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Towards a biblical mind

Integration, assimilation and fundamental British values

Invested Citizenship and 21st century 'belonging'

By Sean Oliver-Dee

Summary

This paper proposes a new approach to citizenship in the UK. It tracks the short-term history of how questions of identity, citizenship and 'Britishness' were engaged with over the past forty years, whilst highlighting the systemic difficulties encountered when trying to create a sense of common identity, before moving on to analyse the limitations of the very different traditional approaches to inculcating citizenship: integration and assimilation. This becomes the basis for the paper's proposition of a new approach to the issue, which is labelled 'Invested Citizenship'. A form of citizenship in which, the paper proposes, Christians can (and should) play an active part.

Introduction

This paper sets out a positive vision of what citizenship in Britain can mean and reasons why Christians in Britain can embrace this vision.

In June 2016, the British people voted by a narrow but clear majority to leave the EU. That result was the outworking of a number of factors, positive and negative, which had been emerging in the UK (along with worries about lack of accountability in the EU) over the previous six or seven years.

This result, whatever else it might mean economically and politically, means that the conversation that has been bubbling away over more than a decade concerning what it means to be 'a British citizen', or to 'be British' has taken on a renewed importance.

Historically, there have generally been two differing approaches to engendering a sense of 'citizenship' or 'belonging' in modern democracies.

The first has been the assimilationist model where definitions of citizenship are laid out and demands are made on any would-be immigrant that they conform to that model if they wish to enjoy the benefits of citizenship. This has been the French approach. The other is a natural, or managed, integration of cultural norms between pre-existing communities and newly arrived ones. This has generally been the British approach.

The time has come to think about a new approach to developing 'belonging'. I have termed it 'invested citizenship'.

Yet neither approach has created a modern citizenry with a strong sense of the value of belonging to that country whilst at the same time happy to be a part of an international human community. This conundrum is encapsulated in the debate over fundamental British values (FBVs) and so the time has come to think about a new approach to developing 'belonging'. I have termed it 'Invested

Citizenship' and it is an approach that Christians have good reasons to embrace.

So we will first diagnose what has been preventing a sense of belonging amongst citizens before proposing what can be done to change that dynamic. In so doing the paper will briefly reference the French approach, even though the paper is UK focused, in order to help understand the problems with both assimilation and integration as currently manifested.

Contextualising the issue

The fundamental British values debate

The term 'fundamental British values' had first been used by the Coalition Government in 2011 when, in response to Lord Carlisle's review of counter-

terrorism policy, the Coalition sought to bring forward a raft of policies which addressed the problem of government funding going to groups who, though non-violent, espoused an ideology which provided fertile ground for jihadism to bloom. Yet, whilst FBV was a new phrase which tried to capture a sense of ‘commonality’ and ‘belonging’ for the increasingly ethnically diverse citizens of the UK, this all too apparent lack of community and sense of ‘togetherness’ had been developing over decades.



In this context, the attacks by jihadists simply forced an awkward discussion about what being British meant in the world of dissolving borders and mass migration. Incidents such as the Tottenham riots in the 1980s (when some African and Caribbean background people protested violently against ongoing racial harassment) highlighted the lack of collective connection amongst differing elements of the British population. A growing sense of frustration was manifested in then government minister Norman Tebbit's complaint about the fact that, during cricket matches between England and her former colonies, immigrants from those former colonies seemed to be supporting their homelands, rather than their adopted country. Consequently Tebbit argued that in order to be considered properly British, a person needed to support English (or British) sports teams. It was a comment which became laughingly known as the ‘Tebbit Test’. But away from this rather superficial discussion, the introduction of ‘citizenship’ classes into the newly created ‘national curriculum’ in 1987 highlighted that ‘citizenship’ now had to be taught, rather than inculcated through the home and local communities.

Unfortunately, it was a concern that was impossible to debate in the context of a nation struggling with accusations of institutional racism and its sense of guilt about the UK's recent colonial past. So there was no proper discussion of it during the Thatcher-Major Conservative governments, and whilst this embarrassed silence settled over the political classes, European integration began to gather pace. Three years later a new government swept to a landslide victory. Tony Blair's New Labour sought a different answer to the conundrum of finding a new language of commonality and belonging which was not perceived to have racial connotations.

