A Trinitarian Ministry of Presence

An Encounter of Meaning in Christian Chaplaincy

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Abstract

Chaplaincy is very quickly becoming defined as a 'ministry of presence,' as more and more chaplains find that effective pastoral care takes place from the 'being' and not just the 'doing'. From the perspective of Christian chaplaincy this conclusion is not drawn from anecdotal evidence alone but is well grounded in the explanatory power of a theology of relational presence. Indeed, it is the presence of the Triune God who by God's Spirit is present in, and with, the chaplain that gives such a relational presence its power. Why this is so can be profitably explored through a reflection on God's Trinitarian nature. For if God really is a being-in-relation who has forever taken up in Godself created humanity, then God is not only present to Godself but is also very much present to creation. Indeed, it is this divine embrace to which the created order has been invited, an invitation which is often at its most tangible in the moments of crisis that chaplains find themselves located. But how is such an embrace to be expressed? How can the chaplain reveal the presence of God to the other? Drawing on the work of Bernard Lonergan, it is argued that such an offer of divine embrace could become present to the other when it is embodied–or incarnated–in the chaplain's own identity and expression of meaning. It is, in fact, in the encounter with the world of meaning constituted by the chaplain that the other finds the offer of divine embrace and the healing, empowering and comfort of the living God therein.

A Ministry of Presence

When American Airlines Flight 77 struck the west wall of the Pentagon at 9:37 a.m. on September 11, 2001, Pentagon Chaplain (Lt. Col.) Henry Haynes was, like everyone else, taken by surprise. There had been very little time to process the terrifying events at the World Trade Center and even less time to comprehend that the Pentagon might be next. The first that Haynes really knew that this tragedy was going to touch him personally was when the alarms in his part of the building started blaring. In speaking with reporters some time after the event he said:

> When the alarms went off, everybody ran out of the building, and smoke was pouring out of the western side of the building. There was total chaos and confusion, because nobody really knew what was going on.[1]

He may not have known what was going on, but he knew what to do. Immediately he joined the other chaplains in establishing an operations center to attend to the needs of victims, rescue workers and anyone else who needed help. "It was just a long, long day of trying to minister to and ... take care of people who were hurting" Haynes said. He would, in fact, spend the next 48 hours on the scene of the attack, comforting, helping, and just being present to those who needed a shoulder to cry on or a receptive ear to the oft-recurring question of "why?" Over the coming weeks he would visit the wounded, counsel the families of victims and attend or conduct more than 20 funerals, in some cases more than once per day. When asked how he coped during that time, Haynes said:

> I believe that God gives you strength. And I believe in the power of prayer. There was a lot of prayer going on. A lot of people just wanted to hear some positive words. I felt like that was my duty. I had to do that. I had to be strong for my fellow comrades and employees in the building. I believe that God prepares us for stuff, and I believe that God had me there for a reason.[2]

'Being there for a reason' is in many ways the essence of what it means to be a chaplain.[3] For Haynes there was no other choice, no desire to go home, no plans to leave. Where there were people hurting, his presence was required. He knew this was to be his role, to be present to the other in the midst of their distress and uncertainty, to be someone who just sits and listens or who walks alongside in their moments of need. Actually knowing what that 'reason' might be is not in itself required, it is simply sufficient to recognise that there is one - whatever it may be.[4] In such cases, the presence of the chaplain functions as a non-verbal grace gift. An offer of love, mercy, compassion, and fellowship that doesn't demand anything in return. The truth is that there is no formula to be followed or procedure to be adhered to in being present. One just is, and in being so, somehow and in some way, healing occurs.

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[1]Jeff Wilkinson, "9/11 'Outpourings of Genuine Love'," *The State*, September 11, 2010, http://www.thestate.com/2010/09/11/1459196/911-outpourings-of-genuine-love.html.

[2]Ibid.

[3]The definition of a professional chaplain is often defined as "being present with people where they are, wherever that may be." David J Zucker, T. Patrick Bradley, and Bonita E Taylor, "The Chaplain as an Authentic and Ethical Presence," *Chaplaincy Today* 23, no. 2 (Autumn/Winter 2007): 15.

