



Christianity and the **Nation**

A biblical understanding of nations
and nationalism

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BIBLICAL THINKING FOR PUBLIC LIFE

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Preface

There had been a crisis brewing around Christian political engagement for some years before the storming of the US Capitol building in January 2021.

The fervour of support for Donald Trump amongst many evangelical leaders in the 2016 and 2020 American presidential elections – despite his lack of personal faith or Christian character – shows how far the national political agenda and the mission of the church had become entangled. The crisis came to a head following Trump's defeat in November 2020. This exposed the failure of numerous prophecies in charismatic circles that he would win a second term, and the repeated accusations of electoral fraud which culminated in crowds of protestors storming the Capitol building on January 6th.

The events of that day prompted profound soul-searching about the boundaries of legitimate engagement with politics for followers of Jesus, not only in the US, but also around the world. One of those conversations was in the Lausanne Orthodox Initiative, a forum bringing together Evangelical and Eastern Orthodox leaders for dialogue around mission. Following the events in January they invited Jubilee Centre to propose a framework for exploring the biblical basis for political engagement.

This essay is based on that proposal and is written as a starting point to help Christians go back to biblical first principles when thinking about engaging with politics. The focus is on Christianity and the nation, since it is the rise of 'Christian nationalism' which is fuelling the debate at this time, not only in the US but in other countries as well.

Our prayer is that this will help readers, whatever their current views about their faith and the nation which they call home, to reflect on their assumptions and attitudes in the light of Scripture.

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Introduction

Christians in different circumstances around the world are facing up to a familiar question: what is the proper relationship between Church and State? Following an age of anxiousness in the West over the idea of ‘doing God’ in politics, religion has been re-injected into the public realm, often in forceful ways. The defeat of Donald Trump in the 2020 US Presidential election and the subsequent storming of the Capitol building by protestors in what has been described as ‘a Christian insurrection’¹ has opened up a discussion about ‘Christian nationalism’, and the ways in which the cross and the flag have become intertwined. ‘Strong man’ leaders across Europe – both in government and on the fringes of it – have projected a kind of muscular Christianity as the basis of a populist, far-right, anti-democratic, anti-EU, anti-immigrant or anti-minority politics, as others have done with other faiths in other parts of the world. Where Christians are in the minority, such as in many parts of the Middle East, they may find themselves as the victims of exclusionary religious nationalism.

Underneath all of these dilemmas lies the issue of just how Christians are to relate to the nation. As Christians, our response to this question must be informed by a careful reading of the Bible, understanding it as authoritative and instructive in its whole, while also doing justice to it by considering the context in which it is placed (and the context in which *we* are placed). A flyover account of anything in Scripture will only ever be incomplete, but it is my hope that by surveying the theme of nationhood throughout the Bible, this review can equip readers to better engage with questions of nationalism in contemporary politics.

¹ <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2021/01/evangelicals-catholics-jericho-march-capitol/617591/>

What is the 'Nation'

Before determining a biblical approach to nationhood, we must first ask what is meant when we refer to the 'nation'. It is a fluid concept with loose boundaries, understood in different ways both in theory and in practice by political scientists, historians, activists, and so on. Already this shows us that our own understanding of a 'nation' can be disputed, culturally contingent, and not as universal and timeless as we may think. Further, it provides a warning for us not to substitute our contemporary ideas and experiences of nationhood into the biblical texts without careful thought – ancient Israel was a very different political entity to the modern United States, for example. As is always the case with Scripture, we must take account of context, and here political theory and history are highly informative alongside the theology of Israel, the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, the role of the Church, and – more broadly – political theology itself. Whilst I will not seek to resolve the debate here,² it is important to establish a consistent definition by which we can understand 'nation' throughout this essay, and so will briefly survey the terrain to illuminate the different ways that the nation has been conceived throughout history.

In its current form, the nation is quite a modern concept, with many scholars attributing the origins of the modern nation-state to the 1648 Peace of Westphalia – a treaty signed in the aftermath of the 'Thirty Years' War, which established sovereignty over their own territories for the states involved. Where this starting point is disputed, most that disagree place the date later, rather than earlier.³ Historically, nations have claimed to be nations because of a range of factors: shared language, religion, culture, history, ethnicity, certain geographic features, conquest, and so on. Despite often claiming to be so, nations are very rarely internally homogenous within any of these factors – they are almost always a mixture of different demographic and ethnic elements. Consequently, one of the key tasks of the nation is determining how to operate as a consistent whole despite internal differences. Today, the primary basis for a nation is generally accepted as political rather than biological, geographical or cultural; a bordered territory that is governed (to varying levels of success) as one consistent political unit. This is the nation-state, which is what I will generally refer to in this discussion.

