



# National Political Differences as a Cause of Debate Between the Pharisees and Jesus

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## ABSTRACT

The prevailing view of the frequent debates between Jesus and the Pharisees was based on Jesus' criticism of their hypocrisy and formalism. However, if we look further, the debate was also caused by the contrasts between the national political vision of Jesus and the Pharisees regarding Israel's National Identity. This research explores that the debate between Jesus and the Pharisees is also caused by the differences between the national vision of Jesus and the Pharisees regarding the national identity of Israel in the 1st Century. This research used hermeneutical methods and library research with nation-state theory. This research proved that the sharp contradictions in the national political visions of the Pharisees and Jesus regarding Israel's national identity were also the cause of their frequent debates. The national political vision of the Pharisees was based on "*Imitatio Sanctitatis Dei*," which was interpreted as separation, so it was exclusive. Meanwhile, Jesus' national politics was based on "*Imitatio Misericordiae Dei*," which was inclusive. Therefore, it can be concluded that the debate between Jesus and the Pharisees was not only caused by Jesus' criticism of the formalism, narcissism, and hypocrisy of the Pharisees but also caused by their national political contradictions regarding Israel's national identity.

Keywords: National Vision; Israel; National Identity, *Imitatio Sanctitatis Dei*, *Imitatio Misericordiae Dei*

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## INTRODUCTION

The political nature of the New Testament was, for centuries, hidden in the history of the Christianization and spiritualization of the New Testament. Interpretation models that emphasize the spiritual meaning obscure and even eliminate the socio-political nature of the New Testament (Punt, 2017; Reardon, 2022). According to Lo (2019), such an exposition underestimates the political aspect of Jesus' teaching and ministry and, in doing so, disregards the character of politics in these hermeneutical models. These models focus on Jesus, a spiritual savior who only cares about everlasting and spiritual circumstances. It is, of course, a distortion of the Jesus of the New Testament, who declared the "Kingdom of God" has come (e.g., Mark 1:15) and died on a Roman cross bearing the wording "King of the Jews" (e.g., Mark 15:16). Numerous titles of Christ in the New Testament convey political nuance: Messiah, the Son of God, and the Son of David, for example. The New Testament texts were considerably influenced by the social and political events that surrounded the life of 1st-century Israel. In the era of Jesus' life, there were three primary sects: the Sadducees, the Pharisees, and the Essenes. Although they were a minority group, they had significant authority over the people of Israel. In the time of Herod the Great, there were approximately six thousand Pharisees. This sect is like a Christian religious group and a political party in the modern age. In the past, Judaism had no separation between religion and politics (*The Political and Religious Structure in Jesus' Time*, 2010). The present author tries to highlight New Testament teaching based on its social and political context, especially the contrast between the Pharisees' and Jesus' national political visions regarding Israel's national identity, which is also one of the causes of their debates, as narrated in the Gospel.

The prevailing understanding of Jesus' criticism of the Pharisees is based on religious narcissism (Kantohe, 2020), legalism, ritualism, and the hypocrisy of the Pharisees (Adon & Riyadi, 2021, p. 107; Hutabarat, 2022). The Pharisees are frequently narrated in the Gospels as sanctimonious, prioritizing external things over the substance of religion's teaching, "they teach, but they do not practice what they teach" (*The Political and Religious Structure in Jesus' Time*, 2010). Therefore, in Matthew 5:20, Jesus said: "Unless your religious life is more righteous than the religious life of Scribes and Pharisees, you will not go into heaven." The Pharisees may put themselves up as a model of righteousness, but they are fake." In Matthew 23, Jesus accuses the Pharisees of being pretenders to piety. This statement by Jesus is part of the Sermon on the Mount delivered to his disciples. Amos (2015) states there are two possible explanations: The first takes the proverb so verbatim that it can be rephrased: The scribes and the Pharisees are excellent examples of righteousness, but you must do better than they." Others understand it differently: "The scribes and Pharisees may set themselves up as examples of righteousness, but they are deceivers; Jesus' disciples, on the other hand, must show sincerity. In addition, their emphasis on oral tradition also continued to generate debates between the Pharisees and Jesus. Jesus attempted to reveal the Pharisees' moral wrongs by challenging their warped view of holiness and purity (Furstenberg, 2020). Esler claims that the debate between Jesus and Pharisees has to do with ethnic identity, which is typically defined by (a) having the same proper name, (b) having stories about shared ancestors, (c) having a shared history and collective memory, (d) having the same culture, which consists of things like traditions, language, and religion; (e) having a connection to one's native country; and (f) feeling a sense of unity. The Pharisees aimed to preserve their

ethnic identity in its purest form. However, the Jesus movement was not ethnic, particularly (but not just) because it comprised groups of Jews and non-Jews eating supper together (Esler, 2015). Meanwhile, Liebowitz (2017, p. 53) states that an anti-Pharisee prejudice exists not only in the New Testament but also in Jewish history. It describes the competition among various religious and political ideologies groups to get supremacy. Burchard (2020, p. 21) states, in the Pharisee's view, that Jesus was a false prophet who should be put to death. However, this author argues that if explored more broadly based on the socio-political background, this debate was also caused by differences in the national political visions of Jesus and the Pharisees regarding Israel's national identity. The national political vision of the Pharisees was based on "Imitatio Sanctitatis Dei," which is interpreted as separation from everything that defiles or threatens the purity of Israel. In contrast, Jesus' national political vision was based on "*Imitatio Misericordiae Dei.*"

