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Spirituality, Christmas and Cyalume Sticks: The Pastoral-Liturgical Identity of a Navy Chaplain

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In a time when the Church is seeking to understand contemporary spirituality and “fresh expressions” of religion, a Navy chaplain’s pastoral and liturgical experiences on a warship can challenge us to rethink and reframe how Christmas can be an encouragement to and a provocation for the ensemble of faith. Using Gordon Lathrop’s methodology of juxtaposition, this article explores how a Navy chaplain becomes an integral part of the theological conversations between the seemingly secular and sacred aspects of Christmas experiences. By examining the rituals, activities, and conversations surrounding Christmas icons at sea, a flow of ideas and relationships is discovered that enables us to be stretched in how we view ourselves, others, and God. Defining who the faithful are may even become more inclusive. Invariably it inspires new expressions of faith as well as consolidating longstanding proclamations.

KEYWORDS Chaplaincy, Christmas, Lathrop, Navy, Liturgy

Introduction

During the season of Advent, there is a call to prepare for Christmas Day. This call comes from shops wanting to sell you their products as gifts. It comes from family members who expect you to share the holiday with them. The call comes from the Church who asks you to reflect on the true meanings of the baby Jesus coming to dwell with us. Many of these calls reflect contrasting stories that intersect and disconnect. Hence, preparation during this time is often complicated for many; fraught with tension, excitement, disappointment, and hope, no more so than on a Navy warship at sea. Yet, on a warship there are no shopping malls, family members are absent, and the Church has only a negligible presence.

How is Christmas ritual experienced on a warship? How does ship’s company navigate the distant competing demands? What faith is expressed when the usual defining rituals, boundaries, symbols, or signs are absent or in short supply? As the

sacred and secular symbols of Christmas are placed alongside images of a naval community, the essences of Christian faith are revealed in familiar and unaccustomed ways. Such revelations provide an opportunity to find liturgical and pastoral meanings in perpetual encounters that may coalesce or conflict, disturb or excite, restrain or release. In a time when the Church is seeking to understand “fresh expressions” of what it means to be a person or community of faith, an exploration of Christmas rituals on a Royal Australian Navy (RAN) warship challenges us to rethink how Christmas ritual can be an encouragement to and a provocation for the ensemble of faith in any place.

“Go tell it on the mountains” – peaceful warriors

RAN chaplains are immersed in a particular military community whilst representing a specific denominational faith group. They are required to serve a broad understanding of assembly as their duties include caring for those of all faiths and none at all. This understanding has further emphasis in a Defence Instruction that states, “Attention to the spiritual needs of members of the Navy is a matter of the highest importance” (Defence Instruction (Navy), 2006: para. 3.1). Regardless of their own religious convictions, a RAN chaplain’s responsibilities include assisting all defence members and their families in the pursuance of their particular faith practices (Defence Instruction (General), 2002: para. 6.1). These faith practices may include the world’s major religions, as well as those more recently popular such as Wiccan, Jedi, or Baha’i.

RAN chaplains are the only category that is given a designation and not a military rank in the Australian Defence Force. As such, they are commissioned officers with the title of Chaplain (Defence Instruction (Navy), 2006: para. 36.4), who wear the insignia of an intertwined patonce cross and fouled anchor on their epaulettes. (The insignia includes the same anchor worn by the Leading Seaman rank.) This deliberate positioning allows RAN chaplains to be alongside personnel rather than exercising authority over them. As a chaplain speaks with any individual, they are understood to be taking on the rank of the person they are with, whether the most junior sailor or senior admiral. This concept actively promotes the time-honoured pastoral understanding of the chaplain being “friend and advisor of all on board.” Their station also authorises RAN chaplains to operate within, alongside and around the chain of command. This autonomy enables all chaplains to speak directly with their Commanding Officer regarding chaplaincy matters.

