Evangelicals and their Political Problems with Christian Education

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- **A Statement of the Problem:**

Political debate on a Christian basis has never really developed in Australian public life. This paper examines why there is such an under-developed Christian appraisal of the civil sphere in Australia.

A full discussion cannot ignore the well known attempts at Christian politics. We should study the failure of the now moribund Democratic Labour Party. It did not develop a ***Christian*** democratic ideology, with close adherence to the papal encyclicals since ***Rerum Novarum*** (1891). Instead it careered down the path of political reaction. Nor can we ignore the reasons for the limited appeal of the moral majority politics of the Revd Fred Nile.

But here the discussion looks at the contribution that has been made, and continues to be made, by Christians, to civil society. It is very often the contribution which Christians make which stands in the way of the public disclosure of a Christian political viewpoint. Here I wish to discuss the *indirect,* but effective, roadblock on the path of Christian politics made by Christians through their alternative approaches to public education.

In brief the point is twofold : Firstly, Christian politics has been seriously hampered, if not totally undermined, by Christians adopting the view that their support of Christian schools is a support for private (and at times elitist) education.

Secondly, Christian politics has been rejected in principle by those who assume that the Christian approach to civil society lies in the “civic virtue” of publicly supporting the “common school” ideal through patronage of the State school.

The public scepticism which militates *against* alternative political approaches is well established in popular consciousness. It should not be underestimated. Any alternative Christian political movement will need an alternative political

philosophy which not only also takes account of media, school and church, but in some principled way also takes root in the administration of Christian media, Christian schools and Christian congregations.

Theoretically our concern is about the *secularisation* of political discourse; it is also about the *de-Christianisation* of social life which has developed within the church sphere, or under the auspices of congregations and denominations. These are two sides of one the problem.[1] Schooling is a crucial social institution which, from generation to generation, contributes to the building of civil society. It will also be within schooling that the secularisation and the de-Christianisation can be traced. It is also from within schooling that any effective counter to secularisation and de-Christianisation from generation to generation must be launched.

- **Christian Education and the Christian Political Vacuum**

The *problem of Christian politics* therefore has much to do with the *political problems which confront Christian education*. The 19th century efforts to establish denominational schools, directly and indirectly, became part of the *modus operandi* of the Australian citizenry in public life[2]. The historical ambiguities in the public promotion of Christian education go some way toward helping us explain the absence of Christian politics. They can also help us explain why Christianity remains on the margins of political debate.

As we know, in Australia (as with many other places) attempts to develop political debate has to relate, sooner or later, to a ***de facto*** electoral dominance of the two dominant political ideologies[3]. Both major parties, Liberal and Labor, continue to accept the widespread belief that political action and representation is only effective if, and when, it is made via one or

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[1]. see David Martin **A General Theory of Secularization** Blackwell, Oxford, 1978 espec an appendix (pp.306-308) *"When the Archiepiscopal Trumpet Sounds"* Constantine's conversion heralded the Romanisation of Christianity, entrenchment of Roman notions of patriarchy, hierarchy, precedent and privilege, within Christian communities. Martin's analysis of *secularisation* concentrates upon the public realm, leaving unanswered the question : How does secularization occur in families and marriages?

[2]. Michael Hogan **The Sectarian Strand** 1987 provides an overview of the denominational scramble and a useful bibliography.

[3] see Alastair Davidson **From subject to citizen : Australian citizenship in the twentieth century** Cambridge & Melbourne : Cambridge University Press, 1997 in which liberal/socialist citizenship is accepted as definitive for civil society.

other of these two parties. And many of the comments made regularly by Christians in political debate affirm the view that a political opinion is not realistic when its implications are not easily accommodated within existing political party platforms. It is this ***a priori*** commitment on the part of many Christians which also needs close scrutiny.

- **Public Education Viewed Politically and Historically**

Any organised political action outside the two major parties always confronts the monopoly of the major electoral machines. An alternative political philosophy will have to meet head on the predictable accusations about being unrealistic, unrepresentative, and motivated by self-interest. But it is also that ***anticipated accusation*** that needs to be looked at, because the collective Christian anticipated response to that anticipated accusation still remains a powerful habit forming the way we think politically.

But though there were no attempts to legally establish a Protestant church or churches (as had occurred centuries earlier in the American colonies), nevertheless strong pressures were brought to bear upon the Governors, and Colonial Administrations, to defer to privileged Protestant (establishmentarian and latitudinarian) interests. Majoritarian and establishmentarian interest as expressed by Bishop Broughton could mobilise combined Anglican and Protestant opinion in New South Wales against the efforts of successive Governors (Bourke and Gipps) to organise public schooling on the Irish National model. For a time efforts of successive colonial administrations to challenge the privileged position of the Church of England in public schooling, and public life in general, were thwarted. In education non-Anglicans, particularly the Irish Catholics, were left to conform[4].

With the increase in non-conformist and Methodist migration, the non-established character of Australasian Christianity was re-confirmed. This did not mean that Anglican and Presbyterian churchmen would keep out of politics, in the non-established political realm. But the term *establishment*

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[4]. see R M Younger **Australia and the Australians** Rigby Sydney 1970 p.201; Br Ronald Fogarty FMS **Catholic Education in Australia 1806-1950** (2 Vols) Melbourne University Press 1959 see spec Vol.1 Chapter 1 & 2 espec pp.26-36.

came to refer to, and down to this day still refers to, an informal struggle for cultural elitism and supremacy, rather than a legally stratified class system.

