

What is wrong with Multiculturalism?

What is 'multiculturalism'?

We need to start by defining our terms. What exactly do we mean by 'multiculturalism'? There is a significant difference between describing something as 'multicultural', and the word 'multiculturalism'. It's that suffix '-ism' that turns the adjective 'multicultural' into the ideology of 'multiculturalism'. Think for example of: communism, capitalism, secularism, racism, sexism, nationalism, Marxism, statism, feminism, conservatism, liberalism, Darwinism, fatalism, ecumenism and vegetarianism. These are all ideologies, as is 'multiculturalism'. A 'multiculturalist' is someone who advocates the ideology of multiculturalism.

The ideology of multiculturalism is based on the idea that all cultures are equally valid. No one culture is better than another. All cultures are worthy of equal respect. As a state-sponsored policy it refers to the policy of expecting people from multiple different cultures to live harmoniously alongside each other without any shared values or customs. Since multiculturalists believe that all cultures are equal, they therefore believe that it would be immoral, or even racist, to expect people from radically different cultures to adopt any particular values, ethics, customs or practices. Instead, they argue that we ought to allow them to live their lives according to their own customs, and respect these practices no matter how different or conflicting they may be.

The political failure of multiculturalism

The meaning of multiculturalism is demonstrated by showing how politicians have recently used it. It was the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, who was the first major national leader to openly admit the political failure of multiculturalism. In a major 'state of the nation' speech in October 2010 she said:

*'Of course, the tendency had been to say, "let's adopt the multicultural concept and live happily side by side, and be happy to be living with each other". But this concept has failed, and failed utterly.'*¹

Merkel received a standing ovation and was praised for having the courage to tell a difficult truth in the press. It didn't take long for others to follow. Britain's Prime Minister, David Cameron, speaking in February 2011 said:

'Under the doctrine of state multiculturalism, we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and the mainstream. We have failed to provide a vision of society to which they feel they want to belong. We have even tolerated these segregated communities behaving in ways that run counter to our values. So when a white person holds objectionable views – racism, for example – we rightly condemn them. But when equally unacceptable views or practices have come from someone who isn't white, we've been too cautious, frankly even fearful, to stand up to them.'

*The failure of some to confront the horrors of forced marriage – the practice where some young girls are bullied and sometimes taken abroad to marry someone they don't want to – is a case in point. This hands-off tolerance has only served to reinforce the sense that not enough is shared.'*²

A few days later, French President, Nicolas Sarkozy joined in, pronouncing multiculturalism to be a 'failure' in a television interview, saying: *'The truth is that, in all our democracies, we've been too concerned about the identity of the new arrivals and not enough about the identity of the country receiving them.'*³

It is important to realise that these politicians were not criticising multi-ethnicity. They were stating that

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/oct/17/angela-merkel-germany-multiculturalism-failures>

² <https://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/the-staggers/2011/02/terrorism-islam-ideology>

³ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-sarkozy-multiculturalism/sarkozy-joins-allies-burying-multiculturalism-idUSTRE71A4UP20110211>

the idea of welcoming different cultures, customs and values and treating them all equally, that is the ideology of multiculturalism, has led to a disjointed, segregated society lacking any sense of cohesive identity.

What is culture?

Let's take a step back and examine what culture is. Anthropologists tend to define culture as: 'a shared set of values and rules of behaviour that allows a social group to function and perpetuate itself.'⁴ This is helpful, so far as it goes, but a Christian understanding of culture would seek to broaden and deepen that definition.

First, humans are inescapably religious (Romans 1:25). We all have some ultimate commitment from which we obtain our values and sense of self-worth. Values and rules of behaviour are also inescapably religious. The source of a culture's values and rules is effectively that culture's god. It is the ultimate authority for that culture. Therefore, all cultures are inescapably religious, whether recognised as such or not. An Islamic culture is a cultural manifestation of Islam. A humanistic culture is a cultural manifestation of humanism, which is another religious worldview. Any culture is necessarily a manifestation of the religion of that society. Hence, Henry van Til loosely defined culture as 'religion externalised'.⁵

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Secondly, culture includes more than values and rules of behaviour. Surely it includes works of art, buildings, infrastructure, literature, clothing, food, technology, industry and much else besides. Culture, more broadly speaking, from a Christian perspective is what humans make of creation. Genesis 1:28 is often referred to as the 'cultural mandate'. Humanity is instructed to 'fill the earth and subdue it'. This means to create culture out of creation. God delegated responsibility to humans for creating a social order or culture that glorifies God out of creation. The shortest definition of culture is 'what we make of the world'.⁶ Culture-making is what humans do. All forms of work participate in culture formation. Once again, all this is inescapably religious. Any culture will either be aimed at glorifying the living God or at the worship of some idol(s) or divine substitute from which the society seeks fulfilment and direction.

