Session 02.03 - Nationalism

Lab: Society and Nation - NATIONALISM
Date: 8/10/26
Facilitator: Jim Memory
Note-taker: Jim Memory
Approximate number of participants: 25

1. Key insights

The presentation was very much focussed on nationalism as seen from the experience of Ukrainians, a people living through the reality of war. Almost half the attendees were Ukrainians so what follows is not generalisable to the challenge of nationalism in broader European experience.

Q1 How is it possible for the church to remain faithful to Christ when nationalistic or imperialistic ideologies demand loyalties which are in conflict with the Gospel?

This is an existential issue for Ukrainians. It is about protecting lives not just a matter of opinions. The answer to this question will be different for Ukrainians and Russians. There is significant challenge and tension in answering these questions.

Q2 How can the church carry out its prophetic function (that is, to speak the truth, to protect the vulnerable, and to seek justice) and at the same time promote peace during times of war or in the event of a national crisis?

Truth: what truth? Truth can be spoken or it can be practiced. Yet if I speak out, there will be consequences. Should we only speak about Jesus and the Kingdom or must we go further?

Q3 What does it mean for Christians to remain in vulnerable proximity to those who are suffering and address their needs, rather than maintaining a safe distance, when serving a nation in crisis?

It is difficult to be focussed all the time when you are surrounded by so many people who are traumatised and suffering. There is a weariness associated with being in proximity to suffering, particularly as it is simply impossible to help everyone. We need encouragement and help from the outside.

Presence is a powerful thing. It speaks more than words, demonstrating in action that those that suffer are not alone. Everything within us wants to run away from suffering so staying can be a radical act. It is a challenge to our selfishness.

Disability creates loneliness. We need to remember that in most things, disabled people are the same as everyone else.

Q4 How can we develop a kind of memory that opposes oppression and recognises the victims of injustice and aggression without letting resentment turn into destructive hatred?

There is a war of narratives. Propaganda distorts history and memory. The winners write the history. Speaking truth will be critical. In this war, the images and memories will be there forever. Reconciliation is very difficult when there is no trusted partner on the Russian side; no one to engage with and say things to. Healing will be a huge challenge. There are hopeful examples (Rwanda/South Africa) but we need to find a way to live in the same country.

2. Examples, projects and useful resources

- Paynter, Helen (2023), *Blessed Are the Peacemakers: A Biblical Theology of Human Violence*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic