with issues of faith and religion simply by hosting chaplains).

Why university chaplaincy cannot afford not to have a theology

Whilst the status quo holds superficial attraction, without an articulated theology, or even *raison d'être*, university chaplaincy is vulnerable to unintentional negative consequences in dimensions of daily practice, management and resources, and identity.

Practice

If justification of existence becomes a driver for practice, chaplains are at risk of encouraging a culture of dependence. Needing to be seen interacting with students, the chaplain offers general “pastoral support” and invites students to return for “ongoing support”. Thus workload increases and the value of the role is demonstrated. However, the only psychological interventions with proven efficacy are those with defined therapeutic goals. An easily accessible, warm-hearted, caring adult with no defined therapeutic goals could deter students from taking actions which lead them to independent flourishing. Christian students and staff on campus, many of whom live out their faith intentionally and offer pastoral support to those around them, could also be devalued by the nebulous presence and practice of chaplains.

Resources and management

The historical Anglican commitment to funding HEI chaplains cannot be assumed to be inviolable. A climate of limited financial resources leads to critical questions of efficacy and outcomes. Whilst the efficacy of any pastoral ministry is difficult to evaluate, it becomes impossible without transparency of purpose and clarity of how chaplaincy fits into the mission of the church (Robinson, 2004: 23; Baker & Robinson, 2005). Strategic development is impossible without clear direction, as is focussed ministerial development. Self-understanding consonant with the aims of the institution is also fundamental to negotiating practical resources such as office space and administrative support.

Identity

HEI chaplains find themselves treading on eggshells, negotiating the agendas of others in the changeable political world of the university. Seeking gaps in pastoral provision and flexibly moulding themselves into the space leaves chaplains vulnerable to loss of identity (e.g. a chaplain developing a mindfulness programme seeing a drop in attendance when the counselling service did the same, leaving the chaplain searching for a different focus). Hoping for a distinct identity in the university is futile without chaplaincy having clarity about its own identity and self-

understanding, especially in the multi-faith context. Clines (2008: 41) describes two alternative models for an interfaith team – finding neutral ground where the individual faith diminishes and all faiths enter a shared space, or collaboration, where individual faith identities are valued and celebrated. These are virtually mutually exclusive in practice, and only a theological understanding of chaplaincy would allow a choice to be made between them.

Why are theologies suggested so far inadequate?

Theological understandings of chaplaincy already proposed generally rely on retrospective application of models from other contexts. Whilst having merit they would not justify the development of HEI chaplaincy if it did not already exist. They fail to engage fully with the context, do not speak to institution as well as church, rely on unarticulated assumptions (such as the definition of mission), and lack engagement with the distinctive role of faith within chaplaincy, especially in the multi-faith environment.

“Incarnation” is possibly the most misused concept in relation to chaplaincy, often confused with the notion of “presence”. For Robinson (2004: 54) “incarnational theology” is about love and presence, focussed on the other, leading to his four-part understanding of chaplaincy practice of covenant, contract, conversation, and co-creation. However, this overlooks key facets of the incarnation: it is a unique ministry of Christ (Christians are called to reflect Christ, but are not themselves the incarnate presence of God), chaplains are not themselves students (attending lectures, sitting exams, meeting course-work deadlines, living on student loans), and proclaiming, preaching, and calling to repentance were part of the incarnation.

“Faithful presence” may better fit Robinson’s concept (Woodward, 1999: 165). It makes fewer theological claims but instead has connotations of something once much stronger which, through faithful perseverance and witness, will again flourish, somewhat akin to the rebuilding of the temple or awaiting the Second Coming of Christ. Whilst descriptive of how many chaplains understand their ministry it gives no direction to practice and, inadvertently, devalues the faithful presence of Christian lay people who bear the brunt of witness and ministry (Avis, 1999: 13). “Faithful witness in a secular space” is a positive development of this where chaplaincy presence gives affirmation to other Christians that they should feel at home in that space (Brown, 2010: 28).

Further images of presence are the “resident alien” (noticeably outside the culture thereby challenging it) with a prophetic role to both institution and individuals (Robinson, 2004: 44), “sacramental presence” with the priest embodying the presence of Christ (Threlfall-Holmes & Newitt, 2011a: xvi), and simply “waiting for opportunities to arise” as directed by the Holy Spirit. The prophetic role has merit but only provides a partial account of chaplaincy. Sacramental presence is only fully expressed when the priest presides at the sacraments, requiring the chaplain to lead a worshipping community. Expectant waiting was dismissed in 2002 as 20 years out of date (Church of England Board of Education, 2002: 28). All these models presume the Christian chaplain intrinsically brings something of

benefit to the non-Christian community, but the language used is anathema to the secular institution.