An influential theorist of nations, Benedict Anderson, famously suggested that they were *Imagined Communities*⁴ – that nations are socially constructed, imagined by people that perceive themselves as part of that group, with no real natural basis. That is not to deny the validity of the existence of particular nations, nor to dismiss the power of belonging to a national community, but acknowledges that nations are shaped by historical contingency and are not inevitable. Even those modern-day nations that trace their existence back to ancient empires have gone through countless changes in form and configuration so that it is unclear to what extent they can be considered to be the same place.

² Suggested further reading in this area: E. Renan, 'What is a Nation?', in S. Woolf ed., *Nationalism in Europe: 1815 to the Present: A Reader*, (London, 1996); B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (2nd edn., London, 1991); E. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (2nd edn, Cambridge, 1992); C.A. Bayly, *The Birth of The Modern World, 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Malden, MA, 2004); John Breuilly (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Nationalism* (Oxford, 2012); C. Tilly, (1985) 'War Making and State Making as Organized Crime', *Bringing the State Back In* ed. Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

³ For a useful summary, see Krasner, Stephen (1993) 'Westphalia and All That', in Judith Goldstein & Robert O. Keohane (eds.), *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions and Political Change*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

⁴ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (2nd edn., London, 1991)

Given this contingency, how a nation tells its ‘origin story’ of formation and its subsequent history matters deeply to constructing a national identity. Such history almost always involves violence and oppression of some actors involved, and as a result the telling of national history is often painful and sensitive. The collective stories we tell (and those that we choose not to) shape how the community sees itself, which in turn effects the path taken into the future. With a nation’s religious life forming a fundamental part of its culture, this alone is a major reason to care about how religion is used in the story of the nation.

Before moving on, it is important to make a distinction between patriotism – love of one’s country – and nationalism, the belief that one’s country is superior to others. History is full of leaders who have expounded the glory of their nation above that of others as a justification for wars, empires, conquest, and racial hierarchies. Similarly, the association of a particular religion with a nation has all too often led to the oppression and persecution of religious minorities – an injustice of which Christians have been (and continue to be) both perpetrators and victims. While the absolutism and exclusionary nature of nationalism can pervert patriotism into a destructive force, the social benefits of belonging and community that national identity can provide should be protected.

How Does the Bible Approach Nationhood?

With this in mind, I now turn to examine how the Bible understands nationhood. This is by no means a comprehensive discussion – entire books could be written on each section below – but I hope that it provides a useful overview of how the Bible approaches nationhood.

Genesis: from Eden to Babel

Perhaps the most powerful rebuttal of exclusionary nationalism anywhere in the Bible is to be found in its opening pages. In the Genesis creation account, humans are not the product of struggle between the gods, destined to serve their representative kings with conflict and hierarchy written into their nature, but are created in the image of the Divine himself⁵ – every one of them. This not only radical theologically, but politically too.⁶ While there are no nations at this point in the narrative, the doctrine of the *imago dei* should prevent the establishment of any kind of hierarchy of worth based upon nationality, race, gender, social position and so on. If all people bear the image of God equally, and all have the capacity to reflect his glory and goodness in their lives, then there is no justification for claiming that one group of people can be superior to another. This idea of the equality of all people, whilst somewhat removed from its Judaeo-Christian origin, has since formed the basis of modern ideas of democracy, human rights, and equality under the law, in direct opposition to regimes that enforce distinctions between different classes of people.

Despite this, Genesis does affirm the existence of different nations, rather than either a ‘state of nature’ with no rulers or one universal human society. The twin commands to fill and rule over the earth⁷ imply both that some kind of political authority would be necessary to rule, and that many of these would spring up as humans spread across the world. The Table of Nations in Genesis 10 not only establishes the importance of these units to the biblical story but also shows the inter-relatedness of all the nations – many of which appear throughout the Old Testament – as siblings and cousins to Israel, derived from the same ancestry. The story of Babel which immediately follows in Genesis 11 affirms that it is good for humanity to spread, diversify, and form different cultures and languages – for many, the theoretical underpinnings of what constitutes a ‘nation’ – rather than remaining in one place, homogenous, building monuments to their own success and concentrating power as a regional hegemon. It is significant that these stories are placed together in the narrative (as they are clearly not in chronological order, given the presence of many languages in chapter 10 and ‘one language and a common speech’ in 11:1), as it sets up the tension between the unity of humanity and the diversity of the nations that runs throughout Scripture.

