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Is ‘Being There’ Enough? Explorations of Incarnational Missiology with Chaplains

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Based on the findings of case study research, this paper describes how chaplains conceptualize their ministry in the public sphere, as ‘being there’. They report that they see their work as incarnating something of God and being similar to the parish priest who cares for everyone within a community. They see their role in terms of connecting people to God and, at times, to the church. The chaplains’ sense of ‘being there’ as a missiology is analyzed through a discussion of the theological conceptions of incarnation and *imago Dei*. The paper concludes that the presence of chaplains within public spheres embodies a much-needed paradigm of mission. Drawing on the concept of prophetic dialogue, this paper argues that yes and no — ‘being there’ is enough in terms of the ministry of chaplains, but the theology of ‘being there’ needs to be not only in dialogue with the context, but also be prophetic.

KEYWORDS mission, chaplain, public theology, incarnation, *imago Dei*

Introduction

In an interview, a Church of England parish priest nearing retirement reflected upon his more than forty years of ministry. He remarked that his Bishop, when he was about to embark on his ministry training, had encouraged him to always devote part of his time in the parish to chaplaincy. He recalled, though, that the Bishop had warned him, ‘A chaplain is a bit like a stray dog who has wandered in. People don’t know whether to feed you or throw you out’. With a smile he noted that this had indeed been his experience over the years, but he went on to speak with great animation about the missional opportunities he has encountered in chaplaincy, most recently serving fortnightly as a police chaplain.

This paper considers this very question, 'What does it mean for a chaplain to "be there" – in an ostensibly non-religious context in her or his role as a religious practitioner?' Drawing on empirical evidence, I invite the reader to attend to the voices of chaplains who describe what it means for them to be present in a variety of contexts. This will then form the basis for a discussion of the theology of 'being there', in relation to the missiological theme of incarnation.

In the midst of a contested narrative of religious decline in Britain (Davie, 2000, 2015 see also Gill *et al.*, 1998; Richter and Francis, 1998), the ministry of chaplaincy is growing and flourishing (Slater, 2015). Originally conceived as a means of including people in the church who were unable to attend, chaplaincy remains an important spiritual resource within traditional settings, such as the military, prisons, and hospitals (Todd, 2011). The last ten years has also seen increasing numbers of chaplains working within other areas such as industry, commerce, education, shopping centres, government offices and airports (Brown, 2011; Ryan, 2015).

This paper seeks to contribute to the small, but growing body of empirical data published regarding studies of chaplaincy within Great Britain. Recent years have seen significant publications regarding the nature chaplaincy. Swift (2014: 127) has published a second edition of his reflection on the changing nature of hospital chaplaincy, and argues for an empirical approach that draws on the everyday experience of the chaplain to shed light on the 'crisis' of chaplaincy. This 'crisis' is complex, but one element is the question of what chaplains are actually doing (see Mowat and Swinton, 2005) as they offer spiritual care within an organization (see Cadge, 2013). Several edited books include accounts written by chaplains about their sectors, notably Legood's (1999) book *The Church's Sector Ministries*, and Threlfall-Holmes and Newitt's (2011) *Being a Chaplain*. More recently, Swift *et al.* (2015) *A Handbook of Chaplaincy Studies* also calls for further empirical research to contribute to 'chaplaincy studies'.

This article is also written to contribute to literature that considers chaplaincy and its mission as a mode of ministry in itself, related to but not limited to the institution within which it is placed. Malcolm Brown, introducing his edited volume of *Crucible: The Christian Journal of Social Ethics* devoted to chaplaincy, argues that the study of chaplaincy should move away from being structured 'around a taxonomy of institutions' and instead should be seen as 'a calling that is less about ministry to discrete structures than about the churches' engagement with society and the public sphere in all its fullness' (2011: 6). Theos, in conjunction with the Cardiff Centre for Chaplaincy Studies, conducted quantitative and qualitative research in 2014 in Luton, in a scoping exercise designed to map the state of chaplaincy within a particular area. The report by Ryan (2015) reveals that there are 169 chaplains working in nine different chaplaincy fields in a less than thirty-mile radius. He found that the greatest number of chaplains are volunteers, with only fourteen of the chaplains serving full-time. For the most part, he found that Christian charities and churches fund chaplaincy. This study in Luton sheds light on the question of the impact of chaplaincy, and reveals the ways that chaplaincy is changing in how it works, how it is set up, how it engages with different organizations and how it is recognized by various groups. Similarly, the research reported here studied chaplaincy in a

range of contexts and entailed interviews not only with chaplains, but also with stakeholders.