RAN chaplains are peculiar in that they are subject to command but have no command authority. A chaplain is only immediately responsible for him or herself, which, “[i]s appropriate and deliberate....[and] this lack of direct responsibility gives the freedom to be responsible, in a general sense, for every person in the unit, and often for people outside the unit” (Field, 2008: 111). Chaplains have a particular task to “promote the moral, spiritual, and religious wellbeing of all personnel through personal contact and friendship and by encouraging participation in religious activities” (Defence Instruction (Navy), 2006: para. 45a.5). They also are required to, “[a]dvise their Commanding Officer on all matters relating to

morale and the moral, spiritual, and religious wellbeing of naval personnel and their families” (Defence Instruction (Navy), 2006: para 45.5). These duties include the understanding that, “[i]t is important, to both the member and the Navy that ample opportunity is given for spiritual development. The personal qualities of character that ensure high standards of conduct and that inspire courage and self-sacrifice in a crisis can be developed by religious faith” (Defence Instruction (Navy), 2006: para. 4.1). RAN chaplains are the servant of all and master of none. By their on-going presence, “[t]hey reminded the Churches and their substantial members, that those in the military had as much right to religious life and pastoral care as any other person. On the other hand they reminded military personnel of the ethical and religious values of the God the chaplains served and stood for” (Strong, 2012: 290).

The Geneva Convention considers RAN chaplains to be non-combatants who “shall be respected and protected in all circumstances” (ICRC, 1949: IV art. 24). Whilst deployed at sea, chaplains share the same risks as those of the rest of ship’s company as the weaponry and philosophies of others do not always respect their status. If “engaged” at sea, a chaplain’s duties include supporting those who are in a combat role. RAN chaplains hope that at the very least, their deployed presence reminds people that it is “normal” to be unarmed and it is a common desire to want to live in peace. It is not a chaplain’s job to give advice on the legality of any engagements, regardless of private convictions or theological persuasions.¹ The chaplain may have to make a choice of how or whether to protect the life of another or their own. All RAN chaplains are to contribute effectively to the fulfilment of the mission, that is, to be a “force multiplier.” In doing so, chaplains are awarded campaign medals to wear on their uniform at ceremonial occasions and on their clerical robes at official services. The contradictions are intense and confronting for all military chaplains. For, as Mansfield considers:

They wear a uniform but cannot carry a weapon. They receive a check from the state to do the work of the church in a society deathly afraid of the mixture of church and state. They can preach God’s will for the individual soul but may not preach God’s will for the war. They are ordained by a single religious denomination to preach its truth but as chaplains must tend to every possible religious persuasion. (Mansfield, 2005: 80)

“But wherewith for sacred sign?” – trustful doubt

The juxtaposition methodology of Gordon Lathrop is insightful in exploring how the liturgy or *ordo* proclaims and illuminates meaning (Lathrop, 1993: 33–35).²

¹ For a discussion of the problematic nature of Christian chaplaincy in a secular military organisation, see Darr (1992).

² Rev. Dr Gordon Lathrop is the Schieren Professor of Liturgy Emeritus and Professor of Practical Theology at Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. For further description of his liturgical juxtaposition methodology see Lathrop (1993). Lathrop proposes that in worship an ecumenical pattern or *ordo* of worship can be discerned, which are juxtaposed arrangements of meaning that say something about God. This *ordo* is more than directions about the Service but also includes the presuppositions behind the patterns that yield meaning to the experience of the participants.

Lathrop suggests that it is in the shape of the liturgy as patterns of meaning that we can inquire why, and discover how, meaning does or does not occur. For:

[m]eaning occurs through structure, by one thing set next to another. The scheduling of the *ordo*, the setting of one liturgical thing next to another in the shape of the liturgy, evokes and replicates the deep structure of biblical language, the use of the old to say the new by means of juxtaposition. (Lathrop, 1993: 33)

Lathrop asserts that, “[t]he intention of the liturgy is to manifest the presence of God in this assembly, a merciful presence that is meant not just for this assembly but for the world” (Lathrop, 1993: 18). The Church is not an assembly for the assembly’s sake; “[p]eople gather around something, they gather to do something” (Lathrop, 1993: 87). Effective liturgy refocuses us to look intensely towards God and the world. The Church’s primary task is reconciliation.³

