



**‘Standing in the Gap’: A Theological Reflection on The Meaning,
Value and Significance of Faith in The Life and Ministry of
Healthcare Chaplains**

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A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Submitted May 2021

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Abstract

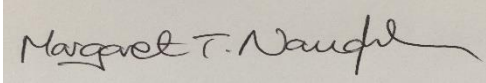
To date, there has been a dearth of research in the area of Healthcare Chaplaincy, particularly in the Irish context. The literature recognises this and indeed, calls for a rebalance, especially by chaplains themselves. Framed around the trigger question, ‘Do chaplains need to be people of faith?’ this thesis seeks to redress the gap in research and begin a process of reflection and growth in this area.

This study is supported and framed by the action-reflection-action methodology which is at the heart of the Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) model of teaching and learning. At the centre of CPE, is what Anton Boisen has called, ‘living human documents’, or in other words, the human person. At the heart of this thesis, is the narrative of twenty-six chaplains. It is their narrative, their experience and their story which help to provide significant insight into the ministry of the contemporary chaplain.

This study is further supported by theological reflection, an integral part of the CPE process. Using the Whiteheads’ model of theological reflection, which encompasses experience, culture and tradition, it has been possible to undertake a process of theological reflection on the meaning, value and significance of faith in the life and ministry of Healthcare Chaplains. Having explored each of these dialogue partners, the thesis then moves to an exploration of the fruits of the dialogue. This is done by using a bespoke method of theological reflection – a new and fresh approach to the discipline. In other words, in crafting a new method of theological reflection, this thesis, is able to attend to the experience of the chaplains, explore what the experience has to say, before then moving to name new insights and areas for transformation and growth.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own work and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or elsewhere.

Signed: 

Date: 28th of May 2021

Acknowledgements

The words of the poet John Donne ‘no man is an island’ reflects the centrality of interconnectedness and the sense of relationship that a study like this is framed by. From the very beginning, this project was supported, encouraged, enabled and eventually completed because of the gentle presence of so many people in the background. The saying ‘it takes a village’ was most certainly tried and tested over the last four years and as the study took root and started to grow, I became more acutely aware of the work and commitment of others in helping to bring closure to this study.

I must, of course, begin with offering a sincere word of thanks to each of the twenty-six chaplains who generously agreed to be interviewed for this thesis. I owe an immense debt of gratitude to each and every one of them. Their honest, open and frank sharing of their narrative and experience and understanding of faith brought me into a world where I was humbled and privileged. I was gifted to stand on holy ground as they shared, each in their own unique way, something of immense importance to them. Thank you seems so inadequate but I offer it with sincerity.

I would also like to thank the greater chaplaincy community who have supported me in all of my various endeavours in the last ten years. I think especially of Fr. Brian Gough who has supported me in myriad of ways and also the ACPE (Ireland) community who have been a source of great encouragement and support for which I am most grateful. I would also like to express a word of thanks to my chaplaincy colleagues who I have worked alongside for the last ten years. I think particularly of Mary Cahill who often held the fort at the Bon Secours Hospital, Tralee while I went off to interview another chaplain or write up another chapter. Thank you most sincerely Mary for your friendship and your collegiality from the very beginning.

I would like to acknowledge and thank my former employers the BSHT for a small educational bursary in year two of the study which I was most grateful to receive.

There are, of course, several others who have helped in various ways over the last few years and I would like to acknowledge their contribution and support: Dr. John Weafer who provided very useful guidance in relation to research methodology at the beginning of the study; Prof. Fiona Timmins, Dean and Head of School, UCD School of Nursing who generously shared articles and documents of interest to my study; Ms. Juanita Guidera, QI Facilitator and Staff Engagement for Quality, HSE who helped in my search for relevant HSE documents; my brother-in-law Niall McIntyre who helped with technical support and document creation and finally Mrs. Mary Clifford who painstakingly proof read chapter after chapter in the quest of a misplaced comma! Thank you to all of you for your contribution to this work.

I would like to offer a word of gratitude to each member of staff at the Theology and Religious Studies Department at Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. Over the last few years, I have been supported personally, pastorally and academically. I have been encouraged, supported, empowered and transformed in multiple ways. I have learned tenfold what I had set out to and I will be forever grateful to a wonderful department led by Prof. Eamonn Conway for the pastoral care we, as postgraduate students, experience from the beginning of the research process to its end. It has been a grace-filled experience which I will, forever, hold sacred.

The most important person in this entire process has been my supervisor – Rev. Dr. Éamonn Fitzgibbon. In truth, I am not sure that I will ever be able to adequately express my gratitude to him for all his support personally, pastorally and professionally over the last four years. He has been my Emmaus Christ figure – walking alongside me as I stumbled, fell and began anew. He has encouraged me, empowered me, challenged me, reined me in, transformed me and supported me in so many ways. When I wavered, he encouraged me to continue. When I got carried away, he firmly but kindly reined me in. When I lost my way, he supported my return to the process. He was pastoral, collegial, supportive and deeply encouraging at all times. I have been immensely humbled by his knowledge, empowered by his generosity of spirit and supported by his pastoral heart. Thank you Éamonn for choosing to walk this journey with me. I will be forever grateful for all that you have offered me — personally, pastorally and professionally.

Finally, I thank my wonderful family – my sister Bernadette and brother John and their respective families. These are the people who have helped to make me the person that I am today. Their unconditional love, support and acceptance help me each and every day to be the best person that I can be. Thank you. I think too, of my parents, now both deceased. For them, education was a dream, not a reality. This PhD bridges their gap as much as it does mine.

I dedicate this thesis in loving memory to my mother Bridie and to my darling nieces and nephews - Fionán, Éanna, Liádh, Charlotte and Ethan – the world is at your feet – grab it and live your best life always.

List of Abbreviations

CAB – Chaplaincy Accreditation Board

CHC – Catholic Healthcare Commission

COI - Church of Ireland

CORI – Conference of Religious in Ireland

CPD – Continuous Professional Development

CPE – Clinical Pastoral Education

CUH – Cork University Hospital (formerly Cork Regional Hospital)

DMin – Doctor of Ministry

HCB – Healthcare Chaplaincy Board

HSE – Health Service Executive

MMM – Medical Missionaries of Mary

NACC – National Association of Catholic Chaplains

NAHC – National Association of Healthcare Chaplains (formerly hospital chaplains)

RC – Roman Catholic

SNCHC – Support Network for Catholic Healthcare Chaplains

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Introduction

From ‘Cinderella Ministry’ to Professional Paradigms – Healthcare Chaplaincy in Ireland – Historical Overview – Setting the Scene

For me, chaplains stand in the gap for all people. As a chaplain I am called to stand in the gap holding a person’s hand and God’s hand so that they can come from where they are to where God wants them to be.¹

I looked for someone among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so that I would not have to destroy it but I found no one.²

In many ways, the issue of professional identity and recognition sits in the background of this particular study which is the first of its kind to be undertaken in Ireland. In looking at the meaning, value and significance of faith for contemporary chaplains it will be possible to undertake a gap analysis study into healthcare chaplaincy and bridge the research gap which currently exists particularly within the Irish context. Furthermore, not only will this research serve to bridge the gap in research into chaplaincy, simultaneously it will also provide an overview of the reality of chaplaincy in the twenty-first century. By reflecting theologically on the issue of faith, it will be possible to obtain significant insight into the reality of contemporary ministry as articulated and shared by the pastoral practitioners themselves. This will provide a picture for practitioners and non-practitioners alike of the challenges and opportunities which face contemporary chaplains. This will also support, supplement and augment issues around identity and recognition of chaplains and for them as we hear directly from practitioners how they understand their faith, their role and their objectives in ministry. Theirs is the voice woven throughout this study and their concerns and issues remain at the epicentre at all times.

This study, framed by the trigger question ‘Do Healthcare Chaplains need to be People of Faith?’ will provide significant insight into the role and function of chaplains

1 Chaplain J

2 Ezekiel 22:30

within a complex and constantly changing demographic. The overall structure of the study is loosely divided into three sections. Section One will look at the overall research methodology employed in the study as well as the rationale for choosing such an approach. This particular section will also explore Theological Reflection as a methodology, a concept which sits at the heart of the action-reflection-action framework. Section Two takes its trajectory from the Whiteheads' Model of Theological Reflection which frames and encases the study and supports an authentic dialogue around the issue of faith for contemporary chaplains. Chapter Three will lay out the themes which emerge from the data collection. In other words, here we listen to the experience of the pastoral practitioners and gain significant insight into their world. Chapter Four examines the cultural context within which chaplains operate. The final chapter in this section explores the theological tradition in relation to some of the key issues which emerge from the data collection. The final section consists of two more chapters and here we experience the fruits of the dialogue. In other words, by putting into dialogue the three partners of experience, culture and tradition, it will be possible to generate an authentic conversation around faith and its meaning, value and significance for contemporary chaplains. Finally, the last chapter will explore the new pastoral insights which this conversation has generated.

The *Code of Canon Law* defines a chaplain as 'a priest to whom is entrusted in a stable manner the pastoral care, at least in part, of some community or particular group of the Christian faithful, which is to be exercised according to the norm of universal and particular law'.³ However, for the purposes of this study 'chaplain' will be broadly interpreted as those who are employed to provide pastoral and spiritual care to the sick and the dying in hospitals and other healthcare facilities who are endorsed to do so by their faith community whether male or female, ordained or lay. Pastoral Care is a ministry which includes but is not confined to the provision of compassionate presence, authentic listening and faith support in its many facets. The *HSE Circular on Healthcare Chaplains* outlines the role of the chaplain as responding to the pastoral need of patients, relatives and staff and that the chaplain will recognise and value other people's belief systems in a developing multi-cultural society.⁴ That said, the term 'chaplain' is not without its complexities and is used with some degree of caution in mind. In a Vatican document

³ *Code of Canon Law*, Article 2, Canon 564.

⁴ HSE Circular on Roman Catholic Healthcare Chaplains, 2006.

published in 1997 entitled *On Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priests*, while it was acknowledged that ‘the lay faithful of both sexes have innumerable opportunities to be actively involved [in ministry]’ that nevertheless, ‘it is unlawful for the non-ordained faithful to assume titles such as pastor, chaplain, co-ordinator, moderator or other such titles’⁵ as in so doing this leads to role confusion. There is somewhat of an uneasy acceptance of the usage of the term ‘chaplain’, within the Roman Catholic tradition at least, for those who provide pastoral and spiritual care in contemporary society despite the clear guidance from Canon Law around its meaning and function. It is the term which will be used in this study for the person who provides pastoral care by both the researcher and those who have been interviewed in the course of this study.

‘Faith’ also needs a brief exploration at this point. While the chaplains themselves will progress the conversation in this regard, nevertheless, it is important to have a starting point, a lens through which to move the dialogue forward. Faith, for the purposes of this study is understood, for the most part, within a Christian context. Therefore, it is this understanding which will frame and support the exploration at the heart of the thesis. In *Share the Good News* we are reminded of Pope Benedict XVI’s words that ‘being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but an encounter with an event, a person, who gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction’.⁶ Faith is an encounter with Jesus. The friends of Jesus became committed to him because ‘they came to know him and his love for them’. They also came to see his commitment to ‘those most in need, his care for the poor, his love for sinners, his ability to change people’s lives by his compassionate presence, his challenging stories, his healing words and works’.⁷ Therefore, faith is about trust, connection, relationship with Christ. His words, his actions, his compassionate presence offers something by way of reassurance, of hope in the darkest of moments. Faith provides a starting point from which we can dig deeper, into the existential questions of life.

⁵ *On Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priests*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, 1997.

⁶ Pope Benedict XVI in *Share the Good News – the National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland*. Dublin: Veritas, 2010, 13.

⁷ *Share the Good News*, 13.

This introduction will provide the historical background to the development of chaplaincy in Ireland and will lay the contextual framework and foundation for the earlier chapters in particular of this study. Healthcare Chaplaincy has undergone a significant paradigm shift over the last four decades or so and therefore it is this timeframe that will contextualise and frame the exploration of chaplaincy in this study. Moving from a predominantly clerical model to one which now encompasses male and female, ordained and lay chaplains, the historical development of the ministry in Ireland has been one woven with many challenges and difficulties which this introduction will outline to some extent. Chaplaincy has also been impacted by the many societal, cultural and demographical changes which have occurred in Ireland in recent years and this introduction will document some of the key changes and challenges especially those faced by chaplaincy leaders from circa 1981. In his introduction to the *History of Healthcare Chaplaincy in Ireland* (2015), Fr. Tommy O’Keeffe (a founding member of the National Association of Healthcare Chaplains NAHC) notes that ‘even after Vatican II, hospital chaplaincy in Ireland was a “Cinderella Ministry” given little or no attention by bishops, religious orders or hospital authorities’.⁸ Importantly, the primary objective of this section is not to try to determine the extent (or not) to which Fr. O’Keeffe’s assertions are valid but rather it is to provide a somewhat brief narrative of the historical and social development of healthcare chaplaincy and CPE training in Ireland. The lens through which this exploration will take place is mainly that of the National Association of Healthcare Chaplains (NAHC) the first professional body founded to provide support and fellowship for chaplains in Ireland.

i. An Association in The Making

A pivotal moment for healthcare chaplaincy was the formation of the National Associations of Hospital Chaplains.⁹ Some tentative steps had earlier been taken in 1976, when a number of hospital chaplains from different parts of Ireland met and expressed the need for peer support and training¹⁰ and it was (eventually) from the discussions that

8 Fr. Tommy O’Keeffe in Naughton, Margaret ‘Healthcare Chaplaincy in Ireland 1981-2014 —A History of the National Association of Healthcare Chaplains’. Dublin: 2015, 5. Material in relation to the NAHC has been obtained from the association archive and some of the founding members. I am particularly indebted to Fr. John Carroll, Chaplain at Sligo University Hospital for providing me with much hitherto unearthed documentation.

9 Now known as National Association of Healthcare Chaplains (NAHC).

10 Fr. Thomas O’Keeffe, Memo re Certification and registration of supervisors of Clinical Pastoral Education and of Pastoral Care Workers, 1st September 1983 - NAHC Archive.

day that a concerted effort was made to form a national association. The nine priests who came together in 1976 felt that ‘a hospital was increasingly an important field for pastoral care’¹¹ but there seemed to be little recognition of this within the wider church context. Five years later, an association was formed to provide professional and personal support to those working within the hospital ministry. Reflecting on such a significant development, Fr. Tommy O’Keeffe wrote:

I think that our coming together as a group of chaplains was born of a certain frustration because we felt that the Church was giving a lot of lip service to the care of the sick and its importance as a ministry so that, in actual fact, very little care was given to choosing chaplains.¹²

At this time, chaplains appear to have felt unsupported by the Catholic Church with the national association accusing it of ‘lip-service’.¹³ Lacking in recognition, training and support, many hospital chaplains were exhausted and without a platform to share their ongoing concerns felt isolated. As well as exhaustion and a sense of being unsupported, there was a growing sense (within the profession) that in order to adequately minister to the sick and the dying that a chaplain needed to have appropriate specialised training so that the hospital would no longer be an ‘adjunct’ to the parish.¹⁴ To that end, in June 1980 Fr. Joseph Cahill of the Columban Fathers was invited by the Conference of Major Religious Superiors to organise a programme in Clinical Pastoral Education in Dublin.¹⁵ In 1981 and 1982, three programmes were held each year, two at St. Vincent’s and one at St. John of God’s.¹⁶

ii. The National Association

On the second and third of June 1981 the inaugural conference of hospital chaplains took place at Emmaus Conference Centre, Swords, County Dublin with a theme

11 Fr. Tommy O’Keeffe, Talk on Pastoral Care given to members of the Irish Matron’s Association in the Aisling Hotel Dublin on 12th February 1985 – NAHC Archive

12 Ibid.

13 Fr. Tommy O’Keeffe, NAHC Conference, 2013. Interestingly, from the data collected the issue of ecclesial connection and support was not explored to any great extent. However, the issue of loneliness was as was role confusion not by chaplains themselves but by managers and decision-makers.

14 Fr. Tommy O’Keeffe, Talk to Irish Matrons Association, 1985 – NAHC Archive.

15 Joe Cahill, First Annual Report of Clinical Pastoral Education, 1983 -NAHC Archive.

16 Ibid.

of ‘The Hospital Chaplain Today’.¹⁷ A facilitated discussion¹⁸ took place to ascertain if it would be useful to create an association which would help support chaplains as well as educate interested stakeholders around the role and function of the chaplain. A consensus to proceed with forming an association was reached at this conference. The second national conference of hospital chaplains was arranged for 18-19th May 1982.¹⁹ During this conference, a key development was the introduction of a draft constitution which had been prepared by Fr. Henry Devlin and Fr. Christy O’ Byrne. Identity had become a key concern for the new association. The following year the predominant theme of the conference was ‘Sacramental Care in the Hospitals’. A number of important motions were passed at the Annual General Meeting that year.²⁰ At the September meeting (of the steering committee) later that year, Fr. Tommy O’ Keffe²¹ outlined plans to assist chaplains to improve their ministry by encouraging reflective practice and appropriate training.²² Members of the Irish Hospital Chaplains Association was also involved around this time in determining standards for training and certification of hospital chaplains.²³

iii. Shifting Paradigm

The growing awareness of the need for appropriate training for chaplains was growing alongside a shifting paradigm within the world of healthcare chaplaincy itself. Fr. Frank Buckley’s Chairman’s address to the annual NAHC conference in 1985 records the changing demographic within Irish healthcare chaplaincy. He opened his address by

17 Conference Programme, 1981.

18 This discussion was facilitated by Fr. Henry Devlin, Fr. Thomas O’Keffe and Fr. Joseph Cahill, NAHC documents.

19 This took place in the Emmaus Retreat Centre.

20 The afore-mentioned motions are as follows: that any motion of the Annual General Meeting to be deemed passed requires a two-third majority of those present and entitled to vote at the A.G.M; that membership of the Association of Hospital Chaplains be restricted to those currently attached to hospitals as Chaplains or Associate Chaplains; that the Executive be elected on the basis of Health Board regions rather than on Ecclesiastical provinces; that the executive should consist of three representatives from the Eastern Health Board area in the Republic of Ireland and one representative from each of the Health Boards in the Republic of Ireland and the North of Ireland; that at least one Regional Meeting be held each year between Annual Conferences on topics initially decided by the Executive Committee; that there should be a maximum of three consecutive years in office for any officer of the Executive and a maximum of six consecutive years for any member of the executive; that the officers of the Executive be elected each year by the incoming Executive at their first meeting after the Annual Conference and General Meeting; that the matter of the Constitution be shelved for the moment; that any motion proposed for the Annual General Meeting be submitted to the Secretary to the Executive Committee at least ten days prior to the commencement of the Annual Conference.20

21 Fr. Tommy O’Keffe was the Chairperson of the NAHC.

22 Minutes of Meeting, 27th September 1983.

23 Dermot Brennan, *Second Annual Report of Chaplaincy Training Programme at Cork University Hospital*, 1983 - NAHC Archive.

making reference to the movement towards the setting up of a non-statutory board which would oversee the development of Pastoral Care in terms of training, standards of entry and training, registration and the involvement and recognition of lay people in Pastoral Care.²⁴ In his address, Fr. Buckley spoke of the classical model in a hospital being that of priest/chaplain and the provision of Sacramental Care. However, by 1985, this paradigm had shifted somewhat to include a broader model of Pastoral Care (priest, nun and lay people). The landscape of Pastoral Care had changed significantly but so too had its context.

Chaplains had begun to realise that such a shifting context potentially had consequences for their role and function. After all, a healthcare facility is a microcosm of society, a meeting and breeding ground for a symphony of life's broken and yet beautiful sounds, to paraphrase Fr. Buckley. Within the Irish hospital of 1985 it had become clear that the chaplain was ministering within a very changed world. Pastoral Care needed to grow, to expand in such a way that it would be capable of reaching out to and connecting with people in a world that was becoming increasingly diverse. As Fr. Buckley points out in his report 'changed times call for change in the means used of being faithful to Christ's command go and preach the Good News to all'.²⁵ Adequate training became key to the survival of healthcare chaplaincy. Buckley believed that it was absolutely necessary that a chaplain was adequately trained due to the multiplicity of roles that he/she was expected to assume in the contemporary workplace – priest, prophet, healer, counsellor, servant or friend.²⁶ Buckley at this point predicted that a new pattern of ministry would soon emerge given the declining number of priests available to undertake the work.²⁷ Training would prepare for and make this transition less traumatic he advised.

iv. Significant Historical Developments 2000-2020

Having solidified its aims and objectives, the association flourished in the next two decades and continued to advocate for its members. A number of key issues dictated the pathway and agenda of the new association and by extension, demonstrate the

24 Fr. Frank Buckley Chairperson's Address, 1985 - NAHC Archive.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

contextual milieu within which chaplains found themselves ministering. Of paramount importance at all times was professional identity and national recognition.

v. Proposal to Establish a Register of Healthcare Chaplains

Taking up this point of professional identity and recognition, in 2005 an attempt was made to establish a register of chaplains. Healthcare was becoming more professional and chaplains were recognising the need to be proficient and accountable. The move away from an ad hoc type ministry had redrawn the parameters for chaplains who were determined to stand as professional equals alongside multidisciplinary colleagues. Four drafts of a submission document in relation to the proposal to establish a register of chaplains were prepared from May to December 2005. In a note attached to a presentation document for The Irish Bishops' Conference and CORI four significant opening points were made.²⁸ The role and function of this proposed Healthcare Chaplaincy Registration Board was to: establish and maintain a Register of chaplains who comply with the prescribed conditions for registration; issue certificates of registration to chaplains and facilitate Annual Registration of chaplains. The suggested criteria were: Catholic chaplains who have been certified by the Healthcare Chaplaincy Board or those who have been granted reciprocity for their certification by an approved association outside of Ireland; Catholic chaplains who have signed tripartite contracts by the end of 2006 and who have demonstrated competency in healthcare chaplaincy and chaplains, other than Roman Catholic, may register with the Healthcare Chaplaincy Registration Body provided they have presented for interview before a certification panel of HCB members and a member of their church/faith community who has been appointed by their church/faith community. They may only register if the HCB and their church/faith community are satisfied that they have met the required standards for certification.

An initial cost was proposed for chaplains to be placed on the register and certain criteria around on-going education would have to be met in order for chaplains to remain

28 The Catholic Healthcare Commission supports the establishment of this Register as an important milestone in the ministry of Healthcare Chaplaincy; the purpose of the Register is to ensure that each registered chaplain is certified to the standards as laid down by the Healthcare Chaplaincy Board and that each Chaplain undertakes educational opportunities that may help their professional development and skills; the cost of setting up the register will be €3000 approximately. Thereafter, it will be self-financing by the annual fees; a membership secretary will be appointed on a contract basis (20 hours per year) to maintain the register.

eligible for inclusion on the register.²⁹ However, the cost to uphold the register, some opposition to having to pay an annual fee to remain on it and the resistance in some quarters to mandatory upskilling meant that this register did not come into existence at this time. However, in 2018 new regulations came into force around CPD for chaplains and maintaining professional accreditation.³⁰ This was an important development in relation to the issue of professional identity and recognition both within and beyond the ministry.

vi. Health Service Executive and Catholic Healthcare Commission - The HSE Review

Within the context of the HSE moratorium on recruitment, in June 2011 the first of a series of meetings were held between the HSE and the CHC³¹/NAHC. The opening meeting was held on June 23rd with the HSE agreeing to investigate the unfilled chaplaincy posts with the caveat that nothing may change. Fr. Brian Gough, a member of the negotiating team, agreed to draw up a position paper to be presented at the next meeting with the HSE officials.³² The negotiating team met on 30th September 2011 to look at their options and they decided to put to the HSE a ‘request [that] the HSE second a working chaplain for six months to meet with chaplains around the country’. The seconded chaplain would: meet with all chaplains working in HSE funded posts to ascertain their views/suggestion on how best to use our resources given the dwindling numbers; meet with chaplains Line Managers/CEO/Hospital Managers to illicit their views on what they expect from the delivery of Pastoral Care Services and get a definitive headcount of HSE Paid Chaplains and Vacant Posts.³³

In December at a subsequent meeting between the HSE and the negotiating team the proposal was ‘responded positively’ to and a number of suggestions were made: a

29 Proposed Register of Healthcare Chaplain’s, 2005.

30 Interview with Bishop Raymond Field Auxiliary Bishop of Dublin and Margaret Naughton on 6th February 2015. Since January 2018 (Healthcare Chaplaincy Board regulations) it is compulsory (in order to maintain professional standing and certification) that a Roman Catholic Healthcare Chaplain engage in Forty Hours CPD per year. This has also helped to create a register of Irish Roman Catholic Healthcare Chaplains. The HCB is a sub-committee of the Council for Healthcare of the Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference.

31 Catholic Healthcare Commission.

32 Minutes of Meeting, 26th June 2011.

33 Minutes of Meeting, 30th September 2011 — the seconded chaplain would return to his/her post at the end of the six months and while on secondment the chaplain would be replaced by a Locum Chaplain who will be paid by the HSE – NAHC Archive.

more realistic timeframe for the review would be three months; a sample of hospitals would be more appropriate; while funding for a locum chaplain may be problematic it was not insurmountable and in tandem with the review, other facilities not visited could be sent a questionnaire for their views. The negotiating team were asked to draw up a succinct 'position paper' outlining the proposal, the context for such a proposal and any conditions.³⁴ The final position paper drawn up by Fr. Brian Gough was subsequently sent to the HSE.³⁵ By February 2012, the following was agreed: Fr. Brian Gough to work with Eddie Byrne and draw up terms of reference; letters to be sent to St. James's Hospital and Archbishop Dermot Martin and questionnaire to be sent to chaplains.

The terms of reference were signed off in May 2012 and Fr. Brian Gough was chosen to complete the review. He was subsequently seconded (as agreed) for three months to enable him to complete the HSE review of chaplaincy services in HSE funded hospitals.³⁶ The objective of the review, was 'how to maintain the required level of Spiritual Care with a decreasing number of Roman Catholic Chaplains'. The Terms of Reference for the review are summarised as follows: to document the views/suggestions of chaplains on how best to use existing resources in the current economic climate; to document the views of Line Managers/CEOs/Hospital Managers and other relevant hospital staff on what they look for from Pastoral Care Services and how best such Services can be delivered; to document the views of other interest groups, i.e service users, patient focus groups, patient advocacy groups; to identify the effects/impact of a decreasing workforce on the delivery of Spiritual/Sacramental Care and to identify appropriate measures to remedy any adverse effects that a decreasing workforce has on the delivery of Spiritual/Sacramental/Pastoral Care.³⁷

The HSE review commenced on 12th November 2012 and all CEOs/Hospital Managers were sent a letter via the HSE cascade system advising them of the commencement of the review and its rationale.³⁸ Importantly, this was the first significant review ever to be undertaken of chaplaincy services in Irish hospitals. Of the fourteen

34 Minutes of Meeting, 15th December 2011.

35 Final Position Paper, 9th January 2012.

36 There had been some disquiet around the selection of a chaplain to complete the review with some interested stakeholders advocating for an outsider to undertake the review.

37 HSE Review Final Report, February 2013 -NAHC Archive.

38 Ibid.

hospitals chosen, twelve site visits took place. A contact person was nominated by each hospital and for the most part the contact person had chaplains present at their meeting. The format of the meeting was an open conversation but with some specific questions asked of CEOs/Line Managers. In the short timeframe given it was not possible to elicit the views of other interest groups or stakeholders. The review ended on 15th January 2013 and the data from the returned audit forms and from the site visits to twelve of the fourteen hospitals chosen was analysed and a report compiled.³⁹ Fr. Brian Gough reflected that given the short timeframe for the review the final report represents just a snapshot of what is happening around the country.⁴⁰

However, having said that, the review constitutes the most comprehensive investigation to date ever into the provision of chaplaincy services in this country. In the majority of hospitals surveyed, twenty-four hour cover is provided seven days a week by staff chaplains on site. These chaplains are engaged in the provision of holistic, patient centred care which is done by means of spiritual care and advice, listening, advocacy, empathy, sharing in the workload of colleagues, bereavement counselling and by providing liturgies at key moments in the life of the hospital.⁴¹ Aside from looking at the type of service chaplains provide to the persons who avail of their service, this study also explored a broad spectrum of related issues such as who do chaplains report to in their hospital, how do we minister to people of other faiths and none, issues around social inclusion were also raised.⁴² In question fourteen of the review, a particularly pertinent question, asks ‘in your view are the current services adequate to meet the Pastoral Needs of patients in your hospital and their families?’. The answer to the question was an unambiguous ‘No’. The biggest challenge the review stated was the reduction in numbers and increased activity levels in the majority of hospitals around the country which places greater demands on chaplains.⁴³ The vision for further development of chaplaincy services is stated as: to develop the work of chaplains in an ever-changing and multi-cultural society; to promote Hospice Friendly Hospital initiative; to improve End of Life

39 Ibid 3.

40 Ibid 3.

41 Ibid 11/12.

42 Ibid 14.

43 Ibid.

Care support; to provide on-going education to staff and to forge links with ministers/pastors from other faith traditions or none.⁴⁴

vii. Research Project

In his address to the membership at the 1996 conference, the then Chairman Fr. Brian Molloy raised the issue of research. He stated that research is ‘something we don’t do’, as chaplains we ‘probably don’t want to but that it was something that would eventually have to be addressed’. Research he stated was ‘tied up with responsibility and accountability’. He noted that chaplains needed to be involved in research for a number of reasons: it establishes our credibility on an equal footing with our peers; research reveals a lot about our work that we need to be aware of; research is a way of establishing and maintaining our professionalism; we learn through research what we can’t learn intuitively; research makes us aware of things in a new way and research increases our knowledge in our field and we learn to approach patient needs, expectations and apprehensions better.⁴⁵

Despite Molloy’s clarity of vision and purpose in 1996, nevertheless, research remained uncharted territory until 2012. The National Executive was tasked to both source and engage a professional researcher with the requisite skills to undertake a piece of research.⁴⁶ The piece was given the title ‘The Role and Practice of Healthcare Chaplains in General Hospitals in the Republic of Ireland’. The joint ethics committee of St. James’ and Tallaght Hospitals as well as the Galway University Hospital Ethics committees all gave permission for the research to take place. A number of Head Chaplains were contacted informing them that some members of their chaplaincy teams had been invited to participate in the research project. Jennings in her introduction to the final report stated that:

This initial piece of research is largely a descriptive study of the role and practice of Healthcare Chaplains in Ireland. As such, the bulk of the time spent on this research was spent conducting face to face interviews with chaplains. Sixteen were interviewed via either on site visits or in telephone

44 Ibid. Fr. Gough’s HSE Review remains an unpublished document.

45 Fr. Brian Molloy, Chairperson’s Address, 17th April 1996 -NAHC Archive.

46 A sub-committee was formed of Margaret Naughton (Chairperson), Susan Dawson (Secretary), Eithne O’Reilly, Jim Owens and Carolyn O’Laoire. Mary Jennings, a researcher with significant experience, was chosen to undertake the project and the sub-committee met with her a number of times to discuss the parameters and progress of the research.

interviews; one interview was off site. Thirteen other people including patients, families and staff were also interviewed. The findings were then analysed and a report compiled.⁴⁷

Jennings' final report to the National Executive included a number of recommended actions:

- Clarify with the HSE that Pastoral Care/Chaplaincy is an integral part of the care of patients and their families at the formal level of policy and is based on two foundations: Religious Belief Systems where people value comfort and reassurance of spiritual care, and it [Pastoral Care] is part of the holistic model of care, which cares for the physical, emotional and spiritual aspects of the patient, their families and of staff
- Co-ordinators/Head Chaplain and HSE to develop/articulate an agreed framework of best practice and quality of standards, including ways to implement and monitor these
- Refer to Pastoral Care, rather than Chaplaincy, or Pastoral Chaplaincy so that both roles are seen to be intertwined⁴⁸
- Ensure that when the role of Pastoral Care for patients is being explained in induction/training/information that the wider role is also clear – i.e. that it is not only about Religious matters but about being present with the person in this situation and that this also has an intrinsic value
- Identify formal research already published in other countries showing how Pastoral Chaplaincy can have measurable health outcomes and disseminate them to management and staff forums
- Commission formal research on the above topic in relation to the Irish Healthcare setting
- When the review on the ratio of chaplains to beds (or other measures) is complete use the information to advocate for resources based on real data

47 Mary Jennings - *A Descriptive Study of the Role and Practice of Healthcare Chaplains in the Republic of Ireland*, 2013 Unpublished Document – NAHC Archive.

48 Adding to the complexity around the 'meaning' of the term 'chaplain' is the fact that there appears to be variances in relation to how the service of Pastoral Care and its practitioners are described even by themselves. Some use Chaplain, Chaplaincy, Pastoral Carer, Spiritual Care Giver and therefore this enhances the confusion amongst professional colleagues. This was a key point picked up by Jennings in her report and therefore she was suggesting the need for one consistent understanding of the role and its function.

- Consider the model of chaplaincy which is appropriate to different levels of provision. The conversational model may not always be appropriate/possible to implement if it requires time, which may not be available
- Undertake on-going research on the patient/families understanding of what Pastoral Care now means (religious/about meaning/about the spiritual) and how this fits within the healthcare setting
- Agree with line management on measures to be put in place to measure key activities including quantitative and qualitative measures
- Include as a major theme in NAHC's Annual Conference how teams can arrive at an openly discussed, shared understanding of the Model of Chaplaincy and how this works in practice
- Include the need for Chaplains to see themselves as a distinct profession in the supervision and training of chaplains⁴⁹

Jennings' research project has to date remained an unpublished document. This would appear to reflect the continuing reticence and reluctance on the part of chaplains to engage in research or to self advocate.

viii. Presentation to The Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health and Children

In October 2013, Fr. Brian Gough, in his capacity as Chairperson of the NAHC received an invitation to make an oral submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health and Children who were holding a series of public hearings on end-of-life care. This was the first tentative step to eventually deliver a best practice policy document on end-of-life care in Ireland. A sub-committee of the NAHC was formed comprising of Margaret Naughton, Eithne O'Reilly and Carolyn O'Laoire to draft the written submission and Margaret Naughton was chosen to make the presentation. The membership was also consulted around what might be included in the presentation and on Thursday 14th November 2013, during the sixth session of public hearings, the NAHC presentation took place.

49 Ibid.

The Oireachtas Committee was chaired by Jerry Buttimer T.D. and had eight members present. There were eight other presentations scheduled - The Hospice Friendly Hospitals Programme; Irish Association for Emergency Medicine; Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council; NAHC; Irish Hospice Foundation; Geriatric Medicine and Cancer Care. All the various speakers spoke of improving the care of the dying and two of the speakers advocated for the need to address spiritual needs. Margaret Naughton was questioned by Sandra McLellan of Sinn Féin about how lack of structures and the moratorium on recruitment had impacted on chaplaincy while Jerry Buttimer displayed a strong knowledge of chaplaincy and asked how unfilled posts impacts on chaplaincy and whether chaplaincy in private hospitals is dependent on financial resources.⁵⁰ In July 2014, the Joint Committee on Health and Children published their report on end of life care which was the culmination of all the submissions (oral and written) presented to them in October/November 2013. It included thirty-seven suggested actions that will improve the provision of end-of-life care in this country. In the introduction to the report, it is stated that this venture was ‘an unprecedented series of meetings to learn about the many issues in relation to dying, death and bereavement in Ireland.’ The committee concluded that:

End of life is an important part of specialised palliative care and involves but is not confined to the provision of appropriate medical, social, spiritual and legal care to persons in order to ensure that they may die well and with dignity.⁵¹

The challenge of preserving the dignity and privacy of patients in public wards was highlighted by Margaret Naughton in her oral submission and this insight is quoted in the final report.⁵²

ix. Publication of the NAHC/Irish Healthcare Chaplaincy History

Following on from the theme of research and advocacy for healthcare chaplaincy, the next year (2014) saw the development of the first history of healthcare chaplaincy in Ireland. The researcher interviewed founding members of the NAHC, current members,

⁵⁰ *The Carer*. December 2013. This question seemed to explore how private hospitals both view and fund Chaplaincy posts and whether budgetary issues impact upon this. *The Carer* is the official publication of the NAHC and is produced by and for the association. It is published four times per year in Dublin and is distributed to paid members of the association and other interested stakeholders.

⁵¹ End of Life Report, 24th July 2014.

⁵² The final report is accessible on the Oireachtas website at www.oireachtas.ie

CPE supervisors and members of the Catholic Hierarchy. NAHC documents were unearthed that had remained untouched for years. Indeed, all material accessed was grey, thus exacerbating the research challenge. The final document was launched at the 2015 NAHC annual conference in Athlone and was well received. Interested stakeholders have also acknowledged its originality and overall contribution to an untouched area of research. Prof. Fiona Timmins wrote in a 2018 scoping study:

However, a recent textbook by the UK healthcare chaplain Rev. Dr. Christopher Swift *Hospital Chaplaincy in the Twenty-First Century*, provides a good overview of the history of Healthcare Chaplaincy in the UK. In the ROI, Margaret Naughton, an Irish Healthcare Chaplain and current Chair of the National Association of Healthcare Chaplains (NAHC), recently outlined the history of the NAHC. Naughton's historical overview of the NAHC is certainly informative. Naughton was able to overcome some of the invisibility by tracing documentation not held within the public domain.⁵³

To date, this remains the only historical exploration of the development and trajectory of healthcare chaplaincy in Ireland, reflective of the dearth of research in chaplaincy within the Irish context which will be partially addressed by this thesis study.

x. Covid-19 Pandemic

The year 2020 saw the unfolding of the Covid-19 pandemic and while it is certainly too soon to explore the more longer-term impact of such a cultural change, it is important nonetheless to acknowledge that it has had some impact already on how chaplains provide spiritual and pastoral care. Challenged to reinvent how they minister during such unprecedented times they used technology and protective clothing in order to continue their pastoral outreach within an ever-changing context. We will, in time inhabit a post-Covid culture, and this is where the impact of the pandemic will be assessed and explored. For now, all that can be said is that in the face of human suffering, chaplains began a process of reinvention and professional self reflection.⁵⁴

53 Timmins et al. Scoping Study, 2018, 8.

54 The research undertaken in this study was done before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, while a significant unfolding context, the data collected does not refer to this event. This I believe will provide scope for another researcher to build on this doctorate.

xi. Clinical Pastoral Education in Ireland

Running parallel to the developments within chaplaincy was the growth of Clinical Pastoral Education in Ireland. This is an important parallel process as the development of the various training centres demonstrate how the ministry and profession of chaplaincy evolved over the last four decades. This gives us insight into the trajectory taken in the last forty years in the areas of education, formation, professional identity and recognition by educators and chaplains alike. Without the evolution of the training centres, the landscape would be very different to what it is now. CPE training bridged the professional gap in a similar way to this study bridging the research gap. It is a key part of the history and evolution of the ministry and profession of healthcare chaplaincy in Ireland in the last forty years. In not addressing this ensures that an important piece of the development jigsaw is missed.

In 1982, the Department of Health approved and funded, on an ad hoc basis, CPE courses in the Regional Hospital, Cork and St. Vincent's Hospital, Elm Park, Dublin. St. John of God's Hospital, Stillorgan also hosted units of CPE. In 1986, the Department of Health formally approved CPE programmes in the Regional Hospital Cork (now CUH), St Vincent's Hospital, Elm Park, Dublin and the Mater Hospital, Dublin. In 1990, Kerry General Hospital, Tralee was accredited to host CPE programmes.⁵⁵ Rev. Bruce Pierce also runs a CPE programme at the Education Centre, St. Luke's, Mahon, Cork and Sr. Mary Jo Corcoran directs one unit per year in Northern Ireland. There are also a small number of people training as CPE Supervisors at present.

xii. The Mater Hospital

In the Mater Hospital, apart from a once off unit in 1980 run by Fr. Richard O'Donnell, the first full-time supervisor was Sr. Louisa Richie M.M.M (R.I.P). She joined the staff at the Mater Hospital in 1984 following her qualification as a CPE supervisor. She was followed by Fr. Dermot Brennan OP who remained there from 1991-1997. Fr. Norman Jennings took over in 1997 and was the supervisor in the Mater Hospital until his retirement in 2009. Dr. Myriam Massabo took over from Norman as Director of the CPE centre following his retirement and she still holds the position. In 2014, the Mater Hospital celebrated thirty years of CPE education and an event to mark this anniversary

⁵⁵ ACPE Ireland Website accessed 12th March 2018. University Hospital Kerry has remained closed as a CPE training centre since 2009.

was held on Tuesday 11th November.⁵⁶ The centre remains open to students under the guidance of Dr. Myriam Massabo and Ms. Pauline O' Dowd, CPE Supervisors.

xiii. St. John of God's, Stillorgan, Dublin

CPE has run at St John of God's Hospital on and off since 1982 and was in fact one of the original CPE centres in Ireland. During these early years, those who supervised units there were Fr. Joseph Cahill SSC and Sr. Louisa Richie MMM. St. John of God's became more established as a training centre when Fr. Norman Jennings SSC ran a unit from 1997, eventually taking on a full-time role at the centre. Fr. Bob Whiteside, a Vincentian priest ran a number of units between 2000 and 2002 with a gap in training to follow for three years. Catherine Keenan then began supervising units at the centre in 2005 as an Associate Supervisor and the following year she became the Director of CPE (full supervisor) and she ran one unit per year from September to December. Catherine reflected that:

It is our privilege and honour to work with the patients who are suffering a mental health diagnosis when they allow us to assess their spiritual pain [as we] attempt to relieve their darkness and bring them light and hope.⁵⁷

Catherine has also reflected that it was in the field of Psychiatry that CPE began in America and that in St. John of God Hospital [they]:

recognise the link made so many years ago in America... when Anton Boisen, Richard Cabot and William Keller began what we know today as the Action/Reflection/Action CPE process of learning competencies in Chaplaincy skills.⁵⁸

Catherine Keenan retired as CPE Supervisor in 2019 and as of 2021 the centre remains closed.

56 Dr. Myriam Massabo, *The Carer*, October 2014.

57 Ms. Catherine Keenan, History of CPE at St. John of God's, 24th October 2014 – NAHC Archive

58 Ibid.

xiv. Kerry General Hospital (now University Hospital Kerry)

In 1990, Kerry General Hospital was accredited to run CPE programmes. They ran a number of units, including extended units of CPE from 1990 until it closed as a training centre in 2009. The units were supervised by Rev. Dr. John Quinlan and Fr. Ned Barrett (who was the first home trained supervisor). As of 2021, it remains closed as a training centre.

xv. Cork University Hospital

The late Fr. Dermot Brennan OP, trained and worked as a CPE supervisor in Canada before returning to Ireland and in January 1982, the first unit of CPE was run in Cork Regional Hospital under his direction. The late Fr. Frank Buckley (Chaplain in St. Finbarr's and the Mercy Hospital) was instrumental in bringing CPE to the Cork hospital. The bishop of the day, Michael Murphy, was also a great support to Dermot Brennan in terms of getting the centre up and running. CPE was also welcomed and encouraged by the then CEO of the hospital, Mr. Christy Walsh.

A key objective of Brennan's was the development of ecumenical links. For instance, he always invited the Anglican healthcare chaplain to come and give an input in each unit of CPE under his direction and Brennan also recalls having a Protestant student in nearly all of his units in Cork. His openness to ecumenism, he credits to some degree at least, to his years spent in the West Indies and Canada where he saw teamwork between many different denominations in action. He also recalled how important it was to develop links with women and to bring them into the Hospital Ministry.⁵⁹

Sr. Una Boland was the second CPE supervisor to work at CUH. In 1983, she returned to Ireland, having trained in CPE to full supervisory status in the United States. On her return home, Una Boland became the first woman in Ireland to enter the supervisory ministry. One major change Sr. Una Boland made when she began supervising units of CPE at CRH was changing the name of the CPE programmes from Care of the Sick and Dying to Clinical Pastoral Education. The wisdom of this change was questioned at the time but Una remained steadfast. She worked as a CPE supervisor

⁵⁹ I spoke with Fr. Dermot Brennan RIP on 9th January 2015 (in connection with the Writing of the 2015 NAHC History) and he wished to acknowledge the role of St. John of God's and the Camillian Fathers in the development of CPE training in Ireland.

at CUH for nearly twenty years. The centre in Cork, run under her direction, was the first to train future supervisors in Ireland. In fact, the centre attracted students from all over the world including Australia, New Zealand, Africa, Holland and England. She has commented that Clinical Pastoral Education ‘has a unique approach to the integration of theory learned in the classroom with the lived experience’. This is ‘crucial’ she has said within both chaplaincy and ministry in general.⁶⁰

Following Una Boland’s departure, Ms. Kathleen O’Connor took over as Director of CPE at Cork University Hospital in September 2005 with many significant developments occurring during her time in education there. For instance, not long after her arrival, the new Accident and Emergency Department was formally opened by Mary Harney T.D. and shortly thereafter the new Maternity Hospital commenced. The bringing together of the three maternity hospitals in Cork was a mammoth operation and the opening of this development in 2007 brought a whole new aspect to the campus Kathleen recounts.⁶¹ A breast clinic subsequently opened, a cardiac and renal unit was developed and a new dialysis unit was opened during her time at CUH.

All these developments highlight the ‘growing size and complexity of the campus and Kathleen O’Connor recalls that students ‘initially found the size of the hospital very daunting’. Simultaneously, however the hospital also provided huge opportunities for them to learn the skills of Pastoral Care. With such a large campus came the possibility of encountering patients from a large array of disciplines. The challenge she says was to make the students aware of how patients ‘suffering from different diseases react emotionally, psychologically and spiritually to their diagnosis’.⁶² There was also great opportunity for learning in the Intensive Care and Accident and Emergency Department during evening duty. Here students were exposed ‘to trauma and intense grief’. Kathleen says that ‘observing students becoming more reflective and self aware during their training was always a joy’.⁶³

60 Interview notes from 2014 – NAHC Archive.

61 Ibid.

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.

One of the significant achievements during Kathleen's tenure at CUH as Director of Clinical Pastoral Education was having the CPE centre accredited by the Healthcare Chaplaincy Board in 2010. The accreditation she recalls was 'very worthwhile as the CPE centre became more integrated into the hospital system and the Administration Team became more aware of the work of the CPE programme'. Sr. Mary Jo Corcoran has become the Director of the Centre at CUH and Rev. Dr. Daniel Nuzum PhD the CPE Supervisor. CUH continues as a vibrant teaching centre of CPE with several units run here each year. In January 2020, Daniel Nuzum ran the first extended Specialist Level Two Unit in Ireland for existing healthcare chaplains which had five participants from a variety of healthcare facilities.⁶⁴

xvi. St. Luke's Home Education Centre, Mahon, Cork.

St. Luke's Home was founded in 1872 by Miss Frances Fitzgerald Gregg (daughter of Bishop John Gregg) and located in Albert House, Victoria Road, Cork. In 1879 a major move was made to Military Hill, the site of the current Ambassador Hotel. The charity running the home during 1993 found itself at a crossroads. New health and safety regulations and the ever - increasing cost of maintaining an aging building placed the future in jeopardy. A decision was taken to build on a green field site on the southside of Cork City in Mahon. Incorporating the latest thinking in care for the elderly, the building is in four modules, three with thirty beds and another with thirty-eight. The latter is for those with Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia.

In 2008, the charity decided to invest in education and employed Rev. Bruce Pierce as Director of Education with the brief of establishing innovative educational courses for those caring for the older person. In addition, as a CPE supervisor, the new Director was enabled to establish a CPE centre on site. During April 2012, Northridge House was opened officially by President Michael D. Higgins. This purpose-built Education Centre has facilities to cater for conferences for up to 120 participants and has four additional training rooms. The Centre is accredited as a FETAC (QQI) provider and all courses are accredited by either FETAC (QQI) or An Bord Altranais.

64 I am a CPE Supervisor-in-Training at CUH and Vancouver School of Theology in 2021/2022.

The mission statement states that St. Luke's Home Education Centre has been established to enhance the quality, consistency and relevance of education to individuals and institutions committed to the care of the Older Person, both in the public and private sector. The Education Centre offers an annual extended unit of CPE running over twenty weeks. It works in close association with Cork University Hospital with interchangeable placements and shared educational components. Other pastoral courses and conferences are run on a regular basis at the Centre. As supervisor, Bruce Pierce undertook his CPE training in Dublin, Toronto and Kerry General Hospital.⁶⁵

xvii. St. Vincent's Hospital, Dublin

St. Vincent's Hospital was established in 1834 by Mary Aikenhead, foundress of the Religious Sisters of Charity for the service of the sick people of Dublin. It was the first Catholic Hospital in Ireland run by women, and was open to 'individuals of every sect and every creed offering to all equal advantages and equal attention'. St. Vincent's, since its inception was a major teaching hospital and is now a world class Academic Teaching Hospital. The Religious Sisters of Charity motivated by their motto 'Caritas Christi Urget Nos' seized the opportunity to reflect upon the need to train healthcare chaplains. Sr. M. Teresita Stewart attended a once off CPE unit supervised by Fr. Richard O'Donnell at the Mater Hospital Dublin in 1980. The leadership of the Religious Sisters of Charity, in dialogue with the medical commission of the Conference of Major Religious Superiors were open to this new venture. On completion of Sr. Teresita's CPE unit, they expressed interest in having a Pastoral training course in their hospital. The Conference of Major Religious Superiors invited Fr. Joe Cahill, a Columban Priest, returned from Korea to organise a programme in Dublin with St. Vincent's chosen as one of two venues for the CPE programme.

Before organising the course in St. Vincent's, Fr. Cahill worked for three months with the healthcare chaplains and staff to familiarise himself with the hospital. Initially, Fr. Cahill ran one unit in St. John of God's and two units in St. Vincent's on an experimental basis. The courses were evaluated by the participants and were very favourably received and appreciated by patients and staff. Due to the difficulty of working in two different institutions, it was decided that one centre would be developed

65 Rev. Bruce Pierce provided this information on St. Luke's Education Centre on 12th November 2014 in connection with the *History of Healthcare Chaplaincy*.

with a view to developing another centre when another qualified supervisor was available in 1984. Fr. Cahill was officially appointed Director of the Clinical Pastoral Education programme in 1982. The programme was held in such high esteem that the Religious Sisters of Charity wanted to establish CPE in a permanent place within the hospital, money for a new Pastoral Care Centre was made available through the Michael Devlin Trust Fund. Fr. Cahill was responsible for the training of professional Healthcare Chaplains until his retirement in 2004.

After his retirement, he continued to run one unit per year until another qualified supervisor was appointed. Sr. Pat O'Donovan RSM was appointed Director of Clinical Pastoral Education in 2006. Sr. Pat was formerly Director of Clinical Pastoral Education in Roper, St. Francis Healthcare System, Charleston, South Carolina. During Sr. Pat's tenure the Pastoral Care Centre and the Chaplaincy Department were relocated to the Old Convent Area in 2009. Again, the Irish Sisters of Charity were instrumental in ensuring the continued importance of pastoral and spiritual Care for patients, families and staff. Finally, Sr. Theresa Kilmurray CSB was appointed Clinical Pastoral Education Supervisor in 2009 and she remained there until she retired in 2016.

Clinical Pastoral Education in St. Vincent's University Hospital has contributed to the development of professional chaplaincy in Ireland and throughout the world. Approximately ninety-seven CPE units have been run since 1981 with two hundred and twenty-two graduates of the programme. Clinical Pastoral Education is an integral part of the professional training of chaplains in this world class teaching hospital. The vision of total patient care, mind, body and spirit as envisaged by the Irish Sisters of Charity is now an integral part of the provision of pastoral and spiritual care to people of all faiths and philosophies.⁶⁶ As of 2021, the CPE centre at St. Vincent's remains closed.

xviii. Northern Ireland

There is currently one unit run each year in Northern Ireland which is facilitated by Sr. Mary Jo Corcoran.⁶⁷

66 Sincere thanks to Sr. Theresa Kilmurray and Fr. Joe Cahill for the information on CPE at St. Vincent's Hospital, Dublin.

67 ACPE (Ireland) Website, 12th March 2018.

xix. St. Patrick's College, Maynooth

St. Patrick's College Maynooth also offers a training programme for healthcare chaplaincy. The MTh in Pastoral Theology (Healthcare Chaplaincy) as well as their Higher Diploma in Pastoral Theology (Healthcare Chaplaincy) currently provides an alternative route (to CPE) into Healthcare Chaplaincy and fulfils the Healthcare Chaplaincy Board (HCB) accreditation requirements.

xx. Conclusion

This introduction has provided an overview of the historical development of healthcare chaplaincy and CPE training in Ireland. It has demonstrated that over the last forty years there has been a concerted effort to mobilise professionally and to develop a solid training foundation. Moving from an ad hoc ministry with little or no recognition, chaplains are now for the most part, professionally trained, contracted and remunerated demonstrating a significant paradigm shift. Having outlined the historical milieu of chaplaincy in Ireland, I will now move in the next two chapters to explore the theoretical framework which will be used in this thesis and which supports an authentic theological reflection on the meaning, value and significance of faith for chaplains.

Chapter One

Research Methodology: Part One

1.1. Introduction

This and the following chapter are strongly interconnected and will present the theoretical framework for the overall thesis. These next two chapters are in fact, I believe, of key importance, as they lay the foundation stone of the entire study. Here I will outline the methodology chosen for this study as well as the reasons why. The chapter describes the methodology as well as the data collection techniques used in this thesis, the focus of which is a theological reflection on the meaning, value and significance of faith in the life and ministry of chaplains in contemporary Ireland. It commences with a somewhat succinct and focused discussion of the overall methodological approach chosen and the rationale for so doing, before moving to look at the rubrics of the research model employed within the study itself. Integral to this discussion is the value of providing an explanation for the choice of model used as well as the necessity to give due consideration to some of the many variables which have influenced and underpinned such decision making.

1.2. Some Key Background Knowledge

Speaking of pastoral formation within intercultural societies Tapiwa Mucherera has observed that pastoral formation refers to the processes by which a person acquires a pastoral identity and the authority to practice as a counsellor in the context of a faith community.⁶⁸ In essence, such thinking reflects the core objective of all chaplaincy training or pastoral formation. Pastoral Care is the discipline of providing a focused deliberate intention of caring for the resiliency of the human soul within the other's theological context and understanding.⁶⁹ Formation prepares and provides the healthcare chaplain or spiritual care provider with the necessary and key skills to accompany, support and empower those who find themselves in life altering situations. Formation, as Mucherera has written, has as its linchpin, the internalisation of attitudes, knowledge,

68 Tapiwa Mucherera. 'Pastoral Formation of Counsellors in Intercultural Societies' in *American Journal of Pastoral Counselling*. 2006: (8) 3-4, 99-111.

69 Stephen Harding, Kevin Flannelly, Kathleen Galek and Helen Tannenbaum. 'Spiritual Care, Pastoral Care and Chaplains: Trends in the Health Care Literature' in *Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy*. 2008: (14) 2, 99-117.

skills and dispositions related to the practices of holistic care which equip chaplains to attend holistically to those to whom they minister, irrespective of their tradition.⁷⁰

Pastoral formation has its roots in unstable origins. Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) was a consequential by-product of the misfortune of its founder. Its bold and somewhat arrogant claim that the student could be transformed ran parallel with the assumption that the minister's person is the primary tool of his/her ministry.⁷¹ Anton Boisen, considered to be the father of Clinical Pastoral Education, created this teaching programme following a period of insanity and subsequent committal to the Boston Psychopathic Hospital.⁷² The educational method underpinning Clinical Pastoral Education has evolved such that it now has a central role in two very different communities, somehow connecting with healthcare's need for expressive care-giving and faith communities' need to prepare its practitioners to minister within profound human dilemmas.⁷³ It is with a deep awareness and understanding of such a viewpoint that the overall methodology for this thesis has found its roots and direction.

In line with Lumpkin's considered reflection on what essentially CPE does and, in order to maintain a service delivery that is professional and theologically sound, there are clear guidelines to be followed both by healthcare facilities and Chaplaincy Accreditation Boards (for example Healthcare Chaplaincy Board (HCB) and Chaplaincy Accreditation Board (CAB) (in the Irish context)) for all chaplains working within Irish facilities.⁷⁴ Healthcare chaplains are, more than anything else, listeners to and interpreters of stories.⁷⁵ Narrative is at the heart of chaplaincy. However, as they listen to others it is also necessary and pertinent that they listen to themselves. Essentially, chaplains need to have a developed ability to listen to what is going on for them in the face of huge crisis and loss. The CPE training provides a framework for reflective practice whereby the chaplain has the requisite skills to sense, feel and reflect upon their various experiences

70 Tapiwa Mucherera. 'Pastoral Formation of Counsellors', 2006.

71 Al Lumpkin. 'Clinical Pastoral Education: Coming of Age' in *Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy*. 1999: (9) 97-104.

72 Anton Boisen. *The Exploration of the Inner World: A Study of Mental Disorder and Religious Experience*. New York: Clark and Company, 1936.

73 Lumpkin et al. 1999.

74 The accreditation process has clear and demanding parameters and requires a significant amount of written material, final self and supervisor evaluations as well as ecclesial endorsement.

75 Charles V. Gerkin. 'Reclaiming the Living Human Document' in Robert C. Dykstra, *Images of Pastoral Care – Classic Readings*. St Louis: Chalice Press, 30, 1984.

and associated emotions which their daily ministry exposes them. Aligned to this, it is necessary to have the capacity to reflect theologically and to be able to place such reflection within the context of the chaplain's own personal faith and faith life.

Chaplains' central focus is to encourage and accommodate the person of the patient within an environment which ironically, despite the efforts to 'heal' the person, has little or no time to 'listen' to the very same person. However, as professional listeners chaplains have time, scope, skills and capacity to do what others cannot or will not. They listen to the story and in so doing help people to construct, share and make sense of their own narrative. As listeners to and interpreters of stories, the chaplain's role is clearly fourfold – they hear the person's story before moving to assist in the construction of the personal narrative; they reflect upon and interpret the shared story and finally they reflect theologically upon what is shared. The capacity to undertake such a key piece of work stems from the myriad of skills with which CPE equips chaplains. Constructed upon a solid foundation, the human narrative becomes and remains paramount. The CPE methodology therefore is essentially a reflective one, making it congruent with the methodology employed in this thesis. It accommodates an overarching qualitative approach which is inclusive of the narrative while also providing space for the experiential and the reflective.

This reflective paradigm equips and supports the chaplain to self-care while simultaneously continuing to do the work for which they are trained. This reflective framework also provides a methodology that is appropriate and a discipline relevant for use by a working chaplain who wishes to undertake an interior study of the profession and ministry. Having the requisite skills to reflect objectively is of key importance, given that this researcher is herself a working chaplain. It is also necessary for the researcher to have cognitive awareness of the possibility that subjectivity and objectivity can come into conflict especially when zealotry and passion raise their heads. Therefore, in order to craft a thesis that is somewhat phenomenological in tone, the need to reflect with considerable objectivity is not only necessary but is of paramount importance. This is necessary in order to avoid crafting a thesis that is overly subjective. Therefore, reflective practice as a discipline provides an overall methodology and paradigm for the thesis which is cohesive and discipline-relevant.

1.3. Literature Review

A key part of the research process is the literature review which involves an extensive search of what currently exists within the field of interest to the researcher. It is important to undertake as wide a search as possible so that the research question or topic is grounded within the context of what is already available to interested stakeholders. This is particularly important in relation to making an original contribution to an area of study. In this case, I came to the project with prior knowledge around the dearth in research which currently exists in the area of healthcare chaplaincy. That said, I still needed to delve heavily into the existing literature to ascertain what is already there and indeed so that I could readily identify and validate particular research gaps.

Therefore, an extensive review of existing literature has been undertaken using databases such as PubMed. Relevant journals not indexed in these databases such as the *Journal of Religion, Spirituality and Aging* were searched separately. Other relevant journals such as *Pastoral Care and Counselling* were hand searched as were various other sources such as National Association of Healthcare Chaplains (NAHC) Association Records and Papers, HSE Policy documents, National Policy Documents, International Chaplaincy documents, Text Books, Websites, Conference Proceedings and Unpublished MA and PhD theses. I attempted to search as widely as I could so that I had a solid starting base for this thesis.

Such an extensive search of national and international sources has led to the emergence (or re-emergence) of a number of key themes and has strongly validated the view that healthcare chaplaincy is underrepresented within the research domain. For instance, VandeCreek⁷⁶ has called healthcare chaplaincy ‘an absent profession’ because it is virtually missing from the discussion about Spirituality and Health in the healthcare literature. Indeed, the findings of a subsequent exploratory study (literature review) some ten years after VandeCreek’s comments serve to further validate his comments.⁷⁷ In fact, it was found that in the literature search, spiritual care is more widely discussed in nursing than in any other health-care profession.⁷⁸ Such statements appear to suggest that the

76 Larry VandeCreek. ‘Healthcare Chaplaincy – An Absent Profession’ in *Journal of Pastoral Care*. 1999: (53) 11, 417-432.

77 Hummel et al. in 2009 argued that Chaplaincy remains an absent profession by virtue of its continuing absence from the literature.

78 Ibid.

trajectory of chaplaincy research has yet to be formulated amongst chaplains themselves both within the Irish and international contexts. That said, there are a small number of international chaplains undertaking studies into patients experience of chaplaincy care⁷⁹ as well as physicians experience. Dr. Katherine Piderman, for instance, has led a number of research projects around patients' experiences of healthcare chaplaincy which are a most useful addition to the research field.⁸⁰ Unfortunately such a body of work is not available in the Irish context. For the most part, research appears to be very slowly embraced by the chaplaincy profession. In contrast, they appear willing to allow others to take up the research gauntlet. However, a recently published white paper (2017) by the Centre for Spirituality Studies in Hull had the following suggestion for chaplains:

Moving forward, one of the greatest and most urgent areas of need is for more proactive collaboration between researchers exploring spirituality in nursing practice and those from the professional chaplaincy community. The majority of nursing articles cited in this paper arise from research that is siloed, and does not involve the profession of chaplaincy, either those practicing alongside the clinical researchers or those involved in research in the field.

Interestingly, a somewhat similar point had already been signalled in the Preliminary Scoping Exercise undertaken by the Spirituality Interest Group at Trinity College Dublin in 2016.⁸¹ Citing one of the primary limitations of its study as its 'etic' approach, this report argues that while this does indeed offer some degree of objectivity, it is simultaneously recognised that an 'emic' approach from within the discipline of healthcare chaplaincy [would] provide an opportunity for a much richer insight.

The absence of chaplaincy from contemporary literature clearly runs alongside the obvious dearth of research into healthcare chaplaincy by chaplains themselves especially within the Irish context. Despite the call by the national association in the

79 See for instance Christina Beardsley. 'In need of further tuning': using a US patient satisfaction with chaplaincy instrument in a UK multi-faith setting including the bereaved' in *Clinical Medicine*. February 2009 and Kevin J. Flannelly, Andrew J. Weaver and George F. Handzo. 'A three-year study of chaplains' professional activities at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Centre in New York City' in *Psycho-Oncology*, 2003.

80 Several of these are cited in my bibliography.

81 Fiona Timmins et al. *An Exploration of Current in-Hospital Spiritual Care Resources in the Republic of Ireland and Review of International Chaplaincy Standards – a Preliminary Scoping Exercise to inform Practice Development*. 2018.

1990s to make research a key priority as previously outlined this continues to be a real challenge for chaplaincy, particularly within the Irish context. Succinctly put, from the literature these are two clear issues which have contributed significantly to the marginalisation of (and on-going continuance of same) chaplaincy within the healthcare world⁸² - within a world where chaplains themselves speak of continually having to legitimise their role to health care providers.⁸³ The dearth in research is a considerable impediment given its importance within the clinical and scientific world.

Jennings⁸⁴ and Naughton in the NAHC *History*⁸⁵ had already highlighted the need and urgency within the Irish context for chaplains to actively engage in research. In the conclusion to the first history of healthcare chaplaincy in Ireland (whilst mindful of its limitations) it says:

However, I am conscious that there are many possible theological, educational and sociological studies of Chaplaincy that could also be completed by an academic or researcher interested in so doing. Both Healthcare Chaplaincy and Clinical Pastoral Education in this country have scope for the completion of many doctoral theses, books and scholarly articles. I genuinely hope that I have opened the doorway to and for further study and reflection on the ministry and profession of Healthcare Chaplaincy in Ireland.

However, apart from the on-going work of the Spirituality Research Interest Group at Trinity College Dublin and a PhD thesis completed in 2016 at NUI Cork by Rev. Dr. Daniel Nuzum on *The Spiritual and Professional Impact of Stillbirth*, the challenge offered in 2015 in the NAHC *History*, for the most part, not been taken up. This is despite an international recognition and drive towards making chaplaincy a more evidence-based profession. Burton, writing way back in 1992, stated that chaplains are

82 Timothy A. Thorstenson. 'The Emergence of the New Chaplaincy: Re-defining Pastoral Care for the Postmodern Age' in *Journal of Pastoral Care and Counselling*. 2012: 1-6.

83 Barbara Pesut and Sheryl Reimer-Kirkham. 'Situated clinical encounters in the negotiation of religious and spiritual plurality: A Critical ethnography' in *International Journal of Nursing Studies*. 2010: (47) 815-825.

84 Mary Jennings. *A Descriptive Study of the Role and Practice of Healthcare Chaplains in the Republic of Ireland*. National Association of Healthcare Chaplains. Unpublished document. 2013.

85 Margaret Naughton. *Healthcare Chaplaincy in Ireland 1981-2014: A History of the National Association of Healthcare Chaplains*. Dublin: NAHC, 2015.

unique among healthcare providers in that they live and work at the crossroads where science, medicine and spirituality meet.

However, despite living and working at such a crossroads, chaplains have not kept pace with the movement of other healthcare professionals in providing evidence-based research to policy makers and interested stakeholders in order to enhance service delivery and inform future policy decisions. Lucy Selman et al. have written that a robust evidence-base to guide clinicians in the provision of spiritual care is needed⁸⁶ and indeed, such a viewpoint is reiterated richly throughout the literature, for example, Koenig⁸⁷ Lyndes⁸⁸ Fitchett⁸⁹ and so on. Thorstenson rightly points out that a central challenge for chaplains resides in finding relevant, current language, in reflecting meaningfully on the chaplains' evolving clinical role and in integrating the deep intent of theological and religious traditions. Indeed, some of the findings of this doctorate run somewhat parallel to this point. Not only is there need to find 'relevant and current language' to speak of their role but there is also a necessity to be able to articulate what is the essence of chaplaincy which is (faith as articulated by themselves as pastoral practitioners). Thorstenson's thinking substantiates and validates the international call for healthcare chaplaincy to become a more evidence-based profession so that the central challenge he has named can in some way be met.⁹⁰

1.4. Qualitative Versus Quantitative Approach

John Swinton and Harriet Mowat have stated that the task of the practical theologian is to 'excavate particular situations and to explore the nature and faithfulness of the practices that occur within them'.⁹¹ In other words, within the research context this

86 Lucy Selman and Ian Stirling. 'Research Priorities in Spiritual Care: An International Survey of Palliative Care Researchers and Clinicians' in *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management*. 2014: 48, 4.

87 Harold G. Koenig. *Spirituality in Patient Care*. West Conshohocken: Templeton Foundation, 2007; Koenig, H.G. 'Why Research is important for Chaplains' in *Journal of Healthcare Chaplaincy*. 2008: (14) 2, 83-90; Koenig, H.G. *Spirituality and Health Research: Methods, Measurement, Statistics and Resources*. Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2011; Koenig, H.G. "Commentary: Why do Research on Spirituality and Health and What do the Results Mean?" in *Journal of Religion and Health*. 2012: 51(2), 460.

88 Kathryn Lyndes, George Fitchett, Clayton L. Thomason, Nancy Berlinger and Martha R. Jacobs. 'Chaplains and Quality Improvement: Can we Make Our Case by Improving Our Care?' in *Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy*. 2008: (15) 65-79.

89 George Fitchett and Nolan, S. *Spiritual Care in Practice: Case studies in Healthcare Chaplaincy*. London: Jessica Kingsley, 2015.

90 Timothy A. Thorstenson, 'The Emergence of New Chaplaincy...', 2012.

91 John Swinton and Harriet Mowat. *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*. Second Edition. London: SCM Press, 2016

translates to a process of excavation, exploration and new learning. Therefore, it is essential to have a solid starting point for the topic under excavation, to borrow from Swinton and Mowat. Indeed, according to Richard R. Osmer, clarity about the purpose of research is an absolutely crucial first step.⁹² The importance of clarity in relation to the overall methodology to be used in the study is a further key consideration.

Traditionally, methodological approaches have varied between quantitative and qualitative. At face value, questions relating to the advantages and capacities of these two approaches and their associated techniques would appear to be technical ones, pertaining to their respective strengths and weakness in relation to particular research topics. According to Jonny Saldana, to this day qualitative data analysis (and collection) seems to remain a somewhat mysterious and elusive process for newcomers to the field. This is due in part, he believes, to the wide genres, methodologies and methods available to researchers, making it sometimes difficult to choose the best ones for the particular study at hand.⁹³ Quinn Patton validates such an understanding also stating that today's evaluator must be sophisticated about matching research methods to the nuances of particular questions and decisions.⁹⁴ Likewise, Swinton and Mowat have acknowledged the complexity of qualitative research saying that it is 'slippery and difficult to contain within one single definition'.⁹⁵

Increasingly though, the terms quantitative and qualitative research have come to signify much more than ways of gathering data; they have come to denote divergent assumptions about the nature and purposes of research education.⁹⁶ In order to address the research trigger question 'Do Healthcare Chaplains need to be People of Faith?' considered thought was given to which particular methodology best fitted the task at hand. Reflecting upon whether a quantitative or a qualitative would best fit the objectives of this research project important decisions were made at the outset. As it is hoped that this thesis will provide an overview and exploration of healthcare chaplaincy within the Irish context (a context which is simultaneously acknowledged as dynamic and evolving) and

92 Richard R. Osmer. *Practical Theology – An Introduction*. Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2008, 48

93 Jonny Saldana in Matthew B. Miles, Michael Huberman and Jonny Saldana. *Qualitative Data Analysis - A Methods Sourcebook*. 3rd Edition. London: Sage Publications, 2014 xx.