Additionally, I discuss the findings of qualitative case study research among chaplains, with a particular focus on the missiological implications of the data. Slater, drawing on case study research, has shown how chaplaincy can be positioned as strategically important to the missional engagement in a local area. Relating her findings to the missional principle of *missio Dei*, she writes,

This research suggests that chaplaincy offers a positive contextual model of ministry that meets this contemporary cultural challenge. Within today's plural, multi-faith context, dialogue and witness need to enter into dialectic, for it is often in genuine encounter and dialogue that the opportunity occurs for authentic witness (2015: 76).

This article also places a missiological principle, in this case, incarnational ministry, into conversation with the everyday experiences of chaplains and seeks to draw out implications for the practice of chaplains. In this case, the chaplains themselves form the conclusions regarding the importance and meaning of an incarnational 'being there'.

Methods

The impetus for the project grew out of the Church of England's concern regarding its place within contemporary society in England, where it continues to function as the state church. Facing declining numbers of regular attenders, the Anglican Church (as it is also sometimes called) has been involved in a number of research projects over the last couple of decades with the aim of shedding light on how the mission of the church should adapt to respond to the changing context.

The Director of the Mission and Public Affairs of the Archbishop's Council commissioned the research in 2013 in order to elucidate the Church of England's current involvement in and support for chaplaincy work and to inform effective planning for the Church's future strategy in this area. The project was developed by Andrew Todd, from the Cardiff Centre for Chaplaincy Studies and Victoria Slater from Oxford Centre for Ecclesiology and Practical Theology. The qualitative empirical research was undertaken by Sarah Dunlop, the post-doctoral researcher and, in one case, was joined by Andrew Todd. A report, 'The Church of England's Involvement in Chaplaincy',¹ which details the findings and analysis of the research, was submitted to the Mission and Public Affairs Council in February 2014.

The research project focused on the Church of England's involvement in chaplaincy, while recognizing that chaplaincy is ecumenical, multi-faith and inter-organizational. Informed by available research, this study aimed to clarify and deepen understanding of the extent, character and narrative of Anglican involvement in chaplaincy. One dimension of this research, not discussed in this paper, addressed the question of quantitative evidence, by soliciting statistical evidence from those in the Church of England who have responsibility for chaplains and chaplaincy at national and diocesan level. The other dimension of the research, which is the focus for this paper, entailed five case studies with Church of England chaplains and their colleagues from other faith communities. These case studies were

conducted between May and July 2013 among chaplaincies in various settings in different regions of England. Each of the five case studies involved interviews and informal conversations with lead chaplains and members of their team, and in some cases, their line manager or a service user. The researcher also collected the literature that each chaplaincy produced about itself, including websites, publicity leaflets, statements of mission and vision, strategy documents and annual reports. The settings for the five case studies were:

- Hospital – this large chaplaincy was set in an urban context over two sites. Six people were interviewed: three ordained, Anglican chaplains, one ordained Baptist chaplain, a neo-natal nurse and a member of the hospital senior management who oversees the chaplaincy.
- Industry – this workplace chaplaincy was set in multiple geographical locations in an urban context. Seven participants were interviewed: one bishop whose remit is to support chaplaincy in the diocese, three ordained Anglican chaplains, and three lay chaplains — two Anglican, one Methodist.
- Commercial Sector – this urban chaplaincy included large companies. We interviewed five people: one who is the co-chair of the chaplaincy steering group, and then the chaplaincy team, which is comprised of two ordained Anglican chaplains, one Roman Catholic priest, one Jewish rabbi and a Muslim Imam.²
- Police – this chaplaincy covered the police stations across a rural county. Five people took part in the research: the ordained Anglican leader of police chaplains for the area, a Baptist chaplain and an Anglican chaplain who work with the local police, and two lay people who serve as chaplains to their local police.
- University – this suburban Cathedrals Group university chaplaincy was located on one campus. Five people were interviewed: the lead Anglican chaplain, the Chair of governors, the director of music, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor who line manages the lead chaplain, and the assistant chaplain, who is an ordained Anglican priest.

