Keeping Faith: Some Issues of Theology in Christian Chaplaincy in Scotland's Schools

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Abstract
Contemporary Scottish school chaplaincy has been struggling to find a theology fit for purpose in the twenty-first century context of the increasingly secular realm of education. A theology rooted in an ambassadorial motif, which can itself be connected to biblical themes, may provide a robust framework and understanding. Such a motif provides a helpful pastoral and diplomatic tone for two highly contested areas increasingly encountered by school chaplains: gender ideologies and polices, and challenges to freedom of belief and speech.

Keywords
Chaplaincy; schools; gender; ideology; freedom of speech

Introduction

Scottish education has deep roots in the vision of John Knox and the sixteenth-century Reformed tradition which placed a high premium on literacy and education. The motivation was arguably evangelistic: a literate population could read and apply the Scriptures and function effectively as church participants and members. Knox's call for 'a school in every Parish'[1] was enthusiastically acted on by the churches across Scotland. By the late nineteenth century, the pattern across both urban and rural Scottish communities physically and literally placed church and school buildings side by side at the heart of many communities. By the time the church relinquished control of schools and schooling in the 1872 Education Act (Scotland), church and school were inextricably partnered.

[1] John Knox, 'First Book of Discipline 1560', in *A Dictionary of British History*, ed. by John Cannon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Scotland still has a strong tradition and pattern of local Church of Scotland congregations linked to schools within their physical parish boundaries through 'chaplaincy'. It is hard to quantify precisely, but my own doctoral research (concluding in 2018)[2] led me to estimate that 65–70 percent of Scotland's non-denominational schools have an active link to a Christian chaplain.

Scottish school chaplaincy may still be very prevalent, but it has no standard pattern, no nationally agreed competencies, and little regulation. It is in many ways a ministry in search of a theology and of secure biblical foundations. To use a current phrase from the political realm, are its current practices and patterns 'fit for purpose'? It is a role that is also increasingly questioned and challenged, primarily by humanists, secularists, and the LGBTQIA+ community. This article proposes a motif for Scottish schools and chaplains to see the role as akin to 'ambassadors', which intersects with several strands of Scripture. I also examine the issues raised for Christian chaplains as to how to respond to curricular issues such as the teaching on Relationships, Sexual Health, and Parenthood (RSHP) and policies mandating a distinct gender ideology. This leads on to the wider issues of how Christian chaplains should handle hostility and secularism and the challenges to their freedom of religion and freedom of speech.

Scottish education is a devolved responsibility, with all aspects of the curriculum, of education policy and philosophy, of teacher training, accreditation, and management controlled by the Scottish Government rather than the United Kingdom Government. Scottish education is managed through Education Scotland[3] and has its own curriculum and inspectorate. Scotland's 'Curriculum for Excellence' is distinct and different from those of the other nations of the United Kingdom. The curriculum includes detailed experiences and outcomes for Religious and Moral Education. It also has a strong emphasis on character and values, influenced by Jacques Delor's report for UNESCO detailing the pillars of education as 'Learning to Know',

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[2] Stephen Younger, 'Religious Observance and Spiritual Development within Scotland's "Curriculum for Excellence"' (doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 2018) <https://theses.gla.ac.uk/8903/>.

[3] Education Scotland <https://education.gov.scot/> [accessed 28 May 2023].

'Learning to Do', 'Learning to Live Together', and 'Learning to Be'.[4] There is a strong historical and active partnership with Scotland's school chaplains (400–500 in number, and often ordained local Church of Scotland clergy) to provide Religious Observance ('Time for Reflection'), assistance in the delivery of RME (Religious and Moral Education), in character formation, in pastoral support to the school communities, and in facilitating partnership between schools and their local communities.

For historic reasons, the majority of school chaplains are broadly Christian and Christianity has a privileged — but increasingly contested — profile in Scotland's schools, even though 90 percent of Scottish Schools are officially classed as 'non-denominational' (the remaining 10 percent are Roman Catholic, Independent, and 'Faith' schools). However, a commonly accepted 'theology of school chaplaincy' in the non-denominational sector is lacking. There are also specific theological issues raised for school chaplains around questions of gender identity and current in-school teaching on LGBTQIA$^+$, and around how to respond to those who question the place and legitimacy of Christianity within Scottish schools.

What, Theologically, Is a School Chaplain?

First and foremost here, is the task of identifying a theology of school chaplaincy. There is currently no agreed national definition or description of school chaplains. It has been left to each local Education Authority on an ad hoc basis to set out any guidelines for chaplains.[5] The 1872 Education (Scotland) Act had a clear understanding of the role of the local Church of Scotland parish minister as the de facto 'chaplain' to any school situated within his (sic; there were no ordained women in the Church of Scotland until 1969) parish boundaries. The custom has proved surprisingly long-lived and there is still an

[4] Jacques Delors, *Learning: The Treasure Within* (Report of the UNESCO International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century, 1996), Unesco Digital Library <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000102734> [accessed 29 October 2023].

