For *Lucas*

Australian Secularism, Religious Not-for-Profits and Higher Education: Connections and Gaps.

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Abstract

Australian secularism of a characteristically pragmatic kind is demonstrated in the historical partnership between the state and churches in delivering education and social services. While the quantum of social services (and schooling) delivered through such partnerships has been increasing in recent years, changes in the nature of these arrangements, especially in the contracts between the state and the church organisations delivering the services is threatening the long-term future of the pragmatic partnership model. After discussing the historical context and describing these recent changes the paper focuses on the issue of leadership development for Christian social service organisations where the tensions are perhaps the most intense. The tensions over leadership development are interesting from a historical point of view because they occur at the intersection of social services sector and our higher education system with its sharp division between church-run theological education for Christian ministry and public universities. Some ways out of the current dilemmas of leadership development in the Christian not-for-profit sector are suggested.

The Argument and Why it Matters

I will argue that the Australian form of the secular, manifested in the cooperative arrangements between the state and Christian not-for-profit organisations, has not been matched by a similar cooperative arrangement in Australian higher education, leaving a gap in leadership training that imperils the future of Christian not-for-profit organisations. What I'm doing is connecting up our dominant historical understanding of the secular, the leadership training needs of our Christian not-for-profit organisations, and the history of Australian higher education with a view to identifying tensions between these.

This is no small matter because Church-related not-for-profit organisations deliver approximately 40% of social services in Australia, often under contracting arrangements with various levels of Australian government. Non-government schools, the vast majority of which are religiously affiliated, mostly Christian but also Islamic and Jewish, educate almost half of secondary school students in Australia. This proportion is rising. Christian not-for-profit organisations also have a substantial presence in our hospital system and our international aid and development sector. If our higher education system cannot supply leaders who can run these large and complex organisations, and just as importantly maintain the Christian identity and mission which has made them so effective, and the government so reliant on them in these crucial sectors, then we have a big problem.

The gap in our higher education system came about because of a chance coincidence between English struggles over the place of Anglicans, Dissenters and Catholics in their university system and the foundation of the Australian universities in the mid-19th century. In other words, the gap exists because of circumstances in higher education that are an exception to the dominant secular tradition in Australia, and therefore in tension with it.

Recent developments in Australian culture, including transformations of the secular have meant that the original gap in our higher education system has widened at the same time as the needs of Christian not-for-profit organisations have intensified. So, this really is a historical paper rather than just an opinionated survey.

The Secular in Australia

The story of the secular in Australia is magisterially told by Chavura Tregenza and Gascoigne (2019). As they argue, an American-style wall of separation between the church and state is foreign to Australia; instead, we have what might be called a "Christian secular state" which sees "religion as instrumental to the realisation of the state's secular aims" because religion is the foundation of morality, both metaphysically and motivationally (p9). They trace the willingness of the state to cooperate with and fund churches in pursuit of shared goals, from the early 19th century Church Acts, through to the late 19th century Education Acts, and beyond into 20th century welfare, schooling and health arrangements. Piggin and Linder (2019) similarly describe relations between church and state as "complementarity in the interests of nation building" (p562)

The meaning of the secular has not of course remained constant over time and Chavura Tregenza and Gascoigne (2019) (along with Williams 2015, Chilton 2020, and Piggin and Linder 2019) devote particular attention to the shifting terrain of the late 20th century. Paradoxically in this period of declining church identification and attendance the engagement of the state with Christian education and Christian not-for-profit organisations has actually increased. The most famous example is the extension of state aid to Roman Catholic and other religious schools by the Menzies government in the 1960s. But equally significant is the contracting-out of government services, with many of the contracts being won by church-related not-for-profit organisations. For instance, the late 1990s saw the abolition of the Commonwealth Employment Service and the government running competitive tenders for the provision of a job matching and training services, with almost all of the contracts initially being won by church-related organisations, though diluted somewhat in recent tender rounds by the entry of commercial for-profit providers (Oslington 2002, 2005). Another instance is the offering of government contracts for relationship counselling services, almost all of which were won by church-related organisations (Butcher and Freyens 2011).

This combination of the growing importance of Christian not-for-profit organisations in the not-for-profit and school education sectors at the same time as declining church attendance, declining religious literacy, and rising hostility to Christianity in Australian culture pressure on the organisations Christian identity and mission. As Judd, Robinson and Errington (2012 p4) write there is a crisis among Christian not for profits "who they are and why they are

doing what they are doing". Christian identity and mission must of course respond to its context, and the context is changing. However if these organisations lose their Christian identity and mission they will become indistinguishable from the government providers of these services that they replaced in the 1990s, and arguably their effectiveness will decline. They will lose their supportive communities. They will struggle to attract, retain and motivate front-line staff. Volunteering will decline. There will be no longer attractive partners for the state. Recipients of social services, school students, aged care residents, the sick and injured who use our hospitals, and many others will be left paying higher prices for inferior services. The cost of delivering these services for the government will rise, as will taxation to cover the increasing cost.