Different from the prior research that interpreted the debate between Jesus and the Pharisees as mainly caused by the narcissism, legalism, ritualism, and hypocrisy of the Pharisees. This research explores the leading cause of the debate between Jesus and the Pharisees: the differences in their national political vision regarding Israel's national identity. Based on the nation-state theory, the research will explore the facts that the debate between Jesus and the Pharisees was mainly caused by the contrast between the national political vision of Jesus and the Pharisees regarding the national identity of Israel. Furthermore, the author hopes that the results of this research can help Christians, as part of the citizens of a nation, to develop inclusive nationalism in line with Jesus' national vision which prioritizes human values and equality rather than developing exclusive nationalism.

## **METHOD**

This research uses hermeneutical methods and library research with nation-state theory. The stages in this research include: First, Carrying out a hermeneutical study of texts. Hermeneutics is a methodology of interpretation, mainly understanding Holy Bible texts, wisdom writings, and philosophical texts. Hermeneutics (Greek) means 'articulating, describing, and interpreting, a method of exploring used by biblical scholars to discuss how divine commandments can be understood by mankind. Hermeneutics has a role in several sciences that require interpretive comprehension that explores the correlation between two contexts: the context of the text on the one hand and the interpreter who wishes to acknowledge it on the other. Namely interpretive studies (Vidhya, 2022); Second, Conducting library research related to the focus of the study. Library research collects facts by reading and comprehending references related to research. Data collection was carried out by reconstructing and analyzing various references from previous research to support the focus of the research (Adlini et al., 2022). Third, Examine the results of hermeneutical studies and literature reviews from the perspective of nation-state theory. The steps that will be taken in hermeneutic research are searching for and exploring Bible texts related to the national political views of Jesus and the Pharisees regarding Israel's national identity. Meanwhile, Data collection was carried out by reconstructing and analysing various references from previous research to support the focus of the research. Library material about the debate between Jesus and the Pharisees from various references is inspected based on the social and political background. These two research results are then examined from the

perspective of nation-state theory. From the standpoint of nation-state theory, it is discovered that there is a sharp difference between the national political vision of Jesus and the Pharisees regarding Israel's national identity. This sharp difference in their national politics is one of the most fundamental sources of fierce debate.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Nation-State Theory**

In general, the view of a nation is divided into two views, namely the perennial group, which understands a nation as a cultural community. The second view sees it as a political community (Arslanera, 2022; Heywood, 2019; A. D. Smith, 2003).

A nation is a human community, generally a unit of government that is believed by those within it to be a natural community. View of the natural communities is often based on ideas or myths about shared biological descent, history, and culture, including shared customs and language (Reynolds, 2015, p. 79; Herder & Barnard, 1969, p. 38; Thapa, 2020, p. 1). Culture is the basis of society's life, so it has an essential function in forming a collective identity, including a nation (Dieckhoff & Schoch, 2017). A nation has folklore, mythology, and songs expressing its *Volkgeist*, historical, cultural, and linguistic legacy (Smith, 1979). It is in line with the view of Grosby (2005), who emphasized that a nation is related to ethnicity, culture, religion, and specific territories from the history of its predecessors. As Heywood (2019, p. 247) referenced, Friedrich Meinecke concludes that a nation as a cultural community is based on ethnic and cultural homogeneity, shaped by natural and historical forces. Civic membership is based on inherited ethnic and religious identity rather than political consensus. This national identity is robust, stable, and cohesive. However, its homogeneity makes it exclusive.

The second view is that a nation is a community of politics emphasizing political consensus rather than cultural, ethnic, and religious identity. A nation is a group of individuals united mainly by the same citizenship who prioritizes civic loyalty and political allegiance over ethnic and cultural identity. Thus, regardless of cultural, ethnic, or other affinities, a nation is bound together primarily by common citizenship and political consensus (Paruch, 2019, p. 110; Heywood, 2019, p. 248)). The nation was the outcome of the free alliance of citizens; it was a logical and voluntary political building. This contractual, facultative, civic nation is the French model of national identity, conceptualized by Enlightenment philosophers and achieved by the Great Revolution (Dieckhoff & Schoch, 2017). According to Anderson (Anderson, 1983), a country is an imagined community; citizens may never experience direct interaction with one another, but in their imagination, they are part of that nation.