On 28th March 2000, Tony Blair made a speech on ‘True Britishness’. In it he argued that ‘True Britishness’ lay ‘in our values, not unchanging institutions’. He went on to

add, ‘standing up for our country means... standing up for the core British values of fair play, creativity, tolerance, and an outward-looking approach to the world.’ Blair had been much influenced by a lecture given by historian Linda Colley at Downing Street in 1999 in which she argued for a vision of 21st Century Britishness which was based around the concept of the ‘citizen nation’ rather than an obsession with ‘identity’. This theme was reiterated after the 7 July 2005 suicide bombings in London, when Tony Blair, and his successor Gordon Brown, continued to talk in terms of a Britishness that was based upon common values and was outward-looking, rather than based upon any one ethnic identity. They were given backing by scholars such as Tariq Modood who proposed the concept of ‘multicultural citizenship’.¹

The debate about multiculturalism was really an attempt to create the space for diversity but, as *The Casey Review* reported (2016), multiculturalism ran up against segregationist desires and could not provide the tools to counter them.

Casey's remarks highlighted the shift which had taken place in the political landscape from New Labour and multiculturalism in the wake of the continued terrorist attacks in the UK, the ‘foreign fighter’ phenomenon and a series of surveys which appeared to show a desire towards separatism amongst some Muslim groups. Those incidents, polls and the rebirth of national pride reset the public landscape for a debate about being British which shifted away from common citizenship towards a desire to create a sense of belonging rather than simply affiliation. In this context Brexit was a symptom rather than a catalyst.



So, as Britain looks afresh at what being British means in a new context, ongoing historical debate over whether an assimilationist or an integrationist approach to creating cohesive communities within the context of ‘being British’ is being fought out once again. Yet in the UK historically, the numbers of immigrants were so tiny until after the Second World War that the question of ‘Britain’ and ‘Britishness’ was little reflected upon, other than in relation to contrasting ‘Britain’ to her opponents and competitors. This ‘other’, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was France, and then became Germany in the late 19th century. Interestingly, Linda Colley in her book *Britons* (1992) argued that the differences which separated the British from

1 See, for example, Modood's article ‘Multiculturalism and Nation building go hand in hand’, www.theguardian.com dated 23rd May 2007. Accessed 21st August 2017.

the French in the minds of the British at that time were not simply economic, but also religious: the Protestant British against the Catholic French. Protestantism, particularly the established Church of England, was an essential ingredient of 'belonging'.²

Because of the lack of immigration to Britain itself, questions about assimilation versus integration were therefore held 'at a distance' in relation to the Empire, rather than those within the borders. In the Empire, Britain had shown itself to generally make very few demands of adhering to 'British values', other than opposing (indeed seeking to remove) what it saw as appalling cultural practices such as *sati* (widow burning).³ Questions about integration or assimilation during the imperial period therefore did not arise in the British home context for 'the other' was remote and distant, negating any reason to discuss absorbing competing visions of cultural norms.

In contrast, the French have been firm and consistent in their assimilationist approach to those of differing cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds who live under their rule, either in overseas colonies, or in France itself. Over recent years this has been most clearly manifested in the discussions over the banning of the burqa and the question of 'Islamic dress'. Where arguments about the compatibility of the burqa with 'being French' fused with wider questions about what can and should be demanded of French citizens in terms of loyalty and adherence to 'French culture and values'.

Patrick Weil helpfully labelled this discussion '*la nouvelle synthèse républicaine*' and he highlights the remarkable continuity which has existed across the political divides in France concerning what it meant to be French, both historically and going forward.⁴ For example, he cites a commission set up in the 1980s which concluded that since France came together in revolutionary wars to which citizens contributed from within a set of geographically defined boundaries, France and being 'French' was therefore identifiable. The commission therefore proposed that any person coming to live in France was therefore an 'insertion' who had an obligation to 'make themselves French'.

So the contrast is clear: Britain made very limited demands of any who wanted to live within the boundaries of either the Empire or Britain itself. The French on the other hand made demands of any who would seek to live within the boundaries of France, or who, in the age of their North African territories, wanted to become French nationals, rather than citizens. They sought to define who they were and demanded others adapt themselves to that model if they chose to come to France.

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The changing culture of Britain

The integration and assimilation debate concerns what the long-term aim should be of a government which has multiple ethnicities and religions living under its rule. Historically, the French have set out a stall and demanded that all French people come to it, whereas the British have sought to create a market square within which citizens can choose which stall they want to partake of. That market square is a limiter: a space outside which citizens are not meant to travel. Yet, even within British policy there have been variable approaches: the Home Office has adopted a more 'hands-off' approach in counter-extremism whereas OFSTED (the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills), through its articulation of FBVs (however generically defined), could be seen to have adopted a more assimilationist approach.