There is no single theological meaning for a liturgical act as liturgies are essentially multivalent. Doctrines influence liturgies, liturgical customs shape beliefs, and pastoral contexts influence liturgical practices. Theology informs liturgical practices and liturgy is a strong source for theological reflection. Liturgy as *ordo* is more than a worship service; it is the structure and shape for all Christian living. As we seek to exercise in all of our living our adoration, confession, proclamation, thanksgiving, supplication, and blessing we resonate from and anticipate the *ordo*. The Sunday service thus becomes the beginning and end of the week.⁴ An understanding of liturgical practice as the “whole of life” becomes an opportunity to discover how pastoral encounters, liturgical actions, the particularities of people’s lives and community rituals can evoke wider understandings of faith and belonging.

Many who are in the shadows of Church life, are suspicious of denominational or organised religion, or who would rarely seek spiritual or religious support, do seek chaplains as faith leaders, pastoral helpers, and life guides. Ordained leadership, “[w]hich is to be taken seriously as a powerful human symbol, means something Christian as it is immersed in the juxtapositions of the *ordo* and, specifically, as it is juxtaposed to the powerful symbols of community and of the participation of all the people” (Lathrop, 1993: 192). By sharing the joys and responsibilities of ship life at sea and Defence life ashore, RAN chaplains earn the privilege of being invited into the intimate and common moments of the Navy community. “Every day is a Sunday, so far as the chaplain is concerned” (Sellers, 1915: 47). RAN chaplains as strong and authentic symbols call to people in their human need and draw them towards hope.

³ Aiden Kavanagh calls this the “Church doing the world” (Kavanagh, 1992: 42). That is, through the church enacting the redeemed world it offers a different view of humanity, shows the world that it too has been redeemed, and thus calls it to worship its creator and redeemer.

⁴ For early Christians, Sunday was also the spiritual eighth day. Justin Martyr wrote, “[f]or the first day after the Sabbath, remaining the first of all the days, is called, however, the eighth, according to the number of all the days of the cycle, and [yet] remains the first” (*Dialogue with Trypho*, trans. R.P.C. Hanson, XLI).

“Let every heart prepare him room” – non-religious piety

Individuals, families, and communities have rituals during the liturgical season of Advent through which they prepare for Christmas Day. For many around the world it includes the putting up and decorating of a Christmas tree in the “hearth” of the home. This reassuring and uplifting custom brings people together as they reminisce about Christmases past, share the wonder of the current year, and hope for the future. Somehow, differences are put aside for a time, there is a sense of hope that sin and sorrow will cease, as love and blessings flow. Every heart prepares him room: whether it is for religion, reward, rations, or recreation.

A RAN chaplain’s duties include assisting ship’s company in maintaining their understanding of faith or spirituality away from their usual routines and symbols of assurance. To “make God possible” and “prepare him room” means engaging words, spaces, and symbols that have meaning for ship’s company as well as the Church. As Ware reflects, “[t]his incarnational gospel the military chaplain preaches is also pragmatic and, in some sense, secular. Very few people will come to a chaplain looking for God in any conventional sense. Instead, chaplains have to go to the personnel and find God in them, often giving expression in very secular terms” (Ware, 1999: 64). This is not a straightforward task. At Christmas, RAN chaplains employ community symbols such as the Christmas tree to connect secular and sacred values in meaningful ways.

The symbolic depth of the liturgy includes many languages: the iconic, spatial, temporal, eternal, aural, and kinetic. Interpretation and reinterpretation occurs as place, time, word, action, experience, or symbol allows for. Intentional, accidental, familiar, or imaginative contrasts can occur before, after, or during an event. It is, “[m]eaning in action as they are used, especially as they are intentionally juxtaposed” (Lathrop, 1993: 10). For example, liturgical preaching involves putting the biblical narratives of Christmas alongside the stories of a specific community. On a warship, the catalyst is the chaplain who offers opportunities for a variety of interrelated interpretations, explanations, and meanings for the assembly to respond to and interpret. It is in their living aboard a warship during the rest of the week, both before and after such a preaching event that will bring meaning and significance to the words spoken and broken for ship’s company and their chaplain. “As well as standing at the boundary of everyday and the sacred and bearing witness, the ordained person has a further function: to make a ‘relationship’ with God possible” (Billings, 2010: 7). For a Navy chaplain this is indeed a “whole of life” task.