### **National Identity of the Nation**

A powerful national identity is essential for the viability of a state. The weakness of a country's identity is prone to division and civil conflict (Arief, Prakoso, & Risman, 2021, p. 1). A nation's national identity becomes significant through differentiation from the "Other" (Triandafyllidou, 1998). Every identity, including national identity, emerges as a response to "the Other." The group categorized as "the Other" often poses the greatest threat to the nation's

existence. The concept of “the Other” is closely related to nationalism. For example, the features distinguishing Ireland from England have been timelessly defined. The Gaelic language and Catholicism are critical to Ireland because they set it apart from England. Shia Islam helps distinguish Iran from its Sunni neighbors. This relates to the importance of the geopolitical power of a nation compared to other countries (In locations where state existence is threatened by the “religious other,” religion has historically been linked to nationalism). Religion has been a critical political weapon for nationalist movements (Grosby, 2005). As Fukuyama pointed out, national identities based on ethnicity and religion have tremendous power and can last longer. However, it can result in various policies that discriminate against groups of different religions (Fukuyama, 2018; Supratikno, 2024). It is in line with Barker’s viewpoint, who asserted that when a particular religion becomes part of the definition of the state, it has the potential to create policies that discriminate against different religious groups (Barker, 2022). However, geopolitical power is not only related to the identity that differentiates one nation from other nations but is also related to economic power, politics, and monetary policy (Suhartono, et al., 2023, p. 122).

### **Israel’s Socio-Political Background in the First Century**

For Jews, the Torah is the divinely revealed constitution of Israel, consisting not only of ritual law but also civil, criminal, and international law. Roman hegemony introduced a second legal system, which often led to conflict. According to the Torah, Israel was to be a theocracy ruled by God through God’s anointed figure (either a King or a high priest). No foreigner was to rule over Israel. Furthermore, since the land itself was considered holy, the provisions of the oral Torah prohibited non-Jewish religious practices and even land ownership by non-Jews. Of course, under Roman occupation, the Jews could not enforce their laws. Jewish farmers bore the burden of double taxation, Torah-mandated rules, and Roman taxes. For the small landowner, the burden was tremendous: the double tax system demanded 35% to 40% of one’s crops, perhaps even more. As a result, there was a social collapse, increased homelessness, wage labor, poverty, and crime (Borg, 1998).

### ***Jewish Nationalism Movement in the First Century***

The Roman occupation impacted Jewish religious, social, political, and economic life. The rise of Israelite resistance to Roman occupation was inevitable and involved all segments of the population, crossing geography, sectarian allegiances, and social classes. The dynamics of Jewish resistance to Roman domination continued throughout the reign of the Roman Empire, as explained in the next section.

Herod desecrated the Temple during his reign by installing a Roman golden eagle over the gate. It caused two Pharisaic scholars and forty of his disciples to be angered and destroy the eagle in 4 BC, for which they were put to death (Josephus, 1895). After Herod’s death, many Jews petitioned Herod’s son, Archelaus, to appoint a new high priest. That led to an armed conflict in which the revolutionaries (Josephus’ term) killed part of the group, and Archelaus responded by massacring 3,000 of them in the Temple. Frightened by the desecration of the Temple, the people rallied in more significant numbers and asserted themselves to wage war for national independence. The quest for autonomy spread beyond Jerusalem. In Galilee, Judas, the son of the

“robber leader Ezekias,” seized and occupied the prominent town of Sepphoris. In Perea, an enslaved person named Simon crowned himself king and amassed a large military force. In the center of Judea, Athronges gathered an army that attacked the Romans. Indeed, “all of Judea [was] one guerrilla battlefield.” The presence of the Roman legionary general Varus was the only thing that stopped the revolution. Varus captured and burned Sepphoris, and immediately after the terrified rebels fled Jerusalem, he finished the job by crucifying two thousand Jews near the holy city (Borg, 1998; Knohl, 2022).

Soon after Pilate was named governor, a detachment of his troops marched into Jerusalem, carrying the emperor’s statues, and deposited them in the Antonia stronghold near the Temple. That broke Torah prohibitions while also defiling the Temple. People of Jerusalem and the surrounding villages protested to Pilate in Caesarea. Pilate relented after learning that they were prepared to die. The large number of devoted Jews, almost definitely including the Pharisees, who appeared to be present here was noteworthy (Josephus, 1895).

In 40 AD, Emperor Caligula planned to construct a statue of himself in the holy location, which sparked outrage. Almost all Jews, including the nobility, proceeded to Ptolemais and Tiberias to petition Petronius, the Roman official entrusted to Caligula’s mission. They appeared to be willing to go to war rather than allow the Temple to be desecrated. The divide between most Jews devoted to non-violence and those committed to violent resistance vanished. Instead, the Jewish people were willing to go to war if necessary to protect their refuge (Borg, 1998). All these Jewish resistance movements culminated in the Jewish-Roman Wars of 66-74 CE (Jordán, 2020, p. 2; Mason, 2015).