[4]Paget and McCormack note that a ministry of presence often takes quite mundane expression such as standing around the water cooler or having a cup of coffee in the lunchroom. However, they argue that the presence of the chaplain functions as a "grace gift" to the human encounter which is why it is able to bring comfort, healing and wholeness. N. K Paget and J. R McCormack, *The Work of the Chaplain* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2006), 27.

However, despite all the work done in recent years in trying to understand why this is so, the healing power of presence remains somewhat of an enigma.[5] Perhaps some of that difficulty arises from the Western tendency to measure success in terms of 'doing' rather than 'being'. In such a context the value of chaplaincy is not found in being present *per se*, but in what actually occurs while the chaplain is in attendance. What prayers were said? What condolences were offered? What practical assistance was arranged? Hospital chaplain Larry Austin remarks that even when receiving positive feedback from those he had ministered to, his default response was to simply say, "I didn't do much, I just was there."[6] Such responses are typical of younger chaplains and evidences a felt need to apologise for one's apparent lack of action.[7] But as Austin looks back on a career of chaplaincy, he is convinced that success doesn't reside in what the chaplain does, it resides in simply being present to the other. He states:

> Pastoral presence is a truly powerful and holy manifestation of pastoral care. It's a shame we underestimate its power and meaning as much as we do. It's time that we chaplains must come to the realization that what we do is unique, powerful, and meaningful to others. It is time that we acknowledge the sacredness of our work and practice it actively.[8]

Australian theologian Neil Holm suggests that such an underestimation of the power of presence arises from the difficulty in being able to adequately define and explain its operation. "Although the concept [of presence] is not new," he writes, "it encompasses a highly elusive phenomenon that is difficult to explain or define."[9] From his discussion it is clear that some sense of reciprocity is required, a mutual giving of oneself to the other, but how exactly that works to bring healing is not as clear.[10] Of course, this elusiveness does not mean that there is nothing at all that can be said - and this paper is a contribution to that dialogue. But it does suggest that such explorations remain tentative and open to further

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[5] Holm cites a number of contemporary works that explore the concept of 'presence' in his article: Neil Holm, "Toward a Theology of the Ministry of Presence in Chaplaincy," *Journal of Christian Education* 52, no. 1 (May 2009): 7–22.

[6] Larry J Austin, "Just Being There: The Power of Pastoral Presence," *Chaplaincy Today* 14, no. 1 (1998): 40. McCormick and Hildebrand note similarly in their study that sometimes all the participants wanted was for the chaplain to "show up". Steven C. McCormick and Alice A. Hildebrand, "A Qualitative Study of Patient and Family Perceptions of Chaplain Presence During Post-Trauma Care," *Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy* 21, no. 2 (2015): 68.

[7] This is often the challenge faced by those just beginning in chaplaincy. See William O Avery, "Toward an Understanding of Ministry as Presence," *Journal of Pastoral Care* 40, no. 4 (December 1986): 342–53.

[8] Austin, "Just Being There," 41.

[9] Holm, "Toward a Theology," 9.

[10] For example, Holm quotes one author who writes, "Presence is the ability to attend to another in an intersubjective and intrasubjective exchange of energy that transforms into a meaningful experience. ... Presence is an intersubjective existential experience in which the chaplain encounters the other person as a unique human being in a unique situation and chooses to 'spend' self on behalf of the other person." The need for reciprocity is clear, but no light is shed on how such an "exchange of energy" functions to encourage healing. Holm, "Toward a Theology," 11.

examination. Indeed, the phenomenon of the healing power of presence may ultimately remain intangible and (perhaps thankfully!) escape the totality of academic classification. At its heart, the power of presence will always be best understood through shared experience than through noetic investigation. However, as I hope to show, such investigation can be fruitful inasmuch as it remains suggestive and may, in fact, act as further encouragement to the important ministry that chaplains provide.

Presence as the Presence of God?