“O Christmas tree” – spiritually secular

A warship is characteristically functional. It is divided into many single and multipurpose spaces that include the operational, communal, private, restricted, secret, administrative, recreational, storage, and machinery. These spaces need to be flexible, durable, safe, and efficient. There is nothing extraneous. Where then is the “hearth” of a warship? Many members of ship’s company would undoubtedly suggest that it is the galley where comfort food is found. However, that busy place has no spare space for a Christmas tree. Another thought may be the dining messes

or living areas, but on a warship these are segregated and delineated by rank and gender. Where can all gather, or pass by, at will, and without censure?

An understanding of juxtaposition explains the historical reasons that have given us many of the symbols and signs that are held dearly as elements of Christian worship or ritual today. The juxtaposition of a Christian ritual against another similar secular or community ritual, such as procession or sacrifice, was an engagement in a vigorous polemic (Lathrop, 1993: 143–9). “Such a polemic was bound to bring Christians into deep political and social conflict with representatives of the prevailing order” (Billings, 2010: 144). A decorated Christmas tree on a warship whilst on deployment in the Middle East is one such contemporary polemic. Placed in a corner of a communal passageway in the bowels of the ship, it is tied down and secured against the possible events of flood, fire, or enemy action. For some it becomes a sacred sign that “God’s peace will reign.” For a few, it is an inconvenience, a distraction, or a lucky charm. For most, it challenges them to think differently about Christmas. The Christmas tree becomes a powerful symbol of on-going ordinary life amidst the uncertainty and dislocation of combat, and much more.

Apart from the usual meanings and interpretations, what does a Christmas tree in a warship represent? How does this image of peace, hopeful expectation, and gifts offer something new when standing in a place of tension, conflict, and potential violence? Each year the RAN chaplain uses this image to have conversations with members of ship’s company that reflect on what it means to be preparing for Christmas in a warship that is on patrol with guns loaded, only a missile’s launch from where Jesus was born. Any opportunity for God-talk is something negotiated. It requires an ability “to loiter on the edge of other people’s lives, to be fully engaged and yet watchful at the same time” (Moody, 1999: 16). As the chaplain loiters, sailors confide that they look at the Christmas tree differently that year.

Rather than being simply a source of tradition and gift giving, this temporal tree becomes an opportunity to “faithfully critique” on what is significant about the transcendence of Christmas. Reflections include:

When I look at that tree all lashed down with rope, it makes me think about how Jesus gets tied down every Christmas, by churches and shopping centres and carols and even by me. I wonder if Jesus ever wants to break free.⁵

And from another person:

It is weird but that tree looks alive, vibrating almost. Do you think it is because you can see God more clearly when you take away all the other stuff, like presents, that do not really matter?

Not all on board will agree with the presence of the Christmas tree. Comments are heard such as:

⁵ All comments have been anonymised. No ship, chaplain, or individual has been identified. The material has been suitably disguised as co-constructed text in short vignettes.

I do not agree with that tree being there, it is in the way and dangerous, a hazard, and we are not here to celebrate but to fight.

Interestingly, others will respond with something like:

I am not religious but isn't that the point of the tree, to interrupt us and get in the way, to make us stop for a while and remember what is important and that war is not what life should be about, but getting on with each other is? The world needs a miracle to be reminded of that.

The secular and the religious are in genuine conversation.

Communication of meaning is never simply a process of coding and encoding. Juxtapositions provide an opportunity for chaos, for ambiguity, for creative imagination and for depth to be disclosed. Liturgy as the whole of life provides a pattern, an intensity, and a flow of ideas and relationships. Juxtaposition is more than conversation or action. It is a transforming relationship that critiques, heartens, and renews. "The spirit of the liturgy is not the fiercely consequent application of one idea. It is rather the continual insertion of a community into unresolved polarities" (Lathrop, 1993: 225). In a context that is intrinsically shaped by polarities, this insertion breaks open and powerfully realises the holy presence of God within the midst of a warship.