[5] There were initially 32 Unitary Authorities, each able to issue their own guidelines on chaplaincy until January 2018, when these were grouped into 6 Regional Improvement Collaboratives. New guidelines may follow.

expectation that ordained local Church of Scotland parish ministers will take on the role of school chaplains. In the contemporary scene, an increasing number of school chaplains are from other denominations (and faiths), from parachurch organisations (such as Youth for Christ, The Message Trust, Scripture Union), and from lay ministries (such as church-based community workers, youth workers, and family workers).

By default, and by common understanding, the roles and duties of those first chaplains could be inferred from the scant references to them in the 1872 Act:

> Every public school, and every school which is subject to inspection, shall be open at all times to the inspection of any of Her Majesty's inspectors, but it shall be no part of the duties of such inspector to inquire into any instruction in religious subjects, or to examine any scholar in religious knowledge or in any religious subject or book.[6]

It can be assumed, then, that the chaplains were not employed school staff as such, and their role was limited to the provision of religious instruction and education. At the time they were all, of course, Christian.

Given the prevailing culture of the 1870s, it may have been widely assumed that chaplains were engaged in the enculturation of pupils for church membership. Daily prayers at the opening and closing of the school day, including reciting the Lord's Prayer, were the norm.[7] Catechisms, the Westminster Confession, and Scripture memorisation were the chosen methods of instruction. Weekly school assemblies operated as mini church services. They included 'sermons' (or 'children's addresses') with moral and scriptural lessons, prayers (often learned by rote or repeated) and hymn singing.

The ministers and Kirk Sessions had a significant level of control over the daily management of each school and the appointment of headteachers, as is evidenced in the 1872 Act:

> In each parish the heritors and minister who under the law as existing at the passing of this Act have the management of the parish school and the

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[6] 'Education (Scotland) Act 1872', Education in the UK <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/acts/1872-education-scotland-act.html> [accessed 29 October, 2023] (paragraph 66).

[7] The daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer persisted until 2017 in some primary schools on the Island of Lewis.

> appointment of the parish schoolmaster shall, as soon as conveniently may be after the publication of the rules and directions for the conduct of first elections of school boards to be issued as herein-after directed by the Board of Education, meet and fix a time and place for the election of a school board, and appoint a fit and proper person to be returning officer at the election, and shall make due publication of the time and place so fixed and of the person so appointed.[8]

Until well into the mid-twentieth century, the majority of Scottish non-denominational schools had ordained Church of Scotland clergy as their chaplains. The 'religious instruction' of schools in 1872 became 'religious education' in the 1960s and a growing number of Scottish secondary schools employed specialist Religious Education (RE) staff. It was not uncommon for ordained clergy with a particular interest in work in schools to transition into being qualified RE teachers. By the 1980s, RE had broadly become 'Religious and Moral Education' (RME) and while the curriculum majored on Christianity it had long lost any evangelistic impact or church enculturation or faith formation in the non-denominational sector. In keeping with the secular tone of education, there is no permission for proselytising in the current curriculum.

School chaplaincy in Scotland is, therefore, a ministry role in search of a theology. School chaplains are no longer instructors or indoctrinators. Informally, many school chaplains do contribute to sections of the RME curriculum, but they are no longer religious teachers or religious educators in any significant numbers. They may provide opportunities and experiences for worship as a part of the informal curriculum, they may lead voluntary groups,[9] and still frequently provide a faith-based input to school assemblies and 'Religious Observance'. They cannot, however, be evangelists or apologists within Scottish schools. The primary theological task, then, for Scottish school chaplains in the non-denominational sector is to find a new identity.

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[8] 'Education (Scotland) Act 1872', paragraph 12 'Election of First School Boards'.

[9] There are, for example, approximately 190 Scripture Union groups (as at May 2022) in Scotland's 2,500 primary and secondary schools.

Books on (Christian) chaplaincy are replete with images and titles that express the search for a meaningful theology of chaplaincy. Some begin by looking into Scripture. Chaplains are, for instance,

> Resident Aliens. If I had to find one source alone in the biblical narrative of metaphors for sector ministry, it would be in the wanderings of the patriarchs in Genesis, people who were dwelling already within the land of promise, but as strangers.[10]

The word 'chaplain' does not occur in the Bible and there is no direct equivalent. Writers on chaplaincy explore a wide range of biblical stories, incidents, and episodes but most often appear to be moulding Scripture to fit the practices of chaplains rather than deriving those practices from Scripture. The most frequently cited Scriptures across the literature on all forms of Christian chaplaincy would include Genesis 39:2–5; Jeremiah 29:7; Matthew 5:44–48; Matthew 22:37–39; Matthew 25:37–40, 44–45; Luke 6:36; and Galatians 6:10.

