



the Ethics Centre of South Australia



Ethics Centre of South Australia

Central Seminar Series 2008

Wednesday 9 April 2008

4.00 – 5.00pm

Scots Centre (*next to Scots Church*)

Cnr North Terrace and Pulteney Street, Adelaide

Has the Archbishop of Canterbury opened a can of worms? The boundaries of religious ethics and secular ethics and law

Presented by

Emeritus Professor Robert Crotty
Director
Ethics Centre of South Australia

"Archbishop calls for Islamic law in Britain." This was the special report from London in early February. Archbishop Rowan Williams told BBC radio that this incorporation of Islamic law or *sharia* could help improve Britain's flagging social cohesion. But, as Fawaz Gerges, professor of Middle Eastern Studies at Sarah Lawrence College in New York responded: "Where do you stop? Where do you set the limit?"

This paper will endeavour to establish limits and boundaries for such an enterprise. It maintains that, historically, approaches to secular ethics have been based on differing perspectives on the attainment of order within a cultural system. It will maintain that, likewise, religious ethics are based on approaches to the attainment of ultimate order. Ethical systems, secular and religious, will have commonalities but essentially they are incommensurable. This has ramifications for secular law.

Where there is a homogenous secular and religious society, ethical conflicts are rare. Law becomes more straightforward. This is not the case in most world societies today. The requirement for conciliation between religious and secular ethics is becoming increasingly problematic. Likewise, the status of secular law is becoming more problematic. Is the Archbishop's solution the best way?

Robert is Emeritus Professor of Religion and Education at the University of South Australia and was appointed as Director of ECSA in 2006. Robert's research interests are primarily in history, especially the early period of Christian history. He has also published in the field of religious ethics, especially regarding the sources of religious ethics.

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