

11 Religion and nationalism in the First World

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Introduction: religion and society

It is now three decades since Walker Connor warned us that ‘ethnic strife is too often superficially discerned as principally predicated upon language, religion, customs, economic inequality, or some other tangible element’ (1972: 341), and more than two since he suggested that this warning has particular application in respect of studies of nationalism in Europe (1979: 40–41). That scholars have sought at least partial explanations of ethnonationalism in ‘objective’ factors of these kinds is hardly surprising, since this pursuit is part of the stock-in-trade of the social scientist; but, as Connor points out, our expectation of success must be realistic – and low. It is nevertheless the case that some relatively measurable human characteristics, such as language, have a powerful impact on ethnonational sentiment, and an enormous body of literature has engaged in further analysis of this relationship.¹ The object of the present contribution is to explore the significance for ethnonationalism of another factor, religion – one to which much less attention has been given in the literature.

This imbalance is not particularly surprising given the fact that ethnonationalism commonly has a linguistic basis. Conversely, linguistic tension almost always has an ethnonational dimension (though there are a few exceptions, such as Ireland, Norway and Greece).² By contrast, many of the sharpest religious-type conflicts (such as those in several contemporary Islamic societies) are not at all obviously ethnonational in character. Europe’s most bitter ‘religious’ wars took place in an age that would conventionally be seen as pre-national, and their echoes continue into the contemporary period, most of them still devoid of ethnic content. It is clear that in the twentieth century most religious conflicts in Europe were not ethnonational in nature, and that most ethnonational conflicts did not have a significant religious dimension.

As the Introduction to this volume reminds us, the study of nationalism has been seriously challenged by definitional confusion; similar difficulties beset the study of religion. One of the biggest challenges is the central term itself. Recourse to a classic – but by no means uncontroversial – definition offers at least a stop-gap solution. Emile Durkheim (1915: 47) defined religion as ‘a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs

and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them'.³ This draws attention to the combination of belief and ritual that lies at the centre of the concept of religion. It also takes us a little further. Ritual is not exclusive, in that an individual may participate (at least externally) in the ceremonial aspects of different religions, for example by attending the mosque on Friday, the synagogue on Saturday and church on Sunday. But subscription to more than one set of religious beliefs is much more difficult: in their finer theological points, Islam, Judaism and Christianity are incompatible.

In exploring the character of religion further, it is instructive to bring to bear a perspective that has been utilised in the study of the relationship between *language* and the state; the similarity of linguistic and religious communities is, indeed, sometimes explicitly noted (Kloss 1969: 31–34). Approaches to the analysis of the spatial dimension of language can resemble strikingly approaches to the spatial dimension of religion. The framework adopted by Jean Lapouze (1987) in his study of language and territoriality shares certain distinctive features with that of Chris Park (1994) in his study of the geography of religion. From the sets of questions that both address, it is possible to abstract a set of three more general questions: about the nature of religious differentiation, the normative content of religious belief and its political implications, and the spatial distribution of religious groupings and its societal consequences (including those for ethnonationalism).

The first question arises from the fact that religious belief varies qualitatively within the individual. Membership of a religious denomination may be easily measurable in terms of participation in an inauguration process such as baptism, but this will tell little about intensity of commitment, and individuals may opt out entirely from membership of *any* religious group.⁴ By contrast, mastery of language is virtually a requirement of the adult human condition and, unlike religion, its importance has increased over time. There are few circumstances where it is possible for an individual to 'opt out' of language; indeed, the modern citizen needs not only oral fluency but also command of the written language, and one's life chances are strongly influenced by one's linguistic competence. The frontiers between languages in the oral domain (for example, between Norwegian and Swedish) may, of course, be gradients rather than lines; but written norms are more clearly differentiated. It is also true that adherence to language is much less exclusive than adherence to religion: additional languages may be learned with more or less difficulty, though in most cases a single language, the mother tongue, will also be the language of everyday use, with other languages consigned to a subordinate position. There are circumstances – admittedly, not many – where simultaneous commitment to two religions is possible. Shintoism and Buddhism, for instance, are said to comprise respectively 79 per cent and 75 per cent of the population of Japan.⁵ The great Western religions can and do form a blend with various folk religions and beliefs in certain societies, just as Christianity in early modern England was able to accommodate, however uncomfortably, magic, witchcraft and astrology (Thomas 1973). The reality is that language has grown in importance as society and the state have developed: the competent individual *must* be fluent in at least one language. The significance of religion for the individual has diminished at the

same time: as states have forsaken their religious trappings, even external conformity has become less important, and wide variations in intensity of religious commitment have evolved.