All together twenty-nine people were interviewed, nineteen were men, ten were women. The researcher (and on one occasion two researchers) spent one or two days on site with the chaplains in their setting. In the midst of observations, site tours and informal conversations, interviews were conducted and audio recorded. The insights gained from this practitioner perspective acquired through the case studies was further developed iteratively through a subsequent consultation with a range of chaplains, at which initial findings from the case studies were discussed and refined.

Findings: how chaplains talk about their work

Although the case studies highlighted a whole range of issues relating to chaplaincy, this article focuses particularly on how Christian chaplains and stakeholders articulated their concepts of the missional rationale of chaplaincy. In our interviews and informal conversations with chaplains, we asked: 'Is there a particular missiology that drives your work as a chaplain?' One of the tensions that most chaplains face is that they are prevented from proselytizing, either as explicitly advised by their public sector organization or through their own implicit understanding of their

role. This means that they are forced to negotiate their very presence and purpose within their context as ministers of religion. So, articulating a missiology was not straightforward. Certainly, most would say they perceive their work as engaging with people when they want to explore and reflect on moral or spiritual questions. But beyond this, when asked to explain their missional approach, they articulated five (not mutually exclusive) ways of conceptualizing their ministry: being there, functioning like a parish priest, incarnating something of God, connecting people to the transcendent God, and connecting people to the church.

Being there

We discovered that many chaplains see their work as a mission of presence, as this volunteer fire service chaplain said: ‘Like all chaplaincy work, it’s the being there ... walking alongside people and being persistent with that’. A hospital chaplain explained, ‘And so in the broadest terms, there is wonderful mission opportunity in just being with people who are out of their normal framework of life and it wouldn’t be too grand a term to say “on retreat”’. Some of the chaplains recognized that this subtle ministry of presence had the potential to sow seeds of interest in Christianity among the people they meet. As one police chaplain put it,

I mean it might be years later – people may think that you were caring and gave time to them, because you are a Christian. So, it is very gradual, but you know, there is something there that can plant a seed in people.

The chaplains expressed that it was really important to them to be visible within their chaplaincy setting. One chaplain told us,

So, the workplace chaplaincy is about being present and visible and approachable in places of work, which will then encourage other people who are employed there, as part of the workforce, also, to become more visible if they also are Christians.

For a university chaplain, his work was about being a visual representation of the church’s presence in that institution. He said, ‘I think that my understanding of mission is to be there, to be seen, to be visible as a resource whether that is for worship or to be seen to be supporting this community or the wider community’. Indeed, many chaplains saw their role as linked to the wider church’s engagement within an aspect of society. For example, this chaplain who serves in both shopping malls and hospitals told us,

It’s about the church being where people are and being relevant to what they do, work is such a major part of what people do. And if you’ve got a significant health problem, that’s a huge thing, and being alongside is – I think it’s being where the need is, going to where people are, and not expecting them to come to you, and just going in love, I think that’s partly what the church is called to do.

Essentially, many chaplains saw their mission as simply ‘being there’ — showing support and kindness to those they meet and being a visible representation of the church in their context. This is not a new concept within chaplaincy. For example, [Earl \(2012\)](#) outlines how military chaplains are encouraged just to be in situ among service people, engaging with people on an individual level through

relationships. He argues that just by 'being there' the chaplains are incarnationally present. However, additional findings demonstrate that for many chaplains, just 'being there' was not enough. Caperon (2015: 320), reporting about how school chaplains see their presence within educational institutions, 'the chaplain's personal being as someone whose *presence and role* both express and embody the truths of the Christian gospel' (emphasis mine). Presence leads to a particular sort of role, which I explore in the following sections.

