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OVERHEAD – BILLY’S MOTHER

I selected this as an opener because it puts me very much in mind of the students and staff in a University, their single-minded devotion to a particular goal can be both touching and irritating. It also makes them particularly vulnerable when they actually recognise that disaster has struck. Whether you minister or administer this is a trait that needs to be recognised.

Good Afternoon

My name is Pat Miller and I am the Director of Student Administration and Support Services at the Australian National University, which tells you nothing about me or gives you any reason to think I might warrant listening to on this beautiful Sunday. I was asked to talk about my views of the relationship between University Chaplaincies and University Administration. And I agreed to do that but I think it is fair to give you more than my name and titles because my views on Chaplaincies and relationships with administration, are heavily influenced by my background and my experiences before and after I came into University Administration.

Thinking this through I realised that my education has a lot to do with it and my family also played a big part. As I expect has become very clear by now I am not Australian by birth, I was born in Turkey of a Turkish Mother and English Father, an issue that I will come back to, but I left very early as a baby and went to England where I grew up and was educated.

So I was raised Church of England, none of this Anglican nonsense. Because I was a Girl Guide the encounters with church were mostly

- Church Parades when being chosen to carry the flag in the procession up the church and peeking at the scouts in the opposite pews were both ordeals enhanced by the gothic splendour of the surroundings and the ceremonies,
- and- King James Bible, Book of Common Prayer and Psalms that were incomprehensible but flowed well.

Schools in England are required to teach Scripture or as it later came to be know, Religious Knowledge. So from a very early age we learnt the stories from the Old Testament and the parables and tales from the New that are to a great extent the foundation stones of the western christocentric culture embraced by most of the English speaking peoples. I was very good at pictures of men in dresses with funny headgear, misshapen pigs in flight over cliffs that bore a striking resemblance to the garden wall and wielded the colouring pencils with a will when it came to Joseph’s coat. The critical thing about this teaching was that it was done by scholars, not retired or overworked

clerics, or well meaning but untrained lay persons. The information was accompanied by information about the allegorical nature of the stories and about the historical context and probity of the Old Testament tales. A healthy scepticism about the words accompanied by an evident belief in a higher being and sometimes faith was apparent in many of the teachers but there was no preaching. It may be of course that they simply took our and their faith for granted and thought they did not need to push it. We were also taught comparative religion, I doubt we were able to comprehend most of it at that stage but at least we had an idea of what might be out there.

My daughters were raised in the Australian education system which allows a choice of religious education which in my view lacks balance, it comes down to selecting one form of indoctrination over another, or none at all. There is no place in the general curriculum for teaching about the Bible as a work of literature or its place in history and at the core of other great works of art and literature. It is a sad lack. No comparative religion and if you are an atheist, a Jew or a Muslim you sit out the religious classes and draw or read.

As a parent without an espoused religion I found this disconcerting, it was either choose a religion or subject them to boredom and since the religious option amounted to authorisation to indoctrinate it was not a choice. I would have been happy for them to have been taught about religions and the bible and the other texts that drive the belief systems in other parts of the world and increasingly here but that option was not available.

I return to my own childhood and my suppressed multicultural background. In England in the 40s and 50s, unlike Australia of the 80s and 90s it was not a good thing to be different, especially that different. Holidays in France were OK, just, but Turkey was truly foreign, probably the source of disease, backward and uncivilised. My Mother had come from Ankara and Istanbul where electricity and water were available on "tap" so to speak but her first encounter with living in England took her to a farm house where all water came from a well, the light came from oil lamps and washing and cooking relied on wood and coal fires. So her perspectives of primitive and uncivilised were a little different. However, my father actively discouraged speaking any language but English in the home and she tried and succeeded in becoming a good English housewife. Her English was good as she had an English Mother, the source of another long story, but all her training and education was Turkish, and most importantly for this saga, she was, if she was anything a Muslim. We did visit Turkey when we were small to meet the Turkish family and I absorbed this knowledge of my Mother and where she and her family fit in the pantheon of religions that were opening up.

