WHY?

AUSTRALIA NEEDS A CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY.
THIS IS WHY >
INFLUENCE

NOUN / VERB

The capacity or power of persons or things to be a compelling force on or produce effects on the actions, behaviour & opinions of others.
WHY A CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY IN AUSTRALIA

Australian Christian Churches has a vision to see Alpharacius College (AC) transition to become the first Pentecostal University in Australia.

Since 1948 the College has been training men and women for effective Christian ministry. This continues to be a strong emphasis of AC and is being enhanced by the college offering education and training for the broader marketplace. AC’s mission is to equip Christian leaders to influence all spheres of society, including business, education, politics, media, and arts and entertainment. This is reflected in the College’s growing array of vocational and higher education awards.

The vision to transition from college to university is primarily based on the rationale that universities exert powerful influence on culture and society and that a distinctively Christian university would contribute to the church’s mission to influence all spheres of society. It would offer a quality alternative for students seeking an education that incorporates Christian worldview and values.

This paper seeks to elaborate on the rationale for a Pentecostal university in Australia.

PURPOSE OF EDUCATION

Many writers on the purpose of education have expanded on Mortimer Adler’s “the Paideia program” that education has a threefold purpose:

- the development of citizenship;
- personal growth or self-improvement;
- occupational preparation.

In essence, education is a social good that contributes to the development of the whole person and to the influence of that person on society. A key part of the educational process is the “socialising” of the student to a set of social norms that reflect the explicit and implicit values of the educator and of the educational institution. Australian universities typically endorse secular humanism and are ambivalent or antagonistic towards the incorporation of Christian faith in curriculum and university life. One consequence of this is that many students from church backgrounds repress or abandon their faith upon entering university and students from other or non-faith based backgrounds are not exposed to Christian principles and values. These students deserve the opportunity to choose a university education that incorporates the development of citizenship, personal growth, and occupational preparation with Christian worldview and values.

A Pentecostal University would be firmly rooted in the Christian tradition and would seek to incorporate the philosophical and moral assumptions of that tradition into the design and development of its curriculum, learning environment, and intentional community. It would be committed to “Christian intellectual engagement” with scholarship and with other faith traditions. It would base its approach to education on the understanding that faith in Christ stimulates believers to study God’s created universe and inspires them to seek to enable others to achieve their full potential as God’s creation.

Students would not be required to be Christians. The image of God is found in each individual, even if they have not yet encountered God in Jesus Christ. All students would be provided the opportunity to encounter Christ in a learning environment committed to the integration of faith and scholarship.


The church was the original and sole provider of education in Australia from settlement until 1860, when the colonial government instituted "government funded" schools in the 1830's. Since that time there have periodically been attempts to remove the influence of Christianity from government funded education. 1 In 1872 the Victorian government withdrew funding to church schools with the other States following its example. Funding for church schools was not reintroduced in Australia until the 1960's by Prime Minister Robert Menzies. 2 This desire, by some, to maintain a firm separation between church and state in the provision of education continues in contemporary Australian society.

Separation of church and state is a misunderstood concept in Australia, involving the assumption that the Australian constitution reflects the American constitution. This is not so. Section 116 of the Australian Constitution precludes the Australian parliament from establishing a "State" religion. The rationale for this constitutional inclusion was to remove the possibility of one branch of Christianity being declared the religion of Australia (e.g., the church of England, the Roman Catholic Church or the Methodist church). The constitution does not mandate a separation of church and state. However, forces other than the Christian church have had significant impact on the shaping of contemporary Australian society. Culture and society are significantly shaped by the realms of politics, media, business, arts and entertainment, education, and family, as well as religion. Forces wrought in each of these sectors of society significantly shapes culture and society. Any agenda to separate church and state and regulate the influence of the church to the realm of private religion is an attempt to minimise the influence of the Christian church across all sectors of society.

Christian churches should seek to continue to exert influence in sectors of society, in that they should continue to operate within the long established tradition of offering church based education.

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3 Gray Bliss Church Inc, v Redman (1994) 54 ALR 571
4 Section 116. "The Commonwealth shall have no power to legislate for the establishment of any church or for the support or maintenance of any church or sect of religion."
THE INFLUENCE OF UNIVERSITIES IN AUSTRALIA

Australia's 43 universities exert a powerful influence on culture and society as they educate and train the leaders of today and tomorrow. The majority of these institutions are influencing students towards secular humanism, and the influence of the Christian church is marginal. A Pentecostal university would be an alternative voice to the secular universities. In the absence of such a voice, secular humanism and other ideologies remain unchallenged.

A university based on Christian worldview and values would bring faith back into the public sphere and counter the prevailing intolerance directed towards the church. Christianity is more than a private and personal practice. It is a public faith that seeks to influence society. A significant component of the church’s influence on society is involvement in education, including the establishment of a university.

