

Faith Friendliness- the New Imperative

Newlandscapes

Newland Uniting Church, Victor Harbour

October 30, 2011

Notes accompanying a Powerpoint Presentation.

Thank you for being here and inviting me to address you today.

I pay my respects to the aboriginal elders and recognise the Kurna people and their custodianship of the land on which we meet. May we walk hand in hand together in harmony.

I also pay my respects to the Uniting Church in Australia which has nurtured me, my Support Group, my mentors and my chaplaincy colleagues at Flinders who have walked with me in my fourteen years of chaplaincy at Flinders University.

The ideas I want to put to you tonight are ideas that have formed in me over these years.

Put simply, as an overview, they are these:

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That at our time in history, we are in a process of fundamental change, prompting a shift in self-understanding and organisation.

We find ourselves somewhere between a need for a sense of security born out of consistency and predictability - what I am calling the Mono-world - and the creative excitement of a Multi-world that is heterogeneous, complex and less predictable.

Recently Sandy and I hosted a bright young Italian student completing her Masters degree at Adelaide University. Her field is Engineering Management. (I never knew such a field existed!). Her thesis is entitled "Risk Management in Complex Projects - an exploratory study to managing unknown unknowns in uncertain environments."

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I put it to you that this is an everyday example of someone living more to the edge of the emerging Multi-world. It's conveyed in the language she uses: managing risks, complexity, exploratory, unknown unknowns, uncertainties, environments.

Her thesis title echoes the central question posed to me by the pluralistic university environment when I first started chaplaincy at Flinders - how on earth are we all going to get on with each other in this multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-political **Multi-world**?

I put it to you that that is our imperative.

Look no further to be convinced than the SBS World News!

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I have asked myself this question: If this Multi-world is the emerging reality, is this God's intention?

Is this a move towards what Jesus calls "The Kingdom, or the Reign, of God"?

And if so, how do I cooperate with what the Spirit of God may be doing? (Wasn't that one of Wesley's questions - What is the Spirit of God doing? And How do we meet the needs of this hour?)

My response to the first two questions is 'yes' and ways of cooperation are the subject of my address tonight.

The words of the exilic prophet Isaiah, pivotal to changing the attitude the Jews in Exile, may well apply - "Do not cling to the events of the past or dwell on what happened long ago. Watch for the new thing I am going to do. It is happening already - you can see it now!" (Isaiah 43:19)

We can learn from the past, but not live there. Jahweh cannot be contained in that box.

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So what is the new thing I see happening? I think it could be summed up as the emergence of a Multi-world.

Tonight I propose to

- Set the scene with some observations about the Mono-world and its resistance to this movement
- make some observations about how the chaplains at Flinders have negotiated this shift ,
- and then make some proposals about how people of faith may engage and cooperate with God in the shift.

But first, I must make an argument against my thesis.

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McDonald's restaurants are found in 119 countries and territories around the world and serve nearly 47 million customers each day. McDonald's operates over 31,000 restaurants worldwide, employing more than 1.5 million people.

The thing tourists love about McDonalds is that wherever you are, which ever outlet you go to, you can guarantee that the food is going to be the same. There is strict uniformity.

The other thing tourists know, of course, is that they have toilets!

McDonald's is an obvious example of a corporation capitalising on the paradigm of a Mono-world

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Shopping Malls around the world are consistently similar. You could be in Hong Kong, Atlanta (Georgia) or Mumbai.

Sometimes when I'm in Westfield Marion, I just imagine that I'm in Paris!

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Globalisation shrinks the world and shapes it into a set of familiar multinational brand names.

The strengths of the Mono-world, the security engendered by consistency are being capitalised on.

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But at the same time, when we look around at the people on our city streets, we know that Australia has become more diverse.

Life has become more complex and diverse.

For some, this is a threat.

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An obvious example of the Mono- paradigm might be 'The White Australia Policy'.

