

Nationalism vs. Christian Faith: A Bible Review

Rajiman Andrianus Sirait¹, Timotius Sukarna²

¹⁻² Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Kadesti Bogor, Indonesia

Author correspondence: rajimanandrianussirait@gmail.com

Abstract. *This article explores the relationship between nationalism and Christian faith from a biblical perspective. Nationalism is often defined as loyalty to nation and state, while Christian faith centres on loyalty to God and His kingdom. In the Indonesian context, churches participated in the nationalism movement from the colonialism era until independence. Based on theological studies, the Bible provides insight that believers' primary loyalty should be to God, although they are also expected to be good citizens. This article uses a literature study method with a qualitative approach to analyse relevant biblical texts as well as related theological literature. The concept of nation in the Bible is examined from the perspective of the Old Testament, which focuses on the ethnic identity of the nation of Israel, to the New Testament, which expands the nation's identity into an inclusive community of faith. The article also highlights the ethical implications of nationalism for Christians, who should reflect the values of justice, love and sacrifice, and avoid exclusionary and xenophobic attitudes.*

Keywords: Nationalism, Christian faith, Bible.

1. INTRODUCTION

Nationalism and Christian faith are two concepts that are often the subject of debate in the context of theology and sociology. Nationalism is a feeling of love and pride for one's country and national identity, (Aritonang, 2019) while Christian faith is belief in and devotion to the teachings of Jesus Christ as taught in the Bible. Nationalism is often defined as loyalty and commitment to the nation and state. (Sukarna, 2024, pp. 139–140) Mochtar Pabotinggi, underlines the difference between nation as a sociological entity and nation as a political entity. (Alfaqi, 2016) Benedict Anderson understands the nation as an imagined community united by a national spirit while Karl Friedrich von Savigny says that nationalism is not abstract, but a unique national spirit. (Alfaqi, 2016)

When looking at the Indonesian context, Christianity has existed in Indonesia long before the proclamation of independence. Early churches were led by European missionaries and indigenous pastors only acted as assistants. (Aritonang, 2019, pp. 112–115) The theology adopted at that time was pietistic, focused on personal spiritual life and less involved in social renewal. (Aritonang, 2019, pp. 112–115) Nationalism in Indonesia emerged as a reaction to colonialism, starting in the 20th century with the establishment of organizations such as Budi Utomo in 1908, Churches and Christians participated in the nationalism movement, despite the view that they were pro-colonialist. After independence, churches in Indonesia formed the Council of Churches in Indonesia (DGI) in 1950, which later became the Persekutuan Gereja-gereja di Indonesia (PGI). The goal was to realize the

one Christian church in Indonesia, but the main focus was on witness and social service.(Aritonang, 2019, pp. 115–130)

In the Bible, nationalism can be seen in the pride of the Israelites as God's chosen people. In the Old Testament, God chose Israel as a special nation and gave them the promised land (Genesis 12:1-3). God called Abraham to be the father of a great nation known as Israel. This can be seen as an early form of nationalism, where the Israelites were regarded as a chosen people with a special mission (Exodus 19:5-6). However, the Bible also warns that excessive nationalism can lead to exclusiveness and pride, as shown in the books of Amos and Isaiah where God criticized Israel for their pride and disobedience (Amos 6:8).

Nationalism is a concept that refers to loyalty and support for one's nation and state. It has existed before Indonesia's independence and is an important factor in maintaining national sovereignty.(Firdaus et al., 2023) In one global example, the case of Scotland becoming independent from the United Kingdom through a referendum shows the importance of unity and national spirit.(Alfaqi, 2016) In the context of Christianity, the biblical perspective provides a unique insight into nationalism. This article will explore how the Bible addresses the nation, loyalty to God, and the ethical implications of nationalism for Christians.