Since the second half of the 19th century there has also been a significant and subtle historical tension in Australian political life in which leadership is shared between those born in the colonies and those 'recent arrivals' who come to Australia on account of their expertise.

- **The Perils of Parental Priority as a Political Principle**

It is important to keep these historical factors in mind when assessing the political character of the evangelical rejection of the idea of Christian public education. Christians in nineteenth-century Australia viewed public education similar to the way they view it today. The question remains : Who is to provide the education and how is public education to be administered? Providing for the education of their children is a parental obligation, as the United Nation Charter of Human Rights was later to affirm. But here is where the ambiguities set in. If we do not have ***structural insight*** then the ambiguities have a tendency of running amok like a tropical rain forest.

Just consider the following phrase: *providing an education for a child*

and compare it with : *providing **for** the education of the child*.

Consider: *providing a school*

and compare that with *providing **for** the building of a school*.

These are all common phrases that regularly make their way into our political speech about education. Our problem here is to note that they do not, of themselves, refer just to one thing. If we analyse each of these statements and systematically consider what they could mean, we will come to the view that without some insight about how education, and social life, is structured we cannot even begin to communicate, even to ourselves, let alone to others.

The question is about ***authority and power.*** It is about what is ***legitimate.*** It is about parental ***obligation***. It is about the ***duty*** of the educator. It is about the ***responsibility*** of students/pupils. It concerns the appropriate ***management structure*** by which school principals should administer the school. It is about the ***constitution*** of school associations. It is about the federative power and ***mandate*** of a "school movement". It is about the role of

State departments to ensure ***public justice*** in education and schooling. It is about the ***laws*** by which the legislature ***should*** ensure that education and schooling be integrated into the civil sphere according to the norm of public justice in education.

Such a question is not only about what ***is***, what has historically come to ***be***. It is about ***norms for public life, education and schooling.*** It is about our stewardship in promoting public justice for all.

Christian educators, at all levels, confront the task of developing a Christian social perspective, to better understand the inter-dependence between, and the peculiar contribution made by, each of these co-ordinated structures: family, school, school association, school movement, Government Department, State. They confront the task, but does such a possibility become an actuality? Our discussion here seeks to explain the absence of a clearly articulated Christian political perspective, even with almost two centuries of attempts to build Christian schools.

It is on the level of developing such a social perspective that we can begin to understand the ideological struggle which is public education these days. Before we "make our pitch" publicly for a distinctively Christian approach to schools and education, we have to clarify how the current debate runs. We need wisdom to anticipate how our proposals for "free schools" and a "free university" will be construed by those whom we would want to join our cause. In particular it demands that we carefully consider how we should present the idea of a free Christian school or university to evangelicals.

- **The Historical Position of the Evangelicals**

Though they may not now constitute a powerful political "bloc" on the political landscape, evangelicals still continue to exercise considerable influence over the way Christian people, of all denominations, discuss and think about education and politics. To understand this power we need to note how Australia's evangelicals formed their "mind" in the midst of 19th century debates about the character of civil society in these South Pacific colonies.

In 1829 Ireland's Catholics had won emancipation, and by the 1860's the Episcopalian Church of Ireland was dis-established. These events indirectly

strengthened Australian democracy by weaving a civil fabric of the South Pacific colonies in which Irish Catholics, Free Churchmen, Anglicans and Presbyterians, disbelievers, unbelievers and non-believers had to work together. In the Colonial period none of the Protestant groups competing for power and prestige could stake their claim as members of an established (ie Australian) national Church. No national Church could be organised before there was a nation; any established Church in the colonies had to reckon with the fact that colonial administrations were ultimately under the rule of Westminster and the Colonial Office.

The major political struggle of the 19th century was not fought out over the establishment or free exercise of religion. That battle had been implicitly fought years before resulting in the codification of the principle in the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States of America, and would, in effect, be incorporated into the Australian Federal Constitution in 1901. Rather the major political struggle was basic to the Sydney-Melbourne rivalry, a battle between (Sydney-based) 'free traders' and the (Melbourne-based) 'protectionists'. This was by far the most significant political battle, even if 'for the most part the Protestant community preferred the Free Trade Party under G H Reid, and the Liberal Party, its successor, under J H Carruthers.'[5] The struggle within the Churches as to how or in which way they should align with political parties has been a consistent pre-occupation. But in this situation we note that Christian people have had to confront the emergence of an historical dilemma : how is public education to be understood in relation to 'free trade' and State protection?

Attempts to straddle this tension in Christian education also confronted the tension between those born in the Colonies and those who had migrated earlier in their lives; those who had demonstrated local leadership and initiative and those brought here for their expertise. Then of course, there has been the tendency of locally born to gain their qualifications at the heartland of Empire and then to return to these shores to take up positions of leadership. There is a definable mosaic of social processes at work here. An historical

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[5]. J D Bollen **Protestantism and Social Reform in New South Wales 1890-1910** Melbourne University Press 1972 p.8.

assessment of Christianity in this part of the world must keep these taken-for-granted aspects of social life in view.