94 Michael Quinn Patton. *Qualitative Education Methods*. London: Sage, 1980, 17.

95 John Swinton and Harrier Mowat. *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 28

96 A Bryman. *Research Methods and Organization Studies*. 3rd Edition. London: Routledge, 1995.

more specifically, at the place of faith within it, it was decided to take a qualitative approach to the question at the centre of this work. This decision was taken predominantly because qualitative research is conducted through intense and/or prolonged contact with participants in a naturalistic setting to investigate the everyday and/or exceptional lives of individuals, groups, society and organizations.⁹⁷ This approach provides a paradigm to engage with chaplains themselves and to try to craft a picture of their personal and professional reality within a demographic that is shifting continuously. It also serves to provide a structure to explore where the faith of the chaplain is within all of this. To borrow from Marshall and Rossman, qualitative research is pragmatic, interpretive and grounded in the lived experiences of people thus making it the ideal framework to attempt to answer the questions at the heart of this study.⁹⁸

The qualitative research model is plausibly a more pertinent and appropriate one than a quantitative approach for this particular study for a number of reasons. Beginning with the actual research question itself, a statistical investigation will, I believe, add little of value to the field of study. Statistics and numbers would provide data that will simply re-tell what is already known and easily attainable within the public domain about healthcare chaplaincy in Ireland.⁹⁹ However, an overarching qualitative study will instead demonstrate quite clearly the current reality for and of healthcare chaplaincy and will help provide the evidence-base that is presently missing. After all, the intention of qualitative research is to uncover and interpret the complexities of the issue ‘at the heart of the matter’.¹⁰⁰ Thus, good qualitative research is rigorous, painstaking, exacting, complex and difficult and requires a wide range of skills including a thorough knowledge of theory and practice of hermeneutics and interpretation.¹⁰¹

Moreover, by using a model of investigation that is guided by the CPE paradigm a more fruitful, engaging and useful study will be possible. Qualitative research is also much more congruent with the CPE model than quantitative is as it allows for the telling

97 Miles and Huberman, ‘Qualitative Data...’ 9.

98 Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B. Rossman. *Designing Qualitative Research*. 3rd Edition. London: Sage, 1999, 2.

99 Such data is obtainable from HSE employment records, private hospital groups such as Bon Secours Mercy Health and the Preliminary Scoping Study undertaken by Trinity College Spirituality Interest Group. There are approximately 235 chaplains currently working in Irish healthcare facilities.

100 John Swinton and Harrier Mowat. *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 29

101 Ibid 29.

of the narrative. Indeed, as Swinton and Mowat have pointed out a key aspect of qualitative research is its frequent orientation towards narrative and for the qualitative researcher, narrative knowledge is perceived to be a legitimate, rigorous and valid form of knowledge.¹⁰² Within this context, it is the narrative of the chaplain that takes centre stage. It is their story, their history, their experience, their hopes and their reality which provides the basis not only for this study but also for future strategic planning of chaplaincy. This framework for investigation allows for Boisen's 'living human document' to become and remain the focus of the study while simultaneously providing the scope and space for a rigorous phenomenological reflection upon the place of faith in the life and work of contemporary chaplains. To draw from Swinton and Mowat once more, it is the meaning and interpretation of the narratives of these chaplains that help to form 'maps of reality' which their community and culture can use to interpret their experiences and to decide on the nature of appropriate action.¹⁰³ In other words, in attending to their narrative it will be possible to map some suggested forms of action for future pastoral practice. Essentially, the job of qualitative research is to enable us to understand the world differently and in understanding differently begin to act differently.¹⁰⁴

1.5. Critical Reflection Upon This Approach

Given that this study's primary objective is to undertake a gap analysis of healthcare chaplaincy through reflecting theologically on the issue of faith for chaplains, it was decided that rather than opt for a survey type study which refers to the collection of standardized information from a specific population and which generally harvests only a relatively small amount of information from the chaplains, that a more direct and engaged approach would most likely work better.¹⁰⁵ Given the emerging themes from the literature (the need for an evidence-based practice of chaplaincy; the dearth in research into chaplaincy; the reticence on the part of chaplains themselves to undertake or engage in chaplaincy research or indeed to become research literate) it was felt that rather than using a survey type methodology that undertaking face to face interviews would be a much more useful and fruitful approach. Moreover, as qualitative research interviews are

102 Ibid 37.

103 Ibid 36.

104 Ibid 44.

105 C. Hakim. *Research Design: Strategies and Choices in the Design of Social Research*. London: Sage Publications, 1987.

essentially more like conversations than formal events this seemed a more appropriate and probing trajectory to take.¹⁰⁶ One particular challenge with this approach however, lies in what Swinton and Mowat have identified as a key difference between the two research methodologies. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research begins with a general field of interest rather than a specific hypothesis. As the research progresses, material for the development of hypotheses begins to emerge.¹⁰⁷ This can make the starting point of the research project somewhat disjointed and potentially overwhelming especially for an inexperienced researcher. Allowing a specific research question or hypothesis to organically emerge might not be the best approach for some researchers. However, that said, qualitative research methods are seen to be at their most useful when little is understood or known about the situation.¹⁰⁸

A further decision was made to conduct semi-structured interviews as this would help to provide a structured framework for the interviews (and thus ensuring consistency in the number and type of overarching questions asked of each chaplain interviewed). Moreover, this would also allow sufficient time and scope for any other pertinent additional issues/feelings/reservations/observations to be aired freely. This was essential I believe, for both researcher and chaplain alike to get as much as possible from the interview experience. Interestingly, the overwhelming majority of the interviewees took this opportunity to expand what had been previously shared. Marshall and Rossman have lent support to the idea that interviewers should have superb listening skills and be skilful at personal interaction, question framing and gentle probing for elaboration to maximise the interview experience.¹⁰⁹

Therefore, apart from the prompt questions that each chaplain was asked during their interview it was important that they each had the opportunity and space to discuss what they felt was important for and to the study and chaplaincy as a whole. A survey approach would most certainly have hindered a free-giving of the narrative. Each interview was scheduled to last roughly between forty-five and sixty minutes and on the whole, they were all within that timeframe. One lasted just over twenty-three minutes

106 Marshall and Rossman, 108.

107 John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, 50

108 Ibid 50.

109 Marshall and Rossman, 110.

with the longest one being just under two hours long. Interviews began with a signing of the consent form (which had been emailed with the recruitment email and the information sheet as per ethics approval - see Appendix 2) and a testing of the recording device to ensure it was working. Chaplains were encouraged to relax and were informed that it was my hope that they would enjoy the experience and perhaps gain something from process of being interviewed.

All the interviews took place at the chaplains' place of work (except for the overseas interviews which were done via Skype, WhatsApp and Messenger). The decision to interview at the chaplain's place of work was taken due to the fact that although this is a piece of research which is predominantly concerned with the person of the chaplain interviewing at their place of work helped to ensure that the trajectory of the study remained at all times professional and focused. The overseas chaplains were interviewed via Skype, WhatsApp and telephone (as determined by the respondents) as travel overseas was not possible due to time, work and financial constraints. All interviews were recorded by means of a digital recording device and stored appropriately as per ethics guidelines – (see Appendix 3). The recording of the interviews was necessary firstly for accuracy of data and secondly so that data could be accessed again during the course of the study if needed.

A vital skill in designing and constructing a semi-structured interview framework is the ability to structure, focus, phrase and ask sets of questions in a manner that is intelligible to those to be interviewed. Such questions also need to clearly minimise any possible bias while at the same time provide data that is appropriate and within the confines of the ethical approval obtained in the first instance to undertake the data collection. In order to achieve such objectives, it is vital to consider a number of key elements. Focus, which is the extent to which questions intend to cover the various aspects of the research problem adequately and in sufficient detail, is an integral and essential component of any study.

Conversely, it is also important to give due consideration to whether or not all questions asked are relevant to the research question. It is incumbent upon the research designer to continually assess whether a question is really necessary and to exclude any

questions that do not clearly serve the objectives of the investigation.¹¹⁰ It is also essential that the phraseology employed throughout the study is intelligible to the respondents and this is what makes undertaking a pilot test essential.¹¹¹ It is important that there is consistency throughout in relation to how the various interview questions are understood, in other words, that each question means the same thing to each individual. Consequently, it is vital that a pilot test is administered amongst a critical and honest subset of chaplains. This is necessary to ensure that the interviewer is professional in his/her approach and is comfortable asking the questions of the chaplains; that there is sufficient space and scope for questions to be answered and addressed; that the questions asked are feeding in adequately to the overall research question. A good interviewer, according to Richard R. Osmer, is an active listener who attends carefully to the verbal and non-verbal responses of the interviewee and guides the conversation along without overcontrolling it.¹¹² This, of course, demands self-awareness and professionalism in approach to the interview process on the part of the researcher. A common mistake, Osmer says, is that novice interviewers talk too much.¹¹³ It is important to keep this in check as otherwise it will potentially thwart the attending and sharing process within the interview.

However, in this instance, a pilot test was carried out before collecting the overall data to try to ensure relevance and consistency of understanding amongst the chaplains as well as to gauge my own ability as an interviewer. This also helped to eradicate any questions that did not make sense or which might inadvertently lead to biased answers or incorrect results. It is important to note that those involved in the pilot test or pilot reading did not take part in the data collection process. Three academics and one chaplain read through the list of questions before any interviews with chaplains began with an eye to the various components involved.

1.6. Formulating The Interview Questions

Research questions represent the facets of inquiry that the researcher most wants to explore and therefore they need consideration and reflection.¹¹⁴ Moreover, as Quinn

110 J. Gill and P. Johnston. *Research Methods for Managers*. 4th Edition. London: Sage Publications, 1991.

111 S.L. Payne. *The Art of Asking Questions*. Oxford: Princeton UP, 1951.

112 Richard R. Osmer. *Practical Theology – An Introduction*, 61

113 Ibid 62.

114 Miles and Huberman, 25.

Patton has observed, direct quotations (gleaned from interview questions) are a basic source of raw data revealing respondents' level of emotion, the way in which they have organised their world, their thoughts about what is happening, their experience and their basic perceptions so questions need to be framed mindful of these facts.¹¹⁵ Consequently, when formulating a set of interview questions there are a number of clear core requirements. The primary consideration is the sequence in which the questions are asked. With regard to the sequential ordering and importance of the questions it is helpful if the design ensures that they have a natural and logical order. This helps to keep the interviews focused and promotes consistency within the overall study. It also minimises any potential confusion on the part of the participating chaplains. Moreover, it assists when the transcribing of the interviews needed to be done. When the questions have a natural and logical order and flow it is much easier and less time consuming to transcribe the interview text.

The route taken with the questions in this study followed a logical and pragmatic course starting with a number of somewhat generic and yet factual ones which gave the interviewer some insight into the person (and context) of the chaplain. This is a useful starting point as it provides some sense of who the person to be interviewed is and also the familiar or ice-breaker type questions may help to quell any discomfort or unease the interviewee may be feeling. Following these opening questions, more specific ones which helped to develop a sense of the faith journey undertaken by the interviewee as well as demonstrate their attitudes, perceptions and experience of chaplaincy were asked.

This was an essential and key component of the interview with all questions included necessary given that the focus of this thesis is a theological reflection upon the place of faith in the life and work of the chaplain. This section required more thought and reflection (arguably by both researcher and chaplain) as the answers posed here helped the researcher to really consider the research question at the heart of the study. It is also the point where the need for congruence was much more pertinent. I considered that the exploration of multi-faith and interfaith chaplaincy was also necessary in order to gain a sense of the chaplain's attitudes, capacity and experience of ministering to people of different traditions. This is an important investigation as it has a clear connection with

115 Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Education Methods*, 28.

the faith of the chaplain and how they understand faith. The theological vision question was also a key one and necessary again as per the aforementioned point. To put it succinctly for example, a chaplain whose personal theology is Christocentric is more likely to be open and able to minister to those of a different tradition/affiliation than a more dogmatic or less introspective Christian would. Moreover, the theology of the chaplain frames their pastoral and professional identity and outlook so this is a useful insight to have about them.¹¹⁶

1.7. Recruitment and Selection of Participants

Sampling involves decisions not only about which people to interview but also about settings, events and social processes.¹¹⁷ From the outset, sampling was a key consideration. To that end, given the principal focus of the study, it was decided to interview chaplains only. This decision was principally taken to give chaplains a solid listening ear and a voice informed and framed by their own needs. Some consideration was also given to whether it would also be helpful to interview patients, family members, healthcare staff and other interested stakeholders. The decision was taken not to interview beyond the chaplaincy profession itself principally for three reasons. Firstly, there were significant ethical considerations and implications to be overcome in order to interview service-users at such a vulnerable time in their lives.¹¹⁸ Secondly, given that this study is a first attempt to look at chaplaincy it is important to begin with the person of the ‘Chaplain’ before exploring the experiences of service-users and interested stakeholders. Finally, given the various themes identified in the literature review it was decided that it would be best to focus the interviewing solely on the chaplains so that the process of evidence-based research could begin.

Consequently, the chaplains in this study were all working chaplains with a mixed cohort of male and female, ordained and non-ordained, Christian and non-Christian, Irish

116 See Appendix 5 for the full list of questions which each chaplain was asked during the interviews. Appendix 6 profiles each of the twenty-six chaplains who took part in this study.

117 Miles and Huberman, 30.

118 There have been some (limited) overseas studies on patients’ experience some of which have been looked at in connection with this study. See for instance Paul S. Bay et al ‘The Effect of Pastoral Care Services on Anxiety, Depression, Hope, Religious Coping and Religious Problem-Solving Styles: A Randomised Controlled Study’ in *Journal of Religion and Health*. 2008: (47) 57-69; Christina Beardsley ‘In need of Further-Tuning: Using a US Patient Satisfaction with Chaplaincy Instrument in a UK Multi-Faith Setting including the Bereaved’ in *Clinical Medicine*. 2009 2(1) 53-58; Katherine Piderman et al ‘Patients’ expectations of Hospital Chaplains’ in *Mayo Clinic Proceedings*. 2008 56-65

and International, who had freely responded to my invitation to participate. This has ensured that my study is free, unbiased and representative of the many variables which are now part of chaplaincy nationally and internationally. No barrier in relation to age, gender, or status was employed in the selection process. Rather, I took the decision to interview a set number of chaplains in accordance with the order in which they responded to my initial email invitation to participate.

This decision was taken so that the data collected would be done without barrier, prejudice or expectation. In other words, there was no selection strategy employed that could be perceived as resulting in bias or agenda harbouring. This was particularly important especially given that I have the dual role of ‘Chaplain’ and ‘Researcher’ in this project. There were also some additional concerns in relation to selection of chaplains. Firstly, because I am a working chaplain and clearly did not want to be perceived as valuing one person’s opinion and experience over another and secondly because of my profile within the chaplaincy community. This meant that a large number of chaplains are known to me (and me to them) and therefore I wished to avoid any possible inferred sense of coercion to participate amongst chaplaincy colleagues. Opting not to operate a selection strategy meant that those who wished to participate could do so freely and without an onerous or misplaced sense of duty towards me either as researcher or chaplaincy colleague.

A number of key decisions did, however, have to be made in relation to the number of chaplains to be interviewed and how these would be recruited. In order to provide some degree of balance and impartiality, it was decided to interview approximately twenty-five chaplains only. As the total headcount of working chaplains in the Republic of Ireland is relatively small at two hundred and thirty-four (Timmins, 2016) it was felt that in-depth interviews with twenty-five or so chaplains would ensure enough data for analysis and provide an accurate picture of contemporary chaplaincy. The only specific criteria employed for selection for participation was as follows: five chaplains would be interviewed from healthcare facilities in Ireland with a clearly defined affiliation with a Religious Order or with an obvious ethos and value system; five chaplains (from Ireland) who work in facilities without an obvious or overt affiliation to a particular group or without a defined ethos; five chaplains from non-Christian

Religions/Belief/Philosophical system (if possible) and five or so International chaplains. Any additional chaplains interviewed could fall into any of these categories.

In order to recruit the required number of chaplains the following steps were undertaken. As Chairperson of the National Association of Healthcare Chaplains (NAHC), I have an up-to-date database of members who are all chaplains working within Irish healthcare facilities. Permission was sought from the National Executive of the NAHC to make contact with its members to invite them to participate in this study and permission to do so was subsequently granted to do so (see Appendix 4). Each member was invited via email to participate in the study (see Appendix 2). The email outlined the rationale behind the study, the aims and objectives of the research, the importance of the piece of work, an assurance that no pressure would be applied on anyone to take part and also that if any chaplain wished to subsequently withdraw their permission to participate (before or after interview had taken place) that no penalty would be applied. Members of the Support Network for Catholic Healthcare Chaplains were also invited to participate in the study via an email invitation sent to and distributed by their chairperson. Both groups were given fourteen days to respond to the invitation. Chaplains were generous and benevolent towards the research project from the beginning and those who presented themselves for participation did so with a genuine openness and commitment to the PhD project which was further reflected during the interview experience.

Recruitment of chaplains from the non-Christian groups was attempted in the first instance, through the HSE Professional Healthcare Chaplaincy Advisory Council. I am an invited member of this Council and an email of invitation was distributed to its members by its secretary. Take up by this particular cohort of chaplains was disappointingly quite poor. Admittedly, this was a hitherto unforeseen problem on my part. It was possible however, to some extent to supplement this group with overseas participants. There was a minor degree of snowball sampling undertaken within the recruitment process but unfortunately chaplains tended to direct colleagues of their own tradition towards the project. Perhaps I could have been more forthright in asking, particularly the overseas chaplains to connect me with colleagues from different traditions and belief systems to themselves. However, in truth, I sought overseas chaplains more for contextualisation purposes and to shed light on the Irish experience, than to seek practitioners from different traditions.

The overseas chaplains were recruited through a number of personal and professional contacts primarily in the United States and Canada. Some overseas chaplains were drawn from former work colleagues of personnel known to me while others were generated through the National Association of Catholic Chaplains (NACC) in America.¹¹⁹ An email of invitation to participate was circulated to members of the NACC and the response was overwhelming, to say the least. In excess of seventy chaplains answered the initial call to participate in this study. This posed an unexpected (and somewhat delightful) problem for me in terms of who to interview. As it was only possible to interview a small number of the chaplains some selection criteria had to be employed to avoid contravention of ethical approval and data saturation.

All chaplains who were retired and those who were still students were automatically eliminated from consideration for participation. This immediately disqualified one fifth of the initial group of chaplains from the selection process. A second email was sent to the first twenty (overseas) chaplains who had expressed interest in the project (outside the aforementioned criteria) inviting them to arrange a mutually suitable time for interview. This again resulted in a reduction of the cohort for interview as a significant number of the chaplains failed to reconnect with me. However, there still remained a sufficient sample for interview having taken this approach in the aftermath of such a phenomenal response to my initial email of invitation. All others who were not for interview were sent an email of appreciation for their expression of interest in the project with regretful apologies that they could not be part of the study. This part of the recruitment process was phenomenal. Many of those who could not take part in the project expressed regret alongside good wishes for the success of the project.

Both those selected for participation and those who were not were also benevolent in terms of sharing personal and professional resources and experiences. Several of the chaplains shared articles, ideas, suggestions, DMin and PhD theses and bibliographies as well as general good wishes for the success of the project. It was both awe-inspiring and humbling to experience such generosity of spirit from complete strangers on the other side of the world. Finally, just to note that all the overseas interviews were done via

119 I would like to acknowledge the assistance of David Lichter, Chairperson of the NACC and Mr. Ken Joyce, Hospital Mission Leader, Bon Secours Hospital Cork, in the recruitment of overseas Chaplains.

Skype or other communication means that chaplains wished to use and this proved to be no barrier to honest and open sharing.

1.8. Ethical Considerations

As there was human participation in this research ethical approval had to be sought and obtained before any invitations to participate in the project or interviewing could take place. An application was made via application form and supporting documentation to the MIREC Committee at Mary Immaculate College Limerick in January 2018 (see Appendix 1) and approval was subsequently granted (see Appendix 3). All ethical guidelines were followed in line with the permission granted to undertake the research. Informed consent (see Appendix 2) was obtained from all chaplains who were aware that the interviews would be recorded digitally, transcribed (by me) and stored appropriately (on an encrypted laptop and locked cabinet at my own home) until the PhD thesis was completed. They were also assured that the data collected would be anonymised (each chaplain was subsequently allocated a letter given in the sequence and order of when they had been interviewed) and that they or their healthcare facility would not be identified or identifiable in the completed document. This had a twofold purpose – to protect the chaplain’s identity and to encourage free and unhindered participation in the study. All chaplains were over the age of eighteen and all efforts were made in the course of recruitment and interviewing to avoid creating a sense of inappropriate invasion into their personal, professional and faith life.

However, a significant ethical consideration came in relation to me, as the researcher. After all, as Swinton and Mowat have pointed out, one of the most important dimensions of qualitative research is the researcher. They are the primary tool. They are the instrument of choice.¹²⁰ Consequently, Hitchcock and Hughes have cautioned that when the nature of the research is so intimately linked to professional practice a whole series of fundamental questions are raised around access, ethics and objectivity.¹²¹ Therefore, considered reflection had to be given to a number of issues both during the interviewing process and later on in the subsequent reflection upon the data collected. As a working chaplain could or did I myself create a barrier to free and unbiased

120 John Swinton and Harriet Mowat. *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 56.

121 Graham Hitchcock and David Hughes. *Research and the Teacher – A Qualitative Introduction to School-Based Research*. 2nd Edition. Abington: Routledge, 1995.

participation? Was I able to remain cognizant of issues around access, ethics and objectivity at all times? The key to good qualitative research does not lie in technical knowledge alone but rather it requires a certain approach which is dependent on the researcher's self-awareness and ability to function effectively within an epistemological context that is rich, creative and sometimes dangerous.¹²² My capacity to be self-reflective and self-aware was of paramount importance and I believe, a key strength of the entire research process.

That said, before going any further, it is important to state that CPE and training in Theological Reflection has, I believe, equipped me with the requisite skills to pause, consider and maturely reflect upon my own motives in relation to undertaking this project. Therefore, when on occasion there were moments of subjectivity (due possibly to a propensity for over zealotry and a deep commitment to the ministry of chaplaincy on my part), these were quite readily picked up when proofing the various chapters.

As a person of faith, who sees the intrinsic value of chaplaincy, I am motivated to elevate the presence of chaplaincy in Ireland nationally and internationally. I am further determined to undertake a study which clearly rises to the challenge to fill the gap in research here in this country in relation to chaplaincy. There are also some important arguments that need to be made in relation to the study being undertaken by a working chaplain and especially by one who has a high profile nationally. Certainly, it could be argued that this makes impartiality somewhat challenging for me as the researcher. With a visible vested interest on the part of the researcher data collected could be in danger of misappropriation in the sense that a particular angle could be taken to skew the research findings or push a particular agenda.

But, as David Silverman has written, the interaction between researcher and subject (and by extension any data collected) is seen as a technical matter where the researcher attempts to follow a protocol in order to limit bias.¹²³ The protocol is essentially that which Hitchcock and Hughes have already identified – access, ethics and objectivity. Each of these three components are key to the success of the study, especially objectivity. This limits agenda harbouring and creates a boundary (albeit sometimes a

122 John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, 56

123 David Silverman. *Doing Qualitative Research*. London: Sage, 2013, 6.

fluid one) between the study and him/her undertaking such work. There is also need on the part of the researcher to 'bracket' which essentially involves the suspension of a person's beliefs and preconceptions in an attempt to look at the subject as it is without any intrusion from them.¹²⁴ This of course is a challenging pursuit for an insider researcher given their awareness of the contemporary reality.

Notwithstanding, as Richard R. Osmer has said 'there are no quick and simple techniques to remove the many obstacles that may cloud our ability to attend'.¹²⁵ This makes objectivity and self-reflection an on-going process within the research context for an insider researcher. It demands a putting aside of 'preconceived perceptions, interpretations and judgments' and in so doing having to 'adopt the viewpoint of someone who is encountering people and activities for the first time'.¹²⁶ It means trying to step outside while being on the inside.

However, having said this, there are also considerable strengths from being an insider researcher. Having the inside track ensures a study that is real, relevant and of particular use to the profession. In essence, despite being an insider, the researcher must assume 'a new identity' as a researcher. This 'new identity' means a dual role for the researcher as an insider and an outsider. As an insider, the researcher is better informed and can recognise cultural issues and nuances that other outsider researchers may not be in a position to do so. After all, distance does not necessarily guarantee objectivity and arguably there is no such thing as a truly objective stance. Broadly speaking, researchers can never be fully detached from their study. As Miles and Huberman have rightly pointed out, the researcher attempts to capture data on the perceptions of local participants from the inside through a process of deep attentiveness, of empathetic understanding, and of suspending preconceptions about the topic under discussion.¹²⁷

Clearly, the value of being an insider (with objectivity) overrides any possible difficulties which may emerge from an introspective stance. Marshall and Rossman have also lent support to this understanding stating that the researcher is the instrument. Her

124 John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, 106

125 Richard R. Osmer. *Practical Theology - An Introduction*. Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008, 40.

126 Ibid 59.

127 Miles and Huberman, 9.

presence in the lives of the participants invited to be part of this study is fundamental to the paradigm.¹²⁸ This certainly is the experience of the researcher in this instance. In fact, being an insider proved to be an advantage as significant trust was apparent between interviewer and chaplain in each of the twenty-six interviews. What is essential however, is that the researcher who has become both insider and outsider, is sufficiently self-aware to be able to hold each role objectively, with respect and honesty. However, this is only possible if the researcher is mature and appropriately equipped with the skills of self-reflection and self-awareness.

1.9 Reflexivity

John Swinton and Harriet Mowat have suggested that reflexivity is *the* most crucial dimension of the qualitative research process.¹²⁹ They consider that reflexivity is crucial for every aspect of the process from selecting the research question, choosing the methodology, analysis of data and writing up the final report. They see it, not as a tool of qualitative research process, but as an integral component. Put simply, they say that reflexivity is the process of critical self-reflection carried out by the researcher throughout the research process that enables her/him to monitor and respond to their contribution to the proceedings.¹³⁰

That said, reflexivity is a mode of knowing that accepts the impossibility of the researcher standing outside of the research field and seeks to incorporate that knowledge creatively and effectively. Swinton and Mowat argue that the reflexive researcher is aware that they both influence and are influenced by the process of engaging in the research.¹³¹ Using such an understanding of the research process posits the researcher in a place of great responsibility. It reinforces the understanding outlined earlier of the researcher being the primary instrument in the process but also of the need for ongoing self-awareness on their part. To my mind, this demands maturity of outlook and a depth of sensitivity by the researcher which ought to be evident from the outset.

128 Marshall and Rossman, 79.

129 John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, 56

130 Ibid 57.

131 Ibid 58.

In terms of this particular study, bringing reflexivity into the equation, I would contend that I am sufficiently self-aware having engaged in CPE myself, both as a student and as a supervisor. Therefore, I made important decisions throughout the entire research process based on my own capacity to be self-aware. However, some key decisions guided my pathway through the doctorate which did not erode or affect my reflexive awareness. For instance, I chose not to keep a reflective journal at any point from initial scoping of the subject at hand to the final weeks of the project. Moreover, I decided not to use an autoethnographic approach to the research question. Instead, I chose to take a more objective stance opting not to use myself as a dialogue partner in the conversation with the chaplains interviewed. In contrast, I deliberately chose to keep my own experience of chaplaincy out of the conversation hoping to draw more on the experiences of others than my own. Perhaps with the gift of hindsight this might have added some additional depth to the study. However, that said, I opted to focus more on the subjectivity and objectivity polarisation within research and how I might adopt an outsider approach while being an insider.

In practice, however, reflexivity was part of the entire process. I came to the project with significant experience in healthcare chaplaincy and with a national, leadership profile. Therefore, from the beginning I was aware of my need to proceed with caution at all stages of the process. After all, I wanted to complete the best project I could but simultaneously I was also aware of the potential difference my position as researcher could make to its success. This is where self-awareness and having the composite skills which CPE equipped me with really came into focus. Armed with the knowledge that self-reflection was essential at all times, I felt that I was well-equipped to undertake this study.

In terms of research question, data collection, participant selection and my own position as researcher, I have already outlined the process in some detail around how this all transpired. However, in relation to reflexivity in the research process, I will now briefly outline how or where this was of particular significance. I was determined from the beginning not to influence the research process and to allow the interview and data collection pathway to organically shape itself. Therefore, I tried to keep myself as 'outside' of the process as I could. The interview questions were formulated in such a way that chaplains were given scope to explore in an honest way the meaning, value and

significance of faith in their lives and ministry. I believe that I was an objective interviewer and allowed sufficient space to the chaplains to speak their truth around the issue at the ‘heart of the matter’.

That said, I am aware that given my position within the chaplaincy world and the reticence of others to engage in research, that some of the chaplains would have felt at least some degree of loyalty towards me. I had to keep this awareness at the centre of my thinking and ensure that I did not consciously or otherwise, exploit this sense of loyalty. It is easy to shift gears and move between chaplain and researcher mode so it was important that I remained cognizant of the objectives of the interview process and the project as a whole as much as possible.

In terms of my own self-examination and self-reflection as a result of undertaking the interviews, transcribing them, analysing them and presenting the eventual findings, I would admit that this is where the subjective and objective debate came into play most pertinently. As I have outlined, I engaged in the entire process with the ‘experience’ of the chaplains and I felt myself struggling a little at certain points on this journey. The experience of undertaking the interviews was an extremely humbling one. Each of the participants in their own unique way trustingly shared key moments of their lives. They were intimate with me as their colleague and researcher around areas of deep pain and hurt in our own personal narrative. They opened many of their personal and ministerial wounds, trusting me to hold the experience in an honourable way.

In truth, each of the chaplains touched my heart in a special way, changing me both as a researcher and as a chaplain. I became aware of how humbled I felt being privy to some of their deepest and darkest secrets. The relationship crafted within the interview process was tangible and real. I sense that the experience has changed me both as a chaplain and as a researcher. What began as a project, a PhD, a quest to get something out there about chaplaincy soon became a labour of love. My emotional attachment to the project grew as each interview moved to the next one. My sense of vocation deepened as the interview process moved through its stages. My awareness of ministry being a great privilege grew as did my sense of awe and wonder for the people who I minister alongside.

From all of this, I felt a profound sense of responsibility in relation to how the experience of the chaplains, shared so freely would be presented within the final project. Chapter Three outlines the experience of the twenty-six chaplains and it stands at somewhere in the region of ten thousand words. However, the first draft of this chapter was just under thirty-five thousand words. The challenge for me was to let go of some of the data. Given the sense of immeasurable trust demonstrated by the chaplains, I wished to return the gift tenfold. Therefore, I wanted to share their narrative, tell their story in a very meaningful way. However, this meant making some key choices in relation to how the data would be presented in an authentic and responsible manner. This proved a personal challenge for me but one which I was thankfully able to overcome.

Two key things assisted me in the distillation process. First of all, using what was only directly related to the actual research question itself meant that the study almost immediately took on a new shape. It meant that what I shared was truthful, real, honest and connected in a very meaningful way to the trigger question ‘Do chaplains need to be people of faith?’. It helped to focus my mind and to become more objective and less emotionally attached to the data amassed in the research process. The second step I took was looking at where and when I wrote up chapters, especially the experience one. I had a habit of writing and reading in my office at work in the evening time when my working day had finished. However, this proved to be somewhat of a false economy as my identity became quite confused. In other words, what I mean here is that as my dual identity as researcher and chaplain became blurred. I was operating as a researcher in a chaplain’s space and objectivity became a real challenge. When writing up the experience chapter, I had become so attached to the data that I almost felt guilty for not being in a position to include everything. The burden of guilt became almost overwhelming at times. However, once this awareness became clear, I opted not to study in my chaplain’s space and therefore, it became easier for me to be ‘chaplain’ and ‘researcher’. Indeed, this experience led to my own reflection on whether it is actually possible to be both an ‘insider’ and an ‘outsider’ simultaneously. I believe that indeed it is but by the same token, I say this conscious of the many caveats that come into play and need consideration.

I must also consider how I have changed as a result of this process. How have my own assumptions, beliefs and practices altered? I sense that at the very least I have been

a more sensitive and intuitive researcher. I have become profoundly aware of the sacredness of research, especially qualitative research given what is shared in the process. I have become more appreciative of those who offer their experience for consideration in any project. It has made me more aware of the privilege of the ministry of chaplain and especially of my own vocation. I have learned to reflect more deeply and I have come to a greater sense of peace around questions not always being fully answered. For instance, I had initially hoped to find one definitive understanding of faith by chaplains and for chaplains. I am however happily reconciled to the reality that one does not exist.

1.10. Analysis of Data

Analysis involves sorting and sifting through coded materials to identify similar phrases, relationships between variables, patterns, themes, categories, distinct differences between sub-groups and common sequences.¹³² All data collected in this instance was recorded, stored and used within the parameters of the ethical approval obtained. Using a qualitative research approach underpinned by a reflective practice framework, a significant amount of relevant and useful data was collected and subsequently analysed so that (as was initially hoped) a gap analysis study of chaplaincy could be completed. The researcher typed up each of the interviews herself providing an additional layer of intimacy with each of them. The data was then manually interpreted and a number of key research findings were identified by the researcher.

Initially the researcher had considered doing the analysis segment with the help of Nvivo but because the interviews were transcribed and undertaken by the researcher herself the manual approach appeared a more favourable one. A major challenge, however, for such an interpretivist approach according to Mason, centres on the question of how the researcher can be sure that they are not simply inventing data or misrepresenting research participants' perspectives?¹³³ This mindset was kept very much in focus at all times when analysing the data especially given its sheer volume. It was necessary to undertake a number of close readings of the interview transcripts in order to decipher what data could be used for the purpose of the research findings chapter.

132 Miles and Huberman, 10.

133 Jennifer Mason. *Qualitative Researching*. London: Sage, 2002, 76.

There emerged from the data a number of core themes and recurrent patterns which again was in line with a phenomenological approach to the research question. The sixteen questions and their findings were initially grouped into six core themes – Chaplaincy, Multi-Faith Chaplaincy, Religious Practice, Faith, Theology and People of Faith. This helped to condense the material and to further help with the distillation process. Each of the core themes were re-analysed while searching for recurring themes and sub-themes and also for any findings which seemed to contrast to any dominant ones. The next layer of analysis involved a rigorous reduction of the data keeping only what directly related to the research question ‘Do Chaplains need to be People of Faith?’. This helped to support the eventual writing up of the chapter on Research Findings (Chapter Three) and the discussion in subsequent chapters.

The major challenge of self-analysis is that manual reading and reduction of the material is extremely time consuming and pedantic especially when dealing with large volumes of data as was the case here. There is also a need for a close reading of the manuscripts to ensure the best use of the data. There is also an obvious need to decipher what is *only* directly related to the actual research question which can in itself create additional work. Having engaged in this process personally there is also a possibility of becoming overly subjective. Whilst I am very self-aware there was at one point in the process of distillation an overly emotional connection to the data. In other words, I was overly subjective and personally attached to the data. The skills of self-awareness and self-reflection helped in overcoming this potential dilemma.

1.11. Limitations of The Study

While one of this study’s principal strengths is that it is done from within the world of chaplaincy itself, nonetheless it is still a rather small study. The fact that it is also a pioneering study has ensured that there really was no earlier data to draw from or consult. It is also an unfunded project so as such resources were somewhat limited in terms of when and where the researcher could travel for interview. This is especially true in relation to the overseas interviews. Given that I work full-time and was unable to take unpaid leave, all interviews were done when and where possible (generally during days off or annual leave). Rather than depending on Skype, it would quite possibly have been more informative and much more relational if these interviews could have been done onsite like the Irish ones.

The sample used for data collection while reasonably varied in terms of gender, location and demographics was relatively small. While conscious to try to avoid data saturation it would have been useful to have time and financial resources to interview more chaplains especially within specialised contexts. It would also have been helpful if the sample could have included a wider array of non-Christian or non-faith chaplains. However, that said, while recruiting chaplains of different faith or belief perspectives proved challenging, by the same token, what I was able to find were Christian chaplains with different understandings of faith. Certainly, they were all people of faith but were so to varying degrees. Therefore, even within a body of ‘people of faith’ there was significance variance in what that actually meant.

Whilst a conscious decision was made to interview chaplains only, this could understandably be viewed as a significant limitation of the work. To gain a considered reflection from service-users might have proved useful or from healthcare professionals who work alongside the chaplains within a Multi-Disciplinary System.

1.12. Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the research methodology chosen and why this method was chosen to consider the trigger question ‘Do Healthcare Chaplains need to be people of Faith?’ in order to do the work which they do, and the subsequent theological reflection it generates. The collection of data was a considerable task and great care was taken to follow the ethical guidelines at each stage in the process. The next chapter will now look at Theological Reflection as a methodological tool which will be employed later in the thesis in order to help interpret and use the data collected to elicit key findings and create a fruitful and authentic dialogue.

Chapter Two

Research Methodology – Part Two (Theological Reflection)

2.1. Introduction

This chapter will look at the discipline of Theological Reflection as a methodology not for pastoral practitioners per se but for researchers. Having looked in the previous chapter at issues around methodological approaches and why a qualitative as opposed to a quantitative stance was employed in this study, it is also important to explore the value of theological reflection as a theoretical framework within such endeavours. According to Elaine Graham et al., theological reflection is an activity that enables people of faith to give an account of the values and traditions that underpin their choices and convictions and deepens their understanding.¹³⁴ In many ways, this is what this chapter seeks to do. Using that framework, this chapter will look at what Theological Reflection is as a discipline and how it underpins some of the choices made in relation to the overall structure of this study. Moreover, such a framework indicates that within this thesis a significant theme is understanding and reflecting upon the role, meaning, value and significance of faith in the life and ministry of the contemporary chaplain.

2.2. Theological Reflection – A Foreword

The overall methodology for this thesis draws its influence and trajectory from the Clinical Pastoral Education model of teaching and learning, which succinctly put, involves skilled reflection on pastoral encounters with a particular emphasis on exploring the place of God and faith in the experience. Within CPE, theological reflection is a key component. Therefore, theological reflection provides a useful paradigm for my study, in that it takes the chaplain (interviewee) from the clinical site and moves them into a reflective space where they explore how and where as, pastoral practitioners they situate God in their life and work.

Given that my thesis is engaged in a reflective practice exploration on the place of faith in the life and work of contemporary chaplains, I believe that theological

¹³⁴ Elaine Graham, Heather Walton and Frances Ward. *Theological Reflection: Methods*. London: SCM Press, 2005, 6.

reflection is congruent with the qualitative methodology I have also chosen to employ. The CPE educational framework draws from the experiential and encourages, in fact necessitates considered reflection upon what has been experienced (in ministry) with the principal aim of promoting learning and improved self-awareness. An integral component of the Clinical Pastoral Education programme is theological reflection which essentially brings theology into dialogue with the lived experience.

Theological Reflection is a conversation, a dialogue between faith and experience. The Whiteheads promote the centrality of such an understanding of the theological reflection process reminding that ‘pastoral reflection is meant to be a communal exercise, not a monologue nor a lecture’.¹³⁵ In other words, it is a conversation where all voices are invited to be heard with equal importance. Theological reflection also brings the pastoral practitioner and their faith/belief system into direct contact. This reflective discourse then frames, promotes and enables spiritual development. It also helps to shift the focus from theory to reality, from the conceptual to the experiential. Peter Van Katwyk has indicated that the formation of Clinical Pastoral Education sparked a revolution in theological education by shifting the focus from books to the patients in the hospital. Yet, rather than contrasting the two approaches, Anton Boisen instead connected theological school and hospital by naming patients ‘living human documents’ that need to be studied and exegeted with the same care and respect as accorded to Sacred Scripture.

The experiential learning from encounters with the living human documents helps to integrate and to implement theory into practice. The discipline of theological reflection has built a similar bridge between school and clinical site, between theory and practice and continues to do so.¹³⁶ In this particular context, the interviews provide a picture of what faith means to those interviewed as well as where they see the place of faith (if at all) in their work. Here, theological reflection enables the participants (to borrow from Graham et al.) to see the connections between human dilemmas and divine horizons and allow such connections to be explored.¹³⁷ Theological reflection is, after all, a

135 James D. Whitehead and Evelyn E. Whitehead. *Method in Ministry – Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry*. Chicago: Sheed and Ward, 1995, 4.

136 Peter L. Van Katwyk. *Theological Reflection in Spiritual Care – Reflection Paper 2002*, 1.

137 Elaine Graham et al. *Theological Reflection*, 6.

transformational activity concerned with helping people and situations change. It is effectively about theology and ministry¹³⁸ and perhaps more specifically it is about adding authenticity and depth to both theology and ministry. After all, to reflect theologically is an essential element in faith formation and in personal faith development.¹³⁹

2.3. Origins of Theological Reflection

Judith Thompson has written that ‘Theological Reflection is, quintessentially, an experiential activity which can only be assimilated, appreciated and mastered by the doing of it’.¹⁴⁰ Before looking at the rubrics of theological reflection, I will begin by briefly looking at how it emerged as a discipline. Historically, it is somewhat difficult to precisely date the birth of theological reflection as a discrete methodological form within the field of practical theology but it does seem to have developed through the coming together of insights from three parallel, though not contiguous, related movements in the twentieth century: liberation theology, the Clinical Pastoral Education movement and various attempts to formalise and enhance the application of reflective practice in professional training programmes developed from the work of the philosopher John Dewey.¹⁴¹ Liberation theologians for instance, employed the Action-Reflection model to reflect upon what was emerging in the church in Latin America in the 1960s.¹⁴²

What has also influenced the development of theological reflection is the broadening of the understanding of ministry to include laity as well as clergy especially in the wake of the Second Vatican Council.¹⁴³ The various different historical, economic, political and societal shifts over the last fifty years or so have also impacted upon many aspects of human life not least the teaching, learning and practice of Theology. After all, human life is characterised by paradigmatic change in all its facets: social, psychological, systemic, economic and sexual as well as theological.¹⁴⁴ Therefore, as John Trokan reminds us, the nature and purpose of a Christian theological education is to promote

138 John Patton. ‘Some reflections on Theological Reflection’ in *The Journal of Christian Ministry*. 2010: 1-23, 22.

139 Richard Dalkey. ‘What is Theological Reflection?’ 2006, 1.

140 Judith Thompson. *Theological Reflection*. London: SCM Press, 2010, 2.

141 Ibid. 17/18.

142 Ibid. 22/23.

143 John Patton. ‘Some Reflections on Theological Reflection’, 2.

144 John Trokan. ‘Models of Theological Reflection: Theory and Practice’ in *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice*. December 2007.

personal wisdom and insight.¹⁴⁵ This personal wisdom (or knowledge) of self and of God is nurtured through the practice of theological reflection which is an excellent tool to systematically explore life experiences, to reflect critically upon their meaning and to theologise explicitly about the God moments which leads to personal (and perhaps communal) growth and insight.¹⁴⁶ At the heart of theological reflection is a movement from heart - felt inner experience into theological awareness.

2.4. What is Theological Reflection?

The British theologian David Ford has written that theology at its best is an attempt to discern and draw on the wisdom of scripture and of tradition in ways that contribute to wise understanding and living before God today.¹⁴⁷ Theological reflection is a key component of Pastoral (Practical) Theology where the minister is the primary practitioner.¹⁴⁸ Robert L. Kinast has contended that theological reflection has become the term for a distinct form of theologising which has emerged over the last twenty-five years.¹⁴⁹ It is important to state that for the most part, theological reflection is probably best known and most widely used in the training of men and women for church ministry especially in the supervisory and field education components of their training.¹⁵⁰ Hoping to contribute to the learning (or wisdom) of the minister, theological reflection should contribute to a wisdom that gains insight into situations of ministry that creatively

145 Ibid. 144.

146 Ibid. 144.

147 David Ford. *Shaping Theology: Engagements in a Religious and Secular World*. Malden: Blackwell, 2007, 152.

148 Pastoral theology according to Stephen Pattison and James Woodward might be seen in broad terms as the theological reflection and underpinning that guided pastoral care directed towards ensuring the individual and corporate well-being and flourishing of the Christian flock. It was the theological activity and tradition associated with 'shepherding' or pastoring. Many people, particularly within the Catholic tradition, still use the term 'pastoral theology' to describe pastoral action such as distributing sacraments, marriage preparation, burying the dead and so on. Practical theology on the other hand is a term that emerged in the German Protestant tradition as part of the academic theological curriculum in the late eighteenth century. Although pastoral care was seen as one important area of concern in practical theology its concerns extended beyond this to specialist interest in worship, preaching, Christian education and church government. The purpose of practical theology was to apply theological principles to these activities. Practical theology has tended to be preferred as a term that includes pastoral theology within the mainstream Reformed tradition. While pastoral and practical theology have different historical backgrounds and uses, nowadays there is a lot of common ground between them both. Ultimately, they are both concerned with how theological activity can inform and be informed by practical action in the interests of making an appropriate, effective Christian response in the modern world. See James Woodward and Stephen Pattison. Eds. *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000, 2.

149 Robert L. Kinast. *What are they saying about Theological Reflection?* New York: Paulist Press, 2010, 1.

150 Ibid. 6.

interprets the texts and traditions of faith and that then further develops the person and practice of the minister.¹⁵¹ Kinast also focuses on the minister's lived experience and what this has to teach him/her. It [theological reflection] correlates this experience with the sources of the Christian tradition before drawing out practical implications for Christian living and ministry.¹⁵²

Theological Reflection guides the experiential learning process that integrates and transforms what we know, what we do, and who we are in the practice of spiritual care.¹⁵³ Theological reflection is a process of coming to know God through reflecting on God's world in the light of resources from the Christian tradition.¹⁵⁴ John Trokan describes theological reflection as the process of learning directly from our experience and as an intentional and systematic activity in the classroom (and in the supervisory relationship) to help individuals to discover God's presence in their experience.¹⁵⁵ Theological contemplation appears to be constructed somewhat upon a Trinitarian structure – combining inseparably the lived experience, knowledge of God (and of self) and the transformative act. This study is effectively a theological reflection drawing on the expressed experience of chaplains working within a variety of healthcare settings. Therefore, I believe that the theological reflection model will support this thesis to create a detailed picture of twenty-first century healthcare chaplaincy and where its practitioners posit faith given an ever-evolving contextual landscape. After all, according to O'Connell Killen and de Beer, theological reflection is:

The discipline of exploring individual and corporate experience in conversation with the wisdom of a religious heritage. The conversation is a genuine dialogue that seeks to hear from our own beliefs, actions, and perspectives as well as those of the tradition. It respects the integrity of both. Theological reflection therefore may confirm, challenge, clarify and expand how we understand our own experience and how we understand the religious tradition. The outcome is new truth and meaning for living.¹⁵⁶

151 John Patton. 'Some Reflections on Theological Reflection', 2.

152 Robert L. Kinast. *What are they Saying About Theological Reflection*, 1.

153 Peter Van Katwyk. 'Theological Reflection in Spiritual Care', 1.

154 Abigail Johnson. *Reflecting with God. Connecting Faith and Daily Life in Small Groups*. Alban: Alban Institute, 2004, 2.

155 John Trokan. 'Models of Theological Reflection', 145.

156 Patricia O'Connell Killen and John de Beer. *The Art of Theological Reflection*. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1994, viii.

Drawing mainly from Whiteheads and O'Connell Killen and De Beer models of Theological Reflection¹⁵⁷, the experience of those interviewed for this study will be brought into direct conversation with the tradition (particularly the theology of suffering as expressed by Simone Weil, Dorothee Soelle, Karl Rahner and Dietrich Bonhoeffer) as well as other relevant aspects of the contemporary cultural context. This is a key piece of work for me as guided by Kinast:

Theological Reflection works out of specific contexts rather than working with generic truths. It draws upon lived experience as much as classic texts.....It begins with the lived experience of those doing the reflection; it correlates this experience with the sources of the Christian tradition; and it draws out practical implications for Christian living.¹⁵⁸

Consequently, I believe that theological reflection is an appropriate paradigm for my study given that within the context of this piece of work I am both researcher and practitioner who has a desire to support positive implications for healthcare chaplaincy on completion of my doctorate. My interest in and passion for the subject under exploration is I believe driven by a threefold desire: to develop a greater understanding of the contemporary reality of healthcare chaplaincy; to enhance and preserve service delivery into the future and to complete a gap analysis study so that other working chaplains may themselves be encouraged and have the confidence to engage in academic research and study. It is my fervent hope that this piece of research will achieve all three of these objectives and I believe that the theological reflection methodology and framework will help to do so.

From a practical perspective, there are many different styles, models, methods and approaches to engaging in theological reflection. However, according to Judith Thompson, first and foremost, whatever the faith tradition, good practice (in approach to theological reflection) depends on the theological reflector being thoroughly steeped in that tradition and its sacred texts.¹⁵⁹ In other words, knowledge of the rubrics and fundamentals of the faith tradition is a key necessity. In the Christian context, this essentially means that the reflector benefits from having a mature rather than an

157 James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead. *Method in Ministry*.

158 Robert L. Kinast. *What are they saying about Theological Reflection?* 2.

159 Judith Thompson. *Theological Reflection*, 77.

embryonic faith formation experience and relational knowledge and awareness of God. Robert L. Kinast has outlined a number of differing styles and models of theological reflection such as ministerial, spiritual, feminist and inculturation with each style corresponding to a gradually widening range of experience and breadth of praxis.¹⁶⁰

Irrespective of style, model or approach undertaken, when reflecting theologically the key components of this process involve the experience under exploration, considered reflection upon this same experience and the response arising from the reflection. All models for 'doing' theological reflection hold that the act of reflecting theologically is critical to an informed faith.¹⁶¹ Translating this to the research context, (if one is to draw from the likes of Kinast), this self-assurance and self-awareness in relation to faith ensures that an investigator has sufficient maturity both in knowledge and in their relationship with God to reflect theologically. Having the requisite skills to reflect proficiently, the researcher is then of course adequately equipped to support others to do likewise with objectivity and sophistication during the data collection process.

In their book on theological reflection, the Whiteheads propose a model of theological reflection which is particularly useful for the dual role of practitioner and researcher. I would consider that this particular model empowers the minister (and I believe the researcher):

who is neither exclusively an activist nor a professional theologian; the minister who needs and wants time for reflection in ministry; the minister who wants to be more critically aware of the influence of the Christian tradition, culture, and personal experience on pastoral decision making.¹⁶²

Therefore, this particular model of theological reflection names three key components in pastoral decision-making and planning – Christian tradition, personal experience and culture.¹⁶³ Important in their own right, each of these become more so when they are put into dialogue with each other. It is my plan to borrow and build upon such a model in my thesis by bringing the experience of the chaplains interviewed in relation to their faith

160 Robert L. Kinast. *What are they saying about Theological Reflection?* 5

161 James Dickey. *What is Theological Reflection?* 2006, 2.

162 James D. Whitehead and Evelyn E. Whitehead. *Method in Ministry*, 64.

163 Ibid. x

into dialogue with the Christian tradition of suffering within the context and framework of a changing cultural and contextual milieu. Indeed, this approach will scaffold much of the latter chapters of the thesis.

2.5. Experience in The Theological Reflection Process

The experience aspect of the theological reflection process is of central importance as it focuses on the ‘person’ of the practitioner and all their nuances and understandings. Experience can be shaped by so many things which by extension come to bear directly or somewhat indirectly upon the theological reflection practice. As Richard R. Osmer has reflected within ministry ‘experience is one of our most important teachers’.¹⁶⁴ It is essential therefore to reflect on and consider what we mean by ‘experience’ in the context of theological reflection as this understanding will determine the trajectory of much of the later sections of this study. It is also necessary that experience is adequately and effectively defined as it is a key partner in the theological reflection process.

While the Whiteheads remind that experience is ‘notoriously hard to define’¹⁶⁵ it is important nonetheless to avoid any hermeneutical naiveté in approach to defining or understanding its meaning. Experience is a key interpretative partner in the theological reflection process. After all, ‘experience’ is what the practitioner brings to the reflection in terms of their own gender, class, culture, prior learning and world view. Arguably a certain degree of pre-understanding is also brought to everything that is read, learned, undertaken and experienced by the person undertaking it. Nothing occurs or exists in a vacuum, thereby meaning that nothing is completely untouched by prior experience. Moreover, when referring to the idea of ‘experience’ this can most certainly include one’s own or another’s – present or past – individual or collective.¹⁶⁶ Or perhaps succinctly, the impact of other peoples’ experiences upon the practitioner and their own world view or theoretical framework must also be given sufficient credence or value. Even when we are unaware of it, we still are influenced by the experience of those around us.

164 Richard R. Osmer. *Practical Theology – An Introduction*. Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008 3

165 Ibid. 43.

166 James Dickey ‘What is Theological Reflection? 2.

For the purposes of this study ‘experience’ is primarily understood as learning within the field of ministry which is influenced and impacted by what additional knowledge the participant has also amassed prior to this. The Whiteheads go a little further than this saying that experience also embraces not only life events, but the convictions and hopes carried in these events.¹⁶⁷ In ‘The Price of Sparrows – Experiencing God Today’ – Prof. Eamonn Conway speaks of experience as resulting from the encounter between the individual and reality, with such experiences ‘lodged in a memory bank’ from which we ‘relate new experiences to previous ones’¹⁶⁸, the subconscious awareness if you will. The danger of the subconscious, of the ‘memory bank’ experiences, is that if the practitioner is not sufficiently self-aware or engaged in reflective practice, these memories may block or thwart mature theological reflection. Bringing the learned or preconceived notions to the process can harbour a desire to move it in a particular trajectory, one which may not offer much depth to the learning or growth of the practitioner.

The greatest challenge of course with ‘experience’ as a methodological tool is its subjectivity. Subjectivity can naturally motivate or help to drive particular agendas or indeed to achieve a desired result on the part of a researcher. To avoid this, the researcher particularly if he or she is also a practitioner in the same field, must continue to try to maintain an objective stance so that they can be both outsider and insider simultaneously. Experience as a partner in the theological process has not been without its detractors. Just as Conway highlights that a shared understanding of ‘experience of God cannot be presumed’¹⁶⁹ neither can a shared understanding of or indeed experience of ‘experience’ (even of the same experience) be presumed.

Conway consolidates such thinking by further reflecting that ‘there is a danger of an arbitrary subjectivism or emotivism in the shift from the experience of authority to the authority of personal experience’.¹⁷⁰ The Whiteheads also caution against subjectivism or emotivism acknowledging that while their method ‘begins in experience’¹⁷¹ it does so

167 James D. Whitehead and Evelyn E. Whitehead. *Method in Ministry*, 9.

168 Eamonn Conway. ‘The Price of Sparrows Experiencing God Today’ in *New Beginnings in Ministry*. 17/18.

169 Ibid. 17.

170 Ibid. 19.

171 James D. Whitehead and Evelyn E. Whitehead. *Method in Ministry*, 9.

with an awareness of its perils. There has long been somewhat of a historical scepticism in relation to the use of ‘experience’ in theology with the Enlightenment period doing little to enhance its standing replacing experience with reason or rationality. Some theologians continue to remain somewhat sceptical of the authentic value of experience with some of those who support the place of experience in theology and theological reflection also cautioning to act with vigilance.¹⁷²

Having earlier stated that experience is influenced by internal and external factors, it is also imperative to say that experience is also ‘raw until reflected upon’ and it is theological reflection which turns this raw experience into ‘lived experience and which moves an individual from insight into action’.¹⁷³ When this trajectory is not followed then the opportunity to learn is lost. That is why, I believe, this particular study is so important. It affords those interviewed (all chaplains) with an opportunity to reflect upon their own experience and learn from it where necessary or needed as well as supporting a wider interpretation of the lived experiences of contemporary chaplains. In other words, it supports a sort of existential questioning for those who empower others to do likewise.

Despite training within a reflective practice methodology, once in pastoral practice, aside from professional supervision, chaplains have limited opportunity to reflect on their lived experience. Learning on the job becomes the paradigm for most working chaplains once their training has been completed. This opportunity to learn is fluid and dynamic and can vary depending on the context within which the chaplain him or herself finds themselves working. Just as learning is fluid and dynamic so too is ‘experience’. O’Connell Killen and De Beer’s definition of experience highlights and supports the dynamic and fluid nature of ‘experience’:

Experience is what happens to us; what occurs in which we are active or passive participants. Experience has an inner dimension – the feelings, thoughts, attitudes, and hopes that we carry into and out of any situation. This inner dimension involves our response to and what we make of and do with what occurs. It accents how we experience events and situations. Experience also has an outer dimension involving the people, places, projects, and objects that surround us and with which we interact. The outer dimension accents what we experience. Experience with its inner and outer dimensions, is a constant, dynamic flow. We can think of experience as the flow between

172 See for instance, John Macquarrie. *Principles of Christian Theology*. London: S.C.M Press, 1977.

173 Joy Gros. *Theological Reflection: Connecting Faith and Life*. Chicago: Loyola Press, 2002, 4.

ourselves and the various places, issues, situations, ideas and problems with which we interact.¹⁷⁴

When bringing the concept of experience into dialogue with reflective practice the learning cycle of theological reflection starts with a concrete, present experience in the practice of care.¹⁷⁵ For Anton Boisen of course, the text in clinical practice and education is to be found in the guise of the living human document. In this instance, it is a reflection on the experience of the practitioner in order to gain insight and perhaps create transformational growth. Yet, when the engagement between minister (and arguably here in this context the interviewee who is a chaplain) and ‘the living human document’ is seen as a relational experience and as a personal interaction in the practice of care, theological reflection almost always culminates in a process of self-reflection.

In the theological reflection experience practitioners become insiders, owning the patient’s lived experience and understanding its meaning in the actuality of their own life.¹⁷⁶ In essence, the reflective practitioner infiltrates the narrative of the living human document becoming as a result a piece of the narrative tapestry itself. In this particular understanding of theological reflection, it almost becomes somewhat of a spiritual discipline in self-care and in personal and professional growth.¹⁷⁷ In the openness to hold what is shared comes a necessity to care for self and to draw on resources within and beyond. Drawing on the Pastoral Cycle model of theological reflection the reflector begins with a naming of the experience for themselves and a consideration of what happened, who was involved and what did they do or say.¹⁷⁸ For the researcher, this *modus operandi* supports a didactic methodology for them and for the topic under consideration.

2.6. Tradition in Theological Reflection

Leaning on each of the Whiteheads and the O’Connell Killen and De Beer models of theological reflection, the second dialogue partner in the process, theological tradition, will now be looked at in some detail. Indeed, the Whiteheads have stated that theological

174 O’Connell Killen and De Beer. *The Art of Theological Reflection*, 21.

175 Peter Van Katwyk. *Theological Reflection in Spiritual Care*, 1.

176 Ibid. 2.

177 Ibid. 3.

178 Drawn from Abigail Johnson. *Reflecting with God*, 2.

reflection in ministry is the process of bringing to bear in practical decisions of ministry the resources of Christian faith.¹⁷⁹ It is these resources of the Christian faith which form the tradition component in the theological reflection process. Tradition comes from the Latin *traditio* which means to deliver or to transmit.¹⁸⁰ Tradition is a process of transmission, an active process where there is mutual dynamic between the scriptures, the tradition and the community of believers.¹⁸¹ In fact, the French Dominican, Yves Congar (1904-1995) goes further implying that if tradition is to be taken up in the basic and strict sense then this transmission excludes nothing but rather, comprises equally the holy Scriptures and beside these, not only doctrines but the sacraments, ecclesiastical institutions, the powers of ministry, customs and liturgical rites.¹⁸²

Historically, this tradition, according to the Whiteheads, has developed as Christianity interacted with different cultural contexts and challenges.¹⁸³ Interestingly, it is not in-depth or academic excellence which they see as being important where tradition is concerned but rather what they term ‘befriending the tradition’, in other words, an intimacy with the tradition in question appreciating its diversity, contradictions and nuances.¹⁸⁴ It is through this process of ‘befriending’ that the tradition provides a scaffold for knowing God and for exploring questions around faith and belief. As O’Connell Killen and De Beer have said that when we deliberately incorporate wisdom from our Christian heritage into the process of uncovering meaning in experiences this is theological reflection.¹⁸⁵

The Christian heritage is a key partner in the theological reflection trajectory. After all, faith is derived from experience and knowledge of God and this understanding is both drawn from and nourished by the tradition. Tradition is then of course further influenced by context and theology as a discipline is contextual and open to external influence and interrogation. It is also this same corpus, it appears, which provides both understanding and support in the face of immense suffering for the pastoral practitioners. Scripture appears to be the aspect of the tradition which speaks most to those interviewed

179 James D. Whitehead and Evelyn E. Whitehead. *Method in Ministry*, ix.

180 Yves Congar. *The Meaning of Tradition*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1964, 9.

181 Gerald O’Collins. *Fundamental Theology*. Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2001, 208-211.

182 Yves Congar. *The Meaning of Tradition*, 13.

183 James D. Whitehead and Evelyn E. Whitehead. *Method in Ministry*, 8.

184 Ibid. 9.

185 O’Connell and De Beer. *The Art of Theological Reflection*, 46.

in that it is familiar and speaks a language that is both real and tangible. The Whiteheads give most prominence to the scriptures also but they do not exclude other elements of the Christian tradition: ‘for the Whiteheads the faith tradition embraces all the sources of the Christian heritage, [but] with scriptures holding pride of place.’¹⁸⁶

However, they have also acknowledged that for some, Christian resources especially scripture can prove rather complex and challenging. Adding this caveat to their discussion on the centrality of the theological tradition to the reflection process, they have, at the same time, indicated that this invaluable source can appear ‘distant and alien’ to the contemporary believer given that it is set in ‘very different times and cultural contexts’.¹⁸⁷ This observation is also a reminder that some will be more familiar than others with the theological canon and this too will impact upon the reflection process.

2.7. Cultural Context

The third conversation partner in theological reflection is culture. The Whiteheads have said that it is important [for the reflector] to read the signs of the times and to hear the voices of the age in question as part of the theological reflection process. In other words, they challenge the community of faith to strengthen its dialogue with the culture in which it lives.¹⁸⁸ They have presented three key reasons for the inclusion of culture in the theological reflection process – it alerts us to the role of culture in shaping human experience, it acknowledges the mutual critique of tradition and culture and finally it encourages the community of faith to actively engage cultural information and resources in its mission and ministry.¹⁸⁹ Most people Anthony J. Gittins has reflected, assume that they can readily identify and understand culture. However, he adds a caveat to this statement reflecting that one needs to act with caution in this regard. After all, he contends, one cannot assume that culture is a univocal term, that they understand it fully or indeed that they share the same understanding of it as others do even within the same community or context.¹⁹⁰ Helen Spencer-Oatley has spoken in similar terms arguing that ‘culture is a notoriously difficult term to define’.¹⁹¹ This assertion while somewhat

186 Robert L. Kinast. *What are they Saying about Theological Reflection*, 7.

187 James D. Whitehead and Evelyn E. Whitehead. *Method in Ministry*, 24.

188 Ibid. 54.

189 Ibid. 55.

190 Anthony J. Gittins. *Living Mission Interculturally - Faith, Culture and the Renewal of Praxis*. Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2015, 32.

191 Helen Spencer-Oatley. ‘What is Culture?’ Global Pad Core Concepts, 2012.

amusing at first is firmly validated by the literature where several definitions of *culture* seem to exist. In 1952, for example, Kroeber and Kluckhohn two American anthropologists critically reviewed concepts and definitions of culture and compiled a list of 164 different definitions.¹⁹² They came to define or understand culture as ‘patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols’ with the ‘essential core of culture consisting of traditional (historically derived and selected) ideas and their attached values’.¹⁹³ Spenser-Oakley has written that to really understand a culture and to ascertain more completely its values that it is imperative to delve into underlying assumptions which she reminds are typically unconscious but which nevertheless determine how group members perceive, think and feel.¹⁹⁴

Raymond Williams reminds us that every human society has its own shape, purpose and meaning and expresses these in institutions, arts and in learning. Essentially, he seems to be arguing that culture is used to mean a whole way of life (the common meaning) to mean the arts and learning, the special processes of discovery and creative effort.¹⁹⁵ Culture is a combination of inherited and learned values which underpin life choices and decision-making. Therefore, for the purposes of this professional doctorate, culture is understood as a pattern of behaviour (explicit or implicit); crafted by inherited and learned norms and mores; which proceed to determine and underpin the values and attitudes of a particular person, society or institution; then providing the framework for ethical decision-making, social and legal reform, and best practice in care of each citizen.

Being a significant partner in the theological reflection model employed in my thesis means that it is imperative to say that culture ensures that the practitioner brings to the reflective process their own faith, history, context and experience. This carries a certain personal dynamic into the heart of theological reflection. The Whiteheads’ model of theological reflection includes culture as a separate partner in the research dialogue whereas most other models see it simply as a fairly minor aspect of the process. Therefore, the Whiteheads’ model is a very useful one for the study under consideration within this doctorate:

192 A.L Kroeber and C. Kluckhohn. ‘Culture: a critical review of concepts and definitions in *Papers: Peabody Museum of Archaeology & Ethnology*. Harvard University, 1952, 223.

193 Ibid. 181.

194 Helen Spenser-Oakley. ‘What is Culture?’ 3.

195 Raymond Williams in N. McKenzie edited *Convictions*, 1958.

The inclusion of the resources of culture is one of the distinctive contributions that the Whiteheads have made to the general form of theological reflection. Like the faith tradition, cultural life is complex and ambiguous, sometimes challenging the faith tradition, sometimes contributing to it and sometimes contradicting it. This is not perceived as a threat or a problem to be overcome but as one of the conditions for carrying out honest, realistic theological reflection.¹⁹⁶

Within theological reflection, culture seems to be about assumptions, values and qualities which shape who we are and what we believe. In many respects it is about having the skills and awareness to objectively observe and understand the interior world of those, in this context, who have been interviewed. In other words, this essentially means to learn to listen with an inner ear and to see anew with the mind's eye.¹⁹⁷ This of course, challenges the researcher to avoid hermeneutical naiveté and to maintain an on-going dialogue with the context of the study in order to avoid an accidental lapse into a more subjective mindset. While any researcher cannot be completely detached from the project they undertake, it is nonetheless imperative to have the capacity to think, engage and reflect with a significant degree of competence and maturation in order to maintain an objective boundary. This is an important consideration for me as I undertake this project possessing a dual standpoint of both insider and outsider.

The primary reason that culture needs to be looked at separately within this dialogue is that I believe it has a profound impact on the *modus operandi* of modern-day chaplains. Cultural developments such as postmodernity, multiculturalism, secularism, pluralism as well as interchanges around state/church relations have all impacted significantly on the work of chaplains. Such movements have all contributed in various ways to the erosion of the historical good standing of church and other traditionally held beliefs, all in turn affecting the work of those involved in pastoral ministry. In exploring and reflecting upon the place of faith in the life and work of chaplains, it would seem somewhat remiss not to consider the role which culture has to play in how they operate and function. Again, the Whiteheads support such an approach asserting that:

196 Robert L. Kinast. *What are they Saying about Theological Reflection?* 8.

197 James Dickey. *What is Theological Reflection?* 2.

The model we explore in this book incorporates this challenge by identifying culture as an indispensable component in theological reflection in ministry. And no longer content with an antagonistic juxtaposition of church and world, most people of faith recognise a richer interaction between faith and culture.¹⁹⁸

Culture shapes human experience. In turn, it is this experience we bring to our theology and our understanding of it.

2.8. Theological Reflection – in the Light of Experience, Tradition and Culture

Theological reflection as a process is a powerful and growth filled tool for theological educators and practitioners. Theological reflection stands in the personal experience of the student and reverences that experience as religious or sacrosanct. It also examines Christian scripture to uncover its truth for contemporary experience. It befriends the Christian tradition to filter out its history and wisdom. Theological reflection critically examines the person, family, and cultural contexts which have been formational in relation to personal values, beliefs and theology. It helps to develop the discipline of an action reflection process of theologising and discernment and it essentially enables students (or practitioners) to experience the process of theology as communal.¹⁹⁹ However, rather than a linear three step theory – experience to reflection to praxis – theological reflection is an on-going cyclical process in experiential learning. It aims at becoming self-aware and intentional in learning from our experience: to know who we are in how we practice what we believe²⁰⁰ which is a key point of learning for those engaged in pastoral ministry.

That said, theological reflection is always focused on a pastoral response, an intended praxis which moves towards action. It is a moment when the gap between faith and the issues under consideration evaporates and there is now a connection, an understanding between the tradition and the experience. When this happens the issue under exploration is seen and understood in a new and more enlightened way. Fresh insight opens the doorway for new and exciting possibilities. The primary purpose of my work here is to unearth new insights and to come to a greater understanding of the reality

198 James D. Whitehead and Evelyn E. Whitehead. *Method in Ministry*, 54.

199 John Trokan. 'Models of Theological Reflection', 156.

200 Peter Van Katwyk. *Theological Reflection in Spiritual Care*, 7.

of healthcare chaplaincy within a changing cultural and contextual milieu with the ultimate objective to help inform future practice and decision-making.

2.9 Theological Reflection – a Methodology for a Critical Conversation

Theological Reflection is, the Whiteheads claim, an essential tool in the discernment of contemporary ministry.²⁰¹ This thesis is a theological reflection, a discernment or exploration of the meaning, on the value and significance of faith in the life and ministry of contemporary chaplains. Without theological reflection, O’Connell Killen and De Beer consider that faith is reduced to a possession, serving as a justification for what we already think, religious code language to legitimate whatever psychological, sociological, economic or political theory that we hold.²⁰² In such a context, the process to be undertaken here in this thesis is a necessary and valuable one, given the shifting milieu within which chaplains operate.

The use of theological reflection will support an authentic and congruent conversation around the meaning and value of faith for chaplains in this thesis. An important first step in this process of exploration or discernment begins by focusing on the chaplains themselves. By paying careful attention to their words, their experiences and their understanding of faith we will be drawn into their community, their world, their mindset and their searching, making it possible to reflect theologically on faith, in a purposeful and timely way. In accordance with the Whiteheads’ model of theological reflection, Section Two will explore the experience, culture and theological tradition which frames and encases contemporary chaplaincy. This will help to lay the foundation stone for the final two chapters of this thesis, which will engage in a critical conversation around the meaning, value and significance of faith for chaplains and will, to quote O’Connell Killen and De Beer, ‘get to the heart of the matter’.²⁰³

2.10. Mapping The Method

The model of theological reflection to be used in this thesis will, according to the Whiteheads, provide an image of the elements that are involved in the dialogue, that is,

201 James D. Whitehead and Evelyn E. Whitehead. *Method in Ministry – Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry*. Chicago: Shed & Ward, 1995, 3.

