

Migration, Religion and Responses by Universities

Krzysztof Batorowicz & William Conwell

University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, Queensland, 4350, Australia.

Corresponding author: Krzysztof Batorowicz (batorowi@usq.edu.au)

Abstract

The process of globalisation, immigration on a large scale, work in other countries and growing international education (study in other countries or students and academic exchange programs) have contributed to direct contact between various cultures, including different religions. Immigrants and international students brought to their new countries religious diversity with introduction of religions and faiths unknown to the local communities. There is a new interest in religion amongst world leaders, politicians, journalists, academics and various professional groups.

The significance of religion in the twenty-first century was anticipated by some well-known figures (Andre Malraux, John Paul II). However, the fact that this eventuated so visibly and so early receives attention in the media, academic writings and the broader community. The state–church relations are continuously reconsidered in many countries and the new practices observed, commented on and widely debated. Religion has a growing role in public and political life.

These developments also have an impact on universities. Even public universities in countries where the rule of separation of state and church is maintained, have been unable to ignore the religious and spiritual needs of students, staff, visitors and the broader community.

This paper notes new developments in relation to religion from a global perspective. The new attitudes towards religion within universities are also analysed. Although the new current policies and practices in relation to religion are very different not only in particular countries but also between particular universities within the countries, a discussion on a more unified approach can be encouraged. Possible future options for dealing with religious and spiritual issues in practice are also partly considered in this paper.

Keywords

Migration, multiculturalism, religion, religious diversity, university

INTRODUCTION

Migration is a factor which has contributed to the changed composition of contemporary

universities in many countries. In Australia, for example, migrants are amongst staff members (both academic and professional) and students. Some of them became migrants because they won their positions based on open international competition; some decided to undertake studies in order to gain local qualifications and some are simply university students. Their presence has changed the racial, ethnic and national composition of universities.

Migration has also contributed to cultural, linguistic and religious diversity on campus. Although international students in Australian universities cannot be classified as immigrants, they are *de facto* temporary migrants, significantly contributing to the diversity of the student population.

The paper notes the growing interest in religion both from global perspectives as well as within universities. This makes the claim of secularisation (understood as a declining interest in religion and religious practices) seriously questionable. This makes the claim of secularisation seriously questionable.

There is also a practical focus on universities' possible response to the growing interest in religion and the religious and spiritual needs of students and staff.

THE NEW CHARACTER OF UNIVERSITIES

In the last three decades, universities became very international and multicultural in terms of their composition, both in relation to students and staff. This is particularly visible in relation to universities in the United States, Australia, Canada, Great Britain and many European countries. From a multicultural perspective it is appropriate to note that the internationalisation of higher education by making university places available for fees to students from other countries, the international exchange programs for staff and students, employment of staff based on international competition, and more generally, globalisation

has made universities very exciting places. The presence on campus of staff and students from other countries creates the opportunity for direct contact with various cultures, languages, styles of teaching, research methods, learning expectations and so on. Students and staff members from other countries also represent different religions, thus contributing to religious diversity within a university.

The aspect of cultural diversity cannot be ignored any more in the university setting. The majority of students from religious minorities are frequently coming from other countries to a university in an often-unfamiliar country, far from their families, communities, religious groups and places of worship. Visiting academics experience similar problems as do participants coming to a university for a conference or other short-term activity. This is a particularly difficult time for people of any minority and in particular for people from religious minorities for whom religious observance and practice is important.

SPECIAL INTEREST IN RELIGION AMONGST POLITICAL LEADERS—SOME EXAMPLES

Interest in religion and speeches with reference to religion by the current and previous presidents of the United States are well known. For example as Hunter (2010) notes:

It is well known that President Jimmy Carter's approach to the Middle East conflict and issues of human rights was to a great extent determined by his deep Christian faith.

Less known are the current religious interests of other world leaders.