The second point at which the character of religion departs from that of language lies in the political domain. Both religion and language may be described as systems in which symbols are shared for purposes of communication, but in its developed sense this is *par excellence* a characteristic of language. Yet, no matter how elaborately developed a language is, it remains in an important sense politically neutral. In all languages, particular words, phrases, stories or corpuses of literature may be redolent with political content; but this is socially generated, and not inherent in any particular language. Politically alternative words and phrases exist (or may be coined), and alternative stories and texts may be created. Language is, then, simply a medium; but it may incidentally be the bearer of a powerful political message. One of the more important types of such message is the religious one. Unlike language, religion can rarely be said to be politically neutral. The teachings of many of the great world religions (such as Islam and the main strands of Christianity) have clear public policy implications, sometimes vigorously expressed. Other groups (such as Mennonites) may seek to opt out of the political world, but this, far from being a politically neutral position, is likely to lead to conflict with the state. Even religious systems that are apparently passive politically (such as Confucianism) may be *de facto* supportive of the political regime, simply by occupying a space that would otherwise fall to alternative and potentially hostile religious perspectives.

The third contrast between religion and language relates to their capacity for boundary maintenance. Purely personal and individualistic forms of religion may and indeed do exist but a language requires a minimum of two adherents, and in practice languages require large communities. Geographical isolation may ensure the continued existence of small language communities, but in the modern world linguistic survival depends on critical mass: the community must possess the demographic resources to survive disruptive patterns of migration and leakage through exogamous marriage. Furthermore, it must also possess the sociolinguistic resources to resist the threat of assimilation by more powerful linguistic communities; this implies not just a high degree of linguistic development (in the sense of standardisation of syntax and orthography, and elaboration of vocabulary) but also a wide measure of use by economic, social, cultural and political élites. The development of the modern state has placed a particular premium on certain languages: those associated with the state tend to enjoy a very considerable advantage, and if, as is the case in most states, there is a single official language, fluency in this language is an imperative (even to those who wish to resist it). In the case of religion, the trend over time has been precisely the reverse. When religion and politics were integrated, political community required religious conformity, and the European principle *cuius regio, eius religio* found its echoes in other parts of the world. But the separation of church and state legitimated adherence to minority religions, or to none, preparing the way for the complex pattern of religious adherence or non-adherence that is now so characteristic of the Western world. As religion was

relegated to the private sphere, in other words, religious pluralism became a realistic possibility, and members of diverse religious communities could coexist peacefully. It should also be pointed out that, like languages, religions may be internally differentiated (with theological tendencies corresponding to dialects), but they may also have extensive external links (the ecumenical movement, for instance, linking the Christian denominations, or the more ambitious global efforts to find common pan-religious moral principles). This is not to say that spatial considerations have become irrelevant. For those to whom access to religious buildings and services is important, residence close to a cluster of co-religionists is a practical consideration (since this is the only realistic way in which a church infrastructure can be provided); but there is no powerful impetus towards integration along spatial lines of the kind that is characteristic of language.

In assessing the consequences of religion for ethnonationalism, the two last questions are arguably the most important, and they are addressed in the next two sections of this chapter, which deal respectively with the impact of religion on politics in general and its impact specifically in the area of ethnonationalism. The concluding section provides some illustrations of the religion–nationalism relationship, and offers some tentative generalisations. The discussion throughout aims to address these questions in a global context, but, due to the complexity of the subject, most illustrative material is drawn from Europe, the continent which the generalisations best fit.

The polity: religion and the public sphere

How, then, may we generalise about the political significance of religion? It has been suggested that the religious vision of the world can result in an ethical position consisting of four parts: *piety*, a set of cultural operating norms that constrain political leadership; *polity*, a model of the ‘right order’ of the political domain; *policy*, a distinctive understanding of those social and cultural programmes that are considered most appropriate; and *political action*, the formation, in certain circumstances, of specifically religious parties or movements (Stackhouse 1987: 411–413). This list dovetails neatly with four of the five aspects of secularisation identified by Donald Smith (1974: 7–17): *polity separation*, the termination of church–state links and of the religious identity of the state; *polity expansion*, extension of the state into sectors formerly regulated by religion; *political culture secularisation*, the replacement of religious by secular notions of politics; and *political process secularisation*, decline in the political saliency of religious élites (the fifth aspect, *polity dominance* or elimination of all areas of religious autonomy, in reality reflects an intensification of the other four processes and is being set aside here). The first four aspects identified by Smith may be seen as corresponding respectively with Stackhouse’s four categories: polity, policy, piety and, more loosely, political action. These four features suggest a useful framework for the examination of the impact of religion on politics. The two gateposts of this framework are two ideal types – complete linkage of religion and the state, and complete separation of the two. But the interesting features are the cross-bars that span these: the conflicts that develop in

the struggle to move from one of these positions to the other. The complexity of these movements depends on the confessional structure of the state, so we may look separately at the position in unidenominational and multidenominational societies.