I was confirmed into the Church of England and it was at that point that I parted company with the Church and developed a deep scepticism and antipathy to organised Christian religions. It appeared that because my Mother was a Muslim she would not be coming to heaven. It was reserved, not just for the good people but also for the ones with the right beliefs as defined by the man in front of me. He knew nothing of my Mother, my Aunt and Uncles and cousins, my Grandmother or my Grandfather but had just pronounced them *persona non grata*, excluded from what suddenly appeared to be an undesirable

place to aspire to. So I revised my views on God down, I was young enough then to confuse the concept of god in any form with the practice of religion.

**BARKING FRENZY** What I am about to say may be seen in this light!

I did move on from there but only to be brought up short by the recognition that as a woman most organised religions overtly or covertly downgraded me, my capacity to think and my contribution. So may I say that I have absolute and overwhelming respect and admiration for all the women in this room and all the women who work through organised religions to try and make a difference. They represent, more than anything else I can think of, the power of faith.

So although I may not be prepared to say that I am an atheist or even a troubled agnostic, I can say that I am unimpressed by the way that men have organised and manipulated most religions, Christian or otherwise, to suit their prejudices and build powerful politico-religious hierarchies that down grade women and use knowledge and learning as weapons in the struggle for control of people and wealth.

So I am like every other University administrator, UNIQUE, I have a history that equips me with prejudices of my own and which influences strongly my views of the ways in which University Chaplaincies should relate to the Administration and the community. I know that other Administrators have equally strong views born of their own experiences and their faith or lack of it. Within the Executive at ANU I can count on a couple of committed Anglicans, a couple of atheists and a couple of Jews, no Catholics are evident which does not mean they are not there. The Australian Catholic University on the other hand probably boasts a more homogeneous Executive, but I would not count on it. So the views I express on Chaplaincies should not be taken to reflect those of all administrators.

To round out the picture a bit more I should recount my encounters with chaplains at Universities, because they too have had a strong influence.

I spent 15 years at the University of Sydney and never saw a Chaplain. They had rooms but were never in evidence at orientation, they did not come into the faculties to introduce themselves or make attempts to engage the administration. Their presence in the Colleges with religious affiliations was inferred and as the Colleges such as Paul's and John's had reputations for misogynistic behaviour enhanced by rugby thuggery that indicated that whatever influence the Chaplains in the colleges had it did not extend to improving the behaviour of the students. Of course that was eight years ago now and I am sure much has changed.

Then I moved to Newcastle and discovered what an asset to a University an active, dedicated and broadly based Chaplaincy could be. I had to come across them because they reported to me, which in itself was a major change in the rules of engagement. Of course I did not appoint the Chaplains but I discovered that they had an effective and rigorous process of vetting the nominees to the Chaplaincy that meant that the recommendations from the various churches that went to the Vice-Chancellor were for people who knew what they were coming to and accepted the precepts of the Chaplaincy.

It was a revelation akin to St Johns and as welcome. Although the Chaplaincy was highly Christocentric because those were the churches that were prepared to fund participating chaplains, they made a point of encouraging people from other religious groups to meet and worship in the Chaplaincy. They specifically banned proselytising and made sure that at least one person was available at all times. They also walked the campus, dropped in on staff and students and were very well up on what was happening, where the deaths and illnesses had occurred, what the levels of poverty were among the student population and which faculties or departments were unhappy and why. The Chaplains were the best-informed sources of information on the health of the university but operated strictly within and in accord with the administrative framework. They worked closely with the administration and other services, not just coming to meetings and making a contribution to the talk but working with them to deliver assistance where it was most needed, from distributing Vincent De Paul food vouchers and setting up a clothing bin on campus, to holding memorials for students who died. The Chaplains at Newcastle were a force for good to be valued and reckoned with. And they involved the students and the staff in what they did. Their focus was the University first with God, their religious affiliations came second in their work although I am sure that each of them practiced and preached and proselytised when outside the University. And I know that they all had orders from on high, and I don't mean God, to bring the students into the fold, whichever one they related too, but they never betrayed their own standards of behaviour and Chaplains who stepped outside the guidelines were reprimanded and if necessary moved on.

After that very positive and constructive experience of working with a Chaplaincy I went to the ANU looking for the same and encountered a blank. There was a Chaplaincy that had a big sign on the window. I tried to engage them and find out what they did but they were not really interested. I could understand, here was a blow in who did not have any role in their lives and I wanted to know what they did, where they did it, and who selected them. They did lots within the confines of the Chaplaincy and for their churches and I discovered that an off campus committee controlled the appointments, but its role and relationship with the University was, and to my mind, still is obscure.

