

Multifaith Chaplaincies in a Pluralistic Society - their contribution to education

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The Context

An Australian concensus on multi-culture?

Federation - Henry Parkes, The Premier of New South Wales, addressing the Federation Conference in Melbourne, 6 February, 1890:

Is there a man living in any part of Australasia who will say that it would be to the advantage of the world that we should remain disunited, with our animosities, border customs and all the frictions which our border customs tend to produce, till the end of time?

I do not believe that there is a sane man in the whole population who will say such a daringly absurd thing. As separate colonies we are of little consequence, but the potentate does not exist, the ruling authority in human affairs does not exist, who would lightly consider the decision of a united Australasia. We should grow at once: in a day, as it were: from a group of disunited communities into one solid, powerful, rich and widely respected power.

A Harbour Bridge - Jack Lang, Premier of New South Wales, opening the Sydney Harbour Bridge, 19 March, 1932:

The achievement of this bridge is symbolical of the things Australians strive for, but have not yet attained. The bridge itself unites people who have similar ideals and aims, but are divided by physical and geographical boundaries. Just as Sydney has completed this material bridge that will unite her people, so will Australia ultimately perfect the bridge which it commenced 30 years ago (referring to Federation). The statesmen of that period set out to build a bridge of common understanding, that would serve the whole of the people of our great continent. The builders of that bridge, as the builders of this bridge, meet with disappointments, which makes the task difficult sometimes: often delicate. But that bridge of understanding among the Australian people will yet be built, and will carry her on to that glorious destination which every man who loves our native land feels is in store for her.

Immigration - William McKell, Premier of New South Wales, supporting Australia's "populate or perish" immigration program, 22 January, 1951:

The great immigration project upon which we are now firmly embarked is undoubtedly one of the most constructive and notable events in the history of Australia. Immigration means the development of our resources, the strengthening of our security and defences and the rapid expansion of our population, while to hundreds of thousands of people in the United Kingdom and Europe, it means the opportunity to live a new life in

Australia...In the nineteenth century period of rapid growth, a sense of “mateship” and fair play, independence of spirit and self-reliance was engendered which forms a vital part of our tradition of nationhood. It is these qualities, which are among the best in the Australian character, that we must seek to pass on the newcomers. By a wise handling of assimilation, our migrants will not only conform to our standards of citizenship, but will add their contribution. There will be give and take. Assimilation will be a two way process, demanding much of both migrants and ourselves, and the result will be mutual enrichment. For the migrants are bringing to Australia not only the benefits of their knowledge and skills, but of their age-old cultures. The old and the new should blend into a better and more varied community of people.

yet

Alfred Deakin, the first Attorney-General of Australia, introducing the Immigration Restriction Act, 12 September, 1901:

It is not the bad qualities but the good qualities of these alien races that make them dangerous to us. It is their inexhaustible energy, their power of applying themselves to new tasks, their endurance and low standard of living that makes them such competitors. The effect of the contact of two peoples, such as our own and those constituting the alien races, is not to lift them up to our standard, but to drag our labouring populations down to theirs...Members on both sides of the house and all sections of all parties: those in office and those out of office: with the people behind them, are all united in the unalterable resolve that the Commonwealth of Australia shall mean a “white Australia”, and that from now henceforward all alien elements within it shall be diminished. We are united in this resolve that this Commonwealth shall be established on the firm foundation of unity of race, so as to enable it to fulfil the promise of its founders, and enjoy to the fullest extent the charter of liberty under the Crown which we now cherish.

These aspirations for national unity, for developing a consensus about our understanding of who we are and what we stand for as Australians, and for who may *be* Australian, continue to echo today. Ten years ago most of us might have agreed that we had reached a consensus about national unity in diversity within the rubric of “multi-culturalism” and that we were on the verge of coming to terms with our history of dispossessing the indigenous people of Australia.

Opportunistic, divisive politics seems to have set back that agenda.

Post 9/11 - the realisation that multi-culture includes multi-faith and no-faith.

The role and place of religion in shaping Australia is now on the agenda. It would be much too simplistic to think that this stems from the present Government’s close relationship with the United States of America, though this is an obvious influence.

In my view it arises from two sources:

1. our efforts to understand the emergent power of the religious fundamentalist and the religious terrorist who pose a threat to democracy, post September 11, 2001.