So why is it that in moments of crisis the simple presence of a chaplain functions to make a real difference? Holm notes that the contemporary literature acknowledges a "transcendental" element to the power of presence, a sacredness which is particularly apparent in the work of religious chaplains.[11] And from a Christian perspective, such a faith presence 'works' because God is present in and with the chaplain during the moments of need.[12] It is, in effect, a partnership between God and the chaplain in which the divine presence is mediated to the other through the act of being present itself. Thus, to be present to the other is not so much something that a chaplain *does,* but is something that the Spirit empowers them to *become.* To quote one author, "pastoral care as a 'ministry of presence' becomes less about one's own presence, and more about the presence of the divine."[13]

It is, therefore, ultimately through mediating the presence of God that chaplains are able to bring "calm to chaos, victory over despair, comfort in loss, and sufficiency in need". [14] This transcendental element to the ministry of the chaplain is where its effective power of presence resides. But the question of how that divine presence is mediated in practice remains somewhat unanswered.[15] Paget and McCormack suggest that the mediation of divine presence occurs through expressions of faith, such as "prayer, rites, rituals, listening, the spoken word, the holy scriptures, and acts of service."[16] But why is this so? How does the expression and engagement in Christian markers of faith mediate the divine presence? In order to answer this question we must explore two complementary aspects of the chaplaincy encounter. The first is that the chaplain's work must be grounded in a reflection of the Trinitarian act of '*koinonia*', and the second is that such encounters are an invitation to a new world of

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[11]Holm, "Toward a Theology," 9. For a defense of the utility and value of faith-based carers see L. B. Carey, "The Utility and Commissioning of Spiritual Carers" in Cobb, M., et al, *The Oxford Textbook on Spirituality and Healthcare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 398-402.

[12]Holm, "Toward a Theology," 8–9.

[13]Storm Swain, *Trauma and Transformation at Ground Zero: A Pastoral Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 20.

[14]Paget and McCormack, *The Work of the Chaplain*, 28.

[15]Holm laments, "[p]art of the reason that we find the ministry of presence ... so hard to understand is that we have trouble fully comprehending the idea let alone the experience of God." Holm, "Toward a Theology," 15.

[16]Paget and McCormack, *The Work of the Chaplain*, 28. A broad range of activities that have been recognized by the World Health Organization as "pastoral interventions" are listed by Carey, "The Utility and Commissioning of Spiritual Carers," 401.

identity and meaning. The remainder of this paper will be devoted to exploring the value of these two aspects for an understanding of how the presence of a Christian chaplain functions to promote well-being.

Embracing the Trinitarian God

The value of partnering with the Triune God to mediate the power of presence is commonly recognised although it doesn't appear as frequently in chaplaincy literature as one might expect.[17] It may be that Trinitarian reflection is considered too abstract for such practical matters but as Holm and others have shown, there is a fecundity here that is worth exploring.[18] Such a reflection is not a matter of orthodoxy as such, but of orthopraxis. How is it that a doctrine of the Trinity can become real to the chaplain who sits beside the bed of the dying or counsels a teen through depression? Or even more importantly, how can the love of the Father, the grace of the Son and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be more than just empty words to the suffering? This is not an abstract question but is one based in the reality of ministering in the presence of, and in partnership with, the Triune God.[19]

The doctrine of the Trinity is, of course, the heart of the Christian understanding of God. God is one yet three, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit existing in *perichoresis* or mutual communion of being. It is that communion of relationship (*koinonia*) within the Trinity that is of importance for our present purposes and there are a number of theologians who have explored this area with some fruitfulness.[20] It is important to note, however, that discussion of the Trinity must always be by way of analogical reflection rather than precise definition. We are looking for avenues to the mediation of divine presence as opposed to positing solutions to the Trinitarian mystery.

The Constitutive Value of *Koinonia*

If the Trinity really is a mutual communion of being then it must be characterised by self-giving and other-receiving love. Augustine made the point many years ago that if we behold love then we see the Trinity, not only because God is love (1 John 4:8) but because God cannot love without someone to

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[17]See for example, John Jefferson Davis, "Practising Ministry in the Presence of God and in Partnership with God," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 36, no. 2 (April 2012): 115–36; Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996).