Politics and religion in unidenominational societies

Complete fusion of religion and politics implies a unified church–state structure; regulation of all aspects of public policy by the state religion; full popular endorsement of the religious value system of the state; and absence of differentiation between religious and political élites. Full-bodied secularisation implies complete separation of church and state; unqualified secular control of public policy and complete absence of distinctively religious influence in this area; popular rejection of the notion that religious values should have a role in the public sector; and complete differentiation between civil and religious élites, with the latter entirely deprived of political influence. These two ideal types represent, of course, polar positions that are not necessarily represented in reality; indeed, it is difficult to find clear-cut examples of complete secularisation, as defined here, and impossible to find examples of the complete fusion of religion and politics. As with all ideal types, empirical cases are to be found in the interesting continuum that lies between these two extremes.

The key to religio-political tensions lies in the third and fourth areas, those of popular values and élite perspectives. Church–state separation and secularisation of public services imply the existence of a public opinion that has been substantially deconfessionalised and of secular élites with the resources to mount a successful challenge to clerical or religious privileges. This was the pattern of development in Catholic Europe following the French Revolution, in the course of which tensions between clerical and ‘liberal’ (or, in effect, anticlerical or secular) tendencies were crystallised. The political history of France, Belgium, Austria and Italy in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries illustrates the evolution of this conflict, as the role of the Catholic Church as a state church was challenged, secular education, health and welfare systems were introduced and social legislation increasingly ignored the efforts of religious élites to provide guidance. Conflict between Christian democrats on the one hand and liberals and their left-wing secular tactical allies on the other became an enduring feature of the politics of these countries (Whyte 1981), and it was to be found, in different form, also in Spain and Portugal.

In the Protestant states of northern Europe, on the other hand, intimate links between the independent state churches and the political system survived until much later, even though the level of secularisation of public opinion has arguably proceeded further and the status of religious élites is less powerful than in Catholic societies. Yet the role of the Protestant state churches (in Scandinavia and the United Kingdom, for instance) has not been subjected to the same degree of secular challenge as that attracted by the Catholic Church elsewhere in Europe – perhaps because the very close links between church and state in these countries has resulted in a partial secularisation of the church itself, or because of

Protestantism's weaker institutional structure. Politically oriented Protestant religious movements tended in the past to have rather different priorities than their Catholic counterparts. Fundamentalist Protestants trusted the capacity of the individual to adhere to biblically enjoined sexual norms to a much greater extent than Catholics did, and did not share the zeal of the latter to ensure that this was protected by legislation; but, unlike Catholics, they utterly mistrusted the capacity of the individual to remain sober in the face of temptation from 'the demon drink' and to keep holy the sabbath, demanding legislative intervention in these areas, particularly in the era of prohibition and strict sabbatarianism.

It would be misleading, however, to see secularist pressure as the only source of political tension in the domain of religion. Resistance to secularism – an effort to slow down or roll back the separation of church and state – has been a distinctive feature of political mobilisation in many societies. Within Protestant societies, religious fundamentalist movements (however described) have sought to restore religious values to political systems criticised for ignoring biblical precepts, and in certain societies – notably Northern Ireland and, until recently, South Africa – conservative Protestantism has been a powerful force in shaping the character of public policy (see Wallis and Bruce 1986: 227–359); the southern United States could be added to this list. In recent decades conservative Protestantism has even found common ground with conservative Catholic movements in such areas as the struggle against the liberalisation of legislation in the area of sexual morality. Within many Islamic societies, the political appeal of fundamentalism has been even more striking, resulting in new linkages between the political and religious worlds (Piscatori 1986).

Politics and religion in multid denominational societies

Tensions between different perspectives on the appropriate place of religious values and symbols in political life are, then, to be expected in unidenominational societies, or in societies where a substantial haemorrhage from religious to secular (or agnostic, or atheistic) positions has taken place. But the potential for such conflict in bi- or multid denominational societies is even greater, since the range of distinct perspectives is likely to increase. There are reasons for expecting religions whose origins lie in the Middle East (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) to make more far-reaching demands on the political system than those whose origins lie in what is now India (including Buddhism and Hinduism): their belief in a single god with whose moral will the political system should comply contrasts with the emphasis of the eastern religions on societal harmony rather than the political order (Stackhouse 1987: 415). But different religions, and even different variants of Christianity, interpret God's will differently, leading to conflicting perceptions in each of the areas we have been considering. Thus, in denominationally divided societies the main religions compete for status in the political system; they may disagree on the colour of public policy and the character of service provision; they seek to protect and reinforce the value systems of their adherents; and their élites may be forced to jockey for positions of power and privilege.

