

How should we responding to racial and cultural diversity

How are we responding to Australia's racial and cultural diversity?

Some assert that there exists a substantive degree of racism in Australia today.

Their research suggests that there is a strong Anti-Muslim sentiment and a persisting intolerance against Asian, Indigenous and Jewish Australians. ¹

The 'Cronulla' race riots of December 2005, according to this view illustrates that racism is simmering underneath the surface.

Other social commentators have dismissed this claim as an ideologically driven exaggeration.

They argue that most Australians, including recent arrivals, view this country as a place where there is a substantial degree of peaceful co-existence and harmony.

Instead of widespread racism, they assert that there exists a widespread desire for national leaders to address genuine concerns about how we will maintain national cohesion and security in the midst of such diversity.

The Christian community has an important public role to play in demonstrating an authentic and alternative way of responding to Australia's racial and cultural diversity.

A Greek historian by the name of Luke recorded an instance when Jesus responded to the ethnic divisions and cultural barriers prevalent in his society. ²

In discussion with a lawyer, Jesus confirmed that God's requirements for all humans and their cultures can be summarised in two great commands.

The command to: *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind;* and the command to: *Love your neighbour as you love yourself.*

The lawyer struggled with the implications of the second command and demanded that Jesus answer the question: . . . *who is my neighbour?*

¹ Kevin M Dunn 2003, *Racism in Australia: findings of a survey on racist attitudes and experiences of racism*. National Europe Centre Paper No.77, a paper presented to *The Challenges of Immigration and Integration in the European Union and Australia* conference held 18-20 February 2003 at the University of Sydney. The survey was a telephone survey of 5,056 NSW and QLD residents. The survey found that racist attitudes were positively associated with age and non-tertiary education, and to a slightly lesser extent with those who only speak English, are Australian born, and males.

² Luke 10:25-37 [NCV]

Jesus replied by telling a story about the compassion shown by a Samaritan who on his travels stopped and assisted a Jew who had been assaulted and left to die.

Jesus was a Jew and for him to make the hero of his story a Samaritan, would have shocked and stunned his community.

He took a member of a despised ethnic group who were judged as practicing a false religion and made him the example of goodness and virtue that is to be imitated.

So in more ways than one Jesus hit at the heart of the issue of what is a just and loving response to ethnic and cultural differences.

For those who want to follow Jesus, the implication is this.

Your adherence to a core set of beliefs and values, that you receive as given from God and relevant for all cultures, must always be joined with a just love for all peoples, irrespective of whether they agree your beliefs and values.

The love of Christians for our neighbours is rooted in the belief that all humans are God's creatures and are created in his image.

The love of Christians for our neighbours is also rooted in the belief that all humans are seriously below God's standards and that we all need his forgiveness and salvation.

Consequently, all human cultures are seriously flawed and need to be transformed in reference to and in a relationship with God.

Further, if the Christian community will take following Jesus seriously, then there lies before us the very real possibility of enjoying and exhibiting real and substantial multiculturalism before a fragmenting society.

As followers of Jesus, peoples from every ethnic group belong to one body, one church.

This body stands together, all equal, on the foundation of a relationship with Jesus and the core beliefs and values he provides.

This body of diverse peoples also can enjoy and utilise the different cultural expressions of those beliefs and values, for the glory of God and the common good.

Why don't you come and follow Jesus and help us to make a contribution to a movement that embraces unity and diversity under God.