

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS COUNCIL of AUSTRALIA
NATIONAL CONFERENCE, HOBART, APRIL 2006

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

WHAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE?

CAESAR'S COIN:

PARADOX IN A WORLD OF PANDORA'S BOXES

Bishop John Harrower

Religion is in the news.

Whether it be a former underwear model in her burkha on trial in Indonesia or in her swimwear upon release in Australia, or the Federal Treasurer addressing a large church in a marginal electorate, or the perceived growing influence of the religious right on US and Australian politics, or the continued anti-Christian venom of a well known Australian journalist, or a measured article on Islam and Democracy in the March 2006 Quadrant magazine. Religion is in the news.

What is the place of religion in personal, national and international life? We live in an increasingly interdependent world. Events in Paris seem eerily mirrored in Cronulla. Is this the same shadow?

In a world of religious convictions, religious conversation is imperative.

Australians speak of multiculturalism but have been slow to speak of religion. In the days of my youth I recall being told it was not polite to speak of politics, sex and religion. The baby boomers were quick to incorporate sex and politics into public discourse, but both slow and inept at including religion.

This omission of religious discourse has left an impoverished Australia: impoverished in its social fabric, capacity to build harmony, leadership both locally and internationally, its educational heritage and institutions both public and private.

There are people wanting to address this omission. Just this week I have reviewed a manuscript concerning the doctrine of God in Islam and Christianity and the implications of belief on behaviour. The manuscript is one of an emerging literature on religion and the behavioural consequences of religious conviction. Loyalty, faithfulness, submission, holiness, honesty and deceit, are explored.

The age old maxim resonates: "we become like that which we worship". As postulated in a recent work: "The overall purpose of this book is to show how ideas about God have shaped the history and culture of the West, and therefore of the world – including both "good" and "bad" consequences". (Rodney Stark, "For the Glory of God: how monotheism led to reformations, science, witch-hunts, and the end of slavery", Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 2003, p.2).

The significance of religion to societal flourishing, or lack thereof, has been explored by Stark who writes: “Let me state my thesis: *Central doctrines of Christianity prompted and sustained attractive, liberating, and effective social relations and organizations* (italics-the author’s).” (“The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a few Centuries”, HarperSanFrancisco, 1996, p.211)

A world of religious convictions is demanding for community leadership.

Too frequently, national leadership has sought to either deny the significance of religion in life or to assume religion devotees desire some form of theocracy. A recent essay, “The Curious Rise of Anti-Religious Hysteria” (Policy, Vol. 22 No. 1, Autumn 2006, pp.7- 12) comments,

“Intemperate attacks on the religious right resonate with progressives, but such attacks clearly do little to undermine the powerful search for meaning that prevails across society. That is why a growing number of liberal and leftist politicians have called for a new moral dimension in their political platforms.” But the essay is critical of such attempts, “a morality manufactured in response to the demands of political pragmatism is bound to lack any organic relationship to lived experience” and hence this “pragmatic search for a ready-made moral purpose usually turns into an arbitrary exercise in picking and choosing some inoffensive values.” The essay notes the vigorous criticism of the CS Lewis Narnia story, now movie, *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*, from critics such as Polly Toynbee of the UK *Guardian*, “Narnia represents everything that is most hateful about religion.” The essay concludes: “For all its faults, the [Narnia] movie attempts to transmit a powerful sense of belief, bravery and sacrifice. Such sentiments are alien to a cultural elite that regards the expression of any sort of strong belief as another form of that dreaded fundamentalism. Envy, bad faith and instrumentalism: these are the raw materials that fuel today’s anti-religious crusade.”

I note that our values come from the deeper currents of our life and inform all aspects of it, including our political and social institutions. We live in a world of strongly held convictions and the education agenda must reflect this if young Australians are to fulfil their role as engaged citizens in our own nation and in the international community.

Leadership which is incapable of engaging with this issue will fail.

