

2. WHICH VALUES DO I TEACH IN A MULTI-FAITH SOCIETY?

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You've asked me to address a very hard question: "Which values do I teach in a Multi-faith Society?" This question presumes that it's possible to find a workable solution in a pluralistic society like ours. It assumes that somewhere there's a bounded set of core values, however minimal, which will enable Australian schools to keep their act together. Indeed, have not the divinities who dwell by Lake Molonglo decreed that there shall be *nine* core values?

But maybe it's wishful thinking to suppose that a value consensus can be achieved. Maybe those divinities haven't walked the side roads of our cities lately. Some people say values have become so pluralised today that any attempt to capture the essence of the Australian way of life will be futile. There are *many* ways of life, ranging from fundamentalism to hedonism, and from liberalism to terrorism. In Australia! The gap between rich and poor is widening, and the majority of people, having been baptised by postmodernism and confirmed by consumerism, do what is right in their own eyes.¹

So it's too late! All that's left to us now is to make more laws controlling people's public behaviour, and increase the police presence to enforce them. What they do in private is their own business, so long as they don't harm anyone else.

That's the gospel of political liberalism, but also, it seems, of many churches. The two values which both political and theological liberals promote more than any other are "tolerance" and "inclusion". They're even enshrined in the rather messy ninth value in the National framework. It's bad form to ask the million-dollar question "tolerance how far, and inclusion of what?" But unless these values are defined, they're mere tranquillisers, masking the effects of deep divisions and religious extremisms. So is it time for Christians to throw in the sponge and retreat into a sub-cultural ghetto?

FOUR REASONS TO WORK FOR CONSENSUS

My answer to that question is an expression of faith; but not blind faith. Let me give you four reasons why it's worthwhile for Christians to be involved in public efforts to work towards a more robust value consensus – in our society, and in *all* our schools.

1. Common grace

The first is what Christian theologians call "common grace," by which they mean that the grace of God is extended to both the just and the unjust.² Primarily this refers to God's continuing love even for those who don't acknowledge him. He hasn't deserted them in a huff. He replenishes the earth and restrains gross evil, while his servants continue to spread the good news of how to get right with God. He doesn't take us out of the world, and he doesn't endorse our taking ourselves out of the world.

A further aspect of his common grace is that even sinners are not totally lacking in awareness of his law. Made in his image, albeit now an image distorted by sin, we still sense the fundamental values built into our natures, and the difference between right and wrong.³ If this were not so, society would disintegrate and fall back on the rule of the jungle. One thing that should disturb us greatly is that there's been a succession of nations in the last century where this did happen, and this was universally viewed, not as a normal state of affairs, but as a disaster.

C. S. Lewis once combed the literature of a number of civilisations past and present round the globe. He claimed that, despite developing independent of each other, they agreed on an impressive number of basic moral ideas. Mind you, he'd be the first to say that this doesn't remove the need for the special grace that brings us salvation from sin. As I emphasised this morning, knowing the good doesn't automatically mean you'll do it. But it suggests that negotiations between people with different world-views won't necessarily fail.

Recently a rabbi wrote to me urging me to consider what many Jewish thinkers call "the Noahide Laws." This term refers, they say, to the seven laws which God gave Noah after the flood. Just out of interest, in summary they are as follows:

- 1 - Do not worship false gods.
- 2 - Do not murder.
- 3 - Do not steal (or kidnap).
- 4 - Do not be sexually immoral.
- 5 - Do not blaspheme against God.
- 6 - Do not be cruel to animals.
- 7 - Maintain a system of justice for all.⁴

The implication is that this pre-Mosaic code constitutes a universal ethic by which God will judge non-Jews, while the Ten Commandments add provisions specifically applicable to the Chosen People. Well, whether this is a sufficient description of a universal ethic or not, it adds weight to the policy of entering into negotiations with people of diverse world-views in an attempt to find areas of practical agreement.⁵

2. Promising Experiments

The second reason for attempting to go down this road is the evidence that in Australia in the last decade or so there have been a number of promising attempts to identify core values. Several states including New South Wales have developed values frameworks, and I've already mentioned the ongoing Commonwealth Values Education Program. I sometimes call them "attempts which have not (yet) failed", because negotiations of this kind will always be ongoing, open to revision depending on which voices gain the most attention. Provisionally, though, they prove it can be done. And Christians are challenged to have their legitimate say.