A more honest and descriptive approach to determining a theology of chaplaincy begins by examining the many functions chaplains are called to perform in their roles. These roles may be identified with reference to an understanding of biblical models of various interwoven ministry competencies: for example, 'as minister, pastor, intercessor, healer and teacher'.[11] But often these roles seem to be determined not by Scripture or denominational theology or personal spirituality but by employer or institutional requirements. They are driven more by job descriptions than by biblical models of ministry. As Keith Evans notes,

> The many functional roles which a chaplain might fill in an organisation may range from advocate-Liaison, counsellor, bioethicist, professional educator, comforter, priest, to even liturgist […] A chaplain is a pastoral and spiritual counsellor, advocate and a guide […] A chaplain is a liaison with local churches, synagogues and mosques. Ultimately a chaplain should be open-minded, flexible, cross-culturally sensitive and understanding.[12]

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[10] Christopher Moody, 'Spirituality and Sector Ministry', in *Chaplaincy: The Church's Sector Ministries* ed. by Giles Legood (London: Giles Chapman, 1999).

[11] Alan Baker *Foundations of Chaplaincy: A Practical Guide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021), p. 4.

[12] Keith Evans, *The Fundamentals: The Why, What, Who and How of Chaplaincy,* The Chaplain Skill Set Series, vol. 1 (n.p.: independently published, 2018), pp. 21, 24.

A more subtle approach to school chaplaincy begins with examining many of the biblical functions of ministry and applying them to chaplaincy. This is helpful in maintaining a focus on faith formation and spiritual development. John Caperon's research has been particularly helpful and clear:

> Basing my analysis on discussion with and observation of the chaplains I worked with, and drawing also on my experience of staff review as a school leader, I initially developed a five-fold functional analysis of the school chaplain's role, later revised to a six-fold analysis to incorporate the teaching dimension of chaplaincy. The different functional aspects of a school chaplain's role, I suggested, could be set out as follows: Pastoral: caring for the whole community. Liturgical: leading prayer and worship. Spiritual: leading the spiritual life of the community. Missional: commending the Christian faith and supporting other faiths. Prophetic: 'speaking truth to power'. Pedagogic: teaching about faith, and Christian catechesis.[13]

An understanding of all forms of chaplaincy as a ministry of presence is also common across the literature. A particularly useful approach is to study chaplaincy in terms of meaning-making.[14] But there is surprisingly little on a specific theological understanding of school chaplaincy at the nursery, primary, and secondary level. Caperon's work stands out as an exception.

At the tertiary level (colleges and universities), a recent study offers the useful notion of seven education chaplaincy 'motifs' rather than an extensive theology: a pastoral motif; a 'religious' motif; an incarnational motif; a prophetic motif; a missional motif; a spiritual motif; and the notion of relationship-building.[15] Each motif has its strengths and weaknesses, its merits and demerits. The central idea of a 'motif' or an 'image' for school chaplaincy rather than an elaborate 'theology' appeals.

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[13] John Caperon, 'The Nature of the Ministry of School Chaplains in Church of England Secondary Schools' (doctoral thesis, Anglia Ruskin University, 2012), pp. 46–47.

[14] *Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care in the Twenty-First Century: An Introduction,* ed. by Wendy Cadge and Shelly Rambo (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022), p. 62.

[15] K. Aune, M. Guest, and J. Law, *Chaplains on Campus: Understanding Chaplaincy in UK Universities* (Coventry: Coventry University; Durham: Durham University; and Canterbury: Canterbury Christ Church University, 2019) <www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-05/chaplains-on-campus-executive-summary.pdf> [accessed 3 November 2023].

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David O'Malley offers a list of 'some chaplaincy images: Jester; Parish Priest; Defragmenter; Still Point; Ship's Navigator; Weaver; Prophet'.[16] These are more stimulating and creative and truer to the lived experiences of many chaplains. They can, however, feel a little contrived and each needs clarification, explanation, and elaboration. But the idea of looking beyond Scripture for an initial understanding of chaplaincy, and then subsequently connecting it back to biblical motifs, images, and ministries seems useful and fruitful.

A Suggested Theological Motif for School Chaplaincy: The Ambassador

I therefore offer into the debate on a theology of school chaplaincy a biblical word that brings theological stability and matches well with the current state of partnership between school chaplains, faith communities, and local schools: 'ambassador'. It is ideal as a biblically grounded motif for school chaplaincy.