The evangelical political position can not be understood if we do not grasp the fact that it was formed historically in the midst of this intense debate about principles for public life, public education and participation in civil society. We might limit ourselves here to the question of schooling but there are implications of the resultant world-view for all areas of civil society, public conduct and social life.

In the context of the historically emergent two-party domination of public political debate the evangelical approach to public schooling coincides with a political philosophy which has usually been majoritarian, establishmentarian, pragmatic ***and balanced***. It is above all a balancing act[6].

- **The political basis of the evangelical perspective on public schooling**

On the one side is the argument that the public education system should enshrine the principle of parental priority in the **choice of school** in which a child's education is to be received. This means that educational choice, on the part of parents, should not be subject to any legal or financial penalty when it comes to the distribution of public funds. This side of the debate is consistent with a 'free trade' style of public argument.

On the other side is an argument that says that since it is a legal requirement for all children of school age to attend school the Government should provide schools which are genuinely open to all classes and all parents, without discrimination. A system of of non-discriminatory schools is what the Government should set up. Discrimination is permissible perhaps, but only in its "own sphere" ie in the private realm of parental choice which the Government should not take away. This is the 'protectionist' redaction. It

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[6]. In the early years of the Labor rule from 1983-1996, the public profile of the Anglican Archbishop the late Dr David Penman was very high. His 'free trade' style, won applause from the Prime Minister at the time, Bob Hawke, particularly in relation to his promotion of multi-culturalism, but as a New Zealander, with a PhD in the sociology of religion from Karachi, he was not so uniformly embraced within his own ***Melbourne*** Diocese which had been formed during the period when Melbourne was the haven of Australian protectionism. See Alan Nichols **David Penman: bridge-builder, peacemaker, fighter for social justice**: Sutherland, N.S.W. : Albatross Books, 1991. See David Penman "Multi-culturalism in Australia - a Christian perspective" Beanland Lecture, Footscray Institute of Technology 1984.

roughly coincides with the idea of the local school in the Irish National Model which the “bloc” of Bishop Broughton prevented from being implemented by successive Governors in the mid-19th century.

So what has happened here? Briefly, non-State education is allowed so long as it is “private”. And State schools have historically been the “template” for how the Government administers it public responsibilities for education (in legal oversight of curriculum, teacher qualifications, funding formulae etc). It is this resolution which lives at the heart of Australian evangelicalism. It is this synthesis which has not only crippled any evangelical contribution to public education; it is this synthesis which has crippled the ***debate*** about the political character of Christian education. I dare say it is this viewpoint that has constrained the development of a distinctively Christian political and social perspective within those schools which are associated with CPCS (Christian Parent Controlled Schools Ltd.).

Note here that ***both sides*** in this cultural struggle appeal to a principle of parental priority in the choice of education for children. The principle itself becomes a means by which public education in civil society is justified. But note also that both sides of this ambiguous political support for “parental priority” in education are at odds with any consistently Christian defence of the principles upon which “parent-controlled schools” and “free universities” are based.

- **Christian principles : between freedom and protection**

In the non-State school sector parental priority has come to mean that parental choice involves a principled parental stand between the State and the child, denying the State any pretensions that the child belongs to the State. In the State school sector parental priority means that parents are allowed to choose a common-school education without being forced into a *de facto* alliance with private educational, and hence elitist, initiatives.

Let us recall that school attendance is a public legal requirement and it is accepted as a matter of justice that the State provides such funds as are necessary to ensure that schools can genuinely meet the needs of all parents in providing a genuine education to fit children as citizens for a complex, modern, industrial society. The prevailing thinking goes like this : if a parent

chooses a non-State school that parent has forgone the Government provision **for** the fulfilment of that parental obligation in the State school. It is this provision which defines the State school as the "pure type" of **public school**.

But the political balance will have to be struck between these diverging approaches to parental priority. And this question is central to the ongoing dilemma of finding a path to an harmonious development of civil society. Some kind of *entente cordiale* has to be struck between alternative viewpoints within the nation's political sphere. But until the ambiguities in the principle of parental priority are addressed openly and explicitly, schooling and education remain an unstable plank in Governmental policy at both State and Federal levels on all sides of politics. And all systems, private and public, State and independent, may try to morally justify their own schools by some or other reference to this principle[7], but the embarrassing thing is that the principle means different things in different systems.

Public, private, independent; these were the key terms which have become the legacy of *Christian* public education in this country. Along with church involvement in social welfare, the Christian contribution came to prominent disclosure in the systems of denominational schools. Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist and Roman Catholic, all came to draw upon their own sense of *noblesse oblige* (even if in a refined and spiritualistic sense) to develop their *distinctive* approaches to education. They also involved extended family and church networks, providing links to powerful networks in professional life and public affairs[8].

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[7]. The term 'parental priority' as used here is indicative of Catholic social teaching - the principle of *subsidiarity* in the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (New Things) of Pope Leo XIII (1891). Protestants might have appealed to 'parental **authority'** if their public philosophy was in line with late 19th century neo-Calvinism (*sphere sovereignty*), which only began to be publicly articulated after WWII with Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrants and the emergence of 'parent-controlled' schools. Australian Protestants have usually given primacy to their own Church Office bearers in matters political and educational, or to experts who have gained legitimacy in church circles from overseas; in this way Christian school curriculum is very often developed under the aegis of the clergy. For Anglicans, for example, the principle of 'parental authority' not only seems to imply a concession to independents, dissenters and non-conformists.; it also relativzes the connection with the 'experts' who are central to the fulfilment of any elitist aspirations. 'Parental authority' is often simply a nettle too difficult to grasp.