No neutral cultures

What this Christian understanding of culture makes clear is that there is no such thing as a neutral culture. All cultures proclaim certain values which they understand to be superior to alternative values. Multiculturalists cannot escape from this since they believe that multiculturalism creates superior forms of society. No culture can be religiously or value neutral.

All cultures will have some ultimate commitments that cannot be challenged. A current myth in our society is that 'tolerance' is a helpful ultimate virtue. Confusion arises here because the meaning of 'tolerance' has changed from accepting behaviours to which we may continue to object, to not criticising anyone else's behaviour. True tolerance is not the same as approval. What the new definition means in practice is that someone who criticises the prevailing morality of society is regarded as 'intolerant' and therefore as someone who is effectively a traitor to this ultimate commitment to be 'tolerant'. Society then becomes highly intolerant of what is seen as 'intolerant' behaviour, whilst claiming to value 'tolerance'! This is why

⁴ Zee, *Choosing Sharia? Multiculturalism, Islamic Fundamentalism & Sharia Councils* (The Hague, Netherlands: Eleven International Publishing, 2016), 5.

⁵ Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Publishing Group, 2001), 200.

⁶ Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (InterVarsity Press, 2013), 23.

we are starting to see the courts attempting to restrict free speech in this country when people criticise currently accepted sexual ethics.⁷ All cultures will have some behaviours of which they are intolerant. Culture is inherently prejudiced and will therefore 'pre-judge' some behaviours as immoral.

This religious nature of culture also enables us to better understand multiculturalism as equivalent to religious pluralism, or state-sponsored polytheism. The multiculturalist tries to say that society can continue without any favoured religion or worldview. This is self-defeating because multiculturalism itself is a favoured worldview. It is also inherently unstable. Different religions and worldviews proclaim different values and ethics which will unavoidably clash. A society with no agreed moral or religious foundation cannot avoid collapsing or fragmenting into a set of isolated subcultures abiding by different values. This is already what we are seeing in the UK with segregation of our society into enclaves dominated by certain religions, most notably Islam in certain areas. Professor Elham Manea aptly described this present reality as 'plural monoculturalism'.⁸

Cultural Relativism

The foundational doctrine of multiculturalism is the view that all cultures are equally valid. This leads straight on to cultural relativism which believes that a person's behaviour should be judged relative to their own culture rather than against any other criteria.

From a Christian perspective we can straightaway reject the idea that all cultures are equal. Clearly a culture aimed at glorifying God is superior to one that glorifies human sexuality or any other idol. Even without this perspective, to say that all cultures are equal makes a mockery of equality. Every culture proclaims certain values and ethical norms which can be in direct conflict with another culture. Therefore, it makes no sense to say that they are all equal. Is a culture that values free speech equal to one that does not? Is a culture that values women's rights equal to one that does not? Is a culture that promotes promiscuity and homosexuality equal to one that does not? What about slavery, racism, polygamy, FGM, etc.? All these are cultural practices, and they are evidently not equal. Of course, to say this is to imply that there is a transcendent source of morality by which all cultures can be judged, which is a truth that contemporary societies seek to reject.

This reality of a transcendent source of morality directly contradicts cultural relativism. A consistent cultural relativist would neither criticise nor seek to curb the practice of slavery, for example, because she sees this practice as culturally relative. She has no moral source to appeal to. As Christians we recognise the divine origin of moral law as revealed in the Bible, and thus we have legitimate, transcendent grounds to criticise various cultural practices. In fact, we are morally obligated to critique cultures and to proclaim God's laws and moral order to them. This is what the prophets did, not only in Israel, but to the surrounding nations – see Amos 1 for example.

This is why William Carey was able to boldly criticise and campaign against the culturally ingrained, religious practice of Sati in India – the practice of burning widows alive at their husbands' funerals. His campaigns led to the outlawing of the practice.⁹ No consistent cultural relativist could consider doing such a thing.