The New International Version of the Bible employs the word 'ambassador' once in the Old Testament (Isa 57:9) and twice in the New Testament (2 Cor 5:20 and Eph 6:20). The OT word is *tsiyr*, an 'envoy, messenger'[17] or 'ambassador, herald, errand-doer'.[18] The NT word is *presbeuomen*, 'marking the exercise of a profession […] This was the regular word in the Greek east for envoys or the emperor's legate'.[19] The word had a definite political-legal sense:

> The ambassador legally represents the political authority which sends him; his competence is according to its constitution […] In the Roman period *presbeutes* is the Greek equivalent of *legatus* […] It is commonly used for the imperial legates.[20]

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16 David O'Malley, *School Ethos and Chaplaincy* (Bolton, UK: Don Bosco, 2008).
17 '*tsiyr*', in the *Hebrew and English Lexicon,* ed. by F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. Briggs, repr. edn (Peabody, MA: Hendricksen, 1991).
18 *James Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010).
19 Cleon L. Rogers, Jr, and Cleon L. Rogers, III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), p. 403.
20 Günther Bornkamm, 'preseubo', in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament VI,* ed. by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968), p. 681.

These legates, however, were more often high-ranking military officers commanding legions than political appointees. While the biblical words translatable as 'ambassador' have a particular historical and cultural context, the concept, when paired with a twenty-first century western understanding of 'ambassador', provides a useful theological descriptor of the role of the contemporary school chaplain.

In my role as Chaplaincy Project Coordinator for Christian Values in Education (Scotland) I train both school staff and school chaplains in the delivery of Religious Observance and spiritual wellbeing and development within Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence. Staff are frequently suspicious of the perceived evangelistic motive of chaplains, and chaplains are frequently sentimental about a loss of Christian influence, coupled with ignorance and uncertainty about the policies and statutes around the expression of faith issues in schools. Chaplains frequently need a great deal of help in understanding the rapidly changing educational context. Many of them do indeed have a strong evangelistic imperative and a 'missionary' mindset. School staff, equally, are often unaware of the skills, knowledge, and contacts that a chaplain can bring to a partnership with a school. For both staff and chaplains, the associations around the word 'ambassador' seem to provide a genuinely helpful common ground. The concept of ambassador can also usefully encompass and echo many biblical strands.

Broadly speaking both school staff and chaplains share an understanding of what an ambassador is and does:

- The ambassador is a citizen of one kingdom, living and working in another kingdom.
- The ambassador is a representative of their kingdom specifically appointed to live in another kingdom.
- The ambassador is a representative of a sending kingdom, able to speak on behalf of its government or leadership.
- The ambassador is typically an example of the best and most able and competent a sending kingdom has.
- The ambassador acts as the liaison between two kingdoms (the sending and the receiving ones).

- The ambassador is therefore expected to robustly explain and defend the actions and policies of their sending kingdom.
- The ambassador may also be called by the government of their receiving kingdom to receive a rebuke for the actions of their sending kingdom with which their hosts disagree.
- The most effective ambassador is often bi-lingual.
- The ambassador has some privileges but works hard to understand and respect their host kingdom and abides by its laws and customs.
- The ambassador is expected to be skilled in diplomacy, negotiation, and creative partnership for the common good of both the sending and receiving kingdoms.
- The ambassador has a role in assisting, advocating for, protecting, and caring for citizens of their kingdom who live in or visit the host kingdom.
- The ambassador works to create multiple mutually beneficial alliances between their sending and host kingdoms.
- The ambassador is always subject to recall by their sending kingdom.
- The ambassador is in a position of accountability to their host kingdom.

While the notion of school chaplains as ambassadors diverges from the biblical etymology, it is generally well-received in joint training events for school staff and school chaplains and is regarded as a positive approach. Both school staff and chaplains appear to understand the concept of an ambassador, and both appear to appreciate the dignity and respect it confers within their respective realms.

Scottish schools use a curricular framework known as 'All Experiences and Outcomes' (the E's and O's) and a self-assessment framework named 'How Good is Our School'. The self-assessment regime is in its fourth incarnation and is usually referred to in schools by the acronym 'HGIOS4'. A theology of school chaplaincy as expressed as ambassadorial fits well with the wellbeing and responsibilities of all in the E's and O's of the Curriculum for Excellence. A school chaplain, with the perspectives of the kingdom of

God, is well described in the language of the official document as a partner to a school who shares a mutual interest in 'health and wellbeing' and in developing 'spiritual wellbeing':

> Each establishment, working with partners, should take a holistic approach to promoting health and wellbeing, one that takes account of the stage of growth, development and maturity of each individual, and the social and community context. I can expect my learning environment to support me to: […] understand and develop my physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing and social skills.[21]

Chaplains as ambassadors also sits well with the partnerships described in the self-assessment framework of HGIOS4.

> Meeting the wide-ranging needs of all children, young people and their families is the heart of what makes an excellent school. Schools cannot achieve this by themselves. As noted in the *Building the Curriculum* series, strong, effective partnerships at local and national level are the key […] You will have a range of partners such as the third sector, youth workers, community learning and development staff, colleges, universities and employers who work with you to deliver learning pathways to meet the needs of all children and young people.[22]

In the language of HGIOS4, a school chaplain functions precisely as an ambassador who brings the resources, roles, and skills of their service in God's kingdom into the realm of education as a partner, sharing the desire to 'meet the needs of all children and young people'.