Who will prepare this calibre of leadership in a world of religious conviction?

'God' made an uncharacteristic appearance during the last federal election. Of course, protagonists frequently attempt to co-opt God in support of their particular human purposes. If we disagree with co-opting God, should God then be excluded from public issues? Senator Amanda Vanstone certainly stated so in the debate concerning stem cell research, “Your religion is your own business and no-one else's”. But religion as “private” has rarely been the case: religion is rather personal and public, at least in the world’s major religions.

The Editorial of The Weekend Australian' April 15-16 2006, page 14, declared,

Christianity is cool again. . . . In the 1960s, many baby boomers declared "God is dead". Now, a younger generation appears to be rejecting the stand of its parents. Today, 40 per cent of young people surveyed say religion is important in their lives, almost double the total in 1978. And 56 per cent consider themselves spiritual even though they don't go to church. This new wave of religious belief reflects a quest for meaning beyond the mere material that is part of the essence of our humanity. For millions of people, religion offers an answer.

It is because "religion offers an answer" that educators and leadership must understand people who hold religious convictions, and in this openness and understanding be capable of educating others.

Caesar's Coin: where the state and religious convictions meet.

Some 2000 years ago in seeking to entrap Jesus zealous religious leaders joined with their traditional enemies of crafty expediency in asking, "Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to the emperor (Caesar), or not?" (Luke 20:20-26)

"Yes" or "No"! If Jesus answered "Yes", then he would lose all credibility with the people who were following him. If Jesus answered "No", then he would be in open rebellion against the Roman power. How did he respond? By asking the question, Jesus was the master of the question: "Show me a denarius (a coin – a day's wage). Whose head and whose title does it bear?" They said, "The emperor's." ²⁵[Jesus] said to them, "Then give to the emperor (Caesar) the things that are the emperor's (Caesar's), and to God the things that are God's." ²⁶And they were not able in the presence of the people to trap him by what he said; and being amazed by his answer, they became silent."

Note: Later on, his enemies in seeking his death falsely accuse Jesus of forbidding the people to pay taxes to Caesar. (Luke 23:2)

I recall after some church services, in which I had made reference to political issues, of being firmly reminded by a local politician to "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's". The politician never did seem to recall the final phrase of Jesus' reply, "and to God the things that are God's"!

As I reflect on Jesus and his use of Caesar's coin, I believe that there are certain criteria from the Jesus' faith tradition which are helpful -

Firstly, Christians have learned a dual loyalty, "Then give to the emperor (Caesar) the things that are the emperor's (Caesar's), and to God the things that are God's." - to God and to the nation they belong to. Sometimes for conscience sake, they choose loyalty to God. This was the seed of Cardinal Sin's church opposition to President Marcos in the 1980s, and to the Rwandan genocide in 1994, and other national crises. Any loyalty to the nation that is above loyalty to God and to Christ is idolatry.

Secondly, people must be permitted the freedom to choose - the exercise of the will is crucial to our community life.

A third criterion insists that we are to seek and uphold the truth and promote attendant opportunities to seek and discuss life issues.

The fourth criterion concerns the corruption of public and private life, a result of our rebellion against God.

A fifth criterion concerns character, both individual and national. Character is a quality of inner conviction, of the 'heart'. A voluntary demonstration of national pride is distinct from an enforced observance that results in both a hollow soul and the fear of being seen to be unpatriotic. My love for my country may be crushed by an invasion of external symbols, fear driven compliance and outward conformity.

A similar response to the question: Does Christian faith have any role in public life? comes from Bishop Lesslie Newbigin, formerly of India:

“To forswear politics means surrendering control of 75 percent of life to forces over which neither the Christian, nor anyone else, has any control. That cannot be called a serious attempt to implement the requirements of God's rule.”

(“Signs Amid the Rubble: The Purposes of God in Human History”, Lesslie Newbigin, Eerdmans, Cambridge, 2003.).

