

Review of: Victoria Slater, *Chaplaincy Ministry and the Mission of the Church* (SCM Press: London, 2015).

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Slater's book draws on empirical research with chaplains in community contexts, co-authorship of *The Church of England's Involvement in Chaplaincy* report and professional personal experience as a chaplain. As such she is well placed to begin to answer, as the introduction puts it, 'two deceptively simple questions: "What is chaplaincy?" and "What is the significance of chaplaincy within the mission and ministry of the contemporary Christian church?"

Chapter one sets chaplaincy within the contemporary cultural context of a pluralistic society, a narrative of secularisation and the related rise of spirituality as a category of human experience. Chapter two provides three cases studies of chaplaincy roles in community contexts; over twice as long nearly all other chapters, the remainder of the book derives from reflection on the material presented here. The relationship between chaplaincy ministry and the mission of the church is explored in chapter three. Slater locates chaplaincy within a framework of building the kingdom by contributing to human and social flourishing. Chapter four attempts to provide some conceptual clarity to what chaplaincy might be setting out three dimensions that provide parameters for best practice (Theological integrity: chaplains are called and sent; Ministerial identity: a distinctive, representative and recognized presence; Professional integrity: skilled and responsive to challenge and opportunities). Chapter five is perhaps the book's greatest gift, looking beneath the tensions inevitably described in any reflection/study on chaplaincy to explore the ecclesiology that is explicitly or implicitly in play. In keeping with good practical theology, chapter six completes the circle by suggesting ways in which the understanding of chaplaincy set out in the preceding chapters may be used to develop and sustain community chaplaincy. The book closes with a brief conclusion that neatly summarises questions and challenges for the future.

Slater notes early on that people talk about 'chaplaincy' without acknowledging that in most instances it is not clear what is meant by the term. As such, she suggests, the designation 'chaplain' is in danger of becoming an umbrella term for anyone from a church who has some involvement in a secular context. Certainly, despite the unpromising context of pluralism, secularism and disillusionment with religious institutions, there seems to be an ever increasing number of chaplaincy roles developing. Slater states that the genius of chaplaincy is that it finds ways to respond to and flourish in diverse contexts. This, though, is surely partly because the word is used as an umbrella term; if the dimensions of chaplaincy set out in chapter four were strictly applied, much that is labelled chaplaincy would need to find a different categorization.

This tension is evident in the case studies where chaplaincy is described by one person as an extension of parish work and chaplaincy roles are developed as part of intentional missional engagement. Such views raise the question of whether community chaplaincy is simply 'mission' done across parish boundaries or, as Slater puts it, 'are chaplains just re-located parish ministers or do they have particular vocation and identity?' In several of the case studies it seems more the former; the lack of role descriptions, boundaries and ownership by the 'host' organisation makes for shocking reading. As Slater notes, this raises profound ethical concerns around competence and accountability.

In several places Slater refers to a theology of chaplaincy as 'guest' within its context. While this may be true of the community contexts explored, I feel it an unhelpful term particularly in settings where the chaplain is paid for by the institution/organisation. Slater is making a point about the dialogic nature of chaplaincy and the need to constantly be aware of and engage with culture and context. However, if chaplaincy is understood as a guest, then it can be seen as an add-on rather than integral part of the service provided. It is not a question the book set out to answer - which makes what follows somewhat pernicky - but I wish there had been more exploration of institutional ownership and what chaplaincy might offer to an organisation. Slater amply proves chaplaincy has a contribution to the church's mission. However, if what chaplaincy offers a 'host' is not clearly articulated, then it really has no long-term viability.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the book is Slater's careful unpicking of the ecclesiologies that underlie the contexts described. Even where chaplaincy is valued, she

highlights how parish-based ministry is given priority and used to validate chaplaincy work. The ecclesiology underpinning this is of the church as a geographically located and gathered community. Rather than the dualism that locates chaplaincy as separate from 'the church,' Slater argues that chaplaincy and church-based ministry should be conceptualized as distinctive but different genres of ministry. A more dispersed ecclesiology, which understands the primary vocation of the church as participating in the *missio Dei*, might view ministries located in society as the embodiment of church in the service of God's mission. Indeed, Slater suggests that the rise of Chaplaincy might constitute a reclaiming by stealth of a traditional Anglican ecclesiology of church called to service the whole of society. The comment that this represents a considerable challenge is somewhat of an understatement, not least because the parish is the main money-raising structure for the church and chaplaincy engages with those beyond the walls.

Overall this is a well written and readable book. The ten step development consultancy model outlined in chapter six would be invaluable for anyone thinking about setting up community chaplaincy. While that model is less helpful to chaplains employed by institutions, the CPD guidelines, including reflective practice, supervision and engagement with research, should be taken to heart by all. More than anything, though, I hope the book will be read and reflected upon by those with any form of episcopal oversight so that the energy and insights of chaplains might be better captured and understandings of church, mission and ministry consequently rethought and enlarged.