



AASR Conference 2007 - The end of the world as we know it? New directions in Australian spirituality

Abstracts

Friday, July 6

Charles Strong Lecture I.

Yoda goes to the Vatican: Youth spirituality and popular culture

Adam Possamai

University of Western Sydney.

Popular Culture can no longer be exclusively seen as a source of escapism. It can amuse, entertain, instruct, and relax people, but what if it provides inspiration for religion? The Church of All Worlds, the Church of Satan and Jediism from the Star Wars series are but three examples of new religious groups that have been greatly inspired by popular culture to (re)create a religious message. These are hyper-real religions, that is a simulacrum of a religion partly created out of popular culture which provides inspiration for believers/consumers. These postmodern expressions of religion are likely to be consumed and individualised, and thus have more relevance to the self than to a community and/or congregation. On the other hand, religious fundamentalist groups tend, at times, to resist this synergy between popular culture and religion, and at other times, re-appropriate popular culture to promote their own religion. Examples of this re-appropriation are Christian super-hero comics and role playing games, Bible-based PC games, and 'White Metal' music. Although this phenomenon has existed since at least the 1960s, this lecture will discuss the changes that the Internet and its participatory culture has brought to hyper-real religions.

Adam Possamai is Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Western Sydney and Past President of the Australian Association for the Study of Religions. He was the Programme Coordinator for the Research Committee for the Sociology of Religion at the XVI World Congress of Sociology. He is the author of *Religion and Popular Culture: A Hyper-Real Testament* (2005, Peter Lang), *In Search of New Age* (2005, Ashgate), and a book of short stories, *Perles Noires* (2005, Nuit D'Avril). His new book, *Sociology of Religion for Generations X and Y* will be published in 2008

by Equinox.

Saturday, July 7

Charles Strong Lecture II.

If Jesus is in Disneyland, where is the Buddha? Challenges for the study of religion from the study of the spirituality of young people in Australia and Thailand

Philip Hughes

Christian Research Association

Recent research on youth spirituality in Australia, particularly in the 'Spirit of Generation Y' project, demonstrates how young people look at religious faith and other forms of spirituality from consumeristic perspectives. They see religious beliefs and practices as potential resources rather than frameworks for the understanding of life and culture. They see themselves as responsible for putting beliefs together. Between 2004 and 2007, a study comparable of the 'Spirit of Generation Y' project was conducted in Thailand in cooperation with the Department of Humanities, Mahidol University and the Church of Christ in Thailand. This study identifies the cultural component in the way young people see religion by comparing the similarities and differences in approach to religion among young Thai Buddhists, Christians and Muslims. Further elucidation of the role of contemporary youth culture is demonstrated by comparing the ways that religion is perceived and in which it functions in Thailand and Australia. These studies of youth and religion demonstrate how religion and spirituality take very different shapes in relation to their cultural contexts. Some of the implications of this finding for the study of religion will be explored.

Philip Hughes is the senior research officer of the Christian Research Association and a research fellow at Edith Cowan University. Among his recent books are *Putting Life Together: Findings from Australian Youth Spirituality Research and Building Stronger Communities*. He is editor of the encyclopaedic *Australian Religious Communities: A Multimedia Exploration*. He has conducted research on religion in both Thailand and Australia over a period of nearly 30 years.

Paper Session 1.1 Australian youth spirituality

Varieties of youth spirituality (The spirit of generation Y project) Michael Mason

Australian Catholic University

The Spirit of Generation Y is a five-year project begun in mid-2002, investigating the 'spirituality' of Australians born between 1981 and 1995. After a first phase of intensive interviews, a telephone survey was conducted in February, 2005, of a national random sample of youth aged 13-24 (with a control sample aged 25-59). Further follow-up interviews were conducted. This paper describes the three main types of spirituality among teenagers in Australia: Traditional, New Age and Secular. Involvement in traditional religions is declining, and although some adopted New Age

spiritualities, the stronger trend was towards indifference or Secularism. Individualism was widely pervasive, even among the traditionally religious. Eclecticism in worldviews and cautiously relativistic values seem to be responses to an uncertain world, in which isolated individuals have only fragile support structures for their identity.

*Spirituality and civic orientation among young Australians
(The spirit of generation Y project)* Ruth Webber
Australian Catholic University

The Spirit of Generation Y study explored the relationship between spirituality types and specific outcomes for young people including how they relate to the wider community. A number of aspects of civic orientation were examined including social compassion, generosity, altruism, civic values and community participation. Religiously active teenager and/or those who take spirituality seriously differ in a number of significant ways from those who showed little interest in these matters. Active Christians demonstrated high level of social concern in many ways that include both values and actions. New Agers who were raised Christian also rated highly on some of the dimension of civic orientation. Results indicate that strong commitment to a belief system whether Christian or another faith relates to a more involved and caring citizen

Generation Y's New Agers and Seculars (The spirit of generation Y project)
Andrew Singleton
Monash University

Much has been written and theorised about the changing spiritual landscape in late modern societies: the increasing popularity of the New Age, the attraction of Eastern religions, the emergence of nature religions and Neo-Paganism and the turn towards secularism. Drawing on the data from the nationally representative Australian Spirit of Generation Y survey (see Mason paper above), this paper examines the extent to which Generation Y accept New Age beliefs and adopt New Age practices and considers the social factors associated with being involved in the New Age. It is argued that for the overwhelming majority of Generation Y, New Age practices are simply not important, but a greater number hold New Age beliefs. The paper also examines those who follow a secular path rather than a Traditional religion or a New Age spirituality and identifies the social factors associated with being 'nonreligious'.

Spirituality and schools - Some explorations from the Young People and Spirituality Project
Jacqui Holder
University of Melbourne

This paper presents some initial findings from the Young People and Spirituality Project. The aim of this project is to further explore contemporary understandings of youth spirituality and to explore conceptualisations and usages of the word 'spirituality'. A further aim is to explore the ways in which understandings of the 'spiritual' may be used to frame a conceptualisation of spirituality for schools in line with the

Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling's claims that: 'schooling provides a foundation for young Australian's intellectual, physical, social, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development.' (M.C.E.E.T.Y.A. 1999). However, it may be hard to imagine how schooling could provide for young Australians' spiritual development when spirituality is viewed as a personal, experiential phenomenon. This paper will explore the ways in which it may be possible to envisage a spiritual dimension for state government education in light of some initial findings from what young people say they understand spirituality to mean and in light of their own personal experiences and thoughts.

Paper Session 1.2 Secularism and Interfaith dialogue

Colin Williams and secularisation

Brian Howe

University of Melbourne

Rachel Kohn asks the question in *Meanjin* (vol. 65, no. 4), how useful is spiritual life if it remains in the realm of private delectation and assumes no responsibility for the shape and quality of our society and our world? The Australian Methodist ministers I have been researching (Clifford J Wright, Alan Walker and Colin W Williams) each believed passionately that their Christian faith was very much about taking responsibility for society. In this paper I wish to discuss the contribution of Colin Williams to the ongoing debate about the nature of faith during the 1960's - a time when traditional Christian beliefs were under intense scrutiny and there was unprecedented public interest in religion. Williams was important not only because of the importance of his influence on theological students in Melbourne during the time he was a Professor of Systematic Theology at Queen's College (1959-1962) but also because of the influence he exercised through the prominent positions he held in the at the National Council of Churches of Christ in New York (1963-1968) and from 1961 on the Commission on Evangelism in the World Council of Churches. These appointments provided a rare opportunity for a sophisticated Australian theologian to debate and influence the strategies of the post war churches in the United States and more broadly through the ecumenical movement. Williams took seriously the impact of modernization and was an important contributor to the debates around secularisation. In this paper I will trace in a preliminary way the development of his thought around the nature of faith and the mission of the church while offering some thoughts on his ongoing relevance to what Duncan Reid suggests may be a 'post secular age'.

Towards resolving the confrontation of religious ethics and secular ethics in modern society

Robert Crotty

University of South Australia

Recently an Orthodox Jewish rabbi had his contract terminated by the Adelaide Hebrew Congregation, the governing body of the Orthodox community. He was ordered by the secular court to desist from any contact with the local Orthodox synagogue and to vacate his house, part of the

contractual arrangement. He has asserted that he is bound by Jewish religious obligation to perform the Sabbath services and that this obligation overrides any secular determination as to what he should or should not do. Islamic clerics in Australia are alleged to be encouraging followers not to pay income tax to the Australian ATO because income tax is contrary to sharia law. This paper will endeavour to establish the basis of all ethics in order. Historically, approaches to secular ethics have been based on differing perspectives on the attainment of order within a cultural system. The paper will maintain that, likewise, religious ethics are based on approaches to the attainment of ultimate order. Ethical systems, secular and religious, will have commonalities but essentially they are incommensurable. Where there is a homogenous secular and religious society, ethical conflicts are rare. This is not the case in most world societies today. The requirement for conciliation between religious and secular ethics is becoming increasingly problematic.

Spiritual and religious: Inter-religious interaction in urban Australia

Elizabeth Chittock
University of Tasmania

This paper derives from a sociological qualitative project in the interpretive tradition, *Inter-religious interaction in urban Australia: The influence of religious-identity on perceptions of 'the other'*. The project seeks to understand the interactions and perceptions between Jews, Christians, and Muslims, using Hobart, Tasmania, as a case study. Data from face-to-face in-depth interviews and participant observations of seven Abrahamic congregations over 8 months, has revealed individuals across the faiths who acknowledge a spiritual dimension in their lives, some of whom also experience mystical encounters. They have strong belief convictions, understand their perspectives to be valid, and accept and even respect difference. Their awareness - mindfulness - of their relationship with God guides their attitude in daily actions and interactions. Yet two clear demonstrations of understanding exist: when regarding others of differing religious affiliations, one type tends towards isolation, distance and defence; the other towards communication, interaction, and appreciation of diversity. When considering the existing boundaries and divisions between religions, an acceptance of an 'in-common' spirituality across the three religions that transcends worship practices may offer the best hope for dialogue and understanding, and so positively contribute to the end of the world as we know it.

Multifaith and religious-secular peacebuilding networks in Australia

Anna Halafoff
Monash University

Heightened awareness of global risks has produced an unprecedented interest in global peace and security initiatives. Concurrently the role of religious leaders in promoting social cohesion is increasingly being examined by scholars, as is the growing multifaith peacebuilding

movement. This paper discusses the impacts of international crisis events and discourses of exclusion on religiously diverse communities in Australia, in particular rising Islamophobia, migrantophobia and attacks on multiculturalism. Religious communities have been far from passive in their responses to the impact of these events initiating dialogue and educational activities to dispel negative stereotypes and attitudes. State actors, including police, have prioritised engagement with religious leaders resulting in a rise of state supported multifaith and religious-secular peacebuilding activities in Australia. This paper argues that networks including religious leaders, state actors, educators and the media have the potential to counter risks and advance social cohesion in multifaith societies.

Paper Session 2.1 Contemporary Christianity

Australian 'Health and Wealth' Ministries in Britain: The 'glocalization' of hybrid Pentecostalism

Stephen Hunt

University of the West of England

There can be little doubt of the international impact of the various expressions of contemporary Pentecostalism. Of all the major 'streams' of neo-Pentecostalism, it is perhaps that constituted by one variety or another of the Faith movement which has proved to be most significant in highlighting the dynamics of globalisation. Ministries originating or influenced by the Bible Schools of those such as the North American Faith evangelists Kenneth Hagin, as well as the South African Ray McCauley, have aided the proliferation of distinct 'health and wealth' teachings in numerous cultural settings. In recent years Australian ministries have made their contribution to the influence of the Faith 'gospel'. This paper seeks to throw light on the influence of two Australia Faith ministries in one international context, namely Britain. Based on fieldwork analysis of two of the most prominent ministries, this paper will throw light on the development of such ministries in Australia. Secondly, to understand the impact of the ministries in Britain in terms of establishing new churches and through the medium of 'televangelism'. Thirdly, it will consider the demographic and religious backgrounds of those attracted to such ministries. Finally, the paper will explore the limitation of these Australian ministries within the British setting.

Religious goods and social capital: a study of community in Australian Catholic parishes

Bob Dixon

Australian Catholic Bishops Conference

The idea of community is central to the Catholic parish. The parish is actually defined in terms of a community in Church law, and contemporary church planning documents in Australia emphasise the communal aspects of parish life. This sociological investigation of the communal nature of Catholic parishes uses the concept of social capital, a type of capital that facilitates individuals working together for mutual benefit. According to the literature, local churches, both Catholic and Protestant, are widely regarded as being

generators and repositories of social capital. Social capital is a highly abstract concept which needs to be broken down into its different components. In this study, some of those different components which are created in a Catholic parish will be identified and measured using Stolz's typology of religious goods, a theoretical framework which attempts to integrate Weberian and rational choice concepts of religious goods, religious markets and religious authority structures.

Paper Session 2.2 Contemporary Islam

Spirituality, activism, scholarship, and Muslim women

Roxanne D. Marcotte

University of Queensland

It has been noted that the absence of authority in Muslim diaspora minority context - for example, the greater individualism among young North American Muslims vis-à-vis traditional Islam - is partly responsible for the appearance of the Wadud phenomena, the Muslim woman who lead the Friday prayer in 2004. A more constructive approach might be to rely on such ideas as Mandaville's 'translocalities' of Muslim diaspora communities. These 'translocalities' provide opportunities for the emergence of a self-reflective 'critical Islam.' They provide critical spaces for Muslim women to reflect on their own experiences and to question both religious interpretations and hegemonic traditional discourses on which they depend. There is no doubt that, at present, this is most aptly achieved by Muslim women activists and scholars who provide new reflections on gendered Islamic spirituality (Wadud, Hassan, Ali, Anwar, Hibri, Barlas).

Re-interpreting the scriptures: Bringing spirituality and ethics back into religious law

Silma Ihram

Noor Al Houda Islamic College

It is the year of Rumi - the great Sufi poet of the 13th century. Rumi's poetry is popularly read amongst Americans of all religious backgrounds along with the resurging spirituality of great Islamic poets and thinkers including Al Ghazzali, Shadhili and Jilani amongst others. As the Muslim world (and mosques in Australia) are flooded with Imams trained in the fundamentalist, legalistic view of Salafism / Wahabism, does Sufism and a deeper spiritual understanding of Islam still have relevance for today's society and especially the teaching of Islam in comparative religion? While traditionally the Sharia or Islamic law was rich and diverse in its content and applications, Islamist religious leaders have increasingly influenced the discourse of youth towards a more legalistic narrow minded view of the Sharia where the law became not the means to spiritual advancement, but the end. In the light of such increasing fundamentalism propagated through various mosques, writers and the pervasive influence of the internet, is there an important role for teachers of comparative religion to be acquainted with the great writers, theologians and poets of religions including Islam, in order to bring ethics, morality and a greater sense of common humanity to students in the classroom?

Islamic schools in Aalia
Peter Jones
The Friends' School, Hobart

Islam is now the second largest religious faith in Australia, although the current number of Muslims will not be known until the recent census figures are published. The main communities are from Turkey and Lebanon, with the greatest number of Muslims in Sydney and Melbourne. The first Islamic School started in Sydney in 1982 but it was difficult for new ones to find the starting capital or the land, especially as most Muslims in Australia are from the lower socio-economic bracket. The growth of Islamic schools received a boost after the election of the Howard government in 1996 and its support for private schools, though most of the new ones starting up in the last decade have been conservative Christian schools. Today there are 27 Islamic Schools, mainly in Sydney and Melbourne, but also four in Perth, two in Brisbane, and one each in Canberra and Adelaide. Most of them are K-6 but in the long term a number of these smaller schools hope to become K-12 institutions. At the moment they cannot meet the demand and it is estimated that 5-10% of Muslims of school age attend these schools. In recent years (since September 11, 2001) a number of their school buildings and their students have suffered from racist attacks and become the focus for the 'Australian Values' debate initiated by the Howard Government as well as media attacks and community fears that they could be teaching 'un-Australian Values' or supporting 'terrorists'. The paper will address what the schools teach in the context of the Values Debate as well as their importance to Australia's growing Muslim community.

Paper Session 2.3 Buddhism and Hinduism

'Shifting the focus again': The politics of geography and class in bhikkhuni ordination debates in Thailand.

Barbara Kameniar
University of Melbourne

In 1990-1991 I undertook a study which involved a small group of mae chi living in regional Thailand. Amongst other things we discussed the mae chi's responses to the bhikkhuni ordination debates that were occurring at the time. The majority of women expressed little concern for pursuing full ordination. Some of the mae chi saw the pursuit of bhikkhuni ordination to be the desires of an educated urban elite with little connection to their lives and some raised concerns about what might happen to their status if full bhikkhuni ordination was permitted. This paper revisits some of these earlier findings and compares the findings to that of other groups of mae chi living in wat in the old capital of Ayutthya in April 2007. The views of these groups of women are particularly pertinent because it is in Ayutthya that recent bhikkhuni ordination ceremonies have taken place. The paper will address the following questions: How are mae chi living in Ayutthya engaged in the contemporary debates about bhikkhuni ordination in the Thai Theravada tradition? To what extent have the views of

mae chi living in regional Thailand changed in the past 15 years and to what extent have they remained the same? How might the mae chi be engaged respectfully and productively in bhikkhuni ordination debates in Thailand?

Buddhist, Hindu, and Humanist perspectives on the Dhammapada

Peter Friedlander
La Trobe University

The collection of Buddhist sayings called the Dhammapada is considered by many to be a spiritual classic. Since it was translated into English in the 19th century it has been seen by many in the world as the archetypal representation of a Buddhist text. It is quite possibly one of the most translated Buddhist texts today, with translations into most world languages and probably more than a hundred different translations into English. That it is also highly regarded today in India can be seen from the way a quote from it each day adorns the editorial page of the Times of India newspaper. Moreover commentaries on it by leading Hindu teachers, such as S. P. Radhakrishnan, the scholar of Vedanta and first President of India testify to its appeal amongst followers of the Hindu tradition. In addition in a role as a spiritual classic its 19th century translation by Max Mueller has been retranslated by contemporary American poets and is now seen by many as an ideal example of how Buddhist teachings can be appreciated in the context of modern humanist approaches to spirituality. This paper seeks to explore two things. First, what the Dhammapada actually is, by looking at the different Buddhist Dhammapada textual traditions of India, South East Asia, Tibet and China. Second, how the Dhammapada is seen by different religious traditions and how its multiple translations continuously create new visions of what are the teachings of the Buddha in the Dhammapada. This paper will be of relevance to all of those who are involved in studying Buddhism as it will provide a background to understanding this textual tradition itself. It will also have importance for those studying modern spirituality as it explores how the process of dialogue between followers of different religious traditions over the interpretation and exposition of sacred texts creates new insights into contemporary spirituality.

'A holiday is a holy day!': Spiritual tourism in India

Alex Norman
University of Sydney

India has been regarded as the ultimate travel destination by many for some time. The confronting poverty, spiritual diversity, overwhelming density of population, and the challenging lack of anonymity make it a difficult place for independent travellers, and thus the pinnacle of backpacker culture. While this image has to some extent diminished recently, India remains a mysterious 'Other' calling exploration for many. It is also seen as a spiritual melting pot, and a place in which one can experiment with spiritual ideas. From yoga courses to casual philosophical lectures to intensive meditation retreats, India offers the spiritual tourist a wide range of possibilities. This paper delivers the findings of a recent field research trip to Rishikesh and

Dharamsala investigating the reasons why tourists engage in spiritual activities, and the benefits they see themselves gaining from it. It draws on theoretical themes from both tourism studies and studies in religion to argue that for most spiritual tourists the journey is not so much about finding a new religion, but about finding a new or improved way to live their lives.

Paper Session 3.1 Neo-paganism and new religious movements

Paganising the Devil: The reclamation of the Witches' Sabbat

Marian Dalton
La Trobe University

The creation and performance of ritual is a central element of Neopaganism. Often these rituals are celebratory in nature, recurring every full moon or on specific dates throughout the year. Others are crafted for a specific purpose, such as healing. Dark Pagans use ritual as a means of engaging with their shadows and working towards self-transformation. Baphomet was first conceived of as an ecstatic, liberating and culturally relevant ritual. Based on descriptions from medieval and early modern texts, the ritual aimed to 'paganise' the Witches' Sabbat, and provide Neopagans with an experience comparable to Afro-Caribbean Voudou. After an initially unsuccessful start, the rite has been continually rewritten and re-performed, with an increasing emphasis on using its 'satanic' imagery to create a space in which participants can release buried feelings of fear or anger, and reclaim those repressed parts of the self. This paper will trace the evolution of the Baphomet ritual from its conception to its last performance in 2005, with an emphasis on the changes made by the designer in response to participant feedback and the changing needs of the community.

Teenage Witches

Douglas Ezzy
University of Tasmania
Helen A. Berger
West Chester University

This paper reports the results of an international qualitative study of 90 teenage Witches, analysing the social sources of the rapid rise in the numbers of teenage Witches and focussing on the process of becoming a teenage Witch. The growth in teenage Witchcraft is a product of a cultural orientation to Witchcraft combined with individual seekership. Images of Witchcraft in the mass media are largely positive, if at times trivializing, and many people already share many of its central ideas and values such as those about feminism, environmentalism, and magical realism. Witchcraft is non-dogmatic, without a central hierarchy, and its main rituals and practices encourage self-reflexivity. This combines well with the individualistic self-reflexivity central to contemporary culture. Witchcraft is a late modern, or postmodern, religion that resonates with young people searching for a personal myth or worldview.

Deniable discrimination: UFO religions in the Australian media

Morandir Armson
University of Sydney

According to Australian law, it is not permitted to discriminate against a person or group based on their religious beliefs or practices. Indeed, religious discrimination is widely recognised as a divisive social force in the communities in which it flourishes. However, the Australian news media would seem to be engaged in widespread implicit discriminatory practices directed at new religious movements. To explore the processes of this implicit discrimination, the current paper used a critical discourse analysis on 12 articles from mainstream Australian newspapers, each of which dealt with a UFO-based religion. The findings of this analysis are that, implicit within the language used in mainstream Australian news media reports about UFO religions, are numerous examples of discriminatory speech and descriptions, adding up to an image of UFO religions which is almost wholly negative. These negative images seem based, not on any criminal or anti-social acts performed by these groups, but rather on the fact that the beliefs of these groups are considered 'weird'. The findings in this paper would seem to reflect a negative and hostile attitude, on the part of the Australian news media towards new religious movements as a whole, with UFO religions being a representative sub-set of these religious groups.

Hermes Down Under

Morgan Leigh
Monash University

What is Hermeticism and why is its religious tradition one of the fastest growing in Australia today? I will explore the nature of the Hermetic current as it has been manifest in the Southern Hemisphere. Beginning with an explanation of what the Hermetic current comprises, I will move on to look at the shape of this tradition in Australia by describing the history of one of the most well known of Hermetic groups, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Tracing the path of this tradition's slow and circuitous route from its heyday in 19th century Britain to twenty first century Australia, and discovering the characters who brought it here, opens a window into the interconnected history of alternative religious traditions down under.

Paper Session 3.2 Education, spirituality and schooling

Meditation: A direct link between spirituality and religious education

Chris Morris
Catholic Education Office, Melbourne

There is a growing interest in meditation today. Meditation has been shown to reduce stress, and people in all walks of life are finding that practicing meditation helps them achieve a more balanced and fulfilling life. This paper will investigate the nature of meditation, with particular emphasis on its

origins within the Christian tradition. It will be asserted that meditation is fundamentally a religious activity, in that it binds together again the person to their source. From the Christian perspective this is to discover the spiritual dimension and to grow in one's relationship with God. Meditation is also extremely practical, as it encourages personal experience and self-discovery. It will be asserted therefore, that meditation directly links Religious Education (when taught as a central prayer tradition within Christianity) and spirituality (the process of self-discovery at the deepest levels of human experience). Meditation also positively supports the search for identity, and is therefore engaging for young people.

Children and spirituality: Teaching Christian Meditation to children

Joan Neal

Catholic Education Office, Townsville

It may seem a paradox that children and young adults can be still and silent, and not just be quiet, and enjoy it. Like adults, children yearn for the experience of meeting God. A significant development in the world of Christian Meditation is the way this form of prayer can be embraced by children. Children can be taught when they are young to be still, to say the mantra maranatha so their hearts may be open to the work of the spirit and the presence of Jesus. In 2004 the idea of teaching Christian Meditation to children was conceived by Ernie Christie, Assistant Director, and became a diocesan wide project in Townsville. With the support of Bishop Michael Putney, Ernie Christie and Joan Neal worked with a trial group of classroom teachers from prep to year 12. These teachers attended in-service and returned to classrooms to put their learning into practice. They wrote about and discussed their classroom experiences and their wisdom became part of the book by Ernie Christie *Coming Home*, a guide to teaching Christian meditation to children which will be published this year with accompanying DVD by the World wide Christian Meditation organisation.

Spirituality as education

Aaron Ghiloni

University of Queensland

'education divorced from religion is doomed to spiritual sterility; religion divorced from education is doomed to superstition'. - Theodore Greene

Educational philosophers frequently emphasise the compatibility of spirituality and schooling. They write about 'spiritual curriculum' and 'education as prophecy'. Phenix suggests the notion of 'education for reverence'. Pinar understands 'curriculum as theological text'. Others make proposals for 'moral education', while for others, learning is a 'spiritual journey'. These proposals are not about religion as a subject area, as much as they are about the spiritual nature of education itself. To educate is to act religiously. The pedagogical event is a theological event. This connection can be reversed. Spirituality is a learning event; the quest to know God is essentially educational; religiosity has a pedagogical horizon. In this paper I examine the

interface of education and spirituality, suggesting that spiritual reflection can be understood as pedagogical practice. There is an educational contour to religious thought. Theology is curricular text. To illustrate education's usefulness as a hermeneutical lens, I examine the work of John Dewey, showing that his renowned experimental pedagogy can be employed in religious studies. Specifically, I apply Dewey's notion of 'reconstruction of experience' to spiritual reflection.

'I'm not religious... but I am spiritual!': University chaplains nurturing spirit, building community

Geoff Boyce
Flinders University

This paper considers the growing acceptance and understanding of spirituality within the context of the work of chaplains at Flinders University who work cooperatively within the rubric nurturing spirit, building community while also working individually representing diverse religious faiths. A recent development has been the emergence of the idea of the faith-friendly workplace - that faith value-adds within a secular organization and therefore should be nurtured within the organization.

Sunday, July 8

Paper Session 4.1 Religion, spirituality and health

Exploring the phenomena of spiritual wellbeing: Results from the pilot of a mixed methods PhD study

Lindsay Smith
Australian Catholic University

Understanding which pathways in life lead to positive outcomes and what factors encourage an individual to follow pathways that are related to positive outcomes can be understood in terms of varying risk and protective factors. Research has identified that spiritual wellbeing, religious and spiritual activities are correlated to positive adolescent and youth outcomes. Spiritual wellbeing, however, remains poorly understood. Despite the correlation being well-known, how and why spiritual wellbeing leads towards enhanced life outcomes is poorly understood. Spiritual wellbeing has also been identified as an important strength that families consistently identified as important to healthy outcomes, yet spiritual wellbeing is the least understood and researched known family strength. This PhD study is exploring the phenomena of spiritual wellbeing from a strengths perspective and an ecological context. The bioecological theory of human development theoretically underpins this exploration of the influence of the family and the church on spiritual wellbeing. The bioecological theory of human development identifies the church and the family as important systems that influence an individual's development (Bronfenbrenner 2001). The pilot of this explanatory mixed methods study that follows the triangulation convergence design has been completed with 8 adult participants and the findings will be discussed in this paper.

Yoga, self-care and the mystical ethic

Jennifer Sinclair
Monash University

The popularity of yoga is frequently cited as evidence of new spirituality or of Eastern spirituality. However there is little empirical research into yoga practitioners' understandings of the practice, whether or not they deem it to be spiritual, and if so, in what sense. In this paper I will present the findings of a small exploratory, empirical research project into the ways practitioners make sense of the practice. For most practitioners in the study yoga is undertaken as a practice of self-care contributing to wellbeing. 'Self-care' differs from 'therapy culture' and from Foucault's idea of care of the self, both of which are organised around 'ascetic' concepts of 'correction' and 'cure'. By contrast self-care is organised around a 'mystical' ethic of caring for the self, of cultivating 'harmony with' self and body. The mystical ethic of self-care apparent in yoga practitioners' understandings of the practice is a spiritual articulation of a broader cultural turn to a mystical ethic. A mystical ethic stands in contrast with a 'modern' ethic of mastery, progressively subject to critique in Western culture and outmoded by material realities of late modern societies.

Spirituality and disability: An emphasis on spirituality and intellectual disability

Graeme Watts
University of Sydney

The theme of spirituality and disability is somewhat focused and the subset of spirituality and intellectual disability more so. Yet within this seemingly narrow frame of reference there presents the most profound issues of human spiritual experience. A Christian view on spirituality and disability as presented in the Bible and by the Church Fathers is open to mixed interpretation. There are limited direct references to people with intellectual disability but it is clear that intellectual disability, and in particular, profound intellectual disability, has an impact on all aspects of life including spiritual development. In response, the contemporary church has developed policies and programs supporting the inclusion of people with an intellectual disability in many aspects of church life. However, in spite of such initiatives there can be detected a sense of unease regarding the spiritual status of persons with a disability, and in particular, those with an intellectual disability. References to approaches to include people with an intellectual disability in Christian sacraments, such as Confirmation and the Eucharist, are indicative of promising initiatives.

Paper Session 4.2 Religion, politics and Australian society

Chaplains, wellbeing and spirituality: More opportunities for the Christian-Right to influence South Australian public education policy

Tim Richter
University of South Australia

The dominance of social conservatism in contemporary

Australian politics has seen an increase of conservative Christian influence in public education policy. Over the past year there have been at least three policy changes, which can be added to the list of conservative Christian and, as a consequence, neoconservative preferences for the Australian public sphere. Drawing upon Habermasian arguments about 'the great unfinished project of modernism', this paper will argue that eagerness on the part of political philosophers and policy-makers to proclaim the postmodern era has provided opportunities for religious 'premoderns', and their neoconservative sponsors, to gain an influential foothold in social policy areas such as education. Efforts by left-leaning post-secularists to reintroduce concepts such as 'spirituality' into 'holistic' policy-models have, arguably inadvertently, assisted religious conservatives, in their 'crusade' to 'evangelise' the public sphere. New 'well-being' policies that emphasise psychological holism and argue for the inclusion of a 'spiritual dimension' have been 'providentially' welcomed by Christian evangelicals. This paper will explore the terms 'well-being' and 'spirituality' and how local policy-makers have applied them. Comparisons will be made with the way these terms are interpreted within conservative Christian rhetoric. This paper will also explore potential 'conflicts of interest' between new local guidelines on religious activities in government schools and the Federal preference for chaplains in all schools. It will be argued that by linking the concept of chaplains as counsellor-confessors, to supposedly 'holistic' models of values, well-being and spirituality that Federal preferences for religion in the public sphere are neoconservative.

Secularisation and secularism: a fresh approach to the church and state relationship through the lens of the law
Charlotte Baines
Monash University

The relationship between the church and the state continues to remain unclear in Australia. This paper examines the factual and legal relationship between the two institutions in Australia, and charts the development of their relationship from European settlement to the twenty-first century. It then discusses how their roles have been defined and their boundaries been described. This research is conducted from a legal perspective, and has a specific focus on four High Court judgments that consider section 116 of the Australian Constitution. These cases are: *Krygger v Williams* (1912) 15 CLR 366, *Adelaide Company of Jehovah's Witnesses v Commonwealth* (1943) 67 CLR 116, *Attorney-General (Vic); Ex Rel. Black v the Commonwealth* (1981) 146 CLR 559, *Church of the New Faith v Commissioner of Pay-roll tax (Vic.)* (1983) 154 CLR 120. The legal analysis indicates that there is a discrepancy between the facts and the administration of the law on this issue. As a result, the boundaries are hard to define and there is ongoing tension.

'Overlookers, bailiffs and shopmen': Model minority Muslims in Marxist perspective
Ibrahim Abraham
Monash University

This paper analyses the religious, cultural, political and

economic aspects of a nascent social phenomenon in Australia - the rise of 'model minority Muslims'. Drawing on Marxist analysis from the Manifesto, through to Antonio Gramsci, Paul Gilroy and Slavoj Žižek, this paper argues that the identity and ideology of these model minority Muslims mirrors that of the petite bourgeoisie of Marx and Engels' time - an angst-ridden social sub-class caught between the bourgeoisie proper and the working class. This analogy is drawn out through the analysis of contemporary examples, from the various scandals of Sheik al Hilaly, to the rise of 'spirituality' as the religious logic of liberal capitalism. For eager to fully embrace, and be embraced by, the middle class, our subjects are desperate to separate themselves - economically, politically, culturally and religiously - from the working class. Given that in certain contemporary contexts the label 'proletariat' has been replaced with 'Muslim' to signify the lowest legitimate rung on the social ladder, the desire of model minority Muslims to efface alterity is thus revealed as the desire to be other than Muslim.

Paper Session 4.3 Theology and Australian society

A Damaged Wisdom?

Lawrence Cross

Australian Catholic University

In its most genuine and fullest expressions, Christianity is marked by a kind of 'holy materialism'. Consequently, why should a purely secular concept of knowledge arise only within a Christian civilisation? While accepting the fact that a purely secular concept of knowledge appeared only in the Christian West, it would be a serious mistake to blame Christianity. The causes are not to be found in anything intrinsic to Christianity, (or to Judaism before it), but are located in the ancient cultural and philosophic world that was absorbed into the new Christian civilisation of Europe and its descendant variations. The effects of this deep cultural-spiritual development have washed up on our Australian shore with serious consequences both for institutional Christianity and for personal spirituality. This paper explores the process and the effects, while offering some tentative directions for the retrieval of spiritual wholeness.

Sacred Irreverence

Cameron Freeman

Flinders University

This paper argues that the parables of Jesus handed down to us in the synoptic gospels consistently disrupt conventional notions of religiosity. Firstly it will be demonstrated that all of the most memorable parables of Jesus conform to the same linguistic structure of bi-polar reversals, where what is holy in one context suddenly becomes blasphemous, while what is blasphemous in the same context suddenly becomes holy. Then it will be shown that this penetrating insight into the authentic teachings of Jesus of Nazareth gives rise to a kind of "sacred anarchy" that questions commonplace assumptions about who is upright and who is degenerate when it comes to the ways of God. While arguing that the more 'lost' you are, the

stronger the trace of God and the more 'saved' you are, the further away from God you might become, this paradoxical approach to the scandalous teachings of Jesus will be proposed as one way in which to re-activate the dangerous memory of this 1st century Jewish sage prior to his inscription in the Christian tradition proper, and thereby bring the earliest beginnings of Christianity into a secular, post-modern context, that also fits well with the irreverent undercurrents of Australian spirituality.

Paper Session 5.1 Interventions in contemporary religion and spirituality

The Religious Aspects of Celebrity

Carole Cusack
University of Sydney
Justine Digance
Griffith University

Traditional religions proposed models of the perfected life for their adherents; medieval Christians sought to emulate the saints and martyrs, tales of the compassionate bodhisattvas enthralled Mahayana Buddhists and the wandering holy teachers of the Hindu tradition exemplified renunciation and holiness for Hindus. It is clear that since the mid-twentieth century Western religion has changed dramatically, in that traditional religion it is now more strongly influenced by its host culture (for example, materialism, the use of media and the adoration of success characterise Christian churches such as Hillsong) and also that activities previously understood as profane (such as shopping, travel, and physical self-cultivation) have taken on spiritual overtones and constitute quasi-religious praxis for many secularised but still 'spiritual' people. The prominence of celebrities in contemporary Western culture is undeniable. It is here argued that these people function as exemplars of the perfected life (through their wealth, beauty, larger than life profile, and the fact that their existence is conducted entirely in the spotlight) for aspiring followers of this-worldly spiritualities and materialist adumbrations of traditional religions alike in the contemporary Western world.

Throttle-up a whirlwind: space, time and the sacred elixir of speed amongst recreational motorcyclists

Richard Hutch
University of Queensland

A sense of human spirituality is generated by ritual activity. Such activity generally sacralises space, converting it into a special province, and sacralises time, making it appear to stand still or be 'eternal', if only for fleeting moments. Such sacralisation has been referred to by a number of scholars of religion as a reversal of the 'terror of history', or a reversal of the fact that time moves forward bringing with it an increasing awareness of human mortality. A spiritual practitioner seeks to make life stand still in one place', sacred time and space that valorizes living and adds a sense of moral presence to group activities. The argument of the paper is that the use of speed amongst groups of recreational motorcycle enthusiasts is a means to bring about a reversal of the terror of history amongst riders.

Speed, and more of it, makes time stand still in one special place, albeit briefly during group rides. The natural beauty and grandeur of where rides take place underscores the transformative effect of speed. The faster one goes over prolonged periods of time, the more spatial distance appears to shrink, doing so in an ever-shortening space of time. Riders speak of how far they have gone and about how short a time covering such distance has taken. The fastest riders become like religious leaders and heroes who advocate the use speed as a sacred elixir for living, 'speed freaks' indeed. The faster one goes, the greater becomes the sense that time stands still in a blur of one place; distance is of decreasing consequence as the group rides its run as fast as possible. Speed makes space and time contract into 'sacred' time and space. This sense occurs during motorcycle runs filled with 'pushing edges', occasional moments of fear and terror, mishap and accident, exhilaration and the camaraderie of the pack during rest stops. Such a ritual process of sacralisation is illustrated by testimony from seasoned members of the Riders Association of Triumph (R.A.T.) of Southeast Queensland, Australia, or 'Ratbags' as they like to be known, all of whom are proud owners of a variety of high speed, iconic Triumph motorcycles.

The spiritual and the religious in contemporary Australia

Aziz Akbbar

Ethnic Communities Council of NSW; World Conference on Religion for Peace

How Australians conceptualise spirituality could be attributed to an assortment of sociological influences. Today, Australia is the manifestation of modern ethnic fusion, producing varied and often polarised responses to the notion of spirituality. The emergence of modern/alternative forms of spiritual expression found in and amongst the social order, would suggest that there is a notable shift in the way spirituality is perceived and practiced. And at a time when some religious groups are repackaging their otherwise rigid modus operandi in an attempt to engage modern culture, one might believe that this is a reactive response to the perception that formalised religious theologically based spirituality has lost its lustre. Perhaps the only statement one could make with any surety is that these differing spiritual attitudes have all been subject to an element of transformation as a result of a predominantly Australian environmental experiential force. This paper suggests that Australia, in its remote uniqueness, has fostered an evolution in spiritual consciousness on a national level that is exceptional and due to its dynamic nature, most likely infinite in potential.

Paper Session 5.2 Spirituality, ecology, and prophecy

Wild and wilderness: Getting spirited in nature

Sylvie Shaw

University of Queensland

This paper explores the experiences of connecting with the 'great outdoors'. Western culture has fostered a false consciousness that we can live as separate individuals independent of each other and the natural world and yet this

separation is illusory. Rekindling the connection with nature by spending time in wild places can awaken and animate that part of ourselves which lies dormant in our busy city-driven lives. I refer to this awakened self as the 'wild self'. Seeking the wild in the outdoors, away from the machinations of everyday life, we may come into contact with the instinctual wild within. However, Western culture has a suspicion of wild things, a fear of the wild which equates to a fear of the unknown, and by extension, a fear of the other - human and/or nature. In contrast, the 19th century writer Henry David Thoreau said: 'In wildness is the preservation of the world'. I argue that experiences in wild nature can lead to a kind of 'eco-conversion' as responsiveness in nature gives way to responsibility for nature, where spirituality blossoms through a range of activisms from eco-ritual practice and environmental restoration to frontline action.

Contemporary supernatural consequences as eco-motivators
Christine Malcolm
University of Queensland

The world as we know it must radically change if ecological sustainability is to be achieved. The anticipation of personal supernatural consequences (in this life, the afterlife or the next life, here on earth or elsewhere) may have potential in the re-enchanted 21st century to motivate the kind of extreme changes in lifestyle that will be required of people globally. Traditional religious images of supernatural consequences, from karma to paradise, would benefit from mutual reinforcement within a multi-religious environment if they are to effectively empower systems of belief. The development of contemporary images, influenced by global culture, science, and environmental ethics but grounded in ancient symbols and wisdom, may provide the common language to support multiple metaphysical options. Barriers to such development come from a long history of misuse and manipulation of the anticipation of supernatural rewards and punishments, and from the demands of rationalism. Entrenched political and spiritual correctness may now yield to a new era of heightened spiritualization and dire planetary predictions. This paper will explore images of supernatural consequences within the Judaism and Ecology discourse, and discuss their potential to become effective metaphysical eco-motivators.

In a Prophetic Voice: Australia 2012
Joseph Gelfer
Victoria University Wellington

December 21 2012 marks the end of the thirteenth B'ak'tun cycle in the Long Count of the Mayan calendar. A growing number of people believe this date to mark the end of the world or, at the very least, the end of the world as we know it: a shift to a new form of global consciousness. Many books have been published heralding 2012 whose authors appear as prophets or channels for the plumed serpent god Quetzalcoatl. Mel Gibson's *Apocalypto* has increased a popular awareness of Mayan prophecy. This paper identifies some Australian examples of the 2012 phenomenon and locates them within a long tradition of millenarianist

spiritualities, and also as an explicit example of the appropriation of indigenous (both Mayan and Australian) culture.

Peggy Magee Memorial Lecture

Religion studies: From university to school

Peta Goldberg

Australian Catholic University

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