Describing chaplaincy as “ministry in context” is refreshingly simple (Threlfall-Holmes, 2011: 116). However, it lacks engagement with the secular institution which does not self-describe in terms of Christian ministry, justification of why this context should be prioritized by the church, and direction and boundaries for practice. Similarly the model of parish ministry: the chaplain ministering to a defined population, nourishing and building up Christians, and reaching out with sensitivity to those who are not. Whilst universities are not usually geographical parishes this model may be easiest from a church perspective (it is the model for most Roman Catholic HEI chaplaincy (McGrail & Sullivan, 2005) and students have been described as living in a “bubble” whilst at university (Sharma & Guest, 2013). However, the model risks being too parochial, failing to address the multi-faith agenda, and assumes HEIs will welcome this ministry because of historic tradition. Robinson’s (2004: 57) redevelopment of the parochial prophet, priest, and pastor into language more familiar in the secular world of friend, accompanist, and bridge-builder helps bridge this gap but loses distinctive faith identity.

Pioneer Mission is a concept that currently attracts church resources and has been adopted by some HEI chaplains due to their setting outside the traditional parish (Church of England Board of Education, 2002; Threlfall-Holmes & Newitt, 2011a: 32). However, pluralism within Christianity includes a lack of clarity about the term mission, illustrated by disagreement over the place of evangelism (Robinson, 2004: 14). Former Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey insists evangelism is essential whilst others argue it has no role in the public sphere (Avis, 1999; Edwards, 2009). Pioneer Mission is therefore only a helpful model if fuller definition is added.

An alternative approach, rather than models of church ministry, has been the language of spirituality and well-being. Spirituality mirrors healthcare chaplaincy, where spiritual care completes the package of physical and psychological care offered by health professions, religion being relativized (Lack, 2013). It is presented as an attractive, efficient option of one chaplain able to serve all, on the assumption that in a pluralist society chaplaincy must also become pluralist (Todd, 2011: 101). Yet chaplaincy has developed from the rich heritage of religious faith that is central to the human story and many would assume chaplains to be people of faith who will unapologetically enable others to continue to benefit from that heritage. A focus on spirituality questions the merit of specifically “Christian chaplaincy”, and whether it would be better staffed by people with no particular religious affiliation (Lack, 2013; Threlfall-Holmes & Newitt 2011b: 28). The term “shaman” has been used to describe religious chaplains focussing on spirituality: chaplains using their own experience of faith to provide wisdom and insight to others, rather than encouraging people to explore faith for themselves (Threlfall-Holmes & Newitt, 2011a: xv). Again this assumes that those of religious faith have something to offer to those who do not share that faith (Robinson, 2004: 28). Although advocates of spirituality appeal to the multi-faith agenda they risk irrelevance to students of religious faith and preclude the engagement with doctrinally based faith demanded by the political agenda of anti-extremism and religious tolerance.

“Well-being” places even less emphasis on any form of religion, chaplaincy becoming a welfare service with a holistic remit, focussing on social as much as spiritual growth. It is easy to see the attraction of this to HEIs, as chaplains have genuine concern for student welfare and versatile pastoral skills which can flexibly enhance a student services team of other professionals. However, the chaplain risks simply becoming the professional “nice-guy”, filling in gaps with no specific direction. Published theological support is limited, other than one view that in the public sphere it is only appropriate to respond positively to people’s desires and needs: people want to live well, and so chaplaincy should help them do that (Edwards, 2009). Whilst HEIs may welcome reliable “helpers” in the system there is little to justify church resourcing. Counselling or social work training may be a more appropriate prerequisite than ordination (Threlfall-Holmes, 2011: 119).

None of these paradigms offer the breadth and depth needed from an adequate theology of university chaplaincy. Breadth is needed for diverse institutions and students, a multi-faith environment, secular political agendas, other student support services, and an imprecise theology of mission in the church. Depth is required for a solid anchor, identity, and purpose in a constantly changing environment on which creative practice can be built (Pattison, 2013: 4). Depth also allows a confident claim on resources whilst escaping confusion about the societal authority of the Church of England as the established church. Current writing on chaplaincy lacks generalizability, tends to be unidirectional (speaking to either institution or church, but not both), and avoids tensions between focussing on general pastoral needs, spirituality, and confessional faith.

So what does a theology of university chaplaincy need?

A robust theology of HEI chaplaincy needs to acknowledge its place at the interface between church and secular academic institution and be expressed in language which is meaningful and has integrity to both:

- for the church: addressing issues of mission, priority and distinctive faith;
- for the institution: understanding context, embracing the multi-faith agenda, robustly out-living changes in the landscape of higher education and the differing sociological profiles of institutions;
- for chaplains: providing a confident foundation on which individual practice can be built.

