Nationalism and Religion in a Global Age

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Nationalism and secularism should go hand and hand—at least that was the way the thinkers in the European Enlightenment of the 18th century had imagined it. The social contract that Jean Rousseau described between a people and their government was largely a secular compact, unmediated by the clergy and unfettered with pious language. In the Enlightenment view, the nation-state was almost by definition a secular affair.

One can only imagine the shock that would have been experienced by Rousseau and his Enlightenment colleagues, therefore, if they could have been transported to the present day. The rise of religious nationalism would have seen by them to be an odd creature. Odder still is its adherents' venom against the secular state. In an unusual way, religious language has become part of the political discourse of both defenders of and protestors against the status quo, not just in particular nations but as part of what Manfred Steger has aptly called "the global imaginary."

How has religion come to this global role? And why have the champions of religious nationalism and the protesters against secular authorities at the turn of the 21st century been couched in the language and images of religion? From 9/11 to the Mumbai attacks of December, 2008, religious rhetoric has been associated with assaults on the security of public life. These attacks have not been solely Muslim—they have been perpetrated by Christian militia in the United States, Jewish activists in Israel, and Buddhist militants in Sri Lanka. One question that is frequently raised is whether religion causes these acts of violent protests. I would like to turn the question around and ask— perhaps more intriguingly--whether the problem lies in the nature of the modern secular state.

Elsewhere I have explored the question, "is religion the problem?" and concluded that regardless of how one conceives of the term, the answer is "no."1/ The acts of militant Muslim extremists in the Middle East, Christian militia in the United States, Jewish nationalists in Israel, Hindu activists in India, and angry Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka are seldom motivated by religion—at least not "religion" in the narrow sense of theological positions or particular doctrines. The anger of many of the groups is propelled by economic or cultural or political issues, or by the poignant sense of being displaced

from, or denied, a homeland—as Robert Pape has demonstrated in an intriguing book, *Dying to Win,* which relies on statistical surveys of recent incidents of suicide bombing in South Asia and the Middle East to show that religion—in the sense of piety or ascription to beliefs—has little to do with them.2/

So whatever else is going on in the world to link religious language with violence in the last several decades, it is not in any narrow sense religion that has caused this connection—if one means by that term religious institutions and codified beliefs. From al Qaeda to the Christian militia, from Hindu nationalism to messianic Zionism, today's religious activists have entered the political fray for reasons that most in the Western world would describe as social or political. They are not trying to convert others. They are not trying to destroy other people's faiths. They are almost uniformly critical of secular politics and secular modernism, but none of them attempts to force others to join their ranks. Nor—Islamophobes aside—does anyone think that forms of religious piety lead to violence. Though sometimes Islam is accused wrongly of supporting suicide attacks, no one blames Christianity for abortion clinic bombers, nor Judaism for militant Zionist settler movements.

On the other hand, though what we think of as "religion" is not the cause of violence, it is also absurd to claim that there is not a religious side to the violent images and dogmatic claims of today's religious activists. Although the motivations might not be religious in a narrow sense, the acts of violence perpetrated by many activists groups in the past three decades are identified with religious language, symbols, identities, and leadership roles. The grand narratives of religious scenarios and the absolutism of authoritarian claims buttressed by the religious images of cosmic war are—if not *the* problem—*problematic*. Thinking of social conflict in the magnified theatrical images of sacred war may raise large crowds in support of political ventures but they also harden positions and make them less easy to negotiate or resolve. Though I agree with Wilfred Cantwell Smith's dictum about avoiding the use of religion as a noun—as if religion were a reified thing—I do think that there is an absolutistic side to religious language, images, and institutions that is easily exploited.2a/ Non-religious ideologies and ideas can also be absolutistic, of course, and convey images of grand moral struggle. Most of the wars of the twentieth century were waged for absolute secular ideological positions. But in our time, it is religious language that offers a particularly powerful reservoir of such images and ideas.

I still hold to this position: though religion does not cause violence, thinking of social conflicts in religious terms is a problematic situation. What I want to explore in this lecture is the question of why social conflicts have been seen this way. Why have religious language and identities become involved? Why is the contemporary critique of the social order, in many parts of the world, stated in religious terms, and why have religious ideas and images been posed as an attractive way of thinking about alternatives to social order?

One answer to the question of "why religion?" is the one that I will explore in this lecture: that the politics and society that is being critiqued has been framed by both its proponents and its detractors as being "secular." Hence it is understandable that the response, the critique and the vision of an alternative social order, is couched in the opposite terms, in the language of religion. This is the reason that I have concluded, as I stated in the outset of my remarks, that it is not religion that is the problem as much as the

idea that there is a secular-religion distinction. The problem has been created by imagining the realms of religion and the secular as residing in two opposing spheres.

How did this come about? In this lecture I will go back to the creation of the idea of the secular state, examine how it attempted to extricate religion from public life, and observe how it has recently come to be rejected by those who used the language of religion as a form of political critique.

The Rise of the Secular State

Secular nationalism as we know it today—as the ideological ally of the nation-state—began to appear in England and America in the eighteenth century. Only by then had the idea of a nation-state taken root deeply enough to nurture a loyalty of its own, unassisted by religion or tradition, and only by then had the political and military apparatus of the nation-state expanded sufficiently to encompass a large geographic region. Prior to that time, the administrative reach of the political center was so limited that rulers did not govern in "the modern sense."3 Although there were embryonic forms of secular nationalism before then, the power of the state had been limited.4 Until the advent of the nation-state, the authority of a political center did not systematically and equally cover an entire population, so that what appeared to be a single homogeneous polity was in fact an aggregation of fiefdoms. The further one got from the center of power, the weaker the grip of centralized political influence, until at the periphery entire sections of a country might exist as a political no-man's-land. For that reason, one should speak of countries prior to the modern nation-state as having frontiers rather than boundaries.5

The changes of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries included boundaries; the development of the technical capacity to knit a country together through roads, rivers, and other means of transportation and communication; the construction of the economic capacity to do so, through an increasingly integrated market structure; the emergence of a world economic system based on the building blocks of nation-states; the formation of mass education, which socialized each generation of youth into a homogeneous society; and the rise of parliamentary democracy as a system of representation and an expression of the will of the people.6 The glue that held all these changes together was a new form of nationalism: the notion that individuals naturally associate with the people and place of their ancestral birth (or an adopted homeland such as the United States) in an economic and political system identified with a secular nation-state. Secular nationalism was thought to be not only natural but also universally applicable and morally right.

Although it was regarded almost as a natural law, secular nationalism was ultimately viewed as an expression of neither God nor nature but of the will of citizens.7 It was the political manifestation of the Enlightenment view of humanity. John Locke's ideas of the origins of a civil community had virtually no connection to the communities of Church and Christendom.8 And Jean-Jacques Rousseau's social-contract theories required little commitment to religious belief.9 Although Locke and Rousseau had religious sensibilities and allowed for a divine order that made the rights of humans possible, these ideas did not directly buttress the power of the church and its priestly administrators. Their secular concepts of nation and state had the effect of taking religion—at least church religion—out of public life.

The medieval church once possessed "many aspects of a state," as one historian put it, and it commanded more political power "than most of its secular rivals."10 By the mid-nineteenth century, however, Christian churches had ceased to have much influence on European or American politics. The church—the great medieval monument of Christendom with all its social and political diversity—had been replaced by churches: various denominations of Protestantism and a largely depoliticized version of Roman Catholicism. These churches functioned like religious clubs, voluntary associations for the spiritual edification of individuals in their leisure time, rarely cognizant of the social and political world around them.11

The Enlightenment ushered in a new way of thinking about religion—a narrower definition of the term that encompassed institutions and beliefs that were regarded as problematic, and conceptually separated them from the rest of social life, which was identified by a new term, "secular." What many people in Europe were afraid of at the time was the economic and political power of the clergy, and the fanaticism associated with the terrible wars of religion of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These would be controlled in a society in which "religion" had its limitations within "secular" society.

At the same time that religion in the West was becoming less political, its secular nationalism was becoming more religious. It became clothed in romantic and xenophobic images that would have startled its Enlightenment forebears. The French Revolution, the model for much of the nationalist fervor that developed in the nineteenth century, infused a religious zeal into revolutionary democracy; the revolution took on the trappings of church religion in the priestly power meted out to its demagogic leaders and in the slavish devotion to what it called the temple of reason. According to Alexis de Tocqueville, the French Revolution "assumed many of the aspects of a religious revolution."12 The American Revolution also had a religious side: many of its leaders had been influenced by eighteenth-century deism, a religion of science and natural law that was "devoted to exposing [church] religion to the light of knowledge."13 As in France, American nationalism developed its own religious characteristics, blending the ideals of secular nationalism and the symbols of Christianity into what has been called "civil religion."14

The nineteenth century saw the fulfillment of Tocqueville's prophecy that the "strange religion" of secular nationalism would, "like Islam, overrun the whole world with its apostles, militants, and martyrs."15 It spread throughout the world with an almost missionary zeal and was shipped to the newly colonized areas of Asia, Africa, and Latin America as part of the ideological freight of colonialism. It became the ideological partner of what came to be known as nation building. As the colonizing governments provided their colonies with the political and economic infrastructures to turn territories into nation-states, the ideology of secular nationalism emerged as a byproduct. As it had in the West during previous centuries, secular nationalism in the colonized countries during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries came to represent one side of a great encounter between two vastly different ways of perceiving the sociopolitical order and the relationship of the individual to the state: one informed by religion, the other by a notion of a secular compact.

In the West this encounter, and the ideological, economic, and political transitions that accompanied it, took place over many years, uncomplicated by the intrusion of foreign control of a colonial or neocolonial sort. The new nations of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, however, have had to confront the same challenges in a short

period of time and simultaneously contend with new forms of politics forced on them as byproducts of colonial rule. As in the West, however, the challenge they have faced is fundamental: it involves the encounter between an old religious worldview and a new one shaped by secular nationalism.

When Europeans colonized the rest of the world, they were often sustained by a desire to make the rest of the world like themselves.16 Even when empires became economically burdensome, the cultural mission seemed to justify the effort. The commitment of colonial administrators to a secular-nationalist vision explains why they were often so hostile to the Christian missionaries who tagged along behind them: the missionaries were the liberal colonizers' competitors. In general, the church's old religious ideology was a threat to the new secular ideology that most colonial rulers wished to present as characteristic of the West.17

In the mid-twentieth century, when the colonial powers retreated, they left behind the geographical boundaries they had drawn and the political institutions they had fashioned. Created as administrative units of the Ottoman, Hapsburg, French, and British empires, the borders of most Third World nations continued to survive after independence, even if they failed to follow the natural divisions between ethnic and linguistic communities. By the middle of the twentieth century, it seemed as if the cultural goals of the colonial era had been reached: although the political ties were severed, the new nations retained all the accoutrements of Westernized countries.

The only substantial empire that remained virtually intact until 1990 was the Soviet Union. It was based on a different vision of political order, of course, one in which international socialism was supposed to replace a network of capitalist nations. Yet the perception of many members of the Soviet states was that their nations were not so much integral units in a new internationalism as colonies in a secular Russian version of imperialism. This reality became dramatically clear after the breakup of the Soviet Union and its sphere of influence in the early 1990s, when old ethnic and national loyalties sprang to the fore.

The Golden Age of Secular Nationalism from 1945-1990

In the middle of the twentieth century when many colonies in the developing world gained political independence, Europeans and Americans often wrote with an almost religious fervor about what they regarded as these new nations' freedom—by which they meant the spread of nationalism throughout the world. Invariably, they meant a secular nationalism: new nations that elicited loyalties forged entirely from a sense of territorial citizenship. These secular-nationalist loyalties were based on the idea that the legitimacy of the state was rooted in the will of the people in a particular geographic region and divorced from any religious sanction.

In the mid-twentieth century, the new global reach of secular nationalism was justified by what it was—and what it was not. It distanced itself especially from the old ethnic and religious identities that had made nations parochial and quarrelsome in the past. The major exception was the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 as a safe haven for Jews, but even in this case the nation's constitution was firmly secular, and Israeli citizenship was open to people of all religious backgrounds—not only Jews but also Christians and Muslims. In general, mid-twentieth-century scholars viewed the spread of

secular nationalism in a hopeful, almost eschatological, light: it was ushering in a new future. It meant, in essence, the emergence of mini-Americas all over the world.

European and American scholars in the mid-1950s embraced the new global nation-state era with unbridled joy. Hans Kohn, his generation's best-known historian of nationalism, observed in 1955 that the twentieth century was unique: "It is the first period in history in which the whole of mankind has accepted one and the same political attitude, that of nationalism."[18] In his telling, the concept had its origins in antiquity. It was presaged by ancient Hebrews and fully enunciated by ancient Greeks. Inexplicably, however, the concept stagnated for almost two thousand years, according to Kohn's account, until suddenly it took off in earnest in England, "the first modern nation," during the seventeenth century.[19] By the time of his writing, in the mid-twentieth century, he cheerfully observed that the whole world had responded to "the awakening of nationalism and liberty."[20]

Not only Western academics but also a good number of new leaders—especially those in the emerging nations created out of former colonial empires—were swept up by the vision of a world of free and equal secular nations. The concept of secular nationalism gave them an ideological justification for being, and the electorate that subscribed to it provided them power bases from which they could vault into positions of leadership ahead of traditional ethnic and religious figures. But secularism was more than just a political issue; it was also a matter of personal identity. A new kind of person had come into existence—the "Indian nationalist" or "Ceylonese nationalist" who had an abiding faith in a secular nationalism identified with his or her homeland. Perhaps none exemplified this new spirit more than Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt and Jawaharlal Nehru of India. According to Nehru, "there is no going back" to a past full of religious identities, for the modern, secular "spirit of the age" will inevitably triumph throughout the world.[21]

There was a cheerful optimism among the followers of Nehru after India's independence, writes the political scientist Donald Smith: "The Indian nationalist felt compelled to assert that India was a nation," even though some "embarrassing facts"—such as divisive regional and religious loyalties—had to be glossed over.[22] The reason for this compulsion, according to Smith, was that such people could not think of themselves as modern persons without a national identity. "In the modern world," writes Smith, "nationality and nationalism were the basic premises of political life, and it seemed absolutely improper for India to be without a nationality."[23] A similar attitude predominated in many other new nations, at least at the beginning.

Leaders of minority religious communities—such as Hindu Tamils in Ceylon and Coptic Christians in Egypt—seemed especially eager to embrace secular nationalism because a secular nation-state would ensure that the public life of the country would not be dominated completely by the majority religious community. In India, where the Congress Party became the standard-bearer of Nehru's vision, the party's most reliable supporters were those at the margins of Hindu society—untouchables and Muslims—who had the most to fear from an intolerant religious majority.

The main carriers of the banner of secular nationalism in these newly independent countries, however, were not members of any religious community at all, at least in a traditional sense. Rather, they were members of the urban educated elite. For many of them, embracing a secular form of nationalism was a way of promoting its major

premise—freedom from the parochial identities of the past—and thereby avoiding the obstacles that religious loyalties create for a country's political goals. By implication, political power based on religious values and traditional communities held no authority.

The problem, however, was that in asserting that the nationalism of their country was secular, the new nationalists had to have faith in a secular culture that was at least as compelling as a sacred one. That meant, on a social level, believing that secular nationalism could triumph over what they thought of as "religion." It could also mean making secular nationalism a suprareligion of its own, which a society could aspire to beyond any single religious allegiance. In India, for example, political identity based on religious affiliation was termed communalism. In the view of Nehru and other secular nationalists, religion was the chief competitor of an even higher object of loyalty: secular India. Nehru implored his countrymen to get rid of what he called "that narrowing religious outlook" and to adopt a modern, nationalist viewpoint.[24]

The secular nationalists' attempts to give their ideologies an antireligious or a suprareligious force were encouraged, perhaps unwittingly, by their Western mentors. The words used to define nationalism by Western political leaders and such scholars as Kohn always implied not only that it was secular but that it was competitive with what they defined as religion and ultimately superior to it. "Nationalism [by which he meant secular nationalism] is a state of mind," Kohn wrote, "in which the supreme loyalty of the individual is felt to be due the nation-state."[25] And he boldly asserted that secular nationalism had replaced religion in its influence: "An understanding of nationalism and its implications for modern history and for our time appears as fundamental today as an understanding of religion would have been for thirteenth century Christendom."[26]

Rupert Emerson's influential From Empire to Nation, written several years later, shared the same exciting vision of a secular nationalism that "sweeps out [from Europe] to embrace the whole wide world."[27] Emerson acknowledged, however, that although in the European experience "the rise of nationalism [again, secular nationalism] coincided with a decline in the hold of religion," in other parts of the world, such as Asia, as secular nationalism "moved on" and enveloped these regions, "the religious issue pressed more clearly to the fore again."[28] Nonetheless, he anticipated that the "religious issue" would never again impede the progress of secular nationalism, which he saw as the West's gift to the world. The feeling that in some instances this gift had been forced on the new nations without their asking was noted by Emerson, who acknowledged that "the rise of nationalism among non-European peoples" was a consequence of "the imperial spread of Western European civilization over the face of the earth."

The outcome, in his view, was nonetheless laudable:

"With revolutionary dynamism . . . civilization has thrust elements of essential identity on peoples everywhere. . . . The global impact of the West has . . . run common threads through the variegated social fabrics of mankind, . . . [and it] has scored an extraordinary triumph."[29]

When Kohn and Emerson used the term nationalism they had in mind not just a secular political ideology and a religiously neutral national identity but a particular form of political organization: the modern European and American nation-state. In such an organization, individuals are linked to a centralized, all-embracing democratic political

system that is unaffected by any other affiliations, be they ethnic, cultural, or religious. That linkage is sealed by an emotional sense of identification with a geographical area and a loyalty to a particular people, an identity that is part of the feeling of nationalism. This affective dimension of nationalism is important to keep in mind, especially in comparing secular nationalism with the Enlightenment idea of religion. In the 1980s, the social theorist Anthony Giddens described nationalism in just this way—as conveying not only the ideas and "beliefs" about political order but also the "psychological and "symbolic" element in political and economic relationships.30 Scholars such as Kohn and Emerson recognized this affective dimension of nationalism early on; they felt it appropriate that the secular nation adopt what Charles Taylor in *The Secular Age* has described as the cultural sensibility of secularism, and what might also be called the spirit of secular nationalism.31

The Religious Challenge to the Secular State in the 21^(st) Century
     Since the modern nation-state has been presented to the world as a secular institution, the criticism of it has often been clothed in religious language. In the contemporary era, the "crisis of legitimation" that Jürgen Habermas has observed in social institutions has led to a rejection of the optimistic premises of secular politics.32 The legitimacy of the secular nation-state has been eroded by several factors, including a resurgent new wave of anticolonialism, the corrosive power of globalized economic and communication systems, and the corruption and incompetence of secular leaders. In many parts of the world the failure of the secular state began to be attributed to secularism itself. This raised its twin concept, the newly-created idea of "religion," to a position of political influence. In earlier decades, traditional leaders and cultural institutions seldom played a political role, though when they did become involved, it was often to critique specific social issues of the state rather than to challenge the credibility of the entire political system.33
     Contemporary religious politics, then, is quite a new development. It is the result of an almost Hegelian dialectic between what has been imagined by most citizens of the modern world to be two competing frameworks of social order: secular nationalism (allied with the nation-state) and the Enlightenment idea of religion (allied with large ethnic communities, some of them transnational). The clashes between the two have often been destructive, but they have also offered possibilities for accommodation. In some cases these encounters have given birth to a synthesis in which cultural ideas and institutions have become the allies of a new kind of nation-state. At the same time, other liaisons with contemporary political trends have led to a different vision: religious versions of a transnationalism that would supplant the nation-state world.
     The rivalry between secular nationalism and cultural identities makes little sense in the modern West, where the idea of religion has been conceptually confined to personal piety, religious institutions, and theological ideas. But it makes much sense among those in radical religious communities in Europe and America, and in traditional societies around the world, where the cultural and moral elements of religious imagination are viewed as an integral part of social and political life.
     Perhaps it is useful, then, to think of religion in two senses, in Enlightenment and non-Enlightenment ways of thinking. The first, the Enlightenment view, is the narrow idea of religious institutions and beliefs contrasted with secular social values in the

modern West. The other, the more traditional view, is a broad framework of thinking and acting that involves moral values, traditional customs, and publically articulated spiritual sensibility. The latter, traditional view of "religion" (or rather, the religious world view) includes much of what the secular West regards as public virtue and purposeful social life—values shared by most thoughtful and concerned citizens within a society.

Hence the elusive term "religion," in the broad sense, can point to a moral sensibility toward the social order that in many ways is remarkably similar to the civic values of those who feel most ardently about secularism. This is especially so in the non-Western world. In traditional India, for instance, the English term "religion" might be translated as the word for moral order—*dharma*—as well as for belief (*mazhab*), fellowship (*panth*), or community (*qaum*). As *dharma*, Hindu thought is like political or social theory, the basis of a just society. The Enlightenment thinkers who were most insistent on secularism did not see religion in this way; what they saw was an arrogant religious hierarchy keeping the masses enslaved to superstition in order to avoid justice and reason. They thought of religion as competitive with Enlightenment values, yet religion as *dharma* looks very much like that moral ground on which the Enlightenment thinkers were able to build the edifice of a just society. In ways that might surprise them, religion—at least in its broad sense, as a conveyer of public values—and secularism as a social ideology might well be two ways of talking about the same thing.

Because the functions of traditional religious and secular social values are so similar, it might be useful to designate a general category that includes both terms: a "genus" of which religion and secularism are the two competing "species." Wilfred Cantwell Smith recommended enlarging the idea of "traditions" to include secular humanism; Benedict Anderson suggested "imagined communities" for all national societies; and Ninian Smart offered "worldviews" as the common term for nationalism, socialism, and religion.31 Elsewhere I have suggested the phrase "ideologies of order," even though the term is freighted with meanings attached to it by Karl Marx and Karl Mannheim and a great deal of controversy lingers over its interpretation.32 The term originated in the late eighteenth century in the context of the rise of secular nationalism.33 A group of French idéologues, as they called themselves, sought to build a science of ideas based on the theories of Francis Bacon, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and René Descartes that would be sufficiently comprehensive to replace religion, in the broad sense, and provide a moral weight to counter the violent excesses of the French Revolution. According to one of the idéologues, Destutt de Tracy, whose book Elements of Ideology introduced the term to the world, "logic" was to be the sole basis of "the moral and political sciences."34 The French originators of the term "ideology" would be surprised at the way it has come to be redefined, especially in contemporary conversations, where it is often treated as an explanatory system that is specifically nonscientific.

In proposing a "science of ideas" as a replacement for religion, the idéologues were putting what they called ideology and what we call religion (in the broad sense) on an equal plane. Perhaps Clifford Geertz, among modern users of the term, has come closest to its original meaning by speaking of ideology as a "cultural system."35 Geertz includes both religious and political cultural systems within this framework, as well as the many cultural systems that do not distinguish between religion and politics. Religion and secular nationalism could both be considered cultural systems in Geertz's sense of

the word, and, hence, as he uses it, they are ideologies. Both conceive of the world in coherent, manageable ways; both suggest that there are levels of meaning beneath the day-to-day world that give coherence to things unseen; and both provide the authority that gives the social and political order its reason for being. In doing so, they define for the individual the right way of being in the world and relate persons to the social whole.

Secular nationalism is a social form of secularism that locates an individual within the universe. The idea of a secular nation ties him or her to a particular place and a particular history. A number of social scientists have argued that the phenomenon of secular nationalism is linked to the innate need of individuals for a sense of community. Recently John Lie has posited that the idea of a common "peoplehood"—often construed in ethnic or religious terms—is essential for the modern idea of nationhood.36 Earlier Karl Deutsch pointed out the importance of systems of communication in fostering a sense of nationalism.37 Ernest Gellner argues that the political and economic network of a nation-state can function only in a spirit of nationalism based on a homogeneous culture, a unified pattern of communication, and a common system of education.38 Other social scientists have stressed the psychological aspect of national identity: the sense of istorical location that is engendered when individuals feel they have a larger, national history.39

But behind these notions of community is the stern image of social order. Nationalism involves loyalty to an authority who, as Max Weber observed, holds a monopoly over the "legitimate use of physical force" in a given society.40 Giddens describes nationalism as the "cultural sensibility of sovereignty," implying that, in part, the awareness of being subject to an authority—an authority invested with the power of life and death—gives nationalism its potency.41 Secular nationalism, therefore, involves not only an attachment to a spirit of social order but also an act of submission to an ordering agent.

Scholarly attempts to define religion also stress the importance of order, though in a post-Enlightenment context where religion is thought of in the narrower sense, the orderliness is primarily metaphysical rather than political or social. In providing its adherents with a sense of conceptual order, religion often deals with the existential problem of disorder. The disorderliness of ordinary life is contrasted with a substantial, unchanging divine order.42 Geertz sees religion as the effort to integrate messy everyday reality into a pattern of coherence at a deeper level.43 Robert Bellah also thinks of religion as an attempt to reach beyond ordinary phenomena in a "risk of faith" that allows people to act "in the face of uncertainty and unpredictability" on the basis of a higher order of reality.44 This attitude of faith, according to Peter Berger, is an affirmation of the sacred, which acts as a doorway to a truth more certain than that of this world.45 Louis Dupré prefers to avoid the term sacred but integrates elements of both Berger's and Bellah's definitions in his description of religion as "a commitment to the transcendent as to another reality."46 In all these cases there is a tension between this imperfect, disorderly world and a perfected, orderly one to be found in a higher, transcendent state or in a cumulative moment in time. As Émile Durkheim, whose ideas are fundamental to each of these thinkers, was adamant in observing, religion has a more encompassing force than can be suggested by any dichotomization of the sacred and the profane. To Durkheim, the religious point of view includes both the notion that there is such a dichotomy and the belief that the sacred side will always, ultimately, reign

supreme.47

Even on the metaphysical level, religion, like secular nationalism, can provide the moral and spiritual glue that holds together broad communities. Members of these communities—secular or religious—share a tradition, a particular worldview, in which the essential conflict between appearance and deeper reality is described in specific and characteristically cultural terms. This deeper reality has a degree of permanence and order quite unobtainable by ordinary means. The conflict between the two levels of reality is what both religion and secular nationalism are about: the language of both contains images of chaos as well as tranquil order, holding out the hope that, despite appearances to the contrary, order will eventually triumph and disorder will be contained. Because religion (in both broad and narrow senses) and secular nationalism are ideologies of order, they are potential rivals.48 Either can claim to be the guarantor of orderliness within a society; either can claim to be the ultimate authority for social order. Such claims carry with them an extraordinary degree of power, for contained within them is the right to give moral sanction for life-and-death decisions, including the right to kill. When either secular nationalism or religion assumes that role by itself, it reduces the other to a peripheral social role.

Religious Violence as a Response to Secular Nationalism

The rejection of secular nationalism is often violent. The reason for this is not only because those who challenge the secular state are eager to assume their own positions of power in public life. They are also challenging the right of the secular state to the legitimacy provided by its monopoly on the use of violence to maintain public order. The creation of "religion" in juxtaposition to "secular" provides the potential for religion to utilize the same force of power that the secular state has used to maintain its order.

Hence the religious critique of secular nationalism contains a challenge to the source of social power on which secular public order is based: absolute control undergirded by the moral sanction of political violence. Ascribing to an alternative ideology of public order—religion—gives that religion the ability to be violent. In the modern world the secular state, and the state alone, has been given the power to kill legitimately, albeit for limited purposes: military defense, police protection, and capital punishment. Yet all the rest of the state's power to persuade and to shape the social order is derived from this fundamental power. In Weber's view, the monopoly over legitimate violence in a society lies behind all other claims to political authority.49 In challenging the state, today's religious activists, wherever they assert themselves around the world, reclaim the traditional right of religious authorities to say when violence is moral and when it is not.

Situations of social conflict provide contexts in which religious authority is called upon to sanction killing. This is especially true in the case of conflicts that involve issues of identity, loyalty, and communal solidarity. Religious identities may be a factor in movements of mobilization, separatism, and the establishment of new states. It is interesting to note, in this regard, that the best-known incidents of religious violence throughout the contemporary world have occurred in places where it is difficult to define or accept the idea of a nation-state. At the end of the twentieth century, these places included Palestine, the Punjab, and Sri Lanka; in the twenty-first century they include Iraq, Somalia, and Lebanon, areas where uncertainties abound about what the state

should be and which elements of society should lead it. In these instances, religious loyalties have often provided the basis for a new national consensus and a new kind of leadership.

Cultural practices and ideas related to Islam, Judaism, and Christianity have provided religious alternatives to secular ideology as the basis of nationalism, and political images from their religious history provide resources for thinking of modern religion in political terms. This is also true of Hinduism, Sikhism, and perhaps most surprisingly, Buddhism. In Thailand, for example, Buddhist political activists recall that the king must be a monk before assuming political power—he must be a "world renouncer" before he can become a "world conqueror," as Stanley Tambiah has put it.50 Burmese leaders established a Buddhist socialism, guided by a curious syncretic mix of Marxist and Buddhist ideas, and even the protests against that order in Burma—renamed Myanmar—had a religious character: many of the demonstrations in the streets were led by Buddhist monks.51 Thus in most traditional religious societies, including Buddhist ones, "religion," as Donald Smith puts it, "answers the question of political legitimacy."52 In the modern West that legitimacy is provided by nationalism, a secular nationalism. But even there, religion continues to wait in the wings, a potential challenge to the nationalism based on secular assumptions. Perhaps nothing indicates this potential more than the persistence of religious politics in American society, including the rise of the Christian militia and the American religious right.53 The justification for social order may be couched in secular or religious terms, and both require a faith in the unitary nature of a society that can authenticate both political rebellion and political rule.

When I interviewed Sunni mullahs in Iraq in 2004 after the U.S. invasion of their country, they told me that opposition to U.S. occupation was because they regarded America as the enemy of Islam. What was striking to me about this comparison is that they were equating a secular state with religion. This would have startled many of the twentieth-century proponents of secular nationalism. Scholars such as Kohn and Emerson and nationalist leaders such as Nasser and Nehru regarded secular nationalism as superior to religion in large measure because they thought it was categorically different.

Yet it seems clear in hindsight that to believe in the notion of secular nationalism required a great deal of faith, even though the idea was not couched in the rhetoric of religion. The terms in which it was presented were the grandly visionary ones associated with spiritual values. Secular nationalism, like religion, embraces what one scholar calls "a doctrine of destiny."54 One can take this way of looking at secular nationalism a step further and state flatly, as did one author writing in 1960, that secular nationalism is "a religion."55 A scholar of comparative religion, Ninian Smart, has gone further to specify the characteristics that make secular nationalism akin to a certain kind of religion—"a tribal religion."57 Employing six criteria to define the term, he concluded that secular nationalism measured up on all counts: on doctrine, myth, ethics, ritual, experience, and social organization.

The two inventions of modernity--secular nationalism and religion—both serve the ethical function of providing an overarching framework of moral order, a framework that commands ultimate loyalty from those who subscribe to it. Nowhere is this common form of loyalty more evident than in the ability of nationalism and religion, alone among all forms of allegiance, to give moral sanction to martyrdom and violence. As a result the

modern idea of religion is a potential revolutionary construct, for it can provide a justification for violence that would challenge the power of the secular state.

Though it may be true that other entities, such as the Mafia and the Ku Klux Klan, also sanction violence, they are able to do so convincingly only because they are regarded by their followers as (respectively) quasi-governmental or quasi-religious organizations. For that reason, I believe the line between secular nationalism and religion has always been quite thin. Both are expressions of faith, both involve an identity with and a loyalty to a large community, and both insist on the ultimate moral legitimacy of the authority invested in the leadership of that community. The rise of secular nationalism in world history, as Benedict Anderson observes, has been an extension of "the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which—as well as against which—it came into being."58

Anderson, in observing the ease with which secular nationalism is able to justify mass killings, finds a strong affinity between "nationalist imagining" and "religious imagining." This affinity leads to a blurring of the lines between them. Secular nationalism often evokes an almost religious response and it frequently appears as a kind of "cultural nationalism" in the way that Howard Wriggins once described Sinhalese national sentiments.59 It not only encompasses the shared cultural values of people within existing, or potentially existing, national boundaries but also evokes a cultural response of its own.

The similarity between secular and religious imaginings that Anderson has described enforces the idea that many present-day religious activists have asserted: that religion can provide a justification for the power, based on violence, that is the basis of modern politics. And why not? If secularism, as an imagined concept of social order, is capable of providing the ideological legitimacy to modern political communities, this same legitimizing function can be extended to the twin concept, the modern idea of religion. The religious activists of today are unwittingly modern, therefore, because they accept the same secularist notion that there is a fundamental distinction between secular and religious realms. Religious activists think they are simply reclaiming the political power of the state in the name of religion. It might be a workable arrangement in a pre-modern world where religious sensibilities are intertwined with a broad sense of moral order, and a religion-based polity could embrace a varied and pluralistic society. The irony is that the modern idea of religion is much more narrow than that, limited to particular sets of doctrines and to particular confessional communities. The Frankenstein of religion created in the Enlightenment imagination has risen up to claim the Enlightenment's proudest achievement, the secular nation-state. The tragedy is that the challenge to the secular order that emerges from this kind of religion shakes the foundations of political power in ways that are often strident and violent.

FOOTNOTES

1. See my article, "Is Religion the Problem?" *Hedgehog Review,* Spring 2004
 See also the last chapter of my book, *Global Rebellion: Religious Challenges
 to the Secular State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008). Parts of this
essay incorporates material from the first chapter of this book.

2. Robert Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Bombing.* New York:
Random House, 2005.

3. Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence. Vol. 2 of A Contemporary Critique of
Historical Materialism.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985, 2:4. For the
idea of nationalism and the nation-state, see also Ernest Gellner, *Nations and
Nationalism.* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983) and Craig Calhoun*, Nationalism.*
(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

4. According to Joseph Strayer (Medieval Statecraft and the Perspectives of
History [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971], 262–65), secular nationalism
was promoted in thirteenth-century France and England in order to buttress
the authority of secular rulers after the clergy had been removed from political
power earlier in the century. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, there
was a reaction against central secular-national governments; the next great wave
of laicization occurred in the sixteenth century. .

5. The situation in India prior to the twentieth century was remarkably
 similar to that in pre-eighteenth-century Europe. See Ainslie T. Embree,
"Frontiers into Boundaries: The Evolution of the Modern State," chap. 5 of
Imagining India: Essays on Indian History (New Delhi and New York:
Oxford University Press, 1989), 67–84.

6. This world economic pattern, which Immanuel Wallerstein calls the
 "modern world-system," has its roots in the sixteenth century. See Wallerstein,
*The Modern World-System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins
of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York:
Academic Press, 1974); and *The Modern World-System, 2: Mercantilism and
the Consolidation of the European World-Economy, 1600–1750* (New York:
Academic Press, 1980). For the importance of the economic market system in
European nation building, see *Sidney Pollard, Peaceful Conquest: The
Industrialization of Europe, 1760–1970* (New York: Oxford University Press,
1981).

7. Challenges to the divine right to rule in Europe reach back at least to the
twelfth century, when John of Salisbury, who is sometimes regarded as the first
modern political philosopher, held that rulers should be subject to charges of
treason and could be overthrown—violently if necessary—if they violated their
public trust. Along the same lines, William of Ockham, in the fourteenth century,
argued that a "secular ruler need not submit to spiritual power." See Sidney R.
Packard, Twelfth-Century Europe: An Interpretive Essay (Amherst: University
of Massachusetts Press, 1973), 193–201; and Thomas Molnar, "The Medieval
Beginnings of Political Secularization," in George W. Carey and James V. Schall,
eds., Essays on Christianity and Political Philosophy (Lanham, Md.: University
Press of America, 1985), 43.

8. Because humans are "equal and independent" before God, Locke argued,
they have the sole right to exercise the power of the Law of Nature, and the only
way in which an individual can be deprived of his or her liberty is "by agreeing
with other Men to joyn and unite into a community, for their comfortable, safe,
and peacable living one amongst another." John Locke, "Of the Beginnings of
Political Societies," chap. 8 of The Second Treatise on Government (New York:
Cambridge University Press, 1960), 375.

9. According to Rousseau, a social contract is a tacit admission by the
people that they need to be ruled and an expression of their willingness to relinquish

some of their rights and freedoms to the state in exchange for its administrative protection. It is an exchange of what Rousseau calls one's "natural liberty" for the security and justice provided through "civil liberty." Rousseau implied that the state does not need the church to grant it moral legitimacy: the people grant it a legitimacy on their own through a divine right that is directly invested in them as a part of the God-given natural order. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "On the Civil State," chap. 8 of The Social Contract (New York: Pocket Books, 1967), 23.

10. Strayer, Medieval Statecraft, 323.

11. Although the churches supported a number of secular reforms in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, religion in the West largely fit Whitehead's description: it was what "an individual does with his own solitariness." Alfred North Whitehead, Religion in the Making, reprinted in F. S. C. Northrup and Mason W. Gross, eds., Alfred North Whitehead: An Anthology (New York: Macmillan, 1961), 472.

12. Alexis de Tocqueville, The Old Regime and the French Revolution, translated by Stuart Gilbert (New York: Doubleday, Anchor Books, 1955), 11. See also John McManners, The French Revolution and the Church (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1969).

13. Ernst Cassirer, The Philosophy of the Enlightenment (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 171. Among the devotees of deism were Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and other founding fathers of the United States.

14. Robert Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," Daedalus 96, no. 1 (Winter 1967): 1–22.

15. Tocqueville, The Old Régime, 13.

16. Liberal politicians within the colonial governments were much more insistent on imparting notions of Western political order than were the conservatives. In the heyday of British control of India, for instance, the position of Whigs such as William Gladstone was that the presence of the British was "to promote the political training of our fellow-subjects," quoted in H. C. G. Matthew, Gladstone, 1809–1874, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 188. Conservatives such as Benjamin Disraeli, however, felt that the British should "respect and maintain" the traditional practices of the colonies, including "the laws and customs, the property and religion." From a speech delivered after the Sepoy Rebellion in India in 1857, quoted in William Monypenny and George Buckle, The Life of Disraeli, 1: 1804–1859 (London: John Murton, 1929), 1488–89. In the end the liberal vision caught on, even among the educated Indian elite, and the notion of a British-style secular nationalism in India was born.

17. Not all missionary efforts were so despised however. The Anglicans were sometimes seen as partners in the West's civilizing role. Activist, evangelical missionaries were considered more of a threat.

18. Hans Kohn, Nationalism: Its Meaning and History (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand, 1955), 89.

19. Ibid., 16.

20. Ibid.

21. Jawaharlal Nehru, The Discovery of India (New York: John Day, 1946), 531–32.

22. Donald Eugene Smith, India as a Secular State (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 140.

23. Ibid., 141 (italics in the original).

24. Nehru, Discovery of India, 531.

25. Kohn, Nationalism, 9 (italics supplied).

26. Ibid., 4.

27. Rupert Emerson, From Empire to Nation: The Rise to Self-Assertion of Asian and African Peoples (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), 158.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid., vii.

30. Giddens, Nation-State, 2:215–16.

31. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Belknap Press, 2007.

32. Jiirgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*. Translated by Thomas McCarthy. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975).

30. Gerald Larson describes the relation between religion and nationalism as mutually destructive. According to him, the global system relies on autonomous nation-states that need religion for their legitimacy—as long as religion stays in its place. But as religion is drawn into the public arena, the debate over public values is opened up, and religion can then impose itself on political decisions. This "religionization" of politics is a blow to secular nationalism and calls into question the global nature of the nation-state system. Gerald Larson, "Fast Falls the Eventide: India's Anguish over Religion" (Paper presented at a conference, Religion and Nationalism, University of California, Santa Barbara, April 21, 1989).

31. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, The Meaning and End of Religion (New York: Macmillan, 1962); Anderson, Imagined Communities; and Ninian Smart, Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human Beliefs (New York: Scribner's, 1983).

32. See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, The German Ideology, edited by R. Pascal (New York: International Publishers, 1939); and Karl Mannheim, Ideology and Utopia (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1936). For a discussion of the contemporary meaning of ideology, see David Apter, ed., Ideology and Discontent (New York: Free Press, 1964); and Chaim I. Waxman, ed., The End of Ideology Debate (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1964).

33. Richard H. Cox, Ideology, Politics, and Political Theory (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1969).

34. Quoted in Cox, Ideology, 17.

35. Clifford Geertz, "Ideology as a Cultural System," in David Apter, ed., Ideology and Discontent (New York: Free Press, 1964).

36. John Lie, *Modern Peoplehood.* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

37. Karl Deutsch, Nationalism and Social Communication (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1966).

38. Ernest Gellner, Nations and Nationalism (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), 140.

39. Anthony D. Smith, Nationalism in the Twentieth Century (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1979), 3. See also L. Doob, Patriotism and Nationalism (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964).

40. Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," in Hans H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds., From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 78. Regarding the state's monopoly on violence, see John Breuilly, Nationalism and the State (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982); and Anthony D. Smith, Theories of Nationalism (London: Duckworth, 1971).

41. Giddens, Nation-State, 219.

42. The notion of religion as a conceptual mechanism that brings order to the disorderly areas of life is a theme of such structuralists as Claude Lévi-Strauss and Mary Douglas, and the adherents of René Girard's mimetic theory. For mimetic theory, see Jean-Pierre Dupuy, Ordres et désordres: Enquêtes sur un nouveau paradigme (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1982); and Paisley Livingston, ed., Disorder and Order: Proceedings of the Stanford International Symposium (Sept. 14–16, 1981), Stanford Literature Studies 1 (Saratoga, Calif: Anma Libri, 1984).

43. Geertz defines religion as "a system of symbols which acts to establish

powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating
conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions
with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely
realistic." "Religion as a Cultural System," reprinted in William A. Lessa and
Evon Z. Vogt, eds., Reader in Comparative Religion: An Anthropological Approach,
3d ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 168.
44. Robert N. Bellah, "Transcendence in Contemporary Piety," in Donald R.
Cutler, The Religious Situation: 1969 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969). 907.
45. Peter Berger, The Heretical Imperative (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 38.
See also Peter Berger, The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory
of Religion (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1967).
46. Louis Dupré, Transcendent Selfhood: The Loss and Rediscovery of the
Inner Life (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), 26. For a discussion of Berger's and
Dupré's definitions, see Mary Douglas, "The Effects of Modernization on Religious
Change," Daedalus 111, no. 1 (Winter 1982): 1–19.
47. Durkheim describes the dichotomy between the sacred and the profane
in religion in the following way: "In all the history of human thought there exists
no other example of two categories of things so profoundly differentiated or
so radically opposed to one another. . . . The sacred and the profane have always
and everywhere been conceived by the human mind as two distinct classes, as
two worlds between which there is nothing in common. . . . In different religions,
this opposition has been conceived in different ways." Émile Durkheim, The Elementary
Forms of the Religious Life, translated by Joseph Ward Swain (1915;
reprint, London: Allen & Unwin, 1976), 38–39.
48. Although I use the term religion (as in "the Christian religion"), in general
I agree with Smith, who suggested some years ago that the noun religion
might well be banished from our vocabulary because it implies a thing—a codified
structure of beliefs and practices. He suggested that we restrict ourselves to
using the adjective religious. Smith, The Meaning and End of Religion, 119–53.
49. Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," 78.
50. Stanley J. Tambiah, World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of
Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background (Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press, 1976). For a useful overview of Theravada society,
see Donald K. Swearer, Buddhism and Society in Southeast Asia (Chambersburg,
Pa.: Anima Books, 1981). For the role of monks in Thai politics, see Somboon
Suksamran, Buddhism and Politics in Thailand: A Study of Socio-political
Change and Political Activism of the Thai Sangha (Singapore: Institute of Southeast
Asian Studies, 1982); and Charles F. Keyes, Thailand: Buddhist Kingdom
as Modern Nation-State (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1987).
51. For the background of religious nationalism in Burma (Myanmar), see
Donald Eugene Smith, ed., Religion and Politics in Burma (Princeton: Princeton
University Press, 1965); E. Sarkisyanz, Buddhist Backgrounds of the Burmese
Revolution (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965); and Heinz Bechert, "Buddhism
and Mass Politics in Burma and Ceylon," in Donald Eugene Smith, ed.,
Religion and Political Modernization (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974),
147–67. For a somewhat opposing point of view—that there is relatively little
Buddhist influence on Burmese nationalism—see the chapter on Burma in Fred
R. von der Mehden, Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia: Burma, Indonesia,
the Philippines (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1963), and
"Secularization of Buddhist Polities: Burma and Thailand" in Smith, Religion
and Political Modernization, 49–66.
52. Donald Eugene Smith, ed., Religion, Politics, and Social Change in the
Third World: A Sourcebook (New York: Free Press, 1971), 11.
53. See Walter H. Capps, The New Religious Right: Piety, Patriotism, and
Politics (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1990); Randall Balmer,
Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in

America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); and Lawrence, Defenders of God.

54. Arlie J. Hoover, The Gospel of Nationalism: German Patriotic Preaching from Napoleon to Versailles (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1986), 3.

55. Carlton J. H. Hayes, Nationalism: A Religion (New York: Macmillan, 1960).

56. Talal Asad, Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003).

57. Ninian Smart, "Religion, Myth, and Nationalism," in Peter H. Merkl and Ninian Smart, eds., Religion and Politics in the Modern World (New York: New York University Press, 1983), 27. For another comparison of nationalism and religion, see Hoover, Gospel of Nationalism, 3–4.

58. Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London: Verso, 1983), 18

59. W. Howard Wriggins, Ceylon: Dilemmas of a New Nation (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), 169.