

"Multiculturalism in a future peaceful world"**Graham Nicholson**

We live in a rapidly changing world, one in which the movement of different peoples from country to country, from place to place, has increased exponentially. The transport and communications revolutions of the modern world have facilitated this movement. The opportunities for human contact over ever greater distances have consequently increased. As a result, on one view, many countries have increasingly become more multicultural in nature[1]. And yet the subject of multiculturalism continues to be a sensitive one. One commentator has ominously stated "The first rule of multiculturalism is that you can't talk about multiculturalism." [2]. It is apparently such a sensitive contemporary subject, arguably in part as a defensive tactic, including because of the sensitivities that can be impacted by the expression of prejudices of various kinds, whether those sensitivities are of those persons favouring multiculturalism or otherwise.

But can and does multiculturalism truly work? It is suggested in response to this question that it is not enough to simply argue that multiculturalism by its very nature can never ever truly work; in other words it is not enough to simply argue that only a pure monoculture can work. The fact is that pure monoculture, in the sense of a given society having exclusively one culture, has become the exception in modern societies rather than the rule, with most societies now having a mix of peoples and cultures. That being the case it is necessary to look for ways and means to make multiculturalism more effective and beneficial[3]. Of course if multiculturalism is not generally accepted and valued in a particular society it can run into difficulties. But arguably it can work and be of benefit to society if the correct ideas and attitudes are adopted by those involved[4]. The objections to it may well be just a veil or front for prejudices of various kinds. Those prejudices that create negative attitudes towards multiculturalism and other cultures can in themselves cause or lead to inflammatory attacks on cultural diversity and on those people of different cultures. This can result in divisions, trouble and confrontation, even violence. The result is that some think it is a subject that should be avoided altogether as a subject for discussion.

But it is argued in this article that the subject that should be openly addressed is the issue of prejudice. This subject can lie at the root of the concerns and is the matter to which this article is addressed on a global basis. If prejudice can be positively addressed and corrected then there is a real prospect that multiculturalism can also work and social cohesion be maintained for the benefit of all humanity. Where the sensitivities towards multiculturalism arise, there may well be an underlying issue of prejudice. The task, it is argued, is to constructively and rationally address this particular issue, with a view to hopefully eliminating the prejudice in the minds of people worldwide. No sensible person, it is argued, seeks the confrontation and violence, hatred and bigotry, which can result from prejudice. As is stated, most human societies these days have, to a greater or lesser degree, a mixture of different peoples, whether it be based or is perceived to be based on race, colour, ethnicity, language, culture, gender, religion or belief, etc[5], and that is a situation that is not likely to greatly change without societal disruption. It is the prejudice based on

such factors that is therefore the real issue which should be addressed. Once the prejudice is much reduced or eliminated, then other issues of concern, if any[6], can more comfortably be addressed.

In this context, it is necessary to briefly consider the meaning of prejudice. There is some debate on this subject generally. Gordon Allport defined prejudice as a "feeling, favorable or unfavorable, toward a person or thing, prior to, or not based on, actual experience"[7]. Prejudice, to be undesirable, is based on an opinion felt towards another person or persons based on grounds where that opinion deserves disapprobation. Of course all people have good and not so good characteristics and attributes, and an unfavourable opinion of the characteristics or attributes of another may not necessarily be prejudicial. Thus to disassociate with people because they are in fact thieves is not a form of prejudice. It can become so when that opinion is generalised and adopted as a matter of an assumption about the specific characteristic or attribute of people generally. One can be prejudiced against or have a preconceived notion against some person or group of persons due to his, her or their characteristic or attribute, or presumed characteristic or attribute, which is among those characteristics or attributes which should not be the subject of disapprobation. In this emerging global age, if that characteristic or attribute is based upon the nature or circumstances of the person or persons that are inconsistent with the notion that we are all members of the one same human race[8], such as those characteristics based on difference of culture, race, colour, ethnicity, language, gender, religion or belief, and there are no other relevant and justifiable considerations, then it is argued that that prejudice is not compatible with a situation of a harmonious society based on multiculturalism.

