

## **You are a chaplain at a higher education institution: So what, and where to from here?**

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores the teaching of theology and world religions in Australian secular universities. Changes in the student and staff population along with attitudes towards religion and spirituality have led to changes in the models that are used in chaplaincy in Australian higher education institutions. The paper, also, looks at the challenge of the plurality of religions presented to students on our university campuses. What is the effect of the world-wide revitalisation of religion on our student and staff population? Will this affect the chaplain's work on campus? How are chaplains to deal with the challenge of working amongst students and staff with the attitudes they have towards religion and spirituality and other challenges that they face in life within higher education institutions?

### **Keywords**

*Chaplaincy in higher education, religious diversity, multiculturalism, tertiary students, spirituality*

### **INTRODUCTION**

A newly appointed university chaplain sat in the chaplaincy office as she pondered her role among the 25,000 students and staff that would pass by that office during their time on the campus. Those who went past could not possibly know the thoughts and concerns that she had for them, their educational interests, their background, their hopes and fears, their needs and desires. Her desire was to tell them about Jesus but knew that this was not part of her job description. She knew that she was not to proselytise. How, then, was she to nurture and challenge faith in those who were going past?

I suspect that every chaplain or campus minister who comes to a higher education institution has expectations and questions about the ministry in which she or he will be engaged. Will I be able to work with others in chaplaincy? Will my counselling skills be adequate for the issues placed before me? How can I be an authentic and effective religious presence among the students, academic and general staff on campus? Hereon in the paper the terms "chaplain" and "campus minister" are regarded as interchangeable terms.

### **AUSTRALIAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS**

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Before embarking upon the model of chaplaincy into which the new chaplain finds herself, she reflects on the nature of the higher education institutions in which she will be working.

In Australia there are three groups of higher education institutions on which chaplains or campus ministers operate. First, there are the private universities, for example, religious denomination-based institutions such as Australian Catholic University with campuses in Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory, The University of Notre Dame in Fremantle, Broome and Sydney, and Avondale College in Cooranbong, New South Wales. Bond University on the Gold Coast is non-denominational and is the first private university established in Australia. Each has its own campus ministry. In addition to these there are a number of Bible Colleges and theological seminaries that belong to a number of Christian denominations.

The second group consists of public universities with campuses throughout metropolitan and regional areas of each state. They were established as secular institutions where theology was not taught. Various Christian denominations, however, established residential colleges for university students. It was in the colleges that the systematic religious teaching of the denomination was to be found. Most of the public universities in Australia now include a chaplaincy or multi-faith centre that is serviced by chaplains or campus ministers. Some of the chaplains are employed full-time in that capacity by their denomination while others come into the chaplaincy on a part-time basis.

The third group consists of Technical and Further Education campuses spread throughout Australia. There are several instances in which TAFE colleges share a campus with a university. A few of the stand-alone TAFE campuses provide for chaplaincy or campus minister services. There is a chaplaincy service at four NSW TAFE colleges, including the Ultimo TAFE College in Sydney and a number of TAFE colleges in Victoria. The Victorian chaplains are accredited by the Council for Chaplains in Tertiary Institutions, or CCTI.

The secular public universities did not teach theology in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This meant that provision was made in places other than the universities for the theological education of those who would enter the ministries of the various Christian denominations. This was accomplished through the establishment of denominational theological colleges and seminaries along with Bible Colleges for the theological training and the Christian formation of those preparing for denominational ministries. This situation, in turn, led to the establishment of a number of Christian Colleges of Divinity.

### **COLLEGES OF DIVINITY**

The first was the Melbourne College of Divinity (MCD) which was established by a Victorian State of Parliament Act passed in December 1910. The College then represented the Church of England, the Baptist, Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian churches, and by co-optation, the Churches of Christ. It offered awards of Licentiate in Theology (LTh) and a Bachelor of Divinity (BD). The requirements for the Melbourne BD were modeled on the University of London's Bachelor of Divinity (BD). The Act was amended in 1956, 1972, 1979 and 1990, to enable the MCD to become more comprehensive, and was thoroughly revised in 2005 (Melbourne College of Divinity 2010). The MCD affiliated with the University of Melbourne in 1993.