My most direct involvement in such an exercise was a review in the mid-90s of the Dawkins Curriculum, carried out by a West Australian consortium of independent school systems. Negotiations with Christian, Jewish and Muslim systems resulted in a robust framework of about 60 value statements (not just single-word terms) designed to guide educational effort. Once it was recognised that we were looking for an Agreed Minimum rather than a comprehensive system everyone would be expected to agree to, reason and good will achieved a level of consensus no-one had dreamed possible.

I need to add that people who are skeptical about even making such attempts should realise that logically they are hardly the right people to be active in state education. School education is by definition the teaching of things that the sponsoring community considers valuable. Those who try to fall back on the supposed neutrality of just teaching "knowledge and skills", as if these were somehow free of value issues, are kidding themselves – or trying to kid us.

3. The Christian Heritage

The next two reasons for making the attempt are more specifically Christian. One concerns the Christian element in our Australian heritage. For some time, a few Christian scholars, like Dr Stuart Piggin at Macquarie University, in his *Spirit of a Nation*, have been arguing that the writing and teaching of Australian history has been at fault because historians have consistently played down the role of strong Christian devotion and service to the community. This concern came to a head in a conference hosted in July in Canberra by the Parliamentary Christian

Fellowship, and organised by National Forum on Australia's Christian Heritage. I mentioned it briefly this morning and I'd like to say a bit more about it now.

Most of the papers delivered at the conference are now on the website.⁶ Leading historians argued strongly at the forum that our present-day culture relies considerably on its legacy of such Christian values as compassion, equality of all persons before God, and liberation of the oppressed. They further suggested that we were at risk of having many of our most distinctive Australian values and practices rolled back by our cultural slide into hedonism, consumerism, and the privatisation of care.⁷

Enough of this values legacy is still embedded in the sub-conscious of Australians who might otherwise appear to be indifferent to the Christian gospel, to justify efforts to bring it out into the open through public negotiations. This is no time for Christians to be running away from the public domain. We have a right to be prominent in the debate to identify core Australian values.

4. The Opportunity to Commend Kingdom Values

The last reason for being involved is the opportunity it presents to commend Christian values as contributing in their own right to the well-being of the general community or polis. The biblical concept of the Kingdom of God is wider than the concept of the Church of God. A community in which the Church of God is not only active when it is gathered, but committed to loving action when it is dispersed through society – in workplaces, parliaments, cultural associations, and neighbourhoods – is advancing the general influence of the Kingdom of God and the values at its core.

As the heritage argument illustrates, Kingdom values have so infiltrated social institutions, that even without the direct leadership of individual Christians, many of these values are now taken for granted, like the air we breathe. If, now, Christians draw back to protect their own interests, not only will these values be gradually leached out, but honourable opportunities for evangelism and social welfare will be closed off.

One case in point is the state school system. That's why from here on I'll be addressing our key question – "Which Values Do I Teach in a Multi-Faith Society?" – in the context of seeing what is appropriate and possible in state schools. But I won't be ignoring the fact that the question is of equal importance, though the variables differ somewhat, in Christian schools. I occasionally come across Christian schools which are resolved to keep the pluralism of Australian society out of their curriculum as much as possible. At best, any evangelists they produce will be tongue-tied, lacking understanding or sympathy for where their neighbours are coming from.

So let me tell you about Gary Butcher. Gary is a chaplain in a West Australian high school. In his limited spare time, he's been developing a curriculum package to help schools become more effective in the area of values education.⁸ He's been particularly concerned to offer something more positive than the typical "Against Bullying" approach. He was working on this well before the Commonwealth funding program came on board, but it could easily be nested in grant applications in that context. Currently 27 schools in WA have implemented his program (6 of them Christian schools, the rest state) and another 18 are looking into it.