In this way, cultural relativism suffers from what is known as the Reformer's Dilemma.¹⁰ If cultural relativism is true, then a person's actions can only be evaluated according to the culture they are from. If that is so, then the greatest crime possible is to try to change the practices of a culture. Cultural change can only be evaluated by a multiculturalist as immoral. Therefore, the cultural relativist must condemn people like Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., William Wilberforce, William Carey and many others. Their actions can

⁷ For example, the case of Felix Ngole who was thrown off his university course for supporting biblical sexual ethics. Also, the case of Richard Page who was dismissed as a magistrate for expressing his belief that children are best raised with a mother and a father. <http://www.christianconcern.com/our-issues/employment/employment-tribunal-allows-censorship-of-christian-beliefs>

⁸ Manea, *Women and Shari'a Law: The Impact of Legal Pluralism in the UK* (London: I. B. Tauris Limited, 2016), 171.

⁹ <http://www.christiantoday.co.in/article/wiliam.carey.played.significant.role.in.abolishing.sati.system/4906.htm>

¹⁰ Moreland, *Kingdom Triangle* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2007), 101.

only be regarded as moral if we accept a transcendent source of morality.

Furthermore, cultural relativism is also undermined by cross-cultural actions. What are we to make of a person from culture A having extra-marital sex with someone from culture B, whilst staying in a hotel in culture C? By which culture should the morality of this act be evaluated? How about someone who's biological parents are from cultures A and B, and whose foster parents are from cultures C and D, who is now living in culture E? Which culture's moral standards is she expected to abide by? These are not merely hypothetical examples – witness the fuss caused by the story of a child with some Christian cultural heritage being cared for by Muslim foster parents who were alleged to be imposing Muslim values on the child last year.¹¹ The child was actually of mixed cultural heritage which added to the complexity of the story. The point is that cultural relativism cannot resolve issues like these because it tries to affirm that all the cultures are equally valid even though they clash and conflict in multiple ways. It is the ideology of multiculturalism that has created situations like this.

Other examples of the absurdities of multiculturalism abound; a court in Ontario ruled that a man was not guilty of raping his wife because he genuinely believed he could have sex with her whenever he wanted.¹² No matter that he broke Canadian law. The judge accepted that he did not know it was against the law to have sex with his wife without her consent. An Australian court granted leave for an Afghan rapist to appeal on the basis that the rapist had 'an unclear concept of what constitutes consent in sexual relationships in Australia'.¹³ A judge in Germany acquitted a Turkish man of a rape that had left the woman incapacitated. The judge argued that in 'the mentality of the Turkish cultural circle,' what the woman 'had experienced as rape' might be considered merely 'wild sex'.¹⁴ An Iraqi man who raped a 10-year-old boy at a swimming

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pool in Austria had his conviction overturned after judges found he may have believed the child consented.¹⁵ The victims in all these cases had a valid cultural expectation not to be abused in this way, and a further cultural expectation that their abuser would be punished by the law. Multiculturalism is responsible for such injustices which undermine the fundamental principle of one law for all. The multiculturalist thinks that someone's moral behaviour can only be judged relative to their culture. What this means in practice is that multiculturalists hold people from other cultures to a lower standard of morality, which can be viewed as a form of racism in itself.

Samuel Huntington writes: 'Multiculturalism is in essence anti-European civilisation... It is basically an anti-Western ideology.'¹⁶ Western culture was based on Christian values. We have seen that fundamental to multiculturalism is the denial of objective transcendent moral law. Thus, multiculturalism is directly opposed to Christianity, which proclaims that there is one God who is the sole source of objective, transcendent moral law by which all people from all cultures will be judged. Therefore, multiculturalism is fundamentally anti-Christian. It cannot tolerate Christians proclaiming that there is a God who 'commands all people everywhere to repent' (Acts 17:30).

On cultural identity

Multiculturalism teaches that a person's authentic identity is bound up in their cultural identity, so much so

¹¹ <http://www.christianconcern.com/our-concerns/the-multicultural-adoption-case>

¹² <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5001452/Man-NOT-guilty-rape-did-not-know-illegal.html>

¹³ <http://www.frontpagemag.com/point/184298/australian-judge-finds-muslim-cultural-differences-daniel-greenfield>

¹⁴ <https://pimedia.com/trending/2017/04/21/german-judge-acquits-turkish-man-of-rape-after-4-hours-of-forced-violent-sex/>

¹⁵ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/iraqi-refugee-raped-10-year-old-boy-swimming-pool-vienna-austria-sentence-conviction-overturned-a7377491.html>

¹⁶ Samuel P Huntington, *Who are We?: The Challenges to America's National Identity* (Simon & Schuster, 2004), 171.

that non-recognition of this cultural identity constitutes psychological harm.¹⁷ The idea that identity is bound up in culture assumes that people never change culture, or convert to another religion. A multiculturalist would severely criticise anyone who criticised their original culture – that is seen as a form of treason.