2. The emergence of “spirituality” as a unifying phenomenon.

- “secular” to the “dissenters”

The founders of South Australia were escaping the hegemony of the Church of England, who made life difficult for anyone outside of their fold. These “dissenters” were determined that South Australia would foster religious freedom. So, far from seeking a religion-less society, parliament established a clear line between church and state so that no one religious denomination could dominate the culture. (It was a Christian paradigm.) “Secular” for them meant that any Church had no privilege in the affairs of state. There was no ‘House of Lords’!

- secular and the “death of god”

Over time, the meaning of the word “secular” in common parlance came to mean ‘without religion’ or ‘godless’. Religious belief became increasingly privatized and religious practice marginalized.

- Secular in a post-secular society

However the decline of religion spawned a renewal of interest in spirituality as a human trait.

David Tacey at Latrobe, aware of this shift in the late 1990’s, offered a first year liberal arts topic simply called “Spirituality”. Most of his colleagues thought he was ‘nuts’. But about 100 students turned up and it has been growing ever since. Spirituality is becoming a normal part of discourse in areas as diverse as management and governance, science, medicine and education. Our understanding of “secular” in a post-secular culture is in urgent need of clarification.

Spirituality the common factor

- Innate
- connection
- meaning

Regional Interfaith Cooperation for Peace, Development and Human Dignity
Jogjakarta, 2004; Cebu 2006

• Australia, Brunei, Cambodia, Fiji, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Vietnam.

Christian Chaplaincy

- Spirituality
- Holism

- Pastoral care

Spirituality

Spirituality is that which gives meaning and purpose to being. Chaplaincy provides a spiritual resource for the institution. It respects and can transcend differences of denomination and religion, recognising aspects of grace in all. The chaplain may minister in ways that enable questions of life and death, reality and meaning, fear and hope to be articulated in a manner that encourages an exploration of such issues in an honest, caring environment.

Holism

Chaplaincy should be an integral part of the institution. Its focus is in the unique pastoral and spiritual contribution to the overall care provided. It is integrated and congruent with that offered by other disciplines and adds to the totality and 'completeness' of the care the institution provides.

Pastoral Care

Pastoral care is a caring resource at the client's point of need. It allows the client to 'set the agenda' with the Chaplain being available to journey with the client as a vulnerable, caring, listening fellow human. The chaplain may provide a spiritual perspective and a liturgical resource as a tangible adjunct to pastoral ministry.

Models of multifaith chaplaincy

- coordinating chaplain and 'visiting chaplains'
- "a community of colleagues"

Inclusivity

"the approach that affirms the truth and beauty of other religions but assesses that truth/beauty according to its own criteria and then seeks to bring the value of the other religions to an even greater fruition by inviting them to be 'included' or fulfilled in its own."

Knitter, Paul F. 2002: *Introducing Theologies of Religions* Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, U.S.A. p217

- A 'colonial' mindset
- Assumes superiority
- Inclusive "on my terms"

From Diversity to Pluralism through Mutuality

"Pluralism is an encounter of all of our differences. It is a reconstruction and renegotiation of our common life in light of that encounter. Pluralism requires something of us; it is not a given; it is an achievement. What is required is the kind of six years of work that the Multi-faith Council here at Wellesley has put into it. This is one of the stories of the movement from diversity to pluralism that is still being written."

Diana Eck, Pluralism Project, Harvard University

Mutuality

- *Mutual service - outward looking*
- *Mutual mission statement -
“nurturing spirit, building community”*
- *Mutual ‘gift-giving’*

- *Principle of mutual recognition*
- *recognises the right of all faiths to meet the needs of their respective members in any given community.*
- *Principle of mutual concern*
- *intends to meet the pastoral concerns of, rather than convert, members of the various faiths.*
- *Principle of mutual understanding*
- *seeks to understand the values and beliefs of each faith in a given community rather than to pass judgement on them.*
- *Principle of mutual service*
- *is committed to serving the spiritual and personal needs of each member of each faith tradition in the community.*
- *Principle of mutual advocacy*
- *is committed to advocacy for the rights of other faith traditions to equal status and participation in the community.*
- *Principle of mutual deference*
- *encourages direct contact with authentic sources of information rather than mediating in any investigation of one faith tradition by a member of another.*

Chocolat

- *a metaphor for “traditional chaplaincy”*
- *Minister to members of own faith or ‘the converted’*
- *Priest and parish model (extension of the church to the geographically isolated) - preaching, teaching, worship, fellowship, prayer, pastoral support.*

My predecessor’s appointment and contemporaries’ appointments are consistent with these values, beliefs and expected activities.