These sketches demonstrate the cross-sectional and cross-geographic nature of the 1st-century Jewish nationalist movement. Galilean militants were not the only ones who resisted Rome, for the center of resistance was in Jerusalem, the center of Jewish religious and intellectual life. Therefore, the analysis that stated the Sadducees as collaborators, the Pharisees as pacifists, and the Zealots as Galilean revolutionary militants must be reconsidered.

The Torah and the Temple, Judaism’s two most fundamental institutions, were the basic twin themes of resistance. The Temple was not only a key source of Jewish opposition to Rome during the battle but also a cause of disagreement among the Jews themselves. Each side saw the preservation of the Temple’s sanctity as the primary reason for the civil war. Each side saw preserving the Temple’s holiness as the primary reason for the civil war against the other (Mor et al., 2011).

### **The Pharisees’ Nationality Vision of Israel’s National Identity: *Imitatio Sanctitatis Dei***

According to Borg, the desire of Jewish tradition to shape the life of a community within history so that it displayed fidelity to Yahweh is commonly articulated as *imitatio Dei*. The Israelites’ lives had to imitate God’s nature and actions. Throughout the Maccabean and NT periods, *imitatio Sanctitatis Dei* became the dominant culture in Jewish society, especially among Pharisees (Borg, 1998). The Pharisees’ national political vision of Israel’s national identity was based on *imitatio sanctitatis Dei*, imitating God’s holiness, which was interpreted as separation from everything that threatened the holiness and purity of the Jewish people. Pharisees tried to fight for the sanctity of the two primary Jewish institutions: the Torah and the Temple. They intensified their

search for holiness, thereby demanding separation in society. Their connection to holiness is clear. The name of Pharisee was most likely derived from the Hebrew word *parush* or Aramaic word *perishaya*, which means “separate,” and is equivalent to *qadosh*, which means “holy.” The name shows the difference from the ordinary community in obedience and faithfulness in maintaining the Torah’s commandments and purity (Knohl, 2022; Kim, 2017, p. 2). Many academics argue that the Pharisees were a development of the Hasideans, faithful adherents of the Torah who were part of the Maccabean rebellion: “Then they became part of the Hasideans, the brave men of Israel, all of whom were pious adherents of the Torah” (1 Maccabees 2:42). The Hebrew word Hasidean means “pious.” The Pharisaic movement later became the rabbinic group of Judaism. The foundation of Judaism teachings is the Mishnah and Talmud (Liebowitz, 2017; The Living in Christ Series, 2010). Pharisees were to be found in all places in the Land of Israel, and they greatly influenced Jewish society (Knohl, 2022; Magda, 2019, p. 228; Gonzalez, 2016, p. 3).

The national political vision of Pharisees regarding Israel’s national identity was founded on *Imitatio Sanctitatis Dei* (*imitating God’s Holiness*), which they interpreted as a detachment from everything threatening Israel’s purity. According to the Pharisees, Israel would be “a Royal Priesthood and Holy Nation.” As a result, it had to retain its purity by keeping itself separate from anything threatening the ethnic purity of the people of the Jew (Neusner, 1975). All social groups that are considered to contaminate the purity and holiness of Israel’s national identity are negated from the community’s social life. Several groups considered unclean were non-Jews, Samaritans, Lepers, and Tax Collectors.

### **Jesus’ Vision of Israel’s National Identity: *Imitatio Misericordiae Dei***

The essence of Jesus’ ethics is to resemble God: “God is your Father, be his child.” Living as a child of God entails “treating your neighbor as God treats you.” Just as the pursuit of holiness is founded on *Imitatio Dei*, so is Jesus’ ethics. Furthermore, just as the Pharisees’ *Imitatio Sanctitatis Dei* was intended to be a national identity for Israel, it is logical to believe that Jesus’ alternative *Imitatio Misericordiae Dei* was designed to be a national identity for Israel. Matthew 18:23-35 supports this assumption:

Matthew 18:23-30 tells Jesus’ parable about a king who settled accounts with his servant who owed him 10,000 talents. But because the man was unable to reimburse the bill, the king commanded that he be sold, his wife and children and everything he owned to pay his bill. The servant prostrated and asked the king for patience to give him time, and he promised to pay off his debt. The king was moved with compassion and paid off his debt. One day, the servant met a fellow servant who owed him one hundred dinars. He strangled his friend to pay his debt, and his friend prostrated himself, begging for time and promised to pay off his debt. However, he refused and imprisoned his friend until the debt was paid off. The other friends were sad and conveyed this to the king. The king was furious and ordered the servant to be arrested and tortured until he was paid the debt.