The Victorian Government announced on 30 August 2011 that subject to state parliamentary approval MCD will become 'MCD University of Divinity' becoming effective from the start of the next year (Trounson 2011). This was realised when "on 1 January 2012, MCD University of Divinity officially became Australia's first University of Specialisation and the first university to be established in Victoria in over two decades.

"Under the Federal government's provisions, protocols and guidelines for 'Establishing Australian Universities' and following a rigorous 15-month period of assessment, Melbourne College of

Divinity's application for Specialised University status was approved" (MCD University of Divinity 2012).

Other Colleges of Divinity were established in Adelaide in 1979 (Adelaide College of Divinity 2010), Sydney in 1983 (Sydney College of Divinity 2010), and Perth in 1985. Later the Perth College was affiliated with Murdoch University and the Adelaide College was affiliated with Flinders University. Each college had a programme of studies leading to the award of the Bachelor of Theology and some post-graduate degrees. The Sydney College is not affiliated, however, with a secular university even though attempts have been made by the Sydney College of Divinity to affiliate with a number of metropolitan universities. The Adelaide and Perth colleges have been represented by at least the Anglican, Roman Catholic and Uniting Churches. Moore College, an Anglican theological college in Sydney, is not part of the Sydney College of Divinity.

Prior to the establishment of the Melbourne College of Divinity, the Australian College of Theology was founded in 1891 by the General Synod of the Dioceses of the Church of England in Australia. It was founded for the study of theology, especially for the clergy of the Church of England. The Australian College of Theology offered awards of Licentiate in Theology (ThL) and Scholar of Theology (ThSchol) (Australian College of Theology 2010). Students for the Anglican ministry were taught at theological colleges established throughout Australia and examined by the Australian College of Theology.

### **THE STUDY OF WORLD RELIGIONS IN SECULAR UNIVERSITIES**

Prior to the introduction of the study of theology in Australian secular universities the study of world religions and spiritualities was being introduced into secular universities in the United Kingdom, the USA, Canada and other English speaking countries onwards from the 1960s. Lancaster University (2010) established a Department of Religious Studies during the 1960s and lays claim to being the first Department of Religious Studies at a university in England. Many of the universities in the United Kingdom, including, Cambridge, Oxford, Leeds, Bristol, Open University, Nottingham, Wales, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Glasgow include Religious Studies within a Department that also includes theology. The situation in the United States is similar with the establishment of a Department of Religious Studies at Yale University (2006) in 1963, University of California, Santa Barbara (2010) in 1964 and Stanford University (Department of Religious Studies 2009) in 1973. In Canada, McGill University taught theology within the Faculty of Arts. However, in "1970 the name of the Faculty was changed to the Faculty of Religious Studies in order to reflect the new emphasis on the academic study of religion" (McGill University 2012). In Australia, the University of Newcastle introduced 'Religious Studies' as a second year course in the B.A. programme in 1979. 'Studies in Religion' was first offered in the B.A. programme at the University of New England in 1992. The 'Graduate Certificate in World Religions' programme started in 2008 at the University of New England. At Monash University a 'Centre for Studies in Religion and Theology' was established by the Faculty of Arts in 1991. The University of Sydney made an appointment to a chair of Religious Studies in 1976 (Osborn 1978). This provided increased opportunities for post-graduate studies in Religious Studies in Sydney.

### **THE STUDY OF THEOLOGY IN AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES**

Except for the private higher education institutions it has been a long, slow process to see the establishment of a department of theology in the secular universities in Australia. The denominational, private universities established a department of theology at the time of their founding according to the denomination of which they were a part. This was an important part of their *raison d'etre*.

In the secular universities the role of chaplain was established during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This was prior to the study of theology or of world religions on Australian public universities.

It was during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that departments of theology were established in Australian universities. In 1986 Murdoch University first offered a degree in theology in association with the Perth College of Divinity (School of Social Sciences and Humanities 2004). Murdoch University, Flinders University and Charles Sturt University continue to offer degrees in Theology in association with Theological Colleges and Colleges of Divinity. The University of Newcastle first offered a Bachelor of Theology programme in 2007 and a chair of theology was established. The theology degree programme and the chair of theology were established in conjunction with the Anglican Diocese of Newcastle after the closure of St. John's Theological College at Morpeth. The programme is offered to students of any or of no particular faith. This programme was independent of a College of Divinity. Prior to these events theology was taught in denominational seminaries or theological colleges, Bible Colleges and through Colleges of Divinity.