202 Patricia O’Connell Killen and John De Beer. *The Art of Theological Reflection*. New York: Crossroad, 2007, 15.

203 Ibid. 61.

experience, culture and tradition. The critical conversation at the heart of this thesis will be possible to have by using a particular method of reflection, one influenced by a number of different theorists and which will be outlined in due course. According to the Whiteheads, a method of reflection describes the dynamic or movement of the process, outlining the stages through which the conversation proceeds.²⁰⁴ In fact, it is the method of theological reflection which makes a conversation possible, in the first instance. For the Whiteheads, the goal of developing a method of theological reflection in Christian life is not simply to help believers understand more clearly, but to help them act more effectively.²⁰⁵

In essence, this is what is sought here. In striving to understand more clearly the meaning, value and significance of faith for chaplains, it is both hoped and envisioned, that this study will support an action-reflection-action exploration and thus, provide a template for best practice in ministry within an evolving context and milieu. Laurie Green in speaking of the ‘Doing Theology Spiral’, finds it most helpful to think of the [reflective] process as a circle, a cycle or even better a spiral which moves continually from action to reflection and from reflection to action – a constant interplay between the two he describes as praxis.²⁰⁶ Ultimately, it is only from a considered reflective process like the movement described by Laurie Green, that genuine insight and growth can ever really be attainable or achieved. However, as O’Connell Killen and De Beer caution, searching for meaning through theological reflection is not easy because it does not yield the security of absolute answers. Rather, the search invites us to befriend our Christian heritage, our lived experience, our culture and our contemporary faith community as conversation partners on the journey of faith.²⁰⁷ It is, in this process of ‘befriending’, that we come to look more deeply at some of the enigmatic questions which life throws at us, a point which has also been made by O’Connell Killen and De Beer. They have reminded us that our capacity to live rich, authentic human lives depends on our capacity to befriend

204 James D. Whitehead and Evelyn E. Whitehead. *Method in Ministry -Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry*, x.

205 Ibid. 3.

206 Laurie Green. *Let’s Do Theology – Resources for Contextual Theology*. London: Bloomsbury, 2012, 19.

207 Patricia O’Connell Killen and John De Beer. *The Art of Theological Reflection*, 3.

and enter deeply and openly into our Christian heritage²⁰⁸, a process which supports us to be able to ask the difficult questions in life, ‘the why about our lives’.²⁰⁹

The greatest challenge, however, is the multiplicity of answers which such a process can throw up. In fact, sometimes the movement towards insight can create even more questions than answers and thus demonstrates the complexity of the theological reflection framework. Neither is it envisaged that my dialogue here will profit from the certainty of absolute answers. What is certain though, is that there will be a befriending of each of the dialogue partners, in order to attain insight and learning around the meaning, value and significance of faith for those engaged in a faith-based ministry, within a world that continues to grow more pluralist and secular, with each passing decade.

In striving to produce and engage in a critical, incisive, perceptive and challenging dialogue around the place of faith in the life and ministry of contemporary chaplains, I will lean heavily on the Whiteheads’ method of theological reflection. However, it is also my plan to borrow some components from the O’Connell Killen and De Beer method of theological reflection, which will, I believe, provide a very solid framework for real and tangible dialogue, in this thesis and beyond. For instance, the O’Connell Killen and De Beer method gives significant credence to the place of imagery and emotion in the reflective process whereas the Whiteheads’ method does not, at least not in any sustained way or to the same extent. However, it is my view, that these are key elements of the theological reflection process and their inclusion here will support the overall dialogue between the partners, in a critical, insightful and transformative way. This new and bespoke method of theological reflection to be used will be outlined in greater detail in the next section.

The Whiteheads have written that a faith community gathers to reflect on some important aspect of its shared life.²¹⁰ In this particular context, the question or issue for reflection, is to seek out whether chaplains need to be people of faith or not, in order to do the work, they do. This trigger question unlocks the issue at the heart of the exploration

208 Ibid. ix.

209 Ibid. x.

210 James D. Whitehead and Evelyn E. Whitehead. *Method in Ministry*, 13

and allows a deeper conversation around faith and what role it plays in their life and ministry against a background of increasing secularisation, than may otherwise have been possible. Before coming to any sort of conclusion in this regard, it is necessary to explore some key questions around the meaning, value and significance of faith in their personal and professional lives.

The new and bespoke method of theological reflection created here in this thesis will, I believe, both support and aid this important discernment process. In the Whiteheads' model, there are three stages – attending, assertion and pastoral response. Later on, in a subsequent chapter (Chapter Six) the experience of the chaplains will be attended and put into conversation with the other two partners which will then lead to an authentic and congruent dialogue around the meaning, value and significance of faith for them. Chapter Seven will then focus on pastoral response, or in other words, what I have named transforming insight into action. Below is an outline of the key elements of the interpretative paradigm which I will be using in this thesis which in effect, is a combination of the Whiteheads and O'Connell Killen and De Beer methods of theological reflection with additional emphasis on insight and transformation in the final stages. See table below:

The Whiteheads	O’Connell Killen and De Beer	Naughton
Attending	Experience/Feelings/Images	Naming the Issue and Experience and associated feelings and images
Assertion	Insight	Awareness and Insight
Response	Action	Response and Transformation

2.10.1 Attending – The Listening Begins

Phase one of the reflective process is attending which, the Whiteheads have said, involves seeking out the information on a particular pastoral concern that is available in personal experience, Christian tradition and cultural resources.²¹¹ This takes a metaphorical leap of faith, a swim in the river of the totality of our human experience. Indeed, O’Connell Killen and De Beer use this image of the river to remind us that experience is the flowing river of interactions with people, places, events and other factors that make up our lives.²¹² A noteworthy point to keep in mind at this juncture, is that, in the model of theological reflection, experience was understood as the narrative, the lived experience of those interviewed whereas here in the Whiteheads’ method of theological reflection, it encompasses experience, tradition and culture as defined by O’Connell Killen and De Beer.

This serves as a reminder that we do not operate within a vacuum and that we are impacted, consciously or subconsciously, by a multiplicity of factors. In many ways, the conversation to follow, involves an unhindered jump into the river of experience of those interviewed in an attempt to hear their story, to gain insight into how their narrative, culture, tradition and experience all intermingle to shape their understanding of faith and

211 James D. Whitehead and Evelyn E. Whitehead. *Method in Ministry*, 13.

212 Patricia O’Connell Killen and John De Beer. *The Art of Theological Reflection*, 59.

where they posit it in their ministry. Experience is what happens us, what occurs in that which we are active or passive participants. Experience has an inner dimension – the feelings, thoughts, attitudes and hopes which we bring into and out of any situation and has an outer dimension – the people places, projects and objects that surround us and with which we interact.²¹³ The Whiteheads identify experience as a critical voice in the theological conversation²¹⁴, but only if we learn to listen to it and purify it.²¹⁵

This process of discernment begins by listening with an open heart and a suspension of judgment. This is a key part of the process, but one which demands, skill and patience. Laurie Green reminds us that at this stage we will not engage in a thorough analysis of the situation, but instead, simply make sure that we really are conscious of the feelings, emotions, and impressions that the experience engenders in us.²¹⁶ The Whiteheads see this stage as simply listening or attending to the pastoral concern under consideration.

Faced with a particular concern, the reflector must seek out the information that is available in the experience, in the tradition and in the culture. However, they also remind that hearing is neither automatic or easy.²¹⁷ Listening can be uncomfortable, challenging both the listener and the speaker to hear from the heart. It can bring up feelings and emotions in a most unexpected manner. To listen with authenticity demands depth and maturity. It also asks for an openness to hear a perspective we might not share. This also demands a letting go of what O’Connell Killen and De Beer refer to as certitude and self-assurance, in favour of a more explorative stance. The danger of certitude however, is that it harnesses an overreliance on both tradition and experience. This results in rigidity in the reflective process. In other words, we may only tolerate that which, fits into, our predetermined category. This can hinder the reflective process because when working from such a framework we operate exclusively from a standpoint where we are unable to test a new experience against the view of life that we hold.

213 Patricia O’Connell Killen and De Beer. *The Art of Theological Reflection* 21.

214 James D. Whitehead and Evelyn E. Whitehead. *Method in Ministry*, 43.

215 Ibid. 46.

216 Laurie Green. *Let’s Do Theology*, 19.

217 James D. Whitehead and Evelyn E. Whitehead. *Method in Ministry*, 13.

In other words, we make our current interpretation absolute, unchanging and true. This ensures that we miss the gift of learning, insight and transformation, which this new experience offers us. Self-assurance is another *modus operandi* which can hinder the process and thwart the listening process. It can create agendas, ensure that we control the process of exploration and dull our potential for awareness. When we are fed up with the frailty and fallibility of our context, we can move to trust only ourselves, our own experiences, how we think and feel now. We choose to be our own compass, map and guide rejecting the need for another external influence.²¹⁸ This, of course, means that we can become closed off to all external factors and as a result corrupt the listening process. There is a danger here that we hear only what we choose to hear, risking a process of attending, which lacks genuine and authentic value.

The listening process can also pose some additional challenges if the reflector (or researcher) is inside the context and tradition. For this person, it can open up difficulties or potential difficulties around subjective and objective listening or researching, challenging the researcher to remain grounded, in an objective space. The Whiteheads remind us, that a range of listening skills, are needed to discern what is happening among us and what God would have us do. Skills of introspection are needed as these alert us to the movements of our mind and heart, thus helping us, to become aware of personal motives, biases, convictions and values. This self-awareness is an essential part of spiritual growth according to the Whiteheads and is critical to any process of pastoral reflection.²¹⁹ Such self-awareness is also crucial for the insider researcher or reflector as it assists in maintaining that objective stance which is so necessary. A key ingredient of listening to a group, the Whiteheads contend, is an ability to suspend premature judgment. This is challenging, of course, and as the Whiteheads say ‘a threatening venture’. Suspending judgment leaves us vulnerable to challenge and even to change and yet, the effectiveness of theological reflection, depends on the ability to explore honestly the information available, in the three sources of experience, tradition and culture.²²⁰ A quick evaluation has the potential to damage the capacity and willingness to find creative and meaningful insight.

218 Patricia O’Connell Killen and John De Beer. *The Art of Theological Reflection*, 4-11.

219 James D. Whitehead and Evelyn E. Whitehead. *Method in Ministry*, 14.

220 Ibid. 14.

O’Connell Killen and De Beer have spoken of the image of the prism in relation to experience. This is a rather interesting, but complex image. However, when it is deconstructed, it sits well with the dynamic nature of the river image (they also use), which in turn, reflects the uncharted trajectory of human experience. A prism refracts light, sound and waves, allowing them to pass almost seamlessly from one substance to another. It is a reminder that experience also seamlessly refracts and interacts with tradition and culture until we consciously stop and assess our experience. Each point on the prism is a source for theological reflection – and the prism represents the dynamic relationship with the sources.²²¹

This is a useful image given the dynamic nature of faith, as recounted by the chaplains in this study. Faith appears not to be a static or unchanging element in their life but rather, one that is dynamic, open to influence and change given the context or reality of their own life and ministry. In delving into their experience, chaplains were able to reflect upon and name some key moments in their life, where they came to understand what faith means for them and how it supports or challenges them, in life and in ministry. The ebb and flow of the river reflects the movement which so many of them have experienced in relation to their faith and which they shared in their interviews. The sphere represents the river of experience frozen at an instant in time²²², echoing what has unfolded in this study, with chaplains sharing their experience and understanding of faith at this particular moment in their life, which is an amalgamation of various experiences and influences. In delving into their narrative or their river of experience, such a picture was possible to construct, leading to deep insight and potential for transformation and growth.

The conversation at the heart of the theological reflection also involves listening to what culture and tradition have to say about the pastoral issue under reflection. The Whiteheads remind us of the ‘overlap and interplay’ between all three conversation partners²²³, something which is necessary to keep in mind as this conversation progresses. As Elaine Graham has said of contemporary culture, we now live in an age of uncertainty, in a society which has been characterised as one in which there is no longer a consensus

221 Patricia O’Connell Killen and John De Beer. *The Art of Theological Reflection*, 59.

222 Ibid. 59.

223 James D. Whitehead and Evelyn E. Whitehead. *Method in Ministry*, 55.

of values.²²⁴ Yet, as the Whiteheads have said of culture, ‘our own culture surrounds us like the air we breathe, it is so ordinary and natural that we seldom notice its influence’.²²⁵ It is one of the key sources in that river of experience, an important dialogue partner in the process of the discernment, a key partner in the conversation. Culture, according to O’Connell Killen and De Beer, is so large and dominant a source that is most easily conceived to have three distinct, but inseparable elements. The first of these are our symbols, mores, assumptions, values and norms. The second involves the pattern of organized interaction within human groups and the third element is our physical environment – issues of ecological justice.²²⁶

In many ways, culture has several voices. The Whiteheads pick this point up noting this reality.²²⁷ Some of these voices have considerable influence and very often strengthen the discernment process. However, awareness is key in this regard, because not paying sufficient attention to the cultural context will inevitably, risk an important player, being absent from the process. Of course, some of these voices in the conversation are quite readily picked up whereas others might prove more challenging to decipher. Once again, this is a reminder that the listening process must be authentic, patient and open to hearing all the voices that form the conversation set. Simply hearing the narrative of the chaplain is not enough. There is a need to have the capacity to listen to the ‘other voices’ in the dialogue, which then in turn, leads us into a deeper conversation.

In the context of the chaplains interviewed here, such voices would include how they can function within a clinically driven space and at the same time, hold their ground and remain balanced within a society that continues to grow more secular and pluralist. Some voices strengthen the discernment process whereas others, may be considered, to challenge it. Irrespective of what the voices add to the conversation, we cannot reflect theologically and remain what the Whiteheads call ‘culture free’.²²⁸ In other words, in listening, we need to remember the centrality of our cultural context and its impact on what we are hearing and seeing, when we delve into the river of our experience. After

224 Elaine L. Graham. *Transforming Practice – Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty*. Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1996, 1.

225 James Whitehead and Evelyn E. Whitehead. *Method in Ministry*, 11.

226 O’Connell Killen and De Beer. *The Art of Theological Reflection*, 56/7.

227 James Whitehead and Evelyn E. Whitehead. *Method in Ministry*, 12.

228 Ibid, 57

all, the myriad of social, economic, political, sociological and demographic issues which form part of our own culture and that of the group under discernment, will impact upon the issue, at the heart of the exploration. Therefore, it is an important component of the process and must not be boxed off but rather, it ought to be allowed to ebb and flow, as the conversation moves along its own trajectory. In attending to the many cultural considerations at play, we witness its centrality to the pastoral concern under reflection and come to learn, what it teaches us, about the issue at hand.

Tradition, another conversation partner, also plays an integral part in the reflective process. Theological reflection puts our experience into a genuine conversation with our religious heritage, a conversation which enriches and strengthens our experience of the tradition's sustaining wisdom and power.²²⁹ The Whiteheads have named Christian tradition as 'our religious heritage embracing both Sacred Scripture and the long history of the Christian church with its multiple and changing interpretations of the Bible and its own life'.²³⁰

Our tradition, they have said, brings to the dialogue the range of insight and grace that Scripture and Christian history have given us. Tradition, for Christians, spans the beliefs and convictions embedded not only in Scripture and the church councils at Nicaea and Chalcedon but, in denominational history as well, with its theological statements and pastoral guidelines. When we face a particular ministry concern or issue, we turn instinctively to these sources to guide our response,²³¹ in this context, the theology of suffering (and accompaniment) was consulted. Chaplains, in their sharing, grappled with key existential questions around suffering and its meaning, pastorally and personally. In cracking open their thoughts around the mystery and the agony of suffering, they brought many challenging questions to the surface. Seeking to find answers to their questions, they oftentimes turned to passages of scripture or the words of theologians, to try to make sense of it all.

In many instances, this movement towards the tradition was unconscious, while oftentimes, it was, in fact, a more concerted process. However, instinctively there seems

229 O'Connell Killen and De Beer *The Art of Theological Reflection*, viii.

230 James D. Whitehead and Evelyn E. Whitehead. *Method in Ministry* 5.

231 Ibid. 6.

to have been an awareness that the tradition had something to offer to the discussion, to the reflective process, that it was an important piece in the jigsaw. Another chapter will delve somewhat into the tradition in order to gain some insight into what it has to offer the reflective practitioner. Essentially, while the tradition cannot offer an agreed definition of atonement, or indeed neither can it proffer a solution to the problem of suffering, it can nevertheless, reach out and scaffold the reflective process, in a supportive and at times, empowering way. Therefore, the tradition is a key conversation partner and one which draws us into the Word of God and connects us with a historical narrative which supports and connects us, to the universal questioning.

It is interesting how some people are quite emotional and share their thoughts, feelings and emotions around a particular issue readily and with spontaneity. This, of course, can be done through the use of language or indeed, by painting a word picture of what the emotion stirs up within the reflector, often unconsciously. Language and imagery are important signposts when listening and attending to the experience of another person. Language can indeed give a very clear indication of what has been experienced. Some people are demonstrably comfortable with the use of words to explore their feelings and they can give delightful insight into the thought process and experience of the reflector in relation to the subject under investigation.

However, for others, words do not come that easily. Neither, do words always articulate clearly what the person is thinking or feeling. We can find it a challenge to use the right words to say what it is we want to say. Some people may not be particularly verbally demonstrative about how they feel and, very often, the creation of a word picture, an image which helps to explore what perhaps, cannot be said in any other way. In turn, this becomes the key which opens the doorway to a richer and deeper insight than any words can give. In attending to the experience of the chaplains interviewed, I will pay specific and marked attention to their use of language and imagery which, I believe, gives deep and meaningful insight into their understanding (and experience) of faith and of ministry. Several times when questions challenged them to provide a ready answer or when words failed them for whatever reason, it was an image which spoke of what they had earlier struggled to articulate. In order to achieve this, I will be guided principally by the framework, which O'Connell Killen and De Beer use in their text *The Art of Theological Reflection* which will add a significant layer to my interrogation of the data.

Their reflective process moves through five stages – experience, feelings, images, insight and action. Experience, with its inner and outer dimensions, is a constant, dynamic flow.²³² When we enter into our experience, according to O’Connell Killen and De Beer, and narrate it nonjudgmentally and attentively, we find it saturated with feeling. Our feelings exemplify the human need for meaning, a drive that the Christian tradition understands as the desire to know reality intimately and ultimately to know God.²³³ Feelings are our embodied affective and intelligent responses to reality as we encounter it. O’Connell Killen and De Beer say, feelings are a necessary component of the movement toward insight. They are clues to the meaning of our experience. We cannot have transformative insights without them.²³⁴ I would strongly concur with this line of thinking and this is why I wish to add this aspect to the Whiteheads’ method of reflection. This will enhance the learning and insight achievable from the data that has been collected from my interviews. Again, to borrow somewhat from O’Connell Killen and De Beer, a feeling response to a situation is potent with meaning, even when we are not able immediately to state it.²³⁵

The key, of course, is to be able to name the feelings without judgment, without condemnation and without a sense of reluctance. The challenge, can be to name or identify the feeling and this is where the use of imagery can prove to be a useful addition to a reflective process. Using an image can make the naming of the feeling attached to the image less loaded or challenging. It can articulate feeling and insight in a most unobtrusive way but can also help to get to the depth of the feeling.

Feelings in any experience carry energy. They embody a holistic response to our existence and are a source for creativity. The feelings that accompany our experience are the carriers of unspoken, unrecognized questions, values and wisdom and the key to their conceptualisation. If we attend to those feelings as a gift, they can help us to begin to articulate our question (or issue or problem) by leading us to an image.²³⁶ We give shape and voice to our feelings in the language of imagery. They symbolise our experience. They help us to name our experience. Images invite us into a deeper conversation than

232 O’Connell Killen and De Beer. *The Art of Theological Reflection*, 21.

233 Ibid. 27.

234 Ibid. 27.

235 O’Connell Killen and De Beer, 29.

236 Ibid. 33.

perhaps we first planned on having about the issue at hand. They invite us to relate to them. An image, that captures experience acts like a metaphor, disclosing and surprising what is familiar and perhaps, not so in our experience. They help to enrich and broaden what we know and what we value. They add depth to a conversation. They speak, when words can fail.

Essentially the method of reflection which will take place in this thesis will take the following direction. I will begin the process of attending by entering into the experience of the chaplains, hearing their narrative, looking and listening for words, images, feelings, emotions – key prompters, all of which will help to lead me into a deeper reflection around the issue of faith in their lives and ministry. During this process of attentive listening, I will seek out the information which is also available in the personal experience, the Christian tradition and the cultural context which again, will support an authentic and congruent conversation. The next step in the process is what the Whiteheads call assertion and this will involve a dialogue between experience, culture and tradition and framed by the pillars of challenge and mutual clarification. This will offer insight and will provide signposts for the final part of the conversation – pastoral response. O’Connell Killen and De Beer name this as action but I would like to call it response and transformation. In other words, the response will not only respond or answer a particular question but, will in addition also offer some suggestions on how transformation or growth can be facilitated and encouraged.

2.10.2 Asserting – The Critical Conversation

The next part of the theological reflection process will involve what the Whiteheads refer to as assertion. Having listened to the experience of the chaplains, seeking to locate and identify feelings and images, I will proceed to undertake a process of assertion or in other words, a critical conversation between the three dialogue partners. In this conversation, I will seek to discover how they speak to each other in relation to faith in the life and ministry of healthcare chaplains. The Whiteheads’ method of theological reflection refers to this as an ‘assertive relationship of challenge and confirmation’.²³⁷ Two assumptions ground such a framework or understanding – firstly that God is revealed in all three sources and that secondly, the religious information

237 James D. Whitehead and Evelyn E. Whitehead. *Method in Ministry*, 15.

available in each source is partial.²³⁸ Laurie Green sees this moving from listening to the experience to asserting its challenges and opportunities as a step on the continuum of the action reflection praxis. It is a move from those impressionistic anecdotes into factual analysis – from generalised sketches to specific description. In any action – reflection praxis there will be a need to stand back a little from the situation in order to carefully analyse the hard facts of the issue, while at the same time, it will be important to keep well rooted in the experience of it all.²³⁹

This stage of the reflective process can, according to the Whiteheads' method, be clarified using two metaphors – conversation and crucible. The conversation aspect of the process involves allowing the different voices to be heard and enabled to freely speak to each other. The challenge, of course, is to try to bring the separate and oftentimes, conflicting voices into dialogue. This is where we hear what is consistent and equally what is divergent, in terms of values, norms, mores and standards within the subject under consideration which in this context is framed by the trigger question 'Do Chaplains need to be people of faith?'

The second image is that of a crucible. The diverse information is poured into a single container where insights and convictions are allowed to interact with one another. This image suggests an uncontrollable intermingling of all three dialogue partners, which will allow for an authentic and unhindered reflective experience. This mirrors the river image mentioned earlier. In the ebb and flow of the river, the movement can be nuanced at times, but at others, it is uncontrollable, going in its own direction, creating its own waves. The crucible offers a similar image of interaction between the dialogue partners. In throwing all three into the crucible, they will create their own waves, interact in a direction that is impossible to predict or control. According to the Whiteheads, the image of a crucible is suggestive of transformation, something which can happen at this point in the journey, if we can handle the volatile components with care. Pastoral reflection requires assertion at both a theological and interpersonal level. A willingness to face diversity and to tolerate ambiguity and difference is also needed.²⁴⁰ This part of the process involves some degree of judgment making in relation to the information gained

238 Ibid. 15.

239 Laurie Green. *Let's Do Theology*, 60.

240 Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, 15/16.

from all three dialogue partners. In other words, we need to be able to create a conversation that is framed by a capacity to engage maturely and critically with experience, tradition and culture so that essentially, we can get to the heart of the matter.

2.11 Pastoral Response – Insight and Transformation

This final part of the theological reflection process will involve looking at what inductively emerges from the ‘befriending the crucible’ exercise. The key strength of the ‘befriending the crucible’ process is that the reflection and learning are simply allowed to happen, to ebb and flow, to go in a direction that is freely determined, with no agenda or expectation, with an openness to let the movement simply follow its own trajectory. As a result, this will afford us with the possibility of engaging in an authentic conversation, one which will capture and develop in a cohesive way what organically unfolds within the crucible. This, in turn, will help to provide both insight and opportunities for pastoral response for chaplains in terms of their faith and the many issues around it. O’Connell Killen and De Beer have said, that ‘insights are an invitation to transformation’²⁴¹ and by taking the lead from the action-reflection-action methodology, this final part of the process will create a space to reflect upon the various pastoral insights gained as well as to explore opportunities for potential growth and transformation.

2.12. From Insight to Action – Methodology

The final component of the Whiteheads’ method of theological reflection is pastoral response. Having listened to the experience of the community, a conversation will be created which captures considerable insight into the strengths and limitations, which both the cultural context and theological tradition, bring to the conversation. Or, as the Whiteheads have stated, this three-step process of theological reflection is the space where ‘information is clarified, coordinated and allowed to shape pastoral action’.²⁴² This reflective process lends itself to the creation of a conversation which is authentic and congruent, which has depth and clarity. It firmly supports a process whereby insight and response can inductively come from within the pastoral community itself. In befriending our heritage, our culture and our contemporary experience, we will be able to gain

241 Patricia O’Connell Killen and John De Beer. *The Art of Theological Reflection*. New York: Crossroad, 2007, 42.

242 James D. Whitehead and Evelyn E. Whitehead. *Method in Ministry – Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry*. Chicago: Sheed and Ward, 1995, ix.

considerable insight into the reality of contemporary healthcare chaplaincy and to come to an understanding of what faith means to chaplains and indeed what role it plays in their everyday lives. This process of theological reflection or discernment, is considerably aided by the use of the innovative and bespoke method of theological reflection outlined earlier.

The reflective process created through the amalgamation of two methods of theological reflection, will I believe, bring a depth of clarity to what is unexplored territory, thus providing more insight than may otherwise have been possible. I believe, that the movement through the dialogue will be consistently solid and underpinned by an equally sound framework. I believe that this will bridge gaps which may otherwise have had to be left open. It will allow an opportunity to both articulate and explore, the feelings which the images identified in their sharing created for the chaplains. As a result, this will shine a light into another area which could otherwise have been left untouched. The blending of the two methods has, therefore, afforded a unique opportunity to explore the reality of contemporary healthcare chaplaincy and, to reflect theologically, on what faith means for those working in this context. It will help to name key areas of importance to chaplains in need of further consideration.

The Whiteheads support such thinking, having written that pastoral insight and decision are not just received by the community but are generated there as well.²⁴³ This is why attending to the experience of a community is so important. It means and ensures that through authentic, non-judgmental listening, the community can be enabled to move from passivity to action. It is from within a particular community, that its own needs can best be articulated and subsequently, addressed. In other words, pastoral reflection seeks not religious insight alone but, insightful religious action.²⁴⁴ This is suggestive of a listening process which listens from within in order to empower and encourage a call to useful action. Interestingly, this also corroborates with and supports, the assertion by Timmins et al, of the pertinent need for a more emic approach to chaplaincy research, in order to gain a more substantial view from within, than currently exists.²⁴⁵

243 Ibid, xiii.

244 James D. Whitehead and Evelyn E. Whitehead. *Method in Ministry*, 86.

245 Fiona Timmins et al. *An Exploration of Current In-Hospital Spiritual Care Resources in the Republic of Ireland and Review of International Chaplaincy Standards – A Preliminary Scoping Exercise to Inform Practice and Development*. Dublin: 2016.

For the Whiteheads, the critical test of reflection in ministry is not simply the quality of the insight to which it leads but the quality of the pastoral response which is its fruit.²⁴⁶ The ‘depth’ of the transformation is what O’Connell Killen and De Beer have named this part of the reflective process. They have cautioned, however, that not all insights will prove equally valuable or appropriate, for growth. That said, they have also encouraged that any important new insight, one that has carried a crucial invitation from God, will continue to emerge during our reflective process until we respond.²⁴⁷ Nevertheless, they contend that the movement towards insight is like a journey. In this particular context, the movement towards insight will be made possible because of a solid conversation, which an appropriate support system will inevitably generate. In this thesis, the journey towards pastoral insight and response will travel through the experience of contemporary chaplains, by listening and attending to their lived experience. This in turn, will allow space and opportunity for their voice to be heard, for their reality to be articulated.

2.13. The Uniqueness of the Bespoke Method

Having explored theological reflection as a methodology and outlined a new bespoke method to be used here in this thesis, it is important at this point, to demonstrate the uniqueness and value of this new method. After all, as I have already said earlier, there are several methods of and approaches to theological reflection any of which I could have used. However, in this context, I have presented something which I believe to be fresh and innovative, a method which provides the best approach for the task at hand here. Richard R. Osmer has posed four key questions in relation to theological interpretation and response in his book on Practical Theology which, in many ways, offers us something of value here to help ‘get to the heart of the matter’. He says that when exploring a particular pastoral concern, we need to reflect upon these four questions: what is going on; why is it going on; what ought to be going on and finally how might we respond. In our attempts to answer such questions, he believes that we are moved into the four core ethical tasks of practical theological investigations: descriptive-empirical; interpretative; normative and pragmatic.²⁴⁸ In many respects, this is not too dissimilar to the process that will be undertaken in this study.

246James D. Whitehead and Evelyn E. Whitehead. *Method in Ministry*, 86.

247Patricia O’Connell Killen and De Beer. *The Art of Theological Reflection*, 42.

248 Richard R. Osmer. *Practical Theology-An Introduction* 4

The four core ethical tasks of practical theological investigations provide us with a most useful paradigm through which to explore the uniqueness of my own bespoke model. If we look at the very first one – the descriptive-empirical task which involves asking the very basic question as researchers and as practitioners that we begin with – what is going on here – we see that this involves a gathering of information. In turn, this accumulation of material and information helps us to discern patterns and dynamics in particular episodes, situations or contexts. Here is where I also began my process of discernment. I listened to the experience of the chaplains interviewed asking them key questions about their faith and ministry.

Using the Whiteheads' and O'Connell Killen and De Beer methods as a guiding force, I was able to listen and attend to the experience of contemporary chaplains. In trying to discern and answer the trigger question 'Do chaplains need to be people of faith?', I was doing so with my 'third ear' to borrow from Osmer.²⁴⁹ In other words, I was listening not just for words but also the silent moments and what they might mean. I watched for the images, the word pictures, the body language that all in itself helped me to understand the 'what' of the process. Osmer says of this stage in the process that it is 'grounded in a spirituality of presence'.²⁵⁰ Presence is key to the success of any listening process that wishes to be authentic and real.

I believe that I was truly present both as insider and outsider in the process of listening to the chaplains whose narrative is at the heart of the study. This makes my first stage of the listening process a very nuanced one. It also has ensured that with such in-depth attending to the experience of the chaplains, a very clear and honest picture has been gleaned of their reality. The listening ear of the researcher was attuned to their experience in a very skilled and reflective way. This has led to a very solid first step in the process of reflection, which in turn, has lent itself to a more detailed sharing and discernment than may otherwise have been possible. This new bespoke method supports a listening process which hears beyond the immediate and looks with a new and enquiring lens and listens with the 'third ear'.

249 Richard R. Osmer. *Practical Theology-An Introduction* 5
250 Ibid 34

The interpretive task, or the ‘why’ of the process involves looking at why things are as they are. Osmer says of this phase that it involves drawing on theories of the arts and sciences to better understand and explain why these patterns and dynamics are occurring in the first instance.²⁵¹ He also likens this part of the process to reading a map. Interpretative guides he says, ‘must be wise in discerning which theoretical maps will be most helpful in guiding others through the territory they are entering’.²⁵² To transfer this to the context of the ‘bespoke method’ here in this thesis, I believe that I have drawn solidly upon the Whiteheads’ method of theological reflection but where there were inherent limitations in the approach, I was able to move beyond it and borrow anew from O’Connell Killen and De Beer. I ‘read the map’ and ‘wisely discerned’ that my theoretical base needed to be more solid. It lacked key elements which were needed to progress the conversation further. I believe I exercised the ‘wise judgment’ which Osmer names as key in this part of the interpretative journey.²⁵³ In so doing, I borrowed and moved beyond what I had found in my own reading and discernment process, aware of the limitations of the framework and of the need for a more fluid one for the task at hand.

The third question which Osmer says is of key importance is what ought to be going within the situation which he believes translates to the normative task of theological interpretation. At the heart of this is discernment which he says is the activity of seeking God’s guidance amid the circumstances, events and decisions of life.²⁵⁴ This, he says, means to sift through and sort out like a prospector must sift out the dross to find the nuggets of gold. It also means to weigh up the evidence before reaching a decision.

In truth, this question of ‘what ought to be going on’ was not one I asked in the process of my investigations or subsequent reflections. In contrast, I opened up the conversation, allowing it to germinate and organically take its own lead. I opted to borrow from the Whiteheads’ and engage in a three-way conversation between experience, culture and tradition. I heard the experience of the chaplains before setting it in cultural context. Then I allowed the theological tradition’s understanding of suffering to also enter into the conversation. It was an authentic, congruent conversation which simply

251 Ibid 4
252 Ibid 81.
253 Ibid 85.
254 Ibid 137.

happened. Listening effectively to all three dialogue partners allowed me to ‘hear’ what was important in each before placing them into the ‘crucible’ to engage freely with each other. This ensured that we heard what was at ‘the heart of the matter’ for chaplains instead of what ‘ought’ to be there. I believe the authenticity which is at the epicentre of the dialogue in this thesis has led to an open reading of the times, a congruent listening experience and the crafting of a very real conversation. The three dialogue partners engaged with each other without agenda, without expectation and without any idea of what trajectory the conversation would take. This, I believe, is a key strength of my ‘bespoke method’ of theological reflection.

The final stage, pragmatic, or how we might respond involves determining strategies of action that will influence situations in ways that are desirable.²⁵⁵ For Osmer, this is about ‘leading’ change. Here he talks about the different types of leadership and the overall goals of any change that may be possible. In relation to my own method, I have moved to explore pastoral insight and transformation. Drawing from the CPE methodology insight is the first step towards enacting change with an awareness that ultimately the only one we can change is ourselves. In this context, I believe that the section on pastoral insight which has emerged because of the conversation between the three dialogue partners (which will be discussed in chapters six and seven) offers significant insight into areas in need of growth within the chaplaincy profession. This insight organically emerges from the narrative of the chaplains and the conversation which follows in the crucible.

Insight needs to come first before we can move to transform who we are or what is in need of change. This is where the transformative element of the ‘bespoke method’ champions a way forward for chaplains within a very changed contextual milieu. However, drawing from both the conversation in the crucible and the CPE methodology, transformation is only possible if desired. My method offers insight but also a possible way forward. This pathway can only be travelled by the chaplains themselves if they are willing. Therefore, chaplains need to be their own ‘leaders’ and need to determine their own plan for the future. The cumulative method I have created offers insight and potential for change. After all, to draw from Swinton and Mowat, the aim of practical theology is

255 Ibid. 4

not simply to understand the world but also to change it, not through pragmatic regurgitation but critical discernment.²⁵⁶

In truth, however, it is more than responding to change. It is about determining what change is needed, what is realistic or possible as well as identifying within, leaders who can support growth and transformation, individually and collectively. I believe that the process which the ‘bespoke method’ undertakes allows for the needs of the community as well as a pathway forward to emerge for itself. The pastoral practitioners have named their own concerns and the conversation around cultural context and the tradition have supported and encased a wider discussion on what might be possible in this regard going forward.

2.14. Conclusion

This chapter has primarily explored theological reflection as a methodology not so much for pastoral practitioners but as a framework for my study. Having outlined the purpose of theological reflection as a didactic tool for those engaged in pastoral ministry, I have demonstrated its effectiveness as a methodology for a study of this scope. After all, at the heart of this work are the chaplains interviewed, each of whom have taken time to stop and reflect on the place of faith in their personal and professional lives. Theological reflection is a solid lens which supports the exploration within this work. Drawing on the Whiteheads’ model of theological reflection (supported by O’Connell Killen and De Beer’s interpretation of it), the conversation partners of experience, tradition and culture provide a steady scaffold through which to probe the reality of contemporary healthcare chaplaincy. This new and bespoke method of theological reflection will, I contend, craft a more insightful and authentic conversation around faith for contemporary chaplains than would otherwise have been possible. The next section of the thesis will now move to look at each of the three conversation partners in detail before moving towards a dialogue which will discern new pastoral insight and learning both for the chaplains themselves and those beyond the profession.

256 John Swinton and Harriet Mowat. *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 26

Chapter Three

Research Findings: The Ministry of Healthcare Chaplaincy in The Twenty First Century – First Person Narrative

3.1. Introduction

Experience is a key conversation partner in the theological reflection process. After all, the experience component gives insight into the reality of the group of chaplains engaged in the reflective pathway. This chapter will set up the second section of my study – a study in which each of the conversation partners of experience, culture and tradition will be explored individually. This will then help to provide a framework for the final section of the thesis which will involve a three-way dialogue of the conversation partners in order to identify new truths and pastoral insights.

At the heart of this chapter is narrative and more specifically, the narrative of contemporary chaplains. During the course of the twenty-six interviews undertaken in March/April 2018 (across a number of chaplaincy specialist areas and contexts) to consider and explore the trigger question, ‘Do Chaplains Need to be People of Faith?’, the adage that ‘we all have a story to tell’ was certainly tested and authenticated. Participating healthcare chaplains were asked several key questions, in relation to Faith, Theology and their understanding of Healthcare Chaplaincy, which provided a solid framework within which to consider and reflect upon the reality of their experience within ministry and beyond. By focusing almost exclusively on the person of the chaplain and their own personal narrative, it has been possible to gain some considerable insight into how they are both enriched and challenged by the role so many of them consider vocational. A crucial element here is the place of faith in the narrative and reality of each chaplain’s life and work and especially, how they understand it and its role and meaning in their lives.

Consequently, in response to the sixteen questions asked of each chaplain, a substantial amount of data was gathered during the interviews. Each of the twenty-six digital recordings were subsequently typed up and analysed manually in order to try to gain an authentic epistemology and truth in relation to faith and its place in the life and

work of chaplains. Initially, six key headings were identified which framed and supported the first layer of interpretation of the data collected – Chaplaincy, Theological Vision, Religious Practice, Faith, Multi-Faith Ministry and People of Faith. Further coding was subsequently done during which, three broad areas linked to the research question were identified – chaplaincy, faith and inter-faith ministry. Within each of these areas, there are further sub-sections which help, to give considerable insight into the lived experience of the chaplains interviewed.

3.2. The Route Into Chaplaincy

3.2.1. The Search For Meaning

The data generated has provided much to reflect upon in relation to why those interviewed chose to become chaplains in the first instance. They have cited a number of different reasons, giving a clear indication of their rationale and experience, in this regard. Consistently in fact, all the chaplains were transparent in their sharing, citing many personal experiences or key moments in their lives which had led them to consider healthcare chaplaincy as a professional possibility. Indeed, for some of them, the journey into chaplaincy was driven by a desire to live out their faith while also seeking answers to the existential questions which had at times engulfed them. They had sought to find a deeper sense of personal and professional purpose and wished to help others to do likewise:

And so, then I went to Boston College kicking and screaming, well not really, I mean I just wanted a more meaningful life in terms of you know, I am a practicing Catholic woman and that is my personal life.²⁵⁷

For this person, the quest to live a more meaningful life was essentially faith driven, and although she had come to chaplaincy ‘kicking and screaming’, it was a pathway she subsequently embraced as it provided a framework for her to live and practice her own faith more authentically. Chaplain X²⁵⁸ also tells of being dragged kicking and screaming into chaplaincy:

257 Chaplain A is a lay Catholic female chaplain. She is Irish but currently living and working in the United States. A married lady, with a background in Psychology she moved into healthcare chaplaincy to try to find more meaning in her life and a means to express and practice her personal faith more deeply.

258 Chaplain X is a lay RC female chaplain, married with adult children two of whom work in church-based roles. Faith is a hugely important component in her life. She works in a large acute hospital.

So divine providence, divine timing faith in God. The whisper, faith in the whispers of the Holy Spirit. The utterings of the Holy Spirit. I was brought into chaplaincy kicking and screaming. I did not want it.

For both of these chaplains, it appears that initially at least, chaplaincy, for a multiplicity of reasons, had been resisted as a possibility. However, despite some earlier misgivings, they both went on to become chaplains. For another chaplain, the quest to find a greater depth and meaning in her life began in the midst of domestic busyness when her youngest child was seven. At that point in her life, she recounts having ‘had a moment of madness and decided that it was time to go to college.’ She went on to explain that:

I had been at home for many years and when she [daughter] was seven I thought maybe I would do some study and I took a moment of madness and decided to do theology and had no idea really where I would go and I did a three year degree over part time, it took me six years to do it and came out so proud of myself with my third level degree that I thought the world would be knocking down my door to give me jobs, and suddenly they weren’t and I couldn’t really understand it because I thought I was so brilliant.²⁵⁹

Seeking a greater degree of personal fulfilment, this chaplain found that her theological studies proved to be the first tentative steps into chaplaincy. Essentially, the quest to find a more meaningful trajectory in life, was framed by a sense of wanting and needing to express her faith in a more overt and visible way, and this happened in the ‘gift that was handed to me’ in CPE.²⁶⁰

3.2.2. Drawn to be a Chaplain

A number of the chaplains interviewed spoke of what they termed being drawn into the ministry. One of them recounts how she felt ‘very drawn to being a chaplain and being with people who were sick’²⁶¹ following several years working in teaching and

259 Chaplain W is a female non-ordained Church of Ireland Chaplain, wife and mother, working in an urban setting.

260 Chaplain W

261 Chaplain B. This chaplain is a Religious Sister who was born in Ireland but has lived and ministered mainly in the United States for over fifty years.

parish ministry. Actually, this theme of feeling drawn towards the sick emerged again when speaking to another chaplain who works in the area of Palliative Care:

During my nursing I always saw the importance of, we used to maybe call it pastoral support in those days, and one of the things, as I said I worked in a paediatric hospital and I was working on an infant ward with seriously ill babies, mostly cardiac and surgical things but one of the things I did every morning, after taking the report I went to every cubicle and I gave time with the parents or whoever was there with the baby, just that kind of a sense of support. Now I suppose not exactly what I do today because I have a different role but it actually brought in some of that so it was something that I always felt was very important. And I suppose if I go back to many years ago it was ticking a box, you know if somebody came in if you were in a general hospital and was really sick, you saw they were a Catholic, you made sure they saw the priest, you made sure the priest definitely saw them and you ticked it off and that was done. I never felt that was enough. So, I always had a draw to that.²⁶²

This chaplain seems to have been drawn to offer some type of pastoral support to others. Speaking in a similar vein to Chaplain O, another interviewee revealed that she too wished to do likewise, albeit within a secular context:

And I suppose looking back on it I realise that actually it was almost like being a Chaplain, I was seeing a need and I was doing everything I could to help support the family who were in trouble I think my ability or my desire to reassure to bring comfort is innate in me and I think that is why when I became a chaplain or was doing my training that really surfaced and blossomed, that need or desire to bring peace and comfort where I go. So, I think nearly I was born a Chaplain if that makes sense.²⁶³

It would appear, that for some of the chaplains, the desire to become involved in chaplaincy ministry was born out of ordinary contexts and experiences which subsequently provided space for reflection and direction. However, whilst this process of growth and self-development took place within the ordinary and the seemingly banal, such learning would subsequently prove significant in later harnessing a desire to become a chaplain for some of them. Nevertheless, according to some chaplains, there are other

262 Chaplain O. This person is an Irish Religious Sister and a former nurse, who now works mainly in the area of Palliative Care Chaplaincy.

263 Chaplain W

factors worthy of consideration when discerning the chaplain's ministry. Running parallel to the desire to journey with people during times of suffering and loss, is a basic need to possess personal suitability for hospital ministry. They believe that motivation alone is simply not enough. Of key importance here it would seem, is the necessity to have the personal capacity and skillset to journey with the sick, the dying and their families. As one chaplain observes:

So, I think there has probably been something in me to be able to walk with people in difficult situation and I have a capacity to be with people at difficult times and I know that I have always had. I have had a capacity to relate to care for folks and not be overwhelmed by it, and there is a mixture of a sort of certain distance but yet still a strong empathy. And I do credit the divine maker for that rather than taking too much credit for it myself.²⁶⁴

Recognizing that a draw towards chaplaincy in itself is simply not enough, but that there is a further necessity to have a capacity to 'walk with people in difficult situations' is a key point. In summary, it seems that there is a need to be and to remain, sufficiently self-aware and self-assured in order to walk comfortably, with those they are drawn to serve. Remaining consistently reflective and self-aware is absolutely crucial in this respect.

3.2.3. Vocational Aspect

Several of the chaplains interviewed recounted feeling a marked sense of vocation in relation to their route into chaplaincy. For example, Chaplain B recalls a pivotal moment during her training when she became deeply aware of the voice of the Lord calling her into the ministry:

It was a wonderful learning experience for me and all through it of course my faith in God and I knew God was calling me into this ministry and it became so clear as time went on you know that it was important to be with people, listen to them, support them but at the same time also invite them to open up to God in their illnesses and so on.²⁶⁵

264 Chaplain E. This is a Roman Catholic lay woman. A former Religious Sister and trained Social Worker with a D. Min. Degree. She is Irish but now living in the United States and working in a Catholic Hospital in Mission and Pastoral Care.

265 Chaplain B

It would seem, that although she had already begun the journey into chaplaincy (she was undertaking CPE studies at the time), it was undeniably the realisation of her own personal human limitations that helped to redraw the parameters of her life (and work) and allow the voice of the Lord to be heard. During a period of intense and troubling self doubt, fearing she would be unable to minister to those with serious illness, she came to understand the essence of pastoral care and, by extension, experienced a vocational call into hospital ministry. Knowing that ‘God was calling [her] into this ministry’ provided renewed stamina and reassurance for the student chaplain.

Another chaplain speaks of vocation but also of a ‘professional interest’ in the people that chaplains care for:

A sense of vocation and also a professional interest that you know in caring for fellow human beings in the midst of joy, but inevitably in the midst of sadness and distress and a sense of calling that I may be gifted in this area and that I enjoy working with people and I guess also my disposition, the sense of affirmation or feedback I would have received from people you know in various stages of my life that you know they experienced my care as something that is transformative and helpful to them in the midst of crisis.²⁶⁶

Combining the two issues of vocational call and personal suitability, this chaplain takes the concept of vocation to a different level to previous chaplains. While chaplaincy is viewed in vocational terms by many chaplains, simultaneously, there also appears to be a need to bring strong personal (and professional) qualities to the pastoral relationship which can support and empower transformative healing. A chaplain simply cannot separate the personal from the vocational. In other words, aligned to the vocational appears to be the giftedness (and suitability) of the minister. Chaplains believe that there are core requisite skills that need to run parallel with the awareness of an inner vocational calling. For another chaplain, this vocational call came while working within another listening profession:

I have always had a very strong faith and I felt very much a vocational call to chaplaincy when I was working as a psychotherapist I encountered this I suppose you would say a kind of dilemma about the way the culture is and

266 Chaplain R, an ordained COI chaplain working in a large city hospital with a vast amount of experience and authority in the area of Pastoral Care.

recognising how much the spiritual dimension has to offer for healing, for psychological healing you know I always needed obviously my patient's permission to bring the spiritual in but I found as I matured in my work and depending obviously on the clients I more and more brought in the spiritual side of things including prayer, as appropriate so it was a very natural transition really to move into chaplaincy.²⁶⁷

A recognition of the contribution that spiritual care can make to personal healing underpinned a growing awareness of a personal vocation for hospital ministry for this particular chaplain. Therefore, the move into chaplaincy seems to have answered both a personal and professional dilemma for this chaplain, as it enabled and supported an overall merging of faith and professional identity, of personal vocation and professional empowerment.

3.2.4. Providential

For some of the chaplains, there is a deep sense of vocation evident in relation to their route into chaplaincy. For others, this draw or vocational aspect appears to have been somewhat providential in that chaplaincy seemed to simply happen at the right time, often without any great thought or planning:

Well, it was a strange, well I had been involved in, this is my third type of chaplaincy, I had been a chaplain as I said in a prison, and then I was a chaplain in a third level college and then I was in pastoral development in the diocese after setting up a whole structure and that and I had been, I suppose with seven years in it and I was pondering what do I want, I felt I was getting tired in it and I felt where do I need to go now? I would also be going to my spiritual director and we would talk, and I was talking about this and then just out of the blue I got a phone call from my, at a conference my bishop made an announcement at a conference saying that he was looking for someone to actually consider doing CPE because he needed to actually maybe put someone up for appointment, another chaplain in the hospital. And when he said that the thought, I said oh, that is maybe something I would like to try, but I did nothing about it. And maybe a month later he rang me and asked me would I consider it, would I be interested and I felt well, and there is where I am being called, and that is how I got into it and when I went and did CPE, I felt very content in it and very at home and I was saying that when the pupil is ready the master appears.²⁶⁸

267 Chaplain V. RC female chaplain working in a large acute hospital in an urban setting.

268 Chaplain I is a Roman Catholic Priest who has worked in a number of different types of chaplaincy and is currently working in a large acute hospital.

‘Pondering what do I want’ was answered providentially for this chaplain as ‘just out of the blue I got a phone call’ which led him to chaplaincy. Believing that ‘when the pupil is ready the master appears’, this chaplain firmly believes in a vocational and providential trajectory. However, he is also adamant that this was only made possible with an opening of the heart, to the call of the Lord. In other words, when this priest opened his heart to whatever pathway the Lord wished him to follow (in the midst of his uncertainty and unknowing), the answer came in the words and insight of another person (his Bishop).

The Master also appeared for Chaplain N²⁶⁹ in the words of another person but, in contrast to Chaplain I, she was at that point quite contented in her work. Working as a nurse replacing a colleague on maternity leave, she ‘loved it’. However, the direction of her life and future work was changed, through the providential words of someone she was to encounter, in her day-to-day activities:

It was there I met a very nice lady, a Roman Catholic lady who said to me one day, did you ever consider being a priest. And she said “I think you would be lovely working in a hospital with the sick and I said why do you say that?” She said your mannerism, everything about you is so lovely so that lady really gave me a clout in thinking about becoming a chaplain.

A woman, barely an acquaintance of the above chaplain, recognised her giftedness and spoke with conviction and encouragement to a surprised, but open listener. Once more, there was no planning, no sense of wanting to become a chaplain but rather, a chance conversation, the voice of another, led to the opening of a new pathway for this person.

3.2.5. Second Career

Moving away now from an intuitive interpretation, from the vocational or the providential, to perhaps a more pragmatic reflection on why some of the chaplains initially entered the ministry of healthcare chaplaincy, I will now outline some of the other reasons shared in relation to why they have become chaplains. Several of the people interviewed seem to have, in many respects, moved consciously or unconsciously almost seamlessly into chaplaincy. For many of them, chaplaincy appears to be a second career,

269 Chaplain N is a Religious Sister who comes from a large rural family, has experienced significant loss in her own personal life and has spent prolonged periods of her life working abroad.

an addendum to both their working and faith lives. Chaplain C, for example, states simply that ‘well I used to teach and I retired there a couple of years ago and retrained as a healthcare chaplain so that is the stage I am at now’.²⁷⁰ In contrast to Chaplain C, another chaplain speaks more passionately of the transition into healthcare chaplaincy.²⁷¹

As a second career, she speaks of the distinct advantages of coming with significant experience and maturity to such a challenging ministry. Arriving in chaplaincy with passion and energy which is underpinned by an earlier reflective faith journey is, in many respects, a core necessity she believes. After all, when you can bring a more mature outlook to both life and faith ‘you are bringing your life experiences, I bring not just my life experience in all of us but you bring a lifetime of your faith experience to chaplaincy as well’. Taking this point a step further, she speaks of a depth and groundedness that may be missing in the earlier years of life and, by extension, from work as a chaplain, if undertaken too prematurely in life. Reflecting that ‘yeah you are kind of grounded in something bigger than yourself by the time you arrive there, so that is how I would see it’, chaplaincy is something this person clearly sees as benefitting from personal maturity and lived experiences. Seeing chaplaincy in many respects as simply more than just a second career, her thinking while framed by passion and drive, is clear that the cumulative learning that life experience offers is both a key requirement and indicator of having the capacity to competently serve those who suffer.

Chaplain J, a former nurse and midwife tells that:

I just wanted something that would allow me to interact with people, not on a nursing level, but I love, and this is why I come back to the nursing home, where I love to go and meet people and I actually have nothing in my hands. I am just meeting a person face to face. And that to me is most important.²⁷²

With an affinity for working with the elderly, this brought to awareness an innate desire to offer something more than her current role accommodated or permitted. The

270 Chaplain C is a lay female locum chaplain and is Roman Catholic.

271 Chaplain K is a female Roman Catholic Irish Chaplain who works in community services chaplaincy supporting service users and their families.

272 Chaplain J is a COI Healthcare Chaplain who works in a number of Healthcare Facilities offering care especially to the elderly of her tradition.

challenges and time constraints of nursing appears to have thwarted what she earnestly desired, of going deeper, with the people in her care. The desire to interact person to person, with ‘nothing in my hands’, with no agenda except to meet ‘a person face to face’ compares to Chaplain K who believed, that she too, could bring the love and experience of her working life to her role as a chaplain offering that which her earlier career would not sufficiently allow – her time.

3.2.6. Death

Personal experience of bereavement appears to have been a catalyst for some chaplains to enter the ministry. For example, Chaplain D²⁷³ who shared openly of the death of her brother in 2006 which had a profound effect on her and her family:

He passed away rather traumatically for us and he had some kind of lung infection and spent three weeks in ICU and then died on full life support and the doctors were not able to figure out what happened to him.

His death which ‘was huge, a huge trauma in our lives’ was followed by more trauma because ‘eighteen months later my sister Jan passed away from breast cancer, so it was really such a difficult time’. Reflecting on these two enormous experiences of loss she said: ‘so it was like opposite sides of the spectrum of the End-of-Life care’. Yet, these two deaths are ‘what really turned my life toward hospice chaplaincy’ reflected Chaplain D. For another chaplain, he credits the death of his father as the catalyst for his eventual decision to become a chaplain. Mediating on the question around how he found himself within the ministry Chaplain F²⁷⁴ said:

I think one of the key experiences that connects me to, that I would see as connecting me to hospital ministry was when I was a senior in High School my father died in an industrial accident and I still can remember that, I see that as one way that I connect to hospital ministry and then throughout my life there have been a lot of times with retreats and I guess that I would say there is no one or two areas, it is a sort of ongoing journey with the Lord.

273 Chaplain D is an American Roman Catholic female chaplain working in hospice ministry and is also a wife and mother of two teenage sons. A devout Catholic with a deep sense of God working in her life.

274 Chaplain F is a Roman Catholic priest living and working in Texas.

3.3. What is Chaplaincy?

Having reflected upon some of the many reasons why they became chaplains, I will now consider what the chaplains interviewed understand healthcare chaplaincy to be. There was some consistency in their understanding of chaplaincy with some considerable variance also. One of the themes that re-emerged several times was presence and within this came a number of interpretations. To begin, for one chaplain, presence:

is being able to sit with someone and help them to articulate what is going on for them and to be able to listen at a very deep level. Maybe an awful lot of time beyond what they are saying and just be that sort of compassionate presence, without any agenda.²⁷⁵

Chaplain A reiterates a similar understanding, describing chaplaincy as an empathetic and caring presence with someone who is experiencing a transition in their lives or, experiencing a transition in the life of a loved one, so it is offering a loving presence. Chaplaincy is about providing a listening ear. However, she takes this idea of compassionate presence a little further, in that she admits, that this sitting with vulnerability, suspension of judgment and no agenda is challenging. Nonetheless, she argues that it is both a challenge and an opportunity to find a way in, an opening, a ‘nugget that would help you to get on that island’. For this person, it would seem that chaplaincy is about being present with patience and with an openness to be led by the person in front of them, to meet them where they are at, to get on their island only when they are willing and able to really let you in. As Chaplain U²⁷⁶ reflects:

Chaplaincy I suppose is just, it is being with people who are in a vulnerable place in their lives, as they go through illness or deal with being in hospital really and I suppose as a chaplain I am the person who is able to connect with them, be with them, spend time, listen to them, bring some compassion, bring some I suppose presence to them is the other big thing.

Essentially that ‘it is not really what I say, or what I do, it is actually being present with the person’ as and when they need such presence. Presence continued to emerge as a key

²⁷⁵ Chaplain I

²⁷⁶ Chaplain U is an Irish Religious Sister who has worked in Nursing, Nursing Administration and now Healthcare Chaplaincy.

understanding of the essence of chaplaincy. For example, presence as journeying as reflected by Chaplain O:

I suppose a very brief definition for me is journey with another person at a moment in their life, you know that you come in on them, and because healthcare chaplaincy you come in on them because there is an illness either of the person him or herself or a family member or significant others whoever they are. So, for me it is very much about going in as [O] who is the chaplain here and being there with them and allowing them to take a lead as it were, but then attentive in a way that you I can respond or maybe explore is another word I would use. It sounds very sharp but I mean it in a very tender way, that sense of something comes up and you what to do with it. It is being very gentle, but first of all I think being a human person with no airs or graces.²⁷⁷

For this person, chaplaincy is a sort of vulnerable journeying, in the sense that this journeying is an intricate web of waiting, offering and readiness. It is about allowing the person (patient or family member) to dictate the pace, to determine when they are ready and able to share with him/her who has nothing to offer but their own self, thus constituting a sort of vulnerable self-offering. The pastoral encounter would seem to be a walk into the unknown, into a situation or experience that is very much unscripted.

For Chaplain T, chaplaincy is about being present, offering support to help people figure things out for themselves:

I understand chaplaincy as a way to support a person, I will just use the hospital as a reference because that is the only chaplaincy that I know, but it can be for in general too, I see chaplaincy as a support for another human being who is experiencing some kind of difficulty and just needs someone to hold, an intangible you know, to hold what is going on in their lives so that they can just let go for a minute and perhaps think things through. And just listen and in that talking in the process that we human beings put together and organise our feeling and our thoughts to make a language, I think that in that process somehow, we figure things out for ourselves. We come to realisations and just in hearing ourselves speak words, that we have formulated we come to own what is going on within us and we little by little come to our own solutions. I see chaplains as the persons that sit there, or stand there or whatever and just hold a sacred space for the person to be able to do that.²⁷⁸

277 Chaplain O.

278 Chaplain T is a female Roman Catholic Chaplain.

Chaplain M also develops this theme of chaplaincy as supportive presence:

I understand chaplaincy as being present to another human being, coming towards them as a spiritual person, spiritual being. I recognise them as my brother or my sister, recognising them as spiritual being also and as a person who is with them in my presence and my silence just by being with them to help them to find God in their brokenness and their pain and to be nearer to God and to support them in their pain and their sickness in their journey in the hospital. Am I making sense?²⁷⁹

For Chaplain L, when asked to outline his understanding of chaplaincy, he reflected likewise:

You have to be a person for others, and be present. The two big components are presence, being present first of all and then engaging but you have to be present first you know and that is, all of these things are very exacting and listening, learning to listen. For priests to learn to listen! That took a good, few years. And still, it is a work in progress.²⁸⁰

For him, chaplaincy is being ‘a person for others’. Chaplaincy it would appear, is about offering a service that is driven by the capacity to listen and to be directed by the needs of the person and not those of the chaplain. Chaplain H considers chaplaincy to be a process of reaching out to those in need of spiritual support:

Well let’s see, chaplaincy would be when a minister or other person of faith reaches out to people in need, usually in some kind of institution, be it a hospital or convent or prison and cares for the people on a spiritual level, tries to address their spiritual needs which are part of the whole approach to a human being’s wellbeing.²⁸¹

Chaplain K considers chaplaincy as a metaphorical offering of the human hand:

I suppose it is to hold your hand, you know it is the person who metaphorically sits and holds your hand while you are going through the struggle and making that difficult journey not alone, not in a lonely isolated place.²⁸²

279 Chaplain M is a Roman Catholic Priest working in a large acute hospital.

280 Chaplain L is a Roman Catholic Priest working in a large acute hospital.

281 Chaplain H is an ordained woman – Presbyterian but ministering to a community of Religious Sisters in the Unites States.

282 Chaplain K

Continuing along a similar line and drawing from Ezekiel, Chaplain J describes chaplaincy ‘as holding a light in the darkness, of having the capacity to stand in the gap’.²⁸³ Chaplain E speaks of chaplaincy in similar terms, reflecting that it is, a willingness to stand ‘in the place of helplessness’, with no fear of being ‘there with another helpless’.²⁸⁴ It is also, as Chaplain G has said, about providing a ‘safe and secure place where they can find safety and trust and hopefully some hope, love, acceptance’.²⁸⁵ Overwhelmingly, for this particular chaplain, it is about being there in the mess, in the awfulness of the situation. It is also about being present to the brokenness and having the strength to stay with the vulnerability and the pain with a suspension of judgment and no sense of condemnation.

Interestingly, for some of the chaplains interviewed, there is a clear sense that chaplaincy is somewhat of a learning process. Chaplain F, for example, when asked what chaplaincy is, replied:

How do I understand chaplaincy? I still don’t understand it – I am learning as I go along, but right now my sense primarily my focus is responding to patients who request support, initiating contacts by giving people information both directly and I work indirectly with my colleagues who are not Catholic.²⁸⁶

Chaplain K reiterates this same point claiming that chaplaincy is somewhat of a process, a continual process of learning how to give of self to others:

I think it is just for me after thirteen years, other than marriage of forty-five years, it is the longest commitment I have ever had in my life. You know I have children and obviously there is that commitment and that is on-going but I have never had a job let’s say that I stayed with for that length of time, now I have worked in a variety of community services but for the same organisation and for thirteen years of my life I wouldn’t change it for the world. I have learned so much from the people that I have ministered to and I know that there is at least a few that have gone away not feeling isolated and lonely in their struggle because they had a chaplain. That I am absolutely sure of because people come back. I have thank you cards hanging on the wall that say that, so you know it is not about me personally

283 Chaplain J

284 Chaplain E

285 Chaplain G is an ordained Methodist Minister and Chaplain. She works in an acute hospital and has several years’ experience in chaplaincy.

286 Chaplain F

that is as much about the role of the chaplain and the, you know what would you call it, like the port in the storm, the eye of the storm, you are holding people in the eye of the storm, and there is great satisfaction in that, you know you need your on-going professional development, you need to have supervision, you need somebody there for the days when you are hairy yourself, and that too you know to have a supervisor who is somebody of faith that grounds you and re-energises you to go back into the struggle again with people, very challenging work but wouldn't change it for the world. Wish I had another twenty years to give. But good, great work.²⁸⁷

3.4. Understanding Faith

3.4.1. Faith

Moving on from the practice and understanding of chaplaincy it is now time to consider how chaplains understand faith. Indeed, when asked to reflect on the meaning and significance of faith, chaplains articulated a number of different understandings. For example, some spoke of faith as 'something to lean on'. Chaplain A speaks of her personal faith as something 'to lean on', with Chaplain C declaring faith in similar terms saying, that without God and faith 'there is absolutely nothing'²⁸⁸ Chaplain U reiterates such an awareness of faith as a *raison d'être* reflecting that for her, faith is 'something that motivates me, faith is something that you know keeps me going and keeps me wanting to bring goodness and help to people'.²⁸⁹ Another chaplain speaks of faith as the 'scaffolding around my life', something which 'helps me to find stability when things are difficult and when I can't understand what is happening or I struggle to see or make sense of what is going on in life'.²⁹⁰

While Chaplain X also speaks of faith as a scaffold and sharing an experience of personal suffering (childhood abuse) she recounts learning from this experience to 'rely on my God and savour to survive, and that built me up and I have fantastic courage in the name of Jesus. Fantastic courage'.²⁹¹ Chaplain Z also speaks in similar terms, naming

287 Chaplain K

288 Chaplain C

289 Chaplain U

290 Chaplain R

291 Chaplain X is a lay female chaplain, married with adult children, two of who are working in church-based roles. Faith is a key element in this chaplain's family life. She works in an urban hospital.

faith as an anchor which ‘gives me a platform, it gives me meaning, it gives me reason. It gives me a sense that what I have today is precious but there is more to come’.²⁹²

Some chaplains consider faith to be something which creates a sense of ‘wholeness’ or connectedness in their lives. One chaplain for instance, speaks of faith as having an awareness of ‘something greater than oneself’. For her, faith is about connection, about the wholeness of life – of self, of world, of God, of belonging, of trust and of simply believing that God has a plan for her:

A sense of a beyond what we see. A sense of the wholeness of all of life. And having a belief in that and trust in that, that things then do unfold the way they are intended to unfold.²⁹³

Chaplain Q, a Muslim chaplain, reiterates this sense of trust, of wholeness, of connectedness and of believing in the benevolent goodness of God:

It is about believing in a creator that created us, making my supplications to that creator and doing good work, doing good things, being an honourable person in society and the world. To me that is faith. That is something that is innately built into my human character, by God, by the creator, whatever name you choose to call it. That is faith in me.²⁹⁴

For a number of the chaplains, they declare faith to be about ‘trust’. Chaplain A tells how she ‘trusts Christ fully’ which makes life less burdensome for her, while for another chaplain, this type of understanding helps to harness a sense of hope and reassurance in the midst of personal and universal suffering:

Well, I think faith obviously is a belief and trust in something we don’t see, but a hope in not knowing. I guess I love that idea or that phrase of when you know, that you know that you know.²⁹⁵

Another chaplain expresses an understanding of faith in terms of being calmed amid the storm of life:

292 Chaplain Z is a Canadian, RC Chaplain who has also undertaken several research projects on healthcare chaplaincy.

293 Chaplain E

294 Chaplain Q is a lay Muslim chaplain working mainly in Paediatric Chaplaincy in New York.

295 Chaplain G

Faith is, there is a most beautiful picture that I have only ever seen once, and I cannot find it on the internet, and it is a picture if you think about it of a rocky fact and it is storming like when we had Ophelia and all those storms we have and the waves are coming up and the trees are bending over, they are nearly on the ground, but if you look closely at the rock, nestled in a tiny little hole is a little bird with her little chicks, that is faith.²⁹⁶

For several of the chaplains, this concept of faith as trust is, intrinsically linked, with the certainty of the existence of God. As chaplain A says ‘well faith for me is the certainty that God exists, that he loves me, that he is quietly present when I listen’.²⁹⁷ Chaplain G reflects along similar thinking: ‘so I guess faith is this knowing that I know that there is God but I think because God is a personal God and shown up so many times in my life’.²⁹⁸ Chaplain H says of faith that it is ‘a conviction and a power greater than myself who has created this world in a beautiful way and I am part of that creation’.²⁹⁹ Chaplain K who speaks of faith in someone ‘holding it all together no matter what kind of chaos seems to be raining’³⁰⁰ while for Chaplain P, it is simply ‘just knowing the one conditional loving presence of what I call God’ a belief in ‘something that I know exists even though I can’t see it, but I can feel it, it is present and it just this belief and unconditional love that exists all around me’.³⁰¹ Another chaplain, a Catholic priest, speaks of faith as:

First and foremost a belief in the person Jesus Christ and that God is constantly at work in my life and that I suppose I have this thing about going with the flow, or being in sync and that when I am in touch with where I am being called.³⁰²

Chaplain C speaks of her relationship with Christ in redemptive and salvific terms which is ‘sort of consolidated with the idea of you know Jesus, as the love of God who died for me, and for everybody else, but for me personally’.³⁰³

296 Chaplain J

297 Chaplain A

298 Chaplain G

299 Chaplain H

300 Chaplain K

301 Chaplain P is a lay female chaplain, Roman Catholic who currently works in a large acute hospital.

302 Chaplain I

303 Chaplain C

Interestingly, several of the chaplains interviewed spoke of faith in terms of a struggle. One of them draws from Michael Paul Gallagher's image of 'vulnerable faith' and, in fact, he uses this term several times during our interview.³⁰⁴ Another speaks of the centrality of faith in his life and in his priesthood but, almost immediately, moves into speaking of the struggle that faith sometimes is for him. He speaks candidly of the journeying aspect of faith, of a trajectory that is framed by a sense of the presence and oftentimes the absence of God in his life:

To me life is faith. I am only speaking to you about my faith, faith is everything to me. God's presence in my life is everything to me. My best friend is God, Jesus my best friend. On that journey of course there have been times when I feel God very near as I said to you and there have been the other times and times of failure and loneliness.³⁰⁵

Another chaplain shared an awareness of God's presence in her life and in her work, but also of the struggle, that sometimes comes, within her faith and within her personhood. She speaks of a dependence on God to guide her work, while having a deep awareness of her own personal limitations and yet interestingly, this understanding mirrors her perceived shortcomings of God at times, in relation to how He supports and helps her within complex and difficult situations. She likens her faith to a see-saw, a faith whose trajectory is underpinned by a struggle or a vulnerability as some of the other chaplains have also spoken of: 'So there are two experiences. A seesaw up and down. So, my faith is very much about that trust, that struggle but knowing that God really loves me'.³⁰⁶

Chaplain Y, a Jewish Rabbi, gave an interesting and contrasting faith perspective. Reacting strongly against the concept of faith or indeed of being expected to speak of it, she demonstrates an unease around all of this, instead speaking of not having a faith but rather of having what she termed an 'awareness', 'You know faith is a word that Christians use a lot more than Jews do. I don't know maybe we are sort of uncomfortable with the word because Christians use it so much'. Pondering further on the question, she said: 'so I am trying to think of a word that I would use instead of faith. But if I had to use the word faith, it is more like an everyday, keeping your eyes on what is important'.

304 Chaplain L

305 Chaplain M

306 Chaplain O

She then goes on to effectively name this awareness as a sense of personal duty or responsibility to make the world a better place in the way Christians understand the social justice agenda.³⁰⁷

3.4.2. Religious Practice

Leading on from the area of self-care, chaplains were asked about the role and function of religious practice in nurturing and supporting their own faith and spiritual well-being. Chaplains offered several reasons why religious practice was essential both on a personal and a professional basis for them. For example, Chaplain O shared how they felt without religious practice it would be difficult to find God in the pain of others:

I have a firm belief that I cannot find God unless, how will I put this, if I don't give time to religious practice be it prayer, reflection or whatever, how am I going to recognise God in other situations that could be drastic or traumatic or a situation that you can make no sense of at all from a human perspective.³⁰⁸

For Chaplain C, religious practice is 'as necessary as everything I do to stay alive'³⁰⁹ while for Chaplain E, is it about forging a Christian identity.³¹⁰ Chaplain Q, a Muslim chaplain reiterates similar point of the absolute necessity of religious practice for identity, faith and culture: 'Yes, it has continued to be part of my life. I pray five times a day. I believe in the five principles that makes me a Muslim'.³¹¹

Parallel to personal identity, chaplains recount the sheer necessity of engaging in some type of religious practice, to do and to continue to do, what they do. For instance, Chaplain J sees chaplaincy and religious practice as interconnected, both of which cannot be done without the other, in her opinion:

I think practicing as a chaplain involves religious practice. I would put it that way. In that there again it is community. And for chaplains coming together,

307 Chaplain Y — is an ordained Jewish Rabbi since 1990. She is married to a Jew and she has reflected on the centrality of her culture and tradition to her life and sense of identity. She has worked primarily in hospice chaplaincy.