Of course, prejudices can be deep seated arising from the past. The path of human societal history has been a disparate one, as human groups dispersed and separated around the planet and different cultures developed. With that separation, then inevitably when different societies later intersected, the risk of prejudice increased. But in this modern global age, the links between different peoples are extending and deepening and we as humanity now have a common interest in the whole planet and all humanity. The connections between people worldwide are spreading. The famous quote from antiquity, now more relevant than ever, is that "No man is an island entire of itself every man is a piece of the continent a part of the main"[9]. The inherited prejudices are still there in humanity and it would be unrealistic to expect them all to suddenly disappear of themselves. Their elimination worldwide is not an easy matter. This essay expresses a view on how they can and should be eliminated over time as the recognition of the oneness of all humanity grows and these connections between peoples extend globally. Such an achievement would make a monumental contribution to future global peace, understanding and human wellbeing. Then the question in this essay becomes – how to constructively and purposefully address the elimination of prejudice in any society arising from multiculturalism so as to make the latter a more effective and beneficial form of human organisation?

Definition

One definition of multiculturalism is from an Oxford source – "Multiculturalism refers to the recognition, acceptance, and celebration of cultural diversity within a society or organisation. It acknowledges that people from different cultural, ethnic, religious, and linguistic backgrounds can coexist, contribute, and thrive together. Rather than demanding assimilation into a single dominant culture, multiculturalism promotes equity by valuing multiple cultural perspectives as equally valid and important." [10]

Thus to meet this definition there has to be both a recognition of the existence of diverse cultures within a society, and a willing acceptance of that diversity overall as a thing to be valued.

This definition is set against the background of the two contending approaches as to whether there is or is not support for multiculturalism in any given society. The negative, or what can for convenience be called the monocultural approach, is one that places more emphasis on the importance of building and maintaining cultural homogeneity within that society at the expense of cultural diversity. It can lead to policies that are designed to produce that homogeneity as much as possible and may be influenced in whole or part by relevant prejudices. The opposite approach is one that values cultural diversity as an asset for that community and can produce policies that put the emphasis on principles such as tolerance, respect, understanding, cooperation, positive discrimination for the disadvantaged and the like in a non-prejudiced way. As will be seen in discussion below, it is an approach that can reflect the concept and belief of human unity in diversity and human oneness as an important contribution to a peaceful and united global society.

The term "multiculturalism" suggests by its own use of language that the diversity that is intended to be covered by this term may stem from matters of culture alone. Of course the subject of culture has wide connotations extending to other matters. For the purposes of this article it is taken that the term can extend to other matters creating diversity such as race, colour, ethnicity, language, gender, religion or belief, etc. All such matters can contribute to a multicultural society if the above definition is met.

Multiculturalism, to be effective and beneficial, must be free of any discrimination and prejudice based solely on such cultural issues, assuming of course that it does not involve any other justifiable basis for special treatment [11]. Any such discrimination and prejudice is arguably antithetical to the principle of multiculturalism.

And to be truly effective, multiculturalism also needs to occur within the context of a general recognition of the diverse cultures in the nation or society in question and a ready acceptance of that diversity as a thing of value. This does not need to descend to the minutiae of particular cases involving particular people of a particular culture within the jurisdiction and their faults and prejudices unless this information is used to generalize. It is sufficient that there is such a general and widespread recognition and acceptance. Without those two factors then the policy of multiculturalism is likely to run into difficulties.