Many of the indicators from the sections 'Partnerships' (2.7) and 'Ensuring Wellbeing, Equality and Inclusion' (3.1) of HGIOS4 help to illustrate the strong ambassadorial position of a school chaplain in partnership with schools in terms of bringing together local, third-sector faith groups (such as church congregations and parachurch organisations) and their local schools. We might cite, for instance, the following examples:

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[21] Education for Scotland, 'Curriculum for Excellence: All Experiences and Outcomes', Scottish Government, 2017, last updated 3 April 2023 <www.curriculumforexcellencescotland.go.uk> (p.12).

[22] Education Scotland, 'How Good is our School (4th Edition)', Scottish Government, 2015 <https://education.gov.scot/media/dtnnmvjh/frwk2_hgios4-4.pdf> (p.7).

> **The development and promotion of partnerships**
>
> Our partnerships are firmly based on a shared vision, values and aims which put the needs of all learners at the core of our partnership working. […]
>
> **Impact on learners**
>
> […] As a result of our effective partnerships all our learners have access to an extended range of learning pathways through which they are developing skills for learning, work and life and securing sustainable positive destinations.
>
> **Features of highly-effective practice**
>
> […] The school understands and plays a significant role in the life of the local community.
>
> […] The school can demonstrate the impact of partnerships through improved outcomes for learners.
>
> Our school community has a shared understanding of wellbeing and in the dignity and worth of every individual. We know and can demonstrate that all of our children and young people feel safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included. All staff and partners feel valued and supported.[23]

Theological Issues Around the LGBTQIA$^+$ Agenda and Policies on Gender Identity

Scottish education, Scottish school chaplains, Christian staff members and parents, face a number of issues which are currently in flux, that are creating tensions, and which touch on the messy interface of several fields — ethics, faith, theology, conscience, philosophy, freedom of speech and expression. These include education policies on LGBTQIA$^+$; on inclusion, respect, and equality; on gender identity; on what constitutes 'hate speech'; on conversion therapy; teaching on Relationships, Sexual Health, and Parenthood Education (RSHP); teaching in a multi-faith context. These policies are not unique to Scotland, nor are they confined to the field of education. For example, the tabloid newspapers recently made much of a story of a woman in her 70s being presented with a form at a National Health Service clinic in Darlington which invited her to indicate which of eighteen genders

[23] Education Scotland, 'How Good is Our School', p. 7.

she wished to identify as.[24] Schools are equally struggling for consistent and clear guidance on, for example, how to address and accommodate pupils who are transitioning or who self-identify as gender fluid.

Some school chaplains feel the prevalence of such policies and issues are creating an exclusion, a disrespect, and inequality for those affirming a traditional biblical stance on gender, family, marriage, and sexual relationships. They express a frustration that no neutral debate on these issues is possible as those promoting what they regard as traditional biblical understandings are accused of bigotry and intolerance. They express a fear that certain aspects of proposed Scottish legislation on gender conversion therapy effectively silence and even criminalise the expression of alternative (Christian) viewpoints and the exercise of activities such as prayer and preaching.[25] For all participants in these debates, it seems increasingly difficult to disagree without becoming disagreeable and combative. These points of tension and contention illustrate the value of the motif of school chaplains as ambassadors. How can we bring the tact, diplomacy, and creativity of an ambassador to this clash of values between two kingdoms?

Issues of Gender Identity and Ideology

A common thread through the issues centres on gender identity and ideology. It is not possible to definitively state a common approach amongst all school chaplains. Their instinctive theologies, philosophies, moral and ethical values, and biblical literacies vary enormously. There are, however, still many traditionalist chaplains who maintain what they view as a mainstream biblical point of view: that God created humankind with only two genders (male and female); that 'normal' sexual relationships are between male and female (with any other type of relationship therefore being regarded as abnormal); and that God's patterns for marriage, sex, and procreation should only occur between

[24] Stephen Moyes and Sam Blanchard, 'Woke Hospital Chiefs Under Fire', *The Sun,* 18 May 2023 <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/22407379/hospital-listing-gender-options-patient-form/> [accessed 23 May 2023].

[25] The Christian Institute, *Banning 'Conversion Therapy' in Scotland: Summary and Extracts of the Written Legal Opinion of Aidan O'Neill, KC* (Scotland: The Christian Institute, 2023). The Christian Institute is a charity that campaigns for the protection of Christian rights and the promotion of Christian values in a secular world. See <https://www.christian.org.uk>.

a man and a woman (with any other pattern being regarded as sinful). This sketch is no more than a caricature and a generalisation. But it is obvious that this sets these chaplains at odds with many of the current policies on inclusion and respect in education. A part of my task in school chaplain education is to encourage fresh thinking.