[18]Neil Holm, "Practising the Ministry of Presence in Chaplaincy," *Journal of Christian Education* 52, no. 3 (December 2009): 29–42 Maria L. Boccia, "Human Interpersonal Relationships and Love of the Trinity," *Priscilla Papers* 25, no. 4 (Autumn 2011): 22–26. Storm Swain, *Trauma and Transformation at Ground Zero: A Pastoral Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011).

[19]Davis, "Practising Ministry in the Presence of God and in Partnership with God," 127.

[20]John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, with a foreword by John Meyendorff, Contemporary Greek Theologians, no. 4 (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985); Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, Margaret Kohl (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981); Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*.

love.[21] That love is expressed between the Trinitarian members who mutually indwell one-another (the meaning of *perichoresis*) and whose personhood is thus defined by being-in-relation. In other words, the Father is who he is because of his relationship with the Son and Spirit, the Son because of his relationship with Father and Spirit, and the Spirit because of his relationship with Father and Son. If this was not the case then the three divine persons would collapse into one undifferentiated divine substance and it would make no sense to talk of a Triune God of love. But the Scriptures confirm that God *is* love and so the drawn conclusion is that the relations between the members of the Godhead function to constitute their personhood. This is not a contentious point, it has long been recognised in both Eastern and Western traditions that to be a person is to be in-relation.[22]

It is this being-in-relation that is at the heart of *koinonia*, the perfect communion of the Triune God.[23] But how is such a perfect communion reflected in creation? What bearing does God in Godself (the immanent Trinity) have upon God's working in the world (the economic Trinity)?[24] This is not an idle question for it has important consequences for how humanity is to relate to God as well as for how humanity is to relate to one-another. Key to answering this question is the recognition that the perfect communion of the Trinity is not an exclusive 'holy huddle' but an open invitation to inclusion. This was captured beautifully by the Church Father Irenaeus who viewed the divine communion in terms of the Son and the Spirit reaching out as the hands of God to embrace creation in self-giving fellowship.[25] This wonderful image works because having been created in the image of God, humanity is now welcome to participate in the divine *koinonia* through the ascended incarnate Son and in the power of the Spirit who is now present with us.[26] It is, in fact, the proper work of the Spirit to bring about the *koinonia* of the people of God. As Trinitarian theologian Catherine La Cugna notes,

> The Spirit gathers together in Christ persons who would not otherwise gather, making possible a true union of hearts and minds, the ground of which resides not in individual differences-age, gender, opinions, abilities-but in the very being of God.[27]

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[21]"But what is love or charity, which the Divine Scripture praises and proclaims so highly, if not love of the good? Now love is of someone who loves, and something is loved with love. So then, there are three: the loved, the beloved, and love." *De Trinitate* 10.14

[22]Neil Ormerod, *The Trinity: Retrieving the Western Tradition*, Marquette Studies in Theology, no. 48 (Milwaukee, Wis.: Marquette University Press, 2005), 99f.

[23]Catherine Mowry LaCugna, "The Practical Trinity," *Christian Century* 109, no. 22 (1992): 681.

[24]Rahner's rule (the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity and the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity) is insightful but it is not determinative here because our understanding of who God is ad intra, is limited by our experience of God ad extra. That is, our understanding of the Trinity is by way of analogous experience which by definition cannot be exhaustive.

[25]See *Against Heresies* 5.6.1

[26]For Holm, it is the Spirit who makes possible a sense of presence and indeed, it is the Spirit who opens our eyes to God's presence. Holm, "Toward a Theology," 16.

[27]Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 298.

This means that whenever one comes to believe in the Trinitarian God they immediately become part of a community that constitutes who they are in-Christ. "Fellowship with the triune God *is* therefore at once also fellowship with all other human beings who in faith have surrendered their existence to the same God."[28] A Christian chaplain is therefore someone who is already defined by being-in-relation to other Christians through the work of the Spirit in uniting them to Christ.