"Silent night, holy night" – perilous safety

Christmas carols can be poignant, reassuring, thought provoking, or even amusing. Their comforting and sanguine messages bring joy, hope, and encouragement. The tradition of carolling began in the Middle Ages when people would gather in the streets and public places to sing. The carollers would often go door to door of private homes, as the carols were once banned from being sung in churches. Across the world, often by candlelight, a myriad of cultures still sing about devotion, faith, baby Jesus, Santa Claus and local images such as snow or kangaroos. On a warship, fire is a foe. There are no streets to wander or parks in which to gather. No snow is falling and there are no kangaroos for thousands of miles. Carols by candlelight could not be contemplated ... or could it?

For many years now, each Christmas Eve sees RAN warships on patrol in the Indian Ocean alert to intercept any boats that enter Australian waters. Many of those boats are coming with the hope of claiming refugee asylum. It is common practice that permission is given by the Commanding Officer to hold a Christmas Carol Service when no vessels are in sight or expected in the area. The flight deck becomes active with sailors setting up stereo systems, handing out song booklets, and taking photos of each other with Santa hats and reindeer ears. Others diligently search through all the cyalume light sticks to find all that are out of date to use as "candles." Beneath the stars in the bright sky, ship's company not needed to keep the ship safe or remain on task join together to sing and to celebrate. Surrounded by ocean, holding "candles," these "safely vulnerable" sailors will think of home as they sing about baby Jesus, love, grace, and hope; knowing that at any moment they may be called to stand to, to fulfil their mission.

Does anyone else hear the discordant note? As the sailors sing their Christmas carols, there will be families who are fleeing looking for shelter and protection just

like the baby Jesus and his family who fled to Egypt for safety two thousand years ago (Matt. 2: 13–14). Ship's company certainly hear it. Sailors muse about the situation with comments like:

It is a bit ironic, isn't it, here we are singing about peace and hope and we are here to stop people looking for exactly that.

They respond with comments like:

I find it hard. However, I see what we are doing as rescuing them not stopping them. Without us, they would probably drown. We do our best to keep them safe. I have to believe that people are sleeping in peace tonight because of what we are doing.

At a time like this, the RAN chaplain will suggest something like:

It is easy to sing about the Christmas story, and it is another thing to do it. Being here, doing this now, it makes me think differently. How about you?

Poignant answers may follow:

It makes me think about my family, and what I would risk for them," and "It makes me think about Jesus' birth being messy, vulnerable, bizarre, and dangerous. So much could have gone wrong and people still have different opinions about it all. Who really determines what is right?

Other more surprising responses include:

These boat people are seeking a new life of hope and there are many different views about them. I have never been that sympathetic before, but tonight, I hope they find whatever they are looking for.

The sacred stories and the secular are connecting in unforeseen ways.

Being silent does not always mean being unheard. Whilst singing Christmas carols ship's company find themselves connected to loved-ones, meaning and convictions in unexpected ways. This "detached connection" becomes evident in later conversations. A sailor reveals:

I am in the middle of the ocean, miles away from my family at Christmas time, yet when I sang those songs I felt close to them, almost like they are sitting right next to me singing along. It makes me wonder if that is what God is trying to tell us at Christmas, that even though he is miles away that he is closer than you think.

Another reflection related in many ways to RAN chaplains sounds something like:

It is so calm out here, it really is a silent night with bright stars looking down on us. As we sing, I find myself wanting to believe in God. It somehow seems possible that God might be real and listening and care, waiting for me to connect, and that I just might be willing to try.

During Christmas at sea the "unknown God" becomes more apparent to some.

