

## **Multiculturalism: Opening the Floodgates to Foreign Gods?**

From: Mok, Jeannie. The Technicolour Faith: Building a Dynamic Multicultural Church, Brisbane, Asian Pacific Institute, 2004 (pp 1-6)

Since the White Australia policy was dismantled in the early eighties in favour of Multiculturalism, there have been distinct attacks on a policy that supposedly allows for the erosion and corruption of our Judeo-Christian based, Anglo-Celtic heritage. The 'Blainey Debate' in 1984, the 'Pauline Hanson Phenomenon' in 1998 for example, focused on the disadvantages of opening the Immigration gates especially to non- Caucasians. At the height of the controversy, talk shows referred to Hanson as "being big with the Bible Belt"; many fundamentalist Christians were supporting her anti-multiculturalism policies.

Closer to home, a member of an international church wrote Hanson a letter of support when she advocated stopping Asian migration and ending multiculturalism. He believed that a multicultural society promotes tolerance of peoples of various cultures, allowing "all these foreigners to bring in their heathen gods". He decried the construction of mosques and temples all over the country, as Christians would then have to fight all these "demonic influences"! Imagine the dismay of many ethnic Christians when they found his view to be fairly prevalent among several Caucasian Christians.

### **Fundamentals of Christianity**

Let us get back to the fundamentals of Christianity. Aren't we to rejoice when God brings the unsaved into our lives? So many churches work so hard to get their congregations "mission-minded" and spend many precious dollars supporting missionary initiatives abroad. Shouldn't we then be shouting ""Hallelujah" when we ALL can become missionaries since the mission field in is now so obviously in all our neighbourhoods? Since when did we become fearful of 'foreign, ungodly' influences?

Have we forgotten that when the first disciples went about spreading the Gospel nearly two thousand years ago, they faced almost similar scenarios in Jerusalem, Samaria, Athens, Rome etc? Even when facing the stiffest competition against a pantheon of weird and fantastic gods, Paul built bridges and was able to be pro-active in his evangelism, rather than react defensively. And what about Elijah and his contest with the 900 prophets of Baal? Not only did that prophet stand his ground, he made sure that all the odds were against him; and he still won! So why this anxiety or apprehension today? Our God is still the King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

### **'Us' and 'Them' Mentality**

But why this 'us' and 'them' mentality in the first place? After all, Christians are in a sense, responsible for the influx of these "foreigners' into our fair land. Centuries ago, Christian missionaries braved horrendous conditions to valiantly penetrate the wilds of Africa and the inhospitable regions of Asia to spread the Gospel. In doing so, they

inadvertently heralded the “Westernisation” of such societies, inculcating a thirst for Western education, philosophy, democratic ideals and lifestyle.

Not surprisingly, today this trend has been reversed and it is ironic that these foreign folk for whom ‘our’ ancestors gave up so much, are viewed with suspicion and sometimes, are not being welcomed as they enter Australia as refugees or new migrants. It is sad that this is happening in a society that prides itself on being founded on Christian values. It is, however, TRAGIC that opposition is felt among Christians who owe an allegiance to a God who reigns in justice; a God whose eschatological rule aims at transforming social and political institutions into agencies that create an environment in which basic moral values are encapsulated – including social justice and liberation of the weak and oppressed.

Jesus came to set the captives free, to give hope and freedom to the poor, the oppressed, the marginalised. More importantly, He became man and died so that ALL men would be reconciled to the Father. Isaiah 2:2 states that “in the last days the mountain of the Lord’s temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills and all nations will stream to it”. Many good, sincere Christians today sacrifice much to go as missionaries to China, India and elsewhere, so that this prophecy can be fulfilled. Why aren’t Christians here also rising to the challenge and taking on this new ‘opposition’ with enthusiasm and a sense of fulfilling the destiny ordained in this end-time ministry?

We Christians have had a ‘cushy’ time so far, being THE only major religion in Australia since the coming of the First Fleet. And yet, we have not capitalised on that ‘monopoly’. We have rested on our laurels; perhaps our complacency has led to the alarming erosion of crucial numbers within some of our major denominations. Yet at the first signs of ‘foreign’ competition, we seek to eradicate our opposition. It is a well-known fact that faith and growth among adherents increase in times of trials and extreme persecution. We should thus be responding to this ‘alien’ influx with such glee, because the opportunities for evangelism are enormous and that in the face of new challenges, we will be stretched and forced to grow like never before!