Gary's slogan is "Choose Respect." It unpacks this concept as "respect is to be treated with care and consideration", which actually knits together at least five of the National Framework's Nine Core Values. And from this Gary derives a clear and practical Code of Behaviour. The package also provides resources to draw in the wider community as well as the school. One state school principal has said that "the strength of *Choose Respect* is that it provides a common language and framework for students, staff and parents for promoting positive behaviour and relationships."⁹

What particularly appeals to me is that the package comes across as a non-partisan approach compatible with Australian culture. Another reason it interests me is that it also reflects a

central tradition in moral philosophy of nominating “respect for persons” as the fundamental principle of ethics, thanks to Immanuel Kant. Mind you, it’s not the air you breathe in some other countries! And that’s because behind that tradition itself is the Christian heritage. Gary says in an in-house piece of documentation that his definition “closely ties ‘Respect’ to the biblical understanding of ‘Agape’ love.”

Unlike some of the other packages I mentioned this morning, which fight shy of saying up front where they come from, I don’t think anyone adopting this package will be unaware that it’s emerged from a Christian perspective. But it’s not “in your face.” And it’s home-grown. I hope it goes far.

THE GAP BETWEEN KNOWING AND DOING

I’d like to say one more thing before getting on to some of the other values we should be teaching in a multi-faith society. This morning I used a diagram to illustrate the difference between mere belief and a personal commitment. I pointed out the gap between these two stages in the process of acquiring values. The best education will not be able to guarantee commitment to the values we teach. Human beings are not puppets, but choosing beings. That’s another aspect which Gary Butcher’s approach highlights.

What I did not go on to say then was that Christians have a particular take on this difficulty. In regard to moral and religious commitments, the Scriptures underline this point when they speak on the one hand of “believing that certain things are true.” and on the other hand of “believing in Jesus.” James says scathingly that just saying you have faith, or believe certain truths, doesn’t guarantee that you’ll act on them. “Even the devils believe there’s a God”, he says, but “they tremble in terror”, because they’ve chosen not to obey him.¹⁰ And Paul reminds us in Romans 1: 16-17 that human beings have a tendency to go against their consciences in a rebellious act of self-assertion.

These insights highlight the need to include teaching about the Christian perspective on salvation from sin, and therefore the need, if for no other reason, to back up the teaching of values in the school with the study of the Christian world-view. I’ll come back to this point later. In the meantime, let me offer a definition of values that I’ve been using for many years now. It has even crept into one or two of the National Framework documents!

I say that values are “the priorities which individuals and societies attach to certain beliefs, experiences, and objects, in deciding how they shall live and what they shall treasure.” This definition isn’t confined to moral and religious values only. We set priorities on many other kinds of belief and experience as well: in the arts, in sport, in our work-life, and so on. Whichever area we’re concerned with, we become **committed** to certain values.

So to link the two concepts together, I say that commitment involves developing a disposition (a settled tendency) to act upon your cherished beliefs. Most of all when you commit your way to the Lord, your beliefs become the source of saving faith, and the gap between knowing and doing is bridged.

OTHER VALUES

But now let’s come to other values. I recently drew up for my own benefit a comparative list of values from various sources, including the 2004 N.S.W. revision of *The Values We Teach*, the traditional seven Catholic virtues, and some of the packages on the web. No one word occurred on all lists, though by taking synonyms into account a lot of convergence could be inferred.

Humility, integrity, justice, respect and responsibility scored well, and love best of all. Nevertheless faith, hope, forgiveness, self-control, sexual purity and truth (as distinct from truthfulness) barely featured, and reconciliation not at all.

Out of all this, we can see that the 9 Core Values of the National Framework fare reasonably well, but this list remains rather muddled, and omits some core Christian values. For example, take the failure to mention “truth”, which one might have thought was crucial to values education. This is partly because the National list is primarily about moral values, not educational ones as such. And the postmodern spirit that’s abroad discourages confidence in the possibility of our knowing the truth about anything! It’s all in the mind. But Christian epistemology is realist; it affirms a real world made by the true God. It’s not a case of “anything goes”, morally or epistemologically. So what are we to make of all this? At least two imperatives emerge.