It was originally a response to the resentment of white miners toward industrious Chinese diggers, which led to ethnic violence in the 1850's; and then later, resentment from workers in the southern Australian states, believing that

their jobs and standard of living were under threat by the hard-working South Sea Islanders working in the cane fields of north Queensland,
These are arguments we still hear today.

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Before post war immigration we were mainly white and Caucasian.
After World War 2, immigration added Europeans seeking a new life here. We needed them for post-war reconstruction. And they were (mainly) white!
After the dismantling of the White Australia Policy in the 70's, many Asians were granted asylum and given citizenship after the Vietnam War. Like the Europeans, they too were looking to start a new life.

Our own South Australian Lieutenant Governor, Hieu Van Le, was among them.

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He recalls:

"We (Hieu and his wife) arrived on board a leaky wooden boat one hot afternoon in 1977, and as we chugged slowly into Darwin Harbour, two sun-burnt Aussies in a tinnie sped past and yelled out to us: G'day mate! Welcome to Australia".

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But 24 years later, in August 2001, Muslims fleeing from Afghanistan were picked up at sea by the Tampa and met a very different response.

Why weren't they welcomed like Hieu Van Le and his wife?

Why have successive governments invested so much in resisting the welcoming of asylum seekers?

We thought we had mainly overcome the colour bar.

Could it be that we were unprepared for an influx of people of another faith? - that a harmonious, multi-religious society could not be imagined?

The substance of what I want to discuss with you today is how we may, as people of faith, contribute to that imagination.

But first we must examine the possibility of our own complicity.

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The Parable of the Good Samaritan has been placed by Luke at the centre of his Gospel. It is part of Jesus' response to the most fundamental religious question, which, for our purposes today, I loosely interpret as "how then should we live?" The hero of the story is the outsider, the religiously and racially vilified one. The story attacks the Mono-world religious purity culture of his time and gives us clues about the Multi-world God imagines. A God for all.

The expected religious ones, the priest and the Levite see the beaten man in his need, but they are pre-occupied by their own religious system – they might be worried about the implications for them if they were to respond. So they don't. They can't respond. They are not free to respond. They are captives to their religious dogma. So they avert their gaze, cross the road and continue walking.

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I can identify with that. To be honest, there was a time when if I were to place myself in the story, I might be the priest or the Levite, preoccupied with what I believed and what I didn't believe. I still feel that tug.

The Good Samaritan was not preoccupied. He was unencumbered, free to respond, free to be compassionate.

The stifling of our spirits by institutionalised belief is one of the themes Harvey Cox takes up in his new book, *The Future of Faith*.

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We may know Harvey Cox from his highly influential book “The Secular City”, which appeared in 1965.

He is a historical theologian and teacher. His latest book was launched on his retirement from Harvard last year.

His thesis is that Christian history falls into three ages:

In the first of these ages, the early Christians passed on their faith orally, enacting the inclusive message of God’s agape-love. Christian faith tended to be caught rather than taught. Cox calls this early period “The Age of Faith”.

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He says:

“Christianity erupted into history as a movement of the Spirit, animated by faith - by hope and confidence in the dawning of an era of *shalom* that Jesus had demonstrated and announced. This “Reign of God” would include both Jews and Gentiles. The poor would be vindicated, the outsiders brought within. For nearly three centuries the Age of Faith thrived. Then, however, in a relatively short time, faith in this inclusive reign faded, and what had begun as a popular movement curdled into a top-heavy edifice defined by obligatory beliefs enforced by a hierarchy.”

The Age of Faith declined. The Age of Belief ruled.

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“Right Belief” or “orthodoxy” would dominate Christianity for the next 1,500 years. The fight for “right belief” would underscore Crusades, Inquisitions, Reformations and Counter-reformations, Expulsions, Witch hunts, Anti-semitism, Heresy trials, Silencing, and a proliferation of church denominations determined to be “correct”.

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The Age of Belief was, according to my schema, a Mono-world age of conformity. Hardliners, firmly believed they had a God-given mission to correct people if they appeared to stray from the path of right belief. If a well-directed sermon or a “quiet word” didn’t do the trick, firmer measures could be taken - white-anting, humiliating, bullying, demonising or vilifying. “Telling” was the paradigm. It still seems to be, among those who live in the Mono-world.