2. METHODS

This paper uses a qualitative approach with literature study as the main method. The author analyses various theological, biblical and literary sources related to nationalism in the Indonesian context and how the Bible views the concept of nation and loyalty. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of the relationship between nationalism and Christian faith through a textual study of relevant biblical passages, such as Genesis, Exodus, and the Gospels, as well as the writings of the Apostle Paul. Historical and theological analyses are also used to explore the role of the church in the Indonesian nationalism movement as well as the development of the concept of nation from the Old Testament to the New Testament. Thus, this method provides a foundation for understanding issues of ethics and loyalty from the perspective of the Christian faith.

3. RESULTS

A. The Concept of Nation in the Bible

1) Old Testament

In the Old Testament, the concept of nation is often associated with the nation of Israel. Israel was chosen by God as His special people. (Sukarna & Okoi, 2023) The Israelites were considered God's chosen people, who had a special covenant with Him. The Israelites were identified as the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and they were given the land of Canaan as the promised land. This is evident in the story of Abraham's calling and the promise God made to him and his descendants (Genesis 12:1-3; 17:4-8). (Pranoto, 2017, pp. 1–2) Israel's national identity is strongly linked to God's covenant and the law given through Moses, which guides their lives as a just and merciful nation (Exodus 19:5-6, Leviticus 19:33-34, Deuteronomy 10:18-19). (Blomberg, 2012) The identity and sustainability of the Israelites can be seen in three fundamental things, namely; first, attachment to God, where the Israelites have a strong identity as God's chosen people. They were called to obey God's laws and live according to His commandments. Secondly, the land of promise, where the land of Canaan was given as the promised land to Abraham's descendants, which strengthened their collective identity as a nation chosen by God to live in the land. And thirdly, from culture and tradition, where the Israelites were heavily influenced by their relationship with God. The rituals, festivals, and laws given through Moses served to maintain the identity and sustainability of the nation. (Pranoto, 2017, pp. 1–2)

2) New Testament

The concept of nation in the New Testament underwent expansion and transformation through the work of Jesus Christ. In the context of the New Testament, nation is no longer limited to ethnicity or biological descent, but includes all believers in Jesus Christ, both Jews and Gentiles. (Lih: Pranoto, 2017, pp. 12–13; Sirait & Sukarna, 2024) In the New Testament, Jesus Christ brings the message of the Kingdom of God that transcends national and ethnic boundaries. For example, the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) shows the importance of love for others regardless of ethnic origin. The Great Commission given by Jesus to His disciples (Matthew 28:19-20) emphasizes the call to preach the gospel to all nations, indicating the universal vision of the Christian community. Paul's letters, such as

Galatians 3:28, emphasize that in Christ there is no difference between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, affirming the unity in Christ.(Feoh & zega, 2023)

In 1 Peter 2:9-10 it describes believers as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession," indicating that the church, as an assembly of believers, is a new nation chosen by God.

Overall, the concept of nation in the Bible evolved from a specific ethnic identity in the Old Testament to an inclusive community of faith in the New Testament, focusing on a relationship with God through Jesus Christ and the hope of resurrection and eternal life.

The Bible emphasizes that the believer's primary loyalty is to God and His Kingdom. Philippians 3:20 states that the believer's citizenship is in heaven. However, Christians are also expected to be good citizens in this world, respecting governments and authorities (Romans 13:1-7). Nonetheless, loyalty to God and the moral and ethical principles taught by Christ must remain paramount.

3) Ethical Implications of Nationalism in Biblical Perspective

True nationalism in a biblical perspective must reflect the values of justice and compassion. Old Testament prophets often criticized the Israelites when they failed to meet these standards. Micah 6:8 asserts that God requires His people to be just, to love faithfulness, and to walk humbly before God. Amos 5:24 calls for justice to flow like water and righteousness like an ever-flowing river.

Exclusionary and xenophobic nationalism contradicts the Bible's teachings on acceptance and love of the stranger. Leviticus 19:34 states that foreigners living with the people of Israel are to be treated like citizens and loved as themselves. Jesus also taught the importance of service and sacrifice for others (Mark 10:45), which suggests that true nationalism from a biblical perspective should reflect this spirit.