Functioning like a parish priest

Some chaplains, particularly those ordained in the Church of England, compared their work within a specific context to the parish model, in the sense of the Anglican vicar being responsible for a local geographical region, and going out into the area to meet people and mix with them. An Anglican chaplain to a shopping mall said,

I think the old-fashioned view of the local vicar who just gets around the parishes in whatever way it is and meets people, does the pastoral offices, I think that is a very worthwhile thing and I think that could translate easily here. I feel that that is the strength of the Church of England, that's another reason why I like doing this. People still have a respect for the Church of England and want to see the vicar. And I don't think it really matters whether it is in the workplace or just in the parish.

Indeed, there was a sense from some of the chaplains that being Anglican gave them a measure of legitimacy within the general British public sphere.

A businessman who serves on the board of a commercial sector chaplaincy observed that perhaps the new parish is the workplace:

As I say, the everyday engagement [of the chaplaincy], I see as being critical. In today's life, everybody has got too many things to do, too many pressures, and the chaplaincy has the accessibility, visibility, the ease with which there is engagement without disrupting too much, without it being so separate from the rest of life, this will increasingly be important. It may be nothing more than a re-creation of what we used to have, with local, very tightly knit communities where everybody was educated, worked, lived and died in the same community, and you were never more than two miles from the church, and that was the centre of the village. Whereas now, people are coming from all over the place and their roots are in different places, and even if they had those roots, they can't go back to them frequently. Whereas this is day-to-day activity, and I think it has a bigger impact.

So, we see that the role of 'being there' is geographically located and chaplains are setting out a 'patch' in which to actively have some form of Christian presence. Industrial chaplains spoke about walking on the factory floors, shopping centre chaplains about walking between shops and hospital chaplains about walking the wards. There is a sense that just being present where people are working accomplishes some form of ministry within that place. But this was more than just comparing their 'patch' to a parish, most had a theological rationale for this location-based ministry of presence — speaking in terms of the incarnation of God.

Incarnating something of God

Indeed, almost every chaplain within our case studies spoke of his or her own missiology for chaplaincy work in terms of the incarnation. For example, a hospital chaplain said, 'I hope that through my presence, and any interventions I carry out, I incarnate something of God's grace and love, as seen in Jesus, for that person'. A parish priest explained the notion of mission that drives his police chaplaincy work in this way:

I would talk in terms of incarnational theology, in terms of God being everywhere and perhaps the job of the priest to help to draw the veil back a little bit and help people see the presence of God or Christ in those situations.

The language of incarnation that chaplains employ ranges from being an expression of pastoral presence alongside people, to a stronger articulation of incarnating the presence of God in particular situations. For this industry chaplain, this conception of mission can lead to a holistic view of life:

Well the chaplaincy work that I have been speaking of is very much about being a Christian presence. It is supposed to be about being incarnational, it is about being alongside people, it is about listening to them, it is about being ready to respond to them, it is about being ready to pray for them. And to view the whole of life as something which matters to God, it's not segmenting it into different compartments.

However, this notion of the incarnation seemed to often be invoked somewhat vaguely. Certainly there was a sense that just as God has chosen to be present with humanity, so the chaplain is present with people in everyday life, but not all chaplains spoke with confidence about what this incarnation was meant to accomplish.

Connecting people to the transcendent God

Along these lines, some chaplains also spoke about how they see their ministry as pointing people to the possibility of the transcendent. A police chaplain put this notion quite simply: 'That is exactly what my mission is – helping people to identify the sacred both within and without'. A hospital chaplain explained,

From a missiological perspective I would see the aim of my work within the hospital as attempting to facilitate those I minister to to connect, re-connect or deepen their connection with a loving divine presence, or at least that which is transcendent or 'other' to them.

An industrial chaplain spoke explicitly about linking people to the transcendent God, which he described as

showing people God is at work here actually – even those who don't go to church, to say to them, 'God is here, you may not pray to him or want to use that language, but I am happy to use that language'.