The importance of this for chaplaincy work with other Christians is clear, but a significant part—if not the most part—of chaplaincy work is done with those who are outside of the body of Christ. Is such a *koinonia* still possible? The answer is an assured 'yes' because all humanity has been created in the image of God and, as Augustine argued, this means that humanity is not only invited to participate in God but also reveals the potential for relationality in the uniqueness of its own creation.[29] That is, the potential for *koinonia* between a Christian chaplain and those outside the Christian faith is still present because all of humanity carries the being-in-relation marks of the Triune God.[30] Here, Augustine's psychological analogy of the mind's *memory*, *understanding* and *will*, often criticised for promoting independence of being rather than a community of being, actually functions to describe humanity's potential for inter-relatedness.[31] In her reflection on how the Trinity functions to ground a praxis of Christian chaplaincy, Storm Swain writes:

> It is extremely important, therefore, when contemplating Augustine's conception of the person, to realize that it is *not* memory, understanding, and will as a deification of the rational mind that is the image of God, but that these are relational functions in the person which give the ability to love God. As such, even though Augustine's image can be read as self-contained and oriented to itself only, it is in essence relational, its object being God. The trinitarian image in the human person is grounded in the love of God and lived out in love of the "neighbor".[32]

Swain's point here is crucial: A chaplain who is grounded in the love of the Triune God can evidence the *koinonia* of God through the praxis of love even when such love transcends faith boundaries. The receptivity of that love, made perfect in the Spirit is nonetheless possible for those outside of the Christian faith because to be human is to be created with the potential for *koinonia* 'built-in'.

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[28]Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*, Sacra Doctrina (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 33.

[29]*De Trinitate* 14.18.

[30]Scott Horrell remarks that despite humanity's fallen condition the image of God the creator "though disfigured, is not beyond recognition." "In the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit: Towards a Trinitarian Worldview," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166 (April-June 2009): 138.

[31]The psychological analogy is best understood as exactly that, an analogy and not a model. Much of the contemporary criticism levelled against the analogy stems from construing it with greater force than Augustine intended. On this, see the discussion in Ormerod, *The Trinity: Retrieving the Western Tradition*.

[32]Swain, *Trauma and Transformation*, 25.

The conclusion to be drawn from this insight is that humanity is not created to be a collection of unrelated individuals but persons who exist in relation—both to their God and to the other.[33] Eastern Orthodox theologian, John Zizioulas came to the same conclusion in his influential book *Being as Communion* in which he argues that it is only in *koinonia* with one another that we can fully realise our relational potential and thereby become fully persons.[34] In other words, to actualise true fellowship brings fulfillment to humanity's created intent, both for the chaplain and the one in need. As Ziziouslas notes,

> Love is a relationship, it is the free coming out of oneself…it is the other and our relationship with him that gives us our identity, our otherness, making us "who we are" i.e. persons; for by being an inseparable part of a relationship that matters ontologically we emerge as unique and irreplaceable entities. This therefore is what accounts for our being, and being ourselves and not someone else—our personhood.[35]

It is this fulfillment of our created potential through *koinonia* that provides the grounding for the re-creation of well-being in the individual. For far from being an isolated entity in which the troubles and woes of this world must be borne alone, the one in need can take up the chaplain's invitation to *koinonia* and therein find the healing and wholeness they desperately desire. What guarantees the effectiveness of that fellowship is the discovery of their own potential fulfillment of human personhood, which is ultimately effected through the chaplain's own grounding in the love of God and shared invitation to experience the divine.[36] This is where the power of presence truly lies and is why chaplaincy provides a doorway not only into healing and wholeness but into newness of life itself.

What this means for our discussion is that a chaplain is not present to the other merely by being in the same room. A chaplain will only be present when they engage with the other in *koinonia*. This is why a proper 'being' achieves more than a busy 'doing'. But how does the chaplain engage in *koinonia* with the other and how is the divine Triune presence made real in the process? Precise answers are not necessary nor indeed wise but two congruent moments are suggestive. The chaplain must embrace

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[33]It is important to note that we cannot then read this conclusion back into the immanent trinity and thereby define divine being by volitional love. It is the essence of God to be love and not merely a voluntary act of divine will. If the latter was the case then God the Father could choose not to love the Son and the Spirit, just as easily as God the Father could choose to love them. But love is an essential act of God and so God does not merely choose to act in love, which is why the divine *koinonia* is a perfect fruit of the Triune being-in-relation. However, even being created in the image of God, human acts of love are nonetheless volitional and therefore our fulfillment of personhood is not guaranteed but is only present to the extent that we choose to love the other in *koinonia*.

