

July 17, 2017

Dear Members, Co-Workers and Friends:

To grow up in Germany after World War II meant complete rejection of any form of nationalism or even patriotism. The German flag was rarely seen and the national anthem was rarely played. The slogans of Nazi propaganda, such as "Deutschland Ueber Alles" ("Germany over all"), and the extreme practical misapplication of this phrase had taken their toll. When the Berlin Wall fell, it was propagated that Germany should only become united within the confines of a European Union. Today, patriotism and even nationalism can be observed in certain parts of Germany, while renewed efforts are made to guarantee strong and powerful European unification.

Without the experiences of Germany's past radical nationalistic concepts, America has always had a fond approach towards (rightly and wrongly understood) patriotism, while the distinction between patriotism and nationalism became oftentimes quite blurry. Recently, this has been a deeply troubling development, with propagated slogans such as "America First," "Making America Great Again", or "Buying American." While America had accused Europe in the past of becoming a "fortress," this accusation has been launched now, in return, by Europe against America, while phrases have also been coined, in response, such as, "Europe First" or "Making Europe Great Again."

Of course, nationalism and patriotism can be found in just about every country on the face of the earth, and Christians can be affected quite strongly by such sentiments, especially during times of conflict or war.

How, exactly, can we describe the concepts of patriotism and nationalism? Are both concepts right or wrong? What should a true Christian's position be in this regard?

Merriam-Webster defines nationalism as "exalting one nation above all others," adding that "intense nationalism was one of the causes of the war." Others have pointed out that nationalism wants to be, and proclaims itself to be, "the greatest."

In his essay, "Notes on Nationalism," George Orwell wrote that nationalism "is inseparable from the desire for power."

When describing the difference between nationalism and patriotism, a statement from Sydney J. Harris is often quoted, as follows: "The difference between patriotism and nationalism is that the patriot is proud of his country for what it does, and the nationalist is proud of his country no matter what it does; the first attitude creates a feeling of responsibility while the second a feeling of blind arrogance that leads to a war."

The website of [differencebetween.net](http://differencebetween.net) states: "Patriotism is based on affection and nationalism is rooted in rivalry and resentment. One can say that nationalism is militant by nature and patriotism is based on peace."

The Huffington Post wrote on July 3, 2016: "... nationalism... unites people against other people... Nationalism focuses on the State while patriotism focuses on the people..."

Focusing more closely on God's viewpoint, which should always be our viewpoint, Christianity Today published an interesting and insightful article on June 26, 2012, stating this:

"Patriotism can be defined simply as love of country... Nationalism... expands it to mean love of country at the expense of other nations. It's when someone believes they are better because they come from a particular place, or that someone else is less valuable..."

"There's a reason Paul writes repeatedly about the need for the Jews to recognize the full participation of Gentiles in the kingdom of God. The Jews' national and religious identity made it difficult for them to understand how a Greek, Ethiopian, or slave from Asia Minor could be just as much a part of God's [Church]. But Paul's famous assertion that there is 'neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus' [Galatians 3:28] demonstrates that nationalism must never be part of the... kingdom of God..."

"In the midst of the pomp and glory of the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem, Jesus begins to weep... because he knew the impending destruction of Jerusalem... Jesus... loved his people, his city, his nation—so much so that he cried over it..."

"Jesus' example of patriotism [reflects] a love for nation that doesn't pit it against other nations."

Instead, it's a recognition of love followed by a mournful recognition of shortcomings... we mourn the times when our nation does something wrong... G. K. Chesterton sums up this stance perfectly in *The Defendant*: 'My country, right or wrong,' is a thing that no patriot would think of saying...

"Perhaps the most important distinction to be made by Christians is that our first love must be the kingdom of God, over and above any love of country..."

"It's easy for Christians to begin to worship their country as an idol. In *The Four Loves*, C. S. Lewis puts the matter quite succinctly. He notes that love of country 'becomes a demon when it becomes a god'... It wouldn't take long for any of us to think of examples of when Christians have placed love of country above love of God—and what disastrous consequences this has had.

"Therefore, the Christian's primary allegiance is to God and to his church—which sometimes means the Christian patriot must disagree with [his or] her country and do things which might be counterintuitive to 'civic duty.' It might mean engaging in civil disobedience over issues like abortion or torture... Jesus... died for people of all nations... Christians [pledge] their allegiance to God and to one another over and above any allegiance to country..."

All of these quotes, and we could give you many more, should show us that it is not wrong to love our country and our people. However, loving our country must NOT be at the expense of others. This means, rightly-perceived patriotism is not wrong, while nationalism always is. But rightly-perceived patriotism will never justify evil and sinful conduct of our country, its leaders and its people.

Rather, a true "patriot" will sigh and cry over the abominations committed in and by his country (Ezekiel 9:4-6). He understands that God's Church has been given the commission to cry aloud, spare not, and lift up its voice like a trumpet to tell the physical and spiritual people of God (including the political and religious leadership) their sins and transgressions (Isaiah 58:1).

The true "patriot" understands that he is a pilgrim, sojourner and stranger in the land (1 Peter 2:11; Hebrews 11:13-16), waiting for the establishment of God's Kingdom here on earth; that he is a representative and ambassador of that Kingdom (2 Corinthians 5:20; Ephesians 6:19-20); and that his true citizenship is reserved in heaven (Philippians 3:20).

Therefore, he will not participate in the political maneuverings and inappropriate "civic duties" of his country, such as voting in governmental elections, participation in jury duty or joining the military. A true "patriot" will not fight in his country's wars, as his first and foremost allegiance is to God, who prohibits him to take up the sword for the purpose of fighting against others (Matthew 26:52). A true patriot will not participate in his country's glorifications of war or of those who fought and died in war, no matter what the cause. A true patriot's love for his country will never allow him to have feelings of ill will towards others of another race or of a different ethnic or cultural background.

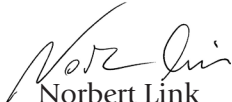
The Jews during Christ's First Coming had a difficult time accepting that they were not better than, nor superior to others (but compare Philippians 2:3). They were willing to kill Christ when He praised the faith of a Gentile widow (Luke 4:25-30), as they later persecuted Paul because he preached to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46-50). Paul loved his countrymen very much (Romans 9:1-5), but not at the expense of others, and his love for his people did not motivate him to love others less or disobey God who had ordered him to preach to the Gentiles. On the other hand, Jonah was unwilling at first to obey God to warn the people of Nineveh because his nationalistic feelings were directed against the Assyrians—the enemies of his people, Israel.

We must understand that God created every human being, and that He loves everybody (even though He most certainly does not love sinful conduct of anybody). God is NOT a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). He desires everyone to be saved and to come to the understanding of the Truth (1 Timothy 2:4). In God's Church, there is no place for nationalism or falsely-understood patriotism.

In addressing His people who were plagued with a wrong kind of "love" for their country, God leaves us with a powerful admonition in Amos 9:7: "'Are you not like the people of Ethiopia to Me, O children of Israel?' says the LORD. 'Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt, The Philistines from Capthor, And the Syrians from Kir?'"

As God freed Israel from slavery, so He did the same for the Philistines and the Syrians. Let us understand this fully, and let us think and act as God's people without any false concepts of nationalism or misguided patriotism, and without any hatred towards others.

Your brother in Christ,

  
Norbert Link