Time magazine (June 9, 2008) contained a significant article about Tony Blair. Although Tony Blair was no longer the British Prime Minister, the focus of the article 'Tony Blair's leap of faith' was on his religious views. Michael Elliott conducted an interview with Blair (after he formally unveiled The Tony Blair Faith Foundation in New York in May 2008) and commented:

Faith is part of our future', Blair says, 'and faith and the values it brings with it are an essential part of making globalisation work'. For Blair, the goal is to rescue faith from the twin challenges of irrelevance – the idea that religion is no more than an interesting aspect of history – and extremism. Blair

and those working with him think religion is key to the global agenda (Time, June 9, 2008).

Even more vocal about religion has been the French President Nicolas Sarkozy. Firstly, as the well-known politician and interior minister he wrote a book titled 'The Republic, the Religions, and Hope' with a strong focus on religion. The book was influential and generated interest amongst intellectuals and religious officials, not only in France, but also in Italy where it was later published. Later, as the President of France he made a number of public comments about religion. For example, as *Newsweek* (2008) reported:

He told diplomats in Paris last month that the two most important challenges facing society in the 21st century are climate change and "the conditions of the return of the religious in most of our societies". Last month, he declared to his UMP Party and visiting German Chancellor Angela Merkel that it was "a mistake" to withdraw the reference to "Europe's Christian roots" from the European Constitution.

In December 2007 during his visit to Rome, President Sarkozy made a statement, which was considered by the majority of French people to be very controversial at least. Rather than commenting, it is probably more appropriate to quote (Beer de 2008):

France's roots are essentially Christian... A man who believes (in God) is a man filled with hope. And it is in the Republic's interest that there should be many believers. Gradual emptying of rural parishes, spiritual desertification of suburbs, vanishing of (religious sponsored) youth clubs or shortage of priests have not made the French happier. The school teacher will never replace the priest or the minister when it comes to passing down values or learning the differences between Good and Evil.

It is clear that both Tony Blair and Nicolas Sarkozy have demonstrated a special interest in religion and have articulated this interest in the public domain.

RELIGION IN CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIAN DEBATE

Brennan (2007) argues that Australians should keep religion in place. Discussing politics and religion, he believes that 'each has its place and each must be kept in place for the good of

us all, and for the good of our Commonwealth' (Brennan 2007:231).

There were significant religious issues in Australian politics during pre-election 2007 public debates. Before Kevin Rudd (2006) became the Prime Minister of Australia, he had written an influential article, full of surprises for some, concentrating on politics and religion as well as more generally about Christianity, encouraging a national, public debate. He wrote that:

In both George Bush's America and John Howard's Australia, we see today the political orchestration of various forms of organised Christianity in support of the conservative incumbency. ... US Catholic, Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians are now engaged in a national discussion on the role of the religious Right. The same debate must now occur here in Australia (Rudd 2006).

Although this statement can be seen by some observers as populist politics, careful and critical analysis of Rudd's articulated supplemented by his demonstrated public behaviour (for example regular church attendance and media interviews close to the church building) tend to support the conclusion that he is genuine about the important role of religion in public life.

RELIGION ON UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES: AMERICAN AND AUSTRALIAN EXAMPLES

Religion has become very popular on campuses of American universities. According to Peter Gomes, who has been with Harvard University for 37 years and remembers the time when students who have been seen as religious were considered as not bright – 'there is probably more active religious life now than there has been in 100 years' (Finder 2007).

Finder (2007) notes that:

More students are enrolling in religion courses, even majoring in religion; more are living in dormitories or houses where matters of faith and spirituality are a part of daily conversation; and discussion groups are being created for students to grapple with such questions as what happens after death...

A survey of the spiritual lives of college students, the first of its kind, showed in 2004 that more than two-thirds of 112,000 freshmen surveyed

said they prayed and that almost 80 percent believed in God.

Nearly half of the freshmen said they were seeking opportunities to grow spiritually, according to the survey by the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California in Los Angeles.