The problem the British government has in seeking to implement an integration strategy which is based upon the idea of corralling the citizenry rather than enticing it is that the very idea of 'integration' is based upon shared community interaction, whereas the evidence of social attitudes surveys suggests that we are becoming more isolated, polarised and insular in the UK, rather than community-focused. For example, in 2016 Professors Cattle and Kaufman published a study which showed very clearly a trend towards increasing ethnic division. Their study found that white British people moved away from areas when non-white populations moved in. Of course, there could be multiple reasons for this, but whatever the reason, there is no doubt that the trend is real.⁵



But whilst inter-community spirit appears to be eroding, there is still a growing sense of pride in being British. Polling done in 2003 and 2013 found that those who said they were 'somewhat proud' to be British increased from 39 per cent in 2003 to 47 per cent in 2013.⁶ The opportunity therefore exists to find a fresh way to help develop a form of citizenship or 'belonging' which is modern, inclusive and attractive -

2 Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992, pp.23-33.

3 Lawrence James, Raj: *The Making and Unmaking of British India*. London: Abacus, 1997, p.226.

4 Patrick Weil, *La France et ses étrangers: L'aventure d'une politique de l'immigration de 1938 à nos jours*. Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1991, p187.

5 <http://tedcattle.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/099-Is-Segregation-Increasing-in-the-UK-Cattle-and-Kaufmann-Open-Democracy-Nov-2016.pdf> accessed 18th July 2017.

6 www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/38109/proud-to-be-british-data.pdf accessed 18th July 2017.

restoring not just a sense of 'being British', but also a sense of community.

This paper proposes the encouragement of 'Invested Citizenship', an approach to reinvigorating a sense of 'belonging' which is focused around our inheritance. From a policy perspective, such an approach would require initial government stimulation, particularly through the national curriculum.

Narrative and gratitude

Invested Citizenship (IC) uses the tools of storytelling and remembrance to inculcate an understanding of how Britain has come to be what it is today. Remembering the sacrifices made to help shape society and defend our freedoms helps instil a sense of gratitude and fosters an understanding of our inheritance which needs to be preserved (perhaps tweaked where necessary) and passed on to future generations. Invested Citizenship invites citizens to participate in holding officials and governments to account. It involves caring about people outside of our own immediate communities and seeking to serve each other.

There are clearly echoes of 'The Big Society' (TBS) in IC. But whereas TBS was focused around encouraging volunteerism and local community engagement as a way of reinvigorating social cohesion and integration, IC is about establishing a metanarrative of belonging as a way of building attitudes which manifest a desire to cooperate and serve each other. Just as community and belonging are multifaceted, so promoting them will be a multifaceted task. So, quite apart from IC and levers available in the national curriculum to promote IC, there are factors, such as town planning, architecture, media representations of ethnic/language groups, labour mobility and regional policy, which can affect the extent to which people feel a sense of belonging/participation in a country. This paper deals only with the metanarrative, but development of these ideas into a long-term strategy would require the creation of tools in these areas as well.

How is that to happen? The long-term key lies in changes to the school curriculum. At present the national curriculum promotes a set of skills, such as critical thinking and research techniques, along with information on our democratic system, the human rights all citizens should enjoy, and practical information about where to get help for different issues, through sciences and humanities subjects, as well as PSHE. All of these elements are useful. However, there is no sense of narrative or inheritance being delivered. There is also considerable latitude regarding what specific subject matter is being taught in history, so long as specific skills are being learnt. So skills-acquisition is paramount and the subject matter generally serves the teaching of the skills. Some material, particularly 'the Holocaust' is prescribed, but pupils leaving the school system presently will have

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little sense of the story of why Britain is as it is today, and therefore no sense of what is valuable about Britain.



At present IC is being stimulated informally through events such as the commemoration of World War One. In the short term therefore, the government could lay the groundwork for long-term IC by creating a touring 'Town Hall' forum, using historical analysis of the patriotic fervour surrounding World War One as a basis for thinking about what is positive, or negative, about those attitudes and discuss what is appropriate for today. That process should include honest self-critical analysis on historical social and political mistakes, as the narrative about Britain's 'inheritance' should not slide into the kinds of mythologised narratives which are the hallmark of nationalist tendencies. But what our historical discussion does need to do is to examine and discuss important historical events, such as the reasons for fighting World War Two, along with other parts of British history such as Empire, Commonwealth, mass migration, the Napoleonic Wars, English Civil War, Wars of the Roses, Magna Carta. All of which say something about why Britain is Britain and not anywhere else.⁷

Biblical reflections: why Christians should embrace IC

The answer is really in two parts: obligation and gratitude. The obligation to make a positive contribution to the society in which we live, and gratitude for the freedoms we enjoy.