Religious Prejudices and Multiculturalism

Religious pluralism can potentially provide one of the major flash points in assessing the value of multiculturalism in any society. The emotions generated by religious affiliations are well known. Depending on the policies adopted in any society and the strength of feelings of religious members of that society, particularly of those where there is a majority religion, multiculturalism can run into serious difficulties. No need to document examples as they are well known. On the other hand there are other examples of pluralistic societies where there is a strong commitment to religious tolerance and respect, in some cases constitutionally guaranteed. Religions generally require a high degree of certainty of belief and can become exclusivist in nature in the quest for that certainty, to the exclusion of other beliefs. There is a question as to when religious views go beyond matters of certainty of belief and become a form of bigotry, that is, a form of prejudice. It follows that in any situation of a plurality of religious belief in a society, for multiculturalism to work, that form of prejudice must be adequately addressed.

Position in Australia

It is possible to speak from the vantage point of Australia as it has had a somewhat unique multicultural experience. Australia is an example of a country that has for some years pursued a multicultural approach[12]. Many people are remarkably tolerant of other cultures, including those involving religions, although this has been put under some strain by terrorist events and other developments both within and outside Australia. The existence of multiculturalism was recognized in the recent Australian Multicultural Framework Review of 2024[13]. Some may argue that Australia still has a unique majority Australian culture notwithstanding that approach, or at least that there are certain common Australian values. It has been written that Australian culture is of primarily Western origins, and is derived from its British, indigenous and migrant components[14].

The commentator Professor Fethi Mansouri wrote:

"The story of modern Australia is a story of migration — successive waves of migrants that built on the millennia-long history of the diverse cultures of First Nations people. Despite the ongoing challenges of achieving justice for and reconciliation with Indigenous Australia, generations of newcomers have helped build prosperity, fuel innovation and enrich our cultural fabric. Multiculturalism remains one of the nation's greatest achievements. Yet today, social cohesion is under real strain." [15]

Mansouri notes the conclusion of the Scanlon Foundation that 70%[16] still believe migrants make the country stronger, but the deeper truth is that while Australians remain broadly supportive of diversity, the rising costs of living and pressure on housing and services are being exploited by some to feed discontent, racial antipathy and social discord.

In so far as this is an accurate statement, it goes to the second factor already mentioned, namely, that general acceptance of the diversity in Australia as a thing of value. The vast majority, he says, still value multiculturalism and recognize migrants as a source of strength. But this, he says, cannot be taken for granted. The dissent does not in the main withhold recognition of the existing diversity, although there are concerns expressed with the composition and numbers of any new immigration and there have also been some calls

for greater homogeneity within the Australian community[17]. The dissent tends to emanate from those that advocate a return to the monocultural approach.

Mansouri thinks that Australia needs to do better in terms of its multiculturalism. Despite decades of multicultural policy, Australia still lacks a national legislative framework to enshrine and protect diversity, particularly at the Federal level. Beyond that, he says that a successful multicultural society needs committed leadership, serious infrastructure and strong legislation to enable that society to withstand the shocks of various crises, economic, security related and environmental. He makes his point in favour of maintaining social cohesion, a relevant consideration having regard to the breakdowns in that regard in some other pluralistic countries which sometimes descend into violence.

There are of course a range of other views in Australia. These range from those which are opposed to cultural diversity or are opposed to special treatment for any group under a concept of the level playing field for all, and those advocating a more monocultural system and also for strict restrictions on immigration. Other views advocate at the other end of the spectrum a more global or cosmopolitan approach, including the protection and extension of Australia's cultural diversity, with protections of multiculturalism, more compassionate policies on immigration and on more assistance to disadvantaged minorities within Australia.

