Flying the Australian flag

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I love God and my country;
I honour the flag; I will serve the King, and cheerfully obey my parents, teachers, and the laws.



Australian National Flag Day meeting at Mannum in South Australia, 2011

- Words pledged by Australian school children in Victoria, 1901

Understanding God's interest in the nations and their flags

Since Almighty God has worked to establish and sustain the various nations, we may rightly regard their national flags as conceptually valuable. Flags indicate distinctive nationhood, which itself is the invention of God:

> *... when the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when he divided all mankind, he set up boundaries for the peoples ...* (Deuteronomy 32:8).

Furthermore, flag utilisation has explicit biblical warrant as the Israelites declared, *we will lift up our banners in the name of our God* (Psalm 20:5), who himself *raised a banner to be unfurled against the bow* (Psalm 60:4), and as noted in Numbers 2:2, God asked his people to meet under their flags:

> *The Israelites are to camp around the Tent of Meeting some distance from it, each man under his standard with the banners of his family.*

Then came the following directive by God to the tribes, beginning with Judah: *... the divisions of the camp of Judah are to encamp under their standard* (Numbers 2:3) with the gathering forming a cross, as the twelve tribes formed four groups - at the north, south, east and west (2:3-31). The cross is further prefigured (in 21:8) *as Moses lifted up the snake* on a pole (John 3:14-15).

Thus each of the tribes had its own flag, and the nation was represented by a cross, centred on the Tent of Meeting. Crosses on the flags of several nations may therefore validly indicate spirituality. Furthermore, the flag of Australia also denotes cultural foundations, federal unity, and regional civic kinship.

Interpreting the Australian national flag



Christian belief, cultural foundations, federal unity, and civic kinship are denoted admirably by the **Australian Blue Ensign**:





Christian ideas are upheld on the Australian Flag as it features the five stars of the **Southern Cross** (which may remind us of the piercings of Christ), and as it depicts three crosses which unite as Britain's **Union Flag** (or **Jack**):



St George's Cross was set on a white backing in about 1190 by King Richard the Lionheart, as the Flag of England - honouring a Roman soldier and martyr who lived in the Third Century.



St Andrew's Cross was set on a blue backing by at least the 16th Century as the Flag of Scotland - to honour an apostle who was diagonally crucified. It was joined to St George's Cross in 1606.



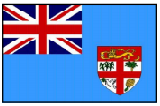
St Patrick's Cross was set on a white background as an Irish symbol prior to 1800 - to honour a Fifth Century missionary to Ireland. It was added to form the modern Union Flag in 1801.

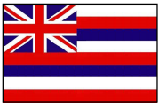
Cultural foundations are denoted as Australia's Flag has the Union Jack in the honoured top left corner, since the language, institutions, customs, laws, political system and values of Britain are fundamental to Australian society.

Federal unity is depicted by the **Commonwealth** (or the **Federation**) **Star** with its six points to indicate the six Original States and one point to designate the Territories, in accord conceptually with Psalm 133:1 - *How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity*.



Civic kinship in the Pacific is shown by a Union Jack on the flag of Australia, **Fiji**, the State of **Hawaii**, **New Zealand**, **Tuvalu**, **Pitcairn Islands**, **Niue**, etc













and by a Southern Cross on the flag of **Samoa**, **Papua New Guinea**, **Tokelau**, New Zealand, and Australia. Though colonisation was highly problematic, it gave isolated people a kinship with broader communities - by God who *sets the lonely in families* (Psalm 68:6).







Developing respect for Australia's Star-Crossed Federal Blue Banner

The Australian people and their governments were very slow to accept and promote the Australian Blue Ensign as our national flag, but it was firmly embraced in the second half of the Twentieth Century, especially during the Sydney Olympics in 2000. Flagging and rising support occurred as follows:

1901 - A federal government flag design competition attracted 32,823 entries.
- Featuring a Union Jack along with a six-pointed Commonwealth Star (denoting the six Original States), and the Southern Cross, the result was announced by Prime Minister Edmund Barton on 3rd September.

1908 - The Commonwealth Star gained another point, to indicate new States or Territories (after Australia gained the Territory of Papua in 1906).

The Union Jack was often flown in the first half of the Twentieth Century, as the Commonwealth authorities actively discouraged use of the Australian Flag. Only the government could legally fly the Australian Blue Ensign, as it was intended for official and naval use, while the Australian Red Ensign was to be flown by the merchant fleet. But the public began using the red flag on land.

1941 - Prime Minister Menzies commended the blue flag as a national emblem.

1953 - The *Flag Act 1953* recognised the Blue Ensign as the National Flag.

1981 - Ausflag was formed, so as to seek popular support for a new flag.

1983 - The Australian National Flag Association was formed to defend the flag.

1993 - The Australian Flag was removed from the Prime Minister's official car during a period of serious uncertainty about the Australian identity.

1995 - The Aboriginal Flag was officially proclaimed as a flag of Australia.

1996 - The Australian Flag was returned to the Prime Minister's official car.
- Australian National Flag Day (each 3rd September) was proclaimed.
- The *Flag Act 1953* was modified so any proposal to change the flag would require approval *by a majority of all the electors voting*.

2000 - The flag obtained popular favour as it flew at the Sydney Olympics.

2004 - The federal government required all schools to fly Australia's flag using a functional flagpole, as a condition of public funding - from 2005.

Promoting the Australian Flag

As the hearts and minds of successive generations are powerfully shaped by signs and symbols, the meaning of our national flag is enormously valuable. Love for the nation, and for God who *makes nations great* (Job 12:23), may occur as individuals, families, churches, and community groups fly the flag:

- Families could include a flag ceremony as part of their daily devotions.
- Homes, church grounds and civic centres may feature functional flagpoles.
- Children may praise God by waving various flags during worship services.
- Students in assemblies may face the flag as they sing the National Anthem.
- Congregations may provide hand flags as a gift at citizenship ceremonies.
- Australia Day (26/1), Anzac Day (25/4), National Flag Day (3/9), Citizenship Day (17/9), and Remembrance Day (11/11) may be flagged and commemorated - particularly as outreach activities.

Honouring the Australian Blue Ensign

Since opponents of national flags in general, and of the Australian Blue Ensign in particular, may gradually be persuaded about the goodness of nations and flags, it is important for Christians to speak in defence of the national symbol:

- Teachers may be cautioned against asking children to re-design the flag.
- Students can be taught to not misuse the flag (on footwear or as a tattoo).
- Schools and churches may learn and re-tell the federation story, with its various elements of Christian foundation, as a witness and a celebration.

The national flag should be raised at dawn and lowered at sunset, or it should be illuminated at night. The flag should not touch the ground, nor be treated carelessly. Whenever the flag is displayed vertically, the Union Jack should remain in the top left position of respect - giving a civic appropriation of the Fifth Commandment: *Honour your father and your mother* (Exodus 20:12).

All who fly the flag may rejoice that it accords with our national foundation: *humbly relying on the blessing of Almighty God*, as noted in the Constitution. May we fly our flags prayerfully, as we *prepare the way for the people*, and *raise a banner for the nations* (Isaiah 62:10), anticipating the coming Messiah - who *will stand as a banner* (11:10) to which *the nations will rally* ....

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