God ordained earthly authority

The Apostle Paul took up the theme of the Christian's relationship to government in Romans 13:1 when he reminded his readers/listeners that 'there is no authority except that which God has established...'. His bold statement was underlined and enhanced by Peter and Titus who were very clear that God expects Christians to obey government insofar as they are called to 'submit' and 'obey' that authority. (1 Peter 2:13; 3:5-6 and Titus 3:1). For this reason, adds Paul, 'he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what the Lord has instituted.' (Romans 13:2)

However, this apparently straightforward set of consistent commands should be qualified with acknowledgement

7 The World War Two example is not highlighted at random. A poll conducted by Lord Ashcroft in 2012 found that 21% of 17-18 year olds and 25% of 15-16 year olds did not know why Britain fought the Second World War. See <http://>

lordashcrofthpolls.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/WW2-children-survey-summary-of-results-June-2012.pdf accessed 15th September 2017.

there are some considerations which would place the Christian at odds with the authorities. The apostle Peter responds: 'Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God' (Acts 4:19) when he is told to refrain from preaching the Gospel. It should also be noted that, as Norman Geisler puts it, 'The Bible does enjoin obedience to governments even if they are evil, but it does not demand obedience to the evils of government.'⁸ Thus, when King Nebuchadnezzar ordered all his subjects to bow down to the idol he had created, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused (Daniel 3). Their refusal was legitimate because they were being called to do something directly against the commandment 'Worship no other gods but me.'

So submission to earthly authority is obligatory, but that does not mean that Christians should therefore be party to government actions which are evil. On the other hand, passive 'limited' citizenship is also not what God calls Christians to, for Christians are called to make a positive contribution to the societies in which they live.

The obligation to make a positive contribution

Bruce Winter in his book *Seek the Welfare of the City* argues for Christian participation in, and contribution to, the societies in which they live.⁹ Key to his argument is the connection between the exhortation found in Jeremiah 29:7 and those in the New Testament which centre around public service, or '*politeia*'. Winter's focus passage is 1 Peter 2:1–3.17, but he highlights the fact that the description of Christians in 1 Peter 1 (as 'elect sojourners of the Dispersion') matches the position of the Israelites at the time of Jeremiah. This parallel is important because it underlines the teaching that the principle of service to non-Jewish, or non-Christian masters for the benefit of all remains the same under both the old and the new Covenant.¹⁰ Seeking to play a full part in the *politeia* was not only about serving society for purely altruistic reasons, but also because a thriving society would also include Christians: '... if it prospers, you too will prosper.' (Jeremiah 29:7, NIV translation).

The Bible then is clear that there is a requirement for Christians to be obedient to earthly authority and to make a positive contribution to the society in which they live. Thus, whilst such service has some propaganda benefit for Christians amongst wider society (1 Peter 2:15), the duty to serve and contribute remains, whether it is appreciated or not. This teaching is described and discussed in *Church as Politeia: The Political Self-Understanding of Christianity*, where Oliver O'Donovan relates the story of St. Augustine, who, in response to some criticism of his actions in giving solace to condemned prisoners (which he was told was tantamount to condoning criminality) replied: 'It is easy and

simple to hate evil men because they are evil, uncommon and dutiful to love them because they are men: thus in one and the same person you disapprove the guilt and approve the nature.'¹¹ Encapsulated in this reply was the essence of the teaching given in both the Old and the New Testament: to serve society (even the apparently unlovable) whether it was appreciated or not.

Christians have an obligation to serve society and already do so in many ways (not least in the fields of education and welfare); Invested Citizenship is simply an encouragement to do so in the arena of citizenship. Engagement with questions of citizenship for Christians has always run into the kinds of discussions around the balance between loyalty to faith versus loyalty to state which have been touched on already. But in Britain we have less reason to feel that tension than those

in many other parts of the world. Which leads us onto the next reason for Christians to be involved in IC.

Christian gratitude

As we make a contribution to society and submit to our government, we can do so in gratitude from several perspectives.