Multicultural politics

This author of this article does not seek to be drawn into commenting on the political arguments so advanced in relation to Australia and its governmental laws and policies. This article leaves aside the particular partisan political issues in Australia and does not seek to enter upon or debate them or to offer a critique of the various Australian views. Rather the article accepts the reality of multiculturalism in most societies and looks to the underlying issues that are said to give rise to difficulties in the success of that concept, in particular that of prejudice. In doing so it stresses what is seen as the importance of a belief in the principle of unity in diversity as a general rule of value and importance in global human affairs in this modern age. It is therefore a more global perspective that is advanced in this article. It is concerned with the negative impact of prejudices that can detract from the principle of unity in diversity and thereby impact the practice of multiculturalism. Those prejudices operate within the mind of the individual and it is argued that it is within the mind and heart of each individual that effective solutions must be sought to prejudice and not just in governmental laws and policies. The question is to ask what is the best way to overcome prejudices within the mind and heart with a new, non-prejudiced, global approach. Passing more governmental laws and adopting more governmental policies are not by themselves going to achieve that. Among other things, the many divisions in the present global society make that impossible. Nor is to be achieved by mere logical arguments[18]. It has to be something that positively goes to and directly affects the mind and heart on an ongoing basis capable of leading to a change in strongly held views and perceptions worldwide.

It is argued that the best way to achieve the elimination of those prejudices is by adopting a particular spiritual approach, having regard to the matters discussed below. This is seen as being necessary in the effective global implementation of the principle of unity in diversity in order to make a contribution to a peaceful and united global society. The power of a strongly held spiritual view and belief on the mind and heart is incredible, and if firmly held and rightly directed towards that principle it can overcome the prejudice in any person. If widely accepted and practiced it can make a significant contribution to humanity.

This is not to enter into an argument about the details and value of any particular national law or policy nor is it to challenge any nation and its laws and policies or even to challenge the legitimacy or existence of individual nations. Those are matters external to the inner human. Rather it is to argue from a global perspective in the context of a world of humanity increasing coming together in many ways, recognizing humanity as one race on one common planetary homeland, and anxious to secure global peace, wellbeing and prosperity for all humanity. Such a perspective must be based on the principle of unity in diversity and can only succeed if the inner human is free of prejudice.

The question then becomes to identify a spiritual source for such an approach.

A spiritual approach

It is possible to identify in some of the great religions as originally founded a teaching opposed to prejudice of the kind described above.

Thus in the New Testament there is a command to love thy neighbour as thyself.[19] Of this command it is stated:

"In James:2:8-13, James continues to argue that showing prejudice is incompatible with true faith"[20]

Thus the Good Samaritan story in the Gospels[21] is illustrative of this command, extending to someone of a different ethnicity and religion and requiring no discrimination. Christians have used it as an example of Christianity's opposition to racial, ethnic, and sectarian prejudice.

The Holy Quran states in Surah Al-Hujurat [22] that mankind was created from a single male and female and divided into nations and tribes so people could get to know one another, not to despise or feel superior to each other. Thus Islam is said to be against all forms of racism and bigotry.

His Holiness the Buddha was said to be adamantly opposed to any form of racial or ethnic discrimination. He even condemned the caste system. Guru Nanak of the Sikh Faith also explicitly denounced the caste system.

But the fact is that history and human behaviour show a significant gap between these core religious teachings and the actions of many followers. History is replete with examples where prejudice by or between followers of the great religions has been demonstrated,

often descending into violence. This extends right up to the present day. While some of the followers of those religions may have practiced a more tolerant form of their religion and placed much more emphasis on the teachings of love, harmony, respect and peace, this was not and is not universally the case. In fact a recent report suggested that religious intolerance was a bigger cause of prejudice than race[23].

In this regard, the example of prejudice becomes even more marked in the case of religions that have a belief in their superiority and exclusiveness over other beliefs[24]. Exclusivism in a particular religious belief is one of the main causes that can lead to religious prejudice. Theological arguments based on particular interpretations of their sacred writings are often used to support this exclusivist approach. It can be more difficult to find examples where adherents of one religious belief accept that other religious beliefs have any truth or validity which should be respected[25].