[8]. The Methodist-Wesley College connection played a most important role in the

Alternative Christian schools, which have emerged in the context of post war immigration and the social development of the past four decades, have had to build in an educational ethos strongly shaped by this tradition. The tradition and ethos gives little if any support to the idea of a non-State ***public*** school. For this reason, non-State schools are dragged, as if by historical necessity, into the camp of 'private education'. This occurs despite the fact that some non-State schools are anti- and contra-elitist in principle. Sometimes they express Christian, at others times various humanist, affirmations that civil society needs a strong and diverse structure if a healthy pluralism of religious world-views is to result.

By way of contrast the civic ideology of Henry Parkes, enshrining the State school as the normative standard for all schools, has advocated *free, secular and compulsory* education. The State in its regulative and administrative duties must oversee all schools and in this viewpoint the State school provides the standard by which the standards of the non-State schools are evaluated.

- **State Promotion of a Culture for Elite Private Schools**

State responsibility in public education is formed according to policies which have to negotiate these two ideologies. In popular discourse non-State schools are referred to as *private* schools, and to this day the elite Church Schools refer to themselves as *Public Schools*. Some other non-State schools prefer the *independent* tag and among the State Schools there are also 'elite' High Schools, just as there are non-elite Church schools (Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist/Uniting, Catholic regional Colleges). The euphemistic *public* tag is used by 'the top of the range' elite church schools and in fact denotes private, privileged and expensive, and in this way the tag *'independent'* becomes an appeal to an ethic of non-expensive egalitarian *quality*.

But de-regulating policies, at Federal and State levels, continue to use these terms in an ambiguous, arbitrary and unprincipled way. It might be that the

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public career of Frederic W Eggleston described by Warren G Osmond **Frederic Eggleston - An Intellectual in Australian Politics** Allen and Unwin 1985. Among the Methodist Egglestons, Osmond observes, was a strong sentiment to return to Anglicanism.

current de-regulating policies of Departments of Education, in which State schools are required to take on forms and practises more appropriate for business, is a step towards a polity in which all schools will be administered as (a variant types of) public schools but with the "free enterprise" model as the ***required normative "template".*** This revolutionary tendency blurs the distinction between education and business and is part of a relentless drive to plunder of civil society to serve an abstract ideology. It is also quite consistent with our political and educational traditions and will have to avoid addressing the linguistic and logical ambiguity in any principled way[9].

- **Pluralism and Non Conformity**

Was the educational diversity in the second half of the 19th-century the beginnings of cultural pluralism? Australia did not develop the institutional forms of a pluralistic society that might have been prefigured by this colonial variety of denominational schools. And the denominational schools are still an important corner of, what is now, a spiritually uniform and somewhat monolithic (in educational terms) mass society. If *religious* pluralism in education means the public expression of distinctive educational principles from a variety of public schools, it faces an enormous struggle at all levels - primary, secondary and tertiary.

The resultant culture may not be *totally* uniform; variety is regularly affirmed as good for business and what is good for business is usually viewed as good for society as a whole. Alternative schools and school systems add vigour to education. The Catholic education system is the pre-eminent example, extending from primary to tertiary levels, including several elite secondary schools. At the tertiary level there are two Catholic Universities and the Catholic Institute of Sydney. There are Catholic theological colleges and student halls of residence located adjacent to State University campuses.

Protestant Churches have established residential colleges, usually with theological training halls. But the educational presence of Protestantism after secondary education, is found, by and large, in theological colleges,

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[9]. This is the form which "unbelief and revolution" ccontinues to take in this country. see G Groen van Prinsterer **Lectures on Unbelief and Revolution** translated and edited by Harry van Dyke Wedge Toronto 1989.

residential colleges, student fellowships and prayer meetings, and numerous other *ad hoc* efforts annexed to denominational structures[10]. J Davis McCaughey, a former Governor and Student Christian Movement director, notes that the Protestant belief in "glorifying God and enjoying Him forever" has not advanced into building a Christian University. [11] At the higher level Protestants have been content with everyone receiving a State-controlled tertiary education, with the exception of theology.[12]

An Arrested Cultural Pluralism

It must be said that Australia's arrested cultural pluralism has everything to do with the failure to develop an extensive nation-wide system of Christian public education at all levels. Diversity, if it is present, is expressed within the educative sphere by schools keeping to their 'distinctives' and then it stops there. Because it stops there it eventually eats into the intended educational diversity. Educational diversity has not developed a strong cultural pluralism.

This contrasts with the Netherlands, for example, a country of comparable population. There Roman Catholic, Calvinist and neutral systems of education have legal room to develop their own educational traditions and civic culture[13].