308 Chaplain O

309 Chaplain C

310 Chaplain E

311 Chaplain Q

I am sort of bringing up chaplains coming together and exchanging prayers and worship and just generally talking. That is a religious practice. Because as chaplains I think we need to talk about the realities of God within our work, even our conversations before they started that was actually kind of a religious practice because we were talking about things that matter to us. And when people talk about things that matter, God is part of that. that is a religious practice.³¹²

Several others speak of the necessity for at least some religious practice in order for them to have the strength spiritually and pastorally, to minister to others. Chaplain E sees it as ‘a bedrock for spirituality’³¹³ and without engaging in some religious practices, it is, as Chaplain I has said like ‘drawing from an empty well’. In order to avoid this, it is necessary to ‘get in touch with the source and stay in touch with the source every so often’³¹⁴ to avoid an empty well. For Chaplain L, religious practice provides an anchor with Christ which keeps chaplains connected with the mystery of death and suffering which is at the heart of what they do.³¹⁵

3.4.3. Key Moments in Their Faith Journey

In probing what faith means for them, chaplains shared key moments on their own personal faith journey. These moments indicate the importance of faith in their lives and work, as well as give snapshots into key foundational faith experiences. For instance, several of the chaplains speak of faith in the context of a moment of loss. For one chaplain, it was the loss of a much longed for baby which resulted in an affirmation of her faith. Sensing the closeness of God through the kindness, compassion and prayer life of colleagues and companions at this time, she came to experience the love and warmth of God in her sadness:

I felt like God used other people, he used various experiences, just very profound and just, really, I guess in a crazy way, probably the hardest loss that I have been through was the place where my faith was probably the most affirmed.³¹⁶

A number of those interviewed recounted conversion experiences which influenced their faith journey and, their overall understanding of what faith is. For one chaplain, her

312 Chaplain J

313 Chaplain E

314 Chaplain I

315 Chaplain L

316 Chaplain G

conversion experience appears to have been a journey through different faith traditions and strands, before she finally found an understanding of faith, that has since shaped how she functions within her ministry:

And I think that is an interesting part of my journey is that I was raised in a Baptist, conservative Baptist church, baptised into faith there and then I actually went to a what we call free Methodist church and I went to a free Methodist undergraduate college and then I actually met and married a man who was Catholic and so I became very interested in the Catholic faith and was confirmed in the Catholic church and stayed in the church for quite a few years, but then I actually wandered back to my Methodist roots, so I kind of came back to the united Methodists and so yes, my faith has grown and shaped in many ways over the years and a big part of that is just the influence of the people that I have met along the way as well, I think so.³¹⁷

Chaplain Q, recounts a similar journey through traditions in order to find an ultimate understanding of faith:

As a descendant of slaves I was born here in America, my mother, my grandmothers, my grandfathers and great grandfathers, as well as my father they were descendants of slaves, here in this society and I was raised as a Baptist and what turned me to Islam was the fact that I was about nine years old, I was asked to always go to the church with my grandmother who was a Baptist at that time and the first thing that I thought that the Baptist was not for me was at the church one day that my grandmother attended and she always had me and my uncle come with her, there was so much hollering and screaming and it just put fear in my heart, that this is not the house of God for me, because when the people start shouting and screaming and I saw my grandmother fall out on the floor you know I though then, this was not the house of God for me.³¹⁸

For some of the others, faith appears to have been based on an experience of chasing God, of longing to know Him and understand His plan for their life. Chaplain D recounted how she had ‘been chasing God since I was in second grade’.³¹⁹ Another chaplain has shared of the running and searching for God, describing a journey she says, which can be mundane and relentless:

317 Chaplain G

318 Chaplain Q

319 Chaplain D

I would be searching to find it. And I think it is a mundane journey, you know some days it feels stronger than other days depending on what is going on but always the role of prayer. You know you go back to the very beginning of why am I not experiencing what I know to be true, you know I know in my heart and in my mind that it is true so ya.³²⁰

Religious life appears to be another catalyst in relation to knowing, understanding and expressing faith for chaplains. For Chaplain E, as a young Religious Sister, she learned that the Christian vocation and role is person-centred rather than context based:

There was one key moment when I thought I should have been saving the world and my superiors decided something different and I ended up actually in my mid-20's working with one of our employed nurses in the Infirmary in the Convent and I thought, I should have been out there saving the world doing really hard stuff and not back here looking after little old ladies! And well anyway it has proved to be a very educational piece for me because at one point in terms of my faith journey, at one point I did have a very strong awareness and as the Angeles bells rang of being the hand maid of the lord and that really meant for me was, it doesn't matter who I am tending to because each one is important.³²¹

In other words, there appears to be a sense of learning from the pain of others – that pain is pain and how this pain is supported with faith or by faith. Chaplain G, for instance, has been particularly informed by those who despise God or who have little or no faith:

I think my faith has matured as a chaplain where you have to find ways to be a reminder of God even to people who despise God and who don't even believe in God and as I do that, I think what I realise is faith often comes because of experience and a lot of people who I have met have had so much brokenness in their lives, and if I can be with people as a represent, so they see chaplain they obviously immediately think of somebody of faith and somebody that is you know connected to God. I can just be with them you know in their suffering and somehow, they are going to somehow in some maybe minute way, that God was with them in that moment. So, my faith has really, I think grown.³²²

320 Chaplain K

321 Chaplain E

322 Chaplain G

In contrast, however, Chaplain L found that his faith was shaken badly in the face of suffering:

Yeah, well I think the first time I was badly shaken was with the encounter with unrelieved and human suffering in Nigeria, the indifference you know to, this wasn't universal but you could encounter it, and the ruling issue, to hurt and even kill other people, you know you are talking about very turbulent period. It was the civil war and we were just on the fringe of it but it was pretty horrible you know and but also the dreadful disabilities, you know children blind and dying from very simple conditions, very little help available for them and at the same time you know others doing well, because it is a rich country you know but more the shock of face-to-face human suffering, that was early on, but actually the first real challenge to my faith.³²³

3.4.4. Do Chaplains Have to be People of Faith?

Within the context of exploring what chaplains understand faith to be they were also asked to consider whether they had to be 'people of faith' in order to do the work which they do. There will be further exploration of this question later on in the thesis but at this point it is important to provide some sense of what chaplains themselves have to say on this particular matter. For Chaplain M for instance, chaplaincy is not about faith but rather, is about the soul/spirit of the chaplain so in principle, a chaplain need not be religious or a person of faith but fundamentally what they do need is to be spiritual or to have 'a sense of your own spirit'.³²⁴ For chaplain T, neither is there a need to have a formal faith tradition and that in some respects bringing faith or religion into a pastoral encounter is somewhat of a 'drawback'.³²⁵ In contrast, Chaplain Y, a Jewish interviewee, imagines a person needs to be practising some type of spiritual nourishment, but, that it is not particularly necessary for a chaplain to be a person of faith:

So, I think my answer would be if a person considers themselves spiritual but not affiliated with a particular religion and has a spiritual practice like for example somebody who meditates regularly, somebody who cultivates their spiritual awareness regularly but is not affiliated with a particular religion, yes, I think that person could be a chaplain.³²⁶

323 Chaplain L

324 Chaplain M

325 Chaplain T

326 Chaplain Y

However, for the most part, it would appear that chaplains feel that faith is a core requirement given the uniqueness of their role.³²⁷ Chaplain O believes because of the depth of the role faith is a necessity:

I think by nature of what we do, my one word would be yes. Chaplaincy is about something to do with that spark of hope within us, the God within us. It is something bigger than ourselves, so my answer is yes.³²⁸

Chaplain X is conscious of a growing awareness of the need to be ‘a person of faith’ the longer she works in healthcare chaplaincy given the challenges presented daily:

I do think they have to be a person of faith. Definitely, definitely, definitely. Because otherwise you know I believe you could make a mess of so many people’s lives. We come into contact with some many people and they are all vulnerable and fragile, and the more I work in hospitals the more I am aware of the fragility and vulnerability of life. But I don’t know how anybody could do chaplaincy work if they didn’t have a faith in God.³²⁹

Chaplain I suspects’ that ‘he would most certainly not be a chaplain if he were not a person of faith’. Faith, for him, is a lens through which he functions and therefore, it is faith which underpins his role as a chaplain:

It would be, personally I wouldn’t be able to be in the job unless I was a person of faith. It is a sort of it shapes how I view things, how I work, gives me the support to get me through so many different situations. And I suppose it is something that has grown, has just formed and I am sort of immersed in it. It has been a gradual building up of faith. I always say that I have been very lucky in my journey of faith. I always seem to meet the right people at the right time who guided me and took me to the next step.³³⁰

For some of the others interviewed, the answer was not as straight forward. Chaplain B, for example, maintains a need to ‘to have some belief system’³³¹ while Chaplain J believes

327 Chaplain E

328 Chaplain O

329 Chaplain X. It might be useful to state here that this chaplain works in a hospital which is also the county morgue. Therefore, she deals with suicide and sudden deaths weekly.

330 Chaplain I

331 Chaplain B

it necessary ‘to believe in somebody, to minister to people’.³³² For Chaplain R, it is necessary to be a person of faith in somewhat of a broad sense:

I think it is necessary to be somebody of faith in the broadest sense of that. What I mean by that is that it doesn’t mean that you have to do any one faith, it may well be that as somebody who doesn’t profess maybe in faith, in God as I understand God, but actually has a deep awareness of spirituality that may even be a secular spirituality so I think there is a sense of interiority that the person has a spiritual awareness and that isn’t anti-faith.³³³

3.5. Multi-Faith and Inter-Faith Chaplaincy – Learning About Faith From Other Traditions

Chaplain A shared that ‘okay so I am a Catholic person. I am an interfaith chaplain. I wouldn’t have it any other way just seeing one religious affiliation because that runs contrary to what I believe my calling is’³³⁴. The question which arises here is what do chaplains have to say about multi-faith and inter-faith chaplaincy and how proficient do they feel they are, when it comes to ministering to those of a different tradition or belief system to themselves. For example, Chaplain D operates from an ecumenical standpoint while, simultaneously remaining faithful, to her own tradition:

Oh, okay I am a practicing Roman Catholic and my faith is very much part of my job, it is also first and foremost it is part of my life, you know it’s a daily practice so I personally I pray the Rosary on a daily basis, I have faith in going to mass, I go to confession about once a month. I have really become, dived more into my faith and faith practices and its really has had a huge impact in my personal life but also in my profession as well. But we are trained ecumenically so I am Roman Catholic in practice but you know certainly honour peoples, my patients’ religious backgrounds and affiliations.³³⁵

Just as Chaplain R sees multi-faith ministry as ‘utterly natural’³³⁶, Chaplain T speaks of multi-faith ministry transcending difficulty and boundaries and indeed, as a liberating type of ministry:

332 Chaplain J

333 Chaplain R

334 Chaplain A

335 Chaplain D

336 Chaplain R

I don't find it difficult at all, I kind of like it because it frees me to be there for them no matter where they are, as far as a faith or not faith and it frees them to be totally who they are, and to just kind of explore what life is about and how they see their life.³³⁷

In contrast, however, Chaplain K admits to finding herself challenged when ministering to someone of a different tradition to herself:

I find it challenging. I am not as confident in, how would I describe it, I find it challenging. I am nervous that I will be seen to be trying to evangelise them over to my way, you know I think it is an age thing. But because I am aware of it I tend to prepare better when I am going to meet somebody who is of a different faith. I am hugely respectful and I would always wait to hear where they are coming from in their own tradition you know and I have to be cautious not to jump and say well I will find someone of your own faith for you, rather than to just sit to do the chaplain thing, to sit and be present, be Jesus to that person regardless of what faith they are coming from.³³⁸

But she is quick to also remind that multi-faith ministry is not 'a competition between faiths' but rather that 'our job is to be a presence, a compassionate caring presence to whoever presents in front of us'.³³⁹ Chaplain S also shares of her sense of multi-faith chaplaincy as 'daunting' because she feels she needs to 'more mindful, more careful to be sensitive'.³⁴⁰

3.5.1. Can a Chaplain Adequately Meet the Spiritual Needs of a Person of a Different Faith?

Those interviewed were also asked, if they believed a chaplain can effectively attend to, or meet, the needs of a person of a different faith tradition to themselves? Chaplain P believes this is possible because 'God is always there and God will make it right'.³⁴¹ For Chaplain M, 'the more you steep in your own tradition the more you can do

337 Chaplain T

338 Chaplain K

339 Chaplain K

340 Chaplain S is a lay female chaplain. Born Roman Catholic and then converted to the Episcopal faith about ten years ago.

341 Chaplain P

it'.³⁴² Another however cautioned of the need to be 'sensitive' and to 'tread carefully'³⁴³ while Chaplain U expresses the didactic value of multi-faith ministry:

I think so, I mean there is a learning in it and I think that is probably where a chaplain of a different faith needs to, I suppose, learn maybe the rituals or the customs for other religions so that when there are times that you know especially near death.³⁴⁴

Interestingly, a number of chaplains, had mixed thoughts on the effectiveness of multi-faith ministry. For example, Chaplain A reflected that 'I think yes for ninety percent of the visit because it is a humanistic interaction but is also always nice to be able to speak to something that somebody might be practicing'³⁴⁵ while Chaplain C considers that 'the closer the other person's tradition is the easier it is'³⁴⁶ to minister to others. Leaning on this particular point, Chaplain O considers that sometimes there can be gaps or that ministry can 'probably be incomplete in areas'.³⁴⁷ Chaplain R makes an interesting point cautioning that no single chaplain can meet the totality of needs by any service-user and thereby:

They can meet most of the needs but they are not, if there are specific usually religious needs, specific to any particular denomination or any particular religion well then no one chaplain is able to meet all of those needs.³⁴⁸

However, Chaplain Z feels that, while not all needs can be met, there are some key considerations:

Oh, if I were running a hospital those are the people I would want, but what I wouldn't want is people who are dogmatic, so I wouldn't want every person of faith, I wouldn't want someone who was dogmatic or judgemental or doesn't, I mean I wouldn't want someone who needed to proselytise but I would want people who are grounded in a religious faith. I would. Because I think it is like, you know St. Paul says – we are called to be all things to all

342 Chaplain M

343 Chaplain S

344 Chaplain U

345 Chaplain A

346 Chaplain C

347 Chaplain O

348 Chaplain R

people or as he once called that one. I think we can be religious without it is that statement of St. Francis or attributed to him, you know always preach the gospel and sometimes use words and I think if you have that background, you can minister well to people of religious perspective or non-religious perspectives. Without it I don't know how you would every touch people who are religious, I just don't know, and they want more than prayer and ritual. They don't just want communion or anointing. They want presence, they want connection, they want relationships.³⁴⁹

3.6. Challenges of Being Present: The Human Cost of Self-Giving

Just before concluding this particular chapter, I will briefly look at what chaplains have named as the cost of self-giving. Within the context of their understanding of chaplaincy and of faith comes, an almost subtle naming, of the price that is paid for engaging in pastoral ministry. Interestingly, these challenges seem to have commonality across the various contexts and cultures. Chaplain A spoke of a sense of disappointment 'that chaplaincy is not understood in a way that allows us folk who have worked really hard to turn it around in a way where we can seek a living'.³⁵⁰ Chaplain D regretfully reflects of a need to justify the role and to offer an explanation 'for the inexplicable to management'. Chaplain A refers to role confusion in relation to the people chaplains minister to, especially as a non-ordained female chaplain:

Yeah, I am disappointed at this time because you know chaplaincy as I mentioned to someone recently is if you are a priest, a protestant minister, an imam, a rabbi – people know what it is that you do. They see you, you are a man of the cloth or a woman of the cloth. They know that you minister sacramentally in some way to a person, to the sick and the dying, to the suffering. But when you are a layperson and you are not ordained and you are a woman like what do you do. Are you having a little social conversation but no like we are trained, very well trained to help people navigate transition and pain of themselves and their loved ones.³⁵¹

Another chaplain working in end-of-life care, speaks of human limitations, of the vulnerability of the chaplain and, of the uncertainty at times of what they have to offer, of what they can say to help or simply being aware of how powerless they can be, in the

349 Chaplain Z. It is worth stating that this chaplain is a leading academic in the field of chaplaincy who has learned from several painful experiences in her own life and is deeply motivated by a desire to serve others and help them to heal.

350 Chaplain A

351 Chaplain A

face of such overwhelming pain and loss.³⁵² A number of them named loneliness as a difficult by-product of the role. For example, Chaplain A reflected that:

And you have people like me honestly whenever you, I mean I am working on my own business now community chaplaincy, workplace chaplaincy, having many conversations, getting certified but there are days when I am lonely and low. They are days where everybody is, but I think for an extravert like me you kind of suffer. There is no support system out there.³⁵³

Chaplain D also names the loneliness of chaplaincy simply because those around her don't really understand what it is that she does every day:

Exactly. But I come home and I am exhausted because being, as you know, because you are a chaplain, you know being present for a certain period of time, like we have to do self-care, we have to pursue self-care otherwise it is over. We just need that, I just can't explain it, I can't talk about it with everybody and it is actually kind of lonely in a way, you know.³⁵⁴

Self-care was another issue that came up several times. It is recognized as necessary to function proficiently and yet, appears to be something which it is experienced as challenging to find time to undertake. However, in the midst of vicarious trauma, self-care is recognised as a key coping strategy for chaplains. As one person reflects, 'I mean I have been a chaplain for so long I have probably gone through about four different times of burnout you know where I really had to reassess and you know do some'.³⁵⁵ Chaplain E sees self-care as paramount to the role of chaplain in terms of self-preservation:

I do sense again as I said I came out of a professional social work background and I have many social work colleagues here, you know if you are in that line of work as we are in chaplaincy you need to have counselling, you need to have some place to go with your stuff, and as a chaplain we should have a spiritual director or somebody from where we can go for that type of support.³⁵⁶

352 Chaplain O

353 Chaplain A

354 Chaplain D

355 Chaplain G

356 Chaplain E

Chaplain N speaks of the need to self-care and debrief as part of a team, especially in the aftermath of a difficult working day. Given the continuous exposure to trauma this is necessary she believes.

3.7. Conclusion

A key focus of this thesis is the narrative and experience of the twenty-six chaplains interviewed. This particular chapter has laid out in a very clear way how the chaplains, as pastoral practitioners, understand what is at the heart of healthcare chaplaincy. They have shared in a very authentic and congruent way their experience of chaplaincy, their understanding of its key elements, as well as provided significant insight into what drew them towards this particular ministry in the first instance. They have also explored their understanding of faith and named key moments on their faith journey and in so doing, have demonstrated great courage and openness in revisiting some of the very painful moments of their own lives. The personal narrative, congruent with the CPE methodology and the research methodology used here in this thesis, has provided a very solid structure through which to allow chaplains to reflect on the very essence of their lives and ministry. Therefore, this data sheds considerable light on the experience of contemporary chaplains at a key moment in the development of the profession and ministry. It provides important and valuable insight into a vastly understudied area and what is crucial here is that we hear from the chaplains themselves around subjects of significance to them and their ministry. The next chapter will move to look at the second conversation partner of culture and in so doing will give significant consideration to the contemporary milieu within which chaplains currently work and function.

Chapter Four

Healthcare Chaplaincy in Contemporary Ireland – Culture and Context

4.1. Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to explore how we might understand culture, a key dialogue partner in the theological reflection process. Aside from being a key component of the model which I am using in this study, I also believe that it is helpful to contextualise, nationally and internationally, the experience of the chaplains interviewed for this study. Moreover, it will help to ground the later dialogue in this thesis with the theological tradition. Looking at issues such as values, biases, social and demographical milieu and so forth, this examination of chaplains' current cultural and contextual framework will help to provide clear indicators of external factors which affect and/or impact their service delivery in the twenty-first century.

All disciplines are influenced to some extent at least, by the context from which they have emerged. After all, as Anthony J Gittins has said 'culture identifies not only the greatest heights the human spirit can reach but also the lowest depths to which a society or individual can sink'.³⁵⁷ The introduction to this thesis has already explored the historical narrative of healthcare chaplaincy, charting the somewhat complex development of healthcare chaplaincy (and training), within the Irish context. While the focus or key objective of this particular chapter is cultural and not historical, it will, nonetheless, consider how some contemporary cultural and contextual issues impact upon development and movement of healthcare chaplaincy. Relatively speaking, the intention here is to examine and reflect upon the contemporary social, cultural and contextual milieu within which chaplains currently work. It will also explore the wider issue of faith and culture especially for chaplains working within an increasingly pluralist society.

357 Anthony J. Gittins. *Living Mission Interculturally – Faith, Culture and the Renewal of Praxis*. Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2015, 35.

The challenge for contemporary chaplains, is that this paradigm is continuously shifting. The context within (and indeed beyond) which they minister is somewhat fluid and significantly affected by external stressors and challenges. Indeed, to draw from Gittins once more, he speaks of four pillars of culture – material, symbolic, moral and institutional.³⁵⁸ In the context of this study, moral and institutional culture frames some of the challenges and changes which appear to impact upon the life and ministry of healthcare chaplains. Arguably, as society changes, so too, does the milieu of the chaplain. Essentially, the hospitals and healthcare facilities within which they work are a microcosm of sorts, reflecting the structure and context of Irish society. Moral culture, according to Gittins, is expressed and identified in the cherished virtues and values of a society and yet, the shadow side of this he contends, is revealed in its vices. In relation to institutional culture there are four key elements for him – politics, kinship, economics and religion/belief.³⁵⁹

In the context of this chapter, I will be looking at the values of economics and religion/belief/faith practices all of which will help to progress the conversation at the heart of this thesis. After all, the myriad of social, economic, political, racial and cultural challenges and issues facing society pour inwards and in so doing impact upon the work of chaplains. As healthcare professionals, chaplains cannot work in a vacuum and neither can they allow themselves to become divorced from the contemporary and cultural reality around and beyond them. Stephen Bevans reminds us of the contextual nature of theology, encouraging us of the need to take seriously both the experience of the past and the experience of the present by keeping in mind the context (individual and social experience; secular or religious culture; social location and social change).³⁶⁰ This is a useful reminder of the necessity to keep culture at the heart of the discernment process.

After all, Irish society has undergone some significant changes in recent decades, and indeed, continues to see ongoing major societal and cultural shifts in areas such as education, healthcare, social reform and so on. This chapter will look at some of the

358 Anthony J. Gittins. *Living Mission Interculturally*, 39

359 Ibid 39/40.

360 Stephen B. Bevans. *Models of Contextual Theology – Faith and Cultures*. New York: Orbis Books, 2002, xvi

many issues (principally within healthcare and education)³⁶¹ impacting upon the role, function and practice of contemporary chaplains in Ireland. It is imperative, I believe, to look particularly closely at emerging issues in education and healthcare as they reflect and follow many of today's developments within Irish society as a whole. There are many forces at play, some of which are human made, but all of which impact upon the milieu of the contemporary chaplain to varying degrees. After all, there is no such thing as naked Christianity and therefore, by extension, this would appear to imply that no discipline (especially one like healthcare chaplaincy) can remain unchallenged by emerging trends and movements. I will also look initially at some issues around faith and culture for chaplains within a shifting context. However, this conversation will be progressed further in a subsequent chapter.

4.2. The Irish Health Service – Vision, Values, Reality

Gittins has identified economics as one of the key elements of institutional culture. Economics, he says, concerns the flow of goods and services within and between communities. Each society (culture) must be organised in predictable ways with rules and conventions. Otherwise, he says, the day-to-day running of a community would become unmanageable.³⁶² As a result, I think it is imperative to explore some of the economic issues which have impacted upon healthcare chaplaincy in recent years. After all, chaplains are employed to provide a service and are not immune to the impact of financial decision-making.

The Health Service Executive remains to date the primary employer of chaplains in Ireland³⁶³ and therefore, it is important to examine some of its decision-making trends over the last number of decades. In this next section I will look at a number of the key movements or changes within the Health Service Executive which have impacted the trajectory of chaplaincy and/or some of the decisions made about its delivery in Irish

361 Given the shifting paradigm and the variety of challenges and changes within Irish society in so many aspects of life it has been decided to focus here on Healthcare and Education only. This is a pre Covid-19 study so the challenges of the pandemic on Healthcare and Healthcare Chaplaincy will not be considered here.

362 Anthony J. Gittins. *Living Mission Interculturally*, 40

363 Private hospitals such as the Bon Secours Mercy Health System also employ and pay a number of Healthcare Chaplains.

public hospitals.³⁶⁴ This short exploration provides a contextual framework for the clinical, financial and planning setting within which Irish chaplains find themselves working in, which of course, influences not only their service delivery, but their recruitment and remuneration.

The HSE which was formed in 2005, a year Brendan Drumm referred to as being ‘marked by great organisational and structural change’ following the deconstruction of the old health board system. The financial statement published that year by the HSE provides an indicator of overall activity within the organisation: 572,000 patients were treated in HSE Hospitals as in-patients; 513,000 patients were treated on a day case basis; 2,624,000 attended out-patients departments; 1,257,000 people were treated at thirty-five A&E departments; 622,500 calls were responded to by the Ambulance Service; 100,000 people are employed (directly and indirectly) to deliver health and personal social services and 11.5 billion euro has been spent on providing health and personal social services.³⁶⁵ These figures would appear to reflect the workings of a busy organisation but nonetheless in 2006, the HSE issued an Employment Control Framework Document in which it stated that ‘robust and effective employment control systems be put in place’ in order to ‘effectively manage employment levels’. This essentially meant that recruitment was restricted to approved and funded service developments only with priority given ‘to front line services’.³⁶⁶

This ultimately meant a lonely and isolated few years in the wilderness for healthcare chaplaincy. Recruitment, for the most part, was completely halted (except for a sporadic and almost clandestine recruitment of what was deemed essential replacement supported by business cases) which meant the Irish context became extremely challenging for chaplains. After all, as Gittins has reflected, no economic system can ensure the smooth flow of goods and services to everyone absolutely equally or in this context, this relates to some of the difficult decisions which had to be made in relation to

364 While private hospitals remunerate their chaplains along similar salary scales to their HSE counterparts (as per *HSE Employment Circular 6404*) there is a greater degree of flexibility in terms of staffing and recruitment in non-HSE hospitals in relation to patient/service-user ratios for instance.

365 *HSE Financial Statement, 2005*, 5.

366 *HSE Employment Control Statement, 2006*.

financial planning, choices which ultimately lead to a challenging period for Irish healthcare chaplaincy.³⁶⁷

It was a lonely period in the desert for chaplaincy but with the launching of the HSE Corporate Plan 2015-2017 came renewed hope. This plan was implemented and the financial report from 2017 demonstrates a number of considered responses to increasing health needs, and of course, by now the 2009 moratorium (which banned all recruitment) had been lifted. This 2017 report indicates that more people were seen, both as out-patient and in-patient service users, than in previous years and employment rates also rose with over 15,000 more whole time equivalents across various disciplines having been recruited.³⁶⁸ Once again, chaplains began to be recruited within the public sector like their other clinical and non-clinical counterparts. This actually opened up a new period for chaplaincy as it brought many new faces into the mix.

The HSE has experienced phenomenal challenges throughout its decade and a half existence and particularly, since 2007, there have been a number of policy papers, committees, directives and decisions made about chaplaincy within the HSE and beyond as a result. Some of these attempts at strategic planning have been somewhat subtle and ran almost invisibly parallel to the ongoing work of chaplains, while others, have been more overt with far-reaching consequences. For example, in 2007, the Adelaide Hospital Society and the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice published a policy paper entitled ‘The Irish Health Service – Vision, Values, Reality’ which provided somewhat of a reflective commentary on both the reality and expectations of a quality-driven health system. In the introduction to this document, it says that one of its primary objectives is to provide ‘both a Catholic and a Protestant perspective on the values which should inform the development of the Irish health service’.³⁶⁹

Drawing support from international literature on healthcare, this policy paper emphasises the importance of values in ensuring effective health care systems.³⁷⁰ These values are what provide a foundation and trajectory for designing and sustaining a quality-

367 Anthony J. Gittins. *Living Mission Interculturally*,42

368 HSE *Financial Statement, 2017*.

369 *The Irish Health Service – Vision, Values, Reality*, 2007, 1.

370 *Ibid.* 2.

driven, person-centred health care system. The values which this policy paper name as core to a successful and person-centred health system are care, excellence, justice and freedom.³⁷¹ However, the challenge of course is to turn vision into policy within the reality and context of the here and now.³⁷² Additionally, this appears to have become a key consideration for chaplains who strive to provide values based holistic care to the people they minister.

4.3. The Celtic Tiger

Importantly, the backdrop to such challenges (in 2007) within the health system was the ‘Celtic Tiger’, the economic boom which saw the Irish economy swell to unprecedented levels. The Celtic Tiger had a significant impact on the workplace culture within which Healthcare Chaplains operate. The genesis of the Celtic Tiger dates back to the bleak 1950s when Ireland appeared to be in terminal decline with an average of 50,000 people emigrating each year. Several changes in economic policy followed in the late 1950s and 60s overseen by T.K. Whitaker and Sean Lemass with Ireland subsequently joining the European Economic Community in 1973. However, between 1977-1981 the combination of tax cuts and spending increases resulted in the trebling of the national debt.³⁷³ However, according to Gardiner, the continued success in building up the base of foreign companies, the opening of a financial services centre in Dublin in the late 1980s, eventual political courage and cross party support to control public finances, large structural funds transfers from Europe and a favourable demographic factor with a young educated population, coincided with the take off of the American economy from the mid-1990s and thus the Celtic Tiger was born.³⁷⁴ Dermot McAleese has noted that the unofficial birth date of the Celtic Tiger is 1994³⁷⁵ with an eventual downturn and recession coming by the mid noughties.

In terms of health care and service delivery, by 2005, the HSE had been formed within the context of a society that was now beginning to experience financial pressure

371 Ibid. 2/3.

372 The document goes on to name a number of these challenges such as inadequate capacity, the amount of expenditure on health, access and so on. 2019 saw the HSE implement another embargo on employment which impacted on chaplain recruitment.

373 Kevin Gardiner. *Celtic Tiger and Future of Irish Economy with Overwhelming Dependence on Property Boom*. FinFacts Report. 2019, 13/15.

374 Ibid. 14

375 Dermot McAleese. ‘The Celtic Tiger’ in *Policy Options*. July/August 2000, 46.

with the demise of the Celtic Tiger. With a shrinking economy came an employment embargo³⁷⁶ and chaplaincy posts (like other disciplines) were suppressed with some ultimately lost. This moratorium on recruitment meant that should chaplains retire or move into another role they would not be replaced. For an already small cohort of employees, this presented healthcare chaplaincy, with a significant challenge. Indeed, the HSE Review undertaken by Fr. Brian Gough demonstrated that by 2013 (in just four years) there were slightly under eleven full-time chaplaincy posts vacant throughout the country³⁷⁷ with little hope of them ever being recovered.

The demise of the Celtic Tiger economy ran parallel with the surge witnessed in a diversity of peoples, cultures, race and religions within society. This surge in multiculturalism brought a new religious and cultural paradigm for chaplains to operate. The question for the HSE, which arose directly in the wake of Census 2006 (which documented how the growth in the Irish population had been accompanied by a significant increase in diversity, in national origin, ethnicity and in religious affiliation)³⁷⁸ around how best to service the needs of such a growing and diverse Irish population who were now service-users. The *HSE Intercultural Guide* was subsequently developed and published in 2009, in response to an expressed need, by healthcare staff, across a range of cultural backgrounds, for knowledge, skills and awareness in delivering care to people, from backgrounds other than their own.³⁷⁹ In their 2017 Financial Statement the HSE acknowledged that in the years between Census 2011 and Census 2016, almost 100,000 more people spoke a language other than English or Irish at home and that almost 50,000 people now had dual Irish nationality.³⁸⁰ All the while, chaplains were continuing to minister (and in smaller numbers) within a new diverse, complex and clinical environment which had increasing religious, pastoral, emotional needs and expectations. In fact, as of 2021, the *Intercultural Guide*, remains the guiding document for those working within the Irish health system as diversity and pluralism continues to increase.

376 HSE Employment Control Framework, 2009.

377 Fr. Brian Gough. *HSE Review of Roman Catholic Chaplaincy Services in partnership with the Catholic Healthcare Commission*. February 2013. Unpublished document – NAHC Archive.

378 Census 2006.

379 Introduction to the *HSE Intercultural Guide*. 2009. This document provides a very useful framework for all Healthcare workers around specific cultural needs during illness and End of Life.

380 *HSE Financial Statement*, 2017.

4.4. HSE Review and The HSE Professional Multi-Faith Chaplaincy Advisory Council

Within the context of the many societal and cultural changes developing within the HSE and beyond, a review was undertaken of Roman Catholic Chaplaincy Services. I think that these new developments are worthy of inclusion in this discussion, principally because it gives an important snapshot, into the thought process of strategic planners (within and beyond the HSE), in relation to the possible future direction of chaplaincy in Ireland. The first important move was the HSE Review which was commissioned by the Health Service Executive and completed in partnership with the Catholic Healthcare Commission. This review was undertaken by Fr. Brian Gough, who was seconded from his post at St. James' Hospital Dublin to conduct the review. This review is worthy of inclusion in this cultural discussion as it provides statistical evidence of the implications for healthcare chaplaincy of the HSE employment embargo.³⁸¹ A short, but nevertheless useful review, using a mixed methods methodology, this *Review* and data collected were analysed with eight key recommendations emerging. One of these eight recommendations was as follows:

In light of the above recommendations and to ensure their implementation the HSE will need to establish a Pastoral Care Council of interested stakeholders to oversee the development of Chaplaincy/Pastoral Care Services provided in all HSE funded Hospitals. This council is to provide advice and guiding principles which would serve as a framework for addressing the values and standards of the Chaplaincy profession, guide decision making and professional behaviour and provide a mechanism for professional training and accountability.³⁸²

It is this recommendation I will now proceed to look at, because the formation of this council is a demonstration of the HSE's commitment to try to serve the needs of its patients, families and staff within an evolving contextual framework.

The review of Roman Catholic Chaplaincy services began in November 2012 with five main objectives: to document the views/suggestions of Chaplains on how best to use existing resources in the current economic climate; to document the views of Line Managers/CEOs/Hospital Managers and other relevant hospital staff on what they look for from Pastoral Care Services and how best such Services can be delivered; to document the views of other interest groups i.e service users, patient focus groups, patient advocacy groups and to identify the effects/impact of a decreasing workforce on the delivery of Spiritual/Sacramental Care and to identify appropriate measures to remedy any adverse effects that a decreasing workforce has on the delivery of Spiritual/Sacramental/Pastoral Care.

381 HSE Review of Roman Catholic Chaplaincy Services in Partnership with the Catholic Healthcare Commission. Final Report, 2013, 2.

382 HSE Review, 18. This review is an unpublished document.

4.5. Multi-Faith Chaplaincy Professional Advisory Council

The recommendation to create a chaplaincy council was taken up by the HSE and the inaugural meeting of the *Multi-faith Healthcare Chaplains Group/Council* took place on 2nd July 2014 at the Dr. Steevens' Hospital, Dublin.³⁸³ This council represents the HSE's first concerted effort to consider what the needs of a changing society are in relation to spiritual care. Importantly, as the primary employers of chaplains, the HSE has the capacity to be gamechangers in how chaplaincy evolves and develops into the future. The structure of the Chaplaincy Council also seems to be reflective of its willingness to hear the expressed needs of its service-users.³⁸⁴ The main functions of the council were identified as developing policies, standards and procedures in relation to meeting the needs of all service-users.³⁸⁵

However, in order to try to achieve such objectives it was necessary for the group to have some sense of a shared vision and clarity of purpose. Therefore, the following were identified as key areas for development: the importance of having a common understanding of language in relation to faith and healthcare and the necessity to give this more time; importance of empirical evidence to support the work of the group; importance of clarifying what HIQAs position on spirituality and faith in healthcare contexts; the choices of faith and spirituality available to patients – concern in some places there is no choice; importance of training chaplains – concerns about differing standards of training; necessity to clarify what is ethical for the HSE regarding faith and culture; need the HSE definition and understanding of what chaplaincy in order to inform the work of the group; concerns about the current terms of reference – too ambiguous, too many subgroups; need

383 Minutes of Meeting, Dated 2nd July 2014. I would like to acknowledge the assistance of Juanita Guidera and Orla O'Reilly of the Health Service Executive in retrieving some of the initial documentation in relation to this committee.

384 Present at this inaugural meeting was Yvonne Gilligan (HSE); Diane Nurse (HSE); Fr. Brian Gough (NAHC); Margaret Naughton (NAHC); Bishop Raymond Field (Dublin); Fr. John Kelly (Council for Healthcare of the Irish Episcopal Conference); Sr. Pat O'Donovan (Council for Healthcare of the Irish Episcopal Conference); Rev. Bruce Pierce (St Lukes); Swami Puraananda (Hindu Cultural Centre); Canon Daniel Nuzum (COI); Siobhan Walls (Humanist Association of Ireland); Willie Collins (Humanist Association of Ireland); Hilary Abrahamson (Liberal Judaism); Teresa Buczkoska (Immigrant Council of Ireland); Dr. Mudafar Al-Tawash (Islamic Foundation of Ireland); Riadh Mahmoudi (Islamic Foundation of Ireland); and Dr. J.S. Puri (Gurdwara Gurunansk Darbar).

385 These were identified as follows: meet the Religious, Spiritual and Pastoral Needs of patients and staff; ensure that there is Continuing Professional Development in Healthcare Chaplaincy; establish 'Chaplaincy Collaboratives' in line with the HSE's new re-organised structures and develop a workforce plan where necessary; develop a mechanism for assessing and evaluation of patients' Faith, Cultural and Spiritual Needs; raise the profile of Chaplaincy services in the healthcare setting; demonstrate the efficacy of Healthcare Chaplaincy within the HSE. Minutes of Meeting, 2nd July 2014.

an agreed definition of chaplaincy; concerns that there are not enough representatives on the group; need to see the HSE job description of chaplaincy and importance of getting information about existing chaplaincy services.³⁸⁶

After a protracted period, eventually in June 2015, terms of reference for the council were signed off. In summary, two key objectives had emerged for this group. Firstly, it was felt that pastoral and spiritual care needed support and facilitation within contemporary healthcare facilities (especially given the increasing variance in needs and expectations). Secondly, this council was challenged to provide a platform to exchange ideas and suggestions in relation to how to deliver a service in line with national and international standards of care.³⁸⁷ These terms of reference continue to inform the ongoing work of the Chaplaincy Council and it remains a key piece of work for the HSE.

4.6. Contemporary Society – A Shifting Paradigm

Anthony J. Gittins has identified belief and religion as one of the four key pillars of institutional culture. This next section will look at some of the changing practices around faith and expression of personal belief that have occurred in recent years. The European Values Survey (2017) tells that Europe is a ‘secularised continent’³⁸⁸ with many changes in patterns of behaviour in relation to church attendance, confidence in the church, the importance of God and traditionally held beliefs. About half of all Europeans pray or meditate at least once a week, with three out of four Europeans saying that they are religious people. It would seem, however, that ‘people pick and choose religious beliefs, doctrines and practices mixing and matching them’. So much so, that sociologists now speak of ‘cafeteria religion’ or ‘church-free spirituality’.³⁸⁹ The European Values Study was initiated by the European Value Systems Study Group in the late 1970s with an original aim to explore ‘the moral and social values underlying European social and political institutions’.³⁹⁰ Looking at values, especially Christian values, these surveys consider the geographical, demographical and cultural changes in European countries in relation to society, religion and culture.

386 Minutes of Meeting, 28th November 2014.

387 HSE Healthcare Chaplaincy Professional Advisory Council—Terms of Reference, June 2015.

388 European Values Study, 2017, Religion.

389 Ibid.

390 Eoin O’Mahony. ‘Religious Practice and Values in Ireland-A Summary of European Values, Study 4th wave data’, September 2010, 2.

The data generated provides an indication of church attendance, personal prayer practice and any significant changes in how people articulate their sense of value and meaning within a Christian (or perhaps secular) prism. However, as Eoin O'Mahony has written 'measurements of religiosity, or how religious people are, are highly contested'. Some argue that how religious people are, cannot be measured by their regular attendance at church services such as Mass while others argue that religious sentiment is seen primarily through attendance at mass and other rites.³⁹¹ It does, however, provide some indication of changing trends or of a shifting paradigm in relation to theory and practice. Essentially, the reality is that Europe is changing. Writing in 2010, Santiago Perez Nievas and Guillermo Cordero indicated that 'secularisation theory' had had a significant role to play in the gear shift in Europe. Keeping religion away from government was seen as a means of protecting citizens' rights to a religious freedom.³⁹² While secularisation theory was the dominant paradigm in the sociology of religion for most of the twentieth century, it was not without its limitations, being unable to explain variances in religious beliefs and practices.³⁹³ While data and theories have shortcomings, in this instance, they demonstrate and validate a changing society in relation to faith and church.

From the 1970s with the first EVS up to the present day there has been marked changes in Ireland in relation to Mass attendance. Figures in the 1970s reached up to 95% attendance at daily mass with the figures now much lower, at somewhere in the mid forties.³⁹⁴ People are now seeking other forms of religious expression and spiritual meaning outside of the traditional church practices. The HSE, as the primary employer of chaplains, has tried to respond to the needs of a changing society and health system in relation to caring for the pastoral and spiritual needs of service users, by creating the Chaplaincy Advisory Council. This council is tasked with responding to the needs and expectations of a changed Ireland so that the spiritual and pastoral needs of all service users can be met irrespective of race, creed or religion/belief system. Irish society has witnessed an unprecedented level of change in recent decades in all aspects of life but especially in areas such as church status, religious practice, education and healthcare. All these changes ran parallel with an explosion in the diversity of cultures, races and

391 Ibid. 4.

392 Santiago Perez Nievas and Guillermo Cordero. 'Religious Change in Europe (1980-2008) Conference Paper 2010, 2.

393 Ibid. 8.

394 Eoin O'Mahony. 'Religious Practice... 4

religions that now co-exist in a new more secular and pluralistic Ireland. Historically, the Catholic Church has held a central place in the life and fabric of Irish society but this position has been greatly challenged by recent events in church history. The various church scandals, the decline in Mass attendance and the increasing secularisation of society have all impacted upon church reputation and rank.

4.7. Changing Landscape For The Catholic Church

While the 2016 Census has demonstrated that Ireland remains a predominantly Catholic country, the percentage of the population who identified as Catholic on the census has fallen sharply from 84.2% in 2011 to 78.3% in 2016. Consequently, there has also been a corresponding rise in the number with no religion which grew 73.6% or an increase of 198,600 people. There are now just marginally under ten per cent of the entire population who identify as having no religion.³⁹⁵ Forty-five per cent of those who identify as no religion fall into the 20-39 age category, clearly demonstrating a disconnect from the Catholic Church by those aged under forty, as well as the impact of increasing pluralism and secularisation on faith, religion and church affiliation. Interestingly, the number of Muslims in Ireland has also increased by 14,200 and the number of Orthodox has increased by 37.5% demonstrating a rapid and visible shift in the religious culture and makeup of Irish society.

Apart from the 2016 Census, there have been other strong indicators of the changing cultural context in Ireland. Mass attendance statistics also give considerable insight into the changing demographic. A 2006 poll undertaken by RTÉ showed that at least 48% of those surveyed attended weekly Mass as compared with a rate of 81% in 1990. In the years 1972-2011, weekly church attendance by Irish Catholics fell from 91% to just over 3%.³⁹⁶ Moreover, the number of Roman Catholic priests have fallen significantly seeing a decline of 16.4% over the years 2004-2014.³⁹⁷

Running parallel to the reduction in church attendance and declining number of clergy are a number of other significant social and legal factors, all of which have impacted upon the context within which the church and church ministries are now

395 Census 2016.

396 Faith Survey 2018.

397 Ibid.

situated. The Catholic Church, which had played a central role in the life of twentieth century Ireland, has found itself challenged in this century by the many scandals, which have now become public knowledge. In the 1990s, the Fr. Brendan Smyth case signalled the beginning of a downward spiral for the Church, with, exposure after exposure, of alleged child sexual abuse cases, all running alongside public outrage. The failure of the state to act promptly to extradite Smyth to Northern Ireland where he was wanted on charges of child sex abuse had both political and social implications, with the Irish government collapsing soon after.³⁹⁸

In 1996, allegations of abuse at Goldenbridge Orphanage were detailed in an RTÉ programme *Dear Daughter* which created further public outrage. However, it was following Mary Raftery's *States of Fear* programme in 1999 that the government issued a public apology to all those who had been abused as children in institutions.³⁹⁹ Over the intervening years there have been several other media programmes which have highlighted the various shortcomings in the care of children in church run institutions.⁴⁰⁰ According to Colum Kenny 'makers of Irish documentaries worked closely with groups of Irish survivors who are articulate and informed about the cases of child abuse'.⁴⁰¹ The news of the Tuam Mother and Baby home which broke in 2012, further damaged the standing of the Catholic Church in Ireland. Public outrage was sparked and a commission of investigation was set up. While this situation is on-going, further media coverage continues to create a sense of anger towards church authorities. However, it is important to acknowledge that Ireland is not unique in this regard, as in recent years, scandals in the church in Poland, America and Australia in particular, have also come to the fore. Such exposures have all had a significant impact on the role of the church and its function, within society.

There have also been a number of legislative changes which have put church and state into conflict in recent years with further negative media coverage ensuing. The call for separation of church and state has been voiced loudly with many demanding a total

398 Colum Kenny. 'Significant television: Journalism, Sex Abuse and the Catholic Church in Ireland' in *Irish Communications Review*. 2009: 2, 64.

399 On behalf of the State and all of the citizens of the state, the government wishes to make a sincere and long overdue apology to the victims of childhood abuse for our collective failure to intervene, to detect their pain and to come to their rescue.

400 Such as *Stolen Lives* (TV3), *Suing the Pope* (BBC 2), and *Cardinal Secrets* (RTÉ).

401 Colum Kenny 72.

rupture between the two. On 22nd of May 2015, Ireland became the first country to vote for same-sex marriage. Despite the Catholic Church hierarchy campaigning strenuously for a no vote the referendum was carried. The 34th Amendment to the Constitution was carried by a majority vote of 62%. The victory for the Yes campaign was televised globally, with the world glimpsing a very changed Ireland from that of the previous century. Here, we witness church teachings and state legislation clearly at odds with each other.

4.8. Implications

Such growing levels of plurality and apathy towards established religious practices, as well as significant legislative changes, reflect a significantly altered reality for faith-based roles, such as healthcare chaplaincy. Within the context of chaplaincy, which has traditionally and historically been a faith-based role carried out by ordained and suitably qualified lay appointees to fulfil the Christian mission of Jesus Christ, the movement away from church and faith practice opens up questions on the functionality (and arguably necessity) of such a role. It also demonstrates the increasing importance of groups such as the Chaplaincy Council so that objective and careful planning can take place. It is a reminder too, of what Stephen Bevans has said, that ‘no context is static and that even the most traditional culture is one which is growing, improving or declining’.⁴⁰² Within such a backdrop we are reminded all the more of the need for research and reflection within the chaplaincy ministry.

In the wake of societal and constitutional changes, chaplains now find themselves confronted with deep ethical dilemmas. In a culture in which abortion is legalised for instance, chaplains may find themselves challenged to minister to people having undergone a termination of pregnancy. While, summoned to minister non-judgmentally, this may nevertheless, provoke or trigger deep ethical dilemmas for chaplains who find themselves grappling with a conscientious objection and personal freedom conundrum. The call for privatisation of faith brings a significant challenge for those ministering out of a faith framework, some who themselves experienced hurt by authority figures, and are in need of support to continue their ministry.

402 Stephen B. Bevans. *Models of Contextual Theology – Faith and Cultures*. New York: Orbis Books, 2002, 6.

4.9. Lessons to be Learned – Faith Based Education in Ireland

Healthcare Chaplaincy is only one of many faith-based ministries that are challenged by a changing social and demographic milieu. In recent years, the spotlight has also been on Catholic primary school education and especially on the future (or not) of faith-based schools. Indeed, the debate around faith-based education explicates a wider cultural phenomenon, reflecting many of the challenges and changes which have occurred in recent times in Ireland, and indeed globally. Therefore, Catholic education in Ireland provides an interesting parallel and therefore warrants closer examination.

Much debate has also taken place around sacramental preparation and whether this is the role and responsibility of teacher or parent or both. There are many key policy informing questions which will determine the future structure of not only faith-based education but arguably all types of education in Ireland. The removal of the baptism barrier, for example, has already been a fundamental step in the direction advocated by those who wish to see a complete separation of church and state in key areas of Irish life.

But perhaps aside from the nuances and the idiosyncrasies under debate, and the various approaches under scrutiny in relation to the way forward, an essential place to begin here is to consider what do we mean when we speak of Catholic education, and what it shares with Catholic healthcare? What has Catholic education to offer an increasingly secular and pluralist society if anything? As the rubrics of good and effective Catholic healthcare chaplaincy are built on the core Christian values of love, compassion and mercy, it is perhaps pertinent to consider what are the building blocks of a good Catholic education. Or indeed, more succinctly, what do we mean when we speak of Catholic education and what is it about Catholic education that is unique or worth preserving? What didactic lessons can be gleaned for healthcare chaplaincy from the educational experience of trying to manoeuvre a shifting paradigm, while also trying to hold a place of influence and authority?

4.10. Catholic Education

Francis Campbell has spoken of education as a means of acquiring knowledge, values, skills and habits. But taking this understanding of education within the Catholic context of education, Campbell considers Catholic education to be of a holistic nature, of being a form of education which emphasises the whole person – mind, body and soul. He

takes this a degree further, and argues that a Catholic education provides the capacity to have empathy, compassion and mercy, but more importantly, it gives the ability to put these guiding Christian principles into action.⁴⁰³ What is truly distinctive about Catholic education for Campbell, is that it is about living a fulfilled life, one that is firmly rooted in the Gospels and which springs from the central Truth.⁴⁰⁴ In summary, Catholic education is grounded in a Christian ethos and is a values based approach to teaching and learning. It offers pupils an opportunity to learn and reflect upon existential questions within the parameters of the Christian story following a trajectory which is both inclusive and didactic. This in many respects, echoes the values-based approach to healthcare advocated by the HSE, and demonstrated by its commitment (through the formation of the Chaplaincy Council for instance) to provide a service which addresses the needs of all its service users. That said, for Campbell, Catholic education is something that must be fought for and supported. He senses a need to ‘retain conviction about the offer of Catholic education and its purpose and contribution to society and not apologise for that conviction’.⁴⁰⁵ Values, especially Christian ones are hard fought within an increasingly secular world.

4.11. Catholic Education in Ireland

Prof. Eamonn Conway has reflected upon the struggle between the Catholic and secularist agenda (in Catholic education). In an article in *The Furrow*, he has said that faith schools’ matter ‘because they make a unique and distinctive contribution to the educational landscape that is proper to an authentically pluralist society’.⁴⁰⁶ He goes on to say that a ‘truly liberal, secular and democratic society will welcome and accommodate everything that contributes to human flourishing and this includes the religious dimension of human life for those who wish it’.⁴⁰⁷ However, a key assertion of the secular mindset would seem to be that Catholic education seeks to exclude⁴⁰⁸ rather than embrace plurality. However, as Rik Van Nieuwenhove has argued, the reality is actually quite the

403 Francis Campbell. ‘The future of Faith-Based Schools’. iCatholic. 20th October 2016.

404 Ibid.

405 Francis Campbell. ‘The Church must be prepared to fight for Catholic schools’ in *Catholic Herald*. November 2016

406 Prof. Eamonn Conway. ‘Why faith schools’ matter and the challenges of divestment’ in *The Furrow*. June 2017, 354

407 Ibid.

408 Eamonn Conway. ‘The Right to Opt in into Religious Education’. iCatholic. 15th March 2015.

contrary and that ‘Catholic schools have done a great job at inclusion’.⁴⁰⁹ At the same time, he does suggest that because of the changing context, it is time for some soul searching, and to articulate more clearly what it means to have a Catholic school.⁴¹⁰ This is also especially important when one considers Conway’s view that Catholic education is a basic human right, and that the state has a duty of care to protect those who wish to educate their children in a Catholic run school.⁴¹¹ A key point here is that at the epicentre of the debate in relation to faith-based education is expectation and vision. What are our expectations of an education system which is framed by and built upon core Christian values? Indeed, Van Nieuwenhove has argued strongly for a move away from an over-focus on values within Catholic education. He has said that Catholic education should ‘not be primarily defined in terms of values’. They are an essential part of it he contends, but ‘they do not define it’. In contrast, he proposes that Catholic education be ‘primarily understood in terms of the contemplative disposition which it fosters amongst its students’ with a ‘theocentric focus of knowing and loving God’.⁴¹²

Reflecting on the uniqueness of Catholic education brings questions around the intrinsic worth of an education system that seeks to lay the foundation for holistic and person-centred learning. Perhaps, in addition, more importantly such reflections bring questions around what is the societal vision for the future of faith-based education? Archbishop Diarmuid Martin has said that the faith school must be a place where young believers develop the capacity to realise that their faith can bring an added integrating dimension to their future professional life and in their life in society.⁴¹³ Of key importance here is the need to offer and maintain inclusivity for all.

Conceptually, it would appear, that this is a somewhat similar *modus operandi* for healthcare in relation to the potential faith (and by extension healthcare chaplaincy) has for effective healthcare and healing. By striving to provide care that seeks to attend to all aspects of the human personhood, Catholic healthcare is providing space for dimensional

409 Rik Van Nieuwenhove. ‘Catholic Primary Schools-the challenge from Secularism’. iCatholic 5th January 2014.

410 Ibid.

411 Eamonn Conway, The Right to Opt in.

412 See Rik Van Nieuwenhove. ‘The Identity of the Catholic School’ in *The Furrow*. November 2014 519-524, 519

413 Archbishop Diarmuid Martin. The Future of Faith Based Schools in a Secular Society. October 2016.

care, that is authentic and real, for all service users. Catholic faith in healthcare is grounded in the message of the Gospels but reaches out, and is inclusive, of all. Just as Catholic education offers a holistic approach to learning, so does Catholic healthcare offer a similar healing one. Just as Catholic education, because of its values-based approach to learning, remains real and relevant in a shifting framework, so too does Catholic healthcare. A grounded approach to faith and faith practice, ensures that those engaged (by in large) in Catholic education and healthcare, remain unthreatened by those of all faiths and none. Instead, they welcome healthy and challenging dialogue and debate so that, a future service delivery where the needs of all service users are efficiently and professionally met, is possible. The HSE *Chaplaincy Council* is a very visible example of supporting what has historically served society well, while simultaneously, undertaking a solid hermeneutical reading of current and future needs.

However, while the merits of Catholic education and healthcare are recognised and valued in some quarters this is not universally so. Writing at the height of the National Maternity Hospital debacle in 2017, Dr. Tom Finegan observed ‘an open revolt against church involvement in public life’⁴¹⁴, a revolt which was emotive with many commentators looking to social circumstances, evolving attitudes and demographics to explain it.⁴¹⁵ Finegan sees that to some extent at least, it is an issue of ethos. Every institution has an ethos and Finegan believes that the controversy around the National Maternity Hospital has to do with Christian ethos and the fear that secularists have, that the Sisters of Charity ethos and values could challenge societal norms and mores. This could happen, for example, by preventing abortions taking place within the hospital.⁴¹⁶ Moreover, apart from the issue of ethos, another challenge now it would seem, in a somewhat changed Ireland, is to remember as T.P. O’Mahony reminds us ‘of that a great service was undertaken by the religious orders and congregations for the benefit, welfare and wellbeing of the Irish people’.⁴¹⁷ This is not to suggest a revisionist approach to church history, but rather that, it is necessary to remember the contribution made to education and healthcare, by the various religious congregations.

414 Tom Finegan. ‘Church and State in Ireland are already separate’ in *Irish Times*. 8th May 2017.

415 Ibid.

416 Ibid.

417 T.P. O’Mahony. Wall of Separation between Church and State is far from being built in *The Irish Examiner*. 10th May 2007.

4.12. The International Healthcare Chaplaincy Context – What We Can Learn from Overseas Pastoral Practitioners

Having looked at some of the key cultural developments within Ireland, in recent decades, which have influenced the trajectory of Healthcare Chaplaincy, it is important to move beyond the Irish context, even briefly. Sr. Pat O'Donovan has written that one of the most significant developments within the Churches and within healthcare in Ireland, is the development and growth of the pastoral care movement, and the emergence of healthcare chaplaincy as a profession.⁴¹⁸ This is certainly true and, as well as its development and growth, healthcare chaplaincy has navigated many challenges from church scandals to increasingly secular societal expectations. However, Ireland is not unique in this. Healthcare chaplaincy is developing and changing internationally and, like here in Ireland, is grappling with a myriad of similar concerns and challenges. Having interviewed a number of overseas chaplains in order to shed light on the Irish context, as well as consulting much of the international published literature and research, I believe, that it is important to look, albeit somewhat succinctly, at the international chaplaincy context. This will give somewhat of an indication of some of the various issues that are at play elsewhere.

Meg Orton's article on 'Emerging Best Practice in Pastoral Care' acknowledges that Pastoral Care is under pressure. She contends that the root of this growing pressure comes from a number of different directions. Health consumers expect that modern health care will be effective, efficient and evidence-based. In order to be accepted as part of the health care team or even valued as contributing to the well-being of patients, chaplains must meet such criteria. Failure to do so, Orton contends, will ensure the ongoing marginalization of chaplaincy within the healthcare system.⁴¹⁹ The challenge it seems remains consistent, both in Ireland and beyond, to engage in research, to become evidence-based, or at least to become research literate, so that chaplains can try to both attain parity with healthcare colleagues, and to ensure future preservation of the role. I will now look at the international context to give an overall sense of what is happening outside of Ireland.

418 Sr. Pat O'Donovan. Healthcare Chaplaincy in *The Furrow*. 265.

419 Meg Orton. 'Emerging Best Practice Pastoral Care in the UK, USA and Australia' in *Australian Journal of Pastoral Care and Health*. December 2008, 2.

4.12.1. The United Kingdom

In England, with an established church and a centralised health care system, chaplaincy has traditionally been dominated by a formal relationship between the National Health Service and the Church of England. While numerous posts were funded by the NHS a substantial amount of the work was done by part-time and volunteer chaplains.⁴²⁰ However, the service model in England has moved from a religion focused, clergy dominated model to a more multi-faith and spiritual one, with a move from a predominantly religious and sacramental role to a broader role, responding to the diverse spiritual needs of individual patients, their families and staff, as well as meeting religious needs.⁴²¹ Indeed, the NHS appointed Lindsay van Dijk, a humanist chaplain to lead the chaplaincy team at Buckinghamshire in 2018. Her appointment is seen by the hospital as part of ‘their commitment to provide a chaplaincy service with individual choice at its heart’.⁴²² Her appointment connects strongly with changes in the structure of health care in England which is also undergoing considerable change with a view to implementing a more integrated model of chaplaincy care, with publicly funded health care chaplains being employed directly by the hospitals to provide a spiritually-focused multi-faith service.⁴²³ It now seems that each trust in England decides on the amount and type of Pastoral Care services provided in their own area. Local demographics appear to be the greatest indicator of the specific needs in relation to Pastoral Care provision.

Essentially in England, the focus is on spiritual support and holistic care within a multi-faith environment with chaplains recruited and employed in the same way as other allied health professionals are.⁴²⁴ The College of Health Care Chaplaincy which represents the largest number of chaplains across the United Kingdom appears to have taken the view that professional structures are necessary both to preserve and to (further) develop chaplaincy.⁴²⁵ Chris Swift takes this point much further, by suggesting that, if chaplains are being required to clarify their professional status for administrative and political reasons, this opens up a particular question. Is it fair to simply ask chaplains, to

420 Ibid, 3.

421 Ibid, 4.

422 See Harriet Sherwood. ‘NHS appoints humanist to lead chaplaincy team’ in *The Guardian*. 9th April 2018.

423 Meg Orton, 4.

424 Ibid, 9.

425 Christopher Swift. ‘How should Health Care Chaplaincy negotiate its professional identity?’ In *Contact*. 2004, 7.

fit into a structure developed for other professionals, which, does not reflect or represent the needs of either chaplains or those whom they serve? Swift further cautions that a much greater degree of ingenuity is needed, if a professional status for chaplains is going to enable key features of their work to survive intact and allow them to be at the disposal of patients, families and staff into the future.⁴²⁶

4.12.2. Scotland

Scotland has long been to the forefront of research into the practice of Pastoral Care. They have also produced a number of policy documents since 1998 which have guided the practice and development of chaplaincy provision. Historically in Scotland, the practice has been to appoint Church of Scotland ministers as official chaplains to healthcare facilities, but in more recent times, other religious groups have been able to gain some access as part-time, honorary or occasional chaplains.⁴²⁷ The NHS Scotland requires the production of local Spiritual Care Plans, and any chaplains who had been previously employed by the Church of Scotland (and who work exclusively in NHS hospitals), have been transferred to NHS employment, which is now NHS funded. The result is an integrated model of healthcare chaplaincy with centralised funding and standards with the expectation of local variation reflecting community diversity.⁴²⁸ A *Spiritual Care & Chaplaincy* guiding document published in 2009 reflects this reality stating that ‘the responsibility for a spiritual care service now lies with the NHS’ and recommends that ‘NHS boards should ensure that the spiritual care/chaplaincy service is resourced in human, financial, accommodation and support terms to provide the necessary service throughout the year on a twenty-four hour basis and where this level of service is not currently provided an action plan showing how and when this will be achieved should be developed’.⁴²⁹

4.12.3. United States of America

Chaplains have existed in America since the first expeditions from England had their clergy accompany them on their explorations of the New World.⁴³⁰ Spirituality has

426 Ibid,10.

427 Kenneth Owens. ‘The Future of Roman Catholic Healthcare Chaplaincy’ in *Scottish Journal of Healthcare Chaplaincy*. 4:2, 12.

428 Meg Orton. Emerging Best Practice, 11.

429 NHS, Scotland. *Spiritual Care & Chaplaincy*. 2009, 4.

430 Tim Ford. ‘The Development, Status and Future of Healthcare Chaplaincy’ in *Southern Medical Journal*. Vol. 99, June 2006, 675.

also long been recognized as a part of medical care and is often mentioned in the mission statements of healthcare facilities.⁴³¹ However, over time the responsibility for providing chaplaincy services has shifted, from the religious community, to the healthcare institution itself.⁴³² Therefore, as independent organisations each hospital makes its own decision about the nature and amount of chaplaincy support it provides to its patients, families and staff.⁴³³ This resonates strongly with the experience of the chaplains from within the American context interviewed. There seemed to be no uniformity in relation to the number of staff chaplains employed within their departments. Indeed, in some cases it seemed very much to be on an ad hoc basis. Major hospitals have pastoral care departments which are staffed by salaried chaplains, while in smaller hospitals there may indeed be some salaried personnel, but with a reliance on visiting clergy to support specific faith needs.⁴³⁴ This variance in service provision is echoed loudly within the interview process here.

4.12.4. Australia

In Australia, spiritual care is driven through the prism of regionalism and is, in general, done on a faith basis.⁴³⁵ Consequently, in Australia, the parochial model is still the common one and chaplaincy appears to have no foothold at national policy development level. In many places, the Catholic and Anglican churches appear to provide chaplains to support members of their denominations while interfaith chaplains provide pastoral care to people of other traditions.⁴³⁶ Spiritual Health Victoria in 2016 released a guiding document entitled *Spiritual Care in Victorian Health Services: Towards Best Practice Framework* in which the key components of effective spiritual care are outlined and how best practice in this respect is needed.⁴³⁷ The core strategic intents this document has stated are to build capacity and accountability, for spiritual care to be provided as an integral part of person-centred care and to support faith communities, practitioners and health services to provide quality spiritual care, that addresses the needs of the

431 Ibid. 676.

432 Chris Swift, Handzo and Cohen, 4.

433 Meg Orton. Emerging Best Practice, 12.

434 Ibid. 12.

435 Chris Swift, George Handzo and Jeffrey Cohen. 'Healthcare Chaplaincy in Mark Cobb, Christina Puchalaski and Bruce Rumbold, eds, *Oxford Textbook of Spirituality in Healthcare*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012, 3.

436 Meg Orton. Emerging Best Practice, 16.

437 Cheryl Holmes. *Spiritual Care in Victorian Health Services: Towards Best Practice Framework*. 2016, 1.

community. This can be achieved according to the framework document through collaboration, developing a competent, skilled and accountable workforce, supporting identified needs and being a discerning, responsive, accountable and reflective organisation.⁴³⁸

The development of the best practice framework document came from a need ‘to address the lack of a standardised approach to good practice of spiritual care in Victorian Health Services and to achieve this goal and deliverable’.⁴³⁹ Many key areas are discussed in this framework document which provides a solid trajectory for future service delivery in Victoria and beyond in relation to training, governance, quality and overall service delivery. Key stakeholders have identified a number of important areas which need to be explored, to ensure continuing development and improvement of spiritual care provision such as staffing formulas for effective care service; bench-marking for spiritual care practice, outcome measures and awards with best practice models in Victoria, Australia and internationally; and specialisation in the provision of spiritual care.⁴⁴⁰ But it seems that in Australia chaplaincy is piecemeal and in need of greater care and attention.

4.13. Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that the context within which chaplains work, is changing and, while there is a growing awareness of the need for renewal and regeneration, there is little by way of consensus on how this can be achieved. This is possibly complicated by the number of interested stakeholders involved and the overall lack of certainty for any church ministries in the present day. Education provides a useful parallel for healthcare chaplaincy and, perhaps both areas will, inevitably in time, provide a mutually useful framework for development, growth and regeneration. This chapter has highlighted the shifting sands upon which chaplaincy is now constructed, how uncertain its future direction is and, how culturally it is impacted by many different strands. Society’s values, biases and societal shifts all impact upon how chaplaincy is delivered and how it will be in the future. Having looked at the second dialogue partner, I will now explore theological tradition and how by ‘befriending’ the tradition aids the reflection process, significantly.

438 Ibid. 4.

439 Ibid. 9.

440 Ibid. 20.

Chapter Five

Theological Tradition - Finding Meaning in the Face of Human Suffering – Constructing a Christian Theology of Suffering

*“Where is God now”. And I heard a voice within me answer him: “Where is He? Here He is. He is hanging here on this gallows”.*⁴⁴¹

5.1. Introduction

Kristine Rankka has observed, that for the person of faith, the experience of suffering leads to critical questions about God, oneself, oneself in relation to God and to others.⁴⁴² Michael J. Dodds, further advises, that the task of the theologian in the face of such questions is to speak without diminishing the mystery.⁴⁴³ For the chaplains interviewed in this study, human suffering is a daily reality. Standing on the precipice, oftentimes between life and death, hope and hopelessness, they are tasked with facing into the depths of the mystery spoken of by Dodds. This mystery, in many respects, is the search for God in the midst of life-changing contexts and situations. This mystery, to borrow from Dodds once more, walks us into ‘a realm beyond our human comprehension’.⁴⁴⁴ Perhaps, as Duclow has reflected, ‘nothing is both more ancient and yet more current than human misery’⁴⁴⁵ and yet, it continues to pose questions which demand our deepest consideration.

Suffering does not have a universal shape and there is no one single way to suffer. Suffering, is highly individual and yet, it occurs within a particular time and place, or put succinctly, within a specific cultural context. That context, Arthur and Joan Kleinman have argued, affects both how suffering is experienced and how it is expressed.⁴⁴⁶ I think,

441 Elie Weisel. *Night*. New York: Bantam Books: 1960, 65.

442 Kristine M. Rankka. *Women and the Value of Suffering*. Minnesota: Michael Glazier Book, 1998, 14.

443 Michael J. Dodds. ‘Thomas Aquinas, Human Suffering and the Unchanging God of Love’ in *Theological Studies*. 52: 1991, 330.

444 Ibid. 330.

445 Donald F. Duclow. ‘My Suffering is God. Meister Eckhart’s Book of Divine Consolation’ in *Theological Studies*. 44: 1993, 570.

446 Arthur and Joan Kleinman. ‘The Appeal of Experience: The Dismay of Images; The Cultural Appropriations of Suffering in Our Times’ in Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das and Margaret Lock *Social Suffering*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1997, 2.

that it is important at the outset, to say that this chapter is not an attempt to ‘explain’ suffering, nor, is it to give an ‘intellectually plausible solution’ to borrow from Van Nieuwenhove.⁴⁴⁷ Neither is it a defence of a God who can oftentimes be accused of standing idly by and doing nothing for those who suffer. Rather, this chapter will in some respects, allow the Christian tradition to speak for itself in relation to the question of human suffering. It will grapple with a subject long considered by theologian, believer and non-believer alike - where is God in the midst of human suffering? Karl Rahner has acknowledged the longevity of such a quest for understanding around the place of God in suffering, reminding that ‘this is a question which is universal, universally oppressive and touches our existence at its very roots’.⁴⁴⁸

The chapter will essentially be guided by two key terms, sacrifice and accompaniment, both of which will be explored thematically and somewhat succinctly. This will help to provide some key insight into how each of these concepts relate to and encase the issue of suffering. These two terms will form the bridge that will support the wider discussion within this chapter around suffering. This discussion is not in any way intended to be an exhaustive exploration of each of the theologians looked at in connection with ‘sacrifice’ and ‘accompaniment’ but will nonetheless, demonstrate the integral position these two concepts occupy in relation to human suffering. After all, the operative theology which emerged from experience of the chaplains is that of suffering and within this also came the concept of sacrifice and accompaniment.

In this chapter, I will examine how Christian theologians have, in the past, viewed human suffering and, using a Christocentric lens, will posit Jesus’ death on the cross alongside the issue of human suffering. Paul Fiddes reminds us that ‘the many strands of human experience run through the crossroads of the cross’⁴⁴⁹ and, in many respects, the cross is not only the crossroads between life and death but, also between suffering and healing. The challenge of course, is how we perceive what happened on the cross, and how we understand its significance for those who suffer. In other words, how can we

447 Rik Van Nieuwenhove. ‘The Christian Response to Suffering and the significance of the model of the Church as the Body of Christ’ in *Angelicum*. 82: 2005, 595.

448 Karl Rahner. ‘Why does God Allow Us to Suffer’ in *Theological Investigations XIX*. USA: The Crossroad Publishing, 1983, 194.

449 Paul Fiddes. *Past Event and Present Salvation-The Christian Idea of Atonement*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1989, 3.

interpret and appropriate the salvific act on the cross in a way that provides a paradigm, for those, who wish to find some sort of meaning in the face of human suffering. This, I consider, to be a somewhat necessary exploration principally, because the inductive theological concern which has emerged from the data I have collected for this study, is one of human suffering. For many of the chaplains interviewed, how they understand a theology of suffering opens up multiple questions about God's relationship with the sick and the dying. The challenge, however, is that Christianity as a religious tradition, does not argue against suffering and, neither does it proffer a solution for it.⁴⁵⁰ Nonetheless, how we view suffering and its connection to the cross is, in many ways, the barometer of our Christian thought.⁴⁵¹

As stated, two key terms will frame much of this chapter on suffering – sacrifice and accompaniment - both of which are at the heart of human suffering and indeed, of pastoral ministry. In fact, these two terms, will provide an interpretative paradigm to explore the issue of human suffering within the chapter. Succinctly, the trajectory of my discussion will be as follows: a brief review of some theories of atonement will I believe lead naturally to a deliberation on sacrifice and this will then be followed by a look at theories of accompaniment which emerged following the devastation and brutality of the Second World War. Therefore, the chapter will begin with some consideration, of how, the salvific act on the cross might be understood. This will be followed by an evaluation of the historical development of the theology of suffering from the patristic period to more contemporary times. Effectively, atonement will be examined within the context of human suffering and perhaps more specifically, the suffering of Christ on the cross.