At the University of Wisconsin, an interdisciplinary program in religious studies was created seven years ago and developed into between 70 to 75 majors each year. The University's officials make links between the attacks of September 11th, 2001 and interest in religion.

In US universities there is not only interest in the study of religion but also in academic research. Although in public universities research investigation involving religious issues was seen as inappropriate, this has changed. A practical shift since the early 1990s has taken place with religion as a research topic. Sometimes research investigations deal with religion and economics, political sciences or history in various university departments, whereas previously religious topics were accepted only in a department dealing with religion. There is a realisation that religious elements help to understand the mechanisms in economics, politics or society.

Clayton (2002) noted some specific examples of American universities and research projects related to religion:

A Santa Clara University economist is using economic tools to study religious extremism. An Emory University interdisciplinary institute is conducting a research project on marriage, sex, and family issues as they relate to Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. And such research is trickling into the classroom, observers say, through courses with words like "God" or "religion" in their titles, many of them offered outside the religion department.

Some interesting points in practice about religion in general as well as on campus were made by Stanley Fish (2005) in his article 'One University under God'. He made an interesting distinction between religion as an object of study and taking religion seriously. By taking religion seriously, he understood that religion 'would be to regard it not as a phenomenon to be analysed at arm's length, but as a candidate for the truth. In liberal theory, however, the category of truth has been reserved for hypotheses that take their chances in the "marketplace of ideas".'

FUTURE OPTIONS FOR DEALING WITH RELIGION

Fish (2005), having a long association with the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Illinois in Chicago showed the practical aspect of religious interest on campus, noting that on his campus there were 27 religious organisations for students. He made suggestions that:

Announce a course with “religion” in the title, and you will have an overflow population. Announce a lecture or panel on “religion in our time” and you will have to hire a larger hall (Fish 2005).

A group of 25 scholars from different American universities, representing various disciplines wrote *The Wingspread Declaration on Religion and Public Life*. The purpose of the declaration was to rethink the role of religion and colleges and universities in their curriculum and to provide students with, what they called ‘religious literacy’ within not only religious studies but also their total education. The declaration states ‘students must learn the relevance of religion to all disciplines – sciences, humanities, arts, social sciences – and the professions’ (Calhoun 2007).

With an increasing number of international students from Islamic countries, there was recognition in Australia that they should be provided with space for prayers and with halal food.

There were also instances of offering some discrete courses of religion. However, religion in a general sense was not treated seriously in Australian universities. Currently, there are voices in Australia that religion is back in the public space and universities should abandon the commitment to secularisation by incorporating an understanding of religions into teaching programs (Bouma 2007). Limited presence of religion within Australian universities has been the result of secularist tendencies. There is an understanding for secularist positions or presence, however, as Bouma pointed out: ‘Secularists have a right to have a voice in universities but not a voice to denigrate or relegate religions to a non-space’ (Bouma quoted by Horin, 2007). The majority of Australian public universities provide chaplaincy services with a tendency towards a more multi-faith approach to religious services. Religious studies courses are available at some universities. Some universities are making provisions for religious observation time for staff and students, including arrangement for examinations and attendance of classes.

Religion is an important part of culture as it has been argued elsewhere (Batorowicz 2007) and is an important part of life for many people. Religion cannot be ignored by any university, public or private, regardless of whether religious bodies establish them or not. The fact is that there are religious and spiritual needs on campus.