[34]John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*.

[35]John D Zizioulas, "The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity: The Significance of the Cappadocian Contribution," in *Trinitarian Theology Today* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 54.

[36]As LaCugna notes, "since God is perfectly personal and relational, and since we are created in the image of God … we will be most like God when we live out our personhood in a manner that conforms to who God is." "The Practical Trinity," 682.

the other as a being-in-relation and in the process invite them into a new world of meaning, a world in which healing, wholeness and peace can occur.

The Constitutive Function of Meaning

It will be helpful here to introduce the work of Bernard Lonergan who has written extensively of the interaction that takes place when people are confronted with different worlds of meaning. Some of this discussion is technical in nature but it nonetheless provides a good framework for understanding the chaplaincy encounter.

For Lonergan there are three different 'worlds of meaning' that operate within the human realm: The world of immediacy, the world mediated by meaning, and the world constituted by meaning.[37] The first is simply the world of the senses: that which we come to know through sense experience (i.e. that which is seen, touched, tasted, smelt etc.). In other words it is the world of the everyday, it is the room in which the chaplain and the other sit or the path that the chaplain and the other walk. It plays no constitutive part in the encounter other than being the place in which the encounter occurs. For our purposes the second and third worlds of meaning are more interesting and can be viewed together because they are the worlds that we intend and are therefore worlds that can be challenged and indeed changed.

Worlds of Meaning	Description
World of Immediacy	The world of the senses: that which can be tasted, smelt, seen etc.
World mediated by meaning	The world we experience through intended acts of meaning.
World constituted by meaning	The world we can create by further or additional intended acts of meaning.

Table 1: Lonergan's Worlds of Meaning

These further worlds of meaning are much larger than the world of the senses because their content surpasses that of the immediate physical realm to include that which is, in Lonergan's terminology, intended by questions, organized by intelligence, described by language, and enriched by tradition.[38] What Lonergan means is that "[b]eyond the world we know about is the further world we make," a world that is in fact *constituted* through the human act of intended meaning.[39] In effect, this is

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[37]Bernard Lonergan, "Dimensions of Meaning," in *Collection: Papers by Bernard Lonergan, S. J.*, Editor Frederick E Crowe (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), 232–45.
[38]Bernard Lonergan, "The Origins of Christian Realism," in *A Second Collection*, eds William F. J. Ryan and Bernard J. Tyrrell (Philadelphia: Westminister, 1974), 241.
[39]Lonergan, "Dimensions of Meaning," 253–54.

a world that we collectively create, a world in which we not only experience what is real but judge what is reasonable, fair and appropriate. In other words, we actually make this world (constitute it) as a community by intending that certain things will have certain value for the community as a whole. Hence we don't simply live in a world in which the sky is blue and the grass is green. We also live in a world in which there is language, money, property, governments and marriages just to give a few examples. None of these are mere products of nature nor do they exist outside the realm of human understanding and judgment. For example, in the world of immediacy a fifty dollar note is just a piece of coloured paper, but in the world constituted by meaning it has a fiscal value and can be exchanged for material goods. Therefore what is meant through various acts of meaning becomes real for the community and is, in fact, constitutive of the community itself. Hence it should come as no surprise that the key feature of the world constituted by meaning is human agreement, a *collective intentionality* in which the boundaries and frameworks of authentic living are agreed upon.

Obviously, this designation of 'three worlds' is of heuristic value only, for one does not physically move out of one world in order to move into another but simultaneously experiences all three. However, the distinction is important because it emphasises the constitutive role of meaning in the formation of the community. As individuals we live in a world of immediacy, but when we come into contact with others there is the potential to form a community to the extent that there is an accepted set of meanings and values that is able to be shared by those concerned.[40] Meaning is thus constitutive of the community and its content defines, controls and characterizes the community itself. Thus authentic existence within a community is defined by one's acceptance and judgment that such a constituted meaning has value for me. It is a willingness to submit to that constituted meaning, to take its intended values on board as my own and to begin to live a life in conformity to it.