From this exploration I hope to create a framework for the remainder of the chapter through which, to explore what suffering means, within the Christian context. Looking at a God who suffers with us, for us and alongside us, this chapter will draw from theologians who have grappled with the mystery of suffering and the cross such as Augustine, Anselm, Soelle and Bonhoeffer. In relation to what theories of accompaniment would be explored here, it was, however, necessary to make some crucial decisions. Acutely aware that it would not be possible to look at a multiplicity of

450 Richard Lucien. *What are they saying about the Theology of Suffering?* New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1992, 3.

451 Herwig Arts. *God, the Christian and Human Suffering.* Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1993, 11.

resources, I needed to choose my dialogue partners wisely. Just as a solid and justifiable research methodology was needed for the study, it was also necessary to make legitimate and logical choices in relation to the theological partners to be used in my discussion here. A myopic approach would, I believe, have possibly undermined the discussion and therefore, for the most part, I have chosen as my dialogue partners, theologians writing within the context of the Second World War, an event of great human suffering. Given the multiplicity of writings on human suffering it was necessary to draw some parameters around which theologians would be consulted. After all, it is not possible to enter the entire gambit of the Christian Theology of Suffering because if so, this discussion would dominate, indeed, it would overwhelm the data and culture chapters disproportionately. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, this chapter will explore what Paul Murray refers to as the ‘damaging constellation of ideas about God’s salvific work and the place of suffering in that work’⁴⁵² where suffering is almost valorised, seen in some respects as a coat of arms to be worn and endured proudly. This inspection certainly does not wish to valorise suffering in any way but rather, to look objectively, at what Christian sources have to say on the subject.

This chapter will also look at Sacred Scripture, an aspect of the Christian heritage and tradition which the Whiteheads give particular prominence, as do the chaplains in this study. Robert L Kinast has reminded us of how, for the Whiteheads scripture ‘holds pride of place’⁴⁵³ and therefore a key part of the latter stages of this chapter will be to look at Sacred Scripture referred to in *Dei Verbum* as the ‘mirror in which the pilgrim Church on earth looks at God’.⁴⁵⁴ Essentially, Sacred Scripture will be looked at from three perspectives – the Catholic tradition (*Dei Verbum*); the insights of the chaplains interviewed and the integrity of the theological reflection process.

5.2. Salvation

When we speak of redemption or salvation, we speak of a concept that is at best vague. David Ford reminds us, that theology, like any other intellectual discipline is pervaded by an interrogative mood with the deepest questions rarely satisfactorily

452 Paul D. Murray. ‘Living Sacrifice: Is there a non-pathological way of living suffering as sacrifice?’ in Karen Kilby and Rachel Davies. Eds. *Suffering and the Christian Life*. London: T&T Clark, 2019, 189.

453 Robert L. Kinast. *What are they saying about Theological Reflection*, 7

454 Pope Paul VI. *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation Dei Verbum solemnly promulgated by His Holiness Pope Paul VI on November 18, 1965*. Paragraph Seven

answered.⁴⁵⁵ Or, as Cyprian Love has written ‘the glory of human understanding is that its reach can extend its grasp and we can know beyond argument’.⁴⁵⁶ The challenge of trying to define or make sense of a doctrine as complex and paradoxical as atonement would appear akin to saying, that our reach can extend our grasp. As Augustine says of time: ‘What is time then? If nobody asks me, I know. But if I were desirous to explain it to one that should ask me plainly, I do not know.’⁴⁵⁷

Borrowing Augustine’s sentiment on time, for this context, it is true to say that while knowing intuitively and instinctively what is at the heart of atonement, this simply is not enough. In many ways, perhaps we are trying to put human language on a concept that may well be beyond both our grasp and our reach. Love would seem to back this standpoint as he writes ‘these inappropriate theories of atonement unwittingly resolve the cross by attempting to define the cross more sharply than the cross defines itself’.⁴⁵⁸ This chapter does not seek to resolve the cross, to borrow from Love, but broadly speaking, will explore how the cross helps us to know the God who is the ‘unchanging truth’ which Augustine speaks of in *True Religion*⁴⁵⁹ and how he used the cross as a ‘helping hand’⁴⁶⁰ to enable Christians to be full recipients of ‘that unspeakable beauty, the full vision of which is the highest happiness.’⁴⁶¹ However, there is somewhat of a caveat necessary here, as Raymund Schwager has rightly pointed out, in that the everyday human experience is filled with so many absurdities, tensions and contradictions that even the most strenuous intellectual effort will never completely sort out.⁴⁶² Neither is it envisaged that this discussion will ‘completely sort out’ the complexities of suffering and redemption but will, nonetheless, draw upon some useful material from the theological tradition on the topic.

455 David Ford. *Self and Salvation – Being Transformed*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999, 2.

456 Cyprian Love. ‘Atonement, Liturgy and Metaphor: Finding Meaning in Duality’ in *Irish Theological Quarterly*. 2016: 81 (1) 55-73, 59.

457 St. Augustine of Hippo. *The Confessions* trans by Henry Chadwick. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009.

458 Cyprian Love. Atonement, Liturgy...61

459 St. Augustine of Hippo. ‘True Religion’ in *On Christian Belief* trans by Edmund Hill, Ray Kearney, Michael C. Campbell and Bruce Harbert. New York: New City Press, 2007: (12) 35, 44.

460 *True Religion*. 41, 78-82.

461 St. Augustine of Hippo. *The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Charity* trans by Bruce Herbert and Boniface Ramsey. New York: New City Press, 274.

462 Raymund Schwager. *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation -Towards a Biblical Doctrine of Redemption*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1999, 1.

For Mark Heim in *Saved from Sacrifice – A Theology of the Cross*, he describes the cross as a snarled knot at the centre of a wide web of assumptions and practices, in church and society. Until it is untangled, it tugs everything else askew, a little or a lot.⁴⁶³ Heim's thinking would appear to indicate that the starting point for any theological investigation is the cross, however it is understood. Indeed, as Von Balthasar has observed, if theology is to be Christian, then it can only be a theology which understands in dynamic fashion the unsurpassable scandal of the cross.⁴⁶⁴ For the theologian, Derek Tidball, 'the cross is a wonderfully wrought and complex work of God which cannot be captured in its fullness from one standpoint alone and even less in one theory'.⁴⁶⁵

Moving on somewhat from Tidball's point, there have, nevertheless, been many attempts made to penetrate the mystery of the cross. For Dominic Keech, for instance, Christ is the 'divinely sent physician of sinful souls'⁴⁶⁶ suggesting a healing or reconciliation aspect to the mystery of the cross. However, how Christ appropriates this role depends on the lens through which soteriology is understood. In his history of Jesus of Nazareth, Ivor Davidson speaks of God being present as nowhere else on the cross. Here, there is evidence of God living a finite existence where he suffers and dies as human.⁴⁶⁷ On the cross, Jesus identifies fully with the pain of the human condition. Here he offers his life as a response to sin in a postlapsarian world, as a means of atonement for the sins of his forefathers. Therefore, in sum, at the heart of the cross is forgiveness and restoration. However, Paul Fiddes reminds us, of the challenge it is to forgive because forgiveness, unlike pardon, seeks to win the offender back into the relationship.⁴⁶⁸ That said, at the heart of the salvific act, is an attempt by God to reach out to those who have sinned and to win them back. At the same time, this appears to suggest that the divine-human relationship can be repaired only through one specific event.⁴⁶⁹

463 Mark Heim. *Saved from Sacrifice – A Theology of the Cross*. Cambridge: William B. Eerdmanns Publishing, 2006, xi.

464 Hans Urs Von Balthasar. *Mysterium Paschale – The Mystery of Easter*. Michigan: William B. Publishing, 1990, 56.

465 Derek Tidball. *The Message of the Cross*. Leicester: Intervarsity Press, 2001, 20.

466 Dominic Keech. *The Anti-Pelagian Christology of Augustine of Hippo*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012, 10.

467 Ivor Davidson. God of Salvation in Ivor J. Davidson and Murray A. Rae. *God of Salvation – Soteriology in Theological Perspective*. Surrey: Ashgate, 2011, 2.

468 Paul Fiddes. *Past Event and Present Salvation*, 16.

469 Ibid. 4.

However, if as Fiddes suggests, salvation is the healing of a broken relationship, then surely the repair of this relationship must happen in the here and now and needs to involve human responsibility as, the ultimate part, of the act of atonement.⁴⁷⁰ Consequently, this would seem to imply that the cross is a dynamic and on-going event and not just something which can be assigned to the historical annals. Put another way, this positions the cross not as one static event, but rather, as an on-going series of events (the cross now becomes an on-going act of salvation), through which, the sufferer can make some sense of their experience of suffering. This framework also makes the cross a real and tangible event for those seeking healing or forgiveness. Furthermore, this paradigm also shifts responsibility from the forgiver to the sinner, thus enabling them to gain obvious benefit (and arguably some participation in and) from the salvific act on the cross.

5.3. Trying to Make Sense of Theories of Atonement

The purpose of this next section is to try to provide a somewhat succinct outline of some of the theories which grapple with the event on the cross. I propose not to go into any great detail, but nevertheless, I think this is an essential exploration which will frame much of the remaining chapter. After all, Catholic theology takes seriously theories of atonement which are, according to Paul Fiddes, conceptual tools with which we try to grasp a mystery in the divine human relationship.⁴⁷¹ However, he has also written that at its heart salvation is the search for authentic life, which many hope for well beyond the here and now.⁴⁷² Moreover, as Marilyn McCord Adams has reflected in her study of the cross, good theories exhibit elegant simplicity by virtue of having one type of explanatory position do many different jobs and thereby occupy a variety of theoretical roles.⁴⁷³

Despite the fact that for theologians such as Edward Schillebeeckz⁴⁷⁴ who claim that we have been saved despite the cross, for others like Gustaf Aulen, the subject of atonement is absolutely central in Christian theology because, to his mind, it is directly related to that of the nature of God. After all, perfect penitence is impossible for merely

470 Ibid. 14.

471 Ibid. 28.

472 Ibid. 3.

473 Marilyn McCord Adams. *Christ and Horrors: The Coherence of Christology*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006, 29.

474 Edward Schillebeeckx. *Christ the Christian Experience in the Modern World*. London: SCM, 1980, 675-82.

human sinners who are never able to unequivocally admit the justice of the punishments we suffer. Hence, we all need Christ, a mediator, who is capable of simultaneous double identification: utter identification with righteousness that admits the full justice of the suffering consequent upon sin, and unflinching identification with us, a sharing of our nature out of love for us. This puts Christ in a position to render perfect penitence on our behalf.⁴⁷⁵ As McCord Adams has reflected, Adam's sin makes his whole family liable for a debt we cannot pay but the God-man makes satisfaction for the sins of the world.⁴⁷⁶ At the heart of soteriology, is the repayment of sin and in so doing win forgiveness and reconciliation between God and humankind.

The purpose of this thesis is not to push for any particular interpretation of how the event on the cross is understood. There have been myriad interpretations thrown into the mix such as the repaying of a debt; making satisfaction; Christ acting as mediator between God and humankind; the death on the cross as an act of self-emptying; paying a ransom to win back humanity's freedom; an act of restoration; recapitulation and so on. Faced with such a diversity of thoughts, it is hardly surprising that scholars, since patristic times, have often despaired of discovering any single unifying teaching about redemption. Neither will I be in a position to offer any 'solution' to this problem. However, borrowing from J.N.D. Kelly, because Christ has identified himself with the human race, what can be stated is that He has been able to act on its behalf and in its stead; and the victory He has obtained is the victory of all who belong to him. Significantly, it would seem that all the fathers of whatever school appear to have consistently reproduced this motif.⁴⁷⁷ In summary, each interpretation of Atonement, as Gustaf Aulen has argued, is most closely connected with some conception of the essential meaning of Christianity.⁴⁷⁸

After all, it would seem, that we appropriate the benefits of Christ's saving work the more we identify with Christ, not so that we cease to be ourselves but, so that the Spirit of the crucified constitutes our capacity for responsive holiness.⁴⁷⁹ Emil Brunner sees as essential, to have faith in Christ as the Mediator and in the event which took place once for all on the cross, a revealed atonement – which for him, is the Christian religion

475 Marilyn McCord Adams. *Christ and Horrors*, 146.

476 Ibid. 30.

477 J.N.D. Kelly. *Early Christian Doctrines*. London: HarperOne, 1978, 377.

478 Gustaf Aulen. *Christus Victor*. London: SPCK, 1931, 29.

479 Marilyn McCord Adams. *Christ and Horrors*, 146.

itself. This is, for him, the main point; it is not something alongside of the centre but it is the substance and the kernel, not the husk; this is so true that we may even say in distinction from all other forms of religion, the Christian religion is faith in the one Mediator.⁴⁸⁰ Likewise, he acknowledges that for us, the meaning of the cross, only becomes clear through our knowledge of Christ.⁴⁸¹ In other words, the more we know Christ the greater our understanding of the cross.

The cross is at the heart of Christianity and it would seem that without knowledge of Christ, it is a somewhat meaningless event, something merely consigned to history. Therefore, a relationship with Christ would appear to be a starting point, indeed a prerequisite, in order to come to any sort of understanding of what happened on the cross. Or perhaps, more importantly, a relationship with Christ is a necessary framework to try to accept what happened on the cross and to understand how this one event connects to the pain of the human condition particularly in the present moment. Moreover, beyond understanding and acceptance, what is key for the Christian believer, I would like to contend, is that the death of Christ on the cross can be used as a framework through which existential meaning can be found in the face of deep pain and human suffering. A central thread in existentialism is meaning-making or as Gordon W. Allport has said of it - to live is to suffer, to survive is to find meaning in the suffering⁴⁸², which in turn, is a theme which frames and supports any Christian exploration of Christ's death on the cross.

5.4. The Historical Development of Atonement and The Theology of Suffering

Historically, atonement and what it means, especially in relation to human suffering for the Christian believer has been given significant consideration. As Bernard McGinn has suggested, the privilege of believing in Christ entails suffering for him.⁴⁸³ A Christocentric lens provides a very specific paradigm for those who suffer. Such a framework also suggests, that to be truly Christian, one must suffer for and with Christ, whatever this means. Rik Van Nieuwenhove has observed, that while the patristic period witnessed major debates in the nature of the person of Christ, medieval theology was

480 Emil Brunner. *The Mediator. A study of the Central Doctrine of the Christian Faith*. Lutletworth, 1934.

481 Ibid.

482 Gordon W. Allport. Preface to Viktor E. Frankl. *Man's Search for Meaning*. London: Rider, 2004, 9.

483 Bernard McGinn. 'Suffering, Dereliction and Affliction in Christian Mysticism' in Karen Kilby and Rachel Davies. Eds. *Suffering and the Christian Life*. London: T&T Clark, 2019, 55.

drawn more towards soteriological questions.⁴⁸⁴ It would seem that the early church had no developed doctrine of atonement, as the contributions of the patristic period to theology lie in another direction, being chiefly concerned with Christology and the doctrine of the Trinity.⁴⁸⁵

The word ‘atonement’ was first applied to the work of Christ by the fourteenth century precursor of the Reformation, John Wycliffe. Such an interpretation embodies the idea that through Christ’s work humanity and the Father become ‘at one’.⁴⁸⁶ However, to regress somewhat, it seems that for the most part, the redemption did not become a battleground for rival schools until the twelfth century when, Anselm’s *Cur Deus Homo* (c1097), focused attention on it.⁴⁸⁷ Elizabeth A. Johnson has written that Anselm’s theory provides a particular theory around why it was necessary for God to become human and die in order to save the human race. His argument, called the satisfaction theory, made it clear that Jesus’ death paid back what was due to God because of the sins of human beings, and thus allowing divine mercy to flow.⁴⁸⁸ In her book, *Creation and the Cross*, Johnson reflects on the question at the heart of Anselm’s theory, why did Christ have to die in order to pay back a debt that was not his.⁴⁸⁹ In Book One, Chapter XIX of *Cur Deus Homo* Anselm says that:

Without satisfaction, that is, without voluntary payment of the debt, God can neither pass by the sin unpunished, nor can the sinner attain the happiness, or happiness like that, which he had before he sinned; for man cannot in this way be restored or become such as he was before he sinned.⁴⁹⁰

Essentially, Anselm is arguing that without Christ’s death on the cross, the debt due to God for human transgression would never be repayable. This would have deprived humankind of God’s benevolence and prevented a restoration of the prelapsarian state. It would also have left compensation owed to God for Adam’s transgression which would

484 Rik Van Nieuwenhove. *An Introduction to Medieval Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012, 2.

485 Gustaf Aulen. *Christus Victor*. Paris: SPCK, 1931, 16.

486 Cyprian Love. ‘Atonement and the Language of Excess’. *Conference Paper at St Patrick’s College Maynooth*. 2019, 1.

487 J.N.D. Kelly. *Early Christian Doctrines*. London: Continuum, 2000, 375.

488 Elizabeth A. Johnson. *Creation and the Cross – The Mercy of God for a Planet in Peril*. New York: Orbis Books, 2018, xiii.

489 Ibid. 3.

490 Anselm. *Cur Deus Homo* trans Sidney Norton Deane. The Catholic Primer, 2005, 40.

have thwarted the restorative process. In the latter chapters of *Cur Homo Deus*, Anselm also says of Christ's satisfaction for the sin of humankind:

No man except this one ever gave to God what he was not obliged to lose, or paid a debt he did not owe. But he freely offered to the Father what there was no need of his ever losing, and paid for sinners what he owed not for himself. Therefore, he set a much nobler example, that each one should not hesitate to give to God, for himself, what he must at any rate lose before long, since it was the voice of reason; for he, when not in want of anything for himself and not compelled by others, who deserved nothing of him but punishment, gave so precious a life, even the life of so illustrious a personage with such willingness.⁴⁹¹

Here he reminds us that Christ's sacrifice was a noble one which set an example for all humankind to follow. He is reminding us, of our responsibility, to give back to God what he has given to us. Those who refuse to do so, stand in stark contrast to Christ, who gave his life away so easily, to atone for a debt he himself did not owe.

Anselm's theory of satisfaction is best read within the confines of his cultural context. As Johnson outlines, by the eleventh century, European society had shifted from the law of the Roman Empire, to a feudal system of justice. In the absence of the central authority of national states, the authority of a local ruler grounded and safeguarded the order of a whole region. His word was law and any disobedience to a rule was an offence to the dignity and honour of the feudal overlord. Disobedience to the lord's word created social disruption and unease and in order to restore order, the law-breaker had to be punished or pay compensation to rectify the situation. This payback, called satisfaction, restored the honour of the injured lord and in turn returned peace to the land.⁴⁹² What is key here however, is the amount of satisfaction to be paid to the injured party. The amount of compensation or satisfaction corresponded to the social status of the offended party. In other words, the greater the status of the injured party, the more satisfaction that was payable. In rendering God his due, the debt of satisfaction owed to Him was therefore, quite significant. Therefore, the debt owed to God, by those who have sinned against him, was infinite. The solution is Christ, fully human and fully divine.⁴⁹³

491 *Cur Deus Homo*, 83.

492 Elizabeth A. Johnson. *Creation and the Cross*, 4.

493 *Ibid.* 9.

However, significantly, Johnson repudiates Anselm's theory suggesting that he had set up a very particular type of question in a way that would frame and support his answer.⁴⁹⁴ For example, Johnson is critical of Anselm's portrayal of God. His satisfaction theory puts forward a disastrous image of God, a sadistic type of God whose anger can only be placated by the death of his son. Christ appears as a victim of divine justice, crucified to appease a vindictive God. In summary, she believes that the satisfaction theory makes God morally repulsive and primitive. This theory also seems to indicate the way which God must behave, compelling action in order to attain satisfaction for sin. However, as Johnson reminds, God is not under any such constraint. A God of mercy would not be so constrained. She also quite rightly suggests, that the omission of the resurrection and the gospel narrative of Jesus' ministry is problematic. The theory focuses so strongly on the death of Jesus that it pays insufficient attention to the resurrection.

Anselm's theory also seems to sacralise violence, justifying the brutality of the cross because of the end result. Johnson also cautions that this satisfaction theory appears to valorise suffering, promoting it as something of value, as an avenue towards God.⁴⁹⁵ Johnson also introduces a theology of accompaniment, reminding us that the 'cross is a mysterious and profound sign that God enters into the darkest trials of human suffering, death, and near misery'. At these moments, 'in solidarity with the human race, Jesus crucified and risen abides in intimate contact with all people who walk through the valley of the shadow of death'.⁴⁹⁶ This sits with the theology explored later on in the thesis.

There were others like Anselm, who grappled with trying to make sense of the cross, for instance, Athanasius whose dominant soteriological view is the physical theory that Christ by becoming man, restored the divine image in us but, blended with this, is the conviction that His death was necessary to release us from the curse of sin. Therefore, He offered himself in sacrifice for us.⁴⁹⁷ Moreover, Gregory of Nyssa writing in the fourth century, reflected that the incarnation which culminated in the resurrection was the means which restored man to his rightful state. By becoming man and by dying and rising again

494 Ibid. 3.

495 Ibid. 15-25.

496 Ibid. 187

497 J.N.D. Kelly. *Early Christian Doctrines*. 377.

in human nature, Christ had forever reunited the separated fragments. Therefore, just as death entered the world through one man so by another man's resurrection, life had been given back to humankind.⁴⁹⁸

Also writing in the fourth century, the other Gregory, Gregory of Nazianzus, a leading theologian of the period, reflects frequently on suffering but especially on his own suffering. His preoccupation with suffering was rooted to a large extent in his experience as an Archbishop in Constantinople. It appears that an interesting dynamic in his theological reflection on suffering is that Gregory (Nazianzus) calls out to God and asks why God has afflicted him with various forms of suffering.⁴⁹⁹ Reflecting on the fall, Gregory considers that death interrupts human existence and creates suffering. For Gregory, sin and suffering are inextricably linked, each representing a means of human enslavement. The remedy for this he sees as the incarnation of Jesus, culminating in his death and resurrection.⁵⁰⁰ For the most part, after the fall, Gregory believes that people lapse into an existence of continual struggle with powers of opposition which Gregory describes as a vexatious life.⁵⁰¹ He argues that Christ could have 'done away with the devil' through his death on the cross and resurrection, if this had been what Christ had in mind.⁵⁰²

When speaking of redemption, suffering and the cross, historically there seems to be a consistent sense of Christ's death as a clearing away of sin through the payment of a debt, an act of restoration or restitution. According to Anselm, for instance, Christ, because of His human nature was qualified to pay humanity's debt, but because humans cannot do anything infinitely, Christ acting in his divine person enabled that debt payment to be infinite to satisfy for the infinite offense of the Father.⁵⁰³ For Augustine, writing many years before Anselm, the death of Jesus on the cross appears to be an act of restoration by the Son of God who has acted as a mediator between God and a broken people. In fact, consistently in the Augustinian canon, Christ is referred to as the mediator or intermediary between God and mankind. Indeed, Thomas Weinandy in his book *Jesus*

498 Ibid. 381.

499 Gabrielle Thomas. 'Gregory of Nazianzus on the role of Satan in Human Suffering' in Karen Kilby and Rachel Davies. Eds. *Suffering and the Christian Life*. London: T&T Clark, 2019, 44.

500 Ibid. 46.

501 Ibid. 47.

502 Ibid. 48.

503 Cyprian Love. *Atonement and the Language of Excess*, 1.

the Christ has rightly pointed out that this is the main theme in Augustine's soteriological theory.⁵⁰⁴ Interestingly, Christ is actually referred to as the mediator two hundred and eighty-nine times in the Augustinian oeuvre.⁵⁰⁵

Moreover, as Marilyn McCord Adams has reflected, Christ is best placed to be the mediator Augustine speaks of given his fully human and yet fully divine status.⁵⁰⁶ For Augustine, the story of salvation is the story of Jesus. Indeed, in the years prior to his conversion to Christianity, Augustine's writings demonstrate a deep yearning to find Christ and to know him.⁵⁰⁷ Christ was the scaffolding upon which he leaned upon and sought to know better. Reflecting upon Augustine's *Expositions of the Psalms* Rowan Williams has written that here we see the unifying of the divine and the human voice of Christ. We come to witness Christ speaking for us, making the cry of the human something which the Father will respond to.⁵⁰⁸ Christ is Augustine's alpha and omega, the summit of his theological explorations. Such a hermeneutical reading of Augustine's canon posits the cross and Christ alongside each other, both inextricably woven together as two sides of the one coin.

Rik Van Nieuwenhove has observed that the absurdity and seemingly randomness of afflictions, keep us from instrumentalising our relationship with God, a theme which concerned the Dominican, Meister Eckhart, who encouraged us to live and to love God 'without a why' and not for the benefits that might accrue from it.⁵⁰⁹ In contrast, Gerald O'Collins has argued that Eckhart's fellow Dominican Aquinas' soteriology, in some respects at least, has contributed to the development of a 'monstrous version of redemption' with Christ as the penal substitute propitiating the divine anger.⁵¹⁰ Aquinas' reflections on *Psalms 50* for instance, point out that the incarnation is an act of mercy indicating that he sees mercy as one of the central attributes of God which would seem to validate O'Collins' thinking.⁵¹¹ All acts of divine justice are predicated upon God's prior

504 Thomas Weinandy. *Jesus the Christ*. Huntington: One Sunday Visitor Inc, 2003, 153.

505 Dominic Keech. *The Anti-Pelagian Christology*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012, 11.

506 Marilyn McCord Adams. *Christ and the Horrors: The Coherence of Christology*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006, 20.

507 St. Augustine of Hippo. *The Confessions*.

508 Rowan Williams. 'Augustine and the Psalms' in *Interpretation*. 58: January 2004, 18/19.

509 Rik Van Nieuwenhove. 'Protest Theism, Aquinas and Suffering' in Karen Kilby and Rachel Davies *Suffering and the Christian Life*. London: T&T Clark, 2019, 75.

510 Gerald O'Collins. *Christology: A Biblical, Historical and Systematic Study of Jesus*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995, 207.

511 Van Nieuwenhove. *Protest Theism*, 77.

generosity, goodness, mercy and divine justice is squarely founded upon divine mercy from whom we have received everything there is in the first place including our very existence.⁵¹² The primary reason why somebody gives something freely the way God bestows His gifts is friendship. Therefore, it is our friendship or love for God that creates the context in which we can receive merit from Him.⁵¹³

John of the Cross is probably the best-known proponent of the necessity of inner stripping and suffering on the pathway to union with God during what he has referred to as the dark night.⁵¹⁴ John of the Cross values suffering for spiritual growth and his ‘dark nights’ give value to inward states of psychological suffering in which the soul suffers gravely.⁵¹⁵ For John, only God can remove the severe pain which people feel when they consider themselves abandoned by God. John’s great pastoral concern is that such feelings are not denied but rather approached as an invitation to grow. It is the growth which John values rather than the suffering per se, but paradoxically, both are found in the same place and this makes it vital that sufferings are not simply dismissed.⁵¹⁶ In sum, for John of the Cross, suffering is about abandonment and pain. From Christ’s suffering on the cross, we know that abandonment is the defining element in suffering. Moreover, to take this a step further, the victory over suffering is the promise of our creation in the image and likeness of God and our salvation by Christ on the cross.⁵¹⁷

5.5. The Cross – An Act of Sacrifice

Having looked briefly at the ‘meaning’ of atonement and providing a brief overview of its historical development, I now wish to focus primarily on one particular understanding of Christ’s death on the cross. A model of salvation which suggests itself to be most congruent and applicable to the data I have amassed is that of sacrifice. Participants speak not just of the sacrifice of Christ but of the various sacrifices of those to whom they minister. These are the people who through their experience of illness and loss have made myriad sacrifices in their own personal lives. Therefore, I believe the

512 Ibid. 78.

513 Van Nieuwenhove. *Protest Theism*, 82.

514 Bernard McGinn. ‘Suffering, Dereliction and affliction in Christian Mysticism’ in Karen Kilby and Rachel Davies. Eds. *Suffering and the Christian Life*. London: T&T Clark, 2019, 66.

515 Edward Howells, ‘Suffering and the Desire for God in John of the Cross’ in Karen Kilby and Rachel Davies. Eds. *Suffering and the Christian Life*. London: T&T Clark, 2019, 87.

516 Ibid. 88.

517 Ibid. 94.

concept of sacrifice speaks strongly to the data, and provides a framework or lens through which we may understand human suffering and Christ's role in the restoration of the rightful order. I consider that some key points of interest when reflecting upon sacrifice within this context are as follows: firstly, what do we mean when we speak of sacrifice; secondly, how do we connect to Christ's death on the cross as an act of sacrifice and thirdly, how do we appropriate his death in such a way that it provides a paradigm for trying to make sense of human suffering so that some meaning can be found in the midst of devastation and pain?

Ian Bradley's book *The Power of Sacrifice* develops the claim that sacrifice is at once the most inescapable, impenetrable and off-putting theme in Christianity and yet, the word 'sacrifice' used both as a verb and a noun occurs two hundred and thirteen times in the Bible.⁵¹⁸ Saint Paul for instance uses 'sacrifice' as one of the key metaphors for the efficacy and significance of the death of Christ.⁵¹⁹ McCord Adams contends that the category of sacrifice is too deep for words and yet, it provides an excellent conceptual frame for the Divine Human predicament in a horror strewn world.⁵²⁰ However, in a somewhat similar construct to Cyprian Love's views on atonement, McCord Adams cautions against trying to 'resolve' the notion of sacrifice.

There are of course important reasons why I have chosen to introduce yet another complex term into the discussion around the theology of suffering within this thesis. Despite the fact that Robert George Staines, in his PhD on the Cross and Salvation, reminds us that sacrifice is a complex and fluid term, difficult to navigate and with a multiplicity of understandings⁵²¹, nevertheless I believe that it is a most useful lens through which to explore the meaning of human suffering. After all, sacrifice is a ritual in which human beings make the material stuff of their lives the medium of exchange in the hope that their offering, things about which they are specially concerned, and they themselves will be transformed by supernatural power.⁵²²

518 Ian Bradley. *The Power of Sacrifice*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1995, 1.

519 Stephen Finlan. *Problems with Atonement – The Origins of and Controversy about the Atonement Doctrine*. Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1995, 11.

520 Marilyn McCord Adams. *Christ and the Horrors*, 243.

521 Robert George Staines. *The Soteriological Significance of the Cross of Jesus – Metaphor, Meaning and Salvation*. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 2008, 41.

522 Marilyn McCord Adams. *Christ and the Horrors*, 244.

Paul J. Philibert outlines a traditional understanding of sacrifice as anything offered to God to appease the anger of the deity or to atone for sin. Sacrifices he says, tend to be both impressive and drastic, especially at times of festival or in times of crisis.⁵²³ There is a shedding of blood and to pour out a living creature's blood in sacrifice is to offer back to God the most mysterious and precious gift that a human being can, the gift of life itself. To offer the blood of something or someone is to multiply the personal significance of the gift.⁵²⁴ In other words, there is a giving up of something by the person who has chosen willingly (or perhaps not) to do so. In Christ's case, on the cross, as we read in Philippians 2:7, He emptied Himself of his Divinity and offered up His Humanity for the sake of humankind. Borrowing from Rene Girard, Jesus' sacrifice on the cross is the lamb of God sacrifice which we read of in the Gospels implying the substitution of one victim for all the others.⁵²⁵ In fact, kenotic Christology suggests that, in becoming human, God decided to divest himself at least temporarily, of some of the divine properties such as omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence⁵²⁶ echoing in some respects the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer which will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter.

The language of sacrifice appears in almost every context in which the Fathers (early Church Fathers) speak of the effect and meaning of Christ's death although it is rare for them to explain its use at any great length.⁵²⁷ In Augustine's *Exposition on Psalm 49* for instance, we are told that Christ's death is 'a sacrifice which costs us nothing'.⁵²⁸ It is Christ alone who pays the price for the sin of humankind. It is He alone who suffers the brutality of death on the cross. Christ, the mediator or intermediary gives himself up completely, embracing the wrath which comes to man from God in the aftermath of the fall. In this self-giving sacrifice Christ's identification with humanity rises to its greatest height, in this giving of Himself to the real endurance of the divine judgment, the divine wrath.⁵²⁹ The depth of Christ's suffering is due to the cause for which He suffers because

523 Paul J. Philibert. *The Priesthood of the Faithful – Key to a Living Church*. Minnesota: Liturgical Press. 2005, 115.

524 Ibid. 116.

525 Rene Girard. *The Scapegoat* trans by Yvonne Freccero, 117.

526 C. Stephen Evans. 'Kenotic Christology and the Nature of God' in C Stephen Evans *Exploring Kenotic Christology. The Self Emptying of God*. Oxford: Oxford UP. 2006, 197.

527 Brian Daley. 'He Himself is Our Peace' (Ephesians 2:14): Early Christian Views of Redemption in Christ' in Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall and Gerald O'Collins. Eds. *The Redemption*. Oxford: Oxford UP. 2004, 158.

528 Exposition of Psalm 49, Verse 14:21, 400.

529 Emil Brunner. *The Mediator. A Study of the Central Doctrine of the Christian Faith*.

Christ knows that he is wholly identified with the cause of God and therefore, He is in a position to identify Himself so completely with man to give Himself so unceasingly to man really to take onto Himself the whole misery of man.⁵³⁰ Hence, Christ's Death is a sacrifice offered by Himself to humankind. It is Messianic suffering, the suffering of him who knows that His passion and His death are the ultimate act; it is the act of One who is aware that this is not merely an outstanding event in the whole history of suffering of humanity but something quite specific.⁵³¹ It is not the torture and the cross as such but this complete collapse in shame and complete failure, it is this which makes the suffering of Christ of a kind that no person before or after has ever suffered the like⁵³² making it a very specific act of self-giving.

However, one must consider to some extent at least, how we can connect to the 'sacrifice' on the cross. After all, as Paul J. Philibert has observed, we are redeemed by the self-offering [sacrifice] of God's divine Son, a holocaust of love and compassion that redeems us by embracing the very poverty of our human condition. Christ does not offer something other than himself and we do not offer something other than ourselves.⁵³³ In that offering of self, what do we learn and how do we use such a gift in a meaningful and tangible way. The true nature of sacrifice, Van Nieuwenhove has written, can only be properly grasped from the perspective of the cross and its re-enactment in the Eucharist.⁵³⁴ As part of the mystical body we can have a share in the salvific activity of Christ on the cross. In other words, every time we participate in the Eucharist, in the breaking of bread, we can share in the visible sacrament which is also a sign of the ultimate sacrifice of Christ on cross. We are participating in a re-enactment of the historical event in real time. After all, when we share in the body and blood of Christ, the suffering Christ, in faith and love, we become Christ-like.⁵³⁵ This becomes an act of participation on the part of the ecclesial body in the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

Such an understanding of Christ's sacrifice is most beneficial for making a tangible connection with the cross in the here and now. Furthermore, this hermeneutical

530 Ibid. 496.

531 Ibid. 499.

532 Ibid. 496.

533 Paul J. Philibert, *Priesthood of the Faithful* 119.

534 Van Nieuwenhove. *An Introduction to Medieval Theology*, 17.

535 Van Nieuwenhove. *The Christian Response to Suffering*, 604.

reading of the sacrifice on the cross, brings us I believe, into relationship with the suffering Christ. It transports the cross from the confines of history bringing it into sharp focus, reminding us of the meaning which can be found in human misery and suffering. It reminds us, that in all that we do as Christians, even our sufferings and sacrifices, all are connected to God in a meaningful way. After all, the notion of sacrifice can refer to any act performed for the sake of God, every act in which we freely give ourselves away, thereby mirroring the self-gift of Christ on the cross.⁵³⁶ If we can connect to the sacrifice on the cross in a meaningful way through participation in the Eucharist then we are connecting with the suffering Christ. We are re-living his redemptive activity each time we partake in the body and blood of this same Christ. We are ensuring that his redemption is an on-going event, something with value for the here and now. It ensures that Christ himself remains not a historical figure but rather, that He is someone we can connect with and perhaps more importantly, identify with in a solid way. The more we can identify with Christ's sufferings the more real He becomes, real in the sense that Christ becomes a symbol of God's kindness and benevolence for those who suffer.

The final point for consideration at this juncture is how we appropriate the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Having demonstrated the value of connection and identification with the suffering Christ, it is important to consider what can be done with such a framework in order to support those who strive to find existential meaning in the face of great pain and human struggle. In other words, how can we posit the death of Christ alongside the misery of the human condition in such a way that provides a framework to at least attempt to find meaning in the light of life's greatest challenges. Or as Philibert has asked how can Christ's gift of himself and our gift of our lives fit together?⁵³⁷ Succinctly, how can Christ's sacrifice on the cross be integrated into the reality of our lives in a real and meaningful way especially during time of suffering and loss? Believing that Jesus transforms suffering into an instrument of salvation, Philibert nevertheless reminds that every one of us will know the experiences of cruelty, injustice, disappointment, loss, confusion and fear, but that Christ's incarnation is an act of solidarity with a fragile and suffering humankind.⁵³⁸ How, during such moments of crisis,

536 Ibid. 602.

537 Paul J. Philibert, 69.

538 Ibid. 67.

can the sacrifice on the cross be appropriated and used in a way that is transformative and healing?

Rik Van Nieuwenhove has reflected that God desires ‘the sacrifice of a broken heart’.⁵³⁹ This I believe, is a useful framework through which to consider how the sacrifice of Christ can be appropriated. In some respects, I think this understanding demands a sort of giving up, a self-giving of what is lost or about to be lost. Again, to lean on Philibert, we are reminded that Jesus’ self-giving integrates our human limitations into his Incarnation.⁵⁴⁰ In giving of Himself, He connected with the sinner and with the sufferer. In a complete paradigm shift, when the suffering person gives something up, loses some aspect of their personhood, sacrifices something of their self, they are establishing a tangible connection with Christ’s act of self-giving. They are experiencing a kenotic moment. As they suffer, they are sacrificing something of themselves, their freedom, their health, their well-being, their very selfhood. This way, they are connecting or touching into the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, identifying with His pain and His suffering. Offering their sacrifice of ‘a broken heart’ they are giving back their pain in an act of self-giving, thereby re-enacting the suffering of Christ on the cross.

Reading suffering as having a connection with the cross almost immediately gives it a context and a significance. Drawing from Frankl’s logotherapy, suffering with meaning is a very different thing to suffering without meaning. Despite the harshness of life in the German concentration camps prisoners could still find some meaning in the wake of dire human pain and suffering.⁵⁴¹ A connection with the cross is what provides, for Christians at least, an interpretative standard for grappling with existential meaning in the face of human suffering. This is not to valorise or excuse suffering but nonetheless, it does provide a framework through which to grapple with the harsh realities of the human condition. This connection with the cross as Michael J. Dodds reminds us has implications for pastoral practice. A source of comfort and courage to the suffering, this truth he says, can be used to indict their oppressors, guide those who would minister to them and open a way into the mystery of God whose powers of compassion exceeds all

539 Van Nieuwenhove. *An Introduction to Medieval Theology*, 17.

540 Paul J. Philibert. 44.

541 See Victor Frankl. *Man’s Search for Meaning*.

our powers of knowing.⁵⁴² It is having the awareness that our suffering, pain, hope and love are gathered into Christ's self-sacrifice and are ennobled by it. His humanity, according to Philibert, becomes the bridge by which we cross over from the futility of temple offerings to the saving mystery of our salvation.⁵⁴³

5.6. Post Holocaust Theology of Suffering Part One: God Suffers With Us

Since the beginning of time every literary genre, philosophical, sociological and religious system have struggled to understand or make sense of human suffering. As Rahner has said of suffering and why God allows us to suffer 'it can scarcely be denied that this is one of the most fundamental questions of human existence'.⁵⁴⁴ Remaining an enigmatic subject especially when society faces moments of penetrating human loss and pain, suffering continues to challenge and to perplex. In the 1992 preface to *Man's Search for Meaning*, Viktor Frankl reminds his readers that life holds potential meaning under any conditions even the most miserable ones.⁵⁴⁵

However, while such sentiments are admirable and empowering on one hand, conversely, they could also read somewhat dismissively of the human cost of physical, emotional or spiritual pain. Thereby, the mystery of human suffering remains a complex theological quagmire. For theists and non-theists alike, the reality of suffering creates, to some extent at least, an intellectual puzzle of sorts for them. While a reality of the human condition, suffering challenges our thinking and our behaviour on a multiplicity of levels. Firstly, it raises the theodicy question. If suffering has to be part of the human condition the question of whether God exists needs to be considered. Indeed, could God exist at all when suffering appears to be such an integral and necessary part of human existence. Secondly, apart from challenging us to consider whether God exists or not, suffering frames the way we think about God. What type of God stands back failing to intervene when we face life's harshness? What sort of God allows people to suffer when there suffering need not be part of the human condition? How can such a God be considered compassionate, benevolent and all-loving when He appears absent during times of dire pain and desolation? Or in contrast, perhaps God is what sustains those who struggle

542 Michael J. Dodds. 'Thomas Aquinas, Human Suffering...341.

543 Paul J. Philibert. *The Priesthood of the Faithful*, 119.

544 Karl Rahner. 'Why Does God Allow us to Suffer?' in *Theological Investigations*, XIX, 194.

545 Viktor Frankl. *Man's Search for Meaning*. London: Rider, 2004, 12.

during periods of suffering and loss? On one hand, God can be perceived and experienced as cold and detached, immune to our pain, while on the other hand, He can be a figure of support and encouragement when life presents the miserable conditions Frankl believes are not without their depth and meaning.

An additional consideration here, when ruminating about God's relationship with and to those who suffer, is divine passibility. What of God Himself, does He suffer when those whom He has created in his own image and likeness suffers? Keating and White have reflected at length on this subject stating that this debate takes as its starting point the problematic theological subject of how we are to understand the nature of God in relation to the fact of human suffering and the gospels proclamation of its defeat in Jesus Christ.⁵⁴⁶ Thomas Weinandy, in the introduction to his book *Does God Suffer*, reflects that historically the question of God's passibility focused primarily and at times, almost exclusively, upon the issue of whether God could suffer? On the one hand, he argues that the catalyst for affirming the passibility of God, one that is still intensely operative is human suffering. In other words, in order for God to identify or know the experience of suffering He has to be passible He has to be able to suffer Himself.⁵⁴⁷ However, Weinandy goes on to rigorously challenge such thinking, offering an image of a non-suffering God who has much more to offer us than one who does suffer. Classically, Christian doctrine affirms that God is beyond the reach of both suffering and evil in his very deity⁵⁴⁸ supporting the image of an impassible God. Jurgen Moltmann and Thomas Weinandy have explored both sides of this discussion and I will briefly look at their thoughts on a suffering God in the next section.

5.6.1. Jurgen Moltmann

Moltmann, a German Reformed Theologian wrote his seminal works, *Theology of Hope* and *The Crucified God*, in the years following the Second World War. He had a considerable interest in the issue of human suffering and how the Cross of Christ is to be understood within such a context. For Moltmann, reflecting in *The Crucified God*, the theology of the cross is none other than the reverse side of the Christian theology of

546 James Keating and Thomas Joseph White. 'Divine Impassibility' 2.

547 Thomas Weinandy. *Does God Suffer?*, 1.

548 James Keating and Thomas Joseph White. 'Divine Impassibility in Contemporary Theology' in James F. Keating and Thomas Joseph White. Eds. *Divine Impassibility and the Mystery of Human Suffering*. Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009, 1.

hope.⁵⁴⁹ The cross, in all its brutality and pain, is the complete antithesis of the hope and glory which the resurrection offers the Christian believer. However, in addition, Moltmann believes that there can be no theology of the incarnation which does not become a theology of the cross.⁵⁵⁰ In sum, the story of the cross is the narrative of Christ Jesus. It is how we can come to know God better and find meaning in his actions. Indeed, according to Alister McGrath, for Moltmann, the cross of Christ is the decisive epistemological criterion for our knowledge of God.⁵⁵¹ In other words, how we understand the cross is how we understand God. The God of the cross is the God we encounter in the banal of our daily events and in the darkness of our pain and suffering.

If, as McGrath has argued, the cross of Christ is our epistemological criterion for knowing God, what of God himself in relation to suffering. Can God suffer? Can He feel physical, emotional or spiritual pain? For Moltmann, it seems God can and does suffer. He believes that God is passible and that if God were incapable of suffering in any respect and therefore, in an absolute sense, then He would also be incapable of love.⁵⁵² A God who cannot suffer cannot love either. If God is truly involved in the lives of people, if he actually enters into and acts within time and history and most of all if he does so as the God of love, then such a God must by necessity, experience suffering.⁵⁵³

Keating and White takes this point up also, ruminating that the greater the abasement of Christ in his passion, the more the greatness of God's kenotic love is revealed. If one conceives of the two natures of Christ as distinguishable, and yet analogically coordinated, then the sufferings of the human nature manifest and reveal the perfections of the divine nature without being reducible to the latter. That said, the authentic and inalienable character of Christ's love as God's love is manifest most intensively in the voluntary suffering and agony of the Son's crucifixion.⁵⁵⁴ Thus, the suffering God approach suggests that the more one suffers, the closer one approaches God.⁵⁵⁵ Moltmann believes that through his death, Christ identified himself with those

549 Jurgen Moltmann. *The Crucified God*. London: SCM Press, 1964, 5.

550 Ibid. 205.

551 Alister McGrath. *The Making of Modern German Christology*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell. 1986 187.

552 Thomas Weinandy, 9.

553 Ibid. 8.

554 James Keating and Thomas Joseph White. 'Divine Impassibility', 19.

555 Kristine M Rankka. *Women and the Value of Suffering*, 95.

who were enslaved and took their pain upon himself.⁵⁵⁶ God's solidarity with us in passibility, Keating and White argue, is an essential element of both his own true identity as God and of his soteriological triumph over evil.⁵⁵⁷ The crucified Christ for Moltmann, becomes the brother of the despised, abandoned and oppressed.⁵⁵⁸ One of the basic difficulties of Christian life in the world today Moltmann cautions, is clearly the inability to identify with what is other, alien and contradictory.⁵⁵⁹ In some respects, Moltmann is challenging us to take up our cross and carry it in solidarity with those who suffer.

Such an identification with the sufferer has some considerable implications pastorally and spiritually. Taking the pain of the enslaved onto Himself (to paraphrase Moltmann), Christ offers to those who suffer a paradigm of support and consolation. Being aware that God takes the pain of the sufferer onto Himself preaches a theology of liberty and consolation from the pain of the here and now. It suggests that the pain of the cross will be redeemed through the hope that comes with the resurrection. It suggests a trajectory where pain will be removed through Christ's identification with those who suffer. Borrowing the axiom 'preferential option for the poor' from liberation theology, Moltmann's Christ by becoming the brother of the despised, abandoned and oppressed, becomes the brother of the sick too. In the crucified Christ, those who suffer and struggle find a God who can not only identify with their hardship but who, through his capacity to feel and experience pain, can feel it. A crucified Christ, who can walk the trajectory of illness, suffering as the sick suffer, can become a source of consolation in the midst of deep spiritual and physical pain. Offering a theology of companionship and identification, the crucified Christ, who Moltmann believes is passible, becomes the personification of someone who feels the pain as anyone does in the here and now.

5.6.2. Thomas Weinandy

Moltmann's theory of the 'suffering Christ' has been critically assessed many times over the years with a number of theologians challenging his thinking. Gilles Emery, for instance, has observed some significant difficulties with Moltmann's theology of suffering. Among these he notes, the exclusive primacy of the cross, the radicalisation of

556 Jurgen Moltmann. *The Crucified God*, 48.

557 James Keating and Thomas Joseph White. 'Divine Impassibility,' 21

558 Jurgen Moltmann. *The Crucified God*, 24.

559 Ibid. 25.

the kenotic interpretation of redemption, infernal torments inflicted upon Christ, a functional interpretation of trinitarian language and the eradication of the distinction between the eternal being of the trinity and God's actions within it.⁵⁶⁰ The vilification of Christ, the torment on the cross, the deliberate suffering caused by a God who demands restitution from an innocent son can indeed be a difficult framework with which to grapple. For Emery, acknowledging that while Moltmann does attempt to provide an explanation of suffering, he does so only through divinising suffering and rendering it eternal as an event that is constitutive of the divine persons.⁵⁶¹ Jesus' sacrifice, according to Thomas Weinandy, must not be seen as placating an angry God, as if he were an offended person who demands injustice to be propitiated and appeased.⁵⁶² Rather, he suggests that the salvific act be viewed with another lens.

Instead, he contends, in contrast to Moltmann who believes that a God who cannot suffer cannot love either, that for Him, love is the foundation of God's pathos and thus is the foundation of his suffering.⁵⁶³ Implying that the cross of the crucified Christ is an act of love and not of brute force frames what happens on the cross very differently to the way Moltmann does. Thus, taking a Weinandy stance, Jesus and His redemptive work becomes the Father's full and decisive response to human suffering and its causes.⁵⁶⁴ The death on the cross then becomes an operative theology of love. It is a response borne out of love for a suffering people. After all, it is humankind, not God, who is the beneficiary of Jesus' death. Through Jesus' death God is not reconciled to us but rather, we are reconciled to God.⁵⁶⁵ The cross, is a free gift from God to humankind, the ultimate source of reconciliation for humankind guided by His love for His people.

In contrast to Moltmann who believes that God suffers, Weinandy contends that God does not suffer and that the God who does not suffer is in actual fact, more loving, compassionate and merciful than one who does.⁵⁶⁶ The God who does not suffer acts out of love and it is this love which determines the trajectory of the cross. God is impassible

560 Gilles Emery. 'The Immutability of the God of Love and the Problem of Language Concerning the Suffering of God' in James Keating and Thomas J. White. Eds. *Divine Impassibility and the Mystery of Human Suffering*. Cambridge: William B. Eerdmanns Publishing Company, 2009, 43.

561 Gilles Emery. 'The Immutability of the God of Love, 43.

562 Thomas Weinandy, 224.

563 Ibid. 9.

564 Ibid. 214.

565 Ibid. 220.

566 Ibid. 159.

according to Weinandy, in that he does not undergo successive and fluctuating emotional states, nor can the created order alter him in such a way to cause him to suffer any modification or loss. Nor is God the victim of negative and sinful passions as are human beings such as fear, anxiety and dread, or greed, lust and unjust anger. Thus, to say that God is impassible is again to ensure and to accentuate his perfect goodness and unalterable love.⁵⁶⁷ In sum, Weinandy believes that nothing can change God. God is consistently present in love with us and acts solely out of love towards his sinful people.

Pastorally, such an unchanging God offers a figure of constancy, a deity who is consistently at one with His people. God is experienced as omnipresent reaching out in authentic love to those who suffer. Knowing that God loves us no matter what we do or what we suffer can provide a paradigm of great solace to those who suffer. A God who connects with our suffering and walks with us as we suffer offers an assurance of presence and compassion in the darkest of hours. However, interestingly for Weinandy, there is no comprehensive, complete and final answer. In knowing God more fully, he acknowledges that God becomes an even greater mystery or problem than He was before.⁵⁶⁸

5.7. Post Holocaust Theology of Suffering Part Two: God Identifies With Us in Our Suffering

In the last decades of the twentieth century, Christian theologians turned their attention to the challenges posed by those victimised by violence in history. Events of genocide, particularly the holocaust, and growing awareness of the injustices wrought by practices of colonialism and imperialism in the so-called third world, as well as the exploitation of women and all those deemed 'other' called for serious theological attention.⁵⁶⁹ In this next section, I will look at what my dialogue partners, all writing within the context of World War Two, have to add to the discussion on Christian suffering. Writing within the backdrop of great human suffering, their reflections provide witness to the pain of the human condition when injustice pervades and overwhelms.

567 Ibid. 110.

568 Ibid. 32.

569 Flora A. Keshgegian. 'Witnessing Trauma: Dorothee Soelle's Theology of Suffering in a World of Victimization' in Sarah K. Pinnock. *The Theology of Dorothee Soelle*. London: Trinity Press International, 2003, 93.

5.7.1. Simone Weil

Weil, who was born in 1909 and her brother Andre, three years the elder, were the children of secular Jewish parents living in Paris. As children the siblings were close with Andre frequently acting as her tutor. As a child, it seems that Simone was envious of her brother's ability to penetrate into the kingdom of truth represented by mathematics. Simone spent her life attempting to achieve the kingdom of truth and the majority of her writings are dedicated to elucidating how this might be possible. She sees two routes into the kingdom of truth – the experience of affliction and the experience of beauty.⁵⁷⁰ Simone Weil was writing at a time when the world was witnessing the horrors of the Second World War. Her experiences lead her to write about affliction and listing examples of horror and torture she explains that these experiences can mark the soul and create what is best described as a living hell.⁵⁷¹ Interestingly, in *Gravity and Grace* she defines hell as 'suffering without consolation' and yet, in the same text, she cautions that we 'should seek neither to escape suffering nor to suffer less but rather to remain untainted by suffering'.⁵⁷²

For Weil, the ultimate purpose of each human being is to be absorbed and possessed for God and each person ought to strive for utmost purity in their life. This purity, she believed, can only be obtained through the experience of affliction and beauty. In her text *The Love of God and Affliction* she defines affliction:

In the realm of suffering, affliction is something apart, specific and irreducible. It is quite a different thing from simple suffering. It takes possession of the soul and marks it through and through with its own particular mark, the mark of slavery. There is not real affliction unless the event which has gripped and uprooted a life attacks it directly or indirectly, in all its parts, social, psychological and physical.⁵⁷³

For Simone Weil, suffering cannot, in this life, be redeemed. It cannot be made joyful and, in its essence, it does not produce moral improvement or generate virtue.

570 Scott Taylor. 'Mathematics and the Love of God: An Introduction to the Thought of Simone Weil' in <http://www.math.ucsb.edu/staylor> , 1.

571 Ellie Payne. Simone Weil on Affliction and the Cross in *Awaiting God*, 1.

572 Simone Weil. *Gravity and Grace*. Trans by Emma Crawford and Maria Von Der Ruhir. London: Routledge, 2002, 81.

573 Scott Taylor. 'Mathematics and the Love of God', 2.

Suffering cannot, in any direct sense be put to use.⁵⁷⁴ Imagining that suffering might be joyful, redemptive or useful is a confused Christianity for Weil. She believes that there is a meaningful paradox and contradiction at the heart of suffering with which Christian theology must wrestle.⁵⁷⁵ This intellectual and spiritual struggle with suffering must be had without giving in to the standing temptations to falsely resolve and mediate the tension between the given-ness (and therefore meaningfulness) of suffering and its paradoxical, mysterious inexplicability. While we cannot explain why suffering and affliction exists, its utterly concrete presence challenges us to a politics and a theology of recognition.⁵⁷⁶ For Weil, affliction is an existential problem and thus needs an existential answer. This answer she believes, is the cross of Christ. On the cross, Christ himself experiences affliction in all of its social, psychological and physical aspects.⁵⁷⁷ For Weil, the ethical task is to render suffering meaningful rather than explicable.⁵⁷⁸ Therefore, the cross of Christ is the ultimate integration of social, psychological and physical pain for Weil. The pain of the cross is the personification of the affliction which underpins Weil's understanding of suffering in its truest sense. It is the cross which gives suffering meaning.

5.7.2. Dorothee Soelle

Dorothee Soelle's theological trajectory was determined by many factors including the writings of Simone Weil and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Kristine Rankka also reminds us that for Dorothee Soelle, all true theology begins in the experience of human suffering.⁵⁷⁹ Rooted in contemporary reality, Soelle's theology is reflective of the suffering she witnesses all around her. Rosemary Radford Ruether has noted a similar point in relation to Soelle's work, saying that for her, authentic theology begins in pain, in painful recognition of the hurt to oneself and to others caused by this violent world and one's own collaboration with it.⁵⁸⁰ Hers is a theology of suffering, contextual and contemporary in equal measures, with Soelle a pioneering figure, a leader among German

574 Anna Rowlands. 'Reading Simone Weil in East London: Destitution, Decreation and the History of Force' in Karen Kilby and Rachel Davies. Eds. *Suffering and the Christian Life*. London: T&T Clark. 2019, 115.

575 Ibid. 115.

576 Ibid. 115.

577 Scott Taylor. 'Mathematics and the Love of God', 2.

578 Anna Rowlands. 'Reading Simone Weil', 116.

579 Kristine M. Rankka. *Women and the Value of Suffering – An Aw(e)ful Rowing toward God*. Minnesota: A Michael Glazier Book, 1998, 14.

580 Rosemary Radford Ruether. 'The Feminist Liberation Theology of Dorothee Soelle' in Sarah K. Pinnock. Eds. *The Theology of Dorothee Soelle*, 213.

Christians, all of whom were grappling with the collective shame of Auschwitz.⁵⁸¹ In actual fact, this collective shame haunted Soelle's theological canon throughout her lifetime. This fact was also reiterated by Rev. Baerbel Von Wartenberg-Potter when delivering Soelle's funeral sermon in May 2003, speaking of how she had shed theological light on the godforsaken darkness of the twentieth century.⁵⁸²

Dorothee Soelle grew up in Cologne in Germany and was about fifteen years old when the Second World War ended. This reality and context influences all of her theology and her life's work. Soelle lived in a liberal Protestant household and was exposed to a highly refined culture of literature, music and philosophy. Her childhood, however was filled with the harsh realities of war and after the war ended, she found herself, like many of her contemporaries, suffering from collective guilt. Many Germans asked themselves to what extent they and with them the German Christian churches, had contributed to the mass murder of the Jewish people.⁵⁸³ After the Second World War, Soelle's education focused on philosophy and literary studies. She read the works of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre, Camus, Freud and Marcuse. Around this time, she was also to discover the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer who became a leading exemplar of faith for post-Holocaust German Christians.⁵⁸⁴ Bonhoeffer became a figure of great influence in the life and work of Dorothee Soelle.

Soelle is a political activist and a socialist, an admirer of Karl Marx and a liberation theologian who challenges doctrinal orthodoxy and institutional complacency. She is a mystic offering a vision of faith for people disillusioned with bourgeois Christianity.⁵⁸⁵ It was reflection on Auschwitz that spurred her to reject the notion of a God who allows suffering for good reasons and a God who has power to intervene, but stands aloof and merely watches, the annihilation of life. Her mystical orientation led her to conceive of God as more immanent than transcendent.⁵⁸⁶ A pivotal question which Soelle poses in her seminal text *Suffering* is 'what is the meaning of suffering and under

581 Sarah K. Pinnock in Sarah K. Pinnock. Eds. *The Theology of Dorothee Soelle*. London: Trinity Press International, 2003, 1.

582 Right Rev. Baerbel Von Wartenberg-Potter. 'Funeral Homily 5th May 2003' in Sarah K. Pinnock. Eds. *The Theology of Dorothee Soelle*. London: Trinity Press International, 2003, ix.

583 Nancy Hawkins. 'Dorothee Soelle – Radical Christian in Our Midst' in *The Way*. July 2005, 85-96 86.

584 Sarah K. Pinnock, *The Theology of Dorothee Soelle*, 2.

585 Ibid. 1.

586 Ibid. 4.

what conditions can they make us more human?'.⁵⁸⁷ Such a question is framed by the context within which she was writing. In the godforsaken darkness alluded to in her funeral sermon, Soelle was to find fertile ground in which she could grapple with many of the questions of existentialism. Paraphrasing Soelle's text *Suffering*, Colleen Lashmar reminds us that the passion narratives were written for our instruction and from these accounts come a theology of the cross. The soul is open to suffering, abandons itself to suffering and holds nothing back. God is always with the one who suffers, a suffering which entails not only consolation but strengthening.⁵⁸⁸

Soelle moved away from an excessive concern with trying to justify God's power and goodness and more toward the effects and dynamics of suffering for those who are directly affected by it. Theologically, she seems more concerned with asking 'how' than 'why'. In other words, how can suffering be dealt with or endured when it threatens human meaning and purpose, especially when it is caused not by self but rather by external forces.⁵⁸⁹ Exercising agency, an important linchpin for Soelle in relation to suffering, can be an empowering tool for those who suffer. Rather than transferring responsibility for the cause of the suffering, or the way it can be alleviated or eradicated elsewhere, in contrast, we can be autonomous and exercise 'how' rather than 'why'. Essentially, this empowers the sufferer to look at 'how' suffering can be dealt with (or perhaps the source of the suffering dealt with) rather than there being an overemphasis on trying to explain the 'why' of it all. A second key focus for Soelle in relation to suffering, is that of meaning. To suffer is part of the human condition but to suffer without being able to make sense of it adds a much harsher dimension to the experience. This is especially important, when suffering is not the result of internal or personal forces. In other words, how can meaning be found in our suffering when we are the victims, not the perpetrators.

What of God in Soelle's theology of suffering? In fact, she spends much of her writing reflecting on God and positing Him in the arena of human suffering. Soelle holds that certain models of God are an inappropriate response to suffering. For instance, the portrayal of God as divine king with the power to intervene in human affairs or the image

587 Dorothee Soelle. *Suffering*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975, 5.

588 Colleen Lashmar. *Suffering* 1.

589 Flora K. Keshgegian. 'Witnessing Trauma' 94.

of God as the omniscient spectator who watches human history unfold. Such a God is apathetic in the face of suffering.⁵⁹⁰ Both images appear to imply a detached God, one who is indifferent to our suffering. However, as Flora K. Keshgegian rightly points out, for Soelle, God is not the cause of suffering, nor is He above the suffering. Rather He is to be found in the midst of the suffering. This God is present as a God of love rather than of power, a God who also suffers in contrast to taking sadistic pleasure in exercising dominating and absolute power.⁵⁹¹ Drawing a clear parallel with Bonhoeffer in this respect, for Soelle, it seems that God is truly, authentically and tangibly to be encountered in the suffering power of the cross. It is here, at the epicentre of the cross, that God is encountered and experienced like nowhere else. The power of the cross is such that it becomes a symbol of love, equality and solidarity, a sacred trinity for those who suffer. The God who is not above or below the suffering but rather, in the midst of the suffering, can identify strongly with the sufferer and all that they endure. This God enters into the arena of human suffering, standing in solidarity with those who suffer.

Interestingly, Soelle strongly critiques Jurgen Moltmann's theology of a suffering Christ in very strong terms. Moltmann has developed a theory which demonstrates that Jesus suffers at God's hands making him a crucified God, a suffering, poor and defenceless Christ. Moltmann, she says, attempts to develop a theology of the cross from the perspective of the one who originates and causes suffering.⁵⁹² In the face of suffering you are either with the victim or the executioner – there is no other option. Therefore, that explanation of suffering that looks away from the victim and identifies itself with a righteousness that is supposed to stand behind the suffering has already taken a step in the direction of theological sadism, which wants to understand God as the torturer.⁵⁹³ Rosemary Radford Reuther takes this particular point up saying that Jesus did not die on the cross as a sadomasochistic transaction between himself and an all-powerful God to pay for sins that humans are unable to remedy. Rather, Jesus died on the cross because the mighty of religion and state did not accept his call to repentance and solidarity with

590 Sarah K. Pinnock. 'A Postmodern Response to Suffering after Auschwitz' in Sarah K. Pinnock. Eds. *The Theology of Dorothee Soelle*, 133.

591 Flora K. Keshgegian 'Witnessing Trauma' 96.

592 Dorothee Soelle. *Suffering*, 27.

593 Ibid. 32.

the poor – they sought to shore up their system of power and its ideological justifications by silencing the voice of the prophet.⁵⁹⁴

Colleen Lashmar reminds that Soelle also speaks about extreme suffering which causes one to become isolated, hopeless and to sink into apathy. It is most difficult to comprehend this mystery which can often render us silent in its midst.⁵⁹⁵ Soelle analyses suffering in terms of three essential dimensions – physical, psychological and social, a framework which she draws from Simone Weil. Pain that strikes us in only one of these dimensions is not only easier to overcome but, above all, easier to forget. It does not leave behind on the soul the traces so characteristic of affliction. Each of these three dimensions is present in all true suffering.⁵⁹⁶

For Soelle, the sufferer himself must find a way to express and identify his suffering; it is not sufficient to have someone speak on his behalf. If people cannot speak about their affliction, then they will be destroyed by it, or swallowed up in apathy.⁵⁹⁷ This is an interesting paradigm for the patient-chaplain relationship. At the heart of the pastoral encounter is a hope that patients can both identify and use their own inner resources with the assistance of the chaplain. Through reflective listening and supportive presence, a chaplain attempts to empower people to tap into their own inner resources and to find a pathway towards healing and reconciliation. In essence, while acknowledging the point at the heart of Soelle's thinking, it is more than not being able to speak about affliction or suffering that is important.

What is key here I believe, is that people are able to name and articulate the source of their pain for themselves, so that in turn, they are enabled to find a way through their own personal quagmire. This ensures, to borrow from Soelle, that they are neither destroyed by suffering or swallowed up in apathy. It is, of course, as Soelle argues, impossible to remove oneself totally from suffering unless one removes oneself from life itself, no longer enters into relationships, makes oneself invulnerable⁵⁹⁸ but it is how

594 Rosemary Radford Reuther. 'The Feminist Liberation Theology of Dorothee Soelle' in Sarak K. Pinnock. Eds. 214.

595 Colleen Lashmar, 2.

596 Dorothee Soelle. *Suffering*, 13.

597 Ibid. 76.

598 Dorothee Soelle. *Suffering*, 88.

people are empowered to wade through their suffering that is critical. After all, when someone suffers as Soelle reminds us, a person's wounds are not taken from them. Even the risen Christ still had his scars. But she asks, what does it mean not to remove suffering but to use it differently?⁵⁹⁹ This poses a somewhat enigmatic dilemma for the sufferer, as after all, no one wants to suffer. After all, no one wants to endure the pain of affliction spoken of by Soelle and Weil. Using suffering differently opens up deep questions about healing, punishment and God but also about the potential valorisation of suffering. It challenges the sufferer to seek meaning in the experience rather than striving to avoid it. It offers an opportunity for new learning and potential for an alternative way of being and thinking.

5.7.3. Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Soelle was also very influenced by the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer and there are several threads of his thinking evident in her work. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was born in 1906 in Breslau, Germany and was brought up in a cultured home. His father was a professor of Psychiatry in the University of Berlin where Bonhoeffer himself was later to become professor of Systematic Theology.⁶⁰⁰ On the very day that Hitler came to power in 1933, Bonhoeffer gave a talk over the radio criticising the cult of personality in which he read already the threat of his country's doom. This broadcast, from the outset, branded him an enemy of the Nazi regime.⁶⁰¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer was imprisoned on 5th of April, 1943 in Tegel prison in Berlin. In many of his letters written during this period, he emphasises the personal and the soul-searching aspect of his endeavours.⁶⁰²

In the wake of the human suffering that he both experienced and witnessed, Bonhoeffer was to grapple with questions such as who Christ is for us today and what the meaning of his suffering on the cross is. Reflecting in the introduction to Bonhoeffer's *Letters and Papers from Prison*, Samuel Wells speaks of a time in the sixth century before the coming of Christ, where it seemed as if God had lost everything, land, kingship, the temple and how this became a crucible for a new understanding of God. This new

599 Ibid. 155.

600 William O'Fennell. 'Dietrich Bonhoeffer: The Man of Faith in a World Come of Age in *Canadian Journal of Theology*. 1962: VIII, 172-180.

601 Ibid. 172.

602 Richard H. Bube. 'Man Come of Age: Bonhoeffer's Response to the God-of-the-Gaps' in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*. 1971 (205), 203-220.

understanding of God was recorded in Second Isaiah as a God who suffered ‘with’ Israel rather than simply ‘for’ Israel. For Wells, Bonhoeffer’s *Letters and Papers from Prison* is somewhat of a Second Isaiah moment for the Church.⁶⁰³ It is a moment of identification by Jesus with those who suffer and are pained. Walter Brueggemann has also reflected on Second Isaiah saying it is marvellously filled with promises which are addressed only to people in exile and have suffered the loss of their entire world of faith.⁶⁰⁴

Such a reading of this Old Testament text seems to be implying that when the world as we know it crumbles it is then that we experience a God figure who can readily and truly identify with our sense of desolation and desperation. Using the metaphors of exile and homecoming, Brueggemann implies that these promises are not available to those who cling to the old city or in other words who cling to old ways of being. In Second Isaiah, God is very much a figure of restorative action.⁶⁰⁵ Therefore, it would seem that in the pain of loss, in the midst of human suffering God becomes a figure of transformation and healing. Running parallel to the metaphor of exile is that of homecoming, an envisioning of a great procession led by Yahweh as exiled Jews return home.⁶⁰⁶

This returning home I would see as symbolic of the return of fallen humankind to their Father through the death of His son; it is also reflective of the journey made by the Prodigal Son back to his father when he had nowhere else to go having sinned and lost all that was his; and ultimately it symbolises the coming of the suffering servant who gave of Himself through the ultimate loss - the loss of his life and the renunciation of his divinity. This journey of homecoming in Second Isaiah reflects the restoration of the rightful order in a sense which happened on the cross. It is a claiming back of our weakness caused by humankind’s sinful condition. In fact, it reflects a reclamation of every part of our lives by God in all of its polarisation. Indeed, as Richard H. Bube has claimed, our relationship with Christ must be such that he is able to claim for himself, not just our weakness and our failure, but also our strength and our success.⁶⁰⁷ Namely, our

603 Samuel Wells in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, xi.

604 Walter Brueggemann. *Hopeful Imagination – Prophetic Voices in Exile*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986, 90.

605 Ibid. 90/91.

606 Ibid. 94.

607 Richard H. Bube. ‘Man Come of Age: Bonhoeffer’s Response’, 216.

relationship with Christ in order to be authentic, to be without a tint of disingenuity, must encompass the highs and lows of our life, and will have God at the epicentre of the reality of human existence. For Bonhoeffer, God ‘shouldn’t be smuggled into some last secret place’.⁶⁰⁸

Yet, as Bonhoeffer points out God lets himself be pushed out of the world and on to the cross. He is weak and powerless in the eyes of the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps us. Matthew 8:17 makes it quite clear that Christ helps us, not by virtue of his omnipotence, but by virtue of his weakness and suffering.⁶⁰⁹ By allowing himself to be pushed out of the world and onto the cross, Christ stands side by side with those who struggle and suffer. Christ’s pain on the cross connects strongly with the heartache and darkness of the sufferer. For Bonhoeffer, ‘Jesus is there only for others’⁶¹⁰ and therefore, his gift of self-sacrifice on the cross becomes the ultimate act of selflessness, thereby forging a unique connection with those who are struggling with the reality of human suffering. For Bonhoeffer, Christ is a figure of solidarity, standing alongside those victimised by illness, war and poverty. Suffering ‘with’ us, Christ becomes fully human, identifying with the pain of the human condition, a taking on of our human weakness and failure.