Moving from the background of the establishment of institutions for the study of Christian theology and accompanying disciplines like the scriptures, church history, liturgy and spirituality to the study of theology and world religions in Australian Universities we look at the ways in which the individual chaplain may work on the campus. The changes in curriculum that have taken place in universities have changed the ways of chaplaincy in the university setting.

### **MODELS FOR MINISTRY IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Any survey of chaplains or campus ministers soon reveals that there is not a set pattern for campus ministry. In private Christian denomination-based institutions chaplains and campus ministers are employed to bring the distinctive identity and mission of the institution to life. This may involve teaching religion courses, arranging campus worship, retreats, and other programmes of a spiritual nature, along with the pastoral care of students and staff including spiritual and general counselling.

In public higher education the chaplaincy includes chaplains who are attempting to meet the needs of students and staff, including those coming from cultural and religious backgrounds that are different from the majority of students and staff. The campus ministers bring their own distinct models of ministry. Some will be involved in political concerns within the community, issues brought forward by themselves and students and staff, hoping to bring the rest of the community along with them. Some will seek to make an impact on university policies and the direction that the university is going. Their energies are directed towards staff and legislative bodies within the institution. Others become experts in a particular area such as various world religions and their particular needs on campus. Others are members of human, medical and animal ethics committees, while for others counselling is their area of expertise. They provide resources for the university by sharing expertise. The most common campus ministry model, however, probably seeks to provide a balance between the care and nurture of the students and staff through educational programmes, interpersonal connections, providing a 'listening ear' and an 'encouraging tongue' with opportunities for worship, prayer and meditation and for community involvement. In this model, opportunity and encouragement is provided for students to explore faith with regard to vital issues within a secular life in a secular institution, to experience the church in its pluralistic expression along with ecumenism and to be involved in multifaith exploration and social justice. There was a time in the past when the chaplaincy was exclusively Christian. At present, however, this is not the case in many universities. Chaplaincies are multifaith with physical provision being made for a number of religious faiths. This form of ministry varies greatly from one person to another according to personality, gifts and skills and the ability to work amicably with persons of different faith traditions. This form of ministry also varies according to the amount of time the chaplain spends on campus and the expectations of the religious institution to which the person belongs. In some cases the person is on campus to specifically target those affiliated with their own religious body and to gain a few more adherents along the way. Thus the ministry model will vary according to the circumstances of the chaplaincy. There are, however, common tasks for most chaplains and campus ministers. These include pastoral care and spiritual nurture for those whom the chaplains meet. Often there is some kind of administration to be undertaken along with counselling and providing a spiritual presence on campus.

It would be remiss if we did not consider in more detail the implications that multi-faith chaplaincy places upon the individual chaplain. To have a multi-faith chaplaincy implies that the university is part of a multi-faith and multi-cultural society. Gary Bouma (1995) writes, "A multicultural society is one characterised by religious plurality, a willingness to live and let live among religious organisations, a spirit of respect for religion, and of willing cooperation from governments and their agencies at all levels with religions." In Australia, two dominant Christian groups, Anglicans and Catholics, have in the past been the dominant groups in tertiary chaplaincy. This, however, is not the case at present. Chaplains representing minority religious groups are to be found on many campuses. This provides an opportunity for interaction between chaplains from different religious groups as well as students from different groups. A multi-faith chaplaincy centre with a sharing of office and common space enables interaction to take place provided the participants show a willingness to live and let live among religious organisations and show a spirit of respect for religion and a willingness to work together towards a common goal within chaplaincy. This interaction among chaplains enables each person to learn something of other religions and for the chaplains to trust one another in working towards a common goal in chaplaincy. There may be some conflict, however, where particular groups are actively proselytizing. This may apply especially among Pentecostals and some evangelical Protestant groups and some Muslims. Muslims tend to direct their activities, however, towards those "whose ethnic background make them likely candidates" (Bouma 1995).

The effectiveness of a multi-faith chaplaincy depends upon a number of factors, including the university's attitude towards religion and chaplaincy, the religious composition of the university and the availability of suitable people to perform the role of chaplain. The chaplaincy needs to be aware of the constant changes that are taking place within the universities and be prepared to adapt to the new conditions.