“CHRISTIANITY IS MORE THAN A PRIVATE AND PERSONAL PRACTICE. IT IS A PUBLIC FAITH THAT SEeks TO INFLUENCE SOCIETY”

Figures indicate number of universities in each Australian State or Territory

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Notes:
It is claimed that in the USA “over 52 percent of all incoming freshman students who attend a secular college or university and identify themselves as born-again Christian will no longer identify themselves as born-again four years later.” General surveys conducted on university campuses in Australia indicate that while 80% of first year students surveyed admit to a belief in a god only 15% of second year students answered in an affirmative manner to the same question. This indicates that after being exposed to one year of study at an Australian university a person’s belief in a deity is significantly eroded.

Why would university education have such a deleterious impact on the faith of young people? Recent research shows that in the developing brain the “last connections to be fully established are the links between the prefrontal cortex, seat of judgment and problem-solving, and the emotional centers in the limbic system, especially the amygdala. These links are critical for emotional learning and high-level self-regulation” and are not fully developed until one’s early 20’s. Research on the development of values in children and young adults “concludes that the value termed “universalism” arises in the latter years of secondary school and is higher in university students. The years of life that a person’s personal world view is being formed are late teens to early adulthood. If their thinking is absorbed in ideologies that are contrary to a Christian world view then it is understandable that there is dissonance in the minds and hearts of young Christian believers.

The process of learning involves “looking beyond the information to see the connections to life.” The education offered by secular universities gives students “the ability to develop critical thinking skills, but seldom provides them with a way of relating one thing to another.” Education that does not include an appreciation of the relationship between Creator and creation provides an inadequate foundation for being human and existence. “Christian education is not a means of self-help but the exact opposite. It teaches that we find ourselves in finding our Creator and in placing our lives in his providential care.” Faith and information must be integrated if the learning process is to be complete. When this integration occurs it will have a positive effect upon the student’s values, choices, decision making, and ethics.”

An increasing number of Australian families send their children to Christian schools because they wish to have faith and values incorporated into their children’s education. They seek coherence between the worldview and values offered at home and in school. It is likely that these same families would value the opportunity to continue Christian value-based education at the tertiary level.

A Pentecostal university will equip students to be leaders in the influential sectors of society and will reinforce their Christian values while they are learning. It will also provide a healthy environment for the development of those critical circuitry links which form the final stages of values development and emotional maturation.

The process of learning involves “looking beyond the information to see the connections to life”.

THE OPPORTUNITY TO HELP CEMENT VALUES

The process of learning involves “looking beyond the information to see the connections to life”.

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2) These figures are quoted by Students for Christ but they do not claim the survey was scientifically based.
3) http://www.health.harvard.edu/blog-extra/the-adolescent-brain-beyond-raging-hormones
5) The value termed ‘Universalism’ relates to the welfare of people and welfare of the planet. Early definitions included spirituality, faith and benevolence.
CONCLUSION

The church is the instrument Jesus has instituted to bring redemption to our world. Redemption is not only the saving of the individual human soul but also the redemption of society through the church’s influence on society’s values. An opportunity exists to enter into one of the darkest and yet most strategic areas of society - the hallway of higher education. A beacon of light in Australia and beyond can be created with the development of a Pentecostal university owned and operated by Australian Christian Churches.

We would encourage you to appreciate “the why”, to embrace the vision, and to partner with us in seeing a Pentecostal university established in Australia.

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TWO STORIES

In conclusion, the following two true stories reflect what is indicative of the antagonism towards Christian faith often evidenced in secular universities in Australia today.

1.

The first story is from a Church Board member who enrolled in an English Literature course at a leading university. Her text for the subject turned out to be a portrayal of a sodomous relationship and repeated explicit descriptions of the act to portray it as a social norm. Feeling it was more pornography than literature she sought out the lecturer and requested an alternative text. The lecturer made it clear that it was her personal position and that these behaviours were normal and should be accepted by society. Recognising that to express a contrary opinion or critique of the material would not be accepted the Christian pressed to be allocated another text. She was then told that she could do that but the exam would be taken solely from the prescribed text. This put the Christian lady in an untenable position and she withdrew from the course.

2.

The second story describes the experience of the daughter of a Senior Pastor on her first day at university. She and 400 other students were sitting in a lecture room waiting for the introductory lecture when the professor opened by stating he wanted to find out if it was worth giving of his time teaching the class. He asked all those who were Christians and attended church to put up their hands. She and nine others responded. He then stated he would teach the class because at least 390 of them were thinking people!
WE NEED YOU

Be part of Australia's future. AC's vision to become a Christian university is all about shaping the leaders of our nation and the world. With your help, we can train generations of leaders for lives of influence and significance in every sphere of society.

To find out more about how you can partner with us contact:
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