5.7.4. Karl Rahner

The German Jesuit priest and theologian, Karl Rahner, has also considered and reflected upon the issue of human suffering. Framed around the question ‘Why Does God Allow us to Suffer?’ he explores the subject in his *Theological Investigations*. In this text Rahner considers the issue of suffering under four key areas – as a natural side effect in an evolving world; as an effect of creaturely sinful freedom; as a situation of trial and maturity; and as a pointer to another eternal life. In using such a paradigm Rahner ultimately explores two key concerns – firstly the necessity to clearly name and distinguish between the notions of permit or cause human suffering (in relation to God) and secondly to explain and develop the link he believes exists between the mystery of God and the mystery of suffering.

608 Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Letters and Papers from Prison*. London: SCM Press, 2017, 129.

609 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 16th July 1944, 134.

610 Bonhoeffer, 143.

He says of the cause and permit dichotomy that obviously the legitimacy, or in other words, the objective justification of such a distinction (especially between causing and permitting) is not to be questioned, since respect for God's absolute holiness and goodness forbids us to attribute to Him the sin of the free creature and the resultant suffering, simply in the same way as we would attribute suffering, which does not arise in the first and last place from a creaturely sin, and nevertheless is in the world.⁶¹¹ Here Rahner seems to be making a clear distinction between the sin of Adam and any sin we may commit which results in us suffering as a consequence. We must take personal responsibility for our own sinfulness and therefore, God cannot be blamed for our own suffering in the same way that he is not to be held accountable for the sin of Adam and the resulting consequences for humankind. However, that said, Rahner does add that such a *modus operandi* does not hinder us from asking 'the one and the same question and at the same time about God's relationship to all suffering'.⁶¹² How can we say that a God 'who is purely and simply the ground and cause of all reality'⁶¹³ be accused of permitting or causing suffering. Here Rahner appears to focus more on God and his qualities and characteristics rather than the why of suffering. For Rahner, suffering is a 'practically unavoidable side effect in a pluralistic and evolving world'.⁶¹⁴ Like Soelle, he seems to be more focused on the 'how' rather than the 'why' of suffering.

Rahner also continues this exploration around suffering by moving to discuss the incomprehensibility of God. Reminding that the Christian faith 'declares that God is the incomprehensible mystery' he also says that this is an unchanging fact. Again, a parallel to be drawn here with Weinandy who speaks of a God who is unchanging, impassible but nevertheless solid and capable of standing in solidarity with us in our time of need. God is that 'unchanging truth' as identified and named by Augustine. This unchanging God and incomprehensible mystery are how it will be 'now and for all eternity' according to Rahner and will also be the case when we come to see God 'face to face'. Even when we eventually meet God, Rahner feels that 'the terrible radiance of the incomprehensible God will remain unveiled and eternal'.⁶¹⁵ We are unable to fully understand the mystery that is God.

611 Karl Rahner. 'Why Does God Allow Us to Suffer', 195.

612 Ibid. 195.

613 Ibid. 196.

614 Ibid. 197.

615 Rahner, 205.

However, Rahner considers that the burden of this mystery is ‘endurable only if we love God and exist unconditionally and selflessly in this love that affirms God as He is’.⁶¹⁶ Here we are being strongly challenged to love a God who really mystifies us. That said, we are faced with the reality of never really knowing God or understanding his ways. For Rahner has cautioned that ‘the never comprehensible and never transparent mystery of the infinite God can be our eternal bliss only in the act in which we selflessly affirm him’.⁶¹⁷ Furthermore, this incomprehensible mystery that is God can only be ours to embrace when we remove the former self, the ego and the pride from the situation we find ourselves in and affirm his goodness, his kindness and his benevolence in what we are experiencing.

This also remains true for when we suffer. This is a challenge of course, as it is difficult to selflessly affirm God when we feel pained or lost. For chaplains also this presents some pastoral challenges around how God is to be understood and connected with and equally how suffering may be endured. In the selfless act of handing over of control to God there is almost a shedding of self, a renunciation of our personhood or an experience of what Rahner names ‘man forsakes himself never really to return to himself’. Here there is a metaphorical act of surrender to the incomprehensible mystery. There is a sense of letting go to the mystery of it all. In this act of trust in God we become ‘lovingly lost in God’s incomprehensibility’ and this alone Rahner says ‘is the knowledge that saves us and makes us free by the fact that it is turned into unselfish love’.⁶¹⁸ Rahner sees the ‘incomprehensibility of suffering as part of the incomprehensibility of God’.⁶¹⁹ The absence of suffering he says would in fact make us question God more than its existence. Not only is suffering ‘unavoidable’ but ‘its absence would mean that God could not be taken seriously’.⁶²⁰ Yet, God offers us his abundant love without which ‘there is nothing left but naked despair at the absurdity of our suffering’.⁶²¹ Essentially, for Rahner, when we suffer ‘there is no blessed light to illuminate the dark abyss of suffering other than God himself’. He also cautions that his light in the darkness is only to be found when ‘we lovingly assent to the incomprehensibility of God himself without which he would

616 Ibid. 205.

617 Ibid. 205.

618 Ibid. 206.

619 Ibid. 206.

620 Ibid. 207.

621 Ibid. 208.

not be God'.⁶²² It would seem that when we let go it is then that we truly begin to walk towards the God who is steadfast and unchanging.

5.8. Suffering – A Heroic Virtue?

Thomas Weinandy writes that the Christian experience of human suffering is rich in significance. Human beings may suffer because of their own personal sinfulness or for the sake of God's discipline or because of the sins of others. However, all suffering, whatever its cause, is to be redound to the glory of those who suffer. In the light of the cross of Christ, while suffering may be due to evil it can be transfigured through the Holy Spirit into a means of obtaining and manifesting heroic virtue.⁶²³ Paul D. Murray has recently moved to challenge what he calls 'a damaging constellation of ideas about God's salvific work and the place of suffering in that work'.⁶²⁴ In other words, Murray is seeking a complete paradigm shift in thinking through challenging the long-held concept within suffering of 'offer it up'. This historical line of thinking is one, which he considers not the least bit useful, and in actual fact contends it is unhealthy, damaging, distorted and distorting. Simultaneously, he notes, that at work in many theologies and spiritualities of suffering, sacrifice, self-renunciation, desolation and dereliction is a problematic assumption of 'offering it up' as part of the redemptive activity of Christ.⁶²⁵ A polarisation of views then leads to many questions about the meaning and value of human suffering.

This discussion has more than a little relevance I believe, for the ongoing discussion within my thesis in relation to suffering. While not to undo or regress from the earlier explorations on suffering and sacrifice, there is, nonetheless, much to reflect upon in Murray's theology. I say this as I think of the sick and the dying. For the sufferer, there can be many false platitudes offered in order to provide a helpful or supportive word during time of illness. Generally offered in earnestness, these sentiments, nonetheless, provide little if any support to those genuinely grappling with existential questions or crisis. Then of course, moving to the 'offering it up' concept this can be a less than useful

622 Ibid. 208.

623 Thomas Weinandy. *Does God Suffer?* 281.

624 Paul D. Murray. 'Living Sacrifice: Is there a non-pathological way of Living Suffering as Sacrifice' in Karen Kilby and Rachel Davies. Eds. *Suffering and the Christian Life*. London: T&T Clark, 2019, 189.

625 Ibid. 196.

methodology for those who are suffering. Asking a person who is gravely ill to ‘offer it up’ can appear disingenuous or dismissive of the depth of their experience. It can offer little by way of solace or support and may indeed, to borrow from Murray, instead be damaging or distorting.

Perhaps, more importantly however, is that the ‘offer it up’ concept to my mind at least, gives suffering a damaging dimension. It consigns suffering to something that wins favour from an angry God or cancels out a previous wrong-doing. It also creates a damaging image of God, one which Soelle cautions against in her writings on suffering for instance. ‘Offer it up’ mentality can damage a relationship with God or alter how God is perceived as suffering can now come to be seen as punishment. Such thinking also offers a paradigm of stoicism. For those who can endure suffering with strength and a degree of stoicism they come to be seen as enduring the suffering of the cross with courageous effort and admiration. Dangerous thinking, I would contend, as such an understanding almost valorises suffering, framing it as a heroic virtue, with the endurance of suffering seen as a badge of honour to be worn with pride. Suffering then becomes the emblem of the brave and the courageous. ‘Offer it up’ offers little by way of genuine support to those in need of the love and benevolence of a compassionate God.

5.9 Sacred Scripture in the Catholic tradition (*Dei Verbum*)

A key aspect of the theological tradition is Sacred Scripture. Therefore, I will now move to explore briefly what Scripture has to offer the conversation at the heart of this thesis beginning with a focus on the text *Dei Verbum*. Produced in 1965 by Pope Paul VI, *Dei Verbum* succinctly offers some focused insight into the Catholic tradition’s perspective and understanding of Sacred Scripture in the life and ministry of the church. This document offers ‘authentic doctrine on divine revelation’⁶²⁶ and in so doing allows for a concrete understanding of the place and role of Scripture in the Catholic tradition. *Dei Verbum* argues that Sacred Scripture offers us the ‘deepest truth about God’.⁶²⁷ In many ways, this taps into the search at the epicentre of this thesis. In reflecting theologically on faith, chaplains have been able to explore some of the deepest truths that frame their life and ministry. In the Catholic tradition, it is in the sacred text of the bible that God’s word is revealed to us in a very tangible way. It is here we encounter the alpha

626 *Dei Verbum* Preface.

627 *Dei Verbum* Chapter One Paragraph Two.

and the omega of the Christian narrative. It is here we are offered potential answers to the complex questions which challenge the Christian mind.

However, any attempt to decipher or understand the scriptures can be challenging. Biblical hermeneutics breaks open the scriptures to us inviting us into conversation with the mystery of God and life. In *Dei Verbum* it is suggested that ‘offering the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals’⁶²⁸ ensures that we can begin a process of knowing God more deeply. However, that said this implies a need to engage in a particular process, one which involves ‘moving the heart and turning it to God’.⁶²⁹ It also means letting go of certitude and entering fully into a process that can be complex and challenging. In many ways, this echoes the movement of the chaplains interviewed in this study who face into the mystery of life and death, pain and suffering so that they can try to understand themselves and their God more deeply and authentically. The courage they have demonstrated in their interviews is the same strength of mind and heart that is needed when entering into an authentic dialogue with the scriptures.

Dei Verbum threads this theme of complexity in relation to engagement with the scriptures throughout the text. Pope Paul IV is quick to remind us that ‘those divine treasures which totally transcend the understanding of the human mind’⁶³⁰ is in actual fact where we will find an understanding of God. The ‘gospel which is the source of all saving truth and moral teaching’⁶³¹ is where as Christians we need to look towards to try to make sense of the many enigmatic questions which the conversation at the heart of this thesis throws up. After all, ‘it follows that the books of scripture must be acknowledged as teaching solidly, faithfully and without error that truth which God wanted put into sacred writings’.⁶³² It is in the scriptures that we find God, that ‘unchanging truth’ that Augustine speaks so boldly of in his reflections elsewhere. It is also where we come to know Him ‘in a special way [as shared] in the inspired books’.⁶³³ This is primarily because ‘these same books give expression to a lively sense of God, [and] contain a store of sublime teachings about God, sound wisdom about human life and a wonderful treasury of

628 *Dei Verbum* Chapter One Paragraph Five

629 Ibid

630 *Dei Verbum* Chapter One Paragraph Six

631 Chapter Two Paragraph Seven

632 Chapter Three Paragraph Eleven

633 Chapter Two Paragraph Eight

prayers'.⁶³⁴ The scriptures are our reference point for knowing God, for discerning our relationship with Him and for finding somewhere to turn when we are overwhelmed by the questioning and the overriding sense of mystery.

Furthermore, sacred scripture is not just where we seek to find God and to understand Him but it is also where we are best nourished. It reminds us of the value of interconnectedness between an individual (especially someone in ministry) and their church community. It is here that they will find a place of nourishment for their spiritual journey. After all, 'the words of the holy fathers witness to the presence of the living tradition, whose wealth is poured into the practice and the life of the believing and praying church'.⁶³⁵ At its simplest, the scriptures are 'the foundation of faith'⁶³⁶ and as a result we are cautioned that 'ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ'.⁶³⁷ We are reminded in *Dei Verbum* that scripture is something unique and special. It 'offers the faithful the bread from the table both of God's word and of Christ's body'⁶³⁸ It is an important bridge between God and His people, between people and their church. It is revelatory but it is also a source of spiritual well-being and goodness.

In relation to the questions this thesis is exploring, *Dei Verbum* is a text that reminds us that we are not alone in our searching and in our quest for answers. We are reminded in a very clear way, that we have somewhere to turn to for support for our questioning. We, as Christians, have a framework which is built on a solid foundation. It is a structure whose very foundation is that of faith. *Dei Verbum* reminds us that we are encased by the sacred scriptures. In turn, such an awareness offers us something to explore, to reflect upon, to pray with and to seek to know God more deeply and more congruently. It gives us something through which to grapple with the questions around faith, suffering and existentialism that the conversation here explores deeply and courageously.

634 Chapter Four Paragraph Fifteen

635 Ibid

636 Chapter Five Paragraph Eighteen

637 Chapter Six Paragraph Twenty-Five

638 Chapter Six Paragraph Twenty-One

5.10 Sacred Scripture and the chaplains at the heart of the conversation

As outlined in a previous chapter, chaplains shared their experience of and understanding of faith, of chaplaincy and of multi-faith ministry. An additional area offered for reflection was that of theological vision or underpinning for their work as chaplains. In responding to this question, chaplains were at times perplexed by the challenge but many of them offered scriptural images or understandings as a means of entering more deeply into their own exploration. Scripture passages appears to have invited the chaplains into a safe space, a place of familiarity, offering them a cocoon of intimacy with their God and indeed, with their questioning. I now wish to look at how they draw from scripture in their sharing and it would seem that from attending to their use and experience of it, they do so in the following ways: they share their experience of scripture; they use it as a means of grappling with issues around suffering; they use it to explore how they understand the essence of chaplaincy and finally, images from scripture emerge when looking at self-compassion and care. Therefore, the conversation about scripture within the context of the chaplains interviewed will take its lead from the above structure.

5.10.1 Chaplains Experience of Sacred Scripture

Some of the chaplains interviewed speak very readily and fluidly about their experience of studying or reading scripture. It is evident that it has been part of their faith formation and of their growth as Christians. For instance, Chaplain D has reflected that ‘I have come to believe that what I read in scripture is true and I believe that Jesus is who he said he was.’⁶³⁹ For her, the experience of reading scripture gives reassurance that all she believes in is true and founded in something tangible and real. For her, Jesus’ actions reflect in a meaningful way the words that he spoke. From a personal and pastoral perspective, reading and engaging with scripture gives this chaplain a firm foundation, something tangible from which to draw.

For chaplain O, her experience of scripture also seems to offer reassurance around the very existence of God. Reflecting that ‘I believe that God is in the midst of all that suffering’ she knows that there is someone to draw upon at times of pain and loss. Going on to consider a little deeper she connects this understanding with her knowledge of the

639 Chaplain D

scriptures saying that ‘I then having studied a little bit of scripture and the commandment you know love your God with all your heart and all your soul and to love your neighbour as yourself’. This awareness around her experience of biblical texts then opens up a pertinent question for her pastoral practice ‘and then the question is who is your neighbour’.⁶⁴⁰ Her knowledge of scripture helps her to make a pastoral connection with what she is experiencing in her ministry. In other words, she is able to use her understanding and awareness of scripture as a framework for her experiential reality. Chaplain J is able to make quite a similar connection reflecting that:

When I read scripture then the way I would describe that is when you read a good book and you can identify with certain characters, that is the way scripture opened up for me. That I could identify with the stories of the bible, all of human life is there, you know from suffering to joy to war to whatever it is. All things become alive for you. The scripture becomes alive in you in a very meaningful way.⁶⁴¹

The use of scripture by these two chaplains appears to touch into or echo their capacity to identify with the pastoral reality of their ministry and indeed their own personal growth. Chaplain D had reflected ‘that story always touched my heart’⁶⁴² suggesting an emotional connection with many of the narratives within the bible.

Chaplain J makes an interesting connection with the use of scripture. Using the line ‘you must become like little children to enter the kingdom of heaven’⁶⁴³ she appears to be suggesting an almost child-like approach to engagement with the treasures of scripture. This has echoes of the movement of the heart towards God spoken about earlier in relation to *Dei Verbum*. In the complexity and challenge of trying to understand more fully the essence of sacred scripture, there is a need to let go, to surrender the certitude we can often bring to any process of discernment. In assuming a more child-like persona or approach to the process, we can, in turn become more open to the wonderful possibilities such an endeavour can create. It breaks open the scriptures for us in a most exciting way.

640 Chaplain O. The scripture piece in question comes from Exodus 20: 2-17

641 Chaplain J

642 Chaplain D

643 Chaplain J. The scripture passage referred to here is Matthew 18:3.

5.10.2 Scripture and Suffering

As outlined, a key theme in the sharing of the chaplains is that of suffering and how it might be understood. Many of them have delved deeply into scripture to help frame this conversation and to support their reflective process. For instance, Chaplain J speaks of Christ's incarnation and her sharing has resonances with the kenotic experience of Jesus that is recounted in Philippians 2:7 'He came as a man and he struggled and died and he suffered so our God is a God who understands our suffering. We are not alone.'⁶⁴⁴ This reflection speaks loudly to the experience of the chaplains and of the theologians consulted earlier. There is an awareness on the part of this chaplain that, because Christ took on the human condition, that as a result, he understands fully the pain of our suffering.

Another chaplain draws from the Road to Emmaus narrative to explore a similar theme in relation to human suffering. She reflects how:

I love the Road to Emmaus. That sense that he joins the disciples, they don't know who he is, he overhears their conversation and he gets interested and he voices a few pointers and I think there is something around that you know they were lost, they were totally lost, they were going back to their old way of life.⁶⁴⁵

Christ sensed the pain and suffering of the disciples who were broken-hearted after his death and brutality on the cross. This gospel narrative offers insight and reassurance to this particular chaplain that neither is she alone in her ministry. Essentially, at the heart of this connection between scripture and experience is the knowledge that God reaches out to us when we suffer. Or indeed, for the chaplains interviewed here in this study, there is a sense that they know they are not alone in their ministry. Chaplain F speaks of a beautiful picture he once saw in an art gallery in Montreal depicting the daughter of Jairus. This picture was a reminder that 'Jesus raising the daughter of Jairus (in that picture), well my theology for me is very much being like the Lord at that time'.⁶⁴⁶ There is a reaching out to those suffer by Christ and for this priest, this resonates strongly with his understanding and experience of ministry.

644 Chaplain J. Philippians 2:7

645 Chaplain O. Luke 23: 13-35

646 Chaplain F. Jairus' Daughter Mark 5:21-43

In contrast, Chaplain J draws on the Good Samaritan story to remind that sometimes compassion can be in short supply ‘it is all about compassion and care and you know the people sometimes we expect to be compassionate carers often aren’t’.⁶⁴⁷ Her reflection here on compassion, using the Good Samaritan narrative as a framework, helps her to articulate the need for compassionate care in ministry. For Chaplain D, she experienced compassion when she was mourning the death of her siblings from Jesus, from her faith, from her reading of scriptures. She recounts that as she approached Lent that year, that rather than give something up, in contrast she decided that she would prefer to sit with Jesus in the desert. She recalls that ‘I just told Jesus that if it is okay with you, I would like to sit with you in the desert for these forty days’.⁶⁴⁸ She reached out to Jesus in her own time of personal pain and suffering. In turn, she used a scriptural image to explore and reflect upon her own experience of suffering and also to name how she managed her own pain and sense of loss.

5.10.3 Scripture and the essence of chaplaincy

I have already explored in a previous chapter how the chaplains interviewed consider that for them, at the heart of chaplaincy is presence. Chaplains drew from many different biblical passages to explore and understand this awareness. In this next section, I plan to look at how scripture supports the chaplains to identify what, for them, is the essence of chaplaincy. For instance, Chaplain X, speaks of the authenticity of Jesus and how he met people where they were at, without judgment or condemnation. This connects with the many types of miracles performed by Jesus amongst the desolate and the down-hearted. She says that ‘when Jesus was alive and when he was going around, he was just Jesus with whoever he met. And he sat with them no matter who they were and he spoke to them’.⁶⁴⁹ This encapsulates the chaplains understanding of ministry – a non-judgmental, compassionate presence.

Chaplain W makes a similar point in relation to Jesus’ presence amongst those in need of compassionate care. Drawing from the Woman taken in Adultery narrative she reflects using this scriptural passage on the essence of Jesus’ ministry which for her, connects in a meaningful way with what she offers to others:

647 Chaplain J. The Good Samaritan Luke 10: 25-37

648 Chaplain D. Matthew Jesus is tempted in the desert 4:1-11

649 Chaplain X

I think of the story where Jesus met the woman who they wanted to stone and he just sat on the ground beside her in the sand and wrote words in the sand. He didn't preach at her, he didn't tell them to go away, he just sat in the space with her. And I think his message was received loud and clear by her even though he hardly spoke to her.⁶⁵⁰

Reiterating that Jesus 'hardly spoke' to the woman or those around her, this chaplain is giving us a powerful reminder of the gift of presence, of being there, not doing or saying, simply present in the moment with compassion and care, a heart open to the pain of others. Her reflection speaks strongly of a non-judgmental presence, kindness and accompaniment in a time of deep pain and sorrow.

Continuing on the theme of presence, a scriptural image which emerged a number of times in relation to the essence of chaplaincy is that of light. For instance, Chaplain X, sees chaplaincy as a ministry of presence, bringing light into the darkness in such a way that it regenerates hope. She shared that 'it is to bring that light to the darkness and when you light their darkness they reignite quite often'.⁶⁵¹ Chaplain W makes a similar point likening her ministry to bringing light which can shine through her own fragility and in turn, this same light can bring some of God's healing and compassion 'I am a little bit of salt everywhere I go. I am a little bit of light maybe where I go, that maybe a little bit of light gets through the cracks of my broken bit and I bring a little bit of God where I go'.⁶⁵² Drawing again on the scriptural image of light for the journey, Chaplain J speaks of a sense of being 'called to be a light for their way' and this vocational call to be the light on the journey comes only 'because He is a light for my way'.⁶⁵³ It is also a reciprocal type of relationship these chaplains seem to have with their understanding of 'being the light'. It is only possible for them to be present to others, to be their light in the darkness because God is the lamp that lights their way in ministry.

Chaplains also drew from other biblical images to explore their understanding of faith and ministry. For instance, Chaplain J, leans very heavily on scripture using the

650 Chaplain W. John 7:53

651 Chaplain X

652 Chaplain W

653 Chaplain J. There are several images of light and darkness in the bible. See for example John 9:5 and Matthew 5:16

passage from Ezekiel a number of times. She draws from this particular text as it frames how she understands her role as chaplain ‘to me there is a lovely passage in Ezekiel where he talks about standing in the gap. I can find nobody who will stand in the gap for Israel and therefore I will come again as Israel’.⁶⁵⁴ For this particular chaplain, chaplaincy is about being able to stand in the gap, compassionately and with courage. It is about being present in the ‘gap’ of pain and suffering. It is about service. Another chaplain uses the Good Samaritan narrative to share a similar understanding. For her, chaplaincy is about service, presence, non-judgmental awareness of the pain of the ‘other’ ‘I suppose my sense comes from the Good Samaritan-that sense of serving somebody, being with somebody, helping somebody irrespective of who the person is.’⁶⁵⁵ For this chaplain, ministry is about meeting where the person is at irrespective of who they are or what shape their life story has taken.

5.10.4 Scripture and Self-Care

Chaplains have shared that they are aware of the need to engage in self-care. Some of them have spoken of religious practice being one of the primary ways in which they care for themselves in the midst of pain, trauma and suffering. As Chaplain I has said ‘I do it through so many formal liturgies and all that too and maybe reading scripture’.⁶⁵⁶ This chaplain also spoke of engaging in meditation or going for a long cycle as a means of replenishing himself when needed.

A biblical image which emerges a number of times in relation to self care is that of the well. This is a recurring scriptural image appearing many times in both the Old and the New Testament. One biblical story that readily comes to mind is the Samaritan woman at the well who was encountered by Jesus.⁶⁵⁷ For some of the chaplains, they identify strongly with this particular image as Chaplain I said in relation to self-care ‘you can’t draw from an empty well’.⁶⁵⁸ He knows that in order to survive in ministry he needs to keep his well from running dry. He needs to help to replenish the source of his strength in ministry.

654 Chaplain J. Ezekiel 22:30

655 Chaplain U. Good Samaritan. Luke 10:25-37

656 Chaplain I

657 Jesus meets the Samaritan Woman at the Well. John 4:7-10. Other examples include Genesis 24:11-20; 1 Samuel 9:11; Exodus 2:15-17; John 4:14.

658 Chaplain I

Chaplain X also uses this image in relation to self-preservation in ministry. Reflecting ‘if your well is dry how can you give a drink of water’⁶⁵⁹, she is aware of the need to keep her well recharged. She sees a direct parallel between the scriptural image of the well and the need to prevent herself from becoming burnt out. Without refilling the well, she has nothing to give, nothing to impart to those who are in need of her empathetic and caring presence. The well image represents for both of these chaplains the need to care for self, to take time for prayer and reflection, so that they can be effective pastoral practitioners. It also has echoes of faith being at the heart of their ministry. In order to remain faith-full and faith-filled, the very source of their being needs renewal and regeneration.

5.11 Scripture and the Integrity of the Theological Reflection Process

‘Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest’.⁶⁶⁰ These words from Matthew’s gospel are a reminder that, as people of faith, Christ invites us into an authentic relationship with him. For those who are weary or pained by the challenges of life these words offer a bridge, an outstretched hand from which abundance of presence organically flows. They also articulate an invitation to enter into a deeper relationship with God than we have already. This mirrors one of the objectives as I see it, of theological reflection. After all, theological reflection invites us into relationship with God, with our faith community, with our heritage and our tradition. It offers us an opportunity to participate in an honest and open conversation which is real and congruent. It proffers a dialogue that is filled with authenticity and a sense of hope. Theological reflection frames a dialogue, a conversation where we learn in a very real way about ourselves, our God and our faith. It provides a space through which we can grapple with some of the pastoral issues which as practitioners we have nowhere else to explore. It is a place where our tradition invites us to lean on it for our own growth and transformation as pastoral practitioners.

I have previously drawn from the Whiteheads’ axiom of ‘befriending the tradition’ in relation to the process of theological reflection. A key element of this ‘befriending’ process involves navigating through sacred scripture as well as considering its role within the very dialogue itself. That said, despite its pivotal position, there are

659 Chaplain X
660 Matthew 11:28

some complexities around how we might use scripture in this reflective process. Laurie Green has rightly noted this reflecting that:

The bible, the early Christian creeds, the sacramental and early liturgical life of the church were all formed and developed in contexts vastly different to our own. Our modern world-view has moved on so far that making sense of what was in the minds who lived during those early Christian centuries is not always easy.⁶⁶¹

In other words, it is not simply a case of approaching scripture to see how we might ‘befriend it’ but rather we must do so with a certain caveat or degree of caution in mind. After all, it is a text that was written within a very different cultural and historical context and as a result ‘there is a gap of language, of culture, of expectation and perception’.⁶⁶² This of course adds to the dilemma of how we might approach scripture in the first instance. Aware that as we begin the process of engagement with the sacred scriptures’ we do so at a certain disadvantage given our cultural, historical and demographic distance. The Whiteheads’ have also taken this point up having reminded us that ‘Christian scripture may at times appear distant and alien to the contemporary believer. Set in very different times and cultural contexts, the biblical writings have attained an authority as revelation that creates further distance’.⁶⁶³

That said, its ancient roots and cultural distance does not erode the importance of the bible in any contemporary theological reflection process. As the Whiteheads’ have reflected ‘behind the printed text of Scripture there lies the spoken story, the early preaching and the worship from which the text originated’.⁶⁶⁴ In other words, it provides us with a well to draw from and a framework to encase our exploration given its connection with the origins of the Christian narrative. There is something there to help us to reflect upon and discern the pastoral issues with which we grapple. The Whiteheads’ name this key strength of scripture in the reflective process saying that ‘the scriptures offer us privileged metaphors or paradigms that can inform, influence and inspire us as we approach pastoral issues’.⁶⁶⁵ Taking this point up, this translates to scripture being

661 Laurie Green. *Let's Do Theology* 81

662 Ibid.

663 James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead. *Method in Ministry – Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry*. 24

664 Laurie Green. *Let's Do Theology*. 92

665 James. D Whitehead and Evelyn E. Whitehead. *Method in Ministry*. 29

our guide, our alpha and omega in any authentic theological reflection process. It is at the heart of the process, guiding, encasing and supporting the entire process.

That said, if we are to use scripture authentically and with openness when reflecting theologically, it is essential to come to the text with energy and enthusiasm. After all, the bible is not just any text. Rather, it is what sits at the heart of the tradition. Therefore, engagement with bible needs to be dynamic, open, enquiring and relational. As the Whiteheads' have reflected 'reading the Bible in the process of theological reflection is an event of dynamic interaction between the minister and the text'. In other words, they are encouraging a relational, interactive experience between reader and text. It is the reader who ultimately brings any text to life and this is especially so in relation to a seminal text like the Bible. As readers we bring our own expectations, disappointments, experience, cultural context, history and limitations to the reading process. This is a point the Whiteheads' pick up strongly reminding us that 'the quality of that interaction will be determined to a large extent by the concrete dispositions of the person reading the Bible'.⁶⁶⁶ We, as the reader are an integral component in the process. It is us, the reader, that ultimately leads to success or lack of in relation to the process of dual engagement with the text.

This of course would appear to imply the need for the reader to hold the position of 'expert' in the discernment and reflection process. Placing such emphasis on the reader would lead, it would seem, to an unspoken need for them to have the requisite skills or knowledge base from which to emerge as 'expert'. It is an interesting point which the Whiteheads' have also addressed in their understanding of the place of scripture in theological reflection. In actual fact, they come from the opposite perspective offering the suggestion that this is not the case. Instead, they have suggested that it is not expertise that is needed. In contrast, they advocate for 'intimacy rather than mastery'.⁶⁶⁷ However, this is anything but straight-forward given some of the issues already mentioned around cultural and historical distance. Rather than proficiency, they advise that the reader comes to the process 'with enough familiarity to be at ease with the Bible and the skill to bring what we know to bear in the process of theological reflection'.⁶⁶⁸ In other words, it seems

666 James. D Whitehead and Evelyn E. Whitehead. *Method in Ministry*. 30

667 Ibid

668 Ibid 31

that they promote a sense of ‘befriending’ scripture as opposed to championing mastery. This translates I believe to bringing an authentic self to the reading of and engagement with scripture. It means bringing our faith and our trust to the biblical text when we read it. It also reminds us, by the same token, of the need to be self-aware. In other words, of the need to be conscious of our own inherent limitations with regard to mastery or expertise in biblical hermeneutics.

In relation to scripture and the process itself, here we are crafting a conversation with the texts to try to ascertain what it tells us about God, about us and about our faith. We are delving a little deeper to so that we can grapple with issues around who God is and what kind of God is with us as we reflect on the challenging existential questions, which pastoral practice throws up. What are particular pertinent in relation to some of the theological issues at the heart of this study are I believe the New Testament narratives around Jesus and his healing ministry. A key aspect of the theological investigation in this chapter centres around suffering and as chaplains, those interviewed offer insight into how their presence supports and accompanies those sick and suffering. Therefore, I recall at this juncture the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd⁶⁶⁹ pastoring the people who follow Him in a very compassionate and caring way. This biblical image speaks loudly to the experience of the chaplains in this study and support their theological understanding (and that of the theologians I have consulted in relation to accompaniment) of their ministry. Such an image also translates to a compassionate image of God, a God who supports and accompanies those who suffer and those who minister to them with love and compassion.

There are also the many healing miracles of Jesus such as Jairus’ Daughter⁶⁷⁰, Blind Men Healed⁶⁷¹, the Man with the Withered Hand⁶⁷² all of which demonstrate a kind, compassionate and caring image of him. There is also the raising of Lazurus⁶⁷³, the many calming of the storm narratives⁶⁷⁴, the stories of sitting with sinners and tax-collectors and the forgiveness of the woman taken in adultery⁶⁷⁵ again all of which offer us a glimpse

669 Psalm 18 and John 10: 1-18

670 Matthew 9:18-26; Mark 5: 21-43; Luke 8:40-56

671 Matthew 9: 27-31

672 Matthew 12:9-11; Mark 3:1-5; Luke 6:6-11

673 John 11: 1-44

674 See for example Matthew 8:23-27; Mark 4: 35-41; Luke 8: 22-25

675 John 7:53

of Jesus who sits with us when we suffer and struggle. It gives a picture of a Jesus who cares for the autonomy and dignity of each person who he encountered. It speaks clearly of a Jesus who cared not what people had or who they were but rather who saw the ‘living human document’ that Boisen also speaks of.

Bringing all of this into the heart of the theological process and especially into the one at the centre of this study, the conversation is significantly enhanced by what scripture offers us. As we reflect on the meaning, value and significance of faith for chaplains working in the midst of deep pain and suffering, we are extended an image of God who accompanies those who suffer and those who minister to them, when we consult scripture. The various healing narratives speak loudly to the experience of the chaplains shared in this study. As the chaplains reflect on the meaning of faith within the context of their pastoral reality, there is much that can be gleaned from scripture which can support the discernment process. By consulting scripture, there is a framework through which the challenging questions which their own reflection has brought up, can be progressed further. In ‘befriending’ scripture, it offers in return to the seeking voice, a reminder of the God who is at the heart of what it is we, as Christians believe in.

5.12. Conclusion

This chapter has drawn together many strands of thinking within the Christian tradition while navigating through a number of historical periods. Each era has its own thoughts on the mystery of human suffering. As argued at the very beginning, this chapter is not an attempt to explain suffering but rather to allow the Christian tradition to speak for itself in relation to how we might understand such a complex and enigmatic concept. Using a Christocentric lens, the issue of human suffering is posited strongly beside the cross of Christ. This offers a paradigm where Christ suffers for us, with us or alongside us depending on what theological school one draws. In her introduction to *Creation and the Cross*, Elizabeth Johnson tells of how, in trying to understand the concept of redemption, she many times felt like a water bug skating over the surface of a pond, seeing the enormous wealth of material below but not stopping or diving down to examine it but instead gliding above the depths to forge ahead and reach the goal.⁶⁷⁶ In many ways, the search in this chapter echoes that of Johnson, in that I know there is much more that could

⁶⁷⁶ Elizabeth A. Johnson, PXVI.

be explored in order to make sense of the human condition. However, what this chapter contains, is a look at what some of the significant members of the theological tradition have to say about the theology of suffering and how this can be appropriated in a meaningful way in the twenty first century. This chapter has also looked at the place and function of scripture within the theological tradition. Looking at it from three different perspectives we have gained some considerable insight into its place in any theological reflection process. The next section of this thesis will now move in accordance with the Whiteheads' model of theological reflection to open up a three-way dialogue between experience, tradition and culture, the fruits of which will I hope, offer insight into future trajectory of healthcare chaplaincy.

Chapter Six

Fruits of the Dialogue – Experience, Culture and Tradition – The Critical Conversation

6.1. Introduction

Theological Reflection is, the Whiteheads claim, an essential tool in the discernment of contemporary ministry.⁶⁷⁷ This thesis is a theological reflection, a discernment or exploration of the meaning, on the value and significance of faith in the life and ministry of contemporary chaplains. Or to quote O’Connell Killen and De Beer, it is an attempt to ‘get to the heart of the matter’, to hear the voice of the chaplain.⁶⁷⁸ Having laid out the framework for this critical conversation earlier in Chapter Two and then having explored the three dialogue partners, this chapter will now move to engage in an authentic and congruent exploration of the question at the very heart of this thesis. This will be done by attending to the experience of chaplains using a five-step approach before putting the awareness gained through this process, into a conversation with the other dialogue partners.

6.2. The Practice of Attending

In order to begin the process of attending to the experience of the chaplains interviewed I have decided to proceed using a five step structure: Faith - A Paradigm of Mystery, Faith - A Necessity?, Faith - The Great Challenger, Faith - Human Vulnerability and Faith - Transformative Trajectory. Each stage will help to develop the conversation further, framing the movement through the data and significantly enhancing our understanding of the topic under investigation. In other words, this is the first step in the process, the metaphorical dipping of the toe into the river of their experience, before moving to focus on the process that will ensue within the crucible. It is important to keep in mind that all twenty-six chaplains, while using different terms, images, symbols and word pictures to talk about, explore and reflect upon their faith, each consistently acknowledged themselves to be people of faith, albeit to varying degrees. The only real exception came from a cultural difference, Chaplain Y, a Jewish Rabbi who reflected that

677 James D. Whitehead and Evelyn E. Whitehead. *Method in Ministry – Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry*. Chicago: Shed & Ward, 1995, 3.

678 Patricia O’Connell Killen and John De Beer. *The Art of Theological Reflection*, 61.

her tradition is ‘uncomfortable’ with the word faith. Instead, she stressed the word ‘awareness’ in relation to her understanding of what she believes. She also shared that ‘I always hold God’s name before me’, an alternative way of describing what she believes in.⁶⁷⁹

6.2.1. Faith – A Paradigm of Mystery

In trying to reflect theologically, on the position of faith within the life and ministry of chaplains, it is necessary to begin with undertaking a process of sorts, which will roll back some of the layers explored in an earlier chapter on experience. This process, will of course, also involve looking at culture and tradition and consider how they both speak to the narrative of the chaplains. Those interviewed in this study were asked how they understand their faith and where they posit it in their lives. In other words, they were challenged to reflect on key questions such as is faith important to them, is it a central part in all that they do, or indeed, is it an appendage which they can either take or leave.

This is where the open-ended questions proved particularly useful. In leaving the understanding and experience of faith open to personal definition and reflection, using probing rather than direct questioning, meant that participants were fairly free to determine the general direction of their responses. This helped the reflective process to remain fluid and unhindered, and has given us a very strong insight into their river of experience. In Chapter Three I have already outlined how chaplains described their faith in terms of something to lean on, a scaffold, an anchor, a Christ-centred belief system, a sense of trust in something greater than oneself, something vulnerable and dynamic and so on. While there is certainly evidence of a wide stroke of the brush in terms of the language or the imagery used to describe what faith is, nevertheless, what is consistent among the chaplains, is the sense that faith is seen as something positive. Even when it is referred to as vulnerable it is still viewed as a means of empowerment in the face of personal and professional tragedy, as a constant support within the storms of life.

What I see as a particularly interesting and insightful aspect of this theological reflection on faith is the sense of mystery which questions around faith appear to generate.

679 Chaplain Y

Indeed, several of the chaplains visibly struggled to articulate what faith means for them. This is an especially thought-provoking observation, considering that chaplaincy is a faith-based ministry, with requirements and expectations of theological formation for training and formation, as well as endorsement from a faith community, in order to go forward for professional certification. However, that said, such a struggle to articulate clearly the meaning of faith touches into the mystery of God and the mystery of suffering with which the theological tradition has also struggled. In many ways, mystery is at the heart of the Christian narrative. As Martin Koci has observed ‘God despite his revelation, remains hidden’.⁶⁸⁰ Here Koci quite clearly names what is at the heart of the Christian narrative - mystery. Or perhaps more succinctly, he is citing the challenge it is to know God within such a backdrop and context. There is an ongoing challenge to try to understand God and his ways, to comprehend the meaning of the cross, to make sense of human suffering and for chaplains, how might they respond pastorally to such questions.

However, for the most part, the theological tradition has not been able to provide any definite answers to such enigmatic questions. As Anthony J. Gittins has reflected to many of our contemporaries and sometimes even to ourselves, life does not sadly make much sense. He reminds us that despite all our vaunted scientific progress we seem hypnotised by postmodernity’s mantra: there is no metanarrative, no convincing, overarching explanation for the way things are.⁶⁸¹ That said, the theological tradition has engaged, and continues to, in a conversation that seeks to find answers to the deep-seated mysteries that lay at the heart of Christianity, a conversation which oftentimes creates more questions than answers. Bernard Hoose has written that ‘when we say God is a mystery, we mean that God is unknown and unknowable, incapable of being analysed, inexplicable and incomprehensible’⁶⁸² and yet, the process to try to address or penetrate the mystery remains a reality for many, as the experience of the chaplains demonstrates. While somewhat of an uncomfortable process it was not shied away from. Indeed, in contrast, as the data has demonstrated, the mystery is faced head on courageously and oftentimes, enthusiastically.

680 Martin Koci. *Thinking Faith after Christianity – A Theological Reading of Jan Patočka’s Phenomenological Philosophy*. New York: State of New York Press, 2020, 162.

681 Anthony J. Gittins. *Called to be Sent. Co-missioned As Disciples Today*. Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2008, 1.

682 Bernard Hoose. *Mysterious God*. Dublin: Columba Press, 2014, 9.

While several of the chaplains interviewed articulate a view of faith as a support system, as something to hold on to, as an anchor or a scaffold, nevertheless there is much reflection on the mystery of faith. There is an awareness of this mystery, the inexplicability of faith, as ‘a belief in the unseen’⁶⁸³ which has contributed to the challenges some of them felt when trying to articulate a coherent understanding of their own faith. This, in many ways, echoes Karl Rahner’s exploration of the mystery of suffering reminding us, that ‘God is the incomprehensible mystery’⁶⁸⁴, a mystery which he also sees will be ‘now and for all eternity’.⁶⁸⁵ Indeed, Rahner sees the incomprehensibility of suffering as part of the ‘incomprehensibility of God’⁶⁸⁶, two sides of the same coin. Chaplain F alludes to this aspect of faith when exploring the concept of chaplaincy saying that when he ministers to another, ‘the guarantee of faith is recognising that something is taking place that neither of us is in charge of’. This taps into Bernard Hoose’s point about God who for him ‘is beyond the limits of anything that we can think about or imagine’.⁶⁸⁷ For this chaplain, there appears to be a clear acceptance of the mystery and simply knowing that faith supports him is enough. There is no attempt, at what Hoose has named, ‘trying to fit God into the way we see things or the way we think about things’⁶⁸⁸ but instead, there is an acceptance of the mystery.

Conversely however, while articulating that he is a person of faith, this chaplain still feels somewhat disempowered at times by the mystery of it all - empowered to support those in distress but disempowered by the mystery of what faith means or, where it has led him. In other words, in the midst of human connection there seems to be somewhat of a contradiction, a splitting open of the complexity that faith often is. Paradoxically, there is a sense of helplessness, an awareness of uncertainty and powerlessness in the middle of great mystery. Earlier in our interview, he reflected that for him, faith ‘is a sort of tapestry in the background in which I work. It is the country, my journey, and as I journey in other countries in time, it is the lens through which I read my life, it’s that text, that relationship that I do not understand and that [mystery] reveals itself in so many ways’.⁶⁸⁹ Here there is a consistent expression of mystery, of knowing

683 Chaplain Z

684 Karl Rahner. ‘Why Does God Allow us to Suffer’, 205.

685 Ibid. 205.

686 Ibid. 206.

687 Bernard Hoose *Mysterious God* 13.

688 Ibid, 19.

689 Chaplain F

and not knowing, of reaching out in trust to someone or something not fully understood. This stands in contrast to the desire for absolute certainty which society often seeks, rationality as opposed to mystery.

In many ways, he is speaking of the mystery that many people, not just chaplains experience in relation to faith especially during times of pain and loss. He is echoing the struggle so many have when it comes to theodicy and suffering. He is reflecting upon the very real and enigmatic questions which people have about God and faith. Interestingly, this point draws an important parallel with cultural context. Society has become increasingly secular and pluralist in recent decades and faith has become less important than in previous generations. There has been a considerable decline in religious practice and society has become more scientific and technically driven. Answers can be found for most questions, even the most complex ones, and yet, the theological canon has struggled to provide answers to the questions which surround the mystery of suffering, the mystery of God, and the mystery of the cross. Indeed, there appears to be an acceptance of the incomprehensibility of it all as Rahner's reflection has demonstrated. However, for those who operate within such a paradigm of mystery and uncertainty, it appears to be a challenging place.

Chaplain G seems to reflect this same understanding of faith as a mystery saying that despite having 'always had a real closeness to God', her faith 'is a belief and a trust in something we don't see but a hope in not knowing'.⁶⁹⁰ Here is an image of trust despite not being able to articulate fully who God is or what faith means. There is an acknowledgment that this is something greater than we can ever truly understand. There is also evidence here of a deep sense of hope even within the mystery of not knowing, an awareness of better days to come. For this chaplain, she believes and trusts, not naively though, in what she cannot ever fully understand or indeed experience, in the here and now. However, within this mystery and reaching out in trust, she feels certain of the hope of the resurrection, a hope that comes from believing in a God she trusts even if, she cannot fully know him or understand him.

690 Chaplain G

Chaplain Z also tackles this theme of mystery. Seeing herself as very faith full and faith filled, nonetheless she grapples with what lies at the heart of faith, expressing a sense of mystery about it all. As a young child she recounts having experienced ‘feeling a deep closeness to God back then’. This closeness is something which has sustained her through her adult years and much suffering and pain (which she shared in the course of her interview). When pushed to explore what faith means for her, or to try to unpack the mystery, she speaks of ‘you know faith, trust, hope, it is I think, there is a scriptural definition you know that the belief in what is unseen, that is it for me’.

Once again, we have this theme of the mystery of faith, a sense of not being completely sure what faith is, a belief in what is unseen, in what is inexplicable, in what is beyond definition or, as Bernard Hoose has said, is ‘beyond the boundaries of our understanding’.⁶⁹¹ However, while grappling with such questions, she moves to the use of imagery to explore her faith, to give words and feelings for what she struggles to name. This helps her to split open the paradox. For this particular chaplain, despite the uncertainty and the unknowing, faith gives her ‘an anchor’, ‘a platform’, it gives her ‘meaning’ and ‘reason’. This has echoes of Nietzsche and Frankl who remind us that those ‘who have a why to live can bear almost any how’.⁶⁹² This reminds of the quest to seek meaning and purpose especially in the face of human suffering. For this particular respondent, it is her faith which provides assurance and support in the context of suffering and loss.

It also appears to give her a sense that what she has is ‘precious’ and like chaplain G, a belief and hope ‘that there is more to come’.⁶⁹³ While faith is a mystery for some of the chaplains interviewed, simultaneously and paradoxically, it is what gives them a source of strength. It is an anchor, empowering, supportive and encouraging, a reminder of what is precious and beautiful in life. There is a feeling of gratitude, even in the face of uncertainty and great human suffering as well as an awareness and appreciation for all that life has brought. Indeed, perhaps more importantly, there is a sense of gratitude for what faith brings to her life. Interestingly, she names God as her ‘anam cara’ or soul mate, a further demonstration of the deep sense of trust in what she had earlier called

691 Bernard Hoose. *Mysterious God*, 16.

692 Viktor E. Frankl. *Man's Search for Meaning*. London: Rider, 2004, 9.

693 Chaplain Z

“belief in the unseen”. This image of *anam cara* or companion also connects with Bonhoeffer’s image of Christ as a figure of solidarity. For Bonhoeffer, ‘Jesus is there for others’⁶⁹⁴, a figure of solidarity standing alongside those victimised by illness, war and poverty. He is an ‘*anam cara*’ for those who are pained by the reality of suffering in whatever guise it comes. This also links in with Moltmann’s image of Christ as the brother of the despised, abandoned and oppressed – a Christ who is a companion to those in need, a figure of solidarity and support.⁶⁹⁵

6.2.2. Faith – A Necessity?

This next section will explore what chaplains have shared in relation to whether they need to have faith or not, in order to minister to others. Several of them spoke about the need to possess faith in order to sustain themselves personally and pastorally. For instance, Chaplain B spoke with certainty of the need to have faith, reflecting that ‘going up on the floors, you need to have a strong faith, or going to the emergency room not knowing what you are facing. You knew that you needed God with you’.⁶⁹⁶ In the powerlessness of the human condition, this chaplain honestly names and addresses her need to have faith, in order to face the challenges that ministry brings. For her, faith offers companionship, empowerment and solidarity. This self-reflection touches into Bonhoeffer’s image of Christ as a figure of support and solidarity. Acknowledging the need to have God by her side, she knows that he is not going to let her down. In order to help others, she needs to know that God is with her. Her faith empowers her and helps to quell some of the fear she regularly experiences. There are resonances here with Paul’s Letter to the Romans; ‘with God on our side who can be against us’.⁶⁹⁷

Building on this particular point and from a pastoral perspective, Chaplain D (a hospice chaplain) speaks of the need to have faith in order to adequately address significant spiritual and pastoral issues, especially at end of life. She reflected that:

I believe that it is necessary [to have faith]. And because the Christian belief that we are made in the image and likeness of God, what we are given you know a body as well as a soul, I mean the soul is more important, that is my concern – the person’s soul. I pray for them. I don’t know what their history

694 Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Letters and Papers from Prison*. London: SCM Press, 2017, 143.

695 Jurgen Moltmann. *The Crucified God* London: SCM Press, 1964.

696 Chaplain B

697 Romans 8:31.

is you know, we come into their lives in the last five minutes of their life so to speak. So, I don't see because it is the person's soul, I don't know how a person without faith could address that.⁶⁹⁸

This chaplain uses a particularly interesting image to explore her understanding of her pastoral identity and her own faith. Describing a type of therapeutic horse-riding activity that she is involved in to support children with cerebral palsy, she explains that she is a side walker, and she subsequently goes on to liken her faith and her pastoral identity to that of a side-walker. Walking alongside the horse as the instructor determines the direction and activity, the side-walker remains quiet. They are quietly present. However, they 'can't be drifting off thinking about other things, you have to be focused on the rider and you have to be attentive until that rider is off the horse'.⁶⁹⁹

In order to be a side-walker, the person must have faith in themselves and in the instructor. It is a relationship built on trust. Significantly, trust is also being placed in the side-walker by the instructor, the child and their parent, in a similar way to the trust placed in a chaplain by the person to whom they minister. The trust here is relational and one which is supported by connection and a sense of security. Therefore, it is also necessary for the side-walker (and the chaplain) to feel secure in what is being asked of them. They need to operate from a place of certainty and trust. This is reflective of how some of the chaplains interviewed see the need to have trust in God. However, this is a challenging command - to have an absolute trust in God – given that any relationship is dynamic and open to change. Like that image of the river which can ebb and flow unhindered and uncontrollable, so too can faith shift and move as life experience impacts upon it. Nevertheless, it is a reminder that trust is at the heart of faith for several of the chaplains. It is another indicator that faith is about anchorage in a solid construct. This connects in a very meaningful way with the image of the anchor or the *anam cara* discussed earlier. A relationship with God is built on trust, framed by trust and developed in trust. Just as Chaplain B has said, for her, faith is a prerequisite, to face the harsh realities of life, likewise for Chaplain D, it is necessary to trust so that she can offer the support that is needed, physically, pastorally or spiritually.

698 Chaplain D

699 Chaplain D

For some of these chaplains, faith appears to offer strength, empowering them to be companions on the journey for those they minister. For them, faith offers support but without having the benefit of absolute answers, knowing that they are not alone, appears to be sufficient consolation and support. They can grapple with the challenging questions knowing that they are not alone, that even if they do not fully understand the mystery of suffering, they can take consolation from knowing they are not alone in the pain of the questioning. They appear to be more concerned with offering support than seeking answers to the existential questions they face into every day.

Such an important point resonates strongly with the theological tradition on suffering. Many of the theologians I have consulted in the course of this study appear to be more concerned with the ‘how’ rather than ‘why’ of suffering. For Simone Weil, for instance, ‘the ethical task is to render suffering meaningful rather than explicable’.⁷⁰⁰ Likewise, Dorothee Soelle also appears theologically to be more concerned with ‘how’ rather than ‘why’. In other words, for her, the key question is ‘how can suffering be dealt with or endured when it threatens human meaning and purpose especially when it is caused not by self but rather by external forces’.⁷⁰¹ Assigning blame is not part of her trajectory. In a society that seeks answers, this acceptance of not knowing, with a focus on supporting rather than understanding, stands in stark contrast to the drive to comprehend everything, to apply rationality to every problem we face. Karl Rahner challenges us to become ‘lovingly lost in God’s incomprehensibility’⁷⁰² and in many ways, this is what chaplains B and D have done. They have courageously chosen to accept the mystery of suffering but know they need God to help them walk that pathway themselves and with others.

Chaplain E has reflected that for her, faith ‘is foundational to everything else’. A persistent theme in her sharing was ‘stepping out’ in faith – joining a religious congregation, moving to the United States, leaving the congregation, becoming a chaplain, pursuing postgraduate studies, staying on in the States – all significant life

700 Anna Rowlands. ‘Reading Simone Weil in East London: Destitution, Decreation and the History of Force’ in Karen Kilby and Rachel Davies. Eds. *Suffering and the Christian Life*. London: T & T Clark, 2019, 116.

701 Flora K. Keshgegian. ‘Witnessing Trauma: Dorothee Soelle’s Theology of Suffering in a World of Victimization’ in Sarah K. Pinnock *The Theology of Dorothee Soelle*. London: Trinity Press International, 2003, 94.

702 Karl Rahner. ‘Why Does God Allow Us to Suffer’. 206.

decisions she describes in terms of ‘stepping out’ in faith. To have the courage to try new things, to make big decisions, to become and remain a chaplain, are for her, all dependent on having faith, on being able to rely on her faith for support, of feeling encouraged to take chances because faith gives the strength to change direction time and time again. She also shared how for her to have the courage and the conviction to ‘stand in the place of helplessness and not be afraid to be there with another helpless person’, it is essential to have faith and to feel supported by God. Watching ‘mothers who hold dead babies in their arms’ in that place of helplessness requires faith. To be able to witness such devastation requires faith she says. She goes on to say that ‘to be willing to stand in the place of hopelessness because that is often how we feel that we can’t do anything to sort it out’⁷⁰³ requires faith.

Chaplain K makes a similar point saying ‘yeah, I think faith is probably the key, because you are coming into situations where the difficulties of life can’t be fixed in the traditional sense of fixing things’. Finishing her reflection on the centrality of faith in the work of chaplaincy she says ‘if I am not grounded in that then when I see somebody struggling with the meaning question there is no ground for me to hold’.⁷⁰⁴ It would seem that for these chaplains, faith is not only foundational and necessary but, it is what keeps them grounded. There is an element of trust here, in the sense that it is imperative to be able to trust in the source or foundation of faith, to minister to others. In order to be able to stand in that place of helplessness there appears to be an awareness of the need to be grounded, to feel held by a God who can be trusted to support and to empower even when one is feeling somewhat disempowered. That theme of paradox again speaks loudly to this exploration of faith and ministry. In order for them to be empowered when disempowered the chaplains feel the need to draw upon what is foundational, what is at the heart of the Christian message. Chaplain W also speaks of this foundational importance of faith when facing life and death situations:

I couldn’t function without it. I don’t know how, I mean never mind life or death, just everyday life. I don’t know how people cope without faith. I mean I have never known any different I suppose but I wouldn’t like to be facing life without faith. I wouldn’t like to be getting up every day and thinking that I don’t have any faith in anything.⁷⁰⁵

703 Chaplain E

704 Chaplain K

705 Chaplain W

This total surrender to God, to resist what Bernard Hoose has called ‘the drive to control and to possess’⁷⁰⁶ runs counter-cultural to what contemporary society advocates. In a world that has become increasingly secular, pluralist and diverse, such a reliance on God for support and encouragement is counter-cultural.

Others reflected that in order for them to keep going in ministry means having to tend in some way or another, to one’s faith. Being a person of faith provides significant support for chaplains, however, faith needs nurturing. Chaplain E describes tending to her own ‘spiritual well-being’ as beneficial, noting that ‘I am at my best, most present and able to be present to the other and not be overwhelmed by some of the tragedies that can catch you off guard’.⁷⁰⁷ The need to replenish the well is a recurrent theme in the data. Describing how he needs to have faith Chaplain I commented that ‘personally I wouldn’t be in the job unless I was a person of faith’. He shared how ‘it sort of shapes how I view things, how I work, gives me support to get through so many different situations’.⁷⁰⁸

However, he cautions that ‘you can’t draw from an empty well’, reflecting further that – ‘it is about filling or resourcing myself and giving me that life and that comes from religious practice’.⁷⁰⁹ Later, he reiterates this point noting that ‘if we haven’t got time to replenish ourselves and get in touch with that source [Christ] I think we will run dry, the well will run dry’.⁷¹⁰ Chaplain X also used the image of replenishing a well. Asking ‘how if the well is dry can you give a drink of water’ she goes on to share the experience of her ministry in a busy city hospital where she is faced with ‘suicide, the immediate aftermath of suicide’ as well as ‘murders, road accidents and all that’.⁷¹¹ Faced with innumerable tragedies every week she says ‘if I hadn’t the resources, divine resources, I would not be in my job today. Definitely not’.⁷¹² Reflecting further, she senses that ‘I don’t know how I would cope with all that. I would make a big B of it I’d say if it weren’t for the Spirit of God doing work through me because I could wreck people’s lives if I said

706 Bernard Hoose. *Mysterious God*, 19.

707 Chaplain E

708 Chaplain I

709 Chaplain I

710 Chaplain I

711 Chaplain X

712 Chaplain X

one word of my own that is not right'.⁷¹³ This need for time aside resonates with Christ's need to go to a solitary place to pray (Mark 1:35), to replenish himself emotionally and spiritually. In order to give to others, there is a recognised need to 'care for the carer' physically, emotionally and spiritually.

In many ways, these chaplains are recognising that for personal fulfilment and professional best practice they need to nurture their faith. They know that they need to keep in touch with what is at the heart of their ministry. In order to stay 'healthy' the well needs constant replenishment. The data demonstrates a keen awareness of this and is, for the most part, attended to by the chaplains.

6.2.3 Faith – The Great Challenger

Thus far, I have explored how chaplains consider faith to be a mystery and foundational to their work. While on one hand, faith appears to empower and support chaplains to minister to the sick and the dying, faith also seems to challenge them. When I say challenge, I mean faith calls them to service of others. This vocational calling is underpinned and supported by their faith. However, it is their faith (amongst other reasons of course) which has drawn them into the work which they do and by extension, which enables them to support and accompany others, during times of existential crisis. Moreover, it is their faith which supports them to stay within the ministry. Leading on from the previous discussion around the foundational aspect of faith, there is some opportunity here I think to explore what chaplains identify (sometimes without overtly naming them) as some of the key elements of chaplaincy. In exploring their understanding of chaplaincy, they name some of the complexities which exist for them around faith and ministry, the pain of the vocational calling.

In attending to their experience, chaplains spoke of being present to the pain of others, of supporting at times of existential crisis and of staying with the faith struggles which illness and death can bring. As Kristine Rankka has observed for the person of faith, the experience of suffering leads to critical questions about God, oneself, oneself in relation to God and to others.⁷¹⁴ The data collected documents this process of critical

713 Chaplain X

714 Kristine M. Rankka. *Women and the Value of Suffering*. Minnesota: Michael Glazier Books, 1998. 14.

questioning and of struggle. Chaplain E, for example, has shared of ‘standing in the place of helplessness’⁷¹⁵ a place of hopelessness and desolation. Charged to stand in a place of hopelessness asks much of a chaplain especially when ‘we can’t do anything’. Here there is an unspoken sense of vulnerability and powerlessness. There is an awareness of the poverty of the role and of the challenge it is to stay grounded in the face of human suffering. It is that walk into a ‘realm beyond our human comprehension’ as Michael J. Dodds has written.⁷¹⁶

Continuing with the theme of vulnerability of the role and recalling how many times she has been present ‘when the doctors might come in and say I am sorry he is dead and they leave and you are the one who is there because you are willing to be there with them to help them to absorb that shock’⁷¹⁷, this chaplain gives insight into the helplessness they encounter. Standing in that place of helplessness, chaplains are tasked to step into and stay put in that uncomfortable sphere. This links strongly with Bonhoeffer’s observation that ‘suffering is the badge of true discipleship’.⁷¹⁸

Standing in a place of helplessness demands much of the chaplain. However, my research suggests that chaplains have the courage to stand in that place of helplessness. There is a parallel to be drawn here I think with the liberation theology model of solidarity with those who suffer and this appears to be what this particular chaplain is implying. In a way, this standpoint is reflecting what Laurie Green has said of Christ, who at his incarnation, puts himself right inside the cultural context, alongside people’s experience.⁷¹⁹ It also has echoes of Bonhoeffer’s Christ who he proclaims ‘is there only for others’.⁷²⁰ For Chaplain G her faith and her role demands that she stand with those who are pained, reiterating and consolidating the point made by the chaplain just quoted. For her, this is a ‘coming alongside people in their life moments when they are most in need’ and by so doing ‘providing a safe and secure place where they can find safety and trust and hopefully some hope, love and acceptance’.⁷²¹

715 Chaplain E

716 Michael J. Dodds. ‘Thomas Aquinas, Human Suffering and the Unchanging God of Love’ in *Theological Studies*. 52: 1991, 330.

717 Chaplain E

718 Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *The Cost of Discipleship*. London: SCM Press, 2018, 45.

719 Laurie Green. *Let’s Do Theology – Resources for Contextual Theology*. London: Bloomsbury, 2012, 13.

720 Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Letters and Papers from Prison*. London: SCM Press, 2017, 19.

721 Chaplain G.

This image of companionship is one of presence, security, acceptance and love for those being ministered to but one which by the same token, demands much of the chaplain. There is a real sense of offering nothing more than presence and solidarity in the midst of suffering. Yet, this gift of presence, demands courage and strength on the part of the chaplain. This is very much reflective of Moltmann's image of Christ who he sees as having identified Himself with those who are enslaved, taking their pain upon Himself.⁷²² Chaplains identify with the pain of others and offer support and solace as they walk the pathway with them. This is the antithesis of the individualism of contemporary society.

Chaplain J speaks very strongly in images around what she considers to be at the heart of faith and ministry. Describing her faith as 'a firm belief in God and in Jesus' she goes on to say that her faith in God helps her to see a reflection of this God and Jesus in every person she ministers. Empowering her to walk, talk with and meet people, she says that her faith in God helps her to do her work because 'I can walk with people but my walk with God is where the root of my walk with people is'. Without this rootedness in God, without this sense of trust and belief that 'God is over everything and no matter what happens in this world, no matter what people say, God is still in charge of this world I could not do what I do'.⁷²³ Her image of rootedness both grounds her and yet, challenges her, to meet, walk, talk and be with people who are in need of help and support. As Anthony Gittins has said for Christians, the call and its consequences provide a reason for living and a meaning for life that are unequivocally traceable to, and rooted in, Jesus.⁷²⁴ Such an understanding is echoed in the above reflection by Chaplain J.

This chaplain is also conscious that she is a light in the darkness and how she interacts and engages with people is a reflection for them of God. In other words, especially for those who do not believe in God, or perhaps for those who have begun to waver in their belief, her way of being will reflect to them, some experience of God. This, of course, brings a very strong challenge for the chaplain to be the best version of herself that she can be. Reflecting on this she says:

722 Jurgen Moltmann. *The Crucified God*. London: SCM Press, 1964, 48.

723 Chaplain J

724 Anthony J. Gittins. *Called to be Sent. Co-missioned As Disciples Today*. Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2008, 3.

That voice says you are the way. He has no voice but ours, he has no hands but ours and you know when you go to somebody, when I go to somebody, I am very conscious that what I say and the way I act is a reflection in my belief in God. And that person in the bed because I say I am a chaplain, that person is probably, now this is an assumption, has probably judged me already, so what I say and what I do is my reflection of God to them. And that to me is vitally important. Because we meet people in their darkest hours. We meet them in their most fantastic hours as well, but we meet them basically in their darkest hours and sometimes we are the only light they have, to shine back out of the darkness and I just, for me just I would be so careful that I will not knock somebody's little grain of faith, or whatever or put out that light that they so badly need. Now, I don't know how God is going to use that, that is not my problem, all I know is that I am called to be a light for their way, because He is a light for my way.⁷²⁵

She continues to explore the theme of darkness and how she assists those grappling with theirs. She refers to this as 'holding a light for somebody to find their way out of the darkness' and she feels challenged by her faith to be this light in the darkness for others. Chaplain X uses a similar image saying 'it is to bring that light to the darkness and when you light their darkness they reignite quite often'.⁷²⁶ Quoting from the prophet Ezekiel in 22:30, Chaplain J speaks of 'standing in the gap'. As a chaplain, as a person of faith, she finds herself challenged to 'stand in the gap for all people who [for whatever reason] cannot come and pray to God because there are times in everybody's life when we can't pray'. It is during these times she feels 'called to stand in the gap holding that person's hand and God's hand so that they can come from where they are to where God wants them to be'.⁷²⁷ After all she says, 'once you put your hand in the hand of God he doesn't let go'. This offers something by way of solidarity and reassurance to those who are challenged to stand in the gap, to shine a light in the darkness or as Chaplain K says 'holding people in the eye of the storm'.⁷²⁸ This reflects the sense of solidarity which Bonhoeffer speaks of in relation to Christ and those who suffer, a line of thinking which is, for the most part, counter-cultural.

Chaplain O speaks very clearly of having a strong faith and at the same time, declares that it offers her little to shield her from the reality of life and death situations

725 Chaplain J

726 Chaplain X.

727 Chaplain J

728 Chaplain K

which she faces every day. Exploring what faith means to her, she proceeds to say that ‘even though I have faith in God I am very conscious that I don’t have any answers’. Rahner has reflected that when we suffer ‘there is no blessed light to illuminate the dark abyss of suffering other than God Himself’.⁷²⁹ Or in other words, there are no answers only the ones we find in the incomprehensible mystery that is God. For this particular chaplain, there is an acute awareness of this reality and yet, she shares extensively of the pain this brings her. Likening her faith to a ‘seesaw - up and down’, she herself can see a polarisation within her faith – a dichotomy of trust and struggle. This tug of war between trust and struggle is a continuous theme in her sharing. This reflects her feeling of vulnerability or helplessness which she experiences when faced with human suffering. Working as an end-of-life chaplain, she experiences death and dying on a continuous basis and at times her tug of war in relation to God and faith, between trust and struggle, can almost engulf her.

I experienced this chaplain to be very humble in her recollection and it is difficult not to be touched by the depth of her vulnerability. She shares that, when moving through difficult situations, she comes ‘naked with empty hands’. Reflecting further, she says ‘and that thing about being naked for me paints the picture, you are coming as another human being and you are coming with nothing but yourself’.⁷³⁰ Here there is an authentic introspective journey exploring honestly the challenge which faith brings as well as naming the cost of caring for others. It is also a statement of the vulnerability of the role of chaplain and of the fragility of the human condition. It is an honest reflection of how even as people of faith, chaplains are challenged by what they see and what they experience. They are challenged because faith draws them to this type of ministry, keeps them in the midst of it all while placing them in a space where they come face to face with their own sense of disempowerment and struggle time and time again.

Another image which this chaplain uses is that of the opening of eyes. Reflecting on the Road to Emmaus narrative, she shares about not being able to fix or change a situation. However, for her faith and ministry is being able to sit with the pain and the brokenness of others. In sitting with that pain, she considers that chaplains are challenged to see more clearly what their faith is asking of them. There is a sense of needing to ‘open

729 Karl Rahner. ‘Why Does God Allow us to Suffer’ 208.

730 Chaplain O

our eyes, maybe while we close them'. Clarifying somewhat, she reflects that sometimes 'as a chaplain we don't see very clearly, but the Lord who is with us opens our eyes to the situation'.⁷³¹ This appears to be an indicator of human limitation and an acceptance of it. There is a sense of abandonment or what Bernard Hoose has said of faith, that 'in its richest meaning it is complete and loving abandonment and commitment to God'.⁷³² This chaplain is lovingly and completely abandoned to God and to His ways. After all, she seems to be saying that even when chaplains are blind, metaphorically speaking, to the reality of the situation or when they find themselves powerless to act, somehow, if their guiding principle is trust in God, they will have their sight restored. They will somehow achieve liberation from their personal limitations.

For Chaplain W, her ministry challenges her, asking her to find a way of 'stepping into their shoes' so that she can walk 'alongside them for the length of time that I meet them'.⁷³³ Like Chaplain O, there is an interconnectedness in the sharing, about opening up the eye to the heart so that the pain and experience of others can be understood and held in a meaningful way. Drawing from the biblical image of salt and light, she sees herself as a 'little bit of salt everywhere I go. I am a little bit of light maybe where I go and maybe a little bit of light will get through the cracks of my broken bit and I bring a little bit of God where I go'.⁷³⁴ Here in these two chaplains I captured a sense of powerlessness and even doubt in relation to what they bring to the pastoral encounter. Their use of imagery greatly enhanced the sharing and reflection which links in with the importance which O'Connell Killen and De Beer place on it in the reflective process. I recall the see-saw image used earlier by Chaplain O and for her, there seems to be trust and struggle, certainty and doubt, light and darkness, salt and light in how she understands and experiences faith and ministry.

Ironically, it seems that in their service to others, chaplains can come face to face with their own blindness and shortcomings, a context that shines light on the vulnerability of the human condition, a counter-cultural endeavour. Moreover, faith does not always offer protection or a framework of support against such challenges. Rather, in contrast,

731 Chaplain O

732 Bernard Hoose. *Mysterious God*, 56.

733 Chaplain W

734 Chaplain W

it seems to arouse feelings of ineffectiveness and insecurity. As a chaplain, it is easy to identify with such difficulties and insecurities. Acting out of a place of good faith and a desire to serve others, can place pressure on chaplains to offer what is sometimes, impossible to do so. Or in other words, chaplains can feel quite ineffective when faced with suffering and a lack of certitude. Faced with the mystery of it all, they can feel engulfed by the enormity of suffering.