Israel: a light to the nations

As the story focuses in on Israel in particular, it therefore seems odd that Yahweh would select one particular family (and later, nation) to be his chosen people. Yet, the nature of Yahweh’s

⁵ Genesis 1:26-27

⁶ See Joshua Berman, *Created Equal: How the Bible Broke with Ancient Political Thought*, Oxford University Press (2008)

⁷ Genesis 1:28

covenant with Israel gives them no option to consider themselves superior and exclude others from God's blessing. Abraham was chosen specifically by God out of all the people of the earth, in order that 'all peoples on earth will be blessed through you'⁸, 'through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed',⁹ and so that Israel could be a light unto the nations (Isaiah, various). Israel's election was not about exceptionalism nor hoarding the blessing for themselves, but about glorifying God and being the channel through which God would rescue all of humanity. The story of the Old Testament shows time and again that the people of Israel were not more deserving than – nor morally superior to – their neighbours; in fact, it is through Israel's failure and weaknesses that the mercy and love of God is clearly displayed.

Ultimately, God's salvation purposes for all people in Jesus cannot be removed from the context of his place in Israel's story. Just as we should aim to read the Gospels with this context in mind, we should also read the election of Israel as pointing towards this plan of salvation which is open to all humanity and the redemption of all of creation.

It can be easy to read the stories of Israel's military campaigns and assume that God wants his people to fulfil his purposes by waging wars of extermination upon the godless nations around them. This lends support to a strong, muscular Christianity that wants to battle its enemies, whether metaphorically through culture and rhetoric, or literally through military might, and often gets caught up in a kind of aggressive nationalism that appropriates a language of conquest, inheritance, the Promised Land, God's favour, Jericho, battle, might and so on. However, the broader pattern of Scripture points otherwise. The occupation of the Promised Land aside, Israel was never to fight a war of conquest, the army was to be voluntary and not a permanent, professional fighting force, moderation was to be shown in the conduct of war, and the usual activities of rape, plunder and taking off in marriage were either outlawed or highly regulated so that women, children, and the environment were respected and not completely degraded. These principles are simply remarkable in the ancient world, and greatly influence modern 'just war' theory. Ultimately we follow the lead of Jesus, who eschewed violence and the means of might, taught us to love our enemies, and was himself brutally and unjustly executed by a militaristic empire.

Torah: wisdom for living

The Torah was given to Israel not only to dictate their religious life and give a reference for sin against Yahweh (although this was of course important), but as a set of laws and principles by which to govern and organise the nation. A Torah-observant Israel would be a sign to the surrounding nations of wise people and wise rulers, ultimately pointing to the wisdom of Yahweh, as was seen on occasions in the reigns of David and Solomon. In it, they are called to 'love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt'¹⁰ – a key period in Israel's collective memory. The 'foreigner' is one of the main categories of those who were to be provided for by Israel's charity, welfare, hospitality, and economic practices. This is to be balanced with the repeated rebuke that Israel had gone astray by intermixing with and taking on the worship practices of other nations, and the command to keep Israel separate and pure. This stems from the exceptionalism of Yahweh rather than an exceptionalism of Israel: Yahweh self-describes as a 'jealous God', and the primary sin Israel is reprimanded for is idolatry, whereas the

⁸ Genesis 12:3

⁹ Genesis 22:18

¹⁰ Deuteronomy 10:19

provisions made for accepting foreigners into the community and religion of Israel were very progressive. What this dynamic teaches us is that the people of God, represented by the Church today, are to always be welcoming of strangers, regardless of nationality, and to not put up any barriers to their joining the family of God: however, the Church should be careful not to let external influences divert it from the true worship and love of God. This does not mean universality and the eradication of difference – as we will see later, there is scope for great diversity within the Church.