A university chaplain spoke about how it was not just revealing God that was important, but showing people a God of love.

I think we would want everybody to experience something of the love of God in this institution. I think that's the mission of the chaplaincy; to seek to find a way to allow everybody's soul to be touched by the love of God.

These chaplains understood their role of incarnating the presence of God to entail some means of linking people to God. But below I will explore whether this could be expanded even further to contain some element of the redeeming work of God. But before moving into the theological analysis section, there is one final aspect of the missiology of the chaplains to include in the findings, because they relate to chaplains' conceptions of the aims of their work.

Connecting people to the church

The hospital chaplain referred to in the section above described how deepening people's connection with the divine can serve as a means of connecting people to the church.

... people who describe a real sense of being opened up to a greater awareness of transcendence, the 'other', and keep searching and wrestling with questions of meaning and purpose, can be linked back into communities to continue that exploration. So, there can be that huge connection between what we do here [and the church].

But the majority of chaplains did not speak about the connection in terms of bringing people into the church, instead they described the church moving outside of its building to connect with people. For example, an ordained parish priest who serves as a police chaplain said, 'And things like police chaplaincy or street pastors or hospital chaplaincy, these are all areas where actually the church is moving out of the worship building into everyday life, getting stuck in'. Another clergy person who serves as a police chaplain agreed, saying,

We are not just expecting people to come into our church and be ministered to, but there is a role for ministering to people where they are working, while they are at work... I think more and more churches are going to be needing to be out there, doing the stuff, rather than expecting people to come in.

Another hospital chaplain described this outward movement in terms some of the contemporary ways that the church has responded missionally to the social context:

I think that a lot of the skills that chaplains have are similar to those that are happening within Fresh Expressions, fitting liturgy and ritual to a particular context, to meeting with people who have no real faith heritage, so there isn't a background of knowing miracle stories, those things. And that's entirely where we are – working in an environment where traditional faith assumptions are not held in privilege in society in a way that is increasingly the case.

Thus the chaplains described their mission in terms of presence, an incarnational sense of being there for people as priests to a very unique sort of parish context. Their mission was to connect people to the transcendent God. Many saw their ministry as reaching out from the church into the world.

Theological analysis

As we have seen above, the chaplains' missiology is driven by the notion of the incarnation, a sense of their ministry comprising of physically being in a place and relating to the people in that context. This section focuses on this notion of incarnation, to discern how this doctrine adds insight into the missional approach of the chaplain. Three elements of the chaplains' reported missiology will be analyzed here: physical presence, the redemptive nature of the incarnation, and the resulting view of humanity.

The incarnation is a physical presence

The incarnational call of 'being there' is modelled on the working pattern of Jesus and, as the chaplains themselves said, is a powerful means of conveying the presence of God. The incarnation of Jesus is essentially the reason why Christians celebrate Christmas each year. The evangelist John puts it quite simply, 'The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us' (John 1:14, NIV). The apostle Paul explains that Jesus Christ 'made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness' (Philippians 2:7, NIV). Of course, the doctrine of the incarnation extends beyond the Son of God being born of a woman and includes all of the life and ministry of Jesus. The chaplains have described how their missiology of the incarnation certainly entails a physical presence, choosing to relate to people through 'being there', similar to the way that Jesus chose to relate to humanity.

Missional thinking in some circles has moved toward an incarnational approach. See for example Frost and Hirsch's (2003: 59) emphasis on 'incarnational over extractional' mission and Bosch's (2011: 465) understanding of incarnation inspiring 'authentic inculturation'. He describes how Liberation theologians have drawn this doctrine into aspects of mission, emphasizing that the incarnation is not just about Christ offering a means of salvation, but is about a 'Christ who agonizes and sweats and bleeds with the victims of oppression'. The importance of the incarnation for missiology has grown, as evidenced in more recent mission statements (see Bosch, 2011: 524–25). Fresh Expressions in the UK, as initially articulated in an Archbishop's Council Report, *Mission Shaped Church* (2004: 87), also included the incarnation as a means of promoting a creative missiology for a 'missionary church'.