The parable concludes with the statement: “So My Father in heaven will do the same to you if each of you does not forgive your brother with all your heart.” Matthew places this story about church activities. The parable is addressed to the disciples to demonstrate the need for forgiveness. They will suffer the same destiny as the unmerciful servant “if you do not forgive your brother.” Furthermore, it was a Jewish tradition that God protected the nation of Israel. This narrative demonstrates that taking God’s mercy leads to implementing of God’s mercy to others. Jesus’

alternative vision of Israel's national identity, based on the *Imitatio of Mercy* rather than the *Imitatio Dei of Holiness*, as reported in Luke 6:27-36 and Matthew 5:38-48, has historically solid implications for Israel. This teaching of Jesus recalls and modifies that in Leviticus 19:

But to you who hear me now, I give this message: love your foe and do virtue to those who loathe you. Ask good favors for those who maledict you, and pray for those who are evil against you. If someone slaps your one cheek, let him slap the other cheek. If your cloak is taken from you, give him your coat also. If any man asks you for anything, give it to him; if he takes anything from you, do not ask for it back. Treat others as you would have them treat you. If you love only those who love you, what is your kindness? Even sinners love those who love them! And if you do good to them who do good to you, what is your kindness? Even wrongdoers carry out so! And if you loan money only to them, who can pay it back? What is your kindness? Even sinners lend to sinners and ask for it back. That's not how it should be! Instead, you should love your foe and do virtue to them. You should take out a loan and not hope to get anything back. Then your compensation will be considerable, and you will be sons of the highest God because God is pleasing to the ungracious and wrongful. Be merciful as your Father is merciful (Luke 6:27-36).

According to Borg, both the terminology and the content indicate the status of this passage as an alternative to the quest for holiness. The closing words of the text closely parallel the Law of Holiness in Leviticus 19:2: "You must be holy because I am holy" becomes "Be merciful as God is merciful (*Greek: οἰκτιρῶν*)."

The text echoes Leviticus 19:2. Thus, the replacement of holiness with compassion as the content of *Imitatio Dei* is intentional. While the scribal tradition speaks of holiness as the national identity of Israel, Jesus speaks of "compassion." His relationships with marginalized persons were one of compassion (McClure, 2016, p. 2). That indicates that the dominant vision has shifted. Matthew 5:45 clarifies what God's compassion means: "God makes the sun rise on the wicked and the good, and sends rain on the pious and the disobedient." The idea is the same: God's compassion embraces the good and the bad, the righteous and the unjust. Although compassion as a God-given quality is emphasized throughout the Hebrew Bible, Christians and Jews often limit the radical inclusiveness of compassion to those who are part of the covenant. However, this scripture demonstrates that God's compassion is not only to those who are part of the covenant but also to all people.

Similarly, the extended text's specific application demonstrates the inclusion of compassion as a quality that Israel should practice. The Lord said, "You have heard it was said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your foe," but I say, "You shall love your foe." What did this entail for the Israelites in the first Century? It had clear political implications: the non-Jewish foe was primarily Rome. "Love your enemies" means "love the Romans," and it means shunning the path of violence as an option for resistance. The emphasis on inclusive compassion pushes over the limitations established by pursuing holiness as separation. Jesus' teaching points to various attributes of God that should be emulated.

### ***Imitatio Misericordiae Dei: Embracing and Restoring***

#### ***Jesus and the Table of Fellowship***

Jesus' view on holiness practices is a vigorous debate. Several scholars contend that Jesus contra purity halakhah in several courses of action. One piece of evidence that holds up that Jesus



ignored the holiness rule is that he meal with “tax collectors and sinners.” (Wassen, 2016, p. 137). Sitting at a table with others was a sign of closeness and fellowship. In first-century Judaism, inviting someone to dine meant honoring them and expressing trust and acceptance. On the other hand, refusing to share a meal represented disapproval and rejection. According to Marshall (Marshall, 1946), Havurah or Pharisaic fellowship has two practical limits. First, one cannot be a guest of an untrustworthy individual regarding tithing or preparations. Second, one should not sit at a table with people who could contaminate the food.

Unlike the Pharisees, who carefully enforced the holiness of the table of fellowship, Jesus ate with “tax collectors and sinners.” That prompted his opponents to attack him. Not only did Jesus embrace the primary function of the table of fellowship, but he also exploited it as a weapon. David Daube described it as a revolutionary act, a protest, and a silencing of opponents (Borg, 1998). Jesus dined at the same meal as sinners, a sign that God's reign had come. It demonstrates that He rejected the Pharisees' interpretation of Israel's *Imitatio Sanctitatis Dei* as separation, both as a current practice and an eventual aim. Jesus' action was viewed as a severe challenge to the internal reform movement of the Pharisees to make Israel a holy community. It can be deduced from the claim that he ate with sinners and tax collectors.