Ties of land, family, tribe, religion and culture encouraged by the economic and social laws of the Torah would foster a sense of pride and belonging both in the nation and in sub-national identities, in a way of life that can be summed up as ‘rootedness’. The Jubilee laws of Leviticus 25 were designed to ensure that each family had an allocation of land that remained theirs forever, rooted in a particular location and community that was knit together by strong relational ties. This clashes with the hyper-mobility encouraged by 21st century capitalism and suggests that effective community requires not just strong interpersonal relationships, but also consists of a robust commitment to a particular place. Patriotism, belonging, and other forms of identity are natural consequences of living in community, and are generally positive benefits. However, they can be corrupted when they become defined by discrimination towards those outside of the group but, as we have seen, Israel was continually encouraged to welcome the stranger.

Judges and Kings: failure after failure

For a series of texts produced within the nation of Israel that guide and shape its religious life and sense of national identity, the Old Testament is remarkably critical of Israel as a nation.¹¹ It does not try to whitewash history and present Israel’s leaders as heroes; rather, it is brutally honest about the moral and political failings of even its most celebrated leaders, such as David and Solomon. This history not only supports the warnings Israel was given about having a king,¹² but also models for us how to deal with the inevitably complicated and messy histories of our own nations. Being honest about the past enables us to learn its lessons and avoid repeating the same mistakes in future. This is particularly important, given the role of collective memory and storytelling in constructing national ‘myths’, telling the story of who ‘we’ are and what values we share.

Further, the record of Israel’s leaders reminds us not to put our own political leaders on too high a pedestal, nor to grant them unlimited power. At the beginning of Israel’s monarchy, the prophet Samuel warns the people that the king will rule over and oppress them,¹³ and King Nebuchadnezzar in the book of Daniel is an example of a ruler that sets himself up as a god to be worshipped.¹⁴ Scripture is clear that God and God alone is worthy of our full trust, worship, and devotion, and to place any politician or ruler on the same level is not only committing political idolatry, but is a sure path to failure and disappointment, given the fallen and imperfect nature of all human beings.

¹¹ See John Coffey, ‘Difficult histories: Christian memory and historic injustice’, *Cambridge Papers* Vol. 29, No. 4, Dec 2020

¹² Deuteronomy 17, 1 Samuel 8, Judges 9:7-20

¹³ 1 Samuel 8:9-18

¹⁴ Daniel 3

If true fulfilment is to be found only in Christ, if the ultimate answer to the pain and trouble of the world is the cross and the resurrection, then we should naturally find all ideologies and politicians to be at best only partially worthy of our trust. That is not to say that we should not have political allegiances and beliefs, but that we are free to support particular candidates or programmes without having to affirm everything that they entail and reject everything of the opposite hue. Our hopes should not rise and fall on the results of an election, because our hope is anchored in Christ, who remains Lord and in control – no matter who is in government. As we see throughout Scripture, God often uses those who we consider unlikely – even those outside of the community of God’s people, such as the Babylonian king Cyrus – to bring about his purposes in the world. Therefore, we should not pin our hopes on one particular leader, even if they are a Christian, as the sole executor of God’s purposes.

The Prophets: lonely critics

At the same time, some of the most important figures in Israel’s history were on the outskirts of society, rejected by their peers and out of favour – sometimes dangerously so – with the ruling powers. The messages they had to bring were often uncomfortable, highly accusatory, and sometimes downright terrifying. In almost all cases, they were not what the people nor the kings wanted to hear. Similarly, while Christians should also be willing to praise governments when they do things well, part of the prophetic role of the Church is also to hold power to account, to challenge the nation and its leaders when they are going wrong, and not be so comfortable and cosy with the ruling authorities that they cannot provide an objective critique of them.

This is partly why many important democratic principles emerged out of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Without the freedom of religion, speech, association, or press, separation of powers (including separation of Church and State), secularism, pluralism and a platform given to political opposition, rulers are able to act as they wish without this kind of challenge. Christians should therefore support these freedoms at home and abroad, and in countries where those freedoms are not present or genuinely under threat, it is legitimate for Christians to join others in campaigning for reform.

Often the messages of the prophets were difficult for them to share and they would possibly not have wanted to deliver them, but they did so because they were words from the Lord. It is important that we do not just speak about things that represent our political or sectional interests – things that we would naturally want to speak out about – but also speak fairly and evenly across the board. Christians should not be so allied to one cause that they cannot – or will not – find fault in it, where necessary.