For Newbigin the Christian's active participation in all aspects of life, including politics, was the very stuff of our entering into God's purposes for human history.

Not every area of the academy has undertaken empathetic enquiry in matters of religious conviction.

Professor of Sociology and Comparative Religion at the University of Washington, Rodney Stark, in the Introduction to his recent two volume study of the historical consequences of monotheism commented on the antireligious bias of sociology,

“It seems appropriate for me to acknowledge that until very recently, nearly all social scientists who studied religion did so from antireligious motives and premised their work on atheism – and many still do. . . At the start of the twentieth century the famous french sociologist Emile Durkheim taught that the fundamental reality is that society itself is always the true object of religious worship: “god . . . can be nothing else than [society] itself, personified and represented to the imagination”.”

Stark concludes his Introduction with these words,

“While it obviously isn't necessary that social scientists who want to understand religion be religious, it is necessary that they be able to sufficiently suspend their disbelief so as to gain some sense of the phenomenology of faith and worship. Even Emile Durkheim seems eventually to have accepted this. In remarks made to a meeting of “free thinkers” in 1914, he expressed it this way: “[W]hat I ask of the free thinker is that he should confront religion in the same mental state as the believer . . . [H]e who does not bring to the study of religion a sort of religious sentiment cannot speak about it! He is like a blind man trying to talk about color”.”

Stark observes, “This was not Durkheim's view when he was young, nor was it mine. But, just as Durkheim came to a more mature outlook, so have I. It is in this spirit that I invite you to examine some of the direct consequences of monotheism on our common history.”

[Rodney Stark, “One True God”, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 2001, pages 5, 6.]

Unless leadership (and educators to educate them) is capable of examining the consequences of religious belief and practice on our human history we will be the poorer for it. Unless we learn from history, we will be victims of our own history.

What makes the difference?

Leadership educated in the consequences of religious conviction on our common life.

Our leaders in 2020 will have received foundations in religious beliefs and practices and their consequences for human resource management, entrepreneurship, community development and interpersonal and inter-cultural skills both locally and globally. Will your graduates be there? Will your school make the difference?

And this leadership is increasingly being called for in the business community.

In January of this year the Boston Consulting Group published a report “The Manager of the 21st Century: 2020 Vision” authored by J Nicholson and A Nairn.

“The years to 2020 will see a substantial new agenda unfold for managers and executives. They will need to respond to major changes in their external environment, globally and domestically, as well as changes in the workplace and changing expectations of their role and the way their performance is assessed. The new executive agenda will place responsibility on educations and Human Resources specialists to develop the next generation of executives, and up skill the current generation.” (p.6)

The Report goes on to analyse three major areas: The Changing World; The Changing Workplace and The Changing Mindset (of Managers). In each of these areas the importance of people, treating them with respect and engaging their skills and life priorities flexibly, signifies that “executives will face renewed pressure to operate effectively in other markets and cultures. . . . They will need to take the building of language and inter-cultural skills more seriously.” (pp.12,13)

How might this education for life in a world of religious convictions be undertaken?

Prominent Australian educationalist, Brian V. Hill, is a long time advocate of the vital role of religious education in schools. His 2004 book “Exploring Religion in School: a national priority” (Openbook Publishers,, Adelaide, 2004) set out the parameters of such a program. Voicing this ongoing concern in a more recent address “Does it Matter How Schools Teach Values?” (ACL Conference, Canberra, 2005) Hill argues for the “explicit study of values in the **core** curriculum, complemented by an across-the-curriculum acknowledgement of the ubiquitous role of meaning frameworks in all

areas of study.” He identifies the key to this being “a new-look religious education component which helps students see the need for a personal framework of meaning and purpose, and acquaints them with the resources available in prominent religious traditions, with special attention to the Christian faith.” (p.11)

Earlier this month Professor Hedley Beare launched his work, “How we envisage schooling in the 21st century: Applying the new ‘imaginary’” (iNet:International Networking for Educational Transformation, Specialist Schools and Academies Trust, London, 2006).