I speak from experience! I recognise in myself this zealous stage in my Christian life - “Let me TELL you!!!!”

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The Age of Belief also underscored the idea of aboriginal assimilation and of “Stolen Generations” to get rid of colour. It underscores every genocide to get rid of “the other”. According to the work being done in a centre I recently visited in the UK, we have had 50 genocides worldwide since the Holocaust, which should have been the genocide to end all genocides.

Such are the costs of extreme Mono-world thinking.

Cox’s “Age of Belief” is an age synonymous with a Mono-worldview.

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Little wonder that when the friendly Pagans arrived on the scene at Flinders University in 1999 and formed the Flinders University Pagan Association, the Flinders Christian Fellowship, living within the paradigm of “The Age of Belief”, saw red!

They could not deal with it, apart from hostility.

Nor could they deal kindly with me, when, on the grounds of Freedom of Religion and Equal Opportunity, I supported the appointment of their own Pagan chaplain.

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I had been appointed by the Uniting Church to be “chaplain to all “and, as a result, had already made connections with the Muslims and the Mormons. But I was as shocked as anyone when I first heard about the arrival of the Pagans. I wondered about naked orgies and blood sacrifices by the lake under a full moon! But when I summoned up the courage to talk with their leader, I discovered an intelligent and highly ethical person and my fears were put to rest. And like any of the religious groups on campus, they had every right to equal access of the Religious Centre. However there was an immediate standoff between the staff worker of the Flinders Christian Fellowship, who was employed by the Australian Fellowship of Evangelical Students, against the new Pagan chaplain and myself.

At the time, the film “Chocolat” was showing in the cinemas.

Its portrayal of the arrival of a Pagan lady and her young daughter to a French village, closely paralleled the situation at Flinders.

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The film begins with classic Mono-culture. It is set in a French medieval village in the 1950’s. Everybody goes to the one church. The townspeople are traditional folk who seem quite happy in their simple lives. It is settled. Everyone knows their place.

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The mayor of the town is the moral authority and he sees to it that his town stays the way it is. He even corrects and sometimes writes sermons for the new, young Catholic priest. It is the Age of Belief.

This also happens to be the same role the staff worker played with the Flinders Christian Fellowship at Flinders. Chaplains were never invited to conduct Bible Studies at their meetings. In fact, anyone who spoke at their meetings, unless they were known representatives of bona-fide evangelical organisations, had to sign up to their statement of belief for starters. A tight system of beliefs was being inculcated.

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Just like the arrival of the friendly, intelligent and articulate Pagan Chaplain to Flinders, the arrival of the Pagan chocolate maker to the French village upsets the established norm.

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At first the Mayor politely welcomes her to his village and invites her to attend church, like everyone else. But she tells him of her plans to open up the disused pastry shop, right opposite the church, as a Chocolaterie. He objects because, after all, it is Lent and among other things, these will surely be given up by the townspeople.

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The Chocolaterie opens and it is not long before others are won over to the side of chocolate, a metaphor for kindness, hospitality and integrity, set against a life of legalism, manipulation and conformity.

As you may wonder, how could anyone compete against chocolate!!!

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The stage is set for conflict.

The more the townspeople warm to the non-church-going, friendly new arrival and her chocolates, the more the Mayor is incensed.

And the more he tries to protect the old staus-quo, the more he destroys himself. It was the same at Flinders - eventually the staff worker was relieved of his position by the sponsoring organisation. Their representatives took me to lunch and offered me an apology for his vilification of me, which I accepted.

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So my first point is this: in the change from Mono to Multi, every effort will be made by some to protect the norm. There will be resistance. We have lived with Mono for hundreds years! It is deeply entrenched in our consciousness. Law and Order campaigns still win votes. Border Protection still taps into old fears and insecurities.