### **Multicultural Churches are no Longer an Option**

Many Australians appear apprehensive about embracing multiculturalism, which implies the erosion of the traditional Anglo-Celtic “Aussie culture”. There is the fear on the part of some Church leaders that multiculturalism will open the floodgates to foreign Gods. Others believe that this will lead to a deterioration of cohesiveness in our Australian society, as the many ethnic communities do their own thing and never really become “Australian”.

But the official definition of multiculturalism specifies that even as all individuals enjoy their rights, they also have responsibilities as Australians. The acceptance of all cultures and races should occur only within a democratic framework, where English is the national language and where the Westminster system of justice and government prevails. The ‘shape’ of Australia’s culture may be evolving, but its foundation is undeniably our Judeo-Christian heritage, the Anzac legend, giving the Aussie battler a ‘fair go’ and other cherished traditions.

More importantly, God has ORDAINED that ALL nations will go into the House of the Lord (Isa 2:2). In fact, in Rev 7:9, God gives HIS model of the ideal church: 'Great multitudes that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribe and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne and to the Lamb."

*The Multicultural church is no longer an option.* The multicultural church model should be the norm today. Our God has always been a Multicultural God – He created all that diversity and then said how good it all was! The possible 'erosion' of our heritage is no cause for alarm – remember, in these last days, God has brought the mission field into our own backyards, so we should rise to the challenge! Furthermore, the Aussie church MUST take into account all political, socio-economic factors if it wants to prosper.

### **Global Changes**

Changes in the Australian population through migration now mean that Australia is now the most Multicultural nation in the world, overtaking Israel. If one chooses to disregard the fact that God has allowed this people 'movement', monocultural churches must turn multicultural just for mere survival! (After all, why keep on investing in a sector of population that is surely diminishing?) Furthermore, researchers on intermarriage have found that almost 3 out of 4 marriages are inter-cultural; while 60% of Aborigines have a partner or a spouse who is white. Thus any attempt to preserve Australia's traditionally Anglo-Celtic population is already an impossibility!

Today, the political scene is no longer characterized by ideological warfare (Communism Vs Democracy; Socialism Vs Capitalism), but by racial and religious conflict. The political arena is rocked by ethnic cleansing and religious wars. People who have lived together for centuries are taking up arms against each other in Bosnia, Rwanda; Sri Lanka, Fiji; Timor, Ambon - a new 'hot spot' erupts every few months. The multicultural church is the only solution to all this conflict and division.

Globalization has also had a huge impact on Australia, resulting in massive changes in society. Yet, in spite of us being inhabitants of the 'global village', cultures have resisted this breaking down of traditional economic barriers; and are NOT converging. Thus, if the Church fails to take heed of this countertrend and deal with these global tensions and changes, it will be in no position to cope with this new danger. The Church must rise up and 'seize the day' since it knows that in reality, the church of Jesus Christ is the only 'force that could end division by offering a unique unity in Christ!

Consequently, our religious climate has also changed. In the 1996 Census, affiliates of other non-Christian religions amounted to 3.5%. Interestingly, while only 3.5%, these religions have shown the largest increases since the 1991 census, stated affiliation to Hinduism increased by 54.5%, Buddhism by 42.9%, Islam by 36.2% and Judaism by 7.6%. The WASP church will not be a runner in this race!

Today's reality is the phenomenal rise of Islam. The Third World control of oil and other natural resources means that even as the Western nations can no longer dominate Third World nations, the Western church can no longer continue to dominate Third World churches, or expect these people to assimilate into a Western culture. Australia is desperately attempting to align herself with the Pacific Rim nations to be considered 'Asian'. Is the Australian church going to ignore this crucial shift in Australia's political / social and economic alignment?

Australia is in such rapid change; it is a distinct possibility that monocultural churches could lose their relevance. Paul says in Ephesians 1: 9-12: He has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of His will, according to his purpose which He set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time – to unite all things on earth. *The multicultural church could well be the only Christian institution that could provide the formula for this unity...*

Thus, rather than be upset about these "corrupt influences", we Christians should be totally enthusiastic about sharing the Good News with all these "unreached souls." We should be marvelling that God's hand is so clearly evident in the present movement of peoples all over the world. We can't help thinking that in this new millennium, He seems to be in a bit of a hurry to get people saved and Christians should be thrilled that they can be part of this awesome evangelistic programme ordained by the Father Himself! As for all that diversity, count it a bonus – life is so rich and stimulating when you appreciate each other and when you do unto others what Jesus did unto you.