Geoff Boyce (2010) writes:

*"[...] essentially, chaplains are free agents to act in compassion to 'do what needs to be done'. If others are doing it already, the chaplain is free to move on. This freedom, this availability, is one of the great gifts that chaplaincy has to offer. Chaplains are able to journey with people long term, not restricted to appointment schedules and limited time for meeting and also free to follow up people off campus, whether that be accompanying a student to hospital, to a law court or to a job interview."*

## **THE STUDENTS**

When we walk around a typical campus today we see students in their late teens and early twenties, casually dressed and listening on their iPod or speaking on a mobile phone or occasionally walking with and speaking with other students. No longer, however, does the majority of the student population consist of those who recently have completed their secondary schooling. There are also older men and women who are back at university studying for a second career. Alongside of other students there are older men and women who are accepting the challenge of university for the first time and some of the older women seeking a career outside of the home. Further to this, approximately 18% of the student population are from overseas countries, mainly from the countries of Asia. In addition to their studies, many students are working at least part-time and in some cases full-time with part-time study. Part-time study extends the length of their time commitment for finishing the degree course with the accompanying strain on many areas of life. In addition to the students on campus there is an increasing number of students who do their studies on-line and who rarely come onto the campus.

The idea of a university education where a wide range of disciplines are studied and which is part of training for life in the world no longer seems to be in the minds of the students. Students are seeking training for a specific career in education, business, law, information technology, engineering, health or the sciences, in a career that will give them optimum financial security or at least job satisfaction. Specialisation is highly regarded. The students are on campus to graduate with at least a bachelor degree within a particular area of expertise and give little thought for 'personal concerns' such as

relationships, sexuality, job satisfaction or religion except when life and study get tough: then they see a counsellor on campus or sometimes approach a campus minister.

### **THE STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS RELIGION**

With this in mind, what are student attitudes towards religion? As may be expected, students' attitudes towards religion are as varied as the students themselves. It would be presumptuous to make sweeping statements or generalisations about all students. From my experience there seems to be a divide between a person's religion and academic study. Sharon says, "I'm here to study for a degree to improve my employment prospects and not to learn about religion or to worship. I can do that elsewhere." The heyday in the twentieth century of the Newman Society, the Student Christian Movement, the Anglican Society and other related student religious societies is past. The numbers of students influenced by such religious societies has declined considerably in the twenty first century. Christian Evangelical groups who employ a number of staff workers maintain a considerable presence on university campuses in all states and territories of Australia, in both metropolitan and regional campuses. Such groups provide definite belief and mission statements, stringent ethical and moral teaching and an evangelical interpretation in the Biblical studies conducted by the group. The number of students involved with such religious groups is relatively small when taken from the total student population. Most Australian universities have established Muslim student associations and societies that encourage Muslim students to maintain their religious practices while on campus. Likewise, a Buddhist Society has been established on many university campuses for overseas students and Australian Buddhists. Other societies and clubs of a spiritual nature include those for Baha'i and Jewish students. Generally, however, the students' academic study is approached from a secular position and is related to professional goals.

### **RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY**

After considering students' attitudes towards religion there is another issue that comes into the mix. In the postmodern era of Western thinking it is quite common to hear the assertion that "I am spiritual but not religious." What is meant by this statement? Bryant, Choi and Yasuno (2003) cite Love (2001), who "defines *religion* as 'a shared system of beliefs, principles or doctrines that relate to a belief in or worship of a supernatural power or powers regarded as creator(s) or governor(s) of the universe.' (p. 8)".

On the other hand, *spirituality* is much more difficult to define. David Tacey (2000) acknowledges the difficulty in giving a precise definition of spirituality. He writes of spirituality as "a desire for connectedness, which often expresses itself as an emotional relationship with an invisible sacred presence." He argues that spirituality for tribal and indigenous people was part of the normal, natural way of living in the world. For a person of the 21<sup>st</sup> century spirituality is available to all and not just for a "gifted" few, or for those who like that kind of thing. Spirituality is a "desire to relate to the core of living creation... and to find a stable point in the teeming chaos that modern life has become."