For Christianity, this resistance will take the form of trying to protect itself. Christianity will try to continue to live in the Age of Belief. Generally it will find ways to undermine or vilify others at odds with itself, or simply exclude and ignore others, politely, of course! There will be little interest in people of other faiths. There will be passive exclusion, and plenty of "walking by on the other side".

Now let us move on to some observations about the nature of the emerging age - the age of the Multi-world.

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Cox calls his third age of Christianity "The Age of the Spirit".

He reckons a shift from Belief to Spirit has been going on over the last 50 years and all the major world religions are involved.

For example, he reckons the struggle taking place in Islam is not purely economic and political. For many it is "how to be a better Muslim". This is an important insight and true in my experience.

In a fundraising dinner for Vietnamese'-Chinese Buddhists I attended this week, the monk who spoke was insistent that it was not the money that was important, but that we might have the right attitude.

These examples exemplify "The Age of the Spirit" and are pertinent to the emerging paradigm in my schema, the Multi-world age, in which, and to which, I believe we are moving.

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Cox's understanding accords with what we know of David Tacey's observations, particularly with younger people studying at University. I take it that you are familiar with his work, particularly his book "The Spirituality Revolution". David has spoken in South Australia a number of times. So I will not linger here.

In Tacey's words, the Age of the Spirit arises from love of, and intimacy with, the sacred. Unlike the Age of Belief, spirituality is comfortable with uncertainty and mystery. It recognises and does not attempt to collapse paradox because it is more comfortable with the Multi-world of complexity and heterogeneity.

But let me skip through some aspects of the Multi-world I have come to appreciate, to see if they resonate with you.

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The Age of the Spirit is Postsecular - the movement is not away from faith toward non-faith, but away from being defined by systems of belief toward faith itself as the defining quality.

Post-denominational - movement away from institutions as masters toward institutions only as servants. The exodus from the churches, and other institutions, has been a boycott to do with a lack of spiritual graces within institutions - a hypocrisy much broader and deeper than the sex-abuse tip of the iceberg.

"Recovery" - is concerned not with jettisoning tradition but recovering elements that nurture faith in practical ways. There is a pragmatism and eclecticism about appropriating what is meaningful and life-giving.

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Post-patriarchal - recognises distinctions between men and women, but is conscious of the exercise of power

Building relationships and being connected are important. It's called Networking. For most young people, mobile phones and the Internet have become essential tools.

The ethic that is emerging has to do with sustainability, not just regarding the environment and physical survival, but in every sphere - in business practice, education and even medicine.

For Christians, according to Cox, the Age of the Spirit embraces all of the above but is primarily organised around "following Jesus and actualising the Reign of God".

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There was a documentary recently shown on the ABC's "Four Corners" about a pastor working in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro. He had got to know those on both sides of the shooting - the drug lords and the police drug squad. The drug lords hated what they were doing in peddling drugs, but it was the only way they knew to sustain their communities. The Police hated what they were doing too, but they had a job to do - to stop crime. And there is the pastor in the middle of this paradoxical situation, praying with both opposing groups, and burying their dead. He is not doing anything to solve the situation - to collapse the paradox. It is not possible. He can only be there and bring the message that God loves each one unconditionally, give them hope that one day there will be a new day, all the while looking for any opportunity for new life and reconciliation.

This is ministry at the extremes in the Multi-world.

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The person who spoke at the opening of the European University Chaplains Conference Sandy and I attended in Coventry in June last year is also a pastor, who, for the last ten years, also knows about working in seemingly irreconcilable situations. He is an Anglican priest, sent to Iraq as an Envoy of the International Centre for Peace and Reconciliation of Coventry Cathedral. It was difficult enough getting into Iraq in the first place during the iron-fisted rule of Saddam; and because of the sanctions imposed by the International community at that time, he was seen as representing the bad guys. Building relations with Iraq's religious leaders under the watchful eyes of Saddam's secret police was also difficult, not so much for him, but for those who were willing to see him.