What sets tax collectors apart from the sinners, making their participation at Jesus' lunch so meaningful and explicitly mentioned? The distinction is in their interactions with Gentiles. Daily trade with non-Jewish residents and merchants exposed tax collectors to substantial contamination. Furthermore, they were viewed as collaborators, and the revenue they collected went into the Roman provincial administration's coffers. Tax collectors' involvement jeopardized Israel's ideal of holiness, which needed separation from impurities and Gentile control. In addition, as appears to be the case of Zacchaeus, the tax-pickers were widely considered corrupt, greedy, and sinners. They are considered, not only by Pharisees but also by many other Jews, as a group that has morals comparable to lepers (Amos, 2015).

### ***Jesus Healed on the Sabbath***

The narrative about the healing that Jesus performed on the Sabbath and how the Pharisees responded must take into account the diversity of thought among the Pharisees who lived at the time of Jesus. The two main groups among the Pharisees were the Hillelites and the Shammaites. However, there are varying views among these groups regarding the Sabbath. Historically, the Hillelites permitted prayer on the Sabbath, but the Shammaites did not. The Pharisees who were probably dominant in Jesus' time were the Shammas (Williams, 2022, pp. 1–3). Collins explains healing on the Sabbath as based on the rabbinic concern for saving life (*piquah nephesh*). In the Macabaan view, it was lawful for Jews to defend themselves on the Sabbath and within limited limits for the salvation of humanity on the Sabbath. This is proven by the Damascus Document and decisions collected in 4Q265 (Collins, 2016, p. 442).

The three Synoptic Gospels contain the debate concerning the Sabbath between Jesus and his opponents, especially the Pharisees. According to Marcan's account, the ailing man was expected to wait until the Sabbath ended: “At sunset (i.e., when the Sabbath had ended), they brought to him all who were sick...” (Mark 1:32-34). This remarkably regular pattern conducted the closure that healing on the Sabbath Jesus Sabbath, like the table of fellowship, were planned

revolutionary gestures - to teach or show the meaning of the Sabbath. The Sabbath debate is yet another instance of the conflict between holiness and compassion, and both Jesus' opposition and acts indicate an awareness of Palestine's politico-religious condition in the first Century. The stories about non-Marcian Sabbath conflicts all follow a similar pattern. Taking the initiative, Jesus healed someone before his opponents and legitimized his action with a rhetorical question that referred to typical human behavior. Luke wrote: "The Lord then answered them and said, O hypocrites, does not every one of you untie his ox or donkey on the Sabbath day from its stall and lead it to a drinking place? Shouldn't the woman who had been bound by Satan for eighteen years be released from her bonds because she is a descendant of Abraham?" (Luke 13:15-16)

On both occasions, the opponents remained silent rather than responding. A human being is far more worthy than a sheep! On the Sabbath, Jesus encouraged them to ponder what they would naturally do if they encountered an animal in need (thirst) or suffering (falling into a pit). Surprisingly, Jesus' reasoning is not *halakhic* or based on legal inference. There is most likely no legal judgment in the dominant view of Judaism. Without a legal conclusion, compassion would naturally guide the decision. Compassion, the movement within man amidst the suffering of other creatures, will result in actions to meet the needs of these animals. Compassion in the face of human suffering thus becomes an implicit condition for sabbath exemption. The compassion movement takes precedence above the demands of holiness.

### ***The Temple as a "House of Prayer for All Nations"***

There are numerous teachings and ministering of Jesus in the Temple. One of the most renowned occurrences is the ejection of the merchants from the Temple, written in Mark 11:15a-17 and John 2:13-19. "Jesus entered the Temple, started to excursions those who were selling in the Temple, and overthrew benches of the cash changers as well as the chairs of the seller of doves. Furthermore, He would not permit anyone to bring anything past the Temple. He said, Is it not written, My house shall be named the house of prayer for all nations? However, you made it a lair of burglars" (Mark 11:15-17).

Why were the merchants expelled? The key lies in recognizing the reason for their presence in the Temple in the first Century: to protect the Temple's holiness. They did this by exchanging profane coins for "holy" coins and providing doves guaranteed free from impurities. They clearly distinguished between holy and profane, a holy nation and a profane nation. Their service activity epitomized the paradigm of seeking holiness understood as separation, the root source of resistance to Rome.

Their behavior was based on an ideology they believed: as long as Israel was faithful to holiness, the resistance to maintaining the Holiness of the Temple would be successful. Yahweh would protect the divine dwelling place from harm. The unshakeability of the Temple is closely linked to the belief that it is where Yahweh, the heavenly glory, dwells. It has the consequence that Zion is impregnable, for it is there that God has promised to dwell forever. This ideology became the basis for Israel, making the Temple the center/fortress of Israel's resistance. Isaac examines the ideological and cultural role of Jewish temple imagery in Hebrew literature of 1848–1948. Emerging evidence suggests that in the Jewish faith for nearly 2,000 years, the role of the

temple underwent no dramatic transformation; as a whole, it remains a sign of Israel's history, religion, and nationalism (Hershkowitz, 2023, p. 1101).

