

The Philosophy of the Church Colleges

The Church University College, as it exists in Australia today, had its origins, in Sydney, in 1854. The Preamble to the Act "to provide for the establishment and endowment of Colleges within the University of Sydney" outlines the functions of the Church College as conceived at that time:

"Whereas it is expedient to encourage and assist the establishment of Colleges within the University of Sydney in which Colleges systematic religious instruction and domestic supervision with efficient assistance in preparing for the University lectures and examinations shall be provided for students of the University. Be it therefore enacted by His Excellency the Governor of New South Wales with the advice and consent of the Legislative Council thereof . . ."

(Act no. 37, 18 Vic., 2 December, 1854).

The derision with which this statement is likely to be greeted today - in many quarters - does little justice to the achievements of the men of that age. It does pose the question, however, whether the Australian University Church College today is a thing of the past - a useless anachronistic survival? Or is there, alternatively, a "philosophy" of the Church College which is valid in today's society? And what is the function and purpose of the contemporary Church College?

Despite the gloomy prognostications of its opponents and critics, the Church College does, I believe, have an important role to play in the contemporary Australian university. Its possibilities, moreover, have yet hardly begun to be explored. To judge the Church College today simply in terms of the canons of its founders is to commit an error of history. The function and purpose of the Church College have changed radically in the intervening century. No one now seriously regards the Church College primarily as a bastion for the preservation of the Christian faith and morals of students thrown into the hostile intellectual milieu of the secular University. The philosophy of the Church College is now conceived rather in terms of the Christian notion of service - service to the University, the Church, and the community generally.

The concept of "service" is, indeed, central to Christianity. It demands an attitude of mind constantly directed outwards - away from the "self"; an attitude of "giving", not "taking". As the *raison d'être* of the contemporary Church College, this philosophy is not, I believe, hopelessly idealistic and unreal. It does, however, demand certain conditions.

It demands, firstly, I think, that the Church College function (at least in some measure) as a community, and not simply as a boarding-house where a collection of people sleep and eat when they feel like it, without getting any further value from their experience in it. It requires also that the Colleges avoid the danger of becoming closed enclaves within the University - kinds of privileged preserves for a number of people who exclude themselves from the general pell-mell of the total University life. It presupposes, moreover, that

College staff are alert to the College's role of service and that they see beyond the seemingly interminable inner mechanics of College life.

The Church College contributes to the University, in the first instance, by providing students with opportunities whereby they can develop as mature adults. The demands of community living and facilities for extracurricular activities in Colleges are directed towards fostering the cultural, creative and emotional aspects of the person. The tutorial system, which supplements the lectures and tutorials given in the University, is designed to assist students with their academic work. As Church institutions, the Colleges strive also to help students in their religious development. Each Church College provides students with opportunities for worship, formal or informal religious instruction, and pastoral counselling.

The Church College, however, does not exist simply to provide a Christian academic environment, in which students can grow to Christian and personal maturity. It must see itself also as a vital part of the whole University - a part which contributes in some specific way to the total University.

The form of each College's contribution will vary, according to its particular circumstances. Some Colleges establish College libraries specializing in areas which supplement the collections in the University Libraries. Members of the University (staff and students) are encouraged to use the College library. Many Church Colleges organize special lecture evenings to which they invite members of the University. Other Colleges arrange seminars or projects for University personnel, in areas related to their particular specialization. These are but a few of the more usual ways in which Church Colleges today are interpreting their role of service to the whole University.

The Church University College best serves the Church (I dare to suggest) by attempting, in the first place, to provide the Church with vital, mature and integrated Christian men and women - men and women trained to recognize and accept their responsibility to participate in the service of the Church to the world. (The word "Church" is here used in the broad sense as "The People of God".) In the absence of Faculties of Theology within Australian universities, the Church College has today, also, the additional possibility of establishing a point of communication between theologians and the University. Much of the most fruitful thought of a nation takes place in its universities, and it is important that Christian theologians be in touch with these creative centres. It is imperative that Christian theologians interpret the Gospel in the categories of current thought, if they are to minister effectively in their Churches. The Church University College has the opportunity also, on many Australian University campuses, of initiating projects designed to contribute towards Ecumenical understanding. Church Colleges themselves witness to the different traditions and practices within Christianity. A study and knowledge of each others' customs and beliefs could valuably assist future co-operation and dialogue.