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After the American invasion, everyone thought freedom from Saddam would be enough to build a new Iraq. But we all know now what a hopeless mess Iraq has become. Andrew White continues to work at building relationships between religious leaders on all sides, meeting with terrorists and meeting with the US Army chiefs, meeting with the government and meeting with the opposition. Only his faith sustains him.

These are both examples, even if extreme, of Christian leadership in a Multi-world.

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The West thought it could be Mono by excluding religion, that it could be uncomplicated by religion. That was one of the biggest mistakes the allies initially made in Iraq. They thought at first they could impose their secular culture on the cradle of Abrahamic faith!

It's a mistake anywhere, including the university. Religion is part of the complexity and diversity of the new age. Faith sustains, even in the midst of the incomprehensible complexity of the Multi-world. Faith sustains the pastor in the Favelas, and faith sustains the Vicar of Baghdad. And it sustains the people among whom they minister in the midst of their suffering and apparent hopelessness.

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If we accept the proposition of this shift, we might ask how we, as people of faith, might collaborate with God's Spirit in the movement toward a Multi-world and, in Cox's words, 'actualise the Reign of God' in the public sphere.

I suggest two complementary ways.

The first, by recognising the significance of hospitality. Not the Western notion of hospitality as a money-making concern - the "Hospitality Industry" - but by recovering aspects of ancient traditions that might contribute to our own sustainability.

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Genesis 18. The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.

He said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way—now that you have come to your servant."

"Very well," they answered, "do as you say." >>>>

So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. "Quick," he said, "get three seahs of fine flour and knead it and bake some bread."

Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree.

And then we have the conversation in which the visitors predict that Sarah will have a son.

The story of Abraham meeting three angelic visitors in Genesis 18 is the model for hospitable practice in the Mediterranean and Middle East.

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Over time, a common understanding of the ethics of hospitality pervaded the Mediteranean and the Middle East.

Scholars are now able to identify a code of practice that delineates the expectations of host and guest.

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Immediately after the story of Abraham and Sarah and the three visitors we have the contrasting story of Sodom and Gomorrah, which is a story about in-hospitality.

Later there is the story of how Abraham's descendents stay in Egypt because of famine in Palestine. The hospitality of Egypt gradually changes as the hard working Jews prosper and multiply - shades of our White Australia Policy, perhaps?

Charleton Heston leads the caste of thousands out through the parted sea. But what now? Who will be their host? Jahweh steps up and says "I will look after you, I will provide." God became their host.

To this day, the guest-host relationship established in the wilderness binds Jews together with Jahweh.

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Psalm 23, for example, can be seen as a description of the qualities of the host, written from the perspective of the guest. God is the host in the Psalm.

I won't linger on what is so familiar, except to note the transforming power of hospitality. The finale is an exclamation: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever".

Those of us who have got off the tourist track on our travels, and been invited into homes by locals, will know how that memory of generous hospitality binds us together with our hosts forever. Hospitality is transforming. It is the practice that changes strangers into friends. It was the practice that maintained civil society then, and it can contribute to social cohesion in the Multi-world age now. Diverse people are bound together not by developing a common set of beliefs, but by the experience of and practice of hospitality.

Henri Nouwen, in his book "Reaching Out" has helped me to understand how.

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Nouwen proposes that hospitality may be understood as "making space".

When we offer hospitality we make space for the other.

This "making space for the other" was how the chaplains at Flinders began to get to know each other, despite big religious differences.

I can do no better than to quote Nouwen himself:

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Hospitality means primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines.

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It is not to lead our neighbour into a corner where there are no alternatives left, but to open a wide spectrum of options for choice and commitment. It is not an educated intimidation with good books, good stories and good works, but the liberation of fearful hearts so that words can find roots and bear ample fruit.

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It is not a method of making our God and our way into the criteria of happiness, but the opportunity to others to find their God and their way. The paradox of hospitality is that it wants to create emptiness, but a friendly emptiness where strangers can enter and discover themselves as created free; free to sing their own songs, speak their own languages, dance their own dances; free also to leave and follow their own vocations.

