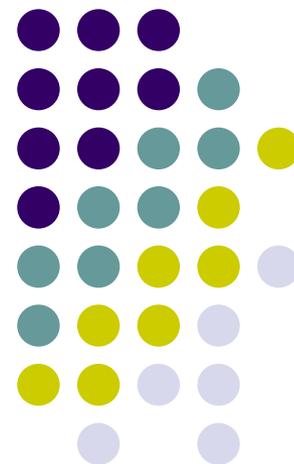


# Faith-Based Ethics in a Multicultural World

Revd Kevin McGovern,  
Caroline Chisholm Centre for Health Ethics:  
*Medical Ethics* at Melbourne Law School,  
25 September 2015



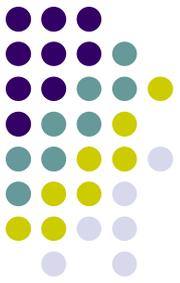
Caroline Chisholm  
Centre for Health Ethics

# Outline



1. Engaging with Religion
2. Healthy and Unhealthy Religion
3. A Religious Perspective on Ethics
4. Some Conclusions for Discussion

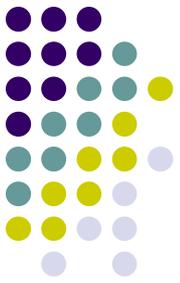
# 1. Engaging with Religion



John Kerry (US Secretary of State), “Religion and Diplomacy,” *America* 14 September 2015:

- “On matters as diverse as how to drive economic growth, rein in corruption, combat terrorism, mitigate conflict, advance women’s rights and promote public health, religious beliefs shape the views of publics and change-makers near and far.”
- “Leaders in public life need to recognize that in a world where people of all religious traditions are migrating and mingling like never before, we ignore the global impact of religion at our peril.”
- In 2013, the Office of Religion and Global Affairs was created in the US State Department “to expand our understanding of religious dynamics and engagement with religious actors.”

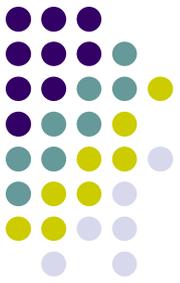
# 1. Engaging with Religion (cont'd)



John Kerry (US Secretary of State), “Religion and Diplomacy,” *America* 14 September 2015:

- “The Office of Religion and Global Affairs is adding value on some of the most difficult international challenges that our country faces. One is the fight against climate change.... Even before Pope Francis issued his encyclical, organizations across the religious spectrum raised the banner against global warming.”
- “The State Department understands the central role that religion plays in the lives of billions of people across the globe, and we know that engagement can open a world of possibilities.” This challenges us to “recognize a fundamental truth:” we need to have “a more sophisticated approach to religion.”

# Religion in Australia



Data from the Pastoral Research Office of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference based on the most recent 2011 Australian Census and the 2011 Catholic National Count of Attendance:

- Out of a total 2011 Australian population of 21,507,719:
- 25.3% or 5,439,267 identify as Catholic
  - A church in decline from past strengths, yet still a significant societal institution:
    - About 12.2 % or 662,000 attend Mass on a typical weekend:
      - 85% of these attend every weekend.
      - Another 8% attend two or three times a month.
- 17.1% or 3,679,895 identify as Anglican
- 2.9% or 614,932 identify as Orthodox
- 15.8% or 3,416,562 identify as other Christian
- 7.2% or 1,546,341 identify as other faiths
- 22.3% or 4,796,797 identify as No Religion
- 9.4% or 2,013,928 did not state their religion

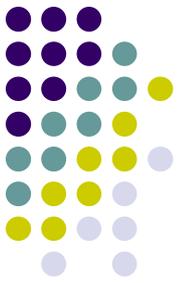
# The Persistence of Religion



Prof. Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain: A Persistent Paradox*:

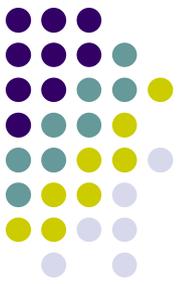
- “Despite secularisation in Britain, religion is showing no signs of fading away.”
- “One major reason... is the deep Christian roots of Europe.”
- “Another major factor... is immigration,” with immigrants “bringing with them strong religious beliefs and practices.”
- However, “secularisation in Britain has caused a loss of knowledge about religion.”
- Indeed, Prof Davie described current public discourse on religion in Britain as an “ill-informed and ill-mannered debate about issues of extreme importance for the future of democracy in [Britain].”
- “If we cannot tolerate the seriously religious, we cannot be a democracy.”

# An Example of Engaging with Religion

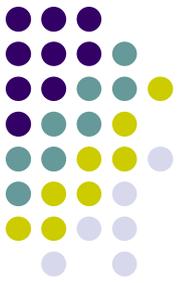


- National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC)
  - “Australia’s leading expert body promoting the development and maintenance of public and individual health standards”
- Australian Health Ethics Committee (AHEC)
  - One of the principal committees of the NHMRC
  - Australia’s health ethics peak body

# An Example of Engaging with Religion (cont'd)



- Section 36 of the *National Health and Medical Research Council Act (Cth)*:
  - Along with the Chair, AHEC must have a person with knowledge of the **ethics of medical research**; a person who has expertise in **law**; a person who has expertise in **philosophy**; a person who has expertise in **religion**; a person who has experience in **medical research**; a person who has experience in **public health research**; a person who has experience in **social science research**; a person who has experience in **clinical medical practice**; a person who has experience in **nursing or allied health practices**; a person with knowledge of the **regulation of the medical profession**; a person with understanding of **health consumer issues**; a person with understanding of the **concerns of people with a disability**; and **no more than 2 other persons** with expertise relevant to the functions of the Committee.

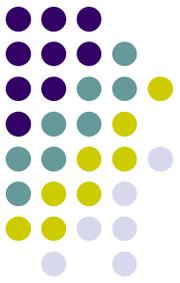


# Questions for Discussion

Some of us practise a religion. Others of us do not. Some of us are supportive of religion. Others of us are negative about religion. Whatever our personal perspective:

- What do I make of this call to engage with religion in public policy and public ethics?
- What do I make of this claim about the persistence of religion?
- “Religion should be kept out of politics.” Comment.

# 2. Healthy and Unhealthy Religion



John McDade, “Fatal dangers of unexamined faith”:

- McDade notes a “growing confrontation between a certain type of religion and a certain type of modernity”:
- On one side of this confrontation are “anti-religious secularists” who regard religion as “a conduit for nasty impulses such as aggression, cruelty (especially self-cruelty), control over others, vengefulness, repressive instincts and resentment, intolerance and hatred.”
- On the other side is a fundamentalist form of religion which is “in principle opposed to critical enquiry and reasoned exploration.”
- Its protagonists on both sides see this conflict as a war.

## 2. Healthy and Unhealthy Religion (cont'd)



John McDade, “Fatal dangers of unexamined faith”:

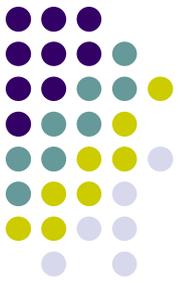
- This war can only lead to more and more religious violence “as both a secularist agenda against religion and a fundamentalist religious hostility to a hostile secular world become inflamed.”
- The only way forward is “not by consigning religion to the category of unreason,” but by “strengthening the bond between religion and reason...”
- “Religion without reason is generally bad and dangerous.”
- “John Paul II and Benedict XVI knew this well and their words about the place of reason in the life of faith are among the best teachings of the modern papacy.”

# Faith and Reason



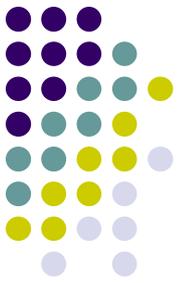
- John Paul II's *Fides et Ratio* (1998), #1:
  - “Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth...”
- Benedict XVI's *Address at Westminster Hall* (17 September 2010):
  - “The world of reason and the world of faith – the world of secular rationality and the world of religious belief – need one another and should not be afraid to enter into a profound and ongoing dialogue, for the good of our civilisation.”

# Faith and Reason (cont'd)



- Benedict XVI's *General Audience* (16 June 2010):
  - “Faith consolidates, integrates and illumines the heritage of truth that human reason acquires.”
- Benedict XVI's *Address at Westminster Hall* (17 September 2010):
  - “Distorted forms of religion, such as sectarianism and fundamentalism, can be seen to create serious social problems.... [T]hese distortions of religion arise when insufficient attention is given to the purifying and structuring role of reason within religion.”
  - “It is a two-way process.”

# Questions for Discussion



Some of us practise a religion. Others of us do not. Some of us are supportive of religion. Others of us are negative about religion. Whatever our personal perspective:

- What do I make of this call for religion to engage with reason?
- What does this ask of religious traditions?
- What does this ask of society and of those engaged in public life?