Nationalism in a biblical perspective is a complex concept and must be understood in a theological and ethical context. The Bible provides guidance on how believers should interact with their national identity, while remaining faithful to the universal, inclusive, and love-based principles of the Kingdom of God. True nationalism according to the Bible should reflect the values of justice, compassion, service, and sacrifice, and avoid exclusionary and xenophobic attitudes.

In living as good citizens, Christians are reminded to always place loyalty to God and His principles above all else. As such, true nationalism will be a reflection of God's love and justice expressed through the lives of His people in the world. The

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4) Christian Faith in Biblical Perspective

Christian faith is the belief and confession that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior. It includes a commitment to live according to His teachings as set out in the Bible (John 3:16, Romans 10:9-10). Jesus taught that His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36), which suggests that Christian faith often transcends the boundaries of nationalism and calls for living according to the values of God's kingdom, not the kingdom of the world.

The Apostle Paul emphasized that a Christian's primary identity is in Christ, not in national or ethnic identity (Galatians 3:28). Christian faith, in the view of the Bible, is at the core of the spiritual life of Christians and includes belief in the One True God, who has revealed Himself through Jesus Christ. This faith is seen as the foundation of all things hoped for and the evidence of all things unseen (Hebrews 11:1), leading believers to submit themselves completely to God's will.(Barna Group, 2021)

The Bible serves as the main foundation of the Christian faith. As the inspired word of God, the Bible provides guidance for life that includes teaching, correction, and education in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16-17). In this perspective, all Scripture is seen as an absolute source of wisdom, which is not only relevant for the spiritual life but also for various aspects of everyday life. The Christian worldview emphasizes that everything in the world is God's creation and that humans are created to glorify God and enjoy a relationship with Him. This view encompasses all aspects of life, including ethics, science, art, and culture, with God at the center of everything. Therefore, every aspect of life is seen to reflect the glory and righteousness of God.(Tischler, 2021)

The Bible teaches that God is the ultimate reality and source of everything that exists. The God described in the Bible is a transcendent and immanent person, who is actively involved in the creation and maintenance of the world. This perspective differs from other metaphysical views such as monism, naturalism, and dualism, which often ignore or distort the reality of a one and personal God.(Smith, 2020)

The transformation of faith in daily life is an important aspect of the Christian faith. Faith is not only theoretical but also practical, seen in acts of love, justice and service. Christians are called to live in truth and love, loving God with all their heart, soul and mind, and loving their neighbor as themselves (Matthew 22:37-40). This covers all aspects of life, from personal relationships to social responsibility, all of which are rooted in the teachings of the Bible.(Terian, 1991)

5) The Interaction between Nationalism and Christian Faith

A Christian is faced with the challenge of balancing loyalty to the state with loyalty to God. This often requires wisdom to know when and how to follow the authority of the state without compromising faith (Romans 13:1-7). The Bible warns against overreaching nationalism that can lead to hatred, violence and injustice. Jesus himself criticized the tendency of the Jews of his day to prioritize national identity over the values of the kingdom of God (Matthew 23:23-24). Christian teaching emphasizes love for others, including those of different nationalities and ethnicities (Luke 10:25-37). This shows that Christian faith often transcends the boundaries of nationalism.

In history, churches have often played a role in nationalist movements, both positively and negatively. For example, in independence movements in various countries, the church has often been a place of refuge and organization. In modern times, the church faces the challenge of navigating the rising nationalism in many countries. The church's approach to issues such as immigration, human rights and social justice is often an indicator of how Christian faith is integrated with nationalism.

4. CONCLUSION

The relationship between nationalism and Christian faith is complex and often requires careful balancing. While nationalism can provide a sense of identity and belonging, the Christian faith teaches that the ultimate loyalty is to God and the values of His kingdom. Through the guidance of the Bible, Christians are invited to live lives that reflect love, justice and humility, often challenging exclusive and overly nationalistic tendencies.

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