Study of World-Views

One is the need to study world-views, or people’s meaning frameworks. I’ve already argued the priority of studying the Christian world-view on educational grounds. But I’ve also argued that other world-views which are important to large groups of people in Australian society ought also to be studied. By the end of their compulsory education, we need to have given all students a fair understanding of the main meaning frameworks which contend for followers in the Australian culture. This involves some teasing out of the strands of old Christendom, including the spin-off frameworks of Atheism, Marxism, Scientific Humanism, old Liberalism, post=modernism, and the Hedonism which several Christian historians have brought to the fore.

More recently, other migrant faiths have begun to impact on us, while increasing respect is being paid to the indigenous religion which has actually proved significantly receptive to incoming Christianity. And none of this denies the prime priority which the teaching of Christianity should have, in the light of its contribution to the Australian story, which I mentioned previously.

Now looking at this vast terrain, you’ll probably decide that I’ve been offering you the pipe-dream of an ageing philosopher. But if we’re thinking of a valid curriculum area, and not just the grudging period a week some children get that’s traditionally been called “Religious Education”, then, as I argued in my last book, it should have a share of the timetable comparable to other key learning areas. Then there’d be plenty of room for this agenda. I think it’s a goal worth working for – on educational grounds. Why should the secularists have all the good lines?

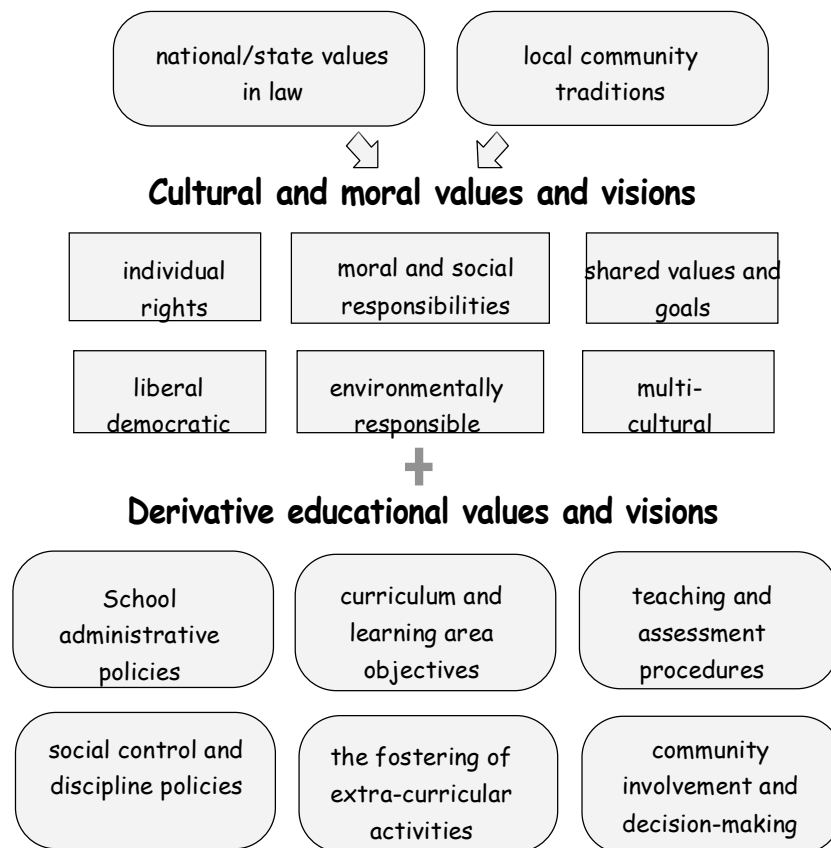
I say again that much of the detail and development of analytic skills belongs in the later secondary curriculum, but the primary years should at least acknowledge the various religious and cultural backgrounds of all children, in a factual and non-judgmental way, as well as majoring on Christian and other core values.

Negotiated Value Charters

That brings me to the second imperative. The need for each school to develop a values charter. It’s important, for example, that we resist trends to turn the Nine Core Values into a strait-jacket. There’s a hint in the materials produced for the Commonwealth-funded program that your best chance of getting a grant is to focus your projects on these nine. I’ve noticed in the case-study reports, however, that some schools have bravely expanded their charters to include other values. And at the national forum there were some expressions of dissatisfaction with just the nine. I believe we should keep insisting at every opportunity that this list is only a starter kit, not a final solution.