Hugh Mackay (1997) writes of the Australian post-war baby boomers as "Saying 'No' to Religion." Church attendance figures had fallen during the adult life of the boomers. There had been a major fall in involvement with the mainstream churches with some boomers turning to Eastern religions such as Buddhism rather than Christianity. Other boomers engaged in forms of mysticism, meditation with or without a mantra, the use of crystals, tarot cards and other forms of clairvoyance. Some admitted that they were hooked on materialism, while others, going through a mid-life crisis, realised that they had no sense of spirituality in their lives.

A national study of the spirituality of Generation Y (people born 1981-1995) was conducted in Australia between 2003 and 2007 (Mason, Singleton. et al. 2007). The study found that just over half of Generation Y said that they believed in God (51 per cent), 17 per cent said that they did not believe and 32 per cent were unsure. Almost half were not affiliated with any Christian denomination or other

religion. Religion was a private matter for them and provided they did no harm to others their religious/spiritual beliefs and practices were personal lifestyle choices.

When questioned specifically about spirituality, the pilot-test interviewees, especially the younger ones, were not sure what the word meant (Mason, Singleton. et al. 2007). The study found that generally Generation Y was not a generation of spiritual/religious seekers. Many of this generation pursued a secular life rejecting a belief in God and any concept of religiosity or spirituality. Human experience, reason and scientific explanations were the basis for the life they lived. In fact, they were mirroring the life expectations of their parents.

There are two other issues that affect students' attitude towards religion and spirituality, namely, religious diversity among the Australian population and the revitalisation of religion throughout the world.

### **RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY IN AUSTRALIA**

The 2006 Australia-wide census provided the following statistics concerning religious diversity in Australia. One quarter of the population self-assess themselves as Catholics, a further 18.5 per cent were Anglicans and 11.7 per cent were Uniting, Presbyterian or Orthodox with 18.5 per cent claiming "no religion". This did not mean that they were atheists: they did not affiliate themselves with any religion.

Further to the religious diversity in 2006, there were more Buddhists (2.1%) in Australia than Baptists (1.6%), more Muslims (1.7%) than Lutherans (1.3%), more Hindus (0.7%) than Jews (0.4%), more Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh Day Adventists (0.3%) than Churches of Christ or Sikhs (0.1%).

There are significant regional variations, also, in religious diversity. This applies to the state capital cities as well as regional and country centres. This religious diversity needs to be taken into account when considering students at Australian universities and other campuses of higher education.

If there is such religious diversity among students and staff a narrow range of chaplains will no longer suffice. This again depends on regional conditions but to have only chaplains from a Christian background may no longer suffice for the student and staff population. The chaplaincy will need to be more inter-faith or at least have chaplains who are equipped to deal with religious diversity.

### **REVITALISATION OF RELIGION**

In addition to the religious diversity that is being offered in Australia and among students in higher education there is a revitalisation of religion throughout the world. This applies to Australia where it is a case of 'out with the old' and 'in with the new'. The 'old' mainline Anglican, Protestant and Catholics do not appear to be part of the revitalisation. On the other hand, the 'new' includes the many variations of Christian Pentecostalism and conservative evangelical and fundamentalists. 'New age' movements are also part of the revitalisation within Australia.

Religion is part of the public and political domain. Politicians are eager to profess their religious affiliation or otherwise and they make clear the religious bases of their policies. At the same time Muslims press for recognition of their values and for the recognition of their religion in law and society.

### **SUMMING UP**

It is important to see something of the background to the environment in which chaplains in higher education work. Consequently, this paper has looked at the higher education institutions in which the

chaplains/campus ministers work throughout Australia. It is during the last half century that provision has been made for the study of theology and world religions within secular universities' curriculum.

Changes in the student and staff populations have led to the consideration of a number of models for chaplaincy within the higher education sector. There are, however, as many models as there are chaplains because each campus minister brings her/his uniqueness into the mix.

The paper, also, considered the most important element in the mix for chaplaincy: the students and their attitudes towards religion and spirituality in the midst of the religious diversity that is found in Australia, along with the world-wide revitalisation of religion and its place in Australian society.

The paper shows that the university is a vastly different place to what it was for previous generations and chaplains are continually on the merry-go-round to accommodate the changes whether it is a gentle breeze or a blustering gale as we attempt to be part of the graduation of a well-rounded, educated person who will be among the leaders in the world of tomorrow.

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