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[10]. Keith C Sewell "The Idea of a Free Christian University" (Research Press, Parkville March 1995) in a paper delivered at *The Idea of an Australian Christian University* Conference at Robert Menzies College, Macquarie University, 25th March 1995. Then Rev Dr Bruce Kaye, Dean of the Anglican Diocese of Sydney pointed to John Henry Newman and the influence of 'broad church' Sydney Anglicanism to justify a claim that a Christian University had already been established by Sydney University's constitution. All the papers from this conference are to be published in M Hutchinson and G Treloar (eds) **The Idea of an Australian Christian University** CSAC, Robert Menzies College, 1997.

[11]. J Davis McCaughey states : "I would have thought that Catholics who have taught us that the *summum bonum* is the Vision of God, and Reformed Christians who teach that 'Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him for ever' would be utterly opposed to a merely utilitarian and instrumental view of university education. Christians ... have a particular responsibility towards one of the institutions of Western culture which they helped to create." **Back to the Drawing Board : Reflections on the Idea of a University in Australia 1988** 15th Walter Murdoch Lecture 21 Sept 1988, Murdoch University.

[12]. see the contribution here of Professor Emeritus Edwin Judge of Macquarie University, an evangelical long-term opponent of Christian schools in his Submission to the West Review of Higher Education. <http://www.deet.gov.au/divisions/hed/hereview/submissions/J/judge.htm>

[13]. Don Anderson's brief account of 'pillarisation' [**Newsletter** (Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia) 11.1 Mar 1992 p.29] identifies the importance of comparing Australia with the Netherlands but completely ignores the fact that it was not the free market ideology which led the way in the Dutch "verzuiling" legislation of 1917. It was *not* the State being forced to allow for private education; it was the State recognising in Statute the legal validity of non-State *public* education. Anderson's interpretation of

Calvinist, Roman Catholic and State Universities are all part of the higher education landscape; public does **not** equal State or neutral. There are also diverse confessional orientations in political parties, trade unions, newspapers, television networks, hospitals, farmers' federations and so on. Even so, 'pillarisation' is under very strong pressure to dissolve itself into simply another former of laissez-faire economics applied to the cultural aspects of national life.

Comparative economic analysis between Australia and the Netherlands, might prove useful at this point. How should confessional pluralism relate to the market and how does this translate into a national civil ethos? Public sentiment does not have to reduce religious belief to subjectivity, nor assume that an appeal couched in terms of one's faith is an implicitly *private* matter.

In Australia, the expression of religious belief in public debate is viewed sceptically, as a subjective and private matter. It is the same for denominational background. Reference to one's denominational background, like one's ethnic background, or one's schooling, is a useful ploy when one seeks *competitive advantage* over against other competitors. Hence public reference to one's religion, or schooling, has been, and still is, almost totally subsumed by a style of utilitarian argument, in which *competitive advantage* and *increased market share*, at personal and public levels, are widely assumed to be the *raison d'etre* of social life[14].

- **Public schools, cultural pluralism and public justice**

It is in this cultural matrix that we can discern historical reasons why genuine cultural pluralism has failed to emerge in Australia. State schools are defined as the template for all **public** schooling, and non-State schools are by

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Kuyper is quite consistent with the **evangelical** approach to public education articulated by professor Edwin Judge. The contribution of Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) has been commented upon by Wilhelm Hennis in relation to this issue. Weber's appropriation of Kuyper's ideas about true civic ***freedom*** central to his idea of a *Freie Universität* (ie non-state, non-church and non-business public education) relates closely to Weber's concept of "value freedom". See W Hennis "The Meaning of `*Wertfreiheit*': On the Background and Motives of Max Weber's 'Postulate'" **Sociological Theory** 12:2 July 1994 113-126 at p.123.

[14]. This is part of the critique of public policy developed by Michael Pusey in **Economic Rationalism in Canberra : A Nation Building State Changes it Mind** Cambridge University Press. Melbourne. 1991.

definition defined as **private achools** meeting the market niche of parents who aspire to, are want to maintain, **an elite status** for their children.

At this point it may be useful to compare the culture of the State High school with that found within non-State education. Consider the ambiguous role of the State school principal. Even when the State School maintains some kind of enduring tradition (if it has not been merged) it is still part of an educational culture superintended by the State. And the structure of such a school community, through the subservience of School principals to what is essentially State departmental control, cannot easily generate a generation-by-generation school culture.

But without such a culture of support at the local level, the State finds itself responsible for a school and a system which, by its own logic, has a discontinuous culture.[15]

In terms of the principle of *subsidiarity*, its functioning on its own local level is continually thwarted by the arbitrary and ideological control from above. In time any attempt by the Principal to gather local support may bring the school into collision with the Department. At best, when the State Education Department re-structures by amalgamations or closures, it will probably find that the Localville High School has an Ex-Students Society that is an unwelcome and vocal opponent. Ironically the State also needs such an association if its school is to be a self-supporting 'school of the future'.