The idea that non-recognition of cultural identity constitutes psychological harm is one of many victim narratives by which contemporary culture is captivated. Why would not being categorised as a member of a particular community constitute harm? Insisting on recognition of different cultural identities is in fact divisive, anti-inclusive, and leads to the fragmentation of society.

Machteld Zee illustrates how this applies in practice:¹⁸

‘Take, for example, “John”. John is an Iraqi-born Muslim living in Birmingham who disapproves of people who do not follow his religion. In fact, an important part of John’s identity is expressed through his dismissive attitude towards non-believers. He wishes not to recognise a non-believer for who that person truly is, preferring to be critical, or even dismissive of Western values. If we were to follow multiculturalist theory, we respect John’s true nature. We should not even criticise John for criticising other people’s life choices. John has the right to believe whatever he wishes, and we should be respectful and tolerant of his position. So far so good. But now we change John a little bit and this time, he is a white male citizen living in Liverpool. John does not recognise Muslims for who they truly are, in fact he is quite dismissive of Islam. He regularly unfolds his critique of life choices inspired by that religion, stating that Islam is detrimental to individual wellbeing. He questions the merits of Islam-inspired practices, such as veiling and praying five times a day. Now multiculturalists would label the latter lack of recognition as a form of causing psychological harm, as well as arrogant, condescending, and Eurocentric, possibly even racist and discriminatory. The moral duty of recognising an individual for who he truly is thus a one-way street.’

Somehow, as Zee points out, multiculturalists manage to assume that white Euro-Americans are psychologically immune to criticism, even to the extent of being called racist, whilst at the same time assuming that members of minority cultures are dependent on the approval of white Euro-Americans for their sense of self-worth! This inequality is held to be justified because of collective guilt imposed on white Euro-Americans for their past behaviour. This imposed guilt actually requires multiculturalism to be false because it assumes that historically, culturally-bound practices were immoral. A true multiculturalist cannot say that past cultural actions were immoral, let alone that present cultures are collectively guilty for those past actions.

It is, in fact, people who should be treated with equal respect and dignity because they are all of equal worth, being created in the image of God. Cultures, however, do not deserve equal respect, because not all cultural beliefs and practices are equally worthy. A person’s identity is not intrinsically bound up in their cultural background, both because their culture may change, and because they may change their cultural allegiance.

On preservation of culture

One argument put forward by multiculturalists is that minority cultures ought to be preserved. This is an odd argument to make. No-one argues for the preservation of Victorian culture. Of course, we should preserve the history and historical information about Victorian culture, but we shouldn’t condemn some people to living as if they were in Victorian Britain today. Neither should we insist that indigenous African tribal culture is preserved. Indigenous people will benefit from better education, water supply, healthcare, and many other technologies that their original culture did not have. They should not be denied these benefits.

¹⁷ Zee, *Choosing Sharia? Multiculturalism, Islamic Fundamentalism & Sharia Councils*, 18-29.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.

Cultures regularly become extinct, largely because people turn away from them. People should have the freedom to do so. Western missionaries have been criticised for changing local cultures by introducing Christianity. But the fact is that cultures change all the time, sometimes for the better. The introduction of Christianity will objectively improve any culture with superior morality and religious conviction. Christianity will also tend to improve literacy, education, healthcare and much else besides. We should all feel morally obligated to seek to change cultures in these various objectively beneficial ways. Multiculturalism is fundamentally opposed to missionary activity and thus opposed to evangelical Christianity.

Our loss of cultural identity

French President Emmanuel Macron famously said, 'There's no such thing as French culture.'¹⁹ Unpicking his words in detail, he explained: 'There is culture in France and it is diverse.'²⁰ This amounts to an admission of no unifying culture. Macron's statement is indicative of a collective loss of cultural identity throughout western Europe. The British government's commissioned report into integration in our society resulted in an admission that we have basically failed at integration.²¹ This is hardly surprising if we lack any sense of collective identity in the first place. The government is now desperately trying to work out what 'British values' are in order to regain some sense of collective identity and shared values. David Cameron was even criticised for wanting migrants to learn English.²² But surely a common language is the most basic requirement of a cohesive society?