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Hospitality is not a subtle invitation to adopt a life style of the host, but the gift of a chance for the guest to find their own.

Do you get the sense that this kind of hospitality is at odds with the Mono-world paradigm that seeks to resolve every difference, to conform people to the culture and worldview of the host? Nouwen's hospitality is potent stuff! >>>>

Nouwen suggests several domains for making space, several kinds of hospitality. For example, intellectual space: Don't you just hate it when people say "I know", leaving you with no intellectual space? Or "you *must* read this book" - meaning, I want to tell you something!

Don't you just hate it when people say "I know how you feel", leaving you with no emotional space?

And don't you just hate it when church people say "we don't do that here" as if religious expression were a totally settled matter?

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The chaplains at Flinders have been able to form a community of colleagues among themselves by hospitality to each other.

We meet each week for lunch. We share our professional concerns and plan actions together. Gradually we get to know each other and the centre circle of common spirituality and values expands. Friendship grows. This is a model of life in the Multi-world paradigm - it is complex and often surprising.

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In contrast, in the Mono-world system, chaplains may recognise their diversity, and respect each other, but without hospitality. There is no cohesion, This can only be multifaith in the sense that chaplains of many faiths are present in the same place at the same time. Such chaplains may smile at each other in the corridor, but they do their own thing - usually the bidding of their employing body. This is still the Mono system and it can't cope with the Multi system.

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The Multi system requires the chaplains to offer hospitality to each other, to share their lives together in concern for a vision of wholeness and wellbeing in the University, “nurturing spirit, building community”. This costs time and energy and requires discipline.

Note however, that each chaplain maintains his or her religious integrity in the process. There is no attempt to reach religious consensus, to submerge each other’s faith into a mediocre grey uniformity as the Mono system might demand. Neither is it inter-religious dialogue, as such, trying to come to some kind of religious consensus. Nor is it Comparative Religion, learning facts about each other’s faiths.

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Rather, through hospitality, a practice common to and valued by all faiths, the chaplains DISCOVER what they have in common - their “common humanity”, as one chaplain has put it. Love, peace, kindness, generosity, hope, forgiveness, compassion... all the virtues we of Christian faith admire, turn out to be common to all.

As the chaplains began to work in this way together, within the rubric of “nurturing spirit and building community” in the university, they began to work at how multifaith chaplaincy might be articulated. In 2006 Norm Habel wrote a Charter for Multifaith Ministry for the Flinders chaplains. We have added a further two principles from our practice.

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1. Principle of Mutual Recognition

A multi-faith ministry recognises the right of all faiths to meet the needs of their respective members in any given community.

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2. Principle of Mutual Concern

A multi-faith ministry intends to meet the pastoral concerns of, rather than convert, members of the various faiths.

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3. Principle of Mutual Understanding

A multi-faith ministry seeks to understand the values and beliefs of each faith in a given community rather than to pass judgement on them.

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4. Principle of Mutual Service

A multi-faith ministry is committed to serving the spiritual and personal needs of each member of each faith tradition in the community.

Two additional principles have been added to the Charter by the chaplains arising from their experience.

I will comment on them together because they are counterbalancing principles.

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5. Principle of Mutual Advocacy

A multifaith ministry is committed to advocacy for people of other faith traditions in terms of what is known to be in the best spirit of each tradition.

6. Principle of Mutual Deference

A multifaith ministry encourages direct contact with authentic sources of information rather than mediating in any investigation of one faith tradition by a member of another.

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Hospitality as making physical, social, emotional, intellectual and religious space, creates the cohesion needed in the Multi-world of complexity and diversity. Recognising diversity is not, of itself, sufficient. Time, energy and discipline are needed to establish and maintain relationships of hospitality, while the integrity of each person is also maintained, each contributing to the variability that is characteristic of the Multi-world, each contributing their gifts to the whole.