I waited for an opportunity to interact with them in a positive way. That chance came at the Commencement Service for the University Year that was held in the Catholic Chapel and was multi-denominational. Multi-denominational but not multi-faith. I went to several of these services. All of them were totally focussed on Christian religions, they excluded the senior officers of the University who were not sent invitations and involved an audience whose average age was 55 minimum. No students were involved in any aspect of the services although we have two Catholic and one Anglican college on the campus and they could have been expected to take an active role in planning and running a commencement service. After the last experience I wrote a scathing critique to the Heads of the Anglican and Catholic Colleges asking what they thought was going on. Even if the Chaplains were an irrelevant force on campus they appeared to me to have responsibility because of their roles in involving students in community acts of worship and celebration. This has had the effect of ending the services, which was not the intention; I just wanted them to become more relevant.

CLAIRE CARTOON This serves as a reminder that although they may look alike young people at University are intelligent and will think outside the herd, and we should help them do so.

Given all of the above you might have guessed that I am very much in favour of a University having an active and lively Chaplaincy on the premises AND that I have very strong views on the way they should work within the University. I am convinced that a community of scholars needs somewhere that takes peoples' faith and beliefs seriously and that a University community includes a lot of people for whom faith is important; they may need to find one, they may need to practice one, they may need to question one. They may need to connect with others and find a place where it is safe for them to explore ideas and concepts outside of the confines that may have been set on them by an entrenched philosophy whether it be linked to a religion or not.

I did do some research on this to see whether my views might be at odds with people active in their faith and in Chaplaincies. I found, perhaps surprisingly that we shared a number of ideas and views. I found that reassuring because although we are coming from different bases we clearly see a University in this time as needing a particular form of ministry. Of great interest were the Keynote address given by the Reverend Richard Burridge, the Dean of Kings College, London at the Phoenix Rising Global Conference in 2000, the papers written by Erich von Dietz on his own and with Monika Chang, and those written by John Bodycombe and Jeff Fitzgerald.

A couple of them explored the meaning of the word, chaplain, and speculated on its pertinence given its close association with Christianity and whether that close tie made it appropriate. However, it appears that the word was derived from "capella" or cloak, the relevant one being owned by St Martin who tore his in half and gave it to a beggar. The Frankish Kings kept the cloak after his death and the guardian of this cloak became known as the "capellanus", which through use in old French then English became chaplain. Bodycombe goes on to say that the Chaplain is "one who maintains reminders of the sublime amidst the secular". I would like to add to this by suggesting that faith provides comfort and protection to many people in the way that one might expect a good cloak to comfort and protect against the elements. So the title would appear to be appropriate for Chaplains in modern universities although I would suggest that comfort and protection needs to be tempered by challenge and debate.

Burridge and von Dietz both confront the problem of ministering in an organisation that is, in Australia, at least, secular. In England the state and the church are much more closely intertwined with the Head of State being the Head of the Church. That confirms the place of at least an Anglican Chaplaincy within the tertiary institutions but adds to the challenge of ministering to an organisation that is diverse and divergent and which builds its reputation on challenging ideas. He has the advantage that he is clearly accepted into the academic community and teaches within the formal curriculum. One thing that concerns me in my experience of Chaplaincies in admittedly only three Universities in Australia is their peripheral nature, something Burridge does not accept and he takes it to

the extent of suggesting a role for the Chaplaincy that I had not thought of but which strikes me as being appropriate. He says

We have to face the implications of new discoveries not just for faith but for society, and often the chaplaincy can organise seminars across discipline boundaries to enable this, and to build communion.

I commend the Burrige paper to you as a wide-ranging and scholarly discussion of the changing face of education and the place of a chaplaincy in the educational market place. He reminds us that education started in the market place, Socrates taught in the Agora, but it is unlikely that Socrates saw education as a commodity for trade with its value and scope limited and measured by the price or by a skills audit rather than the getting of wisdom. And that brings me to one of my many “expectations” of a Chaplaincy, one that is echoed by Burrige. The members of the Chaplaincy should be aware of what is going on in Education in the broad context of Government policies, the way it is funded and what that is doing to students and staff. They should be aware of internal changes as well. New Vice-Chancellors, new Deans new Heads of Administration can radically affect the climate. I pointed out above the way the Chaplains at Newcastle could act as barometers, bringing reports from across the University of the way people were feeling, the impact decisions, made and not made, had on morale and how this was affecting their work. If you remain in the Chaplaincy unaware of the external pressures and disinterested in the internal climate and politics then your guardianship of the cloak is faulty. Instead of it being a foil and guard against the weather it is in mothballs and your value is diminished.

