

National Policy Forum: Multiculturalism in the new Millennium

RELIGIOUS CITIZENSHIP: an address by Professor Wayne Hudson

I have a very simple thesis. I want to say that Australia which has already proven such a brilliant country in the area of multiculturalism should lead the entire world in developing a new conception of religious citizenship:

- A conception of religious citizenship which is pluralist and not secretly secularist or multi-faith or denominational.
- A conception of religious citizenship which is multi-faith and not confessional.
- A conception which is reflexive and not Babylonian.

So there are three ideas there. The first idea is that we should do it. We should do it first. We should do it best and we should lead the world to a new understanding, both of what citizenship is and can be and in what religious citizenship, in particular is and can be. The first thing I need to say to you is that the world literature on citizenship which runs to some 3,000 volumes, 1,500 books published on citizenship last year, one by me, called *Re-thinking Australian Citizenship*, there is no, clear concept of religious citizenship.

There is plenty of things on what it means to be Jewish in Israel, Malay in Malaysia, Indonesian in Indonesia and so forth, but there is no clear coherent concept of what it means to be a citizen who has religious citizenship as one of their citizenships. So that's a chance for us. There is a vast literature, there is a hole in the literature.

The first concept is that there is a hole in the world literature, there is no concept of religious citizenship and we should supply it.

The second concept is that if you study what the actual regime for religious citizenship in every country in the world, you discover horrific things. I won't refer to the regime in China, because people know that, or the regime in Iran, or the regime in Indonesia or the situation in Albania or in other forty countries. Britain isn't very good. The United States is also worrying. So, if we look at it world wide, we can say, quite simply, that in fifty different countries, there is no satisfactory treatment of the problem of religious citizenship.

My first point is the gap in the literature, my second point is the international scene. So, if we review countries all over the world, we can see countries that have established religion, we can see countries where government persecute religion, we can see countries practising 'laicite', the French model (or laicism), in some ways the American model, where you impose a form secularism on all of your people and you call it neutrality, you call it nationalism, you call it cultural identity. But, in effect you treat religious people as less than equal as citizens and you bully people who have a particular cultural identity, never to show it in public. To be Jews, but in the public sphere, to be Muslims but wearing scarves at school, if you know the French case.

Now the international scene is lamentable, the literature is faulty.

Third point is the Australian tradition. We have in Australia what is called a tradition of non citizenship. That is very clear in the case of indigenous peoples. But it is also true when you think about what it means to be a citizen in Australia. We have enormous problems in that area. There are now some good standard histories of Australian citizenship, but they don't really deal properly with the nineteenth century. I myself am editing a book with Mark McKenna, that you will be able to get this year or next year. The first collection of documents on republicanism in Australia and it is largely nineteenth century. Because, although we are about to become a republic, very obviously, Australians have no idea what people in the nineteenth century meant by republicanism. For example, most Australian republicans in the nineteenth century were monarchists. John Howard doesn't know that, Kim Beazley doesn't know that. I told Paul Keating and he didn't listen. So our history is very important and there are lots of good things to celebrate.

But again, there is a kind of problem. We never got up in this country a clear concept of the active citizen. Partly because we were British subjects and partly because we read French books and not German or Dutch books, and from French books you get the idea that a subject is not a citizen. Whereas from German books, you get the correct idea, that the subject is one who exercises the active power.

There is an Australian tradition. There are things to be proud of, there are things to lament. There is a long history of bungling religious citizenship in this country. We have a history of heresy trials. I have another book coming out on the People who were persecuted as Heretics in the Australian tradition. Quite a lot of them. It illustrates again a central failure in our political imagination.

Now we come to the challenge to innovate. What can we do? I want to make a few very simple suggestions. The first suggestion is we do not copy the United States. I am not in the least anti-American. My family have been involved in the United States for 140 years. My grandfather went to University there. I have probably been there 25 times, so this is not an anti-American point. But, we are a young country and the American model, is dangerous for our country, because our people are seduced by it, without understanding the history of that country. Its trajectories and its problems. In the area of religious citizenship, the United States is a very worrying model, because it is a country that is claiming to emerge into multiculturalism without being able to undo a notion of a common identity imposed by law.

We can do better in my view. We have already done better and I think we can do a lot better. The next thing I want to say is if we are going to make a contribution to religious citizenship, we have to catch up with what citizenship means. This is another very long and very boring six month course, but in very simple terms most Australians think that citizenship, is about your passport. You've got one that's good, if you've got two that's better. The vulgar view is that citizenship means that you are a member of a nation state and hence you are a citizen of that nation state. But, if you think of it in world terms and in historical terms, you will see that that is only one definition, and that's not adequate, because obviously before the treaty of Westphalia, there were no nation states and so

that couldn't be what a citizen was. When Paul says in the Bible, "I am a Roman citizen, I appeal to Caesar", he obviously doesn't mean that he is a member of a nation state.

The literature on citizenship in the last twenty years has gone through a revolution and Australia's running behind on it. Basically what has happened is that people have moved from the nation state definition to a multiple level model, where we distinguish, local government citizenship, regional citizenship, national citizenship, international citizenship, transnational citizenship, global citizenship and then we also introduce civil society citizenship as different in kind from nation state citizenship. We go further and introduce the really important concept which is citizenship based on human rights leading therefore to capacities on obligations.

If you move to the Human Rights model of citizenship then you can say that citizenship is something that you attract as a person because of your dignity as a person and it gives you capacities, rights and obligations. The advantage of that model is this; it enables you to give citizenship to every person on this earth; it enables you to help the people on the boat that no government will own; it enables you to protect minorities peoples who are being shot, murdered and killed by their own governments; it enables you to help refugees and stateless persons; it enables you to contemplate the position of anyone in any nation state whose own nation state has passed a law giving them no right to be there or no right to be who they are, when they are there. Think of movements all over the world that have been ridiculed or persecuted or driven out by the hite peoples. If you use a nation state definition of citizenship as your only one, which is what Australians have largely wanted to do, it's hopeless. Because, if the state goes bad, you have nothing to do. You are caught by the legislation your government has passed. If they legislate to gas you in "Auschwitz" it's legal, and what are you going to do? You may appeal to international bodies if they're there.

So I want to argue instead that we propose a new notion of **religious citizenship**. It will of course have the nation state level. It will of course have the local government level. It will of course have the transnational, the international and the global level. It is multi-level. But, the essential thing we need to develop, is a notion of religious citizenship which is based on human rights doctrine of the person and therefore gives you rights, capacities and obligations wherever you are, whoever you are.

Now, what are they? The thrust of it is very simple and in this respect Australia is terrific. Obviously, it gives you rights to exercise religious activity. Obviously it gives you capacities to do that and therefore you need to be given those capacities and those capacities need to be able to be exercised in schools and institutions, in public and not only private sights. So, there I reject the French and the Americans outright. I don't think that secularism is a doctrine a rational person should buy. Of course if you mean by secularism, in the good sense, of course we should buy it. In the sense of self-restraint, non-confessionalisation, an honest religion non-oppressive public seer of course of course, taken as read. But, secularism in the sense of imposing a religion of the eighteenth century Europeans on everyone else, we shouldn't buy it. We certainly shouldn't buy the idea that it's neutral or that anyone has the right to impose that on anyone else. That is controversial.

So, if we develop this human rights type model, then it quickly leads us to say that citizenship may also apply to groups, that leads into the problem of group rights, group capacities and group obligations. It leads very quickly to the idea that human beings have a moral duty to respect the religious identities and confessionality and other exercises of other persons. It leads into a doctrine of inter-group rights. Now, in this respect Australia is leading the world in many ways and I don't hesitate to say that Queensland is outstanding in a variety of ways. Given the history of this state that is something to be pretty proud of. I mean to come to the state of Pauline Hanson and for me to be able to say to you, that this is the most advanced ecumenical place in the world, it's simply unbelievable. Australians don't know that, but in Queensland we are building one church for all the major Christian denominations, in suburb after suburb. They are not doing that in Melbourne or Sydney. So there is much to be proud of in that area. In multiculturalism a similar story that you'll know already.

So, imagine now that we accept the notion of a concept of citizenship, based on human rights, that applies to persons. Imagine that you've got religious rights, religious capacities, religious obligations. A number of questions, immediately arise. Isn't this going to be impossible to manage? Who will be the bureaucratic body to run it? What will you do when they kill each other? After all, confessional groups, religious groups, I mean what's wrong with them, they're irrational. They have crazy ideas that science doesn't support and strong reasons don't ground. They're prejudiced. They're secretive, They're often rich. They're exclusive, we can go on and on. It sounds like a model for social disaster. One could see the treaty of Westphalia, the people here will know about. The end of the 30 years war. The beginning of religious peace in Europe. We could see that great settlement being undermined by crazy new ideas, coming from Queensland, coming from Australia, that threaten to take us back to the period of religious conflict, to the period of religious dissension. I don't think any of that is going to happen. I am proud to say that Griffith University's multi-faith centre will have a big role in helping it not to happen.

How am I going to deal with the problem that my bright idea's going to cause? Well, number one, religious citizenship can be made to work in any modern democratic society, providing it's linked with doctrines rationality. Because if you're claiming to exercise religious citizenship in a modern democracy then you can require citizens to behave in dialogically rational manner. You can make that part of the legal ethic of your country, you can impose it in the courts and you can make it part of the secular public culture of the land. You should do that in my view. That is to say you have an absolute obligation to give rational reasons for what you do, when challenged by others, you have an absolute obligation to engage in dialogical rationality with them.

That doesn't mean that what you believe has to be established by a set of reasons. It doesn't mean that your choices of clothing have to be rationally explained to the woman next door. It's not like that. But, it is an obligation to engage in dialogical rationality as a condition of your own exercise of citizenship rights.

If you apply that to existing religious organisations in our country and in the world, you see that I may not be employed for long. Because I can imagine, for example the Christian churches becoming extremely unhappy with this idea. Imagine if they had to provide dialogical rationality for a good deal of what they do. For example, accumulating property, maximising investments and disinvesting in the poor. They would have some problems in this area. Imagine if it were applied to the problem of the ordination of women. You can see lots of cases again for social conflict and social tension. But nonetheless the central move is a good one. I think I should move to some sort of happy resolution.

We want to lead the world by saying what religious citizenship is. In my version it involves all three of those and of course it involves the fourth which is the beginning of global religious citizenship. It terrifies some of our people in Canberra but it's obviously going to come. It comes in the form of human rights covenants as you all know, it comes in the form of UN declarations as you all know and in time it will come in the form of global regulation and law. Now when I talk about global regulation and law, Australians, look very, very sceptical and they start to say, no, no John Howard is not in favour of that. That's true, but he's just too far behind. Because if you look at simple things like the Internet, we're moving there. If you look at the world climate, you don't have to be anywhere in Australia the last two months, you would have felt it, we're obviously going to have to regulate the climate, or the Dutch are going to have to build higher dykes and Venice is going to sink. You can see the meaning. It is very clear. If you look at the distribution of nuclear weapons it is pretty obvious, it is about time we did something about that. We are reaching a point where we can't go on without global mechanisms, to ensure minimum rationality in the management of the planet. Otherwise the Murray River will be a planetary allegory. So in this area, there will eventually be planetary law and planetary regulation. It's not there. You and I probably won't live to see it, but it's going to come. It is the inevitable tendency of the practical learning evolution.