The value of the constitutive function of meaning to an understanding of the chaplaincy encounter should be apparent. Both the chaplain and the other will have their own intended world of meaning in which their identity, value and self-worth has been defined. On the broad scale, both may be members of the same community inasmuch as they reside in the same town, submit themselves to the same laws and agree on acceptable codes of practice. But at the individual level their constituted world of meaning may be very different. This will especially be the case in cross-cultural and inter-faith chaplaincy but even when the encounter is within the same cultural and faith contexts there will still be the potential for different worlds to have been mediated and constituted by meaning. For the Christian chaplain, their primary world is one that is grounded in the praxis of the Triune God as mediated through the collective intentions of the community of God. For the one suffering, their world is constituted through their past hurts and joys, their experience of others whether good or bad and the situation or crisis in which they currently find themselves. As a consequence, when the chaplain approaches the other to offer assistance through being present, what actually happens is a direct encounter of two

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[40]Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1972), 298.

disparate worlds of meaning. At best such worlds may be merely misaligned, at worst they will be diametrically opposed. In either case, a confrontation or clash of these two constituted worlds of meaning will occur.

The Embrace *(Or 'When Worlds of Meaning Collide')*

To describe the coming together in *koinonia* of the chaplain and the other as an 'embrace' is to deliberately invoke the language and discussion of Miroslav Volf's important work, *Exclusion and Embrace.*[41] Neil Holm has shown how fruitful Volf's insights can be for an understanding of presence in chaplaincy and I hope to further his discussion here through an analysis of how an encounter of two constituted worlds of meaning can provide greater insight to the embrace process.[42]

The embrace itself is a symbol for the mutual reciprocity that occurs when two people come together in a dynamic relationship. It consists of four moments and each moment is like a step in a dance that moves consecutively forwards but the dancers are still able to go back and forth as the music demands. The four moments are:

1. Chaplains open their arms to the other and make space within themselves for the other to enter. This is essentially a commitment to *koinonia*, to decide from the outset that the other is important, that time invested is not wasted, that the chaplain can be blessed even as they provide a blessing. As Holm's notes, what is required here is "[a] willingness for [the chaplain's] basic Christian commitments to connect with the basic commitments of the other."[43] These "basic commitments" are what I've termed 'constituted worlds of meaning' which is why chaplaincy is always a place of encounter and dialogue and an opportunity for these two worlds to collide.

2. The second moment of the embrace is for the chaplain to wait. "Chaplains stop at the boundary of the other person. Chaplains create a space. The wait encourages [the other] to move towards the chaplain."[44] This moment is important because it provides time for the other to respond. The encounter must be mutual if it is to have the potential for transformation.

3. If the offer is accepted then the other will move into the embrace and the chaplain will move into the space that they have created. This is the point at which the two constituted worlds of meanings collide. It is the moment of existential crisis, the time at which the other must decide for themselves whether to accept the meaning that is constituted by the chaplain. This is the moment of transformation and the point at which healing can begin to occur.

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[41]Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996).
[42]Neil Holm, "Practising the Ministry of Presence in Chaplaincy," *Journal of Christian Education* 52, no. 3 (December 2009): 32–33.
[43]Holm, "Practising the Ministry," 33.
[44]Ibid.

4. The embrace concludes and the chaplain and the other step back. As a result of the embrace, even if no apparent change is evidenced, the chaplain and the other are different because they have encountered each other at the point at which existential authenticity is defined. This can only enrich the chaplain, even if the other is not yet willing to finally judge for themselves the new world of meaning that was presented.

With these moments of embrace in mind it is possible to discern that the power of healing presence occurs in three recognisable stages. Firstly, in entering into the embrace both the chaplain and the other are confronted with a challenge to their existing worlds of meaning, a challenge that is also an invitation to transformation. Secondly, each of them must judge for themselves the value of the constituted meaning they encounter over against their current perspectives. Finally, the resulting judgment will go one of two ways; they will either be impacted through the transformation of their constituted meaning and redefine what it means to live authentically, or they will reject the challenge and remain within their previously accepted worlds of meaning.