One way to do this is to talk up the need for schools to negotiate, in consultation with their wider communities, robust agreements on the values for which they want their schools to stand. This is a good arena for Christians to be active in. The National program on School-Community Forums gives us a reason to do it, and do it regularly, irrespective of whether there’s money in it or not.

I don't want to burden this point with detail either, but when I've been asked to speak about school charters, I've been keen to emphasise that these should not just be concerned with moral and civic values but should accommodate consensus agreement on many matters affecting school life and learning. This is the diagram I use.



Formulating school value charters.

Thus, remembering that we have obligations to broad state and community values, we should work within this framework to develop clauses which touch on individual rights, moral and social responsibilities, and shared values and goals. At the least, what we come up with should be compatible with liberal democratic, environmentally responsible, and multicultural values. Then we're in a position to derive educational goals and values. These need to cover school administrative policies, curriculum objectives, teaching and assessment procedures, discipline policies, extra-curricular activities, and community relations.

THE VOLUNTARY FACTOR AGAIN

In including reference to "extra-curricular activities", I return again to the "voluntary factor" that I discussed this morning. I was arguing there that the school classroom is an environment heavily bounded by aspects of compulsion: compulsory attendance, compulsory curriculum, compulsory assessment, and constraints on behaviour in the classroom. Therefore, I said, in our approach to values education, we need to complement schooling strategies with the provision of freer contexts of learning, and I went on to speak especially of the value of voluntary groups – in the community, including the church; and even in the school itself.

But behind what I said then was a longstanding discomfort with the degree to which the church has committed itself to the schooling model in its approach to Christian education. It was therefore a great delight when a colleague from South Australia sought me out as supervisor of a doctoral study of the New Testament concept of “discipling.” Sylvia Collinson’s book *Making Disciples* is the result of that work and I strongly recommend it to you.

Jesus did not teach in a school; indeed, the Bible doesn’t mention the word school though many existed in New Testament times. But Jesus, by what an author of a previous generation called a “transforming friendship”¹¹, turned a small band of followers into ambassadors to the whole world. They heard him speak to situations encountered on the road, they saw him practise what he preached, he sent them out on ministry and debriefed them when they came back. And each of them knew they were there voluntarily. They could leave any time – and one did – but the rest were so affirmed by their personal relationship with Jesus that they crossed the bridge from mere belief to life commitment. Surely, we pray no less, as values educators, for the boys and girls who cross our path.

¹ Judges 17: 6.

² Eg. Matthew 5: 45.

³ Romans 1: 18-20.

⁴ See website of the Institute for Judaism and Civilization at <www.ijc.com.au>.

⁵ Cf. also the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (<<http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>>) and Küng, Hans and Kuschel, Karl-Josef (eds) (1993). *A Global Ethic: The Declaration of the Parliament of the World’s Religions*, London: SCM Press. The World’s Parliament of Religions was founded in 1893 by Unitarians and Universalists of the Free Religious Association, and continues to attract wide participation. Its 2004 meeting in Barcelona, Spain, had over 8,900 participants from over 75 countries.

⁶ , <http://australiaschristianheritageforum.org.au/resources/>>.

⁷ One of the most probing papers of the Forum was one by Stephen Judd and Anne Robinson, Christians involved in the delivery of social services. They argued that in Australia, to a greater extent than in England, or even the U.S.A., Christian churches had been responsible for the development of social services. Now, under the guise of privatisation, many of the safety nets set in place are being removed. At a political level, there is an element of hypocrisy in governments saying, on the one hand, that service delivery is better managed by dedicated voluntary agencies, so grants in aid are the proper form of government involvement, while on the other hand over-regulating how they may spend the money, and insisting that if they want money they must not criticise government policies (see <<http://australiaschristianheritageforum.org.au/resources/RobinsonandJuddsPaper.pdf>>

⁸ <<http://www.chooserespect.com/>>.

⁹ See website.

¹⁰ James 2: 19.

¹¹ Weatherhead, Leslie D. (1929). *The Transforming Friendship*. New York and Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press.