This broad scope necessitates that it be bigger than the perspectives of currently serving chaplains, however vital their experience and understanding are to its development. I would suggest three main criteria for an adequate theology of HEI chaplaincy: clarity about the nature of “mission”, unapologetic identity in faith and religion, and engagement with education and learning.

The nature of mission

Full exploration of the nature of mission is beyond the scope of this article, but as the word is ubiquitous in justification of resources, a sense of how the church

understands “mission” is necessary. The Anglican “Five Marks of Mission” with their focus on confessional faith (“To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom (personal evangelism); to teach, baptise and nurture new believers” (Anglican Communion, 1984) were precised to “God’s way of loving and saving the world” (Lambeth Conference, 1998: 121). The language subtly changed, however, when salvation, faith, and justice were replaced by the outcome-based language of “transformation” (God’s mission being to transform individual lives, communities, and the world) (Church of England, 2015). The lack of reference to the role of individual faith makes the language of transformation appealing to some chaplains seeking identity in the secular world. Extrapolated, this definition of mission includes any activity which may benefit others, providing no direction to chaplaincy other than “do no evil”. At the heart of the issue for chaplaincy is whether demonstrating “love” is sufficient for Christian mission without reference to God as its originator, or indeed to God’s salvation, and whether confident articulation of Christian doctrine of salvation has a place within the secular world. Regardless of the personal theologies of chaplains, fear of evangelism, or even overt discussion of religious faith, can arise from concerns about abuse of power, language that is anathema to the hosting institution (repentance and conversion), or apprehension about insensitivity. Chaplains are encouraged to be wary of evangelism, at most airing questions or planting seeds that may later grow (Threlfall-Holmes & Newitt 2011: xviii). It is important to consider whether evangelism and proselytization are genuinely unacceptable to institutions, or whether the same intentions expressed in a different language are more palatable and only insensitive practice is objectionable. “Encouraging students to rigorously explore issues of faith and come to conclusions about their own belief systems” is concordant with values of whole-person development which are central to the ethos of higher education. Chaplains expressing hesitations may actually be self-censoring when institutions and individuals may be quite open to appropriate discussion of matters of religion and faith (Pattison, 2010). Using the concise Lambeth definition of mission, with its inherent core of doctrinally based faith, is therefore perfectly compatible with the context so long as ensuing practice is appropriately sensitive. It gives a substantial platform from which the familiar activities of pastoral care or engagement with spirituality as a door to discussion of faith find purpose, but also provides an arena for overt discourse of distinctive religious faith and belief. A theology of university chaplaincy needs to hold this broad but religiously confident understanding of mission.

Identity in faith and religion

In the last two decades or more chaplaincy has tended to change course from its identity in the established church at the heart of society to become more a-religious to conform to the secular environment. However, at the same time secular institutions have begun holding the door open to chaplaincy, recognizing the need to offer spiritual and faith support to students even if the institution considers itself secular. A somewhat incongruous position has therefore arisen where society expects chaplains appointed because of their background as ministers of religion to be religious experts and engage with matters of faith, whilst chaplains tend

towards finding their identity by engaging with non-faith-based spirituality and generic pastoral care. At some point the two paths have crossed.

An adequate theological understanding of chaplaincy needs to have a firmly rooted identity in faith and religion, enabling chaplains to engage with apologetics without apologizing for their faith. Without this chaplaincy risks losing its identity and purpose as secular provision of pastoral care continues to expand.

Engagement with the context of education and learning

All chaplains must be committed to engaging with the central purpose of the context within which they operate (Todd, 2013: 169),² and therefore theological understanding must engage with the uniqueness of the context, establishing common ground with hosting institutions whilst also articulating a missional opportunity to resourcing churches. The unique elements of this context are young adults in transition who are establishing their own world view, the focus on the acquisition and processing of knowledge and the development of academic thought which influences the wider society. As well as acquisition of knowledge, university education is also about interpretation and application of that knowledge within an ethical world view. Religious faith has a long established history of contributing to this understanding and needs to continue to do so if it wishes to continue to influence society. The startling statistics about decline in church attendance and practice of faith by students from a Christian background make a persuasive argument for the church needing to specifically engage with students, particularly those who fail to join a church whilst at university. An adequate theology of university chaplaincy needs to incorporate engagement with all the elements of this context.

Potential paradigms for development

Two recently described theological paradigms which may provide helpful directions of travel are alternative knowledge and public theology.