Beare's general proposition is that the way people understand schools and education is different from the past and because the “world-view used to explain life on the planet – what the social philosopher Charles Taylor calls ‘social imaginary’ – inexorably influences the way people vision schooling”. (p.5) The inter-connectedness of our life is “the new pervasive metaphor” for the 21st century imaginary. This is seen in “a/ Networks and webs; b/ The interconnectedness of a living system; and c/ Globalism, or the *planet* seen as a unitary, interconnected, living system”. (p.17)

A learning program which takes this new imaginary seriously will be “increasingly borderless and transnational, and accessing the resources both of the storage and the generation of knowledge becomes relatively easy and routine.” (p.22) Moreover, the student “knows that education is international and that many of her educational programs and services could be generated offshore and will deal with offshore issues and topics”. (p.30)

The analogy of living systems to education highlights that educational organizations are organisms, part of a global organism, “which depend for their well-being on people, on how well they team, and on their modes for combining their several talents and expertise.” The “living-ness (of a network) is a component of the new imaginary.” (p.47) Beare then explores schooling to produce global citizens: “Multiculturalism and the interactions of cultures and religions become immediately and obviously relevant.” (p.49)

“There is a new connectivity forming across the globe, and it shows clearly in schooling practices. It involves networking; international rather than local curriculum predilections in the curriculum; planetary priorities; the new sciences; excursions and visits beyond the local area; new approaches to literature, art, music, languages; interfaith and intercultural learnings.” (p.59)

In developing their models for education both Beare and Hill recognize that we live in a global village. A village which is plural: pluralism is here to stay. In a plural Australia we have much of the global village present. Will your school develop strategic partnerships with community groups, including diverse religious groups, to enrich the learning experience of your school communities?

CONCLUSION

Education plays a vital role in the ongoing formation of Australia, and Australia is increasingly discovering itself in a world of religion. By way of example, the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs and the Australian Multicultural Foundation 2004 report on Religion, Diversity and Safeguarding Australia, (http://www.amf.net.au/PDF/religionCulturalDiversity/Main_Report.pdf) concludes,

“God, globalisation and social cohesion are all major topics, especially in a world where there is a new kairos, a new moment of history when new dangers and new opportunities lie before Australia. The new approach to international order and to the safeguarding of Australia includes to take seriously the resurgence of religion in all its diversity. . . . All the great religious figures of history have been teachers - and education is at the core of the multi-faith agenda.” (p.127)

As a Christian I concur with Dr Ian Barns of Murdoch University, who powerfully stated in his Conclusion to “Christian Engagement in Public Issues: a missionary challenge” (*Zadok paper S131, Autumn 2004, p.10):

“At the heart of Christian engagement with whatever culture it finds itself in is the message of the public lordship of Jesus: that in his life, death, resurrection and ascension, Jesus has overcome the age old powers that have oppressed and disfigured human personhood, society, politics and history and that he now calls people to repent, be baptized 'into him' and to find in him the source and goal of all things.”

“The basic missionary task is to reframe such (public) issues, to contest the taken for granted enlightenment notions of human autonomy, and to re-vision them in terms of the alternative vision of God's kingdom. That is not to suggest that such issues are not important. Indeed, it is to claim that the ultimate resolution of the most intractable of moral problems is ultimately to be found in obedience to Jesus the Christ, the one in whom are found the treasures and wisdom of God.”

Now that is one challenging statement: a statement of deep religious conviction speaking forth a tradition of active engagement between religious and socio-political life.

Educators, “education is at the core of the multi-faith agenda”: an educational agenda in and for a world of religious convictions.

This is the agenda that will make the difference.

Will your school make the difference?

Bishop John Harrower, 21 April 2006