And outside of religions, there is no compelling, unified source[26] parallel to religion that provides a single compelling voice for the elimination of prejudices worldwide sufficient to provide any hope that this might even be possible. International and supra national human rights law are to a large extent framed around the elimination of discrimination and prejudice, with institutions to match, and these have value, but in practice they are often observed in the breach and it is questionable as to the extent to which they impact widely on hearts and minds. Plenty of thoughtful people have expressed their own views along these lines but these do not, it is argued, provide the sort of powerful, unified and unifying voice required for this global task.

It is possible to find in the Baha'i Faith[27] religious teachings expressly opposed to these forms of prejudice that are worth examining. This is an independent world religion founded by the Prophet Baha'u'llah that teaches the oneness of all humanity under the one supreme Deity. Some of their sacred writings are as follows:

"Abandonment of All Prejudice

It is established that all the prophets of God have come to unite the children of men and not to disperse them, and so put into action the law of love and not enmity. Consequently we must throw aside all those prejudices - the racial prejudice, the patriotic prejudice, the religious and political prejudices. We must become the cause of unity of the human race." [28]

"The fifth principle of Bahá'u'lláh is: Prejudices of Religion, Race or Sect destroy the foundation of Humanity.

All the divisions in the world, hatred, war and bloodshed, are caused by one or other of these prejudices.

The whole world must be looked upon as one single country, all the nations as one nation, all men as belonging to one race. Religions, races, and nations are all divisions of man's making only, and are necessary only in his thought; before God there are neither Persians, Arabs, French nor English; God is God for all, and to Him all creation is one. We must obey

God, and strive to follow Him by leaving all our prejudices and bringing about peace on earth." [29]

"Unity in Diversity"

"The diversity in the human family should be the cause of love and harmony, as it is in music where many different notes blend together in the making of a perfect chord. If you meet those of a different race and colour from yourself, do not mistrust them and withdraw yourself into your shell of conventionality, but rather be glad and show them kindness." [30]

"The call of Bahá'u'lláh is primarily directed against all forms of provincialism, all insularities and prejudices. If long-cherished ideals and time-honored institutions, if certain social assumptions and religious formulae have ceased to promote the welfare of the generality of mankind, if they no longer minister to the needs of a continually evolving humanity, let them be swept away and relegated to the limbo of obsolescent and forgotten doctrines. Why should these, in a world subject to the immutable law of change and decay, be exempt from the deterioration that must needs overtake every human institution?" [31]

There may be critics from outside of the Faith who challenge the commitment and practice of Baha'is as to whether they are truly free of all prejudices. The Faith sets the bar very high in this respect and of course the followers are only human. And there are some aspects of the teachings that some such critics find wanting, particularly when measured against present day community standards and mores. But it is the only independent religion the sacred teachings of which are explicitly, strongly and universally opposed to such prejudices as a fundamental aspect of that Faith. It remains to be seen as to whether that Faith reaches a widespread and large global audience and following so as to be able to make a significant and lasting contribution to the wellbeing of humanity [32]. It is too early to fully assess this but it is suggested that it points in the right direction.

[1] The view that modern societies have become more multicultural than earlier is not universally accepted. Thus Wikipedia in its entry on Multiculturalism cites the researcher Hein de Haas, who states that it is a myth that current societies are more diverse than ever. He cites various examples of diversity going back to ancient times. And in addition the Wikipedia entry suggests that there are other factors at work such as globalization that have also reduced cultural differences and also encouraged integration. But at the same time the contemporary facility for the movement of peoples certainly has increased the opportunities for greater diversity within many countries.

[2] Attributed to Lauren Southern – see Brainy Quotes.

[3] One of these ways is to try to encourage greater integration within a society by various means, particularly in relation to those of different cultures who have entered that society that has an existing majority culture. But this raises questions about the methodology used to try to integrate them, which could range from incentives to various forms of pressure, and whether other more conciliatory and tolerant methods should be used. This is a topic beyond the scope of this paper.