Burrige, Von Dietz, Chang and Fitzgerald also come together on another of my expectations. All of us, while acknowledging that chaplains, whatever their religion, are there by grace of the religious order and are funded, in so far as funding is made available by that order, see the University Chaplaincy as having a multi-faith role. Catholic Chaplains need to be able to help a young woman who has just been through an abortion to forgive herself. You are not there for the church but for the people. It seems to be understood that people with a particular set of beliefs who need to relax into the doctrines and ceremonials of the appropriate religion will seek the locus where those needs can be met, but a chaplaincy is there for all, a place of refuge in a crisis and because it is impossible for all faiths to be represented at all times then each Chaplain must be prepared to be there for all faiths. That is not to say that particular times and places within the chaplaincy should not be used and advertised as being for a particular group, many have a Buddhist gathering on Tuesday, Catholic prayers on Wednesday and interfaith discussions at another time. But again the focus needs to be on the community and on keeping the cloak for whoever drops in or expresses a need. In this multifaith role I include the non-Christian chaplains who may be very challenged by it.

As Burrige says-

Campus ministry must be directed not at our own faith group or paid-up members, but to the institution as a whole. We have to apply faith to the whole university in its work of research, teaching and learning

This is all sounding a bit one-sided isn't it? What would the University and in particular the University administration be doing in all this. I suggest that the most important thing we can do is welcome the Chaplaincy as an important unit within the Services provided to staff and students. In doing so we have to recognise that you have a right and need to be involved. In many places although the University does not pay the Chaplains they provide a small subvention for stationary, make space available and provide telephones and email access. As well the Chaplaincy should be represented on Committees that discuss and make decisions on services to students. At the ANU there is a large Student Services Advisory Committee, chaired by the DVC (Education) that discusses student services delivery, the need for action and intervention as identified by the various services and assesses the impact of changes and innovations on the student community. It is an important Committee and a place where information is exchanged and assessed. I would however like to go further in requiring the University to make a place for the Chaplaincy within the formal Service structures and to make the Chaplains notionally responsible to the Supervisory head of all Student Services like Counselling and Disability Services. For ease of recognition I will refer to that person as the Director, Student Services. This arrangement puts obligations for communication on both sides and requires the University to build the Chaplaincy into the planning and delivery of services. It also formalises the links between the Chaplaincy and the acknowledged University Services. It is clear that there has to be a different relationship between the Director and the Chaplains relative to all the other units under them. Both sides need to recognise the value of cooperation since there is no formal authority vested in the Director over the Chaplains and it is very easy to return the Chaplains to the wilderness by just not informing or including them.

There is another role for the Chaplains and it relates to their freedom to express their beliefs - not doctrines. Some people do not want to be left to believe in themselves alone and they do not want to think that it all ends when they end. Counsellors and Psychologists don't have the luxury of being able to rest the burden on a higher being, but you do. In a community of people dealing on a daily basis with uncertainty and paradox you have the certainty of faith that gives you strength and a pivotal role when an individual's world descends into chaos. And when events like 9/11 occur I would expect the Chaplains to be at the forefront of any response.

So despite the divergence of our backgrounds and beliefs, do my expectations match yours as I sense they might? Are you comfortable with the roles and responsibilities I envisage for you? This vision, which appears to be shared by others, requires a proactive and lively engagement with the University community and with the administration. It requires the Chaplaincy to have a very clear view of the way it wishes to engage and one that fits with the Mission, Goals and aspirations of the University in which it is located. It also requires the University to embrace the Chaplaincy and afford it a role within the University Services that acknowledges its value and its independence. Are there tensions

and barriers to achieving these aims as I sense there are, what are they and how would you overcome them. I would, in the time remaining, really like to hear your views.

DON'T BE ALARMED Just a reminder that we should all go through life expecting the unexpected

Thankyou for listening so patiently

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<http://www.une.edu.au/campus/chaplaincy/tcmaconference/papers.html>

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