“Do you hear what I hear?”⁶ – harmonious conflict

Questions of juxtaposition strongly resonate with the experiences of RAN chaplains. As Christians, we live through a series of divergences and combinations. In our daily life, we relate to both the secular and the sacred. We rely on both science and faith. We respond to both the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world. Sometimes we are aware of these associations, these clashes of ideas; but more often we are inclined to amalgamate, harmonise, or compartmentalise these confrontations. It is no different for those who serve in the Navy, especially when on patrol with guns loaded on Christmas Day. How can anyone be a believer in universal peace whilst carrying a weapon? What does it mean to be “loaded” with Jesus at Christmas?⁷ How does a RAN chaplain navigate these waters?

Like many in our communities, the majority of sailors and officers believe in God or think of themselves as broadly Christian but they do not want to be on going members of a distinct Christian community. They rarely have a linear or systematic set of beliefs, preferring a more eclectic or assorted understanding of lived faith. This lived faith is authentic to them. They would rather describe their understanding of connecting with God as being when or what they need at the time, not as prescribed by some authority. That is, during those times in their life that are intense, meaningful, or challenging, they may be provoked to connect with God either individually in personal prayer or attend somewhere communally such as a religious service. As Billings suggests:

They live Christian lives; they are Christians because their lives reflect the life and values of Jesus Christ. Like him they acknowledge that we live in a creation, that God cares for us, that we should care for another, and so on ... Sometimes they feel the need to attend a church on such occasions as a Christmas Carol Service or Midnight Mass ... They see the Church, in other words, as a spiritual resource. But they do not want to belong. (Billings, 2004:12)

Conducting Christmas Services on the flight deck or deep in the ship’s passageways whilst surrounded by “damage control” and “survival at sea” equipment, the chaplain is acutely aware that words of grace and peace are being pronounced on a warship. It can seem like a “precarious certainty” that God does indeed reign. The chaplain as a pastor, “[c]ares for symbols, sets out symbols for other people, hopes these symbols may hold people’s lives into meaning...No wonder, then, that the pastor can take on the character of these surroundings, these materials and tools of the work” (Lathrop, 2006: 1).

The spirituality and the religiosity of ship’s company and their chaplain are challenged as they are forced to consider the meanings of Christmas in unfamiliar and highly charged contexts. Like those first shepherds who were summoned to the baby Jesus, the faithful are not always immediately obvious or apparent. Yet, when invited in ways that are significant to them, most sailors chose to engage and participate with the meanings of Christmas. For many the ship becomes the ideal

⁶This Christmas song by Gloria Shayne and Noel Regney was written during the Cuban missile crisis as a plea for peace at a time when nuclear war seemed possible.

⁷I am grateful to my colleague Owen Davies for suggesting this emotive image.

mix of a refuge from Christmas commercialism and a hideout from the disappointments of family Christmases. Unexpectedly for most, there is also a sense of sanctuary or the divine in the liberation of meaningful ritual and the preservation of sacramental activities and events: “[t]he presence of a chaplain is often experienced—and valued—by those receiving such ministry as the Church validating their experiences, lives and work” (Threfall-Holmes, 2011: 121). On these remote floating communities, RAN chaplains have a vital and meaningful role in concentrating symbols, prompting conversations, and inviting transformation. Their presence encourages sailors to explore who they are in relation to their beliefs about themselves, the world, and God. Spirituality, faith, unbelief, and religion are in active dialogue.

“O come all ye faithful” – following leaders

The pastoral-liturgical role of a RAN chaplain reveals complex layers of values, implications, and perspectives. The methodology of “the use of the old to say the new” (Lathrop, 1993: 33) by means of juxtaposition provides an opportunity to discover fresh meanings in what may appear on the surface to be chaotic, ambiguous or erroneous. As the culture, symbols, and convictions of the sacred stories are placed alongside the history, tradition, and icons of Christmas aboard a Navy warship, a pattern or flow of ideas and relationships is discovered that enables us to be stretched and broadened in how we view ourselves, others, and God. Invariably it inspires new expressions of faith as well as consolidating longstanding proclamations. Defining who the faithful are may even become more inclusive. RAN chaplains challenge the wider Church to consider a fresh understanding of Church that is not determined by prescribed membership, boundaries, buildings, or polity; but a broader understanding of belonging, liminality, sacred space, and community.