[4] There are a range of views on whether multiculturalism is or can be beneficial for a society. The philosopher Appiah has argued that cultures have always been porous, mutually borrowing and changing, and that cultural "contamination" is not a threat but a good, although he also notes the dangers of glossing over the tensions arising from multiculturalism and it is difficult goal toward which we must strive -

Multiculturalism: Expanded Paperback Edition, "Identity Against Culture: Understandings of Multiculturalism" Avenali Lecture, Sept 12, (1994). Others have argued to the contrary and emphasised the value of cultural purity. Of course the extreme version of the latter has resulted in gross human rights abuses.

[5] It is accepted that in parts of the world there is now somewhat of a reaction against multiculturalism, with a coexisting demand for greater cultural and even racial homogeneity within a given society, often associated with a demand for limits on immigration.. It is not the purpose of this essay to express a view on this topic for what is in fact a political debate, likely in itself to provoke division. Rather this essay seeks to address the factors said to make multiculturalism a difficult and contentious practice, with a view to finding ways of creating and maintaining harmony and social cohesion consistently with diversity.

[6] For example, legitimate issues can arise as to the desirable level of immigration into any country for the purposes of assessing the provision of necessary services to migrants and in maintaining an appropriate economic situation in the country. Also issues as to controlling criminal and security risks from immigration or foreign intervention. In this regard it should be accepted that a nation should have control over its own non discriminatory immigration policies, and that all people within a particular nation should obey the law of that country.

[7] Allport, Gordon (1979), The Nature of Prejudice. Perseus Books Publishing, 6.

[8] The notion that all humanity is composed of the one same human race is now strongly established in science, in international law and in the minds of many people.

[9] John Donne.

[10] <https://oxford-review.com/the-oxford-review-dei-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-dictionary/multiculturalism-definition-and-explanation/>

[11] International law recognizes and accepts forms of positive discrimination where necessary to remedy inequity.

[12] A Baha'i submission stated "Australia has achieved a great deal as a nation in recent decades in building a largely peaceful and harmonious multicultural society. Diversity in all its forms has always been part of our DNA, shaping our identity and our vision for the future. This extends from the hundreds of First Nations language groups who have provided wise stewardship over this land for tens of millennia to those who have settled and migrated here in the past two hundred years." (Australian Baha'i Community submission to the Department of Home Affairs' Multicultural Framework Review, October 2023)

[13] Towards Fairness: A multicultural Australia for all

- <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/about-us/our-portfolios/multicultural-framework-review>.

[14] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture_of_Australia.

[15] <https://www.unesco-cdsj.com/media/australia-stands-at-a-crossroads/>

[16] Presumably 70% of those in the Scanlon Foundation's survey.

[17] Not discussed in this article,

[18] The 'Logos' of Aristotle, Rhetoric, but logos is not seen as being sufficient on its own.

[19] Gospel of St Mark 12:31.

[20] <https://bible.org/seriespage/10-why-prejudice-incompatible-christian-faith-pt-2-james-28-13>.

[21] Gospel of St Luke 10:25-37.

[22] Surah 49:13.

[23] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/nov/15/religious-intolerance-is-bigger-cause-of-prejudice-than-race-says-report>.

[24] Or those with no religious belief.

[25] There are examples among some religions where such an acceptance does exist. Thus the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, a Hindu, advocated such a more tolerant religious approach.

[26] Whether secular and humanitarian or spiritual but not religious.

[27] A Faith that emerged from Shi'ih Islam in the 19th century and now rejected by that source, having spread around the world.

[28] From the words of 'Abdu'l-Baha, Vol 11 Star of the West No 1, 5.

[29] 'Abdu'l-Baha, Paris Talks, 132.

[30] 'Abdu'l-Bahá: Quoted in Advent of Divine Justice, 32.

[31] Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Baha'u'llah, 42.

[32] So far the Faith is still relatively young but has members in virtually all countries and territories. Its teachings are widely available and increasingly well known. The author discloses that he is a Baha'i.