It was striking how nearly every chaplain mentioned 'being there' or the incarnation to answer our question about their missional vision for their ministry. The prevalence of this conception of a ministry of presence is most likely linked to the limitations placed upon a chaplain with regard to the overt proclamation of the gospel. But further analysis reveals that some chaplains have thought quite deeply about what this 'being there' really means.

The incarnation brings redemption

As we have seen, some chaplains saw incarnating the presence of God as an activity that can awaken a sense of transcendence among the people within their context. So, for example, a hospital chaplain spoke about how 'sickness can be a thin place'. This meant for the chaplain that he conceived of his mission to bring into a time of healing the possibility of renewal 'not just of body but soul and spirit - a redirection of life'. This ministry of presence has the potential to be more than a comfort to

people — it can be redemptive and provide reconciliation with God. The Nicene Creed explains that the reason for the incarnation is Jesus' mission on earth, 'For us and for our salvation' (see [Bevans and Schroeder, 2013: 45](#)).

An industrial chaplain spoke about mission in terms of transforming situations. 'So, when things are changing we have an opportunity to make that change as faithful as possible'. Indeed, this chaplain argued that for a ministry to truly be incarnational, it should also be transformative or redemptive in some way. The goal of the incarnation (alongside the death and resurrection of Jesus) is to bring about a redemptive work that transforms people more and more into the likeness of God. [Gunton \(1991\)](#) observes that it is the redeeming work of God that enables a human to be shaped into the image of God. It is the process of conforming to the person of Christ that brings about the state of being in the image of God. For Gunton, the image of God means that a person has a particular sort of destiny. So, what does mean for the chaplain's view of humanity?

The incarnation reveals what it means to be truly human

Within the creation account, humans alone are said to be made in the image of God. 'So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them' (Genesis 1:27, NIV). The creation account in Genesis strikingly differentiates the creation of the Earth and animals from humans. Augustine (in [TeSelle, 2002: 116](#)) recognized the great worth of human beings and was influential in developing the understanding of *imago Dei*:

Because man is able to participate in Wisdom through the inward man, it is according to the latter that he is said to be created *ad Imaginem*, in order that he might be fully formed by this Image with nothing intervening and in such a fashion that nothing could be closer to God. Thus he would truly know, and live, and be. No created thing could be greater.

Humans are distinct from all the other aspects of creation. This concept of the *imago Dei* tells us something about humanity. Reflecting upon the unique dignity conferred to humans, [Jewett and Shuster \(1996: 54\)](#) write:

The reason why the concept of the divine image has become so prominent in Christian anthropology is obvious: it confers on the human subject the highest possible distinction, leaving the world of animals far behind. Here is language used of no other creature, language that teaches us to understand ourselves in terms of God rather than in terms of the animals.

The foundations for contemporary conceptions of human dignity are founded in this Biblical doctrine of humanity created in the image of God (see [Howard, 2013](#)). God chose to relate to humanity most significantly via the incarnation of his Son, Jesus Christ, who did more than live among humanity, he brought transformation to the way that people related to God, their earthly reality, and each other. Thus, argues [Mitchell \(2013: 95\)](#), the notion of the image of God, particularly with reference to the incarnation, can form the basis for the Christian call to show compassion to all of humanity who suffers in one way or another.

This belief that humanity was made in the image of God means that all people, not only chaplains, are image bearers of the divine. Chaplains spoke of their ministry as

‘incarnating something of the love of God’, but the doctrine of the incarnation has the potential to extend this possibility to all people, which provides an elevated view of the human person. All people, from firefighters, doctors and patients in hospitals, students, prisoners and factory workers bear the divine image. A commercial sector chaplain spoke in terms of doing the work of God, ‘to make people not more religious, but more human. Facilitating from a standpoint of faith to help people understand who they are and what life’s about’. Chaplains can take this view of human dignity into the shopping mall, the hospital, the university, the banking sector and support those who work in these environments to see people as uniquely created by God in his image, and thus deserving of respect.