“Professional Chaplaincy”

- *chaplaincy to an institution (mid ‘90’s)*

- *Hospitals employing coordinating chaplains but insisting on (Christian) inclusivity*
- *Heads of Christian Churches Chaplaincy Committee response*

Realities at Flinders

- *Internationally, nationally and internally competitive*
- *Diverse population - multi-national, multi-cultural, multi-lingual*

- *Heightened sensitivity to global events and global environment*
- *On-line/distance learning*
- *HECS - 'part-time' students*
- *Diminishment of student life on campus*

Globalisation and Spirituality
The Religious Centre

- *A gift to the University by the Christian and Jewish communities, 1968 (rather than the model of religious colleges)*
 - *“for the spiritual benefit of all”*
 - *In the 90’s, dominated by the “evangelical” Christian club*
 - *Christian ‘wars’ had become normative*
 - *Comments by my guests: ‘dark and dilapidated’*
- A theology for change*
- *UCA “Basis of Union” - journey, openness*
 - *Exile and Promise - vision*
 - *John Wesley - Spirit theology*
What is the Spirit of God doing?
How shall we meet the needs of this hour?

Theological method?

Pivotal Moment #1: 1997

from individual traditional to ecumenical team

- *Decline in religious interest generally*
- *Decline in support from parent churches*
- *Part-time chaplaincy*
- *Decline in student life within the university*
- *Reflecting the Religious Centre donors’ intents*
- *Response to the “Christian wars” in the Centre*
- *Influenced by university polity on inclusivity*

Pivotal Moment #2: 1998- 2001

The Pagan Association, the Pagan Chaplain

- *Inclusivity a matter of social justice*

- *Chaplains of other faiths initially absorbed into the Christian model*

Pivotal Moment #3: 1998

East Timor Independence

- *Inadequacy of exclusivist position to love the other*
- *Friendship with Muslim students*
- *“Prayers for Peace” - first multifaith action*

Pivotal Moment #4: 2001

Refurbishment of Religious Centre

- *Religious Centre Committee established*

- *“Re-opening” celebration, symbolic of new expectations*

Recent Achievements and Outcomes

- *Information For New Muslim Students (CDIP Grant) - link with ISSU*

- *Religion and Violence - link with FUIIE. Ongoing project*

- *St Judes “Week of Teaching” - link with local parish. Meditation.*

- *Heads of Christian Churches Chaplaincy Day - exposure with hospital and prison chaplains*

- *Workshop at Australian National Tertiary Chaplains Conference - links with other Australian chaplains and Asian chaplain*

Challenges

- *Succession*

- *Sustainability*

- *Uncertainty of employment*

- *Part-time, volunteer*

- *Unpredictability - reactive/proactive*

Unresolved Issues

- *Relationship with parent religious bodies*

- *Relationship with University
“in it but not of it”*

Future

- *An active hub, creating and sustaining multifaith community within the university and the community*

- *A sustainable centre of excellence, in research, education, networking and support, modelling a “dialogical community of communities”. (Knitter p8)*

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Today many Christians “sense the tension between, on the one hand, the need they feel to respect, love and dialogue with...believers (of other faiths) and, on the other hand, the traditional Christian claims that Jesus is the one-and-only Son of God and saviour. Something doesn't quite fit. There's a strain between what Christians *experience* in other religions (the clear signs of grace in other faiths) and what they are supposed to *believe* about Jesus (he's the only source of saving grace).

Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*

The Christian Churches have always known that religions were plural, that there were other religions than our own. This consciousness of plurality raised few theological problems, because the church was convinced on a number of grounds that Christianity was the only truly valid religion, the only effective “way”. That we now speak of theological implications of plurality, and clearly intend *serious* implications, this bespeaks a new sense or understanding of plurality, a new assessment of its meaning. This new understanding...includes and adds the concepts of “parity”, or “rough parity” to that of plurality: we recognise, often against our will, that in some sense the sole efficacy or even superiority of Christianity are claims we can no longer make, or can make only with great discomfort.

Langdon Gilkey *Plurality and its Theological Implications*