In Australia today there is need for a much closer relationship between the University and the general community. Ronald Conway points up the

problem in "The Great Australian Stupor". "The problem", he writes, "as Buckley and others have pointed out, is to get Australian tertiary educators away from their jobs at all. Many wharf labourers are more articulate at their level of discourse, than many university lecturers are at theirs. . . . The intellectual and the activist must complement each other. Australia still suffers grievously from their estrangement." ¹ The modern University Church College has, I believe, the possibility of bridging this gap between "gown" and "town". Integrated in the life of the University, with its flow of ideas, and open to the general community with its actual needs, the Church College can provide opportunities for the interaction of academic knowledge and practical experience.

It is not within the scope of this article to detail the means available to Church Colleges to implement these ideals. What I have intended is to set forth a valid philosophy of the contemporary Australian University Church College, and outline some of the many ways in which this "philosophy" can be translated into practice.

There has been, in recent years, considerable debate and controversy as to the function and value of the modern University Church College in Australia. College personnel themselves must, I feel, accept responsibility for much of the current criticism. A constant review of the aims and methods of Colleges is, I agree, salutary and wise. But continuous "self"-examination and "self"-questioning lead only to sterility. Those involved in Church Colleges need to think more in terms of the University Church College as a fait accompli, and direct their attention to creating ways in which the Church College can contribute to the general life of the University, the Church and the community.

Many students today speculate also on the merits of College residence as opposed to residence in flats, private lodgings or University Halls of Residence. Many Christian spokesmen raise the question also of the relative merits of the Church College and the University Religious Centre (such as it exists in Monash and Flinders Universities). I find it surprising in a pluralist society such as ours, that there should be such a demand for "uniformity" - in either area. Surely each form of residence has its function in the community; and no one Christian Centre would deny the help and value of the other. The reasoning which lauds one at the expense of the other is somehow out of touch with reality.

People too who query the place of 'religious' institutions in the contemporary university would be wise to take note again of Ronald Conway and his pertinent remarks on the subject. "If Australia", he writes, "is not populated by moral imbeciles, the nation does have more than its share of metaphysical morons . . . people who assume that the last word to be said about religion is that they fail to see its relevance". ²

1. Conway, Ronald - The Great Australian Stupor. Melbourne, Sun Books, 1971, pp. 222, 230.
2. *Ibid.* p. 208.

To conclude, the University Church College in Australia has, I believe, real possibilities for future development. Much constructive thinking is necessary however (should our Church Colleges, for example, be allowed to expand into such vast institutions?). Much effort too is required on the part of the mere handful of dedicated people in the Church Colleges themselves - I would argue, indeed, that the Church Colleges need many more dedicated personnel to help them inch towards their goals. They cannot aim to be all things to all men all the time, but their primary function of "service" is their *raison d'etre* today - service to the University, the Church and the community generally.

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The foregoing article was compiled for LiNQ by Miss Denise Sullivan of The Grail, Melbourne. Miss Sullivan, who is an Arts graduate of Queensland University, conducted a comprehensive survey of Australian University Colleges for St. Raphael's College in 1969-1970 prior to our move onto the Douglas Campus. She is at present part-time librarian at Mannix College, Monash University, but above all is actively engaged in organising seminars on current religious and philosophical topics for interested students at the three Melbourne Universities, working in close association with the Chaplains at these Universities.

St. Raphael's has benefited greatly from Miss Sullivan's survey and also from our association with the older established Church Colleges and the newer ones in the major cities. But each situation varies and so we are trying to develop our own authentic spirit in keeping with a new University in a different environment.

We are very conscious, for instance, of our associations both with the City of Townsville, having lived in temporary quarters in Hyde Park for seven years, and with the wider area which this University serves. In the northern region long-standing friendships and contacts have been established and this is also the case for the Mackay and western regions. Vacation schools and discussion groups have been arranged to foster and maintain these connections.

With regard to the role of a women's College within the University College structures we believe, as indeed the students themselves believe (if we take the N.U.A.U.C. reports seriously) that there is definitely a place for the single sex College. In a society conditioned to the right of free choice standardisation with regard to residential facilities within the Universities would appear to inhibit this right. Also on the James Cook Campus the physical layout of the various College and University buildings is conducive to good inter-College and University relationships, so that there is no fear of isolation. Moreover the emphasis on the role and rights of women in our contemporary society leads us to consider the peculiar contribution which can be made by a women's College in fostering these principles and at the same time in retaining some of the grace and dignity traditionally associated with womanhood.

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