It is beyond the scope of this short article to explore, justify, dissect or to defend this caricature of the traditional interpretation. My personal observation is rather that the focus on chaplains acting to defend against the perceived threats to their deeply held theologies may be a mistaken one. They are, in essence, fighting the wrong battle on the wrong field. It is certainly pastorally unhelpful when such chaplains come face to face with, for instance, a member of staff in a homosexual relationship or a transitioned/transitioning pupil or a member of the school community insisting on being addressed with their choice of personal pronouns. The pressing theological conundrums are not actually around teaching in schools on gender and sexuality — they are around the secular challenges to freedom of speech and freedom of belief; they are around many chaplains failing to realise that the kingdom that is Scottish education does not share the values of *their* kingdom; they are around issues of coercion and control, and of rights and respect, of arrogance and humility. Just as many school chaplains may object to being instructed to use a language of inclusion, are uncomfortable with and object to constraints on the content of their preaching and praying, so those in the kingdom of education may object to those same chaplains likewise dictating *their* use of language and their practices and policies.

Where to begin on resolving the points of tension and contention? Once again, I have found the ambassadorial motif to be pastorally useful in school. I have found a more careful and nuanced reflection on my own instinctive theology to be beneficial. A key starting point for me has been to ask myself the (deceptively) simple question, What gender is a soul? This is not a new discussion and is an ancient debate within Christianity and Christendom.[26] Yet revisiting this point

[26] For example, Philip C. Almond cites Cyril of Jerusalem (4th century CE) in his piece, 'Are Christian Souls Gendered?', The Conversation, 2022 https://theconversation.com/are-christian-souls-gendered-194998 [accessed 11 September 2023].

of theology/philosophy has been a fruitful way for me to re-examine my own viewpoint and find a way to engage diplomatically, pastorally, and sensitively in that liminal space where the two kingdoms I inhabit overlap. I am at once a citizen in the kingdom of God (and do not claim to understand it or represent it definitively, or completely, or accurately) and simultaneously a citizen of the kingdom of Scottish education. Rediscovering a satisfactory answer to the question of what gender is a soul, helps me personally to navigate a course through the no-man's land where kingdoms clash.

I am certainly not alone in finding that the issue of a soul's gender provides a fruitful point of contact between contemporary kingdoms; in this case between the realms of Christian chaplaincy and Scotland's secular education. Both Plato (428–347 BCE) and Proclus (c.410–485 CE), for instance, wrote on the soul's gender, with conclusions that certainly sound strange to our ears in twenty-first century Scotland but are still being debated by contemporary philosophers.[27] Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) revisited the debate on the soul's gender, and it is fascinating to see a revival of interest in his conclusions in the overlap between Catholic approaches to education and medicine. This can be helpfully illustrated by citing the following abstract to a 2020 article:

> I will defend Aquinas's fundamental insights into the root of gender distinction without defending his biological understanding of the process itself. I will argue that there is a single generic generative power in the soul that is determined by the matter to which the soul is united, to be expressed as either male or female. This paradigm, I believe, copes better than the one offered by Finley with phenomena such as intersexed persons and sex reassignment surgery. While I do not accept the idea of a feminine or masculine soul, the paradigm offered here does lead to the notion of the soul being feminized or masculinized on account of the matter that it informs.[28]

The gist of the argument is that a soul is neither male nor female and that a person's gender identity is therefore a product of the complex

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[27] For example, Jana Schultz, 'Conceptualizing the "Female" Soul: A Study in Plato and Proclus', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy,* 27, no. 5 (2019), 883–901.

[28] William Newton, 'Why Aquinas's Metaphysics of Gender is Fundamentally Correct: A Response to John Finley, *The Linacre Quarterly, the Journal of the Catholic Medical Association*, 87, no. 2 (2020), 198–205.

interplay of their biological en-fleshment, their upbringing, their beliefs and practices, and societal and environmental conventions. Body and soul become deeply intertwined and are not easily separated or discrete from one another. It may be a simplistic conclusion, but viewing humans as souls en-fleshed and their gender as habituated through a life-long dynamic process with multiple influences helps me see and treat every person as a person rather than as a male or female. What gender someone wishes to be addressed by therefore does not matter to me or offend me if I see simply an ungendered soul. What lifestyle a person opts to live does not, then, unsettle me as much as it might if I held to a rigid tradition of theology or morality. My concern becomes more for the salvation of a person's soul than for the correction of their lifestyle.

There are several points to note around gender in the gender-related creation texts: Genesis 1:27; 2:7; 2:21–23; 5:1–2. We note firstly that Adam is clearly the personal name for a distinct male individual and Eve is equally clearly the name for a distinct female individual. Scripture names only the first three of their sons, Cain (Gen 4:1), Abel (Gen 4:2), and Seth (Gen 5:3), and adds that after Seth was born, Adam lived a further eight hundred years and had 'other sons and daughters' (Gen 5:4). Yet we note also that Adam is a generic Hebrew term meaning both 'taken from the earth' and 'mankind' or 'humankind'. Looking more closely, the formation of a male body/bodies came *before* Adam (the man/humankind) becomes a living being (Gen 2:7). Adam becomes a sentient, living being *after* God 'breathed into his nostrils *the breath of life*' (Gen.2:7). The identity of the person seems secondary to the physicality of the body.