The Leadership Education Gap.

We know from the historical experience in Christian social services (Greer and Horst 2014, Judd Robinson and Errington 2012, Cleary 2012, Gallet 2016, Hynd 2016 2022) and education (Marsden 1994, Burtchaell 1998, Collier 2008, Hastie 2017) that the key to maintaining Christian identity and mission is having religiously committed and well-formed leaders for these organisations.

But as well as maintaining Christian identity and mission, particular skills are also needed to run complex organisations in an even more complex environment. Skills of Leadership, HR, Finance, Government relations, Marketing, Fundraising and so on. This leaves many organisations caught between the two needs – or as I put the dilemma in a previous article – choosing between an incompetent minister or a theologically ignorant but sharp-suited MBA graduate (Oslington2019). It is an even more complicated dilemma than that because ministerial training is typically training for a preaching ministry in a congregational setting, so that employing graduates of our church theological colleges does not necessarily help with maintaining identity and mission. What is needed is theological formation plus the capacity to integrate theology with leadership, HR, finance and the other relevant disciplines. Integration is difficult, and not something that Australian theological colleges have demonstrated much capacity to teach.

We desperately need leaders who can maintain Christian identity and mission as well as run complex organisations was shown s by a series of interviews with senior Christian not-for-

profit leaders funded by the Genesis Foundation in 2018 (See Oslington 2020). However, the project could not identify any existing programs in our higher education system that give leaders both things that are needed. Australian theological training as it stands does deliver business skills, and our university business degrees do not address the mission and identity needs of Christian organisations. In the interviews some Christian NFP CEOs indicated they had sent leaders to the NFP programs of overseas universities such as Leuven and Stanford.

Roots of the Problem in the Separation between our Universities and Theological Education.

Australia's higher education system is unusual in its sharp separation between universities which typically exclude theology, and our church colleges which have taught only theology. In the UK and the US theology is taught in universities, and in the US at least there are a plenitude of Christian colleges and universities teaching both theology and the business disciplines. The reasons for Australia's separation lie in an historical coincidence (discussed in Oslington 2014, Treloar 1997 2017) and represent an exception to the usual pattern of the secular in Australia.

Consider Australia's first university, the University of Sydney (Kaye 2020, Horne and Sherrington 2012). The years leading up to its foundation in 1852 were years of intense debate about the place of Dissenting Protestants and Roman Catholics in the traditionally Anglican universities of England. In the colony of New South Wales the leading citizens were pushing for a university and the state was generally supportive. However, the prospect of a university ignited sectarian disputes about the role of the colonial churches in the new institution. The risk of these sectarian disputes ruining the new university was heightened by the strength of the Scottish Presbyterians and the largely Irish Catholic Churches in the colony - Anglicans were neither officially established nor the dominant force in the colony. Added to this was a fair bit of anticlerical sentiment among the lay leading citizens of the colony. They wanted a university rather than a rolling clerical squabble. So, the University of Sydney ended up excluding the teaching of theology and barring clerics from holding professorial positions (though the rule was subsequently bent for pragmatic reasons, including the appointment of one of the inaugural professors John Woolley, and the most recent Vice-Chancellor Michael Spence). These bans on theology teaching and clerics were imposed by a university which included the advancement of religion among its constitutional

objects - clerics perhaps being seen by the mostly devout lay founders of the university as an impediment to the advancement of religion. The role of the churches was restricted to residential colleges at the perimeter of the campus, with no formal teaching function and no power over the award of degrees. This was a situation much lamented by the clergy of the colony, especially the Anglican Bishop Broughton who refused to have anything to do with the "godless" institution. He and the leaders of other denominations set up their own colleges for the training of ministers, separate from the universities. The situation in Melbourne was broadly similar with theology excluded, though some of the Melbourne residential colleges had a role in ministerial training, with these and other denominational institutions eventually joining together to become the Melbourne College of Divinity (Sherlock 2016). The pattern was similar in the other Australian states, sometimes with an even sharper separation between their first universities and theological training for ministry. Growth of Australia's university system in the 20th century didn't change this pattern, and if anything, theology became even more marginal to our universities. Our universities lack chapels, and you can always find the rundown student chaplaincy office behind the toilets on the perimeter of the campus.