Jesus' casting them out emphasized the need for a new notion of holiness. The Temple had become a "den of iniquity" due to the quest for a holy nation. The merchants were cast out because "My house will be known as a house of prayer for all nations" rather than a focus of resistance against the nations. The Holy Temple will be known as a place of prayer for people from all around the world. The Jews, on the other hand, have transformed it into a scumbag's den. This statement by Jesus defines the Temple's role: Yahweh's house will be "a house of prayer for all nations." The line paraphrases Isaiah 56:7; instead of being the source of Israel's national resistance, Jerusalem and the Temple are intended to be a city on a hill whose light will reach the nations. My House is a house of prayer for all nations, containing the message of acceptance of all people as they are (Porton, 2020, p. 261). There is no domination, no hierarchy, and all are welcome to learn from each other and celebrate together (Subowo, 2021, p. 290). Since the Old Testament, the Bible has very seriously emphasized being fair to fellow Israelites and strangers (Nainggolan, 2020).

### ***Holiness as Transformative Power***

'The concept of 'Holiness' is often interpreted as being set apart for God or being 'separated' from man's 'sinful nature.' It is this 'distinction' that leads to hierarchical moral exclusivism (Giles, 2020; Stay et al., 2019, p. 1). The Pharisees' view of Israel's national identity was based on imitating God's holiness, which is defined as separation. Therefore, the Pharisees viewed Israel as a nation consecrated (set apart) for God (Borg, 1998). Meanwhile, in Jesus' teaching, holiness is not considered something that separates. Holiness is understood as a transforming power. It is implied in the metaphor of the physician in Mark 2:17, which is placed in the context of the table of fellowship. "The physician is not defeated by the sick but rather defeats the sickness." In the leper's healing, Jesus "stretched out his hand, touched him, and said: 'You leper, be clean!'" (Mark 1:40-45).

Leprosy makes a person unclean, and everything a leper touches becomes unclean. Therefore, Leprosy excludes a person from the community. For Jesus, touching a leper meant engaging with uncleanness, just like touching a dead body. However, the text's narrative reverses this: Jesus does not get unclean by holding the leper. Instead, the leper becomes pure. Holiness, far from requiring protection from impurity, is instead an active dynamic force that overcomes impurity. The perspective of the Jesus movement in Palestine is clear: holiness is acknowledged as something that overcomes impurity, a power that transforms impurity into cleanliness.

### **Discussion**

From the perspective of nation-state theory, it can be seen that the debate between Jesus and the Pharisees was not only based on Jesus' criticism of their hypocrisy, formalism, and narcissism but also due to the sharp differences between the national political vision of Jesus and the Pharisees about Israel's national identity. The Pharisees' political vision of Israel's national identity is based on *Imitatio Sanctitatis Dei*, interpreted as separation, emphasizing ethnic and religious purity (exclusive). All social groups that potentially contaminate the purity and holiness

of Israel's national identity were marginalized by Pharisees from the community's social life. Several groups considered unclean were non-Jews, Samaritans, Lepers, and Tax Collectors. Based on nation-state theory, the Pharisees understood the nation of Israel as a cultural community based on ethnic and religious homogeneity shaped by natural and historical forces. These national identities are robust, stable, and cohesive. However, their homogeneity makes them exclusive. This national identity prioritizes loyalty to ethnicity and religion. It gives rise to discrimination against different ethnic and religious groups that are considered to threaten the purity of their national identity.

The Pharisees' national political vision was based on *Imitatio Sanctitatis Dei*, emphasizing ethnicity and religious purity; it is based on exclusive religious particularistic values, on the one hand resulting in a robust national identity. However, it also resulted in intracultural segregation in the life of Israel and causing discrimination against other ethnicities and religions. It fits with the nation-state theory that nationalism based on ethnicity and religious purity has the potential to give rise to racism, xenophobia (Heywood, 2013), and discrimination against those considered 'the others' (Fukuyama, 2018). The exclusive texts in holy books often cause the emergence of acts of violence against others (Istiqomah, 2022, p. 143). The group categorized as "the Other" usually poses the greatest threat to the purity of the nation's existence.

Jesus' national vision regarding Israel's national identity is based on *Imitatio Misericordiae Dei*, which means imitating God's compassion. God's compassion embraces the good and the bad, the righteous and the unjust. Jesus embraced those marginalized by the Pharisees, such as Gentiles, Samaritans, Lepers, and Tax Collectors. Although compassion as a God-given quality is emphasized throughout the Bible, Christian, and Jews often limit the radical inclusiveness of compassion to those who are part of the covenant. However, this scripture demonstrates that God's compassion is not only to those who are part of the covenant but embraces all people and breaks the boundaries of ethnicity, race, and religion. The table of fellowship reflected inclusive compassion rather than separative holiness, and the Temple was a place of prayer for all people - meaning that Gentiles could share in its benefits. If examined from nation-state theory, Jesus' national political vision is a national vision that prioritizes humanity and the equality of all human beings and nations. Jesus' ministry reached everyone, including marginalized people. It contrasts with other leaders at that time who tended only to serve specific groups. His example of serving all people was essential to becoming a leader. A Christian leader cannot exercise his leadership only to serve or satisfy a particular group but instead serve everyone so that progress occurs (Katarina & Siswanto, 2018, p. 96).

