The Journeys of Faith

Peter Lineham, address to Conference of Integrated Schools, Brentwood Hotel, 16 Kemp Street, Kilbirnie, Wellington, 17 June 2015.

# Introduction

I have been very interested and intrigued by the theme that you have been following for this conference. I have to confess that I was very keen to sing in the Praise Be recording at Holy Trinity Cathedral last night so elected not to join you then, so I have suffered the indignities of a 6 am flight this morning, which was then greatly delayed through engineering problems. I hope my coherence does not suffer as a consequence.

# History

Over recent years Arts degrees have been in trouble. Derided by Stephen Joyce as of no possible use to anyone much, they have been taking a very humble place crouching beside the STEM subjects in the hopes that someone will take pity on them. It is a far cry from when I went to university and the best and the brightest did these degrees and left the applied stuff to others.

At the same time we have in a sense brought this low reputation upon ourselves by an increasingly theoretical orientation in our subjects. Even history, my subject, which sits so comfortably with amateur and professional practitioners, has become in its academic side, challenging itself about its coherence and linear character in a world which is incoherent and non-linear. The new theories have not produced much by way of good history yet, but we keep hoping.

In many ways we were all drawn to history – certainly I was – by the lure of the story and by the richness and the colour of its individual stories. I recall how from my own rather isolated family background, my father’s books on the renaissance, acquired when he was a soldier in Italy in the Second World War, were an enticing invitation to a bigger and richer world.

Today one of the puzzles is how to start students on this adventure. At present we have a robust debate among the historians in our institution about what coherence we give to our History degree. In the old days there was a kind of curriculum which was shaped around the European world and its empire, but by the time I came to university this sense of a curriculum was beginning to break down. Medieval history remained the beginning papers, because Greek and Roman history by convention belonged to Classical Studies. New Zealand history was still regarded as supplementary papers rather than in the major. By the time I was a lecturer, there was still a requirement that students study at least one paper from before the industrial revolution, but most students were turning decisively to modern history, although there has always been an strong group of classical history and medieval history devotees, perhaps because of the romance of the old or perhaps because of their love of warfare and imaginative romance.

The shape of the history degree is now being forced to conform to the present desire to prove that arts subjects are useful, and therefore priority has fallen on skills definitions of what we hope to achieve. Thgis is very apparent in the Year 12 and year 13 curriculums which are now almost entirely defined not just by skills but by problems. A conflict, a personality, a seeker of social justice. Historical forces and movements, Causes and consequences are complex. The events must “of significance to New Zealanders”.

We have been trying to think through what we want our history graduates to come out knowing, and although it is impossible to define a single body o knowledge, it seems very clear to us that the long period, the survey, is an important grounding for history. Exactly what that grounding is may vary, but in many NZ universities the medieval history papers are giving way to papers on the history of the world with a broad sense of the history of civilisation, culture and society as well as people. This still does not answer the questions of significance but perhaps it enables them to be more aware of the puzzles they will later confront. As for the specialist papers, for a period very few students wanted to look at anything other than New Zealand history. There now seems to be something of a turn away from this.

The other side to the question is making sense of the current and allowing history to explain the current, which always seems to be the end of the story as far as history can understand it, anyway. This is not totally convincing. The next phase of the story seems to throw new understanding on the story, and this is why people with a theological awareness can make good historians. But we never do quite understand how the story is developing. For example my co-author, Allan Davidson and I have been revising our textbook on New Zealand religious history, *Transplanted Christianity* and the book now celebrates 200 years of faith. This seventh chapter and the sense that the story is 200 years long has quite a dramatic effect on the whole story. The distance of the past now envelops the first four chapters which take the story to 1914. But even more problematic has been the issue of making sense of the years since 1980 on which the new chapter focuses. The very rapid changes in religious affiliation, the emergence of a new range of faiths, the strength of the hostility to religion itself have become very powerful themes, and because our book provides documents for students to work on interpretation, we have needed to think very carefully about this.

There is a powerful image in the minds of many New Zealand people that religion is part of an old world. But I think that part of this sense is in the failure of the sense of history in the story. I think that so many people in the contemporary world reach the conclusion with no knowledge of the story of faith. So we get stories that say, absurdly that religion in England will be dead by 2067. I have instead the desire to help people understand how a place becomes hospitable to faith and to a multitude of creeds. I want to explore with you today the importance that a sense of historical development can give us as we grapple with a very present-centred secular culture. And I want to do this by focusing on the puzzling debate between secular and religious in New Zealand history.

# The Present Challenge

We are witnessing in New Zealand culture today very clear evidence of a profound social problem created from generations of secularity. Our government has for economic reasons followed the patterns of many western states in opening our doors to people from throughout the world to come and make their home in this country. And those of us who are Europeans are beginning to understand that we are simply the first of the migrant peoples who have made this country our home. But because of our secularity we are ill-prepared to make this a welcoming and hospitable place. So at the very time when Muslims, Buddhists and Hindu people make their homes here, the government makes no provision for recognising and understanding the world in which we must live together.

There is one western approach which remains the standard solution to this. The idea is that we will all play down our sense of separate stories and will become devoted to a wholly new and open society which in effect has no story, has no significance other than a technological and economic sense of achievement. And then we find that actually the fruits of this secular utopia seem barren and unacceptable to many of the people here, and there are emerging here and in every part of the west deep chasms in our community. And one important aspect of this barrenness is that almost without exception (the exception is Chinese from Communist China, if they do not revert to their traditional faiths) the new peoples in this land have come in with much higher levels of faith and religious community than westerners have. The logical solution, I suggest, is that the people of whatever faith need to be nurtured in their faiths, and that we build a community which is receptive to the contributions that faith can provide to enable communities to be resilient. There was some recognition of this in the Statement on Religious Diversity of 2005, but virtually nothing has been done to strengthen this. Instead the schools shape people in an education which is increasingly barren in its sense of meaning and significance. The only exception has been some recognition of Maori traditions, but even this is being undermined in recent acts by our government.

My argument is that we need to address this barrenness and that this is an educational issue; a desperate need to nurture our whole community in a sense of the long stories of faith and community, both our own stories and the stories of others. Let me attempt to explain the problem and the need for a recovery.

# The Western Heritage

Our sense of heritage is contained in a sense of history. History in essence is creating a sense of story, of connectedness of the present with its past. In the present global setting that story has to be conceived of broadly. No longer can we afford to regard it simply as a western story. We need to see it in the long tradition of the whole human community, its struggles and its needs. Providing a religious framework for this is the easiest way in which to conceive this.

But we first need to address the loss of the western story, which indeed is not really a western story but is the story of the Abrahamic faiths in various cultural settings.

Historically this was not an issue in the western story. The history of European civilization is so bound up in its religious roots, that we need to take it back always to the shaping of faith and faiths. But it is important today to recognise that it has never been a comfortable story. Nor has it been consistent or unified. Western Europe conceived for centuries a united story seen within the setting of the Catholic Church, but this ignored the existence of minorities within western culture which were suppressed harshly and mercilessly, the Christian minorities who have been forgotten, and the Jewish minorities scattered across Europe, let alone the Bogomils and Cathars who for a while threated the Catholic establishment. Further the very definition of western Europe excluded the great range of Christians who were not under the papacy, the great Orthodox churches and the non-trinitarian groups who spread across Asia into Africa and Central Asia and India. Then there were the violent confrontations with the Muslim community which arose in the sixth century and challenged western Europe for its life. The awakening of western technological advances meant that for three centuries it seemed as though these groups would fade away, but instead they came as of right to make their home in the European heartlands and colonial encounters paid an unexpected dividend.

A very strange aspect of that story is the way in which New Zealand was shaped in the high point of the secular solution as for various reasons the British state in New Zealand went for a secular solution, meaning by this that no Christian denomination would have a particular advantage. The roots of secularism in New Zealand are very deep because they stretch to the very foundation of the society, to the “fourth” article of the Treaty of Waitangi which reassured Catholics that all religions, including Catholic and Maori would be treated equally. It may surprise you to know that the secular education principle secured in the 1877 Education Act, also included the provision that History could be omitted from the curriculum, because this could be a cause of conflict. And necessarily so, because it is impossible to talk of history without talking of religion.

## British Background

An odd feature of the situation is that almost every other western state has faced deep religious divisions and debates, and that we are strangely lacking in this tradition. America was founded in party by minority religious groups from Britain, Canada when annexed included a very large Catholic minority, South Africa was profoundly divided from its colonial overlord by religion, and even Australia included a very large Catholic minority in New South Wales which meant that Australia never had conscription in the First World War.

Of course just the same secular pressures existed throughout the English speaking world. But the decision made at the time of the first settler parliament is that Bishop Selwyn was not to be a state appointee, and that the Church of England was not to be an established church here. Consequently the early foundations of the contact between New Zealand and Britain which were primarily although not exclusively religious, were deliberately minimised and the religious respect for the missionaries undermined. The consequences of this were quickly evident in the land wars of the 1860s. In contrast in Britain the Church of England remains established to this day, although massively stripped of its authority and role. Of course the roots of this decline lay in a state imposed religion which then the state was increasingly unwilling to enforce. Gradually in the late seventeenth century and eighteenth century the state realised that the various Protestant churches posed no threat to the state, and therefore could be accommodated within an expanded religious establishment. It was not until the nineteenth century that this took place for Catholics, and what held Catholicism back from achieving this status was a great deal of popular resentment.

# The Age of Formal Structures and Faith

In many respects the neutralising of the Anglican Church and its desire for special status was a good move of course. It gave great opportunities for other Christian groups to develop their energies and ability to build community. It enabled the Anglican Church to shape a denomination in which tradition was combined with a reformist commitment to empowering laity and it limited the abuse of power within the church by over-mighty clergy.

But looking back at this, where the state did not provide much by way of assistance to religious groups, it did stunt the growth of the churches. This was partly because New Zealand was a very poor colony in the early years, with administration largely pushed into the hands of the provinces, many of which were too poor to support anything. Hence educational provision was very inadequate in those early years. It was Presbyterian Dunedin that achieved most.

## The 1877 Act

The most critical step towards an officially secular society came with the 1877 Education Act. And much historical research has focused on the puzzle about why that Education Act declared for a secular education system, at a time when the English introduction of compulsory education incorporated church schools into its structures. I think we need to understand why our state has made the secular choice so central.

I wrote the biography of C. C. Bowen, the minister responsible for the Education Act for the DNZB. One must remember that the provinces had just been abolished. Also that in the previous ten years some of the provinces had taken over the little schools which met in church halls and schoolhouses. As they did this, they except in Nelson cut religious instruction out of the curriculum. Bowen was certainly no secularist. He was the brother of Croasdaile Bowen, (1831-1890) who was vicar of St Peter’s Upper Riccarton, near where the family lived at Middleton Grange. He had wanted to include the Lord’s Prayer and bible reading without comment but he was overruled by many who, working on the precedent of various provinces, had excluded religious education. A clear factor was a desire to accommodate Catholics.

One can see how the solution of a secular school was unsatisfactory to everyone, but because it was equally unsatisfactory, it was the easiest option.

It is important to note that Bowen even viewed this as the only aspect of religious education that could be allowed, he wanted everything else to be secular. (McGeorge & Snook, p. 9) Thus we can see that religion had been pushed to the side, as simply a private sphere of activity tangential to the questions that the state was focused on.

## Catholic Attitudes

Of course the system of secular education divided New Zealand rather than uniting it as had been anticipated. The noble attempt by Catholics to pour their limited energies into church primary schools, using the religious orders, is an astounding story. And yet it was shaped around a siege mentality, profoundly shaped by Pius IX’s Syllabus of Errors, which regarded so many aspects of the secular society and the very notion as being heretical. Bishop Moran of Dunedin began a great personal crusade against the Education Act, although his emphasis lay on the injustice of people paying twice, for secular and for catholic schools. Here was his editorial in the Tablets;

The Catholics of New Zealand provide at their sole expense, an excellent education for their own children. Yet such is the sense of justice and policy in the New Zealand Legislature that it compels these Catholics, after having manfully provided for their own children, to contribute largely towards the free and godless education of other people’s children!!! This is tyranny, oppression, and plunder

He even stood for parliament in 1883 on the issue, but since he was in Dunedin, his defeat was certain.

## Protestant Attitudes

The logical position, one might have thought, would have been for the Protestant churches to have done the same and set about creating their own schools. Two churches, the Anglicans and the Presbyterians arguably had the resources to do so. A few schools were created, but Christ’s College had a very particular class function in the Canterbury Settlement. Bishop Hadfield in Wellington wanted to create parish schools, and did have an idea that the sphere of shaping children was properly a religious sphere. But he was of a missionary and high church background, and had already found that his defence of Maori land rights made him very unpopular with settlers. On the whole settlers were quite comfortable that Sunday schools would provide religious knowledge, using voluntary efforts of pious settlers, while the state could handle all other aspects of knowledge.

## Putting Religion in the Curriculum

After a while some of these Protestants, especially Presbyterians and Methodists, began to sense that the result was going to be a profoundly denominationalised form of Christianity with little common ground. The Bible in Schools campaign that got under way at first in the 1880s argued that the curriculum needed to be amended because a religious education was the cornerstone of true education. Protestants believed that it should be possible to combine on a non-controversial way to talk about religion. They were in a sense ignoring Catholics. In 1912 a combined campaign at last involved the Anglican Church with the creation of the new Bible in State Schools League. Canon Garland was employed as the campaigner for this, he having succeeded in the same role in Queensland. The original desire had been to amend the Education Act to include Bible knowledge in it as a compulsory core subject.

## Opposition

But the debate was brutal, because against the BISL was formed the Catholic Federation and the National Schools Defence league. The latter organisation had strong secular links with Professor Tommy Hunter of VUC, but its organiser was Rev T.A. Williams, a Baptist minister and a number of the lesser churches joined in the opposition. For the small churches were sure that the result would be an enforced religious orthodoxy.

The passion of the debate aroused in the Select Committee Hearings of 1914 was very spectacular. When World War One broke out the BISL withdrew its bill, recognising that the country needed to unite together to fight Germany. After World War One the energies for the fight simply did not command the same support.

There was, of course, a possible solution, that Protestants could support state aid for Catholic schools, and Catholics could support developing a compulsory non-denominational religious curriculum for schools, and that almost happened in 1931, but the junior bishop responsible for the proposal mishandled it, and the other bishops reneged on the deal.

## Voluntary Bible in Schools

There was always an alternative, the one advocated in Nelson where, with a weaker Catholic presence, simple protestant education was provided in the schools on a non-denominational basis, while grants in aid were provided for denominational schools.

What began to emerge with the permission of the Nelson Education Board was a solution where the limits to the compulsory hours of school to two hours in the morning allowed volunteers, mostly religious ministers, to come into the schools one morning a week for a half hour of bible instruction while the school was technically closed. This could have been provided on a denominational basis, but by and large it took up the BISL’s vision of non-denominational bible knowledge.

There was huge objection to this for many years. For a start it was not provided by the school teacher and formed no part of the curriculum and so it was opposed by the teachers’ union, by the BISL itself, and by Catholics who saw it as a coercive propaganda exercise that could affect Catholic children unable to attend a Catholic school. Moreover the protestant churches continued to insist that there should be just one state education system, and vehemently opposed any subsidies for private education.

## Growth of Non-Catholic Denominational Education

The Secondary School situation was different. Until 1903 all secondary education was private. Then a system of funded places for secondary schools emerged for those who passed the junior scholarship. At that time denominations took over small private schools, or created new schools, using the logic that they wanted to be involved in the higher levels of education. It does seem strange that at the same time the Presbyterian Church for example was both opposing state aid for private schools and building them.

## State Authorisation of Bible in Schools

In the post war years bible in schools gained increasing support in schools. It was of course far from satisfactory, dependent upon so many exceptions and loopholes. In 1950 the old BISL decided to adopt the scheme and they developed a curriculum for it. With a name change to the Council for a christian Education it became a body to authorise teachers and negotiate on their behalf.

Their lesser goal was to get the exception legalised in all Education Boards. The amendment to the Education Act in 1962 came after very careful submissions from the Council for Christian Education, and opposition by the National Secular League and by the teachers union, but the reduction in religious controversy made it more practical. In the best New Zealand tradition it was left up to School committees to authorise, a role that was taken over by Boards after the Education Administration Act of 1989. Yet it remained an anomaly and in a real sense the private curriculum and the dependence upon voluntary teachers at a time when the Christian population is in decline means that it is a paradoxical situation. How much better the situation would have been if the Origins, curriculum solution had been adopted, but perhaps that simply was not possible given the debate over religion.

At the same time there was a discussion about Religious Knowledge as a School Certificate subject. But the Commission was content to note that Social Studies could include this.

## State Funding for Private Schools

There had been a huge campaign for state aid to Catholic Schools in the 1950s by the Holy Name Society, in the pamphlet “Hear the Case”. The National Government and even Catholic members of parliament chose to have nothing to do with it.

The creation of the 1975 Integration Act is of great importance as part of this. It was produced by crisis in the Catholic education system with the decline of numbers in religious orders meaning that lay people had to be employed, although there was no money for this. The deal struck by the labour government was significant. The Catholic Church preserved control over religious education and the appointment of the Principal as the “proprietor”, but lost control of all other aspects of its schools.

## The Flowing of the Secular

In many respects the broader context after the 1960s is that New Zealand rapidly secularised in the years after 1960. Church attendance peaked and then rapidly declined from about 1966. Nominal adherence began a rapid decline in the 1970s. I think we need to understand why there was such a flowering of secular culture from the 1960s. We need to trace this from far back, and also to recognise that New Zealand was quite slow in embracing this aspect of society. Secularity gave rise to several features, including a great freedom for different patterns and disengagement from church. New Zealand after World War Two reaped, as did every western culture, its gradual disconnection from religion, and its embracing of the Enlightenment legacy.

So it should not surprise us that there has been very sharp debate in recent years from a highly secularised professional elite at the continued concessions made to religion. Little wonder that the secularity debate has continued with great force. While it may be driven by a small group of people there is a loss of community sense of religious priority. Look at the decline of Sunday schools in the same period. And we see a crescendo of opposition, while at the same time the volunteer force to provide for Bible in Schools has diminished.

## The New Christian Schools

Is the solution a number of religious schools? Gradually people from European Reformed churches and Pentecostals with a critical attitude to the values of the state established their own schools, and as these began to improve in their educational outlook they were able to apply for and achieve educational independence. But it is still the case that a vastly smaller proportion of New Zealanders are in private schools or home schooling than almost anywhere else in the western world. It is roughly half the proportion of those privately educated in Australia.

Nevertheless it is significant to note that the religious schools potentially could have an important role to play. For if there is to be a real impact on our empty society it will need to reshape the world allowing room for holistic integration, and that will involve all aspects of nurturing of live sin community.

# The Age of Diversity

And now we come to the age of diversity. The change in migration policy in 1987 meant that the secular age in New Zealand was quite brief. Meanwhile the discovery of Maori values led to a massive change in the spiritual exploration of society.

The New Zealand Herald recently took this data and argued that it showed that poor people were more religious than the rich. But this was not precisely what it was.

In those statistics it is clear that it is migrant areas, whether Pasifika or Middle Eastern. There is a significant difference between areas of high religious presence

The secular theme has been quite powerful because the new atheism has been provoked by Al Quayeda, and a nervousness about militant religion which is very apparent. In fact the mix-up of peoples which has occurred has not created a strong sense of militant Islam. Yet we can see this is a delicate issue.

**The Failure of Religious Narratives**

If we are to identify what has failed, clearly in the first instance the secular narrative overwhelmed the religious.

It is very apparent that Christianity has come to operate as a more and more incidental part of the culture. Church did not form for most a key structure of the community. Yet there have always been exceptions and these interesting communities, from Presbyterian Dunedin to Anglican Christchurch to Catholic Puhoi to Lutheran Dannevirke and Palmerston North have greater cultural resilience and strength. And it seems to me that today, in a global world, these strengths are highly important.

The challenge for us all then is summed up not in story per se, but in the notion of a connecting grand narrative in which we are able to place our story and our country’s story, but necessarily a bigger story than there has been in the past. The historic tradition placed meaning in the nation state, but in this day when such a high proportion of people are not from this country, and may not stay here, then this story is not likely to be powerful enough.

but at this point our narrative have failed.