Firstly, we can have the same gratitude that was described for the British public at large: gratitude for the freedoms which have been won and defended over the centuries. It is sometimes easy to forget just how unusual an expectation of justice, rule of law, accountability in government, and a relative lack of corruption are, even in the modern world.

Secondly, the Christian has an added reason to be grateful for the freedom enjoyed in Britain: the lack of religious persecution. This is no small thing.

When we hear of Christians being dismissed from their jobs for standing up for Judeo-Christian morality, such as the council worker who refuses to marry a homosexual couple, we can overlook the fact that Christians in the UK have it very easy compared to those in the majority of the rest of the world. A recent report published by Georgetown and Notre Dame universities entitled *Under Caesar's Sword* (2017) describes in some detail the responses of Christian communities around the world to persecution. That publication reported that, according to authoritative sources, between 60–80 per cent of all persecution in the world took place against Christians.¹²

Under the Roman Empire, until the Constantinian conversion, the treatment of Christians fluctuated between explicit opposition (which usually included torture, violence and death) and deep suspicion. Christians in the UK and US have enjoyed a privileged position for at least three hundred years (although Catholics, Baptists and Quakers have been

8 Norman Geisler, *Christian Ethics: Contemporary Issues and Opinions*. (2nd Edn) Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010, p.246.

9 Bruce Winter, *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens*. Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998, pp.83–91.

10 Winter cites V. P. Furnish, 'Elect Sojourners in Christ: An Approach to the Theology of 1 Peter', *Perkins School of Theology Journal* Vol. 28, 1975, pp.1–11.

11 Oliver O'Donovan 'Law, Moderation and Forgiveness', in Christoph Stumpf and Holger Zaborowski (eds), *Church as Politeia: The Political Self-Understanding of Christianity*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004, p.1.

12 Daniel Philpott et al., *In Response to Persecution: Findings of the 'Under Caesar's Sword' Project on Global Christian Communities*. South Bend, Notre Dame Publishing, 2017 p.7.

victims of discrimination, even persecution sometimes, it would be fair to say that this has not occurred for at least a century and a half). The opposition that Christianity has increasingly faced from those who wish to see religion removed from the public space, or from atheists who critique religion as a form of irrational oppression, can hardly be seen as persecution.

For the moment at least (and for the foreseeable future), the state in the UK has not made the demands that set Christianity against the Roman Empire: that of sole loyalty to the God-Emperor. Christians have not been forced to choose between loyalty to state and loyalty to faith. This is the source of much of the Christian persecution today: according to Steven Kettell's 2013 article on the relationship between state religion and freedom, the further down a country is on the scale of 'free' to 'not free', the higher the chance that it had a state religion.¹³

So in the same way that our gratitude to Christ makes demands upon us, so too should our gratitude for the freedoms we enjoy in Britain make demands of us. Invested Citizenship is about cultivating a sense of grateful belonging which springs from an acknowledgement of the sacrifices and legacy of the past and a realisation of the difficulties experienced by citizens of other states, whether they are Christian or not.

A final word

Invested Citizenship is about remembering, with gratitude at a national level, the bond that we all as citizens share. It is about realising the inheritance that we have been passed and seeking to pass that on to the next generation. Present debates about differing policy approaches - assimilation versus integration, and the nature of fundamental British values - have missed the core of what belonging should really be. They have tried to create a 'citizenship within limitations'

inside which competing citizen rights are contested. In short, a rather uninspiring answer to radicalisation, or other alternative ideologies to liberal democracy. Positive citizenship of the kind that IC is proposing requires attraction rather than simply limitations and frameworks.

In the long term it will require the national curriculum to foster a greater sense of Invested Citizenship through the school system. This would be particularly applicable in History and PSHE classes where a story or narrative about Britain can be delivered. In the short term, the current climate of remembrance and positive feeling towards Britain by British citizens can be harnessed to begin discussions about what positive belonging looks like, through remembering the attitudes, events and sacrifices of the past.

This is not to ignore past problems and times when Britain has behaved badly. Critical evaluation is important, but constructing a narrative of Britain naturally includes particular values which, in turn, remind us of what we find important. One example would be 'justice and fairness' which were included in the list of British Values, published as 'The UK Values Survey' by Barrett and Clothier in 2012.

There are very good reasons why Christians should be keen to embrace IC both theologically and pragmatically.



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¹³ Steven Kettell, 'State Religion and Freedom: A Comparative Analysis', *Journal of Politics and Religion*. Vol. 6, Iss. 3, 2013, pp.538-569.

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