This Australian higher education settlement, though the product of the historical coincidence between the beginnings of a university system and the sectarian disputes in the English university system, operated not too badly for a long period. What saved it were two assumptions that could be made in the 19th century and for much of the 20th century. Firstly, that there was a broadly Christian underpinning of our universities. Academic staff and students were usually knowledgeable about the Christian faith and often personally committed to it. Discussion of religious matters - especially a generic moderate Protestantism- was perfectly acceptable in the classroom provided that doctrinal and practical questions likely to provoke sectarian controversy were avoided. Student religious organisations were strong on campus, and supported by academic staff and often the administration of the university, provided that sectarian controversy was avoided. Secondly, the assumption that theological training was mainly preparation for ministry in the various Christian denominations. There was little demand for theological training for other purposes, a situation to which the first assumption of a largely Christian underpinning of the University contributed.

Neither assumption is now valid. In relation to the first assumption, there is now what might generously be interpreted as radical pluralism within our universities (perhaps even a healthy

pluralism that is hospitable to other faiths), or in the eyes of less generous observers a strong and widespread hostility to Christian faith within our universities. Of course, there are still many Christian staff and students, but the culture of the classroom and the wider university community is no longer one where Christianity can be publicly discussed. Except to be warned against or ridiculed. Any sense of the responsibility of the university for the moral formation, Christian or otherwise, of students is long gone. Compounded with this hostility is a staggering degree of ignorance among even the brightest and best-read staff and students about the Christian faith. Our universities have lost their broadly Christian underpinning. In relation to the second assumption, only a minority of students at our theological colleges are now candidates for ordained ministry. Many are studying theology for personal interest, sometimes as a retirement project. Others are taking some theology to prepare themselves for jobs in parachurch organisations, chaplaincy, or perhaps teaching in a Christian school.

Theological training was designed for, and largely still focused on preaching ministry in a congregational setting, and it struggles to be fit for the other purposes. It is unfit for the purpose of preparing leaders for the Christian not-for-profit sector.

Arguably the collapse of these two assumptions underlying our Australian higher education settlement also leaves contemporary university education unfit for purpose of educating students. Without the sense of a larger purpose and the connecting framework that the Christian underpinning of the enterprises provided in earlier times students are leave university with a bag of skills that they hope will translate into a well-remunerated and satisfying career. Miroslav Volf (2015) and many others have written on this aspect of contemporary universities, and the Australian student experience is consonant with his observations. However, this is not the main concern of my paper.

My concern is primarily with the lack of capacity of a higher education system divided between public universities, which do not teach theology, and church run theological colleges which do not teach business leadership to equip the future leaders of our Christian not-for-profit organisations.

Exceptions and Possible Solutions

An objection to the argument I have outlined is that Australian Catholic University and the University of Notre Dame Australia are exceptions to the separation of university education from theological education. This may be so, but both these institutions struggle to overcome the Australian higher education settlement I have described. There seems to be little interaction between their faculties of theology and other faculties such as business - few students study both. Even fewer are pushed to integrate their theological studies with their other studies. Moreover, as Catholic institutions ACU and Notre Dame appeal primarily to students in that tradition, even with the progress that Australia has made in recent decades in overcoming the Protestant-Catholic sectarianism. It must also be said that neither is among our leading Australian universities. So, these Catholic institutions remain a welcome but partial exception to the argument I have outlined.

Australia's newest university Avondale, associated with the Seventh Day Adventist Church, appeals largely to members of that church, and this plus its rural NSW location mean it is unlikely to exert a major influence on our system.

Something must be said about a curious development that flowed from the switch of government funding of universities in the 1990s from block grants to funding based on the number of students enrolled. This created an opportunity for enterprising university Arts Faculty Deans to cut a deal with a nearby church theological colleges to include the college in their Faculty's student numbers and thereby obtain additional government funding. Several of the newer universities took advantage of this, including Charles Sturt University, Flinders University, and Murdoch University. After their adoption by universities the theological colleges operated much as previously (even to the extent of the church still paying the staff salaries), though they were slightly richer because of the share of the additional funding they could claw back from the university, and they gained access to better libraries and technology for delivering online education. The more recent capping of government funding made these sorts of arrangements less attractive for universities and the only one that has survived is Charles Sturt University. This arrangement has survived so far because university and the theological college became more entwined with each other through university buildings on Canberra land leased from the church, and a unique research and ecumenical centre the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture being part of the arrangement. It is hard to see

these funding-driven adoptions of theological colleges as an important exception to the separation of theological and university education in Australia. There is little student crossover between the theological college and other university, nor evidence of innovative integrative courses that one might have hoped would flow from these arrangements.