While geography helps to keep religions apart today, history helped in the past. So central was the political role of religion in post-Reformation Western Europe that an extremely high level of conformity between political borders and religious frontiers was achieved. Nevertheless, by the nineteenth century a number of major bi-religious societies had emerged by different routes, all of them, incidentally, following a very similar pattern: a state imbued with Protestant values housing a predominantly Protestant population, but also acting as host to a significant Catholic minority. Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom are the outstanding examples, but it is interesting to note that this pattern was reproduced outside Europe in such British colonies or former colonies as the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. In each of these cases, religion played a role in political life comparable with that which it played in secularising Catholic states. Catholic élites, like the clericalist élites in France, Belgium and Austria, fought for the preservation of Catholic values, if necessary by carving out a distinct Catholic segment of the public sector (including the health and welfare systems but, in particular, the schools) which would be informed by distinctively Catholic values. Almost everywhere, this was a recipe for political conflict, with Protestants or secularists arguing that services provided and paid for by the state should be subject to state regulation alone, and rejecting demands for Catholic control.

Although these tensions were most visible in the case of the Protestant–Catholic relationship in Western Europe, they were not altogether absent elsewhere. Thus, in the twentieth century, Protestant Latvia found itself with a sizeable Catholic minority in the south; Orthodox Ukraine with a significant Uniate (Greek Catholic) minority in the west; Orthodox Bulgaria with a Muslim minority in the south; Orthodox Romania with Calvinist, Lutheran, Catholic and Uniate minorities in Transylvania; Muslim Albania with a small Catholic minority in the north, and a larger Orthodox one in the south; and the religious complexity of the former Yugoslavia is well known. Although some of these relationships had considerable potential for conflict, this was eclipsed by the threat from an ideology that dismissed religion as ‘the opium of the people’, and that posed a greater threat to religious élites than any of them posed to each other. The secularising (and, in the case of Albania, aggressively atheistic) menace of communism thus entirely eclipsed what might otherwise have become interdenominational differences of some political significance.

The nation: religion and boundary maintenance

The significance of religion for ethnonationalism is, as we have seen, widely acknowledged. It is frequently listed among the factors that are associated with nationalism in general, especially in the case of early nationalist movements. But one of the most perceptive of the founding fathers of the study of nationalism, Carlton Hayes, put his finger on a crucial dilemma three quarters of a century ago: nationalism may well have had religious roots in many cases, but it was itself remarkably similar to religion, constituting a new creed, with its own gods, rituals,

theological system, holy days, and other classical accoutrements of conventional religion (Hayes 1926: 93–125). Indeed, many years later he was to entitle his summary of his lifetime's reflection on the subject *Nationalism: A Religion* (Hayes 1960). Other influential early scholars in the field came to a similar if less categorical conclusion (Kohn 1944, esp. pp. 23–24), or argued that nationalism, because of its own religion-like character, could easily find itself in conflict with conventional religion (Hertz 1944: 121). This interpretation remains of central importance to the present, with leading scholars reminding us that, as a 'political religion', nationalism has been associated with both the politicisation of religion and the messianisation of politics (Smith 2000). In this respect, nationalism can resemble other phenomena such as Marxism in being a type of secular religion, or 'civic religion' as it has been described (Llobera 1994: 134–137).⁶

The concept of a 'secular religion', however, is an oxymoron, at least if we are to start from a conventional definition of religion. Furthermore, as John Hutchinson (1994: 66–77) has pointed out, notwithstanding the extent to which nationalism depends on religion, certain intrinsic characteristics of the latter push in quite a different direction. Unlike nationalism, the great religions are universalistic and transethnic; their orientation is towards the spiritual world rather than towards this world; and their written languages have historically been 'dead' ones. How, then, can religion feed in to nationalism? Anthony Smith's perceptive analysis of the contribution of organised religion to the ethnonational process identifies three aspects of this relationship that are of particular significance: a close relationship, in many cases, between ethnic origin myths and religious belief; religious sectarianism as a potential support for nationalist separatism; and the contribution of a particular religion's organisational base, in terms of educated personnel and communication channels, to the nationalist project (Smith 1986: 34–37). This suggests a possible framework for further exploration of this relationship. Taking Smith's last point first and interpreting all three freely, we may identify three areas in which religion has an impact on ethnonationalism: social infrastructure, ideological roots and political organisation.