As the composition of the population on campus is constantly changing and there are students and staff coming from different religious backgrounds, the services should try to respond to these changes. The traditional model of chaplaincy (where established and focusing on Christian students and staff) does not address the needs of other religious groups on campus. If special facilities responding to religious and spiritual needs of others such as small mosque or an Islamic centre or a Buddhist centre are added, they may create religious separation and possible conflicts between particular groups. Although a respect to all religious traditions should be given and realisation of different religious requirements, an approach towards multi-faith facilities may be further explored and experimented in practice. Such an approach is currently popular in many universities. However, it requires extensive consultations with particular religious and spiritual communities, their leaders and development on campus inter-religious dialogue and creating culture of mutual understanding between particular groups.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE INTEREST IN RELIGION AND PRACTICAL ISSUES OF RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY IN UNIVERSITIES – A PRACTITIONER’S PERSPECTIVE

There are a number of implications for the increased interest in religion for universities. The first is that religion must be taken seriously by universities. Secondly, in the globalised world and increasingly multicultural and international character of our universities the response should be global. Thirdly, we need to recognise that universities become multi-religious as their students, staff and other clients represent many religions. The challenges are serious and difficult at a practical level.

In consideration of a practitioner’s perspective, some examples addressing a number of practical issues of religious

diversity in universities are identified and discussed. The rationale for presenting these examples is to suggest that universities adopt a more unified approach to the growth of religious and spiritual diversity within their institutions. This of course acknowledges that varying countries differ in relation to policies and practices on religion. Taking this into account a basic model of a multifaith approach is presented for consideration.

Higher learning institutions must begin by recognising that religion and spirituality may be part of student life on campus and making this aspect significant rather than a marginalised issue. Such recognition represents also a more inclusive culture for the student and staff body who identify with religious values.

Development of an official, clear policy on religion adopted by governing bodies in all universities, published and widely available to all is critical in meeting the religious diversity at university level. Having a policy unsanctioned by governing bodies such as the document 'Policy on Religion, Belief and Non-Belief for Students' signed by a staff member of the Equal Opportunity Office at the University of York in the United Kingdom, although well intentioned, falls short of having the impact a policy sanctioned by a university governing body would have campus wide. An analogy which might suit this situation is having a structure without a foundation. Crucial to this point is making an appropriate appointment of a qualified officer, experienced in managing and communicating with sensitivity across the diversity of religions, responsible for the implementation of such a policy.

Creating guidelines for the purpose of being the principle motive for carrying out actions in line with the policy represents sound thinking in support of a policy on religion. Contents of such guidelines should include amongst other things the development of an advisory body to provide ongoing consultation on religious and spiritual needs. Reflecting on the religious and spiritual needs of students and staff, provision for this advisory body to nominate for appointment of chaplains representing the diversity of religions on campus is important. Chaplains will carry out the sensitive work associated with providing support services for those who make up the religious and spiritual diversity on university campuses. The appointment status of chaplains can take the form of voluntary or paid.

The establishment by universities of a central point dealing with religious affairs can be seen as an outcome of policy adoption and provides the university community a place to practice

the diversity of religious and spiritual traditions in a safe and inviting environment. Deliberations should not be made in haste as regards to creation of a facility, which will ultimately represent a place for worship and spiritual contemplation. It is prudent to consider the dynamics of competing needs associated with varying religious traditions that may be required to share space within one structure or the possibility of developing a structure that provides separate areas catering to specific religious requirements. This is of course contingent on availability of institutional funding.

The growth in cultural diversity on campuses around the world commands enhancement to the services provided such as sustenance for the health of soul, body and mind. This can take the form of halals' food being made available and the prospect of religious curriculum development at universities while being sympathetic to religious observances such as Ramadan by rescheduling examinations if they fall within this period. Furthermore, development of specific services responding to the needs of particular religious groups and traditions through consultation and their cooperation and involvement is an essential element.

Facilitation of religious dialogue on campuses through initiation of interreligious programs with the participation of various faith organisations presents the shared commonality of religious support for the institutions' community. Opportunities for religious services, practices and faith development to encourage utilisation of the central point which deals with religious affairs, such as provision of religious and spiritual services weekly, is important and should be promoted widely. Involvement of religious leaders in university life through participation in developing programs and services should be also considered. Supporting religious groups organised by students and provision of information on religious events promote inclusiveness and brings about awareness of the diversity of religions on campuses.