6.2.4. Faith – Human Vulnerability

I have been exploring faith and ministry and will now shift gear somewhat and concentrate on the chaplains' personal experience of suffering. Chaplains recalled that when touched by the experience of loss they found themselves journeying introspectively in an attempt to try to make sense of the reality of their own suffering and that of others. Many of those interviewed shared experiences of personal tragedy and suffering which changed them and their faith narrative immeasurably. As both a researcher and a fellow chaplain, I was humbled by listening and attending to such deep human pain. Sharing how it moved something within to try to become more fully integrated as people of faith aroused feelings of gratitude and awe within me. The simplicity and tone of the sharing made it hard not to be touched by their pain. For some, the challenge and indeed, the pain of the faith (and life) journey, is an on-going reality. Even in their sharing it was so obvious. It is interesting to hear how when faced with some of life's worst scenarios, the chaplains have seen their faith polarised into either consolidation or increased vulnerability.

Again, in recalling the see-saw image used previously, in their sharing, there is a reminder of the vulnerability of life and of the faith journey. Hidden within the personal narrative, there can be so much pain and suffering, often rarely spoken of or named. This is a further reminder of the mystery of the pastoral encounter where anything can be shared in the preciousness (and the vulnerability) of the human connection, or during what John Quinlan has named 'pastoral relatedness'.⁷³⁵ I feel that this is what happened during the interview encounter. In the reaching out with an open ear to the narrative of the chaplain, a sacred space was offered within which, the experience and the pain of their life (and for some ministry), could and was shared, without hindrance or judgment.

⁷³⁵ John Quinlan. *Pastoral Relatedness: The Essence of Pastoral Care*. Boston: University Press of America, 2002.

For instance, Chaplain G, recalled that she ‘always had a real closeness to God’ since she was a little girl. Her interview really was a wonderful witness to love of God, gratitude for her faith and a deep sense of appreciation for life and ministry. Recalling how she had felt ‘God’s call upon her life’ at a young age, she shared that faith has always been a central part of her life, even when challenged by experiences of intense pain and suffering. She proceeded to share an extremely painful personal experience of multiple miscarriage and how, at six and a half months pregnant, she discovered during a routine ultrasound that something was wrong. Recalling that the doctor, ‘just turned around and he said I think something is wrong’. She subsequently learned that ‘the child I was carrying had a lot of problems and probably was not going to survive, would not be compatible with life’. Having been told her baby would, most likely, not survive, she continued on with her pregnancy and she ‘called my chaplain friends and I told them to pray you know for me and my baby’. She recounted how many of her chaplain friends and colleagues continued to pray for her and her baby for the next six weeks and when he was born, she and her husband had him for four days.

Reflecting on the experience, she said ‘and just like a lot of different moments that I felt like God used other people, he used various experiences just very profound and just really I guess in a crazy way, probably the hardest loss that I have been through was the place where my faith was probably the most affirmed’.⁷³⁶ This chaplain is strongly linking in with the mystery of suffering and the mystery of faith. At her darkest hour, she experienced the abundant love of God, which Rahner has spoken of in relation to suffering. Without this abundance of love, he has reminded that ‘there is nothing left but naked despair at the absurdity of our suffering’.⁷³⁷ In the absurdity of her suffering this chaplain experienced the love and support of God and yet, the mystery was not diminished.⁷³⁸ There were no answers to explain the pain of her loss but, by concentrating on the ‘how’ rather than ‘why’ which Soelle and Weil challenges us to do, she gained comfort from her faith tradition and community.

736 Chaplain G

737 Karl Rahner. ‘Why Does God Allow Us to Suffer’, 208.

738 Michael J. Dodds. ‘Thomas Aquinas, Human Suffering and the Unchanging God of Love’ 330.

Going on to say ‘when I look back on my own personal experience with my son it was truly one of the most powerful experiences that I have ever had’.⁷³⁹ This, she believes, empowers her to be able to be ‘with people in the mess, in the struggle’, a place she names as powerful and privileged or with someone during ‘the dark night of the soul’ as another chaplain has reflected.⁷⁴⁰ This is a powerful witness to the tragic moments which people can experience. In her longing to become a mother, this chaplain experienced her agony in the garden. Waiting, longing and wanting a baby, she suffered loss after loss. However, it was in the pain of this tragic loss that she was to find herself coming close to God, to feel loved and supported by Him. It was in the abyss of suffering that she surrendered herself to the incomprehensible mystery which Rahner speaks of in relation to suffering. It was in her darkest moment that she felt closest to God. It was at this point she felt the solidarity of Christ which Bonhoeffer has assured us of in his reflections. Solidarity and acceptance radiated through her narrative.

There is something humbling about hearing of such faith and trust in God. Chaplain V echoes and gives witness to a similar experience seeing faith as a ‘grace’, a gift which has helped her through ‘very dark and difficult times’, when she was ‘wrestling with the suffering in my life’.⁷⁴¹ Again, in the pain of suffering, God is to be found close at hand. Moltmann believed that through the death of Christ he identified Himself with those who were enslaved and took their pain upon Himself.⁷⁴² Solidarity in the pain of life is the hallmark of the narrative of these chaplains and the tradition speaks strongly to this. This community support which was offered and experienced also runs contrary to the tendency towards individualism, which contemporary culture very often embraces.

Chaplain J also sees faith as being empowering, as an assurance of protection. For her faith ‘is a most beautiful picture, one that I have only ever seen once’. Reflecting that this picture depicts a storm, she continues to say that ‘when we had Ophelia and all those storms and the waves are coming up and the trees are bending over and they are nearly on the ground’. Continuing to describe this picture which is so meaningful for her she says ‘but if you look closely at the rock nestled in a tiny little hole is a little bird with her

739 Chaplain G

740 Chaplain I

741 Chaplain V

742 Jurgen Moltmann. *The Crucified God*, 48.

little chicks, that is faith'. Interpreting this scene further she says, that for her, it signifies that when life becomes turbulent and pressurised, 'being in that little rock with storms breaking everywhere and yet within that space I am peaceful, I am held, I am loved, I am wanted, I am everything that I need to be because I believe in God and He believes in me'.⁷⁴³ For these chaplains, the worst situations in their life have brought assurance and certainty that God loves them and supports them no matter what the context or situation. They have found in their darkest moment reminders all around them of a God who loves them and cares for them. They have experienced and felt loved and held by God through the actions, the love and compassion of others. Ironically, it is this same supportive presence which chaplains strive to offer to others.

In contrast to such expressions of certainty in relation to God's love, God's protection and God's benevolence, some respondents, while speaking in very concrete terms of being people of faith, found themselves rocked to the core by the realities of life and of ministry. For instance, Chaplain L, a Catholic Priest, shared how 'the first time I was badly shaken was the encounter with unrelieved and human suffering in Nigeria'. Here he witnessed what he termed 'indifference' to human suffering during a 'very turbulent period'. Despite being as he said 'on the fringe of it', it was, nonetheless 'pretty horrible'. Aside from the indifference and the anarchy that had affected him, he also spoke of 'children blind and dying from very simple conditions with very little help available for them' but knowing that 'it was a rich country' which was difficult to witness. It was the 'shock of face-to-face human suffering' which challenged him the most.⁷⁴⁴

While he began with this challenge to his faith, he continued to share an earlier experience of human suffering which brought with it many questions around meaning and the value of life. Recalling at sixteen or seventeen reading a story in the Irish Independent of 'an orphanage burned blazing, you know burning and in China of all places'. Retrospectively, in piecing together the experience, he recalled 'I think it was the photo, it was horrible to think of children dying like that and something just snapped there with me, there and then'. He entered the seminary not long after this which had as much to do with 'trying one's faith to see if I could possibly make sense of it all and stay with it' as it did with vocation. This connects strongly with the concept of mystery which

743 Chaplain J

744 Chaplain L

has evolved throughout the entire listening process. For him, faith is a framework through which to ask the difficult existential questions which people face at various times in their lives. Faith has also offered a companion on the journey towards the mystery and eventually through it when needed. This, in turn, links in with the recurring theme of solidarity and companionship in relation to the value and meaning of faith which is to be found in the theological tradition. Reflecting theologically on his faith, this chaplain sees it as providing a space for looking deeply and honestly at the challenges of life, which have confronted him, from a very young age.

Moreover, this questioning and reflection on the meaning and value of faith has continued for most of his life in ministry. Faith has offered him no shield from doubt and vulnerability. He spoke very openly about his faith wavering many times during his life. Indeed, when quoting Hopkins, he speaks of his 'faith faltering' and of possessing a 'vulnerable faith'. For him faith is 'a gift', but a gift which is not assured of for tomorrow. In fact, he sees that for him, faith needs to be worked out within a community and he quotes from Rahner and the old *seanfhocal* of needing solidarity in faith. 'It is only in the shelter of each other that we can live' he mused.⁷⁴⁵

In the midst of the wavering and movement within his faith, there are flashes of vulnerability and fragility evident, throughout his life. Faith draws but it challenges. Dipping into the river of his experience, it is clear that faith has demanded that he face into the hard questions of life, in order to seek authentic truth. Equally, faith has not protected him from the pain of questioning and uncertainty. In the questioning there seems to be a feeling of loneliness and absence of God in a world which can, so often, be defined by suffering and loss. As Chaplain M says of this dichotomy between absence and presence: 'my best friend is God, Jesus my best friend. Mary is my friend. And sometimes of course they go missing'.⁷⁴⁶

It is this sense of absence in a world which has little space for faith that can challenge and hurt chaplains as they search to find answers to their questions and about God, about suffering and about faith. Chaplain U, a religious sister, shared a very personal and painful family experience of suffering and how this has impacted upon her

745 Chaplain L

746 Chaplain M

faith. Sharing how her faith was ‘rocked I suppose about ten years ago when my brother committed suicide and died from suicide and I suppose I had to journey through the journey of grief’. This journey of grief, she recalled, was one of guilt and shame but one which she believes ‘has strengthened my faith’. However, she also reflected that ‘at times I suppose I felt distance from God and distance from what gave my life meaning because of what happened’.⁷⁴⁷ This is a very painful expression of the absence of God which can be felt by people during moments of intense personal suffering.

6.2.5. Faith – Transformative Trajectory

Personal and pastoral transformation is at the heart of the CPE model and indeed of theological reflection. The chaplains interviewed have provided personal and professional insight into how they understand faith, key moments in their faith journey and how it has framed their own experience of suffering and loss. Despite encountering suffering on a daily basis, they continue to see their work scaffolded and supported by their faith. I will now move to attend to the transformative aspect of faith, as expressed by the chaplains interviewed, opening up this experience for insight and learning into how faith has transformed them personally and professionally.

Chaplain B is one of the chaplains who speaks of, and explores, the transformative nature of her faith. Sharing that faith is about ‘belief in God’s presence’ within and beyond, she says that her faith has supported her during many challenging periods. Reflecting on ‘difficult moments’ she says one can ‘either stay plunged in them or you can help yourself to rise up and God is the Holy Spirit’. ‘Turning in confidence to God’ is what she believes has helped her through these difficult moments. After all she says ‘I mean I had a few difficult experiences in working relationships or in a community setting and I can honestly say I know it was God who pulled me through’. This supportive presence, which she experienced, both supported her and transformed, her faith.

For her, this transformative trajectory, centred around courage and forgiveness – ‘and one thing I was just going to say to you, forgiveness – the importance of forgiveness in our lives, that is a very key piece for me. Being able to forgive ourselves and forgive the other person’. For Chaplain B, at the heart of being able to forgive is ‘courage’.⁷⁴⁸

⁷⁴⁷ Chaplain U

⁷⁴⁸ Chaplain B

Courage empowers, she believes, but is grounded in the supportive presence of God in her life. In relying on her faith to get her through many personal and professional challenges, she is drawing from the ‘how’ rather than ‘why’ framework which the tradition has also explored and which I have discussed previously. This certainly taps into the work of Simone Weil and Dorothee Soelle which has a strong emphasis on finding meaning in suffering rather than focusing on the ‘why’ of it all.

For instance, Chaplain U speaks of a courageous journey through grief, guilt and shame in the wake of her brother’s death by suicide, which was made possible because of her faith.⁷⁴⁹ All this connects, I think, in a very meaningful way with what Chaplain J has called ‘the unforced rhythm’ or ‘grace’.⁷⁵⁰ Courage, is the response to the burden of some unhealed pain and the capacity to forgive and to receive forgiveness is a ‘grace’ which can be attained ‘if we stay with Christ’.⁷⁵¹ Chaplain K also explores the concept of courage reflecting that, faith is a journey towards God, towards ‘a gift that God gives to everyone but until you have a moment where you are willing to open the package and investigate it, it doesn’t come alive’.⁷⁵²

While faith is a freely given gift, it does demand in return courage and determination. This resonates strongly with the courage evident in Bonhoeffer’s *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Contextually, Germany and much of Europe was in the throes of the Second World War and yet, Bonhoeffer demonstrated immense courage in speaking out against Hitler. However, he felt that grace was not to be won cheaply but that true grace came at a cost.⁷⁵³ In Chaplain K reflection on faith and courage, the onus is firmly placed on the chaplain, to act with courage so that full benefit of being a person of faith can be attained. There is a sense here of having to take ownership of one’s own faith. Certainly, she acknowledges that faith is a gift but at the same time, points out that the package of faith needs to be opened by the recipient in order to gain real benefit from the gift. Recalling John 10:10 here, ‘I have come that you may have life, and have it to the full’, I believe that this image of a package signifies a possibility of living a full life but only, if we are brave enough, to open it and take a chance. In many respects, this

749 Chaplain U

750 Chaplain J

751 Chaplain J

752 Chaplain K

753 Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *The Cost of Discipleship*.

standpoint contrasts with Chaplain J who appears to be placing responsibility on Christ for the transformative process. For her, this transformative experience will happen in Christ's time and not ours. In some ways this almost suggests a movement of responsibility away from self and over to Christ. This is a potentially disabling framework in contrast to one of empowerment suggested by the previous chaplain.

Staying with and consolidating this wait and see approach, or in God's own time framework, Chaplain I, sees faith developing gradually, transforming as part of a wider process. Describing his faith journey as 'a gradual building up of faith' within the context of 'following the Lord, listening to him and being guided by where I am called'. However, he sees this as a very slow and gradual process which he likens to 'water falling on a sponge' which stands in contrast, to the image of 'water falling on a rock' which he sees as a 'harsh thing' and not coming from the Lord.⁷⁵⁴ For him, while there is certainty and familiarity about faith, it is a dynamic and changing thing. It is not something that can be rushed or forced. In some ways, this would seem to indicate a need to be patient, to have the capacity to sit with the certainty and uncertainty, the hope and the hopelessness, the joy and sorrow of the personal faith experience.

This has echoes of a parallel process, whereby just as a chaplain cannot rush a pastoral encounter, neither can they afford to push the development of their faith. In many respects, what is suggested here, is that the struggle of the faith journey is to be embraced. I recall the see-saw image used by another chaplain which sits nicely with the trajectory that is suggested here by this chaplain. Embracing the pain of the faith journey, this chaplain is reflecting the tradition's stance in relation to the theology of suffering. It sits with the difficult existential questions without having the benefit of absolute answers.

Chaplain R would appear to explore his faith in a similar vein. Noting that for him, it is 'the scaffolding around my life and like us all, the scaffolding, various pieces have come and gone over the years'. However, while faith might change, the 'framework helps to make sense of what is going on around me'. When there is a struggle or lack of clarity, this framework or scaffold helps to bring insight and growth. For this chaplain, he 'enjoys both the security of the scaffold or a framework around me but likewise that

754 Chaplain I

scaffolding does change and it has the freedom and is porous'. Such security brings the space to 'move in and move out of it, climb up it and down it and you know expand it and at times hold on tight to it'.⁷⁵⁵

In some respects, it is almost as if within the security of faith, there is the space and scope to grow with and against it. There is a sense that the relationship with God is very solid, one of dependence and security, while also being one of freedom and opportunity. Faith for this chaplain is transformative and offers an opportunity to flourish. In contrast, to Chaplain I, who feels the need to watch and wait to be guided, Chaplain R experiences the security of the scaffold of faith as liberating, enriching and empowering. There is space to be the person they are meant to be because there is a place to go for support and love even when life does not seem to make sense. Faith provides clarity when nothing else does.

Chaplain X also speaks of faith providing clarity for her. Reflecting that she has 'fantastic courage in the name of Jesus Christ', it is her faith and trust in Jesus which helps her to 'shed all the things that I carry in life'. For her, this equates to a doing away of her 'blindness, her deafness and lack of clarity'. She uses the image of 'shedding like an onion' to describe this transformative nature of faith. As a result of this experience of faith, she believes that 'nothing will rock me'.⁷⁵⁶ At the same time, she acknowledges that she has had 'bloody hard times' but having Christ as her ever-present companion means that, like Chaplain R, she has a very secure scaffold.

This amplifies Bonhoeffer's image of Christ as a figure of solidarity for those in need of support. Christ stands with these chaplains when they need love and support even if it is not to be found elsewhere. She spoke of how she 'believes that I have died many, many times to my own self in the name of Jesus' indicating a sort of giving up or a renunciation of self for the sake of Christ who is at the heart of all she believes and trusts. Interestingly, Chaplain E, speaks of this 'dying to oneself' also, seeing it as necessary to help people 'not to be alone in their place of misery'.⁷⁵⁷ In many ways, this connects with the self-giving of Christ on the cross, a giving of self for the benefit of others.

755 Chaplain R

756 Chaplain X

757 Chaplain E

We have seen how chaplains have integrated the use of imagery to explore how they understand their faith. For some, they use both word and image whereas for others, they have relied upon commonplace images to tease out how they understand the meaning, value and significance of faith in their life. This has, I believe, helped to bring the theological reflection to a much deeper level, than may otherwise have been possible. This shaping and giving voice to our feelings and deeper awareness, O’Connell Killen and De Beer, say we do ‘unconsciously’ in normal conversation.⁷⁵⁸

Here we have a sense of bringing different personality styles and ways of thinking and being to the process, all which will impact upon how it is done. This runs parallel with Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences which demonstrates that people have a myriad of different learning styles. People learn differently and therefore, it makes sense that likewise, they would choose to use different approaches to theological reflection.⁷⁵⁹ That is why I sense, that the inclusion of imagery and symbols in any method of theological reflection is essential, I because it helps to support those who struggle with language while, also allowing, for a deeper more congruent reflective process for all irrespective of their personality type. After all, in *The Art of Theological Reflection* we read how images work differently from conceptual language as they are less definite and precise and are less rationalised. Because images are not rigid, static or unchanging they are ‘essential to discovering the meaning of our experience in reflection’.⁷⁶⁰ After all, the same image can mean different things to different people.

6.3. Assertion – The Dialogue Partners Combine and Collide

The next stage of the theological reflection process involves what the Whiteheads refer to as assertion. Having listened intently and intuitively to the data, I will now proceed to look at how the dialogue partners speak, to each other, in relation to the meaning, value and significance of faith in the life and ministry of the chaplains. This next part of the process will assist in framing the pastoral insight and decision-making component of the thesis which will be presented in Chapter Seven.

758 O’Connell Killen and De Beer. *The Art of Theological Reflection*, 35.

759 Howard Gardner. *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, 1983.

760 O’Connell Killen and De Beer. *The Art of Theological Reflection*, 37.

At the heart of assertion is a dialogue which seeks to engage with a particular pastoral concern, in order to ascertain how the experience, cultural context and theological tradition relates to, or challenges, existing awareness and understanding of the topic. In this context, faith in the life and ministry of contemporary chaplains is our central issue under exploration and through the use of the trigger question, ‘Do Chaplains need to be People of Faith?’, it has been possible to reflect theologically on the matter. The data indicates that for those interviewed, faith is a key component of their lives personally and professionally, without which, the role of chaplain would be an impossibility, for them. Faith, described in word and picture, appears to be a lynchpin for chaplains, especially as they minister, oftentimes within the context of great suffering. Having attended to their experience, I have been a witness to their understanding of faith. Many of those interviewed shared, that without faith, it would simply be impossible to remain grounded when faced with the reality of human suffering. Faith appears to be an anchor within what many of them describe as a privileged, but challenging, ministry. Feeling that they can come with ‘empty hands’, faith appears to be the anchor, the scaffold which keeps them grounded within such a context.

6.3.1. Experience in Dialogue with Culture

The chaplains interviewed in this study, for the most part, consider faith to have a central role in their life. As outlined in the attending section, chaplains shared multiple understandings of how they view, and understand their own their faith in life and in ministry. Certain of its empowering capacity, consistently they speak of faith forming a key part of their personal and professional life, being their *raison d-etre*. However, in many respects, in twenty first century Ireland, faith is, in actual fact, counter-cultural. Therefore, the conversation at the heart of this thesis is what Bevens has called ‘the attempt to understand Christian faith in terms of a particular context’.⁷⁶¹ This has become a theological imperative, attempting to understand the meaning, value and significance of faith within a specific context. In this regard, I will argue strongly from a counter-cultural perspective. After all, faith has become less important the more secular and diverse society has become. Having said that, to borrow from Bevens once more, as our cultural and historical context plays a part in the construction of the reality in which we live, so

761 Stephen B. Bevens. *Models of Contextual Theology -Faith and Cultures*. New York: Orbis Books, 2002, 3.

our context influences the understanding of God and the expression of our faith.⁷⁶² Chaplains, as people of faith, metaphorically speaking, are to some extent at least, swimming against the tide. As the chapter on culture has already outlined, there has been a significant shift in how faith is viewed within a society becoming more secular and pluralist with every passing decade. A movement to secularise society has left chaplains in a somewhat vulnerable position. With increasing calls for a more marked division between Church and State in all aspects of society, not least in healthcare and education, chaplains are operating out of an uncertain space.

The post-modern culture would appear to be working against those who are people of faith making it difficult to remain grounded and faith-filled within such a context. The HSE, as the employer of the majority of chaplains in the Republic, has recognised this shifting demographic and has sought to explore what the needs of a changing Ireland are, in relation to pastoral and spiritual support, by undertaking the review and, subsequently creating a multifaith chaplaincy council. This is reflective of a shifting cultural and contextual milieu, validated by census figures and the European Values Survey.

Stephen Bevans has identified a model of contextual theology which he has entitled the counter-cultural model. This is a model, he contends, that takes context with utmost seriousness. It recognises that human beings and all theological expressions only exist in historically and culturally conditioned situations.⁷⁶³ It is interesting, however, that the countercultural model finds its most vigorous proponents among theologians who have recognised the deeply anti-Christian nature of all contemporary Western culture.⁷⁶⁴ An important point which Bevans draws our attention to is that the countercultural model is not anticultural.⁷⁶⁵ For Bevans, what is key here, is that at the heart of the countercultural model is ‘to truly encounter and engage the context through respectful yet critical analysis and authentic gospel proclamation in word and deed’ so that we might speak of this model as one of encounter or engagement. This model is committed he says to ‘a prophetic telling forth of the truth’ and is one which best captures the real contextual interaction between a dynamic, challenging gospel community and a powerful, even

762 Stephen Bevans. *Models of Contextual Theology*, 4.

763 Stephen Bevans. *Models of Contextual Theology*, 117

764 Ibid, 118.

765 Ibid, 119.

hostile environment.⁷⁶⁶ Faith in the gospel for Bevans ‘calls Christians to a genuine encounter or engagement with the human context’.⁷⁶⁷

The countercultural model follows a three-step pathway and provides a useful overarching framework for the conversation between experience and culture. First, conversion – acceptance of the experience of the past (scripture and tradition); perspective – using the experience of the past as a lens and finally interpretation/critique/unmasking/challenging – experience of the present, experience, culture, social location and change. It brings into play the experience of the past and of the present reality using a lens which supports an honest exploration of the contemporary reality. For the chaplains here, they are working, encountering and engaging within a particular context which is counter-cultural. This impacts upon their work and how they are perceived and experienced. It also affects how they speak of their faith and where they posit it in their life and ministry.

Faith, as a counter-cultural entity, struggles to find a place in a new Irish society. Faith, often described by chaplains as intuitive, a gut instinct, a feeling, stands in stark contrast to the rationality of science and technology, which defines and underlines, modern thinking. While chaplains speak of faith providing them with support to ‘step out’ and to take a chance or indeed, to have courage in the face of difficulty and diversity, the cultural context works against this *modus operandi*. Society wants answers to the difficult and troubling questions of life. Technology can offer so much to the rational minds in a way faith simply cannot. After all, faith cannot be rationalised or intellectualised. In many ways, when we speak of or about faith, we are trying to explain what society already considers enigmatic.

Or indeed, perhaps we are attempting to explain something which people already have preconceived notions of, which can be difficult to counter. For instance, even for those who believe in God and articulate a faith narrative, they are taking at face value something which they have sensed and experienced but which they cannot prove. After all, there is no equation to prove (or arguably disprove) the essence of faith, to solve the

766 Ibid, 119/120.

767 Ibid, 121.

theodicy question or to demonstrate beyond reasonable doubt that which the gut believes to be true. There is a certain degree of mystery and uncertainty about what Christians believe to be true, but can struggle to articulate or discuss, in a persuasive way. Faith comes from the heart and the soul and this runs contrary to the rationality and mindset of modernity.

Interestingly and somewhat unexpectedly, in attending to the chaplains' experience of faith and of ministry, many of them found it challenging to define what faith is for them. While clear that it is of key importance to their life, for some, when pushed to define or interpret their faith, an unexpected difficulty raised its head. The challenge for some of the chaplains interviewed to explain what they clearly see as key to their very existence, became somewhat of a complex quagmire. However, generally speaking, on probing the question a little bit deeper, came additional uncertainty, followed by more reflection, eventually leading to an expression of feeling that faith is a mystery. Seeing faith as enigmatic, almost evading possible definition, was interesting to witness within a faith-based ministry.

In a sense, trying to understand what cannot be rationalised or explained in human terms, makes it difficult for those who wish to advocate keeping faith-based ministries at the heart of our society, when the paradigm is continuously shifting. While a sense of mystery can provide an opportunity for reflection and theological questioning, mystery can also cause confusion, lack of clarity and cohesion. Mystery provides an almost impossible challenge for people of faith, to be able to articulate in a meaningful and useful way, to an increasingly secular and sceptical society, that God exists and is present even in the midst of existential crisis and suffering. Or in other words, that faith still has something to offer to a society that has become more pluralist and multicultural in thinking and structure.

The difficulty defining faith or explaining the intuitive, gut instinct which chaplains speak of, does little to 'convince' a sceptical audience, of its benefit and value. In contrast to the clinical and technologically driven culture which chaplains work and operate within, that demands answers and solutions, chaplains are, for the most part, content to sit (even if it is with some unease) with the mystery. They are willing to stay with the uncertainty and the scientifically unquantifiable. In the midst of the mystery

there is absolute trust. Even when the words fail, the chaplains have articulated a sense of being anchored by their faith. However, it is not easy to stay grounded in a society that is becoming increasingly anti-church and anti-religion. Legislative changes, behavioural shifts, a demise in the place of church in society, have all impacted on faith and faith practices.

That said, for chaplains, faith appears to be what underpins their role and what keeps them going. It is what keeps them in the transitional space. Chaplains see faith as foundational, necessary for functionality and a source of courage and strength. Even though it can evade definition nonetheless, faith seems to empower and support the chaplains working at the coal face of human suffering. Yet, society does little to support those who reach out in faith and work within the context of faith, to do the work that they do every day. In contrast, there have been attempts made to remove religion from education and healthcare, to open up an alternative way of functioning in a more secular society.

For me, this highlights a key point, the vulnerability of ministry. In standing at the precipice, faced with human suffering, chaplains are challenged to offer something by way of explanation or support, to those struggling existentially. As representatives of a particular faith context and tradition, they can find themselves challenged by the painful questioning of others as recounted by some of those interviewed. That said, there are of course, no answers, no explanations for pain and loss. Faith, while a scaffold, is not a protector from pain and helplessness. Nevertheless, in the midst of the mystery and uncertainty chaplains have shared that there is a connectedness, a pastoral relatedness to borrow from John Quinlan, which happens. While this awareness would run contrary to the rationality of secularism, chaplains sense it and believe in the mystery and the incomprehensibility, that God is there. This of course, has resonances with the scripture passage from Matthew ‘where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them’.⁷⁶⁸ It also has echoes of what Gittins has said about the purpose of discipleship. For him, the purpose of discipleship is mission. But critically he says, it is God’s mission and not the disciples own.⁷⁶⁹ Ministry in this context is about being co-missioned or sent on a

⁷⁶⁸ Matthew 18:20.

⁷⁶⁹ Anthony J. Gittins. *Called to be Sent*, 15

mission, on an initiative and strategy that is not of our own making.⁷⁷⁰ It is about embracing the mystery and the challenges this brings.

The essence of chaplaincy and of faith cannot always be adequately described in word and yet, it is what keeps chaplains in the middle, in that in-between transitional place grounded and rooted, when little else, seems to offer solace or consolation. That said, the human connection becomes a life-line, a space of strength and support even in the face of human suffering. In that in between space, the mystery of faith and of suffering becomes entwined in an inexplicable way, in a way which cannot be rationalised, or intellectualised. While radically counter-cultural, the mystery of faith solidifies the power of uncertainty and simultaneously, offers solace and comfort, to chaplains and those to whom they minister.

By the same token, for those involved in chaplaincy, they know that they are operating out of a space which is vulnerable and uncertain. Swimming against the tide, there is a vulnerability about what they stand for, what they believe in, and in what they offer. Given that they are not in a position to offer absolute answers can place chaplains in a vulnerable space. They stand in a place of helplessness, in the eye of the storm, which demands courage and ability to stay measured in the face of uncertainty. Interestingly, while many of them speak of faith being transformative, this is named as coming at a personal cost. Running counter-culturally, as people of faith, they can struggle, personally and pastorally, as the data has shown. Indeed, many of them have shared a sense of powerlessness and vulnerability, despite acknowledging that they feel, even within the changing demographic, the role is now more necessary than ever before. Chaplaincy is a vulnerable role. With no answers and no certainties, chaplains speak of feeling ‘thrown to the wolves’.⁷⁷¹

As well as the vulnerability of the role, there is the vulnerability of the chaplain. There is, after all, in many ways, a metaphorical renunciation of self, in the role of chaplain. There is a counter cultural giving of self, to those who suffer and struggle, which is the antithesis of individualism. Chaplains have identified the need to be courageous when standing in the eye of the storm. They articulate the need to be

770 Ibid.

771 Chaplain A

sufficiently grounded and rooted by their faith in order to keep going, in the day-to-day reality of their ministry. Without the anchor which faith is for them, their personal and pastoral vulnerability can threaten to overwhelm. In this study, chaplains shared personal experiences of loss and hurt which have shaped their narrative, as well as many insights into personal vulnerability. There have also been several experiences of powerlessness shared, personal doubt, a feeling of ‘coming with empty hands’, with no answers and a fear of the unknown.

In attending to the experience of chaplains in relation to their faith there are other issues also deserving of some consideration. For instance, when we speak of culture, or indeed more correctly, of a countercultural perspective what of the issue of detraditionalization of faith. Indeed, perhaps more specifically what about the faith of chaplains in the face of a society that is growing increasingly pluralist and secular with each passing decade. I have of course already outlined their own personal understanding of faith and how their faith underpins what they do. However, that said, there is another issue here in need of consideration, that of operating within the context of a countercultural environment. After all, they have shared of feeling as if they swim against the tide, metaphorically and otherwise, within the current context. How can they function then within the context of what is, more often than not, a hostile environment? In other words, how can they offer a faith experience to an unwilling audience?

Having outlined many of the social, economic, cultural and anthropological issues that impact upon chaplains and their work we are familiar with their challenges. As ‘people of faith’ how can they hold themselves safely in that transitional space which I spoke of earlier. Paul Lakeland has offered an interesting suggestion in relation to faith in the contemporary context. Perhaps, he says, it would be helpful to see our faith lying *behind* the person rather than in *front of* the person. Any faith statements then are more about who we are in the world rather than the world itself.⁷⁷² This opens up a mirror into the reality of the faith experience of the chaplains interviewed in this study. Certainly, they have shared that faith is integral to their personhood and ministry. They sense a call to discipleship, that co-missioned process that Gittins has championed. They are also

772 Paul Lakeland. *Postmodernity: Christian Identity in a Fragmented Age*. Augsburg: Fortress, 1997, 89.

acutely aware of operating within a countercultural context, an environment that veers towards science and rationality. That said, they operate as professional pastoral practitioners within such a reality. Connecting with Lakeland's notion of seeing the faith of the person (in this case the chaplain) behind them or in other words as part of who they are subtly and without any sense of pomp or ceremony, then it automatically is just part of them. They are faith as much as faith is them.

To link this with pastoral practice, chaplains are by their own words, people of faith. Yet, while courageous and strong, they hold it sometimes easily and at others, not so. That said, faith is part of their *modus operandi* guiding them and supporting them. It is part and parcel of their personhood. It is what is experienced but sometimes it remains an unspoken reality. In other words, they hold their faith in the background. It supports them. It holds them. It encourages them. It challenges them. One of their key strengths is that for them faith is just there. It is what makes them and it is what others experience from them, often without knowing (for the person they minister to) that it is the essence of who they are.

Their faith is what empowers them to do the work that they do as the data has testified. Yet, in being able to hold the faith behind them, they are supported but they can also offer a changing world an experience of compassionate presence that they only give because they themselves have had encounter with Jesus. They believe in but they do not push a faith that is overt but subtle. A faith that is *in front of* them, to borrow from Lakeland, does not always best serve the needs of a pluralistic, detraditionalized society. After all, church practices have changed and meaning is found in myriad of alternative ways. The search for meaning and hope continues but so it does in a different way. A chaplain who can hold their faith solidly behind them offers a new experience of faith presence to a world that does not always respect it. In many ways, chaplains who operate this way, give the world a new experience of faith and of chaplaincy. This concentrates more on the package to be offered than the context from within which it operates. This approach to ministry focuses more on the chaplain, as opposed to their world, cognizant too of its many complexities. Lakeland's thinking does however, offer a way to navigate what can oftentimes appear to be a world devoid of hope in order to find a way to give an experience of faith to a secular world. After all, the model of chaplaincy continues to change with a greater emphasis on compassionate presence than on religious or

sacramental care. That said, this is not to erode the personal importance which chaplains place on their faith or that of others but it does provide a way to stay the course within a context that otherwise could potentially threaten to engulf their ministry.

This also connects with another issue in relation to faith and culture. Stephen Bevans has suggested that when operating out of the countercultural model of practical theology that we need to do so ‘with a good deal of suspicion’.⁷⁷³ However, what of ‘befriending our culture’. In the theological reflection process, we befriend our tradition and therefore what of doing likewise with culture? In many ways, the argument which I have put forward in stating that faith is countercultural almost victimises it. In other words, such an approach might be seen to imply that culture is our enemy, that it is something to resist or treat with suspicion to go down Bevans’ road. However, perhaps it might be useful to briefly consider what culture offers our conversation here and what we might glean from such a reflection.

If we revert back to Lakeland’s assertion around faith being *behind* rather than *in front* of the person then culture can be ‘befriended’ in a very authentic and real way. If the chaplain goes to the pastoral encounter with their faith in the background, not pushing their beliefs but simply being present then culture irrespective of how it addresses the issue of faith need not be feared. One of the key strengths of the chaplaincy role is that its practitioners have the freedom to ‘just be’ in any culture, in any environment. They come in *Locis Christi* in a very subtle way, offering compassionate presence, aware of their rootedness in Christ but also acutely so that others may not share a similar perspective. Chaplains have demonstrated courage in how they speak of their faith and of their ministry and within this context even a countercultural environment is not to be feared. Instead, in befriending the culture, the countercultural can potentially operate relatively smoothly within the overarching framework of secularism or scepticism.

In ‘befriending’ the culture, even within a countercultural context, I believe that this has much to offer in terms of learning and of reflection on the concept of ministry. If the context is not feared then much can be learned from it. I recall how some chaplains have spoken of how they learn from others who are of a different tradition to them.

773 Stephen Bevans. *Models of Contextual Theology*, 117

Therefore, in the same vein, operating within a culture that does not wholeheartedly embrace the role of chaplain allows for a chaplain to explore new ways of functioning. They can try new approaches to navigating the system which may on the surface at least, be rather unaccepting of a faith-based role. They can use the oftentimes hostile context to present what is really a key strength of the ministry – presence, in a non-judgmental and compassionate way.

In many ways, I sense in ‘befriending the culture’, chaplains are gifted an opportunity to really peel back the layers of the onion to use an earlier image and consider what it is they offer, who it is they represent, what gives them spiritual wellbeing, what is their theological framework. If they, for instance, operate out of the *Imago Dei* understanding then culture is not to be feared because each and every person they will encounter, will be just that – *Imago Dei*. Moreover, if they feel that they are rooted in Christ, then this will frame their sense of vocation and give them an identity which is secure. If they consider that they operate in *Locis Christi* then their work accompanying those who suffer and struggle has real and tangible meaning. This offers a supportive scaffold which can empower even within the context of a countercultural environment. Therefore, culture can empower just as much as it can disable.

6.3.2. Experience in Dialogue With The Theological Tradition

From the data, there is a clear continuum in how faith is understood. For some, faith is a mystery which defies explanation and yet, offers solace and support, personally, pastorally and professionally. This is a vulnerable understanding of faith, personally and pastorally. After all, this way of looking at it, opens up a Pandora box of sorts, with faith seen as enigmatic and empowering, in equal measures. On the other hand, others have articulated a more definite understanding. Seen as a supportive framework, it inspires courage, bravery and a scaffold from which to operate. For some of these chaplains, faith is the lens through which they see the world, the framework which encases their life and their ministry. It is what empowers, encourages and promotes a sense of care towards those who suffer. That said, faith cannot prevent suffering. As explored in an earlier chapter, suffering and the quest to understand its meaning has a long historical context.

That said, suffering and the search for its meaning remains, at the heart of existential questioning. This next section will look at what the theological tradition has

to say to the data. In other words, how does the theology of suffering speak to that sense of mystery on one hand, and on the other, to the courage which faith inspires in some chaplains. When exploring the theology of suffering in Chapter Five, I did so, by using a framework which for me and indeed for many of those interviewed, underpins the work of a chaplain – sacrifice and accompaniment. The theological tradition has much to say about both sacrifice and accompaniment as demonstrated in the previous chapter. In this section, sacrifice and accompaniment will loosely frame the next part of the discussion. so that I can enter into a critical and insightful dialogue, between the experience of the chaplains and the theological tradition, in relation to human suffering.

A theology of suffering opens up many critical questions around the meaning and value of suffering. Yet that said, it can seem, that despite the longevity of the quest, there remains more questions than answers. The expectation of a theology of suffering is not to provide ‘an intellectually plausible solution’ to the mystery of suffering, to borrow from Van Nieuvenhove.⁷⁷⁴ However, what is useful and necessary, I think, for chaplains, is to have something to lean on, a scaffold for their own ministry in relation to existential questioning. Still, I believe that the optics of such a challenge is clear. This is a complex endeavour. In trying to make sense of human suffering, we appear to be walking into ‘a realm beyond our human comprehension’⁷⁷⁵, into a sphere where it would seem both rationality and theology fails us. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer has said of discipleship ‘it is not limited to what you can comprehend, it must transcend all comprehension. Bewilderment is the true comprehension’.⁷⁷⁶

In many respects, this is a helpful dialogue between tradition and experience. Perhaps by naming and acknowledging the complexity of it all, this allows for acceptance of the limitations of such a quest. However, in acceptance of its complexity, does not mean a metaphorical throwing down of the gauntlet. Rather, in contrast, as the data has shown, this empowers chaplains to face into the bewilderment. It empowers them to reflect theologically upon the difficult and challenging questions so that they can respond appropriately within the pastoral context.

774 Rik Van Nieuvenhove. ‘The Christian Response to Suffering and the Significance of the Model of Church as the Body of Christ’ in *Angelicum*. 2005: 82, 595.

775 Michael J. Dodds. ‘Thomas Aquinas, Human Suffering and the Unchanging God of Love’ in *Theological Studies*. 1991: 52, 330.

776 Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *The Cost of Discipleship*. London: SCM Press, 2018, 44.

Therefore, this engagement with the theological tradition will seek to explore and understand, what it has to offer those who suffer, and what gaps if any, exist in this regard. It will attempt to explore what the theological canon can bring to an issue long since grappled with and discerned. After all, questions around the meaning and value of suffering open up many complex questions about God, in particular, why He allows us to suffer, something Rahner has said is one ‘of the most fundamental questions of human existence’.⁷⁷⁷ Such a discernment process also opens up other existential concerns or what Rahner has identified as the ‘permitting and causing’ of suffering polarisation.⁷⁷⁸ In other words, is God the direct cause of suffering? Is suffering to be seen as punishment? Or on the other hand, does God allow suffering to happen and therefore, why. This opens up a clear demarcation in the whole suffering of theology issue because how one attempts to answer these questions, inevitably charts, the remaining theological and investigative trajectory.

Theologically, there seems to be a deep sense of mystery to it all, a certain feeling of vagueness about salvation and suffering and how it is understood. Chaplains have spoken of the sense of mystery they feel about faith, about God, about salvation and about suffering and the frustrations and the limitations posed, by not having any definite answers. They have shared a feeling of being defined and confined, by the powerlessness and the vulnerability, of human fragility. Nevertheless, the task of the theologian and the chaplain too of course, as Dodds has reflected, is to face into that questioning, to speak without diminishing the mystery.⁷⁷⁹ At the same time, this mystery can be paralysing for the one who suffers and those who accompany them. Paralysis and existential pain can underpin the feeling of mystery and frame the search for answers.

However, as pastoral practitioners, chaplains sense an expectation that they can and will face into the mystery, into that search to try to understand, what in many ways, defies comprehension. Indeed, Karl Rahner has written that the mystery of suffering reflects the mystery of God, two sides of the one coin. For Rahner, ‘the incomprehensibility of suffering is part of the incomprehensibility of God’⁷⁸⁰, with the

777 Karl Rahner. Why Does God Allow us to Suffer in *Theological Investigations*, xix, 194.

778 Ibid. 195.

779 Michael J. Dodds. ‘Thomas Aquinas, Human Suffering and the Unchanging God of Love’, 330.

780 Karl Rahner. ‘Why Does God Allow us to Suffer’, 206.

only solution being to become ‘lovingly lost in God’s incomprehensibility’.⁷⁸¹ This incomprehensibility around the issue of suffering may have increased the chaplains’ reticence, at times, to name what faith is or clearly name what is at its heart. Engulfed by the enormity of the mystery of God, the mystery of suffering and the mystery of faith, the answers can fail. In not shying away from the difficult questions, they have become lovingly lost in the incomprehensibility of God.

However, the struggle is to find a middle ground. In other words, to ask the challenging questions while, at the same time, not losing sight of the love and compassion of a benevolent God. In sharing experiences of human vulnerability, chaplains charted personal tragedy, feelings of powerlessness, and by the same token, having the strength to ‘step out in faith’. In sitting with complex questions, they are in many ways ‘stepping out in faith’, but can, at times, become lost in the lack of definite answers, in the lack of certainty, and as a result becoming aware of their vulnerability and powerlessness.

Nevertheless, there is an expectation that the chaplains can remain grounded in the face of human suffering, in the midst of such incomprehensibility. However, this is not a good enough place to park this theologically. Given that there still remains no consistent or agreed understanding of suffering by the tradition, this exacerbates the powerlessness. The inability of the tradition to come up with something definite, leaves chaplains in a vulnerable space, as they have reflected, in their interviews. The mystery of the cross and its meaning, offers one particular trajectory in relation to suffering, but that too, brings its own challenges. Paul Fiddes has spoken of the centrality of the cross within the mystery of suffering reminding us that ‘the many strands of human experience run through the crossroads of the cross’.⁷⁸² The cross is not only the crossroads between life and death but, it is also one between suffering and healing. It is how we understand or perceive what happened on the cross which determines what it has to offer those who suffer, and arguably, those who support them. However, herein lies another problem, the kernel of the struggle. Derek Tidball has reminded us of the complexity of the cross, saying that it ‘cannot be captured in its fullness from one standpoint alone and even less

781 Ibid. 206.

782 Paul Fiddes. *Past Event and Present Salvation*, 3.

in one theory'.⁷⁸³ Perhaps in trying to resolve the cross, we can become engulfed by the incomprehensibility of it all, losing its meaning and significance.

This is where the bespoke method of theological reflection assists us once more, to decipher what the chaplains were saying about their faith and, by extension, about the theological tradition. It is also where what has been explored in an earlier chapter on suffering helps us to delve deeply into such a challenging issue. While at times overwhelmed by the mystery of life and death, loss and grief, struggling to express in word, 'how' and 'why', chaplains interviewed were able to draw upon commonplace images to explore their feelings around the mystery of suffering and of faith. By so doing they were able to lessen the gulf which, at times, can appear to overwhelm them. These images supported them to get to a deeper level of self-understanding and self-acceptance than, may otherwise, have been possible. It supported them to find a certain degree of peace around grappling with an issue the theological canon has long since reflected upon. After all, faith is described by a number of chaplains as 'vulnerable' in the face of deep human anguish and paradoxically, for some, in studying theology, in trying to know more deeply, they have found no answers, no consolation for the pain they witness. Indeed, Raymund Schwager appears to think that this search for answers, is a fruitless exercise, given that the everyday human experience, is filled with so many absurdities, tensions and contradictions that even the most strenuous intellectual effort, will never completely sort out.⁷⁸⁴

Nonetheless, the search for understanding cannot be aborted simply because it is challenging. Or perhaps conversely, it is the journey towards trying to seek the truth which the tradition offers the searching minister that is important. This certainly sits with what some of the chaplains feel about the experience of faith. For many of them, in journeying towards the truth, despite the pain and the difficulty of it, they either find the answers they seek or an acceptance of not knowing. They manage to come to a place where they can sit comfortably uncomfortable with the incomprehensibility of it all.

783 Derek Tidball. *The Message of the Cross*. Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001, 20.

784 Raymund Schwager. *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation – Towards a Biblical Doctrine of Redemption*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1999, 1.

For Christians, at the heart of the process of trying to grasp the meaning of suffering, is the cross and how we understand the salvific act. As a Christocentric belief system, Christianity has much to say about suffering and its meaning. The challenge, of course, is that Christianity as a religious tradition, does not argue against suffering and neither does it proffer a solution for it.⁷⁸⁵ Interestingly, neither did any of the chaplains interviewed attempt to argue against suffering or offer a solution. Rather, their primary objective appeared to be more about supporting those who suffer, than trying to explain or argue, against it or its very existence. In fact, it was interesting to see their acceptance of suffering, especially by those who had personal experience of pain and loss. Dietrich Bonhoeffer has said that ‘to endure the cross is not a tragedy – it is the suffering which is the fruit of an exclusive allegiance to Jesus Christ’.⁷⁸⁶ Suffering appears to be the mark of Christianity, an understanding which sits comfortably, with the data collected in this study.

Historically, this topic (of the cross and suffering) has been subject to much debate. That said, as Mark Heim has quite rightly pointed out, the cross sits at the centre of a wide web of assumptions and practices in church and society. Until it is untangled it tugs everything else askew, a little or a lot.⁷⁸⁷ However, within the Christian tradition, chaplains can find some understanding of suffering from the sources and how the death of Christ on the cross can be posited alongside the human experience of illness and loss. Various theories of atonement have been explored which try to understand or penetrate, the mystery of the cross. Paul Fiddes has said, that theories of atonement are ‘conceptual tools’ with which we try to grasp the mystery of the divine human relationship.⁷⁸⁸ Each theory has its own key points and offer some perspective on the issue. There are also some variances within the theological tradition in relation to what the death of Christ on the cross entailed and what value it has for those who suffer. Where there does appear to be some commonality though, within the tradition about atonement, is in relation to the sin/punishment narrative and the need to attain restoration of the proper order, or restorative justice. Drawing its origins from the fall from grace narrative, there is a

785 Richard Lucien. *What are they saying about the Theology of Suffering?* New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1992, 3.

786 Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *The Cost of Discipleship*. London: SCM Press, 2018, 43.

787 Mark Heim. *Saved from Sacrifice – A Theology of the Cross*. Cambridge: William B Eerdmans Publishing, 2006, xi.

788 Paul Fiddes. *Past Event and Present Salvation – The Christian Idea of Atonement*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1989, 28.

consistent awareness of the need to atone for the sin of Adam by theologians from the patristic times.

At the heart of atonement is Christ who as the mediator or intermediary pays back a debt for the sin of humankind. There is a sense that Christ, as the Second Adam, has been tasked with restoring order, to offer atonement for the sin of the First Adam. For instance, Anselm in *Cur Deus Homo* reflects on the need to repay this debt of satisfaction to God. As he has reflected, ‘without satisfaction, that is, without voluntary payment of the debt, God can neither pass by the sin unpunished nor can the sinner attain happiness’.⁷⁸⁹ Essentially, Anselm argues that without Christ’s death on the cross, the debt due to God for human transgression would never be repayable, thus depriving humankind of God’s benevolence and preventing a restoration, of prelapsarian utopia. Anselm further acknowledges that Christ’s death on the cross was a free gift repaying a debt, which was not his own.⁷⁹⁰ This sacrifice by Christ was a noble one, which set an example, for all humankind to follow.

At the heart of much of the tradition is an understanding of the death of Christ as an act of sacrifice and while sacrifice can be a rather off-putting concept, it is nevertheless, a key theme in soteriological thought. As Elizabeth Johnson has written, this payback of a debt called satisfaction restored the honour of the injured Lord and in turn restored peace to the land.⁷⁹¹ However, the status of the injured party is key in such a paradigm. In other words, the greater the status of the injured party, the more satisfaction that was payable. Therefore, the debt owed to God by those who had sinned against him was significant and the solution to the problem was Christ – fully human and fully divine.⁷⁹² This theme of sacrifice is continuous with the early patristic tradition. Athanasius for example, sees the sacrifice as necessary to release humankind from the curse of sin.⁷⁹³ For Augustine too, sacrifice is embedded throughout his writing about the salvific death of Christ, on the cross. Seeing Jesus as mediator or intermediary between God and humankind, Augustine

789 *Cur Deus Homo*, 48.

790 *Ibid.* 83

791 Elizabeth Johnson. *Creation and the Cross – The Mercy of God for a Planet in Peril*. New York: Orbis Books, 2018, 4.

792 *Ibid.* 9.

793 J.N.D Kelly. *Early Christian Doctrines*. London: HarperOne, 1978, 377.

views the sacrifice on the cross as a necessary act, in order to appease God, for the actions of a sinful people.

However, the question is, pastorally how does this relate to the reality of illness and suffering? How or where does the tradition support or challenge the pastoral practitioners to come to terms, with the sense of mystery, which human suffering is. Paul J. Philibert has written that we are redeemed by the self-offering or sacrifice of God's Son⁷⁹⁴, a sacrifice which was demanded by God, to appease his anger. However, I believe that both theologically and pastorally, the concept of sacrifice poses some significant challenges both in theory and in practice. While certainly a useful place to start with in relation to a complex theological issue such as suffering and atonement, nonetheless, it demands deep and considered reflection. First of all, one must consider the image of God projected within a theory which demands a blood sacrifice from his Son, to atone for the sins, of humankind. Here we seem to be presented with an angry God, a violent God, a draconic figure of sorts, who insists on causing suffering and pain for and to his only Son. This image of God stands in stark contrast to the image of Jesus who we meet in the Gospels, who is the personification of love, compassion, benevolence, mercy and forgiveness.

Here I would argue there is a significant limitation within this aspect of the tradition, given that it is not offering much if anything, to those who suffer. After all, would it really be possible to relate to or believe in a God of hope and healing who demands a blood sacrifice in order to restore the old order. This is not the God figure which the experience generates. It does not appear to be the God the chaplains have encountered in life and in ministry. This is not the God who can pastorally connect with the sick and the dying. This is not a God figure who could offer much by way of consolation in the midst of a changing life demographic. As Thomas Weinandy has written, Jesus' sacrifice on the cross must not be seen as placating an angry God, as if he were an offended person who demands injustice to be appropriated and appeased.⁷⁹⁵ In actual fact, in many ways this image of God feeds into the vulnerability of faith, which some of the chaplains commented on in their interviews. What is meant here, is that such

794 Paul J. Philibert. *The Priesthood of the Faithful -Key to a Living Church*. Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2005, 119.

795 Thomas Weinandy. *Does God Suffer?* Glasgow: Bell and Bain Ltd. 2009, 9.

an image of God, would serve to push the person suffering and those who accompany them, away from Him thus creating a barrier and a sense of disconnection from God. This offers little support to chaplains trying to operate within a faith framework. Moreover, in speaking of a faith that is vulnerable, chaplains are suggesting it is one which is easily shaken, one that is expected to stand firm within the context of a complicated environment, despite the powerlessness they themselves can feel. A God figure who is unrelatable serves to exacerbate the sense of powerlessness and vulnerability felt by chaplains. Such an image of God does little to balance the see-saw of faith, which one chaplain spoke of so clearly.

Sacrifice in itself implies to give something up, to offer something back in return for a gift received. Humankind has obtained its liberty through the act of restoration on the cross and therefore it is implied that this debt must be repaid. This is where the tradition speaks pertinently to the pastoral context and experience of the chaplains interviewed. Christ, in his sacrifice on the cross, gave up his life for humankind. He also renounced his divinity so he could identify with their sufferings and pain. For those who are sick and dying, they too are offering up something of themselves, they are giving away or losing (not usually through choice of course) some portion of their freedom, their future, their hopes and their very sense of self. Moreover, the chaplains also give up something of themselves. They offer, through their faithful presence, much of who they are as people. In ministering within the gravest of situations, they are choosing to stand in that place of helplessness, in the eye of the storm, placing themselves in a place of vulnerability and powerless. They expose their fragility and vulnerability. While some of them consider that they come with empty hands, they are sacrificing their strength in order to give from their place of vulnerability and powerlessness. In their self-sacrifice, there is an exposure of a faith which can, oftentimes be vulnerable and easily shattered. As Bonhoeffer has said ‘suffering is the badge of true discipleship’⁷⁹⁶, which is a theme which has strongly emerged from the attending to the experience of the chaplains.

Furthermore, I think there is something to be said about the suffering that is aligned to the concept of sacrifice. Rik Van Nieuvenhove has written that God desires

796 Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *The Cost of Discipleship*, 45.

‘the sacrifice of a broken heart’.⁷⁹⁷ Aside from questions around the image of God being presented in such a demand, there is also I think, a need to consider what all this says about suffering in itself. Bernard McGinn has suggested that the privilege of believing in Christ entails suffering for him.⁷⁹⁸ Bonhoeffer has also said that following Christ means suffering because we have to suffer.⁷⁹⁹ Likewise, John of the Cross values suffering as a transformative tool, pastorally and spiritually. There is a sense within the theological tradition that suffering is something to be endured, to be offered up, to be accepted without question. Once again to draw from Bonhoeffer who says ‘the cross is laid on every Christian’ and that ‘the wounds and scars [a Christian] receives in the fray are living tokens of participation in the cross of Christ’⁸⁰⁰ adds a heroic dimension to the experience of human suffering. The danger here, in such thinking, is the possible creation of a Christian view of suffering which can become dangerously myopic. This view seems to be advocating for a masochistic view of suffering. This brings the danger of valorising suffering as something to be sought, something to be borne bravely, as a badge of honour.

Pastorally, this is of little benefit to those who are sick and dying. It is of little assistance to those who are struggling physically, emotionally and spiritually, to feel that in order to truly follow Christ, they must, metaphorically speaking, take up their cross and walk with it. A theological tradition which could possibly be experienced as valorising suffering, or that advocates for dark nights of the soul, is limiting, dangerous and gives little, by way of courage or support, either to those suffering or the chaplains accompanying them. Rather, in contrast, I think it has the capacity to stunt or overshadow what they bring to the pastoral encounter. A suffering to be endured, to be borne bravely, leaves little or no space for the hope of the resurrection, of experiencing the healing and loving touch of God. However, the data demonstrates, that some chaplains are willing to accept personal suffering and that of those around them. There is an acceptance of the vulnerability of the human condition and, in not having all the answers. There is a willingness to embrace the mystery of suffering by some, while for others, it shakes their faith and challenges them to stay the course.

797 Rik Van Nieuwenhove. *An Introduction to Medieval Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012, 17.

798 Bernard McGinn. ‘Suffering, Dereliction and Affliction in Christian Mysticism’ in Karen Kilby and Rachel Davies. Eds. *Suffering and the Christian Life*. London: T & T Clark, 2019, 55.

799 Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *The Cost of Discipleship*, 44.

800 Ibid. 44/45.

As I move to explore the tradition in relation to accompaniment, I do so, by continuing somewhat along this theme of valorisation of suffering. For instance, the standpoint of Jurgen Moltmann, who writes of a God who suffers, could arguably provide a troubling paradigm through which, to explore the meaning and value of suffering. If God suffers, then surely, suffering must be good, must have something of value to offer to the world. Such an understanding of a suffering God, could be seen as promoting a heroic side to suffering. Where then of finding meaning when we use such a lens. Interestingly, Simone Weil in her text *Gravity and Grace*, defines hell as ‘suffering without consolation’ and yet she cautions against seeking ‘to escape suffering or to suffer less’⁸⁰¹. For her, what is important, is to remain untainted by suffering. Her thinking is similar to Frankl’s and Nietzsche’s where suffering is possible to endure where there is consolation or meaning to be found from, and within, the experience itself. It is within this type of suffering that meaning can be found and hope reignited.

Chaplains, from attending to their experience, consider a significant aspect of their work to help others find meaning in their suffering. Consolation is not valorisation but rather, I think, is about seeking an understanding of what is at the heart of suffering and the grace of inner strength, which can be gleaned from faith. After all, chaplains do not fix or heal, but rather, they support those who suffer, to tap into their own inner resources, in order to try to find meaning, within a crisis context. However, this takes courage on the part of the chaplain. Faith, as one of them has said, gives her the courage ‘to step out’ or for another to ‘stand in the eye of the storm’. Faith helps them to support and empower, to find existential meaning.

The theological tradition (Weil, Soelle, Bonhoeffer and Rahner) reminds us that for suffering to mean anything, it must not be meaningless, or without, consolation. This essentially opens up questions around the ‘how’ and not ‘why’ of suffering using a particularly interesting *modus operandi* used by Rahner and others. However, it also breaks open many other important questions about suffering for those who sit with and endure suffering. Rahner says that ‘respect for God’s absolute holiness and goodness forbids us to attribute to him the sin of the free creature’ and yet, this ‘does not forbid us to ask in one and the same question and at the same time about God’s relationship to all

801 Simone Weil. *Gravity and Grace* trans by Emma Crawford and Maria Von Der Ruhir. London: Routledge, 2002, 81.

suffering'.⁸⁰² Here the theological canon is grappling with some of the key existential questions which chaplains as pastoral practitioners are also asked to reflect upon and discern. For Rahner, and indeed for the chaplains interviewed, 'suffering is an unavoidable side effect in a plural and evolving world'⁸⁰³ and to 'play down the pain of world history is a betrayal of personal dignity, freedom and of the absolute imperative of morality...and it is possible to cope on cheap terms with suffering and death in the history of humanity only as long as this suffering touches a person merely from a distance'.⁸⁰⁴ Suffering is a reality of the human condition but how it is endured is the greatest challenge. It is also where the tradition speaks loudly to the complexity of it all.

Simone Weil considers that suffering cannot in this life be redeemed or in any direct sense, be put to use.⁸⁰⁵ Indeed, for Weil the ethical task is to render suffering meaningful rather than explicable.⁸⁰⁶ Theologically, Dorothee Soelle also seems to be more concerned with asking 'how' rather than 'why' in relation to the mystery of human suffering. Exercising agency, an important lynchpin for Soelle in relation to suffering, can be an empowering tool for those who suffer. After all, this gives them back some of their own power in relation to how they might manage their own experience of suffering. In other words, rather than transferring responsibility for the cause of suffering or the way it can be alleviated elsewhere, in contrast, we can be autonomous and exercise 'how' rather than 'why'. Essentially, this empowers the person who suffers to look at 'how' it can be dealt with, rather than becoming too focused, on trying to explain, the 'why' of it all.

To suffer is part of the human condition but, without being able to make sense of it all, adds a much harsher dimension to the experience. This is particularly important when suffering is not the result of our own actions. For Rahner, it is surrender to the incomprehensibility of God and His love which helps to support us with the 'how' rather than 'why' questions. Reflecting that 'there is no blessed light to illuminate the dark abyss of suffering other than God himself and we find Him only when we lovingly assent

802 Karl Rahner. 'Why Does God Allow us to Suffer', 195.

803 Ibid. 197.

804 Ibid. 199.

805 Anna Rowlands. 'Reading Simone Weil in East London: Destitution, Decreation and the History of Force' in Karen Kilby and Rachel Davies. Eds. *Suffering and the Christian Life*. London: T & T Clark, 2019, 115.

806 Ibid. 116.

to the incomprehensibility of God himself without which He would not be God' leaves us with much to consider.⁸⁰⁷ In the pastoral context, this means that the experience of suffering needs to be connected to something tangible and supported by people who are experienced as caring, as offering something of the hope and consolation of Christ. This, of course, is where chaplains try to connect with and appropriate, the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, in a meaningful way, in a way that supports the journeying or accompanying element of the pastoral encounter.

Pastorally, this connects with the experience of the chaplains interviewed. Several of them have shared through word and image, the centrality of faith in their life and in their ministry. They have shared, that for many of them, faith is a pre-requisite which enables them to do the work which they do. This would certainly sit with the theological tradition where faith and trust in an incomprehensible God is necessary. It also runs parallel with the need to trust in the mystery of suffering, in the inexplicable nature of it all. In order to sit with such challenging questions, chaplains feel the need to be people of faith, to have something to offer those who grapple with the difficult and hard-hitting questions of life.

Dorothee Soelle, writing in the shadow of World War Two, rejects the notion of a God who demands suffering. She also rejects the idea of a passive God who fails to intervene when we suffer. Using the lens of 'how' rather than 'why' we suffer, she aligns with Frankl, Nietzsche, Wiesel and Bonhoeffer, in thinking that suffering can be endured and perhaps, ultimately overcome, when meaning can be attained. For Soelle, love appears to be foundational to the theology of suffering which she promotes. Drawing both from the theories of atonement and her almost counter theory, clearly a Christocentric theology must surely always expound a theology of suffering that encompasses love, faith and hope. Otherwise, the cross has little to offer pastorally and theologically to those who suffer. It demonstrates that their suffering has no meaning and is the result of a cold and distant God.

However, the love of God and love of the sick is foundational to the ministry of pastoral care. Chaplains speak of being drawn to care of the sick, to offer something of

807 Karl Rahner. 'Why Does God Allow us to Suffer', 208.

the love of God, to those who suffer. There is also a sense of standing in solidarity with those who suffer, offering them the consolation of a loving and kind God. This solidarity speaks loudly to the experience of the chaplains. It is also a key component of the theological tradition on suffering. Within the context of the theologians I have chosen to explore in relation to the theology of suffering, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Dorothee Soelle have much to offer the experience of the chaplains, in this regard. Chaplains have shared how they feel as if they stand in that place of helplessness, in the gap, hand in hand, in God's place, in the eye of the storm – all clear images of solidarity and connection with those who suffer. Standing in that place of solidarity and vulnerability, there appears to be a sense of prophetic witness about the role of the chaplain, and where this role meets and encounters the theological tradition. For Bonhoeffer, Christ stands in that place of helplessness with those pained by life. For him, Christ sacrificed his own self, allowed himself to be pushed out of the world and onto the cross, so that those who suffer could experience a Christ who is real and speaks to their context. Chaplains by standing in that gap, in the place of hopelessness, reflect a theology of solidarity as espoused by post Holocaust theologians, something which takes courage. Standing in solidarity does not come easy as many of them have explored. In this Christian calling to stand alongside those who suffer, drawing from the frame of a Christ who stands with us and alongside us as and when we suffer, is a tall order.

However, when chaplains appear to have both the capacity and willingness to stay with the struggle, to stand in that place of helplessness, their reward is a transformative trajectory. Many of those interviewed shared how faith transformed their life and ministry. In experiencing personal and professional suffering, their faith offered consolation and strength to begin anew. It has encouraged them to reach out to others and stand in solidarity with those who suffer. Faith has helped them to overcome their sense of powerlessness and vulnerability and has encouraged them to stay in ministry, even when their faith has become challenged, vulnerable and shaken. The theological tradition encourages pastoral practitioners to stay firm in that place of helplessness and, in so doing, become more grounded and balanced. The tradition helps to bridge the gap which human fragility can at times threaten to overwhelm, a gap the chaplains themselves have named. Arguably, while the theological tradition has much to offer those who suffer, there still seems to be a chasm at times that appears unable to be bridged, a gulf too wide to fill. The struggle to successfully bridge this gap does, at times, remain a pastoral reality

for chaplains. The complexity of soteriological theology contributes to this chasm, as does the lack of consensus in relation to what the event on the cross means for those who suffer. However, the post-Holocaust theologians have much to offer pastoral practitioners as they share a theology, which borne out of a period of deep and intense suffering, has the capacity to speak loudly to a world that remains troubled by suffering.

6.4. Befriending The Crucible – Experience, Culture and Tradition – A Three Way Conversation

The crucible is an image which the Whiteheads use, to describe the second part of the assertion process. Having engaged in a conversation, the dialogue partners are placed into the melting pot and the many voices in the reflective process are allowed to interact unhindered, and without predictability, or control. Like the river which ebbs and flows, so too, does the process which unfolds within the crucible moves in many different directions. The reflective process occurs in waves with the many voices, speaking at times consistently and at others, with divergence. This creates an authentic conversation, something which is allowed to simply happen. Where there is an openness to simply let the movement happen there is richness and real insight to be gained. This happens when there is no agenda, just an openness to let the process organically unfold. So much potential for growth comes into the melting pot when no roadblock is placed in its way. This chapter has attended to the experience of the chaplains interviewed and has put their lived experience into conversation firstly with culture and then with the theological tradition. In the crucible, all three partners will sit and be allowed to engage with each other, unhindered and without expectation. Therefore, the next part of this chapter will explore the fruits of this engagement.

In the intermingling of experience, culture and tradition a number of key insights have become evident. This is possible to see given that a number of key words, images or issues were consistently present in all three dialogue partners. In reflecting theologically on the issue of faith, the narrative, tradition and cultural context followed an interesting and stimulating trajectory. Reflecting on the issue of faith, especially in relation to their life and ministry, many chaplains expressed the need for faith, to underpin all that they do professionally and personally. However, culturally faith is not seen as integral to everyday life and is increasingly being pushed out of education and healthcare. Chaplains are progressively finding themselves swimming against the tide, standing

counter-culturally, in the face of an increasing secularisation of society. This movement in relation to faith connects strongly with Bonhoeffer's thoughts on Jesus' death on the cross. Through this death on the cross, Bonhoeffer feels that God is allowing Himself to be pushed out of the world and onto the cross, in order to give humankind the opportunity to benefit from Christ's death. The generosity of such a gift runs contrary to contemporary experience but simultaneously, reflects another reality in relation to God and faith. Increasingly, God is being pushed out of the world, out of the in between spaces of our lives, leaving people of faith in a vulnerable and oftentimes bewildering space.

Such a reality connects with the image of vulnerability which is consistently evident in all three dialogue partners. For instance, several of the chaplains speak of faith being vulnerable or easily challenged by the reality of personal or professional suffering. In being challenged to face into suffering, chaplains are asked to be courageous as they journey towards the truth that they themselves and others, still believe. They are asked to remain grounded when oftentimes, the sand shifts beneath their feet. Such a vulnerability is both exacerbated and validated by the cultural reality. Faith is vulnerable in the face of its propensity towards being a mystery in a world that grows more rational and scientific with every passing decade. Therefore, chaplains who feel that they swim against the tide are consciously aware of this reality which can increase their sense of isolation and at times, helplessness. Faith while oftentimes a source of great strength and courage, can also be a rod to be beaten with given the uncertainty that inhabits their context.

The tradition further increases this sense of vulnerability, given the lack of cohesive thinking, in relation to God, faith and suffering. Indeed, when one opens an exploration on faith and suffering, they are cracking open Pandora's box, finding not the answers to the many questions but instead, finding several more questions, to be grappled with and considered. The tradition has looked at issues around God and suffering since the earliest of times and yet, when we look into this theological issue, we are faced with the overwhelming incomprehensibility of it all. Mystery, blind trust, incomprehensibility is simply not enough for a probing, technical and fact-based culture and at the same time, the lack of concrete answers from the tradition means that chaplains find themselves shrouded in vulnerability because of what they stand for and believe. This resonates with

the vulnerability of ministry as expressed by some respondents, who can be seen, to operate counter-culturally, out of a fragile framework.

Such an exploration on faith also allows for the opportunity to look at the other side of the coin. Chaplains have spoken of a faith which is empowering and frames their life and their ministry. They find courage and support from God, even when they struggle to name what faith means to them. There is a reaching out in trust, knowing that there is someone or something which offers a hand of support to them as they journey with those who suffer. Here we witness great courage on the part of the chaplains, reaching out in faith and trust within a challenging and complex environment. They give of their self as they believe in God and in the value of their faith and what it supports them to do. While this act of self-giving runs counter-culturally, it connects strongly with the self-giving of Jesus on the Cross. Theories on atonement support the sacrifice of Christ on the cross as a gift to a sinful world. Furthermore, the ministry of chaplaincy appears to be one of self-sacrifice, demanding much of chaplains especially when faced with pain and suffering. That said, oftentimes they think little of the cost to self within a culture that does not always understand the value of what they give or what they stand for personally and professionally.

Faith when spoken of as a supportive framework also links into what faith does and empowers chaplains to do. Offering courage and a capacity to stay grounded in the midst of human suffering, faith helps chaplains to stand in solidarity with those who suffer and struggle. Bonhoeffer has spoken of Christ as a figure of solidarity for those who suffer and therefore this image from the tradition connects very solidly with the pastoral reality of chaplains as reflected in their narratives. In standing in solidarity with those who suffer chaplains have the opportunity to reflect the benevolence and compassion of God. As witnesses to suffering, they are mindful of the people who need tangible reminders of the presence of God in their life, especially at their darkest hour. Bewilderment is, at times, the hallmark of their ministry and yet, they appear to find strength and solace from their faith to stay the course, to remain grounded, in the face of human suffering. This is a challenging task for chaplains. However, as the experience has indicated, they are willing to stand in that place of hopelessness and helplessness. This of course stands in complete contrast to the growing sense of individualism which is evident in contemporary society.

6.5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has attended to the experience of contemporary healthcare chaplains before moving to put this into a critical dialogue with both culture and tradition. This has, I believe, given considerable insight and awareness into both the role of chaplain and the place of faith in their personal and professional lives. It also has given some insight into what will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter – how they can remain grounded and people of faith when their role is counter-cultural and underpinned by a tradition which in many respects, is lacking a cohesive scaffold to encase their work.