Exile: a land lost, a nation humbled

Israel’s exile was not only important in religious and practical terms, but also because there was a deep sense of attachment to the land, and because exile was a humiliation on a national scale. Being forcibly removed from their land, moved elsewhere, and forced to live and work by an oppressive foreign power was a highly traumatic experience; it was God’s judgement on Israel for its sins. This sense of attachment and a desire to live where they belong is present in nearly all human societies, and should be protected, such as in the right to national self-determination enshrined in the UN Charter.

Yet, we also see key examples of how to live well in a strange land, as Jeremiah 29 advocates, in the life of Daniel in captivity, but also in the lives of Joseph, Ruth, and Esther. In a globalised world, where many do not live in the country of their birth, these figures provide inspiration for how to integrate well into foreign societies whilst maintaining the integrity of existing identities.

Jesus: King of Kings

For someone who would become the centre of the largest religious movement the world has ever seen, the circumstances of Jesus' birth and upbringing are simply remarkable. Jesus, the Son of God, was incarnated in human flesh to a poor, young couple living in a country that was under imperial oppression, within a part of that country about which it was said that nothing good could ever come.¹⁵ Mary and Joseph had to flee with the young Jesus as refugees from a brutal king who saw the child as a threat to his own power.¹⁶ These facts should inform our perspectives on nations, empires, place, immigrants and asylum seekers.

Jesus was not the kind of Messiah that many Jews were expecting: what was widely hoped for was a political or military leader that would liberate Israel from Roman rule and assert their national glory once more. Instead, Jesus was crucified by these very authorities. He rode into Jerusalem on a lowly donkey, a sign of a peaceful king, and was heralded as such by the crowds, who were soon to turn on him when they realised that he came to challenge the Jewish authorities as much as the Romans. His crucifixion was a mock coronation; lifted high with a crown of thorns on his head, he had 'King of the Jews' written above him for all to see. Yet, in resurrecting and crushing the power of sin, death and evil, Jesus turned the logic of might and power on its head by winning victory through seeming crushing defeat in his most subversive act. In turn, we are to follow the way of the cross, and not the way of the sword.

King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Christ, Messiah, King of the Jews, Son of God: many of Jesus' most common titles had explicit political connotations then and now, for the Jews and for the Romans. Whilst Jesus was not a political leader and cannot be co-opted by any one political movement, his 'kingdom' certainly has political implications. To declare that Jesus is Lord was to declare that Caesar was not. His Gospel was in contradiction to the good news of the emperor. Our allegiance should be to Christ above all else, whether nation, leader, or party, and if any authority takes the supreme place of Christ in our lives or is placed on a pedestal alongside the cross, that is political idolatry.

In Matthew 12:48 and elsewhere Jesus emphasised that family ties and other associations mean nothing compared to those who follow the will of the Father. Similarly, John the Baptist in Matthew 3:9 declared that 'out of these stones God can raise up children of Abraham'. Throughout his ministry Jesus broke down the belief that the Jews would be saved simply because they were descendants of Abraham and instead expanded God's family to those who truly had faith and did the will of the Father. He reserved great proclamations of faith for the Roman centurion, the Samaritan woman at the well, and the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15, while he continually rebuked the Israelites and their leaders for their complacency in claiming inherited righteousness. Not only did Jesus seek out individuals in ways that broke down social barriers, but he openly affirmed their place in the family of God. This is summed up in Jesus'

¹⁵ John 1:46

¹⁶ Matthew 2:13-23

final proclamation in Matthew's Gospel, to go and make disciples of all nations.¹⁷ Jesus is the turning point at which membership of the family of God is blown fully open to the entire world, regardless of nationality or ancestry.

Church: a radical community of unity in diversity

There is much that has been written historically about the relationship between Church and State or Church and Nation, but biblically speaking, there is a clear vision for the Church to embody unity in diversity. This is displayed most strikingly in the events of Pentecost, the birth of the Church, where the multinational crowds did not all hear the apostles preaching in one uniform language, but by the Spirit each heard their own tongue - an event which ends with three thousand people choosing to follow Jesus.¹⁸ Such differences are not eradicated by the Gospel. Conversely, it points towards the radical transformation of human relationships that is brought about when Christ reigns in the hearts of believers and the communities in which they live. It demonstrates the power of the Gospel to forge community in the midst of great cultural, national and social differences, which is something that nationalism typically struggles to do without excluding 'others'.

