

Morrison announces \$55 million for security at religious premises and warns against “tribalism”

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

Scott Morrison has warned against “tribalists” hijacking policy arguments, declaring the migration issue “must not be appropriated as a proxy debate for racial, religious or ethnic sectarianism”.

In his address in the wake of the New Zealand attack, on the theme of managing differences, Morrison said it was not a matter of “disagreeing less, but disagreeing better”.

“When we disagree better, we engage with respect, rather than questioning each other’s integrity and morality,” he told the [Australia-Israel Chamber of Commerce](#) in Melbourne.

“Tribalists constantly seek to appropriate legitimate policy issues and public concerns as a tool to promote their separatist and exclusive agendas. To contort and misrepresent disagreement in the worst possible terms,” the Prime Minister said.

He announced A\$55 million for religious organisations to increase security at their premises, including schools, and places of worship and assembly.

Grants will range from \$50,000 to \$1.5 million for enhancements including CCTV cameras, lighting, fencing, bollards, alarms, security systems and public address systems.

On two charged and divisive political debates, Morrison stressed that dealing with population growth was a “practical policy challenge”, and claimed “I have never sought to question the compassionate motives of those who hold different views about the best way to manage Australia’s borders”.

He said that in Australia as in many other countries the “ties that bind us are under new pressures and are at risk of breaking.

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"If we allow a culture of 'us and them', of tribalism, to take hold; if we surrender an individual to be defined not by their own unique worth and contribution but by the tribe they are assigned to, if we yield to the compulsion to pick sides rather than happy coexistence, we will lose what makes diversity work in Australia," he said.

"As debate becomes more fierce, the retreat to tribalism is increasingly taking over, and for some, extremism takes hold.

"Reading only news that we agree with, interacting with people only we agree with, and having less understanding and grace towards others that we do not even know, making the worst possible assumptions about them and their motives, simply because we disagree with them.

"This is true of the left and the right. And even more so from those shouting from the fringes to a mainstream of quiet Australians that just want to get on with their lives.

"Hate, blame and contempt are the staples of tribalism, it is consuming modern debate, egged on by an appetite for conflict as entertainment, not so different from the primitive appetites of the colosseum days, with a similar corrosive impact on the fabric of our society".

Morrison said tribalists sought to take over legitimate policy issues and public concerns, using them to promote their separatist agendas, contorting and misrepresenting disagreement.

A discussion of the annual migrant intake was "not a debate about the value or otherwise of multiculturalism or the economic contribution of migration," he said.

"It must not be appropriated as a proxy debate for racial, religious or ethnic sectarianism.

"Just because Australians are frustrated about traffic jams and population pressures encroaching on their quality of life, especially in this city, does not mean they are anti-migrant or racist," he said.

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“For the overwhelming majority of Australians concerned about this issue, this is not and never would be their motivation”.

He said the worst example was “the despicable appropriation of concerns about immigration as a justification for a terrorist atrocity.

“Such views have rightly been denounced. But equally, so to must the imputation that the motivation for supporting moderated immigration levels is racial hatred.

“As Australians we need to stand against the militant and lazy group think that distorts our public debate, stand up for our individualism and seek to think better of each other”.

He said “extremism, or in a different form fundamentalism, is simply an inability to tolerate difference.

“It is to feel threatened by others who do not conform to your world view.

“And it takes many forms: religious extremism, secular extremism, and political extremism.

“Every terrorist attack has at its core a hatred of difference and a hatred about the choices and lives of others”.

Morrison said last week “mindless tribalism” ended the lives of 50 people in New Zealand.

“Tribalists always want to separate us, divide us, set one Australian against another.

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As Prime Minister I want to continue to bring Australians together, not set them against one another”.

“I believe, not in a tribalism that divides, but in an us that unites.”

Morrison took up Jacinda Ardern’s phrase when she said of Muslims “they are us”, and applied it to Australia.

He said:

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Indigenous Australians are us

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Immigrant Australians from all nationalities and backgrounds, including Chinese, Lebanese, Greek, Indian, Turkish, Vietnamese, just to name a few, are us

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Muslim Australians are us

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Christian Australians are us

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Jewish Australians are us

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Hindu Australians are us

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atheist Australians are us

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LGBTIQ Australians are us

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whoever you vote for - us

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older Australians are us

-

young Australians are us

-

female Australians are us

-

male Australians are us

-

regional Australians are us.

“From the bottom of Tasmania to the tip of Cape York, from Byron to Broome, all 25 million Australians are us.

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"We belong to each other. We stand with each other. We must love and respect each other more. That's what we must affirm today to fight the forces that will otherwise weaken our nation".

Michelle Grattan does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond their academic appointment.

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