Conclusions

We have seen that at the centre of the chaplains’ conception of mission lies this mysterious notion of the incarnation, the divine taking on human flesh. For some chaplains this incarnational ministry amounted to a vague sense of ‘being there’, while others were fully immersed in exploring the implications for their own practice and for the people they encounter within their ministries. The concept of mission as prophetic dialogue, as promoted by [Bevans and Schroeder \(2013\)](#), is helpful for analyzing the missiological tensions that the chaplains encounter. They argue that mission should always be prophetic, meaning that it is always the call of the church to preach the gospel, and it is always its obligation to creatively proclaim Jesus Christ. But for them, mission should also be done in dialogue, involving listening, a ‘letting go’ before speaking out, because without this, ‘mission is impossible’ ([Bevans and Schroeder, 2013](#): 350). They argue that dialogue within the mission context and prophetically speaking into that context are the two key missional activities that should be held in tension.

Viewing the findings of this study through this lens, we see that through ‘being there’, chaplains are able to model a very sensitive, in depth dialogue with the people in their setting. Not confined by a building or parish boundary, the chaplain can move among people in a variety of areas of society. The potential impact of chaplaincy can be huge because the chaplain comes into contact with far more people than the parish priest. The chaplain listens to people outside of the typical demographic make up of most churches and encounters people of all ages and social classes.

However, given that a chaplain’s welcome within their setting is often dependent upon agreement to refrain from active proselytism, the prophetic element of the mission is often more complex. In these various contexts the chaplain must be adept at conveying the faith in a manner that engages the variety of people encountered. Chaplains function as ‘public theologians’ or apologists, taking the formal theology of the church and translating it into ordinary theology for every day life. Chaplains can be part of writing new liturgy for a changing culture — alternative worship, performing life rituals and rites of passage (a child’s first mobile phone, moving from home into long-term care — a blessing of the room, move to a new house after a divorce, etc.). We have seen that the calling of the chaplain is that through their presence within each situation they hope to bring transformation and create sacred moments.

Certainly, it is the theology of humanity as made in the image of God that could drive the prophetic vision for chaplaincy — helping people to achieve their fulfilled humanity. But understanding the chaplain as also in the image of God helps to make sense of the incarnational thrust of much that was said within the interviews. Being there in a way that brings transformation and moves people on from image to likeness (in the terms of Irenaeus) is the goal. So, simply 'being there' is good, but 'being there' to enable transformation is even better, and it is this that sets the Christian chaplain apart from the secular chaplain or corporate counsellor. Thus, this paper argues that yes and no — 'being there' is enough in terms of the ministry of chaplains, but the theology of 'being there' needs to be both prophetic and in dialogue with the context.

Being prophetic as a chaplain means believing that the transforming power of God is at work in all aspects of public life, and 'being there' has the potential to reintroduce religion as part of daily life. In fact, the presence of the chaplain five days out of the week offers a huge potential impact in the workplace. Furthermore, for the Christian, the chaplain unites Sunday with the rest of the week, bringing the sacred of Sunday into the workplace for the whole week. The ministry of the chaplain is often very different from the formality of a religious service because it is done without the distinction from a person's working life.

Chaplains embody a paradigm of mission that is much-needed by the wider church. A missiology that encourages Christians out of church buildings and into the public sphere is essential for the future of the church. And the view of humanity as bearing the divine image and worthy of dignity is a highly relevant concept within the public square. Through prophetically 'being there', chaplains can bring redemption and transformation. Returning to the image of the chaplain at the start of this paper, perhaps it is the high view of humanity, borne out of *imago Dei* theology, that causes chaplains to increasingly be welcomed within a variety of public spheres, instead of thrown out like a stray dog.


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Notes

- 1 The report has been published on the Cardiff Centre of Chaplaincy Studies' website: http://stmichaels.ac.uk/assets/pdf/Todd_Slater_Dunlop_2014_Report_on_Church_of_England_Chaplaincy.pdf. Accessed January 20, 2017.
- 2 Although the interviews with the rabbi and imam were included in the project report, their comments are not included within this paper, which focuses on Christian missiology.

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