A noble attempt to create just these sort of integrative courses was Macquarie Christian Studies Institute (MCSI) which operated from 1998-2005. It was inspired by the example of Regent College Vancouver but adapted to Australian conditions and some of Australia's most distinguished Australian Christian academics were involved. Although it was formally separate from Macquarie University the Institute was located on-campus and its courses could be credited towards Macquarie University degrees. This arrangement allowed students to add the Institute's basic theology and integrative courses to their degree in business or education, and to take advantage of the Christian mentoring provided by the community associated with the Institute. The arrangement with the university was attractive to the Institute because it could piggyback on the universities suite of courses, library resources, and reputation. For the University the benefit was attracting Christian students who might otherwise choose University of Sydney or University of New South Wales. Despite doing some great things, student numbers were always small, and it struggled to be financially viable. Eventually the arrangement and the Institute were killed off by a new and unsympathetic Macquarie Vice Chancellor.

An important recent development has Christian colleges branching out beyond theology to teach and research in areas such as business and education. They include the Anglican Ridley College in Melbourne, the Baptist Morling College in Sydney as well as smaller colleges like Christian Heritage College in Brisbane, Tabor College in Adelaide, and Excelsia College in Sydney. Some of these such as Alphacrucis, the national college of the Australian Pentecostal movement (where I have worked for the last 10 years) aspire to be accredited as Australian universities in the next few years. Although they share something of the integrative vision of Macquarie Christian Studies Institute, crucial differences are a more viable financial model (Alphacrucis has as its core constituency the Pentecostal movement which is now Australia's second largest religious group after the Catholics) and a more favourable regulatory environment (such as a pathway to university accreditation, the student access to government-provided income contingent loans, and some very limited government

funding). All of these institutions struggle to get beyond the Australian pattern of siloed and church focused theological training, but the intent is there.

In my view these colleges offer the best chance of developing programs that are needed to equip the future leaders of Australia's Christian not-for-profit sector to maintain the Christian identity and mission of the organisations. But at the moment it is an aspiration rather than a reality. At Alphacrucis the development of a not-for-profit leadership stream within the Master of Leadership has stalled due to staffing and structural changes. Ridley College is currently developing a program for Christian not-for-profit leaders. Partnership between such colleges and large Christian not-for-profit organisations (or consortia of such organisations) would help the process.

Aside from these programs under development in Christian colleges the other hope I have is that Australia's public university business faculties will observe the growth of the Christian not-for-profit and Christian schooling sectors and develop programs that meet their leadership development needs. The problem is that Deans and MBA program directors in public universities tend to be religiously tone deaf (partly because the separation of theology from our universities denies some exposure to theology as an academic field, and partly because they like other Australians have lived through the decline of religious participation in Australian culture). At the moment there a smattering of courses and PhD theses on "spirituality and business" and related topics which tend to take a highly individualistic view of "spirituality" and don't really engage the issues I have discussed in the paper. Discussions of "social justice" in business courses often degenerate into empty posturing about "neoliberalism" and other poorly defined evils while failing to offer constructive alternatives. The rise of entrepreneurship programs are partly a response to this, but again I do not see them filling the Christian NFP leadership education gap. There is growing attention to the Christian faith and work movement (which in my view would be better termed whole of life discipleship movement) which offers more hope of engaging with the leadership training gap than most of what offered at the moment in our public university business faculties.

As well as business faculties, public universities host a few teaching and research centres that engage the issues raised in this paper. Queensland University of Technology hosts the Australian Centre for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Studies which teaches Bachelor and Master

of Business programs in Philanthropy and Nonprofit Studies, as well as supervising PhD students and conducting research. It is hard to overcome the Australian university culture of the avoiding explicit discussion of religious and especially theological dimensions of the not-for-profit sector, despite there being no formal prohibition of theology teaching or research, and despite there being well-informed Christians on staff. The largest and most influential centre in Australia is the Centre for Social Impact, which has nodes at University of New South Wales, University of Western Australia, Swinburne University, and now Flinders University. There are a number of degree programs and many more short courses and workshops, but I have never seen one explicitly devoted to the religious dimensions of the sector, even though as noted earlier in the paper, a large proportion of Australia's not-for-profit organisations were founded by Christians with a clear religious mission and many maintain a Christian identity and mission. There is a great deal of unrealised potential in university centres like these to address the leadership training gap, but they must get beyond the long-standing Australian university reticence about religion and theology.

Conclusion

Whatever the value or otherwise of my speculations about possible solutions, we do have an important gap in our higher education system which struggles to equip future leaders for our Christian not-for profit organisations in social services, education, international development and other areas. Failing to address this gap will mean that organisation risk erosion of their Christian identity and mission, and their effectiveness. This would not be a good thing for Australia.

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