

Dual Citizenship?



Are you a citizen of another nation as well as Australia? This has been the question our federal politicians have been facing recently. Actually, I suggest we all, even Indigenous Australians, have at least a dual citizenship.

As Christians we are, as Ephesians 2:19 reminds us, “citizens with the saints and members of the household of God”. Also, on the basis of this world being God’s creation, all people, whether they know it or not, are in a sense members or citizens of God’s kingdom.

The kookaburra above is very Australian, but it has adapted to a human-made perch in its natural habitat from which to greet each morning with its raucous laugh. This bird is a member of God’s created family, part of God’s kingdom.

I was born in Australia, as were my parents. Further back the waters become muddied with some forebears being born in Scotland or England.

Whether or not we have strong 'feelings' of being Australian, which I do, has been shown by the seven judges of the High Court as immaterial. Even being born in Australia does not prohibit a person being also a citizen of another nation. We have been told that facts are what matter, and they are knowable if we make an effort!

When we Christians were baptised our sponsors, if we were babies, or we ourselves affirmed our faith in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We were baptised using water and the sign of the cross, and were welcomed "as a member...of the body of Christ, a child of the one heavenly Father, and an inheritor of the kingdom of God" (APBA p.60). Our new identity in the church was publicly revealed!

Such an identity is not to be buried in the sand or ignored, but claimed, brought into the open, discussed and developed. It will, or should, affect all our other identities.

As Australian citizens, we are expected to abide by the Constitution of our nation and how it applies to us today. It is the same in other areas of our lives. For example, when we learn to drive, it is not enough just to know how to drive and 'feel' we can control a car. We must obey the rules that tell us to drive on the left-hand side of the road and observe current speed limits, etc.

When it comes to our Christian identity or citizenship, we might 'feel' we are Christians and know we have been baptised and born into a Christian family, but is that enough?

If we are to develop and grow in our faith, we need to know how to live as Christians in our world. In Mark 12:30-31 and Matthew 5:44, Jesus identified the basic commandment for Christians as to love God and to love our neighbour, even if an enemy. This is a fact, but it is not always easy to interpret in the complexity of our lives. The High Court will not help us, but we can examine the life Jesus lived as a first century Jewish

man to discern how to follow him today.

It is in our context and daily relationships that we Christians learn about and share our love for God and others. To encourage and strengthen us in this work we, as members of Christ's body the church, gather regularly as a community to worship God and pray for and on behalf of others. Jesus said "Do this..." in relation to the Last Supper when he fed his followers with his own life. Such meals feed us and allow us to pray together and listen to Bible readings and an interpretation of them.

Christians are in a special sense God's children, and members of Christ's body, but we believe that all people are part of God's creation, God's loved children and members of Christ's body. This identity directs us to love others by showing them respect and service. It will also affect what government decisions and cultural practices we support or must question, and how we respond. At present we are challenged by the presence of refugees in our detention centres, the treatment of homosexuals and women suffering from domestic violence.

If we turn to the non-human part of God's creation, animals, trees, rivers and earth itself, we are very much part of it and belong to it. We are indeed earthlings, made from dust, kept alive by water, plants, animals and the air we breathe. As part of earth, we are to respect and care for our environment, for the sake of God, ourselves and others. Every small action to avoid waste, prevent the pollution of rivers, grow plants and recycle instead of throwing out goods we no longer need, matters.

This planet and our universe is God's creation, a sacred place. It is where we are to live publicly as dual citizens of God's kingdom and Australia. It is where we are called to follow Jesus in loving others and working for the well-being of all, in the power of God's Spirit.

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