Of course, non-State schools do not automatically develop into the culture of "old school tie" networks, even if they can often call upon support from previous generations of students with less ambiguity. A school as a legally constituted and free standing association has the virtue of a constitution under which it can build generation-by-generation support for the school's tradition and its programmes. The development of an on-going post-school network amongst one's former school cohort is never simply a matter of the *absence*

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[15]. Consider the dilemma faced by the Principal in the face of Departmental restriction of their public statements to conform with Government policy. Now there is talk about Government ***requiring*** the re-introduction of "civics" to arrest the alleged decline in civic virtue. How does a Principal discuss this mooted change with the parental constituency of the State school without transgressing the Departmental code? This issue is bound to become another profound struggle in the State schools.

of the State's regulative power and the post-school culture of non-State schools can languish badly. The Localville High School Ex-Students Society can flourish beyond all expectations. But when Government policies are oriented to a de-regulated educational economy, and the State becomes the patron of non-State schools, then the Private School is implicitly affirmed and its mere existence, over against the State established school, is viewed as an endorsement of "private enterprise" ideology. This is the inner ambiguity of the "privatisation of education" policy of Governments around the nation; it is not only a matter a primary and secondary schools. It is now part of the plundering of universities. (This plundering might even caused the *Nomenklatura* - officials of Eastern European regimes who gained from the dismantling of communism - blanch with amazement).

Under these circumstances, Localville State High School is always on a collision course with the State Department of Education. But it is hard to see how any non-State school principal could take the bold step of speaking out against Government's policies which have increased Government support for non-State education at exactly the same rate at which parental 'clients' leave the State school system. Such a principal may be free of State departmental controls but is subject to a peculiar bind that characterises the style of the non-State school contribution in public political discourse and tends to transform all non-State schools into private schools. So the non-State school principal who sees her/himself as a supporter of a genuinely ***public*** system of education is going to find it a rather lonely existence to stand out and effectively 'bite the hand' of Government.

This ruling ideology demands that a public organisation which is not State-controlled is "private". This ideology makes an enormous impact upon the way schools and school systems, public and private, State and non-State, see themselves. How does it maintain its influence?

In the case of the principal of the non-State school who wishes to speak out about the educational injustice in the Government's privatisation policies we can see the historical tendencies clearly. If this principal's own school is constituted as a public school (small "p") and is ideologically opposed to elitism and the idea that schooling is an economic enterprise (as I believe the

Christian Parent Controlled Schools are) then the principal will be able to take a stand on the basis of the school's written constitution, but the criticism of Government policy on public justice grounds will still be very difficult. The principal might confront a parental constituency which has not been educated in Christian political thinking. She/he will simply be getting her/himself into ongoing hot water with parents.

Any criticism from the non-State sector of the Government's contribution to the entire educational landscape might start out by advocating a regime of educational justice for all the citizenry. But through the processes of restructuring the State school ***sector*** of public education, more resources and monies have been re-distributed to non-State schools in which category this school with this principled principal now finds itself. Even if the covert aim of the politicians and policy-makers has been to protect the privileged and elitist "sectors" of non-State education, nevertheless a measure of distributive justice has been achieved.

The truly crucial political question has to do with how the school aligns itself (solidarity) in relation to the public debate about the redistribution of resources for public education (scarcity).[16] Will the non-State public school develop solidarity with other *public* schools in its search of a new order of educational distributive justice? Or will it, as seems likely, prefer to keep up the pressure on the Government in a way that transforms it, at this point, into the political lobby of the parents in its school community?

The local school community which supports a non-State, non-elitist public education will have to confront a dilemma. Does it criticise the Government reforms which have resulted in more money for non-State schools, including non-elitist schools like themselves? Or do they decide to take a stand with the non-State block and advocate the rights of all non-State schools, which includes the elite and well-endowed ***private*** Public schools, seeking equal

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[16]. This analysis accords in some ways with the statement of Bryan S Turner about the nature of social order and the seeming contradiction between the principles of solidarity and scarcity. "One can conceptualise all human societies as divided or organised along two contradictory principles, namely solidarity and scarcity. All human societies, in order to exist, have to find some common basis, some form of solidarity, which will not be overcome but at least cope with the problems of difference, diversity and conflict." *Citizenship Studies : A General Theory* **Citizenship Studies** Vol.1 No.1 1997 p.10.

treatment for all schools with State schools in fund and resource distribution. Historically and sociologically it is easy to see why the latter option has been the path which has usually been taken. Without a genuine public philosophy the popular pressure to dismantle the State ***common school*** will continue to increase and progressively all public funds will be redistributed to the non-State sector as all State schools are "privatised" and re-constituted as, in effect, educational businesses. But such an approach simply ensures that all education becomes ***private*** and the non-State, non-elitist school which would see itself as a non-elitist public school is further squeezed into the mould of elitist private school, a minority endeavour in an esoteric form of educational "private enterprise".

The contribution of those who would seek genuinely public non-State, non-elitist education as an important facet of civil society has thereby been seriously undermined. But more than that. The possibility of genuinely public non-State, non-elitist education as an important facet of civil society has been ***rejected in principle.***

In this situation, the way ahead politically for public education seems to be in the hands of those who support schools which are non-State and which see themselves as public schools. They, with their supporting constituencies, will have to develop a well elaborated public philosophy, to re-specifies the normative framework for a genuinely civil society.

Such a school has a significant educative task among its own parental constituency and community. This involves developing an alternative distinctive respect for civil society according to the principles of their school's philosophy and a break ***in principle*** with the bankrupt Labor/Liberal civil philosophy..