The background to this lies in the failure of the secular enlightenment narratives. There has been a huge sense of the failure of these in recent years and a sense of discontinuity and disconnection has followed. This postmodern condition has meant the end of ideology, the end even of the great theoretical justifications that used to shape our world. I am struck, for example on this the anniversary of Runnymede, that no-one much understands the importance or longstanding significance of democracy in the age when we supposedly want it. Without these values we are left with personal pursuits, current politics and little sense of significance.

**Underlying Issues**

The challenge then is to create and give meaning. Here religious stories, but religious stories big enough to accommodate global trends are needed.

A key feature of the situation is that we need to recover the sense of the story we are in. The presentism of the secular mode is rational but without story. So lacking a sense of identity. But it is clear that we cannot revive Christendom with its strong story. It never has had a chance in New Zealand and in the context of our population we are going to have to establish a new way.

For Christians the challenge surely is to find ways of telling a holistic story which is not totalitarian, which is truly inclusive and finds spaces of welcome and hospitality and dialogue with other faith traditions. To quote Richard Sudworth:

"In Christendom society itself was shaped by the Christian narrative. Where that narrative has become unrecognisable or laden with extra baggage that is somehow counter-gospel, church communities need to be involved in an act of re-narration... One of the challenges of working with other faith communities is that their perception of European and North Maerican cultures is that they are still very Christian in character. it means, I think, that there is a more nuanced task for the church to own and name the positive effects of the Christian inheritance on a culture and to be appropriately humble about the errors of that history."

In order to do this, school must be at the centre. And I think there is every evidence that faiths that do not have a commitment to schooling and education have little hope of doing more than clinging on to the fringe of secular culture in apologetic ways. As Dwight Friesen has argued, "Our new context will invite us to become even more skilled story telling the whole story of God. Such that our churches see themselves as the continuation of God's capacious story. This is more than learning bible stories or being able to recite creeds ,,, we will need to help our churches live the narrative of the gospel." (In Bolger ed, p. 200.) it seems to me that schools embracing the broad history of all of humankind with a bigger vision than narrow secular learning can best expand and stretch our students.

Also we can observe that the militant atheism of the new atheists is very counter-productive. Recent story in the Guardian argued that militant atheism has proved very counter-productive and has not helped to produce a secular society. The tempting model is a reversion to secularity, and one can see that this is the default mode which the state wants to employ. But the problem is the potential disrespect that this shows to other faiths. But I am sure that we need to challenge the model of secularity. Because it is still very powerful and my fear is that the idea of rigorous exclusion of religions from the state is the way to solve the issue.

I wonder with Bible in Schools whether it could make a conceptual jump into providing religious education. But we should remember that it was conservative Protestants and Catholics who defeated the Johnson report. As I see it, Bible in Schools is a rather broken exception, and all the struggles in the world in court to preserve this exception will not save it if the school hosts are intimidated by its foes. Surely the logic must be that we do need something but it must be much more central than just a borrowed period conceded under limited conditions. Profoundly it means that the state system needs to embrace the importance of equipping all the peoples in our nation with a capacity to see where the varied stories of different peoples, their faiths and their traditions fit in. But meanwhile to preserve these stories, independent schools for every faith will be important.

We have to recall that successive governments have been spineless in their response to cultural changes. Their migration policies have had a huge effect, and yet they have done virtually nothing to mitigate it. So I feel the need to stretch our government to recognise the challenge. But I am not holding my breath.

# Conclusion

So here are important issues where some embraced a secular solution because the majority Church solution would necessarily coerce them.

The challenge in this context was to produce a vital Christianity.

Implications in this context was how to impact on society. Possibly there was increasingly vigorous denominational tension.

Implications for education seen in the debate over religious education, and whether denominational education was possible.

Denominational boundaries strict.

But they gradually discovered that denominationalism was becoming more ingrained in Victorian society.

Note that it has not completely ended. So Bible in Schools still continues.

Cultural lesson in the circumstances in which the power of story is the theme.

Could it be that we have missed the boat through our concern about content and lack of interest in story. What massive loss to our society by the lack of permission to enjoy and appreciate stories which compel, intrigue and satisfy.

And we, the people of faith have by and large contributed to this. We have created a stereotype of what faith is.