John Caperon, Andrew Todd and James Walters [eds.] (2017)

A Christian Theology of Chaplaincy.

London: Jessica Kingsley. 174pp.

#### Review

The primary aim of this book is to provide a theological grounding for chaplaincy as a field of ministry. While it is written from a Christian perspective, in particular the Church of England, many of the principles and issues that it addresses are transferable to other traditions.

The contributors are, or have been, either serving chaplains, or researchers into chaplaincy. Nevertheless, the book’s approach is more from the Church’s point of view than the various chaplaincy domains.

Caperon *et al* make a fair summary of the way in which the Church overlooks the contribution that chaplaincy makes to ministry while simultaneously searching for a ministry model that chaplaincy already offers. Caperon himself notes that at a time when churches are increasingly disengaging from parish life, chaplaincy has taken on much of the traditional parish role; that while the churches search for ways to build bridges with the community, chaplains have often established lasting and trusted relationships. There is a need for both churches and chaplains to work on strengthening the connections between them.

Overall, the strength of this book is to provoke reflection from a theological, not just a spiritual, perspective. There is a useful chapter on incarnational theology, including something of its historical application, and which explores the distinction between a Christology of the church, and a Christology of humanity. There is also helpful comparison between theological and secular chaplaincy models and how they relate to each other, which goes some way to identifying how chaplains can hold together dual commitments to faith community and secular organisation.

Caperon *et al* see multi-faith relationships as essential in order to work effectively and fairly in a multi-faith society. While they aren’t unique in doing so, they seek to avoid any consequent syncretism by modelling ‘good disagreement’ that acknowledges and respects the differences.

Readers may or may not agree with views on the professionalisation of healthcare chaplaincy: in particular the understanding of generic chaplaincy seems superficial; there seems too little recognition that the transfer from parish ministry to competent full-time chaplaincy is no longer seamless; and the passionate dismissal, e.g. of outcome measures may be a little too idealistic. But these all remain useful checks and challenges to think carefully about changes in practice.

It’s impossible to cover the whole ground in too much depth in only 174 pages, but this selection of essays on the different theological aspects lays a good foundation for further study, and each chapter comes fully referenced, providing the basis of a reading list for deeper study as required.

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