Given the historical basis for Australia's arrested cultural diversity, educational and cultural competition is easily interpreted as essentially private sector initiative which seeks to gain a competitive advantage over other *citizens* in the public sphere of *economic enterprise.*

This need not be the way civil discourse about education has to unfold but in the Australian case all non-State educational endeavour seems to have a long run tendency to become *private*, to view itself as such, and to be viewed in

terms of undisclosed economic interests. The power of such an interpretation is maintained by a public cynicism about the way in which economic self-interest cloaks itself in religious piety to legitimate its claims in the market place. This is the structural state of affairs with respect to Christian education in this country ***at all levels***. It is a situation which continues to make such endeavour somewhat precarious. Why?

- **Christian synthesis in the public square**

So my point is this. There is a widespread wide that Christian support of Christian schools is essentially a pious attempt to facilitate competitive private advantage, with the aim of controlling the powerful and lucrative institutions of public life. And there is also a significant and powerful established evangelical opposition to this view which sees the Christian civic duty to support the ***common school*** approach which in our Australian situation can ***only*** be found in the State-established schools. Such evangelicals see any attempt to establish Christian schools in the public domain as an attempt to synthesise two basic but opposed spiritual impulses - the spiritual message of Jesus Christ and neo-utilitarian *economic rationalism*. In their view the attempt to overcome a situation in which Enlightenment materialism has conquered the Gospel, is to stay under the umbrella of the State. It is the evangelical rejection of what they perceive as such an attempted synthesis, which leads them (backwards, as it were) to give historical support to the dominant uniform and monolithic, public culture of this country which now also promotes private enterprise at the expense of civil society. The evangelicals maintain their position now only as the proprietors of a moral stand which condemns the direction in which our civil society is heading but have no ***in principle*** position of their own.

Confessional diversity, is affirmed but confined to, if not constrained by, the realm of (non-political) rhetoric. In the views of Edwin Judge and Brian Hill so-called Christian schools may sometimes creatively re-interpret the content of curriculum but they are ***in principle*** sectarian, because they either re-design curriculum in terms of ideology, or if they become popular, powerful and in control of the Government, then they cannot but force their curriculum dogmas down the throats of the entire citizenry.

We have to keep in mind that this strong Protestant, and evangelical, defense of the State school system is part of the evangelical attempt to develop an anti-elitist ethic. It is also an appeal based in the tradition of the common school[17], and this tradition also needs to be examined carefully[18]. Some Anglican parish schools, and Uniting Church independent schools, run according to this notion, but the major expression of common school ideology remains, I suspect, the evangelical defense of the State schools. The appeal is to a deep-seated sentiment that public life should display the tolerance of a 'broad church'. Some non-State common schools make a persuasive case for their alternative because of the widespread apprehension that State schools have sidelined 'majority values', giving in to minority ideologies and it is to be noted that 'ordinary Australians' often turn to the non-State common school out of a sense of a **nationalist** loyalty, and **egalitarian** ethic..

The evangelical Christian defenders of the common-school tradition view the development of explicitly Christian schools with alarm. Schools built on a *confessional* basis are viewed as closed, ideological, sectarian and unwilling to face up to the challenges presented by a secular society. Such challenges, they say, Christians have to be willing to face, and Christian schools cannot mete such a challenges. In this way they assert that Christian schools are not Christian, and by that they mean that they represent a sectarian denial of the importance of civil society. Here again majoritarian and uniformitarian views are evident. Yet, the overwhelming majority of non-State local schools are in the Catholic school system. And Catholic parish schools will these days also often accept non-Catholic children if there is room. The Catholic education system has its own diversity. There is a range of schools available within it,

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[17]. Brian V Hill, a staunch evangelical, argues that the "common school" is the norm for public education **Values Education in Australian Schools** ACER 1991. This is the view of Bob Connell. See his inaugural University of Sydney lecture *Schools, markets, justice: education in a fractured world* "The non-market authority of the state not only guarantees contracts; in modern education the state guarantees credentials, it funds and certifies the production of knowledge, it defines the common curriculum, it certifies teachers, and in its own school and technical education systems it provides the template on which private providers develop variations." http://www.edfac.usyd.edu.au/projects/addresses/connellr/

[18]. see Charles Glenn "Free Schools and the Revival of urban Community" in Stanley Carlson-Thies and James W Skillen (eds) **Welfare in America : Christian Perspectives on a Policy in Crisis** Eerdmans Grand Rapids 1996 pp.393-425.

and here too the formative power of the common school ideal come to expression.

To avoid the political dilemmas which evangelicalism bequeaths to generations of Christians seeking to develop Christian education it will be necessary to develop a political philosophy which is an ***in principle*** rejection of the view that the State school is the "template" for all public education. It will also require a careful articulation of the Christian social perspective to demonstrate that the "common school" is not the standard against which Christians should measure their education stewardship for civil society.

- **The Australian University and public education at century's end**

So how, in this context, should we understand the evangelical predisposition to the idea of a "free university." The University, as a cultural institution, is a most important contributor to the entire educational mosaic, a point of reference by which the value of **all** the diverse educational systems, and what they achieve in terms of their students, can be measured. A school these days still gains much of its internal cohesion, and its ongoing legitimacy, through its public 'presence' fostered by the success of its graduates who move on to University and beyond. The University is one important confirmation of the moral purpose of the educational mosaic of diversity. It functions as a cultural ideal to which (all) schools orient their programmes. It functions to endorse the traditional pattern of public life, a pattern in which ideological diversity has hitherto been locked into the schooling system.