What is the current implication for Christians, then? From this study, Christians can learn about the kind of nationalism they must live as citizens, especially as part of the Indonesian nation, which has religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity. Christians have to avoid nationalist attitudes that are based on exclusive and particularistic religious teachings, which tend to give rise to attitudes of superiority, discrimination, marginalization, and acts of violence against different groups, which are usually considered "the other." On the contrary, Christians must have an inclusive spirit of nationalism, just as Jesus also had an inclusive national political vision based on the concept of *Imitatio Misericordiae Dei*, imitating God's mercy. God's mercy is a universal religious value that prioritizes aspects of humanity and equality, embraces everyone, and breaks

down ethnic, racial, and religious barriers. Nationalism based on exclusive, particularistic religious teachings gives rise to an attitude of superiority, assessing oneself as the most correct and negating those who are different and categorized as “the others.” In the context of Indonesia, Christians must develop inclusive nationalism based on God's mercy; moreover, in historical records, since its founding until now, the potential for division of Indonesian society into two nationalist and religious (Islamic) groups is still quite strong (Arjon, 2018, p. 182). Christians must be aware of the reality of the world and the diverse Indonesian nation by respecting other groups because God has placed Christians among different people to be a blessing to them (Objantoro, 2018, p. 8). Therefore, the author recommends that evangelical theology develop inclusive political theology as part of its responsibility as Indonesian citizens while maintaining a balance between particularistic and universalistic theological teaching.

The strength and uniqueness of this research is that in contrast to previous research that explored the source of the debate between Jesus and the Pharisees in terms of hypocrisy, formalism, and Pharisees' narcissism, this study investigates the differences in their national political vision regarding Israel's national identity. Furthermore, the use of nation-state theory to explore the political vision of Jesus and the Pharisees, on the one hand, can be a strength because this is an attempt to carry out an interdisciplinary study on hermeneutics. On the other hand, it can also be a weakness because the nation-state theory emerged around the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In contrast, the social and political context discussed is the debate between Jesus and the Pharisees in the first century. The author recommends that further research needs to be done on political theology related to the national political vision of Jesus as the promised Messiah both in the context of the first century, where Jesus lived and eschatologically.

## CONCLUSION

Several scholars see the frequent debates between Jesus and the Pharisees as being caused by Jesus' criticism of the Pharisees' hypocrisy, formalism, and narcissism. This research found that one of the fundamental causes of their debate is the sharp difference in their political visions of Israel's national identity. The Pharisees' national political vision was based on *Imitatio Sanctitatis Dei*, which was interpreted as separation from everything that threatened Israel's ethnic and religious purity. Nationalism, which is based on ethnic and religious exclusivity, emphasizes its primary loyalty to the purity of its ethnic and religious identity, so it tends to discriminate against different ethnic and religious groups. In contrast, Jesus' national political vision was based on *Imitatio Misericordiae Dei*, imitating God's mercy. Mercy is a universal value of religion that emphasizes humanity and equality, embraces all people, and breaks down ethnic, racial, and religious barriers. Jesus criticized the national politics of the Pharisees, which prioritized ethnic and religious purity and marginalized who was considered as the other. Then, Jesus offers a transformation of Israel's national identity with a nationalism based on God's mercy that emphasizes humanity and equality. This transformation has two significant implications. First, Israel must do the same things as God: be merciful, forgiving, accepting, and caring for all humanity. An understanding of Israel's internal life must demonstrate greater inclusivity and overcome “intracultural segregation.” Second, the main implication for Israel's “external” life was its relationship with Rome. Israel must be merciful and love its enemies, which can mean

avoiding the path of violence. From the perspective of the nation-state theory, it can be concluded that one of the fundamental causes of the debate between Jesus and the Pharisees is the differences in their national political visions of Israel's national identity. The national politics of the Pharisees prioritized ethnic and religious purity (exclusive) and tended to give rise to attitudes of superiority, discrimination, marginalization, and acts of violence against different groups. Jesus' national political vision is based on *Imitatio Misericordiae Dei*, imitating God's compassion that emphasizes humanity and equality (inclusive). Therefore, Christians, as part the citizens of a nation, especially the plural Indonesian nation, must develop inclusive nationalism based on God's mercy, the universal value of religion, which prioritizes humanity and equality, avoiding exclusive nationalism based on the particularistic religious value which tends to give rise to superiority, discrimination, marginalization, and violence towards different groups who are considered as "the others."

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