Achieving success in managing the diversity of religions and nationalities on campuses around the world can be problematic but through strategic planning obstacles can be overcome. The University of Southern Queensland for example applies these practical suggestions in its daily operations of the Multifaith Centre. This represents a clear understanding of a number of relevant issues associated with the practicality of the growth in religious diversity at universities. These include but are not limited to acknowledging the importance of supporting the university community's spiritual well being; the

awareness that it is not about tolerating religious diversity as it is of accepting differences; promotion of social inclusiveness which ultimately leads to reduction of isolationism; encouragement of interreligious dialogue that can have a profound positive effect on community members interacting with each other and creation of an outreach endeavour providing positive reinforcement to the local and broader communities of the religious diversity on campus.

Developments in this area are ongoing and a key result of sharing examples of good practice between universities. Communications amongst universities on good practices and relevant outcomes is essential to guide further development of services that will cater to the increasing religious diversity at universities.

CONCLUSIONS

Migration is a factor which contributes to the development of particular countries taking immigrants and has an impact on contemporary universities in terms of culturally diverse students and staff population.

There is a new, growing general interest in religion, including in politics, media, professions and academia. Migration has an influence on the religious composition of societies and this is reflected in universities. Traditionally, internationalisation and multiculturalism play a special role within universities. Multiculturalism within universities is more visible, especially in relation to international students. The religious and spiritual needs of students, staff and other university clients should be addressed by universities. There are number of practical difficulties with supporting religious needs on campus. They should be realised, acknowledged, debated, researched and consulted. Cooperation between universities and promotion of the best practices between universities will benefit all.

Acknowledgments

This paper includes some edited and modified parts of a paper under the same title presented by K Batorowicz at the Fifth International Conference on Interdisciplinary Social Sciences, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2 – 5 August 2010.

References

- Abbott, T 2007, 'Trying to be all things to all people', *Online Opinion*, 9 March, viewed 2 May 2010, <<http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=5595>>.
- Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2007, 'Abbott says Rudd uses religion politically', ABC News, 27 January, viewed 2 May 2010, <<http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200701/s1834710.htm>>.
- Batorowicz, K 2007, 'Dealing with religious diversity within universities', *The International Journal of Diversity in Organisations, Communities and Nations*, 7(5): 285 – 291.
- Beer de, P 2008, 'Sarkozy and God', *Open Democracy*, viewed 29 April 2010, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/article/sarkozy_and_god>.
- Berger, P 2006, 'Religion in a globalizing world', Forum of 4 December 2006, Key West, Florida, USA transcript, viewed 15 April 2010, <<http://pewforum.org/events/index.php?EventID=136>>.
- Bouma, G 2006, *Australian soul: Religion and spirituality in the twenty-first century*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne.
- Brennan, F 2007, *Acting on conscience: How can we responsibly mix law, religion and politics?*, St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, viewed 2 May 2010, <<http://www.newsweek.com/id/134120/page/2>>.
- Burchell, D 2007, 'Rudd's religion strikes a chord', *Australian Policy Online*, 10 January viewed 2 May 2010, <<http://www.apo.org.au/webboard.html>>.
- Calhoun, C, Aronczyk, M, Mayrl, D and Van Antwerpen, J 2007, *The religious engagements of American undergraduates*, Social Science Research Council, May 2007, viewed 24 April 2010, <<http://religion.ssrc.org/reguide/index10.html>>.
- Carlton, M 2007, 'Politics and religion: Star-crossed lovers', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 February, viewed 2 May 2010, <<http://www.smh.com.au/news/opinion.html>>.
- Clayton, M 2002, 'Scholars get religion', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 26 Feb, viewed 1 June 2008, <<http://www.csmonitor.com/>>