In these terms the University has been for some decades a conservative cultural force, an advanced common school providing liberal learning and cultural exposure, endorsing the prevailing Liberal/Labor ***entente cordiale*** concerning the ground rules for civil society. . Most important of all professional or quasi-professional training has been provided for students whatever their confessional, ideological or ethnic backgrounds, and in this terms University is seen as a preparation for citizenship in mass society.

If parents initially send their children to private schools to avoid State Education, to maximise their chances for entry into the University, then that impulse may have been transformed in recent years. As the former Labor

higher education minister John Dawkins, and his Liberal successor Senator Vanstone well know, most, if not all, universities in Australia are now dominated by the Federal Government's agenda. They are now State Schools in a way that they never were prior to 1986.

And they are now State Schools in a way that State secondary and primary schools have been susceptible to ideological manipulation under the rule of Departments of Education. The pattern to re-make State primary and secondary education into public educational businesses on the private enterprise model has its corollary in the Government endorsement of Australia's major universities introducing full fees for its courses, the attempts to Vice-Chancellors to get "their" universities in on the ground floor of new attempts to build non-State private elitist universities on the back of large scale business, corporate and multi-national backing. Such efforts are an implicit admission that the grandiose attempts to make Australia's public State universities as good as the best in the world has failed. The decade-long attempt is perceived by the new generation of Vice-Chancellor's to have been a failure. They are eager to make their own contribution. And predictably they will discover that the failure was brought about caused by their "public" character (ie that they have not been disciplined enough by "exposure" to the market") and that this now has to be "re-negotiated" (as in the case of up-front fees). The model of the University as a State-owned business, which has been in place since Dawkins reforms, is now to be replaced by some other "model".

Advocates of the post-1986 university reforms are on the brink of identifying the University as a *common school* for mass education. Mr Dawkins argues in this way[19]. So too do the many Vice-Chancellors who have proceeded to highest University rank in the wake of his post-1986 reforms. Their argument is reminiscent of the evangelical Christian advocacy of State Education[20]. The prevailing pattern allowing for non-State private church schools has re-

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[19]. John S Dawkins ***Higher Education: A Policy Discussion Paper*** (1987); ***Higher Education: A Policy Statement*** (1988) and ***Research for Australia: Higher Education's Contribution*** (1989). **Campus Review** regularly features articles developing this view.

[20]. see Brian V Hill *op cit*.

emerged in tertiary education with the establishment of Catholic Universities[21], but also other attempts, like that of Bond University, which see the University as an extension of business and entrepreneurial activity.

Could not a well-endowed group of Church schools club together to enter the higher education market? Could they not establish a well-endowed 'elite' Christian College on the American model?

Originally the common school idea was oriented to participation in industrial society. It was intended that the population could obtain a sufficient education allowing for employment and training according to talent and merit. The common school was opposed to the ideal of an intellectual and cultural elite; it was based in the belief that only in a non-sectarian public sphere, where all adhered to the common philosophy, could allow for the participation of all whatever their beliefs, whatever their background[22].

While the common school ideal was alive and formative in the State school system, these schools remained strong and powerful. Advocates could be found in all confessions, and after World War II its graduates took up places in increasing numbers in Universities across all faculties. But as long as the University still viewed itself as training the nation's elite, the common school ideal could not transform the university curriculum.

The older 19th century liberal ideal of the university, held sway. But as the BA and BSc have become the basic degrees for the educated masses, the liberal arts ideal has declined in spectacular fashion. With the general availability of the university's basic degrees Universities no longer promotes themselves as institutions for the elite, but as servants of the masses from which the elite, with their help, are to be found. It was at this point that the common school ideal appeared again on the horizon of John Dawkins.

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[21]. "The idea of an Australian Christian University" conference of 25.3.95, (see ftn 7 above) saw Charismatic, Reformed and Roman Catholic Christians defend the idea of a Christian University. It was left to some Sydney Anglican Evangelicals to take the contrary view. see Edwin Judge "The Undesirability of Christian Universities : Some Historical Reflections" **ISCAST Bulletin** Vol.1 No.1 1994 pp.15-17. Judge says that the idea of a Christian school is a contradiction in terms, having been initially formulated by Julian the Apostate.

[22]. The common school also involves an appeal to a generalised Christian ethos. The Unitarian, Horace Mann, was a notable American advocate, emphasising the Jeffersonian ideal of participatory democracy. This is also the kind of school envisaged by the Irish National System. See Fogarty *op cit*.

The universities after 1986 were re-structured according to the common school idea. But now, in management and curriculum, they are dominated by a materialistic and hedonist *economic rationalism*. The most prominent scholarship may be post-modernist de-constructionism but it is far from certain whether such a world-view can critically confront the economic reductionism implicit in Government policy with an alternative approach.

Now that the common school rationale has been skilfully applied to re-constructing the place and cultural contribution of the Universities in the Australian economy, a new ethos emerges. The national Christian ethos of the late 19th century no longer holds sway. The alternative ethic which has taken its place must come to expression throughout the structure of the universities, and from there to permeate all of national life. This leaves the evangelical Christian defenders of State education in a very ambiguous and contradictory position indeed. The ironic thing is that the evangelicals may still believe that they are in a strong position.