“Alternative knowledge” focusses attention on the fundamental purpose of university education, the acquisition and development of knowledge, rather than simply the transitional stage of development of the young adults who mostly populate HEIs (which is the basis of most pastoral models). Whilst theology was central to the church foundation of the first universities, the current dominant narrative in higher education originates in the enlightenment (Brown, 2010: 29). Theology is subservient to scientific understanding of nature and humanity, rather than vice versa. Knowledge is sought and generated without a commensurate emphasis on wisdom and the consequences of the knowledge being obtained. Brown (2010: 30) argues a key role of chaplaincy is to generate alternative knowledge, based on wisdom. This involves relationships, ethics, and the insights of religious faith which is outside the scientific paradigm, elsewhere likened to “discerning God” within the university and within knowledge (Ford, 1999: 13). Brown (2013)

² Todd’s argument in the context of military chaplaincy is that, by their presence within the military institutions, chaplains (on behalf of the church) are demonstrating approval of the exercise of lethal force, as that is the central purpose of the institution.

suggests the emphasis on marketable skills and profitable knowledge is leading to HEIs losing souls to economics, leaving a role for chaplains to find the souls, giving an intriguing link to the language of mission. This paradigm would direct chaplains to working with both the academy and individual students to develop theological understanding of the academic knowledge that is being taught and generated. It fulfils the requirements of an adequate theology of university chaplaincy, offers clear identity to chaplains whilst also opening space for traditional pastoral support, gives institutions good reason to welcome chaplaincy within their educational purposes, and engages with the missional agenda of the church by opening conversation on hope and purpose of life. An interesting question is whether this alternative knowledge is the sphere of the chaplaincy or academic theology departments (Ford, 2011: 14), as the chaplain effectively becomes prophetic theologian to the institution and also the church. HEIs used to chaplains focussing on pastoral support would need to reimagine the contribution chaplains make in order to accommodate this role, but it is congruent with the political agenda of the management of faith in the public space and extremism. The argument for alternative knowledge as a purpose for chaplaincy relies on the assumption that faith perspectives are of value to society, beyond the contribution of disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, sociology, and anthropology which also consider the values implicit behind knowledge and the implications for society as a whole. This promotion of the fundamental importance of considering faith perspectives satisfies the missional agenda of the church.

A second paradigm worthy of exploration is that of chaplaincy as Public Theology, as espoused by Pattison (2013). There is an immediate logic in the title as HEI chaplaincy resides physically within the public sphere. There is synergy with alternative knowledge, but rather than starting in academia, public theology provides a theological contribution to public issues with language of values and beliefs, rather than knowledge. The focus is on exploration of questions that academia is less likely to engage with, bringing an alternative critical perspective to issues of public concern, asking questions of values, purpose, ultimate reality, justice, and motivation. A presupposition of public theology is that religious traditions are part of the “treasure trove of common humanity”, and so would require chaplains to concede that the discomfort felt by some at placing religious tradition and theology at the centre of their role comes from “internally generated self-censorship” rather than being an external requirement, with institutions expecting chaplains to engage critically with their own traditions (Pattison, 2007: 132–43). The attractions and challenges of this paradigm are similar to those for alternative knowledge with the exception of potentially placing less academic requirements outside the field of theology on chaplains. For the church, engagement with mission is found in presenting a faith perspective on societal issues as a valid voice worthy of consideration by all regardless of religious affiliation.

Both of these paradigms offer secure theological platforms as opposed to models of practice, thus providing a clear understanding of the nature and purpose of HEI chaplaincy at a policy level whilst giving individual chaplains flexibility to creatively develop practice pertinent to their particular institutional context. They expand the

potential breadth of chaplaincy, releasing it from defending a continually diminishing niche within pastoral care.

Conclusions

Without a well-developed theology, HEI chaplaincy will always be in a place of uncertainty. Chaplains will continue to spend time justifying their presence in the institution and their resourcing to the church, detracting from actual work or ministry; the picture of chaplains as exiles belonging to neither church nor institution will continue to be valid. A well-developed theology will allow Christian chaplains to be confidently present in both settings. HEI chaplaincy will always look in two directions and needs a theology that can be coherently expressed with transparency and integrity to both. This requires a widening of focus beyond pastoral practice to give enough breadth and depth to encompass more fully the academic context and the impact of universities on society as a whole, whether expressed in language of knowledge, values, or public theology. These principles may also be germane to other areas of chaplaincy located at the interface between faith community and secular institution, where identity can be fragile. This paper has suggested that it is possible to develop a theological understanding of Christian university chaplaincy which accommodates both the secular goals of the institution and the mission of the church. However, even if this is not possible it would be advantageous to both to clearly understand this. If the Church and chaplains retreat from publicly speaking about faith and theology there is the potential for it leading to the death of Christian chaplaincy within the university. If they develop a robust theology of chaplaincy, there is potential for benefit to church, institution, and chaplain.

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