

Date 7 April 2011  
Submission by

### **Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia**

Multiculturalism is defined by different people in very different ways, and so there is no profit in arguing from the terminology. So I state some foundational observations, and some principles for maintaining a workable and integrated Australian society.

1. A culture is an agreed way of living and organizing a society, and always has a series of organizing principles, a framework that maintains the integrity of the society. When the organizing framework is ignored or overthrown, the society loses its integrity and fragments, as history testifies.
2. In some cultures, the organizing principles clearly do not work for the good of all in the society. The Nazi regime is a stunning example in modern history. In that context, the UN Charter of Human Rights was created to provide a social framework that would help protect all members of a society.
3. Every culture and society is flawed and not above critique. Indeed the Westminster system exists as testament to this, with its government and opposition. Hence the right to and responsibility of free speech and orderly dissent must remain part of the framework of any society that is going to continue and be self-regenerating.
4. The organizing principle and framework of Australia, since European occupation, has been Christian law and practice. This is Australia's Christian heritage, which has been handed down from the European founding fathers (even with our shaky convict history). It remains the unifying principle and framework of Australian society.
5. To maintain the integrity of a society, to preserve its organizing principles and framework, the citizens of that society "sign on" to those principles and framework. Where there is lack of commitment to the organizing principles, lack of "sign on" and ownership, the result is a move towards societal disintegration and eventually anarchy. If Australia is to remain an integrated and functioning whole, commitment to the foundational framework must be nurtured and encouraged.
6. The relationship between culture and religion (including atheism) is obvious and universal. Social anthropology shows that every society is shaped by the religious beliefs and practices of its peoples. For a mixed religious culture, as Australia is, the practice of each religion must allow the right of others to exist, which means there is no place for religious coercion. No one can demand or maneuver that all citizens must adhere to a particular religion. Such a religious system would have to modify its exclusivist claim, this would require a step back into wards. , the fundamental freedom of choice is replaced by personal and societal coercion as an organizing principle.
7. Freedom of religion, the freedom to believe, practice and propagate a religion as one chooses, is affirmed by the UN Charter as an essential in every societal framework. The alternative to freedom to choose one's religion is ultimately dictatorship, and generally religious dictatorship.

8. Australia is a nation of immigrants, and our (European) history is replete with good stories of success that arise from the very mix of cultures and backgrounds. Each has added to the colour and vibrancy of the nation. Taking the long view, we note that the fundamental unifying factor in the nation of Australia has been the organizing principles, the accepted framework of law and government, with its Christian base.
9. Freedom of speech and freedom of choice have been and remain brilliant parts of the framework of Australian society, but freedoms are never an absolute. What I mean is, freedom must operate within an agreed framework, and according to agreed principles in the society. Unfettered freedom is no freedom at all, as it ultimately leads to disintegration of society, anarchy. Imagine what the roads would be like if every driver was free to drive as and where he pleased! Yet the freedom within its boundaries allows the free flow of traffic – even allowing for some delays in the major cities!
10. In Australia, the value of our inherited and accepted societal framework and the value of a single unifying language should not be underestimated. These must be safeguarded and taught if we are to keep a national integrity and continue to exercise a positive influence in the world. Immigrants to Australia must be helped to understand the underpinning of Australian society, and citizenship must be taken seriously – more seriously than it has become. The “not-by-choice” immigrants – I refer to refugees – must also be helped into the mainstream of society as quickly as possible, through programs of orientation and education about the organizing principles of the country. The colour and cultural add-ons that all immigrants bring can enliven an already lively country, but this must never be at the expense of “buy-in” to the foundational organizing principles, whether through neglect or policy. These are ways that will help new migrants to become integral parts of the community, ways that will help them “integrate” without denying cultural background or losing personal identity.
11. There are many mainstream organizations that could be recruited again to help the processes of integrating immigrants into Australian society. In an age of volunteerism, this seems such an obvious point to make, yet in the recent past volunteer groups seem to have been supplanted by for-profit companies for many of the services that new migrants need, services that volunteer groups could provide. Following the logic of all I have said, such groups need to be already part of the fabric of the society, so they can help others to understand and be part of the unifying political and social framework of Australia.

I am very glad to be part of Australia, and glad to welcome others from all backgrounds and places who desire to live in and uphold the integrity of Australia, and enjoy its privileges and responsibilities.