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A second way of enabling the movement, I propose, is by way of Faith Friendliness, a phrase coined by David Miller, the founding Director of the Princeton University Faith & Work Initiative. In South Australia, Norm Habel developed the concept into a Charter in 2007 and this Charter has been further developed by a group convened in November 2009. I present the Principles of the Charter to you as a work-in-progress for discussion.

But first I should say something about its intention.

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When Islam hit the headlines for all the wrong reasons in 2001, people wanted to know about Islam.

Australians wanted to know if Muslims were a threat to them.

So there were many public meetings.

This was well and good but ever since 9/11, Islam has been in the newspapers and Muslims have been on the defensive.

By coining the term “faith friendly” David Miller opened the possibility for us to find a way for respectful relations among people of different faiths, or no faith, to be normalised in everyday life - in the workplace, in schools, in sporting clubs and so on.

So, for example, in my work, I ask the university to consider what it might mean for Flinders University to be a Faith Friendly university. What would it mean for the Adelaide City Council to declare Adelaide a Faith Friendly city, for example? Or your church to advertise itself as a Faith Friendly church?

The Charter provides principles such communities may adopt and implement as appropriate to their contexts. >>>>

Whereas the Multifaith Ministry Charter provided principles for persons of different faiths, or no faith, to apply as they work together toward a common vision, the Faith Friendly Communities Charter provides principles for developing an environment for religious harmony, principles any community may action in their own way. It is not about faith or religion as such, but **civic** principles to enable a multi-society to get along in religious harmony.

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A Charter for Developing Faith Friendly Communities

The Vision

An Australian society of faith friendly communities, in which peoples of all faiths or none are open to each other and respect each other.

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Principle of Mutual Respect

A faith friendly community seeks to respect the diversity and differences of faiths and beliefs of all in the community.

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Principle of Mutual Understanding

A faith friendly community seeks to understand the values and beliefs of each faith or world view rather than pass judgement on them.

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Principle of Mutual Concern

A faith friendly community provides opportunity for individuals and groups to meet their religious and spiritual needs and to work in harmony for the common good and a sustainable world.

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Principle of Mutual Responsibility

A faith friendly community has a responsibility to facilitate a context of goodwill in which individuals and groups are free to differ peacefully, choose an alternate spiritual path, or practice a traditional faith with integrity.

Any individual or group may take these principles to their communities for discussion and possible adoption. Churches could discuss them, and possibly adopt them. We might have “faith friendly” churches - places where people of other faith might feel free to come and appreciate worship, as they do, for example, in Andrew White’s church in Baghdad.

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To sum up, I have made an argument that we are in the process of a change from a Mono to a Multi society a change in worldview and organisation.

For Christianity this change entails a shift from the Age of Belief to an Age of the Spirit.

I have provided a number of cases to illustrate the persistence, and strength of denial of the realities of this change.

I have suggested that as people of faith, we may enable the shift toward the Reign of the God who loves all, through hospitality and by promoting the development of faith friendly communities. Both may be potent means of human transformation.

Why is faith friendliness the new imperative?

Because it provides a tangible pathway that promotes peace and social cohesion in the new complex Multi reality. It provides a tool for anyone of faith or no faith to promote religious harmony in their community, regardless of religious knowledge or expertise. It takes the mission of reconciliation into the public square, hopefully as an instrument of inclusion most Australians will warm to, promoting Spirit rather than a requirement to adhere to a set of Beliefs or regulations.

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Let me conclude by drawing your attention to the notes placed on your seats which also give ways of getting more information about aspects of my address tonight.

As I have already intimated, I have written a book “An Improbable Feast - the surprising dynamic of hospitality at the heart of multifaith chaplaincy” which weaves the story of the formation of the multifaith chaplaincy at Flinders with a theology of inclusion and hospitality and of chaplaincy itself. I have some copies here if you would like to purchase one, for \$20.

If you want to connect with this journey of exploring the theme of hospitality and faith in the public sphere, do feel free to email me or look me up on my webpage, geoffboyce.com. My address is in the handout.

Thank you for your attention.

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