The challenge is thus two-ways, both the chaplain and the other will need to judge for themselves what to do with the worlds they each encounter. This means that being present is not just an openness to the other but a drawing together to reach a new point of authenticity. If the chaplain wants to offer an invitation to accept their own constituted world of meaning then they must also be willing to enter into the world constituted by the other. That is, the chaplain must be willing to be vulnerable so that the other may join with them in exploring a new possibility. It must, in other words, be done in *koinonia*, a discovery of what it is to be a being-in-relation as together what is right, healthy and beneficial is discerned.

However, this does not mean that the chaplain must abandon their world of meaning, their basic Christian values or faith commitments in favour of the world constituted by the other.[45] The last thing that the chaplain wants to do is to end up spiraling themselves down the winding path that the other has taken. Their role is to help lead the other out of the rabbit hole, to assist them to bring wholeness, love, joy and victory out of their situation. This requires an encounter of meaning, an intersubjective challenge to the 'status quo' as it is currently constituted by the other. Importantly, such an embrace can not result in a collective wallowing in self-pity because it presents a challenge that something better does in fact exist. There is something that can be done, there is a decision that can be taken, there is a life that can be lived. This is actually the promise of the power of presence because the other cannot be transformed on their own, there must be a challenge to their status quo, an invitation to something better. The chaplain's own constituted world of meaning, grounded as it is in the *koinonia* of the Triune God is the 'that' which is the 'better' and the invitation offered to the other is to assess and to judge for themselves the inherent value in what they encounter.

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[45]As Holm notes, "Chaplains do not abandon their basic Christian ... commitments in this process. They use them as a screen through which they engage with the other person." Holm, "Practising the Ministry," 32.

Such an invitation is expressed through what Lonergan would call, "carriers of meaning."[46] Carriers of meaning are those acts (a word, a smile, a prayer, a symbol etc.) that express what is authentic about the chaplains own constituted world of meaning. This is why Paget and McCormack were right to point out that divine presence is mediated through the various expressions of Christian faith for these are what help to define authenticity within the Christian chaplain's constituted world of meaning. The combined expression of these acts are summed up through the very act of being present itself and this functions to build a framework of authenticity that the other is then invited to judge, and to hopefully accept as valuable for themselves. This is why Holm can comment that the chaplain is actually an *icon or sacramental symbol* of the presence of God and needs to be "as well-resourced as possible, heavily charged with the meanings authorised by his [or her] faith practice".[47] It is through the encounter with the chaplain's constituted world of meaning that the other encounters the very presence of God. And if this offer from the chaplain to embrace a new world of meaning in which God is present is considered, understood, and judged by the other as being beneficial, then acceptance of that new world begins to take place and healing begins to occur.

Conclusion

The process of embrace that has been outlined here is one of encounter and re-encounter. There is an invitation for both the chaplain and the other to assess, contemplate, evaluate and determine what to make of each other's world. And this invitation is not a once off—it is a process that takes time and commitment to see through to the end. The reality is that the embrace process is messy, time consuming and often flows back and forward as the various worlds of meaning are confronted. But it is worth the time and the effort of the chaplain as it is only in this encounter that true transformation has the potential to take place. However, such transformation is ultimately only as effective as the genuineness of the chaplain's grounding in the *koinonia* of the Trinity. This is why the chaplain must be real to the other so that the expression of love, the offer of compassion, and the invitation to a new world of meaning can be genuinely authentic. To do otherwise is to undermine the very power of presence and to deny the effectiveness of *koinonia,* for it is only the power that comes from an authentic being-in-relation that the invitation to transformation carries any weight at all.

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[46]Lonergan identifies five carriers of meaning, the intersubjective, artistic, symbolic, linguistic and incarnate carriers. Detailing the differences between the carriers is not necessary at this point. Here our interest is in the fact that for meaning to be communicated it must somehow be 'carried' to the other. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 57–73.

[47]Holm, "Practising the Ministry," 24. Holm here quotes from Rowan Williams, *Dostoevsky: Language, Faith, and Fiction*, The Making of the Christian Imagination (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2008), 206.