# 3. A Religious Perspective on Ethics



- Different religions have different religious and ethical traditions and resources. This diversity should never be dismissed or understated.
- Even so, many people believe that within these various religious traditions, a common and universal morality can be discerned.
- Our grasp of this common and universal morality is always somewhat tentative, and therefore we should be open to reappraise and perhaps revise traditional beliefs.
- From the perspective of this traditional, common and universal morality, there is now in the world a New Morality with a different perspective on moral matters.
- I call the ongoing clash between traditional ethics and the New Morality the frontier wars in ethics.

# Strengths & Limitations of Traditional Ethics



- Responsibility with exceptions
- Based on reason and revelation
- Human dignity based on *imago Dei*
- Teleological
- Doing and Being
- Virtues
- Common Good
- **Activist Government**
- **Applied ethics – social ethics, bioethics, marriage and family, environmental ethics**
- **Authoritarian**
- **Slow to change**
- **Some say, some reappraisal about sex and sexuality**

# The Enlightenment and the New Morality



- **David Hume** (1711–1776)
  - sought the basis of morality in the emotions (e.g. “moral sentiment,” “sympathy”)
  - BUT why should we follow these ‘moral’ emotions rather than our ‘immoral’ ones?
- **Immanuel Kant** (1724–1804)
  - sought the basis of ethics in reason and duty (e.g. the Categorical Imperative)
  - BUT why should we follow the Categorical Imperative?
- **Jeremy Bentham** (1748-1832), **John Stuart Mill** (1806-1873)
  - sought the basis of morality in consequences (“utilitarianism”)
  - BUT even if we can work out what is best for everyone, why should we do this?

# The Enlightenment and the New Morality (cont'd)



- **Frederick Nietzsche** (1844-1900)
  - efforts so far had presupposed traditional moral content
  - Nietzsche rejected traditional moral content!
- **Immanuel Kant** (1724–1804)
  - moral values do not come from outside – either from God or from nature
  - instead, “each man his own moralist”
  - pure autonomy became the only basis and the only content of ethics
  - “moral relativism”

# Deficiencies of the New Morality



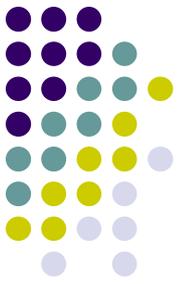
## Traditional Morality

- Responsibility with exceptions
- Based on reason and revelation
- Human dignity based on *imago Dei*
- Teleological
- Doing and Being
- Virtues

## The New Morality

- Autonomy with exceptions
- Basis is unclear
- Human dignity based on actual capacity for reason
- Not teleological
- Little emphasis on Being or the Virtues

# Deficiencies of the New Morality (cont'd)

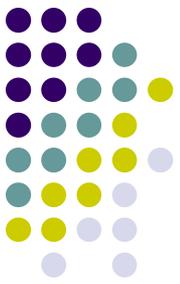


## Traditional Morality

- **Common Good**
- **Activist Government**
- **Applied ethics – social ethics, bioethics, marriage and family, environmental ethics**

## The New Morality

- **Individualistic, with little sense of the common good**
- **Limited Government**
- **Applied ethics – social ethics, bioethics, marriage and family, sex and sexuality, environmental ethics**



# Questions for Discussion

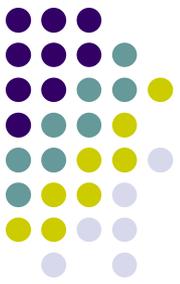
Some of us practise a religion. Others of us do not. Some of us are supportive of religion. Others of us are negative about religion. Whatever our personal perspective:

- What do I make of this claim that there are now frontier wars between traditional ethics and the New Morality?
- What (if anything) do I accept? What (if anything) do I question or reject?
- Where can we best move forward in the ethical debates of Australian public life?

# 4. Some Conclusions for Discussion



- 1) For those of us who belong to a religious tradition, we should feel proud of our religious morality.
- 2) We should also work for appropriate reappraisals within our religious morality.
- 3) Multiculturalism
- 4) Conscientious objection
- 5) Promote the common good
- 6) Promote the virtues

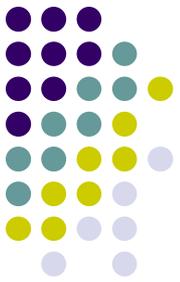


# Questions for Discussion

Some of us practise a religion. Others of us do not. Some of us are supportive of religion. Others of us are negative about religion. Whatever our personal perspective:

- What (if anything) stands out to me as true and important in these conclusions?
- What (if anything) do I question or reject?
- Where do we go from here in Australian society and Australian public life?

# Presenter



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