What, exactly was this 'breath of life' that God 'breathed' into 'Adam'? Victor Hamilton comments that 'instead of using *rûah* for 'breath' […] Gen. 2:7 uses *nᵉšāmā*. Unlike *rûah*, which is applied to God, man, animals and even false gods, *nᵉšāmā* is applied only to Yahweh and to man.'[29] *nᵉšāmā* is the Hebrew word for 'soul' or 'spirit'. Adam's masculinity, his male gender, relates to his physical body rather than to his soul. Therefore, the essence of what makes Adam 'Adam', both the

[29] Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1–17,* New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), p. 159.

individual and humankind, is the *nᵉšāmā*, the soul, that God breathed into him. It is not the physical body that defines 'Adam'. 'Until God breathes into him, *man* is a lifeless corpse.'[30]

Realising this background may help more traditional school chaplains, and Christian parents and teachers, react less virulently and confrontationally to, for instance, a pupil insisting on being addressed by particular personal pronouns, or a school promoting the Pride flag and Pride Week, or RSHP lessons promoting inclusion or equality or respect for the LGBTQIA$^+$ community. Creation recounts the formation of a gendered body that is not animated until a soul is breathed into it, and Scripture maintains an awareness of a fusion yet distinction between body and soul, as can been seen in the following examples: 'Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell' (Matt 10:28); 'At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven' (Matt 22:30); 'If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body' (1 Cor 15:44). In the resurrection at the end of all things, such references suggest that the part of us that is resurrected is primarily spiritual rather than physical, and that we are returned to a new creation that is generic rather than gendered. This also may help school chaplains find their way to a better relationship with those who express gender fluidity or different sexualities.

Twice in the early creation accounts, we read that God created mankind 'male and female' (Gen 1:27; 5:1–2). Gerhard von Rad, commenting on Genesis 1:27, notes that 'one will do well to split the physical from the spiritual as little as possible: the whole man [i.e. the body and the soul, the individual and the collective Adam, the male and the female] is created in God's image'.[31] Yet later commentators suggest a greater nuance:

> Unlike God, man is characterised by sexual differentiation. Unlike animals, *man* is not broken down into species (i.e. 'according to their kinds' or 'all kinds of'), but rather is designated by sexuality: male and female he created

[30] Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, p. 159.
[31] Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis* (London: SCM, 1972), p. 58.

> them […] Sexuality is not an accident of nature, nor is it simply a biological phenomenon. Instead, it is a gift of God.[32]

God created mankind 'in his own image' (Gen 2:7; 5:2) and, as is often pointed out in commentaries, God contains in Godself both male and female identifiers. It seems to me that, again, the truly contentious issue for Christians and school chaplains in Scottish education — indeed, in Scottish society — is not the prevalent teaching on gender and sexuality but the attempt to silence reasoned debate and to exclude and demonise traditional Christian viewpoints as a valid alternative.

Challenges to Freedom of Belief and Speech

For Baptists especially, this can feel, somewhat ironically, familiar. Our insistence on submission to the written word and to the Living Word saw our historic ancestors, the Anabaptists, relentlessly persecuted. Their determination to engage with Scripture and to challenge the churchmanship and Christendom of their contemporaries saw them demonised. Strenuous efforts were made to silence them and to eradicate them rather than to engage with them or persuade them otherwise.

British Baptists have always insisted on freedom of belief, even that of their opponents, and have paid a heavy price for this.[33] They have not always been shown the same generosity of spirit. Nothing in the policies or from the current pressure groups within Scottish education matches the ferocity and violence meted out to the Anabaptists for seeking to hold to their understanding of biblical principles and values. Yet there are some parallels. There is an obvious inconsistency in the way policies aimed at improving equality and inclusion — meant to protect the LGBTQIA$^+$ community — seem to disallow those with particular mainstream Christian views on gender, marriage, and sexual relationships an equal hearing and a right to have their viewpoint included as a valid alternative. Christian voices, when raised, are met

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[32] Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, p. 138.

[33] Ian M. Randall, *Religious Liberty in Continental Europe: Campaigning by British Baptists, 1840s to 1930s,* The Whitley Lecture 2012, Centre for Baptist History and Heritage Studies (Regent's Park College, Oxford: Whitely Publications, 2012).

with accusations of bigotry, intolerance, and hatred and are increasingly vilified.

There are, of course, so many variations among Christians as to what constitutes the definitive or supposedly correct theology on gender, marriage, and relationships. And there are also those who take a highly provocative, rigid, confrontational, and extremist stance. Notoriously, Westboro Baptist Church in the United States of America has frequently headlined international news bulletins for their high-profile demonstrations and inflammatory language at sporting events, concerts, in public arenas, and even in deliberate proximity to military funerals. They contend that the military conflicts into which the US has been drawn and the subsequent deaths are God's judgement on the nation for tolerating and promoting homosexuality. While the US Supreme Court has upheld the church's right to freedom of speech, even neutral ethicists debate if freedom of speech and public debate should allow indisputably hateful speech.[34]

Scotland's school chaplains and Christians within Scottish education (chaplains, teachers, and parents) seem, at this point, to be at the sharp end of a similar unfolding debate. Stating their personal convictions and denominational understanding of moral issues, of relationships, and of sexuality is bringing them into conflict with strongly opposed voices who are deeply offended by the understanding of biblical values expressed. Freedom of belief and freedom of speech are being questioned when Christians attempt to state their opinions.

Baptist chaplains in particular have a dilemma here. They have a long tradition, all the way back to Anabaptist roots, of arguing for and upholding freedom of belief and freedom of speech as human rights. It is a double-edged sword: to defend the right of others to express views strongly opposed to one's own is to risk unleashing strong voices that do not offer the same tolerance.

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[34] Jahel Queralt Lange, 'Oxford University Practical Ethics', blog post 11 March 2011 <blog.practicalethics.ox.ac.uk> [accessed 23 May 2023].

Articles 18 and 19 of the UN Charter of Human Rights state that

> Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.
>
> Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Tony Peck, at the time General Secretary of the European Baptist Federation (EBF), has written on 'Baptists and Human Rights' in this journal.[35] Peck recounts the EBF's creation of

> a small team of three people who can research abuses of religious freedom and human rights and who also travel regularly to Geneva to contribute the experience of Baptist communities on the ground to the Universal Periodic Reviews on human rights the UN carries out on different nations. In recent times, we have done this for Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, based on our own visits there, and we are also currently finding ways to raise the human rights situation in eastern Ukraine.[36]

The need for such a monitoring team in these areas of armed conflict is undeniable and obvious. But the challenges to freedom of belief and speech are subtle and pervasive in many other areas. While it may not be a physical challenge, it could be argued that Scottish education is a field in which an ideological challenge to religious freedom and freedom of speech is unfolding. It should be reiterated here that Christianity has indeed held a privileged place within Scottish education,[37] and the unease of many Christian chaplains, teachers, and parents might also be seen more in terms of defensiveness over the challenge to privilege rather than as a reasoned consideration of challenges to freedom of belief and speech. However, what is emerging is that this generation of believers, comfortably unchallenged for so long, seemingly does not

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35 Tony Peck, 'Baptists and Human Rights', *Journal of European Baptist Studies,* 20, no. 1 (2020), 30–46.

36 Peck, 'Baptists and Human Rights', p. 32.

37 Callum Brown, Thomas Green, and Jane Mair, *Religion and Scots Law: Report of an Audit at the University of Glasgow*, sponsored and published by the Humanist Society Scotland, Edinburgh, 2016 <https://eprints.gla.ac.uk/117621/1/117621.pdf> [accessed 23 May 2023] (p. 19).

know how to respond to efforts to silence and demonise the expression of their views.

What form, then, should this response take? There is the example of Jesus — silent before his accusers (Isa 53:7; Mark 14:60–61; 1 Peter 2:23). And then there is the encouragement to boldness offered by the apostles standing before the Sanhedrin: 'Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard' (Acts 4:19–20). There is an undeniable tension or inherent contradiction here: to maintain a dignified silence or to stubbornly insist on speaking out knowing that it may be perceived as inflammatory. Yet, not to speak up risks emboldening and condoning further restrictions. Martin Niemöller's well-known words reflecting on the Holocaust seem to have some pertinence here:

> First they came for the Communists and I did not speak out because I was not a Communist. Then they came for the Socialists and I did not speak out because I was not a Socialist. Then they came for the trade unionists and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me and there was no one left to speak out for me.[38]

Returning to the theological motif of the ambassador may again prove useful. The ambassador uses skills of diplomacy and tact; acts as liaison between very different and sometimes opposed kingdoms; works to respect and understand the values of their receiving kingdom while at the same time explaining and the values of their sending kingdom; works to find compromises that are mutually acceptable and beneficial to both kingdoms they find themselves in; engages in bi-lingual communication and looks for a common understanding; and ever acts as an advocate and voice for the vulnerable. School chaplaincy walks a fine line between speaking out and keeping silent. Despite all provocation, it should model reasoned, careful, respectful, and kind debate. It should be prepared to make recourse to existing laws on freedom of belief and of speech.

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[38] Holocaust Memorial Day (UK) <https://www.hmd.org.uk/resource/first-they-came-by-pastor-martin-niemoller/> [accessed 29 May 2023).