The early Church offered a radical alternative to the ways of the Roman Empire. Its primary appeal was of course the Gospel, but it was also attractive because a community of people transformed by Christ, living lives of sacrificial love across social and national boundaries, was irresistible to those who were tired of the might and exclusivity of empire (and was an irritant to those who sought to uphold it). Here was a group in which all were welcome and no category disqualified anyone from membership,¹⁹ a body in which diversity was welcomed and appreciated for the contribution each had to offer,²⁰ and a family where former slaves and masters, Roman centurions, governors and Jewish Zealots, men and women, young and old, rich and poor, would gather around the same table as equals and profess their love for one another as family. This was revolutionary then, and it remains revolutionary today. Unity is an essential aim of the Church at local, denominational and global levels, but it was never intended to produce homogeneity – rather, the vision was for a radical diversity united around common faith and common purpose.

Whilst the Church has rarely been united across history, it cannot be overstated how remarkable it is that such a community could exist around the world. The Church is the largest and most powerful supra-national community to ever exist; an enormous network of people united by faith across hundreds of different nations. In its mission today, this global focus should enable the Church to stand outside the constraints of nationalistic concerns and advocate for issues of justice around the world. Most importantly, nationality (alongside other demographic factors) must never be a reason for exclusion from the community of believers.

¹⁷ Matthew 28:19

¹⁸ Acts 2:1-11

¹⁹ Colossians 3:11, Ephesians 2:11-22

²⁰ 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

The New Jerusalem: the healing of the nations

I end this survey by considering what the Bible expects the ‘end’ of nations to be (in both senses of the word), applying eschatology to nationhood. In one sense as Christians we orient ourselves to eternal purposes that are far beyond those of any earthly and time-bound kingdom. This gives us a more considered perspective on the rise and fall of nations and on the relative importance of current political events. Our eschatology affects how we act in the here and now, as citizens of heaven²¹ but also as ambassadors of that kingdom in our earthly context.²²

Yet, in a strange sense, Revelation does not anticipate the end of the existence of nations: ultimately, they are redeemed, not destroyed. In John’s vision of the New Jerusalem, it is not that all in the new creation will be subsumed into one holy nation - a new Israel for the New Jerusalem - but that many nations and kings will still exist and bring their glory into the city.²³ The exact meaning of this is unclear, but it mirrors the dynamic established at Pentecost of unity in diversity, of all the beauty and meaning of our existing identities being brought into the reality of our new identity. Further, John sees Eden being restored with the tree of life once again at its centre, expressly stating that its leaves are ‘for the healing of the nations’.²⁴ This healing will look like the beautiful, hopeful redemption expressed in Isaiah’s vision:

*“(the nations) will beat their swords into ploughshares
and their spears into pruning hooks.
Nation will not take up sword against nation,
nor will they train for war anymore.”²⁵*

An eschatology centred around a new creation leads us to pray and work for the fulfilment of this vision of the redemption of nations. We are neither to dismiss their importance nor over-assert their power; rather, we understand that they will be brought under the Lordship of Christ as we walk in his light. Consequently, we can affirm the power and meaning of nationhood today while holding nations in an appropriate eschatological context.

²¹ Philippians 3:20

²² See my short article “The Time is Ripe to Re-Think Citizenship” at <https://www.jubilee-centre.org/blog/rethink-citizenship>

²³ Revelation 21:24-26

²⁴ Revelation 22:2

²⁵ Isaiah 2:4

Conclusion

As Christians, we should be patriotic and proud of the places in which we live, while also fighting to uphold the worth and dignity of people who live elsewhere. Our allegiance to God's kingdom must never be superseded or wrapped up in our allegiance to earthly kingdoms. We should be concerned when the cross is placed alongside national symbols in our churches, and when Christianity is invoked for nationalist politics. We belong to a global family, the people of the resurrection, whose values are a radical challenge to all earthly authority.

The appropriation of Christianity in nationalist myths is not only antithetical to the way of Christ, but is also a dangerous force in contemporary politics that encourages exclusionary nativism. Some may argue that the solution is to remove the influence of religion from politics, but I would suggest that, rather than less religion, what we need is more thoughtful and engaged exegesis. This article has demonstrated that Christianity possesses within itself the resources to effectively combat this nationalistic tendency. Ultimately, it will require Bible-believing Christians to raise their voices against the persuasive narratives of populist politicians.



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