Neil MacGregor, former director of the British Museum, claims that modern Britain is the first society to try to operate without shared religious beliefs and rituals at its heart. 'In a sense, we are a very unusual society. We are trying to do something that no society has really done. We are trying to live without an agreed narrative of our communal place in the cosmos and in time', MacGregor said.²³ There is truth in this, though it is an exaggeration. No society can hold together without some agreed set of values, and the source of these values is necessarily a religious worldview, whether recognised as such or not. Multiculturalism is an ideology which imposes certain values on society. These values are neither morally nor religiously neutral. What is unusual about multiculturalism is that it expects everyone to accept contradictory values and practices in the same society and yet to live harmoniously together. This expectation is delusional. No society can accept contradictory values and practices and hold together.

Fundamental freedoms

We now recognise that any society necessarily adheres to some religious convictions which provide its source of values. Clearly, the best moral framework for any society is the biblical one. What this framework also provides for is fundamental freedoms such as freedom of religion, freedom of speech and freedom of conscience. Indeed, it is widely recognised that Christianity formed the moral foundation for the whole concept of human rights.

In any society all these freedoms are limited to some extent, and freedoms naturally come with responsibilities. The laws of the land should be respected, and everyone should be treated equally by them. This is another biblical principle (Exodus 12:49; Numbers 5:16). Within these constraints, fundamental freedoms should be maintained and protected, with the law also making allowance for freedom of conscience, particularly in controversial areas. Historically, UK law has allowed conscientious objection during war, and it currently allows conscientious objection regarding abortion. In general, people should be allowed to object to the production of goods or services on conscientious grounds. Recent cases of bakers and printers being asked to produce goods promoting same-sex marriage have raised the profile of this issue. A principle of 'reasonable accommodation' should be agreed which allows for people to obey their

¹⁹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/emmanuel-macrons-unlikely-path-to-the-french-presidency/2017/05/07/f8943ed8-bdc3-4ed4-8bbb-97a8781ff393_story.html?utm_term=.e486fb213820

²⁰ <https://www.newsroom.co.nz/@future-learning/2017/05/04/24457/macron-french-culture>

²¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-casey-review-a-review-into-opportunity-and-integration>

²² <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jan/18/david-cameron-stigmatising-muslim-women-learn-english-language-policy>

²³ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/10/11/neil-macgregor-britain-stands-alone-comes-religi1on/>

conscience. Such accommodation should not extend to the creation of a de facto parallel legal system as we see with sharia courts in this country, nor to the promotion of discrimination on the basis of sex, race, religion, or to promoting hatred for outsiders, for example.

Integration requires a measure of respect for the host culture, including agreement to abide by the laws of the land. Any society also requires not just a common law, but a common language to hold together. Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali is quite right to point out that integration does not necessarily mean assimilation, however.²⁴ Many communities such as Jews, Huguenots and East Africans have successfully integrated whilst also maintaining something of their own distinctiveness. Others are segregated and are widely understood to have failed to integrate, for which the ideology of multiculturalism must take a large part of the blame.

What is wrong with multiculturalism?

Multiculturalism is an ideology that is fundamentally opposed to Christianity. It cannot accept a transcendent source of morality and therefore resists accepting the reality of a creator God. It considers missionary activity and attempts to morally reform cultures as immoral. It is damaging to society in that it creates obvious injustices and holds people from different cultures to lower moral standards, which can be regarded as a form of racism. It undermines a fundamental principle of democracy – the principle of one law for all. State sponsored multiculturalism is a form of state endorsed religious pluralism or polytheism. It is unstable and will inevitably result in the collapse or fragmentation of society.

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Multiculturalism should be resisted by Christians. Indeed, it has only been able to arise in the context of weakened allegiance to Christianity in this country. Our task, as Paul wrote, is to ‘demolish arguments and every pretention that sets itself up against the knowledge of God’ (2 Corinthians 10:5). Since multiculturalism is opposed to Christianity, it needs to be demolished. This article is an attempt to demonstrate the kinds of arguments Christians can employ to do so. We, like Paul, are called to proclaim the gospel to people of all cultures (Acts 17). This necessarily involves the proclamation of a creator God who holds all people accountable to his transcendent moral law, regardless of culture. It is the proclamation of this truth that is our primary tool in calling people to reject multiculturalism, and to seek to objectively improve contemporary culture according to God’s transcendent righteous moral standards.

Tim Dieppe

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Tim Dieppe is Head of Public Policy at Christian Concern.

(This article was originally published in the Affinity Social Issues Bulletin for March 2018. The whole edition can be found at www.affinity.org.uk)

²⁴ Nazir-Ali, Michael, *Triple Jeopardy for the West: Aggressive Secularism, Radical Islamism and Multiculturalism* (Bloomsbury: London, 2012), xi, 12.