Faith is never simple. What is being said about God by this liturgical undertaking? What is the primary theology encountered in the warnings and invitations of liturgical practice? The exploration of contemporary religion and spirituality is ambiguous and multivalent, including a concentration of meanings that are not easily agreed upon or determined. This is no more so than on a warship where there are inherent pressures, competing expectations, enfolding tensions and inchoate expectations beyond the capacity of any chaplain to resolve. These will often cross against each other competing for space and deference. Authentic faith will resist simple resolutions, settled categorization, and unnuanced assumptions. Liturgy as the “whole of life” is like a kaleidoscope that keeps reconfiguring and reconstructing whilst maintaining patterns of Christian conviction and belief. RAN chaplaincy illustrates that the Church must further explore how the gospel can be repackaged and proclaimed in meaningful ways that include being present to people in their context on their terms.

Storytelling, interweaving our story with another, reveals how we experience and think about God. As Lee notes, “[t]elling my story is not itself theology but a basis for theology, indeed the primary context for doing my theology. That is why one cannot do theology for another” (Lee, 1995: 7). The story of Christmases as

experienced by ship's companies and their chaplain reveals that spirituality and faith are not necessarily discrete or unconnected. As stories are shared together and juxtaposed, communal and individual meaning is discovered and rediscovered. Contemporary belief and religiosity are "secretly visible." Meaning is given and taken, accepted and discarded in this complex interaction. Pastoral and liturgical opportunities for God's name to be spoken and Christ's love to be shown are evident. RAN chaplains encourage the Church to consider that our stories, both individual and in community, are the primary context for doing theology and being Church. The Church must connect her narratives with those of society. The supplication remains, "how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?" (Rom. 10:14, NRSV).

Being one of the faithful is never straightforward. As Ware ponders, "[m]ilitary chaplains can be considered as having betrayed the gospel and have deluded themselves into believing that it is possible to provide Christian ministry to a situation which is as far removed from Christian principles as is possible to be" (Ware, 1999: 58). Christmas aboard a Navy warship demonstrates that these tensions are real but not unanswerable. Is there anywhere on a warship that Christ is not or cannot go? Chaplains help take Christ to where people are, as well as uncovering the Christ who is already there waiting to be revealed. Together chaplain and ship's company wend their footsteps. All the faithful and faithless, and everyone in between, are welcome on this voyage.

The paradigm of RAN chaplaincy demonstrates that if the Church truly seeks to better connect with society than the concept of being a sent people who offer generous pastoral and liturgical relationships to all will be more important than programmes, piety, or regulations.

Conclusion

Juxtapositions allow alterity, pursue intensification, and hold both the new and the old together. Christians are in the Church, but they are in the world first. As ordinary Christians interact with their world, liturgies develop that reflect and sustain the whole of their life. These give significance to human existence and engender meaningful relationships with God. Authentic worship of the Triune God in ways that are life-giving and hope-bearing is possible. Indeed the presence of God is realised for the sake of the individual, the community, and the world.

A Navy chaplain's role is multifaceted. It is incarnational, enthused by God dwelling amongst us. It is sacramental, inspired by the grace of Jesus Christ. It is communal, stirred by the Holy Spirit being involved in everyday life. It is missional, moved by the love of God reaching out to us. It is pastoral, encouraged by a comforting and sustaining God. It is liturgical, motivated by patterns of worship that remind us of who God is. It is spiritual, stimulated by the immanence and transcendence of God. It is faithful, instigated by the patience of a persevering God. It is religious, heartened by the life and death of Jesus. It is traditional, revived by the permanence of an eternal Holy Spirit. It is postmodern, aroused by the narrative of local contexts in conversation with a steadfast God. It is liberal,

refreshed by the mystery of a transforming God. It is evangelical, excited by the good news of Christ. It is prophetic sustained by the reconciling power of the Holy Spirit. It is practical. The pastoral-liturgical identity of a Navy chaplain is motivated by holding the hurts and preserving the hopes, by articulating the dreams and naming the fears, and by believing in the creative transformation of those in their care through Christ.

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