

“Religion... Catalyst for violence or peace”

My experience of a Broken Bay Institute eConference

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On the 23rd of June 2015, the Catholic Parish of Ivanhoe was one of many venues to receive the broadcasted 11th National Broken Bay Institute eConference supported also by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. The live interactive event focused on “Religion... Catalyst for violence or peace”. Members of the Catholic Parish of Ivanhoe community and other members of other local faith communities joined together to watch the live stream event at the Mary Immaculate Church Hall. The eConference tapped into faith issues surrounding the three Abrahamic religions; Christianity, Judaism and Islam. The eConference explored the potential for the Abrahamic religions to cultivate peace in the world that associates religion with violence.

The first speaker of the eConference is an Emeritus Professor and Postgraduate Theology Convenor of the University of Newcastle, Mr Terry Lovat. Terry spoke about the theology of the Abrahamic religions and consecutively spoke about how the believer must always feel connected to their God and review if God is bringing happiness and joy to their life. According to Terry, this will determine if God is impacting your life. Terry focused on all three Abrahamic religions rather than focusing on one. After Terry’s speech, as a community we discussed his speech about reconciling the Abrahamic traditions again similar to how all three religions lived in peace in Spain many hundreds of years ago.

The second speaker of the eConference is Dean of the Theological School and Frank Woods Professor in New Testament at Trinity College, Reverent Professor Dorothy Lee. Dorothy has been an ordained minister of the Uniting Church for over 20 years and spoke from the Christian point of view. Dorothy mainly spoke about parables from the Gospel of Matthew and how you should love, respect and most importantly forgive your enemy to be a peacemaker rather than taking revenge. She also spoke about the prayer, which Jesus taught to his disciples, the “Our Father” and how Jesus taught us to “forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” Dorothy used the last part of the Lord’s Prayer to explain that if you want to be forgiven you must be a forgiving person. After Dorothy’s speech, as a community we discussed her speech about the perspective of Jesus and how no matter what faith you believe in, you must believe in a “Faith that does Justice”. As a community we also questioned why the words “kill” and “war” are used in the Bible when Christians are taught to spread the good news of peace and we thought how could we reword those words and if they would impact the meaning of the reading or parable.

The third speaker of the eConference is an associate professor at the School of Humanities at Griffith University in Queensland, Professor Imam Mohamed Abdalla. Imam is the Founding Director of the Griffith Islamic Research Unit and spoke from an Islamic point of view. Imam mainly spoke about the connections between the Islamic world with Christianity and Judaism and how Arabic parables have been translated over the past hundreds of years into many languages and vice versa into Arabic. After Imam's speech about traditions in the Islamic civilisation, as a community we discussed possible factors that may have led to an atmosphere of intellectual cooperation between scholars of the Abrahamic traditions.

The last speaker of the eConference is a Professor of New Testament and Professor of Jewish Studies at Vanderbilt Divinity School and College of Arts and Sciences in Nashville, Tennessee, USA, Professor Amy-Jill Levine. Amy has been awarded grants from the Mellon Foundation and spoke from a Jewish point of view. Amy mainly spoke about the connection of Judaism to Christianity and Islam and the current situation between Israel and Palestine. She spoke about how the Jewish believe they can solve violence and bring peace. After Amy's speech as a community we spoke about how we need to acknowledge our differences as well as our similarities between the three Abrahamic religions. We also explored how the Jewish people are connected to the land similar to how Indigenous Australians are connected to the land.

After all four panelists had spoken there was a panel discussion were all panelists came together for around half an hour to answer questions through email or social media. They also answered questions from people in live audience in Broken Bay were the eConference was held and broadcasted from.

Overall the eConference was a successful outcome where members of the Catholic Parish of Ivanhoe community and other members from other local faith communities learnt lots about the subject "Religion... Catalyst for violence or Peace". We hope to see more members for the next eConference. Thank you very much.