- 2002/0226/p12s01-lehl.html>.
- Elliot, M 2008, 'The faith of Tony Blair', *Time*, 9 June 2008.
- Finder, A 2007, 'Religion gets an 'A' at US colleges', *International Herald Tribune*, 2 May, viewed 5 June 2008, <<http://www.iht.com/articles/2007/05/02/news/college.php?page=1>>.
- Fish, S 2005, 'One university under God', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 7 Jan, viewed 5 June 2008, <<http://chronicle.com/jobs/2005/01/2005010701c.htm>>.
- Garnett, RW 2007, 'China's lesson on freedom of religion' *USA Today*, viewed 2 May, 2010, <http://blogs.usatoday.com/oped/2007/03/chinas_lesson_o.html>.
- Grim, B 2008, 'Religion in China on the eve of the 2008 Beijing Olympics', *The Pew Forum*, viewed on 1 June 2008, <<http://pewforum.org/docs/? DocID=301>>.
- Hamilton, A 2007, 'What's missing in Rudd-Abbott debate on faith and politics', *Eureka Street*, 17(2), viewed 2 May 2010, <<http://www.eurekastreet.com.au/article.aspx?aeid=2198>>.
- Horin, A 2007, 'Professor calls on universities to find religion,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 September, viewed 17 April 2010, <<http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2007/09/04/1188783236837.html>>.
- Hunter, S T 2010, 'Religion and international affairs: From neglect to over-emphasis', *International Relations*, 7 April, viewed 7 September 2010, <http://www.e-ir.info/?p=3771>>.
- Jantos, M and Kiat, H 2007, *Spirituality and health, Prayer as medicine: how much have we learned?* viewed 10 May 2010, <http://www.mja.com.au/public/issues/186_10_210507/jan11101_fm.html>.
- Laurence, P 1999, 'Can religion and spirituality find a place in higher education?' viewed 26 April 2010, <<http://www.wellesley.edu/RelLife/transformation/CanReligionandSpirit.doc>>.
- Magister, S 2008, 'In a very secular France, Nicolas Sarkozy is breaking a taboo', viewed on 29 May 2008, <<http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/55661?&eng=y>>.
- McNicoll, T 2008, 'The President's passion play', *Newsweek*, 18 February, viewed 28 April 2010, <<http://www.newsweek.com/id/109547>>.
- Ojeda Vila, E 2005, 'The religious century', viewed 30 April 2010, <<http://www.cafebabel.co.uk/article/15097/the-religious-century.html>>.
- The University of York 2007, *Policy on religion, belief and non-belief for students* viewed 18 June 2010, <<http://www.york.ac.uk/admin/eo/policies/ReligionBeliefNonBeliefStudentPolicy.pdf>>.
- The University of Southern Queensland 2006, *Policy on religious services*, viewed 18 June 2010, <<http://policy.usq.edu.au/portal/custom/detail/religious-services/>>.
- Pope John Paul II 1994, *Crossing the threshold of hope*, Jonathan Cape, London.
- Robertson, R 2008, quoted by Jim Spickard 'Religion and Globalisation', *Newsletter of the American Sociological Association*, viewed 28 February 2008, <<http://newton.uor.edu/FacultyFolder/Spickard/OnlinePubs/ReliGlob.htm>>.
- Rudd, K 2006, 'Faith in politics', *The Monthly*, October, <http://www.themonthly.com.au/excerpts/issue17_excerpt_001.html>.
- Russy de, C 2000, 'Restoring religious studies in public universities', viewed 26 April 2010, <http://www.catholicsocialscientists.org/CSSR/Archival/2000/381_Russy.pdf>.
- Schmalzbauer, J, Mahoney, KA 2008, 'American scholars return to studying religion', viewed 24 April 2010, <<http://contexts.org/articles/winter-2008/schmalzbauer/>>.
- Sheldon, L 2003, *Why the sudden interest in religion by secular journalists?* viewed 12 May 2008, <<http://www.traditionalvalues.org/modules.php?sid=788>>.
- Ward, D 2008, 'Public interest in religion remains strong', viewed 24 April 2010, <www.prweekus.com/Public-interest-in-religion-remains-strong/article/109350/>.