Chapter Seven

Pastoral Response – Insight and Transformation

7.1. Pastoral Insight – The Data Speaks

This study set out to reflect theologically, on the place of faith in the life and ministry, of contemporary chaplains. Framed around the trigger question ‘Do Healthcare Chaplains need to be people of Faith?’, it was initially believed that valuable insight into the reality of chaplaincy, within a shifting demographic could be generated by the process. It is my clear assertion that it was indeed achieved. The respondents spoke clearly about how they understand (or perhaps didn’t understand) the concept of faith and where they posit it in their own life and ministry. This process of attending to their experience has offered us a rich opportunity to reflect on their historical narrative, their contemporary reality and the potential for future growth and development. It also has given witness to the rich possibilities that exist for the future. Finding itself somewhat at a crossroads at present, nevertheless, there is ample opportunity for chaplains to make a meaningful contribution to their own future pathway. While oftentimes seen as counter cultural, chaplains have demonstrated in this study, their breadth of experience and the variety of skills that exist within the ministry itself. This is an encouraging insight as it means the chaplaincy profession has its own resources to plan for its own future.

Having listened to the experience, there is, emerging from this study, a substantial evidence-base which outlines the challenges, complexities, opportunities and aspirations of those involved in contemporary chaplaincy. They have named in word, thought, image and feeling the core issues they face and grapple with, as well as the key strengths they bring to the role. By using faith as the investigative lens, it has been possible to gain considerable insight into the lived experience of twenty-first century chaplains. This accumulation of data will, I believe, help to support and direct a pathway for transformation and growth for a ministry which often finds itself in the eye of the cultural and social storm.

7.2. Pastoral Insight – People of Faith

In many respects, this study sought to determine and comprehend the shape and context of contemporary chaplaincy. Historically and contextually, viewed as people of faith, this study sought to discover what chaplains themselves have to say about faith. The process of attending to their experience undertaken in this study, has generated substantial evidence supporting and collaborating the view of chaplaincy, as a faith-based ministry, by those engaged in it. Speaking and reflecting on their experiential reality, chaplains consistently shared how they view faith as a key component of their personal and professional lives. As Chaplain A has said ‘everything has to spring from Christ’s wishes for me’.⁸⁰⁸

The data has indicated that, for chaplains who support others through existential questioning and personal crisis, faith is integral. While there is a myriad of understandings of what faith means to, and for them, as well as variance in how it is nurtured and supported, nevertheless, faith is considered foundational. While not always seeing the need to share the same faith heritage and tradition as those they minister to, nonetheless, chaplains operate out of a space which names faith as a primary tool. It is what gives chaplains a personal, pastoral and professional identity and is, they contend, what separates them, from other therapeutic disciplines. It is, they have said, what supports and sustains them, in the face of human suffering. While culturally, they can at times appear to swim against the tide, the tradition goes a long way, in helping to bridge this gap and to recalibrate the imbalance.

As demonstrated in a previous chapter, there are many different voices and perspectives evident in the theological canon, in relation to the issue of human suffering, nevertheless it offers a reflective and supportive paradigm to help chaplains navigate through questions around their faith. While the depth and strength of their faith may waiver and vary from individual to individual, what emerges consistently from their reflections, however, is the need to have faith in order to stay the course. It is the alpha and the omega, the heart and soul, of their ministry. Whether faith is definitive or vulnerable, for those interviewed, it remains firmly positioned at the heart of all they strive to do and achieve. It is what helps them to stand in solidarity with those who suffer.

808 Chaplain A

The tradition opens up the pain and reality of the cross and what it means for us and to us when we suffer, offering a pastoral framework for chaplains who support others with the pain of suffering. According to Bonhoeffer only a person totally committed in discipleship can experience the meaning of the cross.⁸⁰⁹ Perhaps, more appropriately for this context, only those committed to standing in solidarity in that place of helplessness can truly come to experience, the meaning of the cross and help others to do likewise.

7.2.1. Pastoral Insight – Replenishing the Well

This study has clearly identified and named the centrality of faith in the lives of contemporary chaplains. While at times, it appears somewhat enigmatic, nevertheless, faith provides them with something to encase their work, offering them a personal, pastoral and professional identity. Faith is foundational to who they are and what they do, offering a pastoral and professional scaffold for their ministry. It provides a *modus operandi* even when others experience faith as archaic or counter-cultural. In contrast, for the chaplains themselves, while their experience of faith can be riddled with complexity and vulnerability, it is nonetheless, part and parcel of who and what they are.

That said, I believe that faith, something considered so foundational to and for them, generates a key pastoral concern for chaplains. Positioned at the coal face of human suffering, witnesses to crisis and pain, a pertinent pastoral question for chaplains emerges, that of sustenance – how do chaplains manage to sustain themselves personally, pastorally and professionally when challenged by the ongoing reality of human suffering? In other words, how do chaplains remain faith full and faith filled when challenged to stand in that place of helplessness, in the eye of the storm, that chaplains themselves speak so openly of? How do they stand firm in the face of human vulnerability? How do they, or can they, remain hopeful and people of faith within the context of human suffering, in a space of helplessness? As I have indicated, some of the chaplains have spoken of possessing a vulnerable faith, finding themselves disempowered by the reality of personal and communal suffering. They have also shared the personal impact of caring for others when working within such a context.

809 Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *The Cost of Discipleship*. London: SCM, 2018, 43.

Bonhoeffer has written that suffering is the badge of true discipleship⁸¹⁰ and yet, the question remains - how do chaplains sustain themselves personally, pastorally and professionally, when they suffer or when they accompany those who suffer? How do they support themselves or indeed, allow themselves to be supported by others, in order to stay within such a challenging ministry? How do they nurture a vulnerable faith? In this study, some of the chaplains have recounted experiences of deep personal suffering. Invariably, for a number of them, suffering is somewhat historical, part of their past narrative whereas for others, suffering is, and remains, part of their present reality.

In addition, to the overall theological reflection process, I consider this to be an essential question to reflect upon given chaplains' own articulation of the centrality of faith in their life and work. It is important that it moves beyond the rhetorical as it is a key question which will help to achieve considerable insight into how they manage to maintain their own faith and protect themselves spiritually, while working in the midst of human suffering. After all, the reality of human suffering faces them every day, irrespective of how they understand their own faith. It neither protects nor redirects the pain of the human condition. It provides neither answers nor solutions, instead simply offering a framework for the questioning and the reflection. Having said that, the reality is, that in order to stay the course, the well needs to be replenished. There are resonances here with Mark 1:35, where we read that Jesus left the house and went off to a solitary place where he prayed. The spirit needs renewal and regeneration, a key component in the self-care of those in ministry, especially when facing grief and loss. This appears to be the reason chaplains can stay people of faith.

7.2.2. Pastoral Insight – Call and Respond

Chaplains have, albeit somewhat implicitly, offered a number of reasons why or how it is possible for them to remain people of faith within the context of their ministry, as outlined in some of the previous chapters. They shared a number of ways in which they have helped to keep their faith alive in the face of human suffering. A key starting point for this discussion is the area of personal motivation in ministry. An earlier chapter has already considered this question in a somewhat different context. It is important, at this juncture, to recall the sense of vocation, the response to their baptismal calling, of

810 Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *The Cost of Discipleship*, 45.

which chaplains speak readily. The sense of being called, of a providentially guided move into chaplaincy appears to empower and sustain, even when self-doubt and fear, threaten to disempower. Seeing the role as vocational, adds an extra dimension of commitment to care even when faith becomes vulnerable or shaken. Leading on from here, what is clear from the data, is the deep sense of trust chaplains have in what their personal faith brings to their life and ministry. They have trust in God, in what the contemporary culture finds difficult to understand. Seeing faith as something to lean on, empowering and supportive, it is the scaffold which holds and enables them to minister to others. Faith is what keeps the chaplains grounded and balanced even when the context threatens to overwhelm and engulf. It is what rebalances the see-saw, to connect back with an earlier image used.

However, what primarily encourages and supports chaplains to remain people of faith, is I believe, their commitment to self-nourishment and spiritual self-development. Taking time to attend to their prayer life and their spiritual wellbeing, appears to be the key thing which supports, encourages and helps chaplains to stay fresh, energetic, committed and grounded in the face of human suffering. The data clearly, and without ambiguity, validates this line of thinking, demonstrating that for many of the respondents, it is their religious, ritual and spiritual practices which help to sustain and support them within a challenging professional context. For instance, Chaplain S believes that she would not be able to operate on a professional level without the support and practice of her faith. For this chaplain, reflecting that ‘I don’t think that you can appropriately minister to other people unless we have our faith practices to guide us and sustain us’⁸¹¹, it is essential that she finds space and scope to practice and develop her faith, to replenish the well, so that she can function within a challenging environment.

Religious practice appears to be essential both for professional identify and for self-preservation. The Christian heritage supports the chaplains in that it provides them with something to draw from where appropriate or when needed. Chaplain P reiterates such a point saying that for her ‘it is what keeps me centred’ and that without it ‘I wouldn’t be able to be present and willing to hear and walk with my patients’.⁸¹² Chaplain C has said ‘I see it [religious practice] as necessary as everything I do to stay alive’⁸¹³ with

811 Chaplain S

812 Chaplain P

813 Chaplain C

Chaplain K reflecting that ‘it sustains me’.⁸¹⁴ In asking the participants if religious practice forms part of their daily lives so many of them expressed surprise to be even asked such a question seeing it as a necessary and natural part of the fabric of their personal and professional lives. For example, Chaplain D considers it incomprehensible that some form of religious practice would not form part of her life saying ‘I don’t see how it couldn’t be’⁸¹⁵ while Chaplain J needs to ‘spend time with God’ in order to function both as a person and as a pastoral practitioner.⁸¹⁶ Chaplain G is of a similar mindset having shared that ‘I don’t think you can do this work if you didn’t have a place where you were in connection with God and you weren’t renewing your spirit. I don’t think you could do this work’.⁸¹⁷

‘Without my own grounding’, something which is to be found in the practice and nurturing of her faith, Chaplain Z feels she would be unable to survive within her ministry.⁸¹⁸ For another, Chaplain X, an exclamation of ‘if your well is dry how can you give a drink of water, prompted a discussion on the difficulty of her work context and the value she places on her religious practices of prayer, mass attendance and prayer group meetings in order to stay renewed and balanced. Faced each day with the reality of suicide and sudden death, post-mortems and inquests, she is acutely aware of the centrality of religious practices in her everyday life. She stays balanced through ‘her direct line with Jesus’.⁸¹⁹ For her, as she remains conscious of those who ‘are vulnerable and fragile’, in order to minister to them she needs to attend to her own spiritual well-being.⁸²⁰

Without attention to her faith life, she would not be able to continue with or participate fully in her ministry. Chaplain W, who sees faith as something she ‘couldn’t function without’, she echoes an even stronger sentiment when it comes to nurturing her faith. For her, faith and religious practice are key building blocks for her ministry. She feels that religious practice ‘absolutely has to be’ part of her personal and professional life, going on to say that ‘I think if I was to call myself a chaplain and never go to church and never spend time with God and not bother to open my Bible and not bother to pray’,

814 Chaplain K

815 Chaplain D

816 Chaplain J

817 Chaplain G

818 Chaplain Z

819 Chaplain X

820 Chaplain X

she would need to question her pastoral identity. Without the above practices, she would have to seriously ask or ‘question am I a chaplain or am I a social worker’.⁸²¹ Here, faith is clearly something to be attended to, to enhance not only the practice of the ministry but, to support a clear professional understanding of what the role of chaplain means, in the first instance.

Chaplain I also reflected on the necessity for him to nurture his faith, a faith which involved ‘a gradual building up’. For him, like Chaplain Z, religious practice is what keeps him grounded. Saying that ‘when I am not doing it [prayer] that nothing seems to be right and I seem to be uptight’. Coming to the realisation that when he feels like this ‘ninety nine percent of the time I have been running around and haven’t taken those twenty or thirty minutes’.

He uses the empty well analogy to explore spiritual replenishment, saying that ‘you cannot draw from an empty well’ and that religious practice is ‘about filling or resourcing myself and giving me that life which comes from religious practice’. This chaplain, a Catholic priest, resources or refills his well ‘through so many formal liturgies, maybe reading scripture but also meditation, maybe a moment out in nature riding the bicycle, or maybe in the garden’. Considering that he has ‘a broad notion of what religious practice is’, it is nonetheless, something which needs to be ‘intermingled all the time’ or deeply ‘integrated into my life’. For him, any chaplain would need to tap into their own inner resources in order to do the work which they do and to survive, within that milieu. Amplifying this point further, he reflects that ‘I would struggle to actually see how a person, how a chaplain can exist without spending some time being a person of prayer or meditation or actually getting in touch with something more than what they are about’.⁸²²

From reflection upon the lived experience of the chaplains interviewed, religious practice is a valuable tool which supports and empowers them. They are also conscious of the need to find an appropriate mechanism for self-care and for self-renewal, given the complexity of their working environment and wider cultural context. The data has demonstrated an awareness that in order to stay firm and grounded, in the face of

821 Chaplain W
822 Chaplain I

suffering, it is important not to become stale. They are clear that their ministry is a faith based one and they are insightful and vocal about the need to keep the well from running dry. At the same time, given their counter cultural identity, this can prove challenging. It also demands a significant commitment on the part of the individual chaplain to attend to their own needs.

Consistently, they are unswerving in their awareness, that in order to sustain their pastoral and professional identity, and to live out their ministry with energy and ongoing commitment, they need to replenish their faith resources. While there is some disparity in relation to how religious practice is interpreted and understood, nevertheless, it remains centrally important to chaplains to engage in it. Essentially, the data would indicate strongly, that religious practice, in whatever genre it is undertaken, is what primarily empowers chaplains to stay faith full and faith filled, in that place of helplessness they themselves, speak of and to stand in solidarity with those who are pained by the brokenness and vulnerability of life. This is where Bonhoeffer's *Letters from Prison* for instance, speaks to the role of chaplain and connects with the very heart of what they do. Standing in solidarity with and alongside those who suffer, chaplains are very much reflecting the Christ figure which Bonhoeffer writes of throughout his oeuvre. In his text *The Cost of Discipleship* he reminds us that the cross is laid on every Christian⁸²³ but it is, of course, chaplains who support and accompany those who struggle within such a reality. Therefore, to sustain such a role requires ongoing spiritual renewal and replenishment. This is also where the theological tradition can help to supplement and support the chaplains' own endeavours in relation to spiritual empowerment.

7.3. Insight to Action – Transformation

From the data gathered in this study, it appears that chaplains believe that it is necessary to be people of faith. Subsequently, it has also laid bare some of the intricacies, challenges and complexities which such a realisation brings with it. Despite articulating that they are 'people of faith' and seeing faith as integral in their work, in the midst of a rapidly shifting faith demographic and cultural milieu, they are, nonetheless, aware of the complexities such an understanding and context creates for them. The challenge to remain 'people of faith' is mainly fulfilled through personal investment in various

823 Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *The Cost of Discipleship*, 44.

religious practices. Acutely aware, that in order to survive personally, pastorally and professionally their faith requires enrichment and fertilisation. Having identified that faith is a key component of the chaplains' lives and signalled their acknowledged need to invest and attend to it, the next step is to look at this significant insight in a useful and guiding way. In other words, the insight and awareness gained thus far has helped to provide key epistemology in relation to how chaplains understand their faith and how they see it as integral to what they do. Beginning with this, it has also been possible to stitch together a picture of what is needed by contemporary chaplains both to do their work and to continue to do so, within a complex cultural and clinical environment.

Therefore, this study is, I believe, able to offer a knowledge base which can now be used to proffer considerable insight and possible direction to chaplains, academics, church leaders, researchers and strategic planners, in relation to determining a possible future trajectory for practice. In other words, from the perspective of those interviewed, faith underpins the role of chaplain. However, this faith needs to be renewed and regenerated and chaplains need support in this regard. Chaplains need to be able to draw support from their culture and tradition to make this happen. Therefore, it would appear that a much greater connection and understanding is needed between chaplains and their tradition and culture in order to find the support which they need. In many ways, this is indicative of and validates the need which has emerged from the data in relation to the support needed by chaplains to stay the course. It also reiterates the need to continue the process of 'befriending the crucible' so that the experience and reality of contemporary chaplains, can continuously be put into dialogue with the tradition and culture which encases them so that their needs are identified more readily. It would appear an impossibility to operate proficiently without such engagement given the needs as expressed by the practitioners themselves.

7.3.1. A Theology to Underpin The Contemporary Role of Chaplain

This study has extensively explored the place of faith in the life and ministry of contemporary chaplains. It has also reflected on how chaplains understand their role and what it is they bring to the people to whom they minister. I have attended to the experience of the chaplains as well as the culture and the tradition which encases their role and put all three into the 'crucible' allowing an organic process of insight and

transformation to occur. One key theme which emerges consistently in all three of the dialogue partners is that of accompaniment.

While sharing a number of different understandings of what it is they offer in their ministry, a consistent theme is that of presence. Chaplains speak of being ‘a person for others’ and of ‘reaching out to those in need’. In this space, in the ‘place of helplessness’ there is a ‘metaphorical offering of the human hand’ and ‘vulnerable journeying’. They feel that they ‘hold a light in the darkness’ as they ‘stand in the gap’, in that place of pastoral relatedness.

However, the pastoral encounter is a place of vulnerable journeying. Chaplains speak of coming with ‘empty hands’ with no answers or solutions to the pain of the human condition. They have no answers to the deep existential pain which they witness to every day. That said, they can sit with courage and trust in the place of painful questioning. Chaplains have spoken of being comfortably uncomfortable in the place of incomprehensibility, offering a compassionate and empathetic presence to the people they encounter. This has most recently been seen during the Covid-19 pandemic when chaplains demonstrated a capacity to ‘stand in the gap’, to stay in the place of helplessness with those who suffer. Chaplains continued to minister during the pandemic, offering a sense of rootedness in the face of a continually shifting context. They visited patients who were alone due to visitor restrictions in hospitals and nursing homes. They offered pastoral, spiritual, religious and sacramental support to people hurting and lost during a time of great upheaval. They engaged in new ways of ministering making use of technology to engage pastorally and spiritually when face to face ministry was not safe. They have demonstrated not only courage but a willingness to think on their feet and stay the course when faced with challenge.

Faith has become counter-cultural. It offers nothing by way of certainty in a world which strives to have answers and solutions as outlined in a previous chapter. It seeks rational responses and scientifically quantifiable answers to even the most complex of dilemmas. Therefore, society is suspicious and sceptical of easy answers, of narrative or faith answers. Faith is guided by the gut, by what is experienced. It is sensed and believed but not quantifiable. Therefore, staying with the process of the unknown is counter-cultural as is accompanying someone without the certainty of absolute answers.

Chaplains stay the course within a culture that, for the most part, does not understand the essence of their work.

Accompaniment was also a key element in the theological tradition explored earlier. The tradition on atonement and the cross brought a particular perspective to the exploration on the role of the chaplain. Focused on sacrifice or satisfaction, these theories offer some insight into how the Patristic Fathers understood suffering and how the death of Christ on the cross might be understood and appropriated. However, the theology of accompaniment fits with and supports the offering of empathetic presence which the chaplains have spoken of consistently throughout their sharing. Elizabeth Johnson has reflected that the ‘unfathomable divine presence’ ensures that those who suffer are ‘knowingly accompanied in their anguish and dying with a love that does not snap off just because they are in trouble’.⁸²⁴

This understanding of Christian love offers an assurance of support and compassion in the face of human suffering which sits comfortably with what was shared by the chaplains in relation to how they view the purpose of faith in the face of suffering. The post-Holocaust theologians which I have explored in this study have reflected not on the ‘why’ of suffering but rather the ‘how’, not offering solutions or answers but rather the certainty of not being alone when we suffer. Assuring that Christ is with us and alongside us when we suffer resonates strongly with the gift of presence which chaplains bring to the hospital bedside. The tradition on accompaniment assures not of definite answers but of the love and compassion of an Emmaus Christ-figure. It is not about the quest for answers in the face of human suffering but rather presence and hope.

All this translates to a theology of accompaniment (within a theology of suffering) which speaks loudly to the contemporary experience of chaplains. The role of chaplain has evolved considerably in recent years. There has been a move away from the traditional model of chaplaincy. Society has become increasingly pluralist and secular and as a result, chaplains are encountering people of all faiths and none. Many people no longer want a sacramental or religious ‘chaplain’ experience but instead want someone who can meet them where they are at. Chaplains, more than ever, need to have the

824 Elizabeth A. Johnson. *Creation and the Cross* 189

capacity to enter into the world of the ‘other’ and navigate into that space without judgment or expectation. Chaplains are being asked to simply ‘be’, to remain present in the moment of the encounter.

Within this context, there is ‘vulnerable journeying’ on the part of the chaplain. More and more, they are being asked to move into uncharted territory, to ‘stand in the gap’ with nothing more than their presence to offer. Coming with ‘empty hands’ they are well placed to sit with the ‘how’ rather than ‘why’ questions. By shining a light in the darkness, they are sitting at the foot of the cross like Mary did when her son was crucified. Therefore, the theories on accompaniment which were explored earlier offer us a clear theological underpinning for the contemporary role of chaplain. It reminds that chaplains are above all, figures of solidarity with those who suffer and struggle, having the capacity to ‘stand in the gap’, even in the darkest of moments.

7.3.2. Bewilderment – Staying With The Question

Karl Rahner has written that ‘God is the incomprehensible mystery’, a mystery which he sees will be for ‘now and for all eternity’.⁸²⁵ Chaplains, as have been outlined, have also reflected upon this sense of mystery, of not having the benefit of absolute answers. They have shared what a challenging and uncomfortable place it is for them and how powerless they can feel in the face of human suffering. Indeed, they have reflected on coming with ‘empty hands’, with ‘no answers’, in ‘vulnerability’ to the people that they minister to who suffer and struggle with pain and loss. They have spoken of feeling ineffective and anchored by something which is beyond their understanding.

The tradition has also demonstrated a sense of mystery around faith, God and suffering. Despite centuries of reflection, there are no definite answers or plausible solutions to be found from the tradition to the challenging existential questions which chaplains face. The theories of atonement have shown a lack of consistency in relation to the overall subject of suffering and the theology of accompaniment offers a ‘how’ rather than a ‘why’ approach. Added to this, is society’s desire for answers, certainty and structure, the concept of mystery is somewhat enigmatic for chaplains.

825 Karl Rahner. ‘Why does God allow us to suffer’, 205.

Within this context, the ability of chaplains to stay with the questioning, to stay in that place of helplessness and hopelessness demonstrates great courage on their part. Despite speaking of their vulnerability and limitations they have given witness to great courage and commitment to stay the course. They have the capacity, as the data has shown, to ‘stand in the gap’, courageously holding the unanswerable questions in their ‘empty hands’, entering into the world of the ‘other’ in a compassionate and caring way. They have unambiguously shown a capacity to stay with the question despite the pain of the experience, the limitations of the tradition in this regard and the expectations of society.

7.4. Insight to Action - Reconfiguration of The Role

The introductory chapter of this thesis has already outlined the historical background of healthcare chaplaincy in Ireland. The contemporary model of ‘chaplain’ has developed from a historical and traditional model which was primarily clerical, religious and sacramental in nature. This model has, however, evolved considerably in recent decades and expanded to accommodate a more inclusive and overarching vision of healthcare chaplaincy. In other words, a model which is less clerical in nature and more cumulative and collaborative in outlook. This paradigm shift was necessitated, in the first instance, by the increase in the number of non-ordained people who have taken up the role over the last twenty-five years or so, as well as, the changing cultural demographic which has brought many social, political, economic and historical alterations. Significantly, this also includes the declining number of clergy and religious now available, in the first instance, to undertake hospital chaplaincy work.

The last decade has witnessed considerable movement in relation to changes in cultural values and mores. Matters pertaining to church, faith, conscience, autonomy and ethical decision-making, have all become part of public square debate and conversation, and in so doing, reflects the development of a society with a new yardstick for measuring and articulating, its values and expectations. Therefore, as a consequence, it would appear that given such a shifting cultural context, it is time once more for the chaplaincy profession to review for itself, the role and function of ‘chaplain’ and consider if its current *modus operandi* best serves the needs of the people that they now encounter.

From the evidence gathered, it does seem that it is time for realignment or redevelopment of the chaplaincy role despite the courage demonstrated by the chaplains to stay in uncomfortable place. Moreover, as the culture chapter has indicated, there have already been some significant external movements which have attempted to explore how chaplains can best serve the needs of a shifting cultural and religious milieu. After all, the HSE has already begun a process of discernment in this regard. Firstly, they undertook a service review before moving to oversee the formation of the HSE Multi-Faith Chaplaincy Advisory Council. The *HSE Intercultural Guide* is further demonstration of governance and corporate awareness, around a changing milieu and the need to respond appropriately.

Interestingly, all twenty-six of the chaplains had a sense, that despite the changing context, chaplaincy has an enhanced relevance and is needed more than ever. However, increased diversity appears to dictate the need to widen the traditional and historical vision of chaplaincy. Or in other words, it needs a model of chaplaincy, that can speak, in a multitude of ways to a multiplicity of people. The move away from traditional values and mores and, in particular the drifting away from the Catholic Church and its practices, has meant that people who still seek existential meaning do so in alternative and less traditional places.

This is a cultural gear shift named several times in the interview process. The fact that people now seek meaning in non-traditional ways and places, has meant that in many ways, chaplains have been asked to raise the bar, to diversify and look at alternative ways of offering pastoral outreach. This has also opened up a need to be proficient in multi-faith and inter-faith ministry and to have the capacity to move with ease outside the historical model. This is necessary so that chaplains can minister in a holistic and person-centred approach to ministry within a shifting framework. However, this is an emerging area and one in which the chaplains have identified a deficiency. Therefore, this is an area in need of more reflection, consideration and growth. That said, the theological underpinning for chaplaincy which I proposed earlier could support chaplains to see that much of what they do now is within the context of a theology of accompaniment. Honing their skills of multi-faith and inter-faith ministry would simply enhance this part of their work.

Therefore, this study is providing a gap analysis in relation to chaplaincy and its timing is especially opportune. It is bridging a dearth in knowledge, but it is also responding to the needs of the times. While the HSE has made some significant manoeuvres, in order to ascertain how best to service the needs of a changing society the chaplains themselves need, in some way to respond likewise. Disappointingly, despite the shifting demographic historically there has been a reticence on the part of chaplains to engage in research or to seek out new and innovative ways to minister in this new reality.

Consequently, I believe that this study provides a timely snapshot into the key elements of chaplaincy and what it can offer to people of all faiths and none. It demonstrates that chaplains are acutely aware of the changes in society which impact upon their role. However, the research has shown somewhat of a reluctance to move with the times, to re-align their understanding of person-centred care within a shifting paradigm. While some chaplains shared eloquently of their proficiency to minister to those of a different tradition to themselves, others shared of feeling inadequate in this regard. There is therefore, a pressing need, to re-align the role, and perhaps some aspects of their training, so that chaplains are more diverse-aware and more confident in their ability to minister from their own faith grounding to those of all faiths and none. Although, the theology of accompaniment, is I believe, a useful addition in this regard.

The greatest challenge for chaplains is to articulate in a clear, cohesive and concise way what they have to offer an increasingly secular and pluralist society. There is a need for another paradigm shift, one which can respect the roots of the role while fully embracing a changed context and a reconfigured role. I would like to add a caveat here in that I am certainly not suggesting an *a la carte* approach here to pastoral care provision. What does however seem necessary is a focused re-drawing and realignment of a role taking into account the need to accompany pastorally and spiritually, people of all faiths and none. In her research project completed for the NAHC in 2015, one of Mary Jennings' findings was that chaplaincy needed to create a more uniform way of referring to itself. Suggesting Pastoral Care, rather than Chaplaincy, or Pastoral Chaplaincy so that both roles are seen to be intertwined she felt that there was overall confusion around what

is meant by the role of ‘Chaplain’ in contemporary society.⁸²⁶ I would disagree with Jennings around the need to change the name of the ministry but would argue that there is some necessity to re-configure the role to ensure that it offers something to all people, not just people of faith.

However, that said, chaplains need to be their own visionaries and planners. So many of them demonstrated immense courage as they shared their narrative, a sense of courage now needed as the sand continually shifts beneath their feet. In other words, they need to contribute to the process which will lead to their role being re-configured allowing chaplaincy to be experienced and understood as a service available to all irrespective of faith tradition or status exercised by professionals proficient in theology, cultural theory and therapeutic skills. The preparation for the role also needs to partner and support this re-configuration so that pastoral practitioners are able to minister proficiently within a challenging and evolving culture.

7.5. Becoming More Faith Articulate

To effectively reconfigure the role of chaplain, it is I believe, necessary to take a step backward of sorts, initially at least. Or, to borrow an image from one of the chaplains, it is necessary to peel back the layers of the onion in order to see more clearly, the direction to take going forward. To return to the experience of the data, we know that chaplains have struggled, at times, to articulate what faith means for, and to them, even the more articulate and nuanced ones. In other words, many of them had to dig down deep to find the words or images to share their thoughts about the meaning, value and significance of faith. Given that chaplains see faith as foundational and integral to ministry, this is a curious and paradoxical insight. This ambiguity, however, resonates strongly with the theological tradition in relation to the difficulty that exists around understanding human suffering. It strongly connects with the incomprehensibility of the mystery of God. It also indicates an area for chaplains to reflect upon within the context of a changing demographic. While swift to explore the meaning and value of chaplaincy, they were less articulate in relation to their own faith, something which they also shared was foundational to that very role.

⁸²⁶ Mary Jennings. *A Descriptive Study of the Role and Practice of Healthcare Chaplains in the Republic of Ireland*. NAHC, unpublished document, 2013.

Therefore, it appears that an urgent need exists for pastoral practitioners to become more faith articulate. Given the evolving cultural context, this is especially acute and chaplains will have to find a way of articulating what is distinctive and valuable about what they have to offer an increasingly secular and pluralist society and health system. They will need to find their voice, to speak with the courage they have demonstrated, what faith is, what it means to them, and what faith-based practitioners have to offer those who have moved away from traditional values and mores. This would not only help others understand their contribution but would assist chaplains to remain true to their foundational values. There is scope for the development of a more coherent faith language because while chaplains may see faith as foundational, this may be unclear to multidisciplinary colleagues.

Therefore, any re-configuration of the chaplaincy role, needs to include not so much a uniform understanding of faith, but rather, one to be shared with ease with colleagues and strategic planners. Their faith gives them a framework which, while fragile and frail at times, nevertheless, encases them in the love of a compassionate and caring God, the God who, as Augustine has said is the 'unchanging truth'. Faith provides some certainty when everything else appears uncertain.

To avoid a downplaying of the role, there is both need and scope to develop (and use) a language of faith which speaks effectively to professional colleagues. Therefore, pastoral formators and educators have an obvious role to play in this regard, by helping to develop and use a language that can sit at the theological, professional and clinical crossroads. This would, in turn, help to direct and empower chaplains to speak more clearly around what lies at the heart of their own role, to have the necessary word power (or perhaps image power) to share what they intuitively feel. While of course, words will never adequately express the mystery of God and the mystery of faith, by the same token, this cannot be an excuse to speak in terms that can be misconstrued, vague or unprofessional.

The re-configuration process needs to begin with and be underpinned, by a search to find a way to speak more confidently about what is at the heart, of pastoral care. Essentially, the chaplaincy role would benefit hugely from having practitioners who are more faith articulate, not having or expecting absolute answers or definitions but rather,

having the professional and personal capacity to reflect and comment in a coherent and cohesive manner about what they themselves, argue is at the heart, of what they do. The words and images shared by the chaplains in this study which articulate their own experience, supports the possible creation of such a definition or understanding of faith, which could be shared beyond the practitioners themselves. Having afforded chaplains the opportunity to reflect theologically on the issue of faith, there is much within the chaplaincy body itself that can be used, to articulate in a clear, professional and proficient way, what faith is.

7.6. A Narrative of Faith and Pastoral Renewal

The capacity to speak in a clearer, more coherent way about faith would be a useful advancement for chaplains in myriad of ways. In becoming more faith articulate, chaplains would add significantly to their existing skillset and would gain a greater sense of professional identity and recognition. Chaplains have shared feelings of vulnerability, lacking in confidence, often feeling overwhelmed by their context and lack of proficiency in multi-faith ministry. They have tended to focus on the sense of powerlessness they feel within the role, as opposed to the giftedness they, themselves, bring to the ministry. Even those who demonstrated a willingness to stand in the place of helplessness with others, place more focus on personal fragility and limitation, than on having the ability or courage to do so. Some lament the confusion that can arise from a lack of understanding of the role of lay chaplains (Chaplain A) while others speak of feeling that they come with empty hands (Chaplain O).

A more solid foundation, a stronger faith framework would encourage and support chaplains in their role as prophetic witnesses and practitioners. It would help to encourage and to quell some of the doubt that comes quickly to the surface. This doubt is exacerbated, to some extent at least, by the lack of consistency or uniformity within the theological tradition around the meaning and value of suffering, as well as the cultural context within which chaplains operate. The sense of swimming against the tide compounds the vulnerability of the role and does little to reassure or support its practitioners. A limitation of the study is that it was only possible to interview chaplains. Certainly, a helpful next step to enhance our insight and understanding, would be to interview colleagues and service users to try to determine, how they experience the work of chaplains.

I sense that in becoming more faith articulate, chaplains would by extension, become more confident in how they both understand and speak of their own ministry. After all, so many of them shared narratives filled with pain and suffering and how they managed to overcome myriad of challenges and moments of loss. This same courage is not always reflected in how they speak of their own faith and of their ministry to others. In becoming more faith articulate chaplains will help to bring about pastoral renewal for themselves and for others. In re-configuring their role, by developing a more cohesive and coherent language of faith for themselves and for others, they will, by extension, contribute to a pastoral renewal of the ministry. Having identified, in the previous section, the need to develop a new understanding of chaplaincy, this forward step would serve to fill this identified gap and simultaneously, help to bring about a process of renewal. Chaplains need to help steer their own future trajectory especially within a context of counter-culturalism and opposition, in order to renew and flourish. In becoming more faith articulate, they will contribute to a greater understanding by others of what they value.

7.7. Becoming More Theologically Reflective

The guiding framework used in this thesis drew from the Whiteheads' model and method of theological reflection. A significant finding, when attending to the experience, was the struggle which chaplains had to articulate a theology or a theological vision/underpinning for chaplaincy. This is intertwined with the inability at times to articulate an understanding of faith and is a somewhat unexpected finding, given that chaplains are trained through a reflective practice methodology which has theological reflection at its heart. Moreover, professional supervision supports a continuum of reflective practice in relation to how chaplains can support and enhance their pastoral practice and is a mandatory requirement for all accredited chaplains.

Therefore, it was surprising that chaplains were reticent to reflect theologically when prompted to do so. Perhaps this reluctance comes from the place of fear and lack of courage already alluded to throughout this thesis. Nonetheless, it is an issue which needs to be addressed so that chaplains can become more theologically confident and self-aware. It was interesting that ordained chaplains seemed more willing to speak in theological terms and to reflect theologically on the place of God in their work and ministry, than some of the other respondents. Non-ordained chaplains were less so

inclined despite the requirement to have an honours degree in theology for accreditation since 2012. However, some chaplains referred to various biblical passages in the course of their interview, thus demonstrating a more proficient ability to reflect theologically in word, image and symbol than drawing overtly from the theological tradition, to explore issues around faith and suffering. This is where the bespoke method of theological reflection supported the reflective process and deepened the insight and awareness to be gained. Interestingly, Church of Ireland chaplains were also much more theologically confident and free than some of the Roman Catholic chaplains interviewed. This demonstrates that some additional work is urgently needed in this regard both in the areas of theological formation and in the skills of theological reflection.

Therefore, in re-configuring the role of chaplain, it is important that decision-makers in this area, would recommend and empower chaplains to become more theologically articulate and more theologically reflective. As people of faith, a deeper awareness of the theological tradition (especially in relation to the theology of suffering) and of the theological reflection framework, would help chaplains to become more theologically aware and articulate. It would also help to support and enable them in their quest to remain faith full and faith filled in the wake of human suffering. Any re-drawing of professional roles and boundaries would benefit from significant work and formation in the area of theology and theological reflection. This would ensure that chaplains become more confident theologically, thereby becoming more capable of speaking coherently in a rapidly changing milieu.

7.8. Re-configuration – Becoming a Confident Voice – Prophetic Witness

Having signalled the need for a re-configuration of the contemporary chaplaincy role, there is also need to add somewhat of a caveat, to the discussion thus far. While it is clear from the research that chaplains can struggle to be faith articulate, speaking of vulnerability, powerlessness and helplessness – struggling to speak about faith in a cohesive manner, there is also much positivity and encouragement to be gained from the chaplains currently working in the contemporary context. Chaplains have, themselves, shared of the gift of compassionate presence, authentic listening and a genuine willingness to sit in that place of helplessness which their role centres on. They have shared a clear understanding of what chaplaincy means to them and why they have sought to support those in need of compassionate presence.

However, despite such clarity, the subsequent lack of faith confidence, is somewhat puzzling and enigmatic. After all, many of them have come to chaplaincy as a second career, having already spent many years in teaching, business, nursing and other such careers. They have come with depth and spiritual maturity that carries over to their ministry with the sick and the dying. They have raised families, returned to education and experienced losses and yet, they lack the confidence to speak loudly and boldly of who they are and what is intrinsically unique about their role. They have the capacity and the confidence for the most part, to minister to those of a different faith tradition to themselves and speak of having the ability to look elsewhere for additional and resources in this regard, if or where needed. Disappointingly, this ability is not mirrored in how they speak of what they offer to others, often referring to their work as coming with ‘empty hands’ or with a sense of ‘powerlessness’ a clear paradox to how some of their colleagues have shared of the strength and courage ‘standing in the gap’ takes.

In this study chaplains have demonstrated a deep commitment to their role and a visible commitment to reach out compassionately to the sick and the dying. They have spoken honestly and with real depth about their journey into chaplaincy and what it is that keeps them there. I have been humbled by the honest sharing of their narrative, of experiences often sprinkled with pain and huge loss and disappointment. I do believe that the absence of a strong scaffolding or framework in relation to how faith is defined or spoken of contributes in a significant way to the lack of confidence experienced in this study around how faith is, at times, expressed. So too does the deficiency in theological reflection skills contribute to such a lack of self-assuredness about something which they see as integral to all that they do and give witness to. All of this, is further compounded by a seeming disconnection from the theological tradition.

Ultimately, while the dearth in research and in language has contributed to the reluctance of chaplains to unambiguously see and believe in all that they offer to others, nevertheless, it is they themselves must chart their own future. This research points to a gaping hole in relation to how chaplains articulate of and for themselves. I believe that a more solid framework, more research and more support from leaders and professional organisations will empower them to begin charting their own trajectory. It will support and enable them to be more prophetic in their witness to other multidisciplinary professionals and also amongst themselves as chaplains. In order to grow and indeed to

survive, within a changing and challenging secular and pluralist context, chaplains will have to take up the gauntlet and equip themselves with a new language, a new vision and a new *modus operandi* in order to articulate what they have to offer in twenty-first century Ireland.

Essentially, however, what the ‘befriending the crucible’ process has visibly demonstrated is that in order for chaplains to become more confident, to be prophetic witnesses, there is a need for both transformation and action. With a greater degree of awareness around the culture and tradition which encases their work would come the tentative first steps in a transformative and empowering process. In dipping into the river of experience, an experience which includes narrative, culture and tradition, chaplains would be empowered to make key connections and which would highlight how they can be confident prophetic witnesses in the twenty-first century. Chaplains need to find a greater degree of courage and confidence and in so doing they would have a greater and louder voice, contributing in a more tangible way to the future of their own ministry.

A chaplaincy profession with practitioners who are more theologically competent and formed would have a more solid connection with its faith tradition and would by extension gain more support from it. Chaplains need to be supported and encouraged to use the courage they have demonstrated in the sharing of their own narratives to engage competently with the tradition around the theology of suffering. By becoming more faith articulate, more theologically formed and more theologically reflective this would help to ensure that contemporary chaplains find a deeper sense of courage, a louder and stronger voice and a vocabulary to both articulate and serve their needs. The tradition on suffering while complex and inconsistent, has much to offer contemporary pastoral practitioners in terms of a supportive paradigm, a professional competency and a pastoral vocabulary. In becoming more confident around their own tradition and language, chaplains will also become less vulnerable in the face of changing social and cultural demographics. Chaplains need to use their own theological tradition to help them find a voice that can courageously articulate what is at the heart of what they do and what they can continue to do within an ever-changing cultural context.

7.9. Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that chaplains have the opportunity to move from insight to action, that a pastoral response is possible given the many strengths that exist within the chaplaincy profession at this time. The data collected has shown the wealth of experience and capability which exists within the ministry at present and the conversation generated in the last two chapters offer much to reflect upon for pastoral practitioners within this context.

Conclusion

This thesis, has undertaken a theological reflection on the meaning, value and significance of faith in the life and ministry of contemporary chaplains. The crafting, of a bespoke method of theological reflection, which drew on the Whiteheads and O'Connell Killen and De Beer approaches, supported an authentic conversation on the issue of faith. In putting the three dialogue partners into conversation with each other, this allowed for and supported a transparent and congruent exploration of faith for contemporary chaplains. The trigger question of 'Do chaplains need to be people of faith?' framed and underpinned the exploration of faith which, in turn, allowed for a wider reflection on the contemporary reality of healthcare chaplains.

I came to this study with a sense of passion for the ministry but also, with some disappointment that other chaplains were not engaging in research and study into their own ministry. Having published the *History of Irish Healthcare Chaplaincy* in 2015, I had hoped that others might be encouraged to dig a little deeper and start the process of back-filling the dearth in research activity. For the most part, chaplains have remained silent to the call to research here in Ireland and therefore, there still exists a gap in evidence-based knowledge in relation to the work of chaplains, in contemporary Irish healthcare facilities.

Therefore, I am aware, that at the outset, I had three primary objectives in undertaking this particular study: to develop a greater understanding of the contemporary reality of Healthcare Chaplaincy; to enhance and preserve the service delivery into the future and to complete a gap analysis study so that other working chaplains may themselves, be encouraged and have the confidence, to engage in academic research and study.

Reflecting on the first objective, I believe that this study, has indeed succeeded in this regard. The interview process, the listening attentively to the narrative of the chaplain, has helped to provide significant insight into their contemporary reality. They have shared how they understand their role, how they define and posit faith within their work, and how they minister to those who may have a different understanding of faith to

them. They have demonstrated in their open and honest sharing, how they feel both a sense of challenge and privilege, in relation to their own ministry. They have also provided considerable insight into how the shifting demographic, in terms of faith and religious practice, continues to impact upon their role. Acutely aware that as society becomes more pluralist and secular, more challenges will come their way. That said, those interviewed demonstrate, for the most part, a capacity to stand solidly in the midst of continuing changes and challenges. Therefore, this study, has provided considerable insight into the 'life' and 'work' of healthcare chaplains and by so doing, providing an evidence-base from which others, within and beyond the ministry, can draw on and consolidate.

The second objective which I had identified, was in relation to enhancing and preserving service delivery of healthcare chaplaincy. I sense, that at the very least, the first part of this objective has been fully met. In creating an evidence-based study of chaplaincy, by extension, this I contend will help to enhance the role. What I mean here, is that in becoming more visible, chaplains will become more 'professional'. In other words, they will have a greater sense of confidence in who they are and what it is they offer at the interprofessional table. In becoming more visible, their voice will become louder at decision-making tables. They will grow in professional confidence and thereby will create more opportunities for themselves, to stand as professional equals with their colleagues who make ethical, financial and professional decisions which impact, upon them and the patients they care for pastorally and professionally. Professional identity and recognition are generated not only from doing a job well, but also from being able to articulate clearly what it is that is unique and valuable about a role. Having the option to draw deeply from a solid evidence base as well as being research aware certainly enhances professional visibility.

I believe, that this study, will therefore, help chaplains to have something to draw from, which hopefully, will give them a greater sense of confidence in what it is they have to offer to those to whom they care for within an increasingly complex environment. In relation, to the second part of this objective, there may have been some degree of naiveté, on my part. After all, I am not an employer of chaplains. However, what I do hope, is that in undertaking this gap analysis study there is now a well of evidence to draw from for those who are in a position to employ, recruit, replace or displace chaplains. This

offers something from which to consider and reflect upon what it is chaplains have to offer, within a complex and challenging healthcare service.

The final objective was to undertake a gap analysis study into healthcare chaplaincy and, by so doing, encourage others to become involved in research and academic study. This study has most definitely completed the gap analysis study and provides the first in depth exploration of healthcare chaplaincy in Ireland. It will supplement some of the other work being done in spirituality, especially by the nursing profession, but is strong enough to stand alone in its own right also. It most certainly begins the process of 'bridging the research gap' but I am also acutely aware, that there is so much more that needs to be done, in order to close the gap completely. We need to hear from patients, their families and staff in relation to how they understand and engage with chaplaincy services. We need to hear from decision-makers and strategic planners and how they understand the role and what they believe the future is for it. We need to hear from the church leaders, the educators of chaplains and perhaps even from those who have chosen to walk away from the ministry. There is also scope to look thematically at chaplaincy, to reflect more on multi-faith chaplaincy, to look at how chaplains engage with Multidisciplinary colleagues and perhaps how they may be encouraged to understand the integral importance of 'educating colleagues' around the core skills and value set which chaplains bring to the healthcare world. I believe there is much more work to be done in the area of theological reflection, theological formation and theological education and this would be a key piece of work for someone else to undertake. I am conscious, that again, this is simply the beginning of the work to be done. However, it does nonetheless, provide a solid starting point, for anyone who wishes to help 'close' the research gap which I have begun the process of bridging.

I have also crafted a bespoke method of theological reflection in the process of undertaking this study. This may prove helpful for further studies into chaplaincy but also for other types of ministry and pastoral issues for discernment. I contend that I have also offered a solid theological basis for the contemporary role of 'chaplain'. Having explored and moved away from the theories of atonement which centred on 'sacrifice' or 'satisfaction' to a theology of accompaniment, I have been able to offer a theological framework which speaks loudly to the experience of the chaplains. In a ministry of 'presence', a theology of accompaniment sits with ease around the experience of the

pastoral practitioners. It connects with the reality of what they do within a society that is moving away from a traditional vision of chaplaincy. No longer solely focused on prayers and sacraments, chaplaincy is about attentive presence, authentic companionship and walking a step on the journey with people of all faiths and none. Therefore, the theology of accompaniment is at the heart of the ministry. Sitting with the tradition of the chaplain, it fits with ease into the context and the experience.

Appendix 1



Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee

MIREC-3: Application Form

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY: APPLICATION
NUMBER:

SECTION ONE: APPLICATION DETAILS

1.1 APPLICANT TYPE: Faculty/Staff Student

1.2 APPLICATION TYPE: New application
Resubmission

1.3 If this application is a resubmission, please quote reference
number: (e.g. A16-023)

1.4 PROJECT DURATION: Proposed Start Date (Month,
Year)

Anticipated Completion
(Month, Year)

1.5 PROJECT TITLE:

An Exploration of the role of Faith in the Life and Ministry of Healthcare Chaplains in
Contemporary Ireland

1.6 FUNDING BODY: (If any)

N/A

1.7 NAME OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Margaret Naughton

1.8 OTHER INVESTIGATORS AND AFFILIATIONS

N/A

1.9 MICEMAILADDRESS

margaret.naughton@mic.ul.ie

1.10 DEPARTMENT (Students should add the Department of their Supervisor)	Theology and Religious Studies
1.11 ID NUMBER (STUDENTS ONLY)	14211378
1.12 PROGRAMME OF STUDY (STUDENTS ONLY)	PhD
1.13 SUPERVISOR'S NAME (STUDENTS ONLY)	Rev. Dr. Eamonn Fitzgibbon

NOTE: Supervisors are responsible for ensuring their students fill in this form correctly and that all ethical areas have been considered.

1.14 The information in this application form is accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief, and I take full responsibility for it. I undertake to abide by the ethical principles outlined in the MIC Research Ethics Committee (MIREC) guidelines. If the research project is approved, I undertake to adhere to the study protocol without unagreed deviation, and to comply with any conditions sent out in the letter sent by MIREC notifying me of this. I undertake to inform MIREC of any changes in the protocol. I accept without reservation that it is my responsibility to ensure the implementation of the guidance of MIREC as outlined in MIREC-6.

Yes No

1.15 PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR SIGNATURE: DATE

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~~1.16 SUPERVISOR or HEAD OF DEPARTMENT SIGNATURE: DATE~~

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SECTION TWO: DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH STUDY

2.1 Purpose of research (300 words maximum)

The topic under exploration is contemporary Healthcare Chaplaincy within the Irish context. Internationally, the literature has advocated for an evidence-based approach to Healthcare Chaplaincy by the Pastoral practitioners themselves. This is recognized as the preferred means for charting the future of Healthcare Chaplaincy. However, within the Irish context there is little effort made to keep pace with international approaches to and recommendations regarding research on the part of Chaplains. The primary aim of this research is to provide a gap analysis study of Healthcare Chaplain from within the discipline.

2.2 Research methodology. This must detail how you will interact with your research subjects (focus groups/interviews/online surveys etc). (300 words maximum)

As a working Chaplain with a proven track record in research I have the skills and knowledge base to undertake what is both a ground-breaking and future policy guide study.

A qualitative research approach will determine the trajectory of this project. The topic will also be guided by an extensive Literature Review directed most likely by database searches.

Twenty Healthcare Chaplains will be interviewed using a semi-structured approach.

Healthcare Chaplains will be invited by means of an email letter of invitation to partake in the study (see letter of consent). An email of invitation will be sent to all Healthcare

Chaplains contained in the National Association of Healthcare Chaplains (NAHC) database. However, before sending this email of invitation, permission to do so will be sought from the Executive Council of the NAHC. Despite the investigator being the current Chairperson no ethical or recruitment issues are envisaged.

No criteria indicators such as gender, experience, age will be employed in the selective process. The participants will be taken in order of their expression of interest in the project.

It is envisaged that interested Healthcare Chaplains will be interviewed for 45-60 minutes at their place of work and the interviews will be recorded. At a later stage these will be transcribed and stored appropriately most likely electronically until the PhD study is completed.

The twenty Healthcare Chaplains for interview (for balance and fairness) will be as follows:

- Five Roman Catholic Chaplains working in a healthcare facility with a defined ethos and value system
- Five Roman Catholic Chaplains working in a healthcare facility with a more fluidly defined value system
- Five Healthcare Chaplains from a non-Christian background and belief system
- Five international Healthcare Chaplains.

2.3 Sample questions. Sample questions for interviews/focus groups should be included. You may attach a separate document as part of your appendices file if necessary

- Name/place of work/religious or philosophical affiliation
- A little about the interviewee
- Would you consider yourself to be a person of faith?
- What is faith?
- Is it important to you? Would you consider it to be a key component of your life and if so, why/why not?
- Is Religious practice important to you?
- As a Chaplain does it have to be?
- What brought you to Chaplaincy?
- Is Chaplaincy relevant in a society that is becoming more diverse and less engaged with traditional church views/practices?
- Have you ministered to people of a different tradition/belief system to yourself?

- Do you think that a Chaplain of one tradition can effectively meet the needs of those who are of a different tradition?
- Is it necessary for Chaplains to be Religious in order to minister to others?

2.4 Research ethics from another HEI

Are there ethical guidelines (other than MIREC) to which you must adhere in your field of study?

Yes No

Do you require Ethical Clearance from another source?

Yes No

If you answer Yes to either of these questions, please specify the Ethical Guidelines / Ethical Clearance that is required.

SECTION THREE: ETHICAL ISSUES Answer 'yes' or 'no' to the following questions.

HUMAN PARTICIPANTS

Does the research proposal involve:

- Working with participants over 65 years of age? Yes No
- Any person under the age of 18? Yes No
- Adult patients? Yes No
- Adults with psychological impairments? Yes No
- Adults with learning difficulties? Yes No
- Adults under the protection/ control/influence of others (e.g. in care/prison)? Yes No
- Relatives of ill people (e.g. parents of sick children) Yes No
- People who may only have a basic knowledge of English? Yes No
- Hospital or GP patients recruited in medical facility? Yes No
- The use of human tissue/ samples? Yes No

SUBJECT MATTER

Does the research proposal involve:

- Sensitive personal issues? (e.g. suicide, bereavement, gender identity, sexuality, fertility, abortion, gambling) Yes No
- Illegal activities, illicit drug taking, substance abuse or the self- reporting of criminal behaviour? Yes No
- Any act that might diminish self-respect or cause shame, embarrassment or regret? Yes No
- Research into politically and/or racially/ethnically and/or commercially sensitive areas? Yes No

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

Does the research proposal involve:

- Use of personal records without consent? Yes No
- Deception of participants? Yes No
- The offer of large inducements to participate? Yes No
- Audio or visual recording without consent? Yes No
- Invasive physical interventions or treatments? Yes No

- Research that might put researchers or participants at risk? Yes No
- Storage of results data for less than 7 years? Yes No

AREAS OTHER THAN HUMAN

Does the research proposal involve:

- Use of animals? Yes No
- Military technology? Yes No
- Hazardous biological materials? Yes No
- Genetic modification? Yes No
- Nuclear reaction? Yes No
- Any field that may bring the College adverse attention? Yes No

If you answered **YES** to any of the questions above, please specify why:

If you have answered **NO** to all questions, you do not need to complete Section Four. Please go to **SECTION FIVE**.

If you have answered YES to any question, you must fill in SECTION FOUR.

SECTION FOUR: ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS

Only fill in this section if you answered YES to ANY of the questions in SECTION THREE

4.1 What are the ethical issues involved in your research?

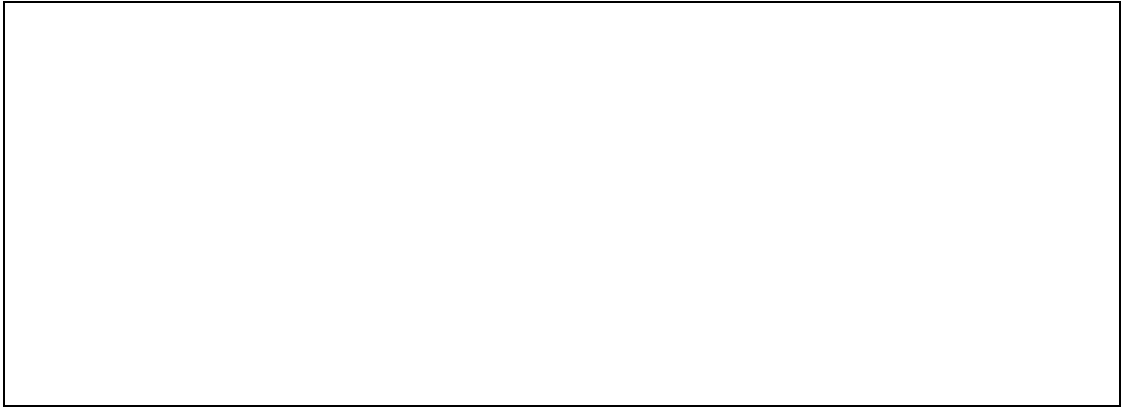
Answer the following questions where relevant to your research project (you must answer at least one):

4.2 How will you ensure that vulnerable research participants are protected?

*You must answer this question if you have ticked "yes" to any question in the **Human Participants** section in SECTION THREE*

4.3 How will you protect participants if your research deals with sensitive issues?

*You must answer this question if you have ticked "yes" to any question in the **Subject Matter** section in SECTION THREE*



4.4 How will you protect participants if your research deals with sensitive research procedures?
*You must answer this question if you have ticked "yes" to any question in the **Research Procedures** section in SECTION THREE*

4.5 Outline how you intend to comply with any established procedures which have been approved by MIREC for your research.
*You must answer this question if you have ticked "yes" to any question in either the **Research Procedures and/or Areas other than human sections** in SECTION THREE.*

4.6 Foresight

4.7 Risk Assessment. Please describe the steps taken to minimise risk.

SECTION FIVE: RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

5.1 Explain why the use of human participants is essential to your research project

This is a study of Healthcare Chaplaincy from within the ministry itself. It is envisaged that the results of this research will help to guide future policy within and beyond Healthcare Chaplaincy. Therefore, it is of key importance that Chaplains themselves are interviewed so that they can have an active voice in framing guidelines and policies for the work which they do.

5.2 Who will your informants be? Please do not give names except where an informant's identity is impossible to conceal.

Working Healthcare Chaplains in Irish and International Healthcare Facilities.

5.3 How do you plan to gain access to/contact/approach your potential informant(s)?

I am the current Chairperson of the National Association of Healthcare Chaplains (NAHC) and I have a database which contains the email addresses of all members.

However, I will email members directly from my own personal email address and not the association address (having first received permission to do so from the Executive Council of the NAHC) and I will invite Healthcare Chaplains to engage in the study from a personal and not an organisational perspective.

SECTION SIX: CONSENT, INFORMATION AND CONFIDENTIALITY

6.1 INFORMATION LETTER FOR PARTICIPANTS

You must submit an information letter for participants with this application, as part of your appendices document. Sample letters can be found [here](#) (MIREC-2: Guidelines for Completing Research Ethics Committee Application Form MIREC-3, Appendix 1).

Please confirm below that your information letter covers:

Description of the research topic and method Yes
 No

Details of what participation will involve Yes
 No

Rights to anonymity Yes
 No

Rights to withdraw from the research Yes
 No

Contact details of the Principal Investigator, Supervisor and MIREC Administrator Yes No

6.2 CONSENT

Informed consent is required for most research. Signed consent is not required for online surveys since completing the survey implies consent of participants. In all other research a signed consent form is required. Sample forms can be found [here](#) (MIREC-2: Guidelines for Completing Research Ethics Committee Application Form MIREC-3, Appendix 2).

Please indicate below if your research requires a signed consent form

Yes, my research requires signed consent and I have attached a completed consent form in the appendices of my application.

No, my research study involves an online survey only and does not require signed consent

6.3 How will you ensure that informed consent is freely given by participants?

Clear and succinct details of the research project will be included in the information letter for participants.

Moreover, participants rights in relation to participation, to protection of identity and freedom to withdraw at any point will also be clearly contained in information letter.

No pressure will be applied either personally or professionally by the investigator in relation to participation in the project.

6.4 ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

What arrangements have you made for anonymity or confidentiality (if appropriate)?

No participant will be named directly in the final PhD thesis and nor will they be clearly identified by virtue of location, healthcare facility name, age, gender and so on.

All recordings of interviews will be stored appropriately.

SECTION SEVEN: STORAGE OF MATERIALS

7.1 ~~How do you propose to store/retrieve the information, and for how long (please justify)? Who will have custody of, and access to, the data? How will you manage data protection issues?~~

Interview recordings will be stored and held by the Investigator in her own home until the completion of her PhD studies (possibly three or more years). Despite the fact that the investigator lives alone and access to the data will not be possible by others the recordings will nonetheless be stored on an encrypted laptop and will be held in a locker cabinet. Data given will have been given freely and in good faith and therefore access by a third party will not be permissible or allowed. This will ensure that there are no data protection issues or misappropriation of resources.

It is necessary to store data for at least three years so that it can be easily retrieved throughout the life of the project. On-going reading (especially around church teachings on Pastoral Care of the Sick) may bring themes/ideas that need to be considered/engaged with in light of some (if not all) of the data collected earlier in the research. It is essential that the investigator has access to data collected at all times.

7.2 I have read the MIC Record Retention Schedule and have made arrangements to comply by them. Yes No

SECTION EIGHT: DOCUMENT CHECKLIST

NOTE: Applicants must create a single electronic document to include all appendices. Multiple files will not be accepted

Which documents are attached? Please tick N/A if not applicable:

- | | | | |
|------|---|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 7.1 | Information letter for participant | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> N/A |
| 7.2 | Consent form for participant | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> N/A |
| 7.3 | Information letter for parent/guardian | <input type="radio"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="radio"/> N/A |
| 7.4 | Consent form for parent/guardian | <input type="radio"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="radio"/> N/A |
| 7.5 | Letter to school principal | <input type="radio"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="radio"/> N/A |
| 7.6 | Questions/survey for interviewees/focus groups etc. | <input type="radio"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="radio"/> N/A |
| 7.7 | Recruitment letter / email / poster | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> N/A |
| 7.8 | Garda Clearance form (See Guidelines and here for more details) | <input type="radio"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="radio"/> N/A |
| 7.9 | Child protection form (See Guidelines for more details) | <input type="radio"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="radio"/> N/A |
| 7.10 | Other document(s) - please specify below: | <input type="radio"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="radio"/> N/A |

WHERE TO SUBMIT

All applications including appendices MUST be submitted in electronic copy to mirec@mic.ul.ie, and handed to the MIREC Administrator, Research and Graduate School, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick.

The deadline for MIREC applications is 5pm on the first Friday of the month.

Appendix 2



An Exploration of the Role of Faith in the Life and Ministry of Healthcare Chaplains in Contemporary Ireland

Consent to take part in the Research

- I..... voluntarily agree to participate in this research study
- I understand permission has been sought (and granted) from the NAHC Executive to undertake this interview
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without consequences of any kind
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview in which case the material will be deleted
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study
- I understand that participation involves a 45-60 minute semi-structured interview
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research
- I agree to my interview being digitally recorded
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.
- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the final dissertation, published papers, conference papers and so forth.

- I understand that signed consent forms, original digital recordings and transcripts of interviews will be retained in researchers own home during the lifetime of the PhD studies
- I understand that under freedom of information legislation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above
- I understand that I am free to contact Margaret Naughton to seek further clarification and information and when or if needed.

Margaret Naughton MPhil, MA, BA (Theology), BA(Hons)

Healthcare Chaplain Bon Secours Hospital Tralee and PhD Candidate Mary Immaculate College Limerick Margaret.naughton@mic.ul.ie 086-8214703

Signature of Research Participant _____ Date: _____

Signature of Researcher _____ Date: _____



Recruitment Email

Dear Healthcare Chaplain,

My name is Margaret Naughton and I work as a Healthcare Chaplain at Bon Secours Hospital, Tralee, County Kerry.

I am also a PhD candidate in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at Mary Immaculate College Limerick.

The title of my research is “An Exploration of the Role of Faith in the Life and Ministry of Healthcare Chaplains in Contemporary Ireland”.

I am hoping to recruit a number of Healthcare Chaplains to participate in my research. The involvement on the part of the Chaplain will be minimal-to take part in a semi-structured interview for 45-60 minutes. Interviews will be digitally recorded and information obtained will be stored and used appropriately in line with research guidelines and best practice. The researcher will meet the participants at their place of work.

I am attaching a Participants Information Sheet and Consent form to allow for informed decision-making in relation to deciding whether you wish to take part or not in the study.

Please can interested Healthcare Chaplains contact me on my email: naughtonmargaret@yahoo.com or 086-8214703 either for more information or to set up interviews at a time suitable to your work and personal commitments within the next 14 working days.

With every good wish,

Margaret Naughton



Participants Information Leaflet

My name is Margaret Naughton and I work as a Healthcare Chaplain at Bon Secours Hospital, Tralee, County Kerry.

I am also a PhD candidate in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at Mary Immaculate College Limerick.

The title of my research is “An Exploration of the Role of Faith in the Life and Ministry of Healthcare Chaplains in Contemporary Ireland”.

Introduction: This is an independent study which will form the basis of my PhD thesis. Internationally there is a visible and commendable move by Healthcare Chaplaincy to become a more ‘evidence-based’ profession but within the domestic context, for the most part, this is not happening. The focal point of this thesis is the Chaplain of the 21st Century and the role Faith plays in their personal and professional lives. By focusing mainly on the person of the Chaplain it is hoped to gain some insight into how the changing demographic of Irish society is impacting upon them and the work that they do. This is a ground-breaking piece of research as it is the first prolonged study of the ministry from within and it is believed it will help to inform the future trajectory of the role. Permission has been sought and granted from the NAHC Executive to invite Healthcare Chaplains to participate in this interview/study.

Procedure: In the region of twenty Healthcare Chaplains will be interviewed using a semi-structured approach. These interviews will be digitally recorded and the recordings will be stored appropriately by the researcher.

Benefits: it is believed that while there will be no direct benefit as such to the Healthcare Chaplains who participate in the research there will be an overall benefit to the ministry/profession of Healthcare Chaplaincy.

Risks: it is not envisaged that there are any direct or indirect risks to those who wish to participate in this research study.

Confidentially and anonymity: The identity of all participants will remain confidential and anonymous. Neither the name of the Healthcare Chaplain or their associated healthcare facility will be named.

Voluntary Participation: Participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to withdraw at any point you will not be penalised in any way.

Permission: The MIREC Committee Mary Immaculate College Limerick has approved this study. If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independently you may contact Mary Collins, MIREC Administrator, Research and Graduate School, Mary Immaculate College, South Circular Road, Limerick, Ireland. Telephone +353 61-204980 Mary.collins@mic.ul.ie

Further Information: Further information can be obtained from Margaret Naughton at Margaret.naughton@mic.ul.ie or on 086-8214

Appendix 3



Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee

MIREC-4: MIREC Chair Decision Form

APPLICATION NUMBER:

A18-002 - FINAL

1. PROJECT TITLE

An Exploration of the role of Faith in the Life and Ministry of Healthcare Chaplains in Contemporary Ireland

2. APPLICANT

Name:	Margaret Naughton
Department / Centre / Other:	Theology & Religious Studies
Position:	Postgraduate Researcher

3. DECISION OF MIREC CHAIR

<input type="checkbox"/>	Ethical clearance through MIREC is required.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ethical clearance through MIREC is not required and therefore the researcher need take no further action in this regard.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Ethical clearance is required and granted. Referral to MIREC is not necessary.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ethical clearance is required but the full MIREC process is not. Ethical clearance is therefore granted if required for external funding applications and the researcher need take no further action in this regard.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Insufficient information provided by applicant / Amendments required.

4. REASON(S) FOR DECISION

A18-002 - Margaret Naughton - *An Exploration of the role of Faith in the Life and Ministry of Healthcare Chaplains in Contemporary Ireland*

I have reviewed the revised application and I believe it now satisfies MIREC requirements.

5. DECLARATION (MIREC CHAIR)

Name (Print):	Dr Áine Lawlor
Signature:	
Date:	7 th February 2018

Appendix 4

National Association of Healthcare Chaplains



Ms. Margaret Naughton
Rangue
Killorgan
Co Kerry

Dear Ms Naughton

Further to your request to use the NAHC Database of Chaplains to invite members to participate in your PHD Research, on behalf of the Executive I am delighted to grant you permission to do so.

Yours sincerely



Fr. Brian Gough
Secretary to the Executive

6th February 2018

NAHC, PO Box 12636, Dublin 8
Telephone – 087 440 2741 - E-Mail: NAHC.Ireland@gmail.com - www.nahc.ie

Appendix 5

Research Questions

1. Name/place of work/ Religious or Philosophical affiliation.
2. Tell me a little about yourself.
3. Would you consider yourself to be a person of faith?
4. Would you share a few of the key moments in your personal faith journey
5. What is Faith?
6. It is important to you? Would you consider it to be a key component of your life? If so, why/why not?
7. Is Religious practice important to you or indeed part of your life?
8. As a Healthcare Chaplain does it have to be?
9. What brought you to Healthcare Chaplaincy?
10. How you do understand Healthcare Chaplaincy?
11. Is Healthcare Chaplaincy relevant do you think in a society that is becoming more diverse and less engaged with traditional Church views/practices?
12. Have you ministered to people of a different tradition/belief system to yourself?
13. What was that experience like?
14. Do you think that a Healthcare Chaplain of one tradition can effectively meet the needs of those who are of a different tradition?
15. What is your theological vision for Healthcare Chaplaincy?
16. Is it necessary for Healthcare Chaplains to be Religious in order to minister?
17. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix Six – Participant Profile

Chaplain A is a lay Catholic female chaplain. She is Irish but currently living and working in the United States. A married lady with a background in Psychology she moved into Healthcare Chaplaincy to try to find more meaning in her life and a means to express and practice her faith more deeply

Chaplain B. This chaplain is a Religious Sister who was born in Ireland but who has lived and ministered in both Ireland and the United States for over fifty years.

Chaplain C is a lay female locum chaplain and is Roman Catholic.

Chaplain D is an American Roman Catholic female chaplain working in hospice ministry and is also a wife and mother of two teenage sons. A devout Catholic with a deep sense of God working in her life.

Chaplain E a Roman Catholic, lay woman who is a former Religious Sister and trained Social Worker. She has a DMin degree and works in the area of Mission and Pastoral Care.

Chaplain F is a Roman Catholic priest working in a parish with a large hospital to which he is chaplain.

Chaplain G is an ordained Methodist Minister and Chaplain who works in an acute hospital with several years of experience in chaplaincy.

Chaplain H is an ordained woman-Presbyterian but ministering to a community of Religious Sisters in the United States.

Chaplain I is a Roman Catholic Priest who has worked in a number of different types of chaplaincies and is currently working in a large acute hospital.

Chaplain J is a Church of Ireland Healthcare Chaplain who works in a number of healthcare facilities offering care especially to the elderly of her tradition.

Chaplain K is a female Roman Catholic Irish chaplain who works in community services chaplaincy supporting service-users and their families.

Chaplain L is a Roman Catholic priest working in a large acute hospital.

Chaplain M is a Roman Catholic priest working in a large acute hospital.

Chaplain N is a Religious Sister who comes from a large rural family, has experienced significant loss in her own personal life and has spent prolonged periods of her life working abroad.

Chaplain O is an Irish Religious Sister and a former nurse who now works mainly in the area of Palliative Care Chaplaincy.

Chaplain P is a lay female chaplain, Roman Catholic currently working in a large acute hospital.

Chaplain Q is a lay Muslim chaplain working mainly in Paediatric chaplaincy.

Chaplain R, an ordained Church of Ireland chaplain working in a large city hospital with a vast amount of experience and authority in the area of Pastoral Care.

Chaplain S is a lay female chaplain. She was born Roman Catholic and then converted to the Episcopal faith about ten years ago.

Chaplain T is a female Roman Catholic Chaplain

Chaplain U is an Irish Religious Sister who has worked in Nursing, Nursing Administration and now Healthcare Chaplaincy.

Chaplain V is a Roman Catholic female chaplain working in a large acute hospital in an urban setting.

Chaplain W is a female, non-ordained Church of Ireland chaplain, a wife and mother, working in an urban setting.

Chaplain X is a lay, Roman Catholic chaplain, married with adult children two of whom work in church-based roles. Faith is hugely important component in her life. She works in a large acute hospital.

Chaplain Y is an ordained Jewish Rabbi since 1990. She is married to a Jew and she has reflected on the centrality of her culture and tradition in her life and sense of identity. She has worked primarily in hospice chaplaincy.

Chaplain Z is a Canadian, Roman Catholic Chaplain who has also undertaken several research projects on healthcare chaplaincy.

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-----.'Expanding and Improving Chaplaincy Research' – Editorial in *Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy*. 2009: (16) 3-4.

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