The social contribution of religion

The impact of religion on society is to be felt not merely in the areas of ideas and rituals; the dissemination of ideas and, in most cases, the management of ceremonies depend on the existence of a relatively sophisticated organisation. They also imply an effective communication system, one capable of disseminating a complex religious message, with a mixture of narrative and normative content, to all potential adherents of the faith. Of course, oral lore and family socialisation have a role to play, especially in local religions, but they need to be reinforced by other agencies in the case of the great religions. In many religions, the task of disseminating the precepts of the faith to the masses is carried out indirectly, through the services of preachers, priests or other intermediaries. But there are others where this need is seen as entailing, in turn, a requirement that members of the church be able to read. This is in particular a characteristic of what Gellner

(1997: 75–78) has termed ‘Protestant-type’ religions (the main Protestant faiths are indeed the most obvious examples of this concern).

The historical distinction between the Catholic and Protestant traditions owes much to the differences between these approaches. The Catholic Church, with its commitment to a moral code whose origins are said to lie in reason but to which access is most obviously provided by a hierarchical pyramid with parochial clergy at the bottom, bishops in the middle and the pope at the top, is, by comparison with the Protestant churches, a highly organised monolith. Protestantism, by contrast, with its commitment to personal salvation through the word of God, to which access is gained by reading the Bible, is much more decentralised and emphasises the importance of individual interpretation of the religious message (even if this encourages sectarian rifts). Profound consequences flow from this: for political cultural values, and even for educational priorities. It is striking, and by no means accidental, that the creation of mass education systems in Catholic southern Europe lagged significantly behind the pace of development in Protestant northern Europe, and wide gaps in literacy levels arose between these two types of society (and, indeed, between Catholics and Protestants within denominationally mixed societies).⁷ These differences within Christianity are reproduced in the differences between the major world religions, which place greatly varying emphasis on the importance of literacy.

There is another respect in which the indirect consequences of different religions have implications for nationalism. Protestantism implies not just literacy, but, to a much greater degree than Catholicism, use of the vernacular language. Translation of the Bible into the languages of the people was a major project of the post-Reformation period, resulting in the provision of an extensive devotional literature. Protestant communities, such as the Estonians and the Latvians, thus found themselves with a more developed school system and a more extensive vernacular literature by the nineteenth century than their Catholic Lithuanian neighbours. Given the more recent vigour of Lithuanian nationalism, it is easy to forget that until World War I its pace of development was much slower than its Estonian and Latvian counterparts (see Loit 1985). In Europe’s Celtic fringe, extensive state support failed to prevent the near-extinction of the Irish language in Catholic Ireland, and Catholic Brittany has experienced an even more dramatic process of assimilation (if not yet complete) to the French language; but the Welsh language, though it exists in the shadow of one of the world’s most vigorous cultures, has been much more successfully maintained, with the democratic tradition of Protestant nonconformism offering significant assistance.⁸ Factors other than religion were, of course, important in all of these cases.

Religions tend, then, to play a considerable role in breaking down barriers of communication between communities that adhere to the same belief system. At a very minimum, shared ritual and geographically transposable religious practice highlight similarities within the community of believers and differences between them and outsiders. The phenomenon of the pilgrimage in Catholic, Hindu, Buddhist and especially Islamic traditions reinforced this sense of community of belief (Barber 1991). But the solidarity of the religious community is also enhanced

by dissemination of shared religious values and perhaps by the use of a common language (even if this is confined to a clerical élite). The importance of Latin, Old Church Slavonic, Arabic, Hebrew and Sanskrit respectively for the Catholic, Orthodox, Islamic, Jewish and Hindu faiths illustrates this point. In addition to establishing common reference points for believers, religions also, in varying degrees, provide a vital organisational infrastructure: a network of clergy imbued with a commitment to the central values of the faith and capable of acting as an effective medium for communication with the masses.

The contribution of religion in this respect plays a central role in preparing the path for nationalism: it has the capacity to provide essential organisational resources, ones whose penetrative power is a central ingredient in the formation of ethnic identity (Enloe 1980; Armstrong 1982: 201–206). But it must be emphasised strongly that there is nothing deterministic about this. In serving as facilitator of at least symbolic communication and as provider of a vital social infrastructure, religion may be paving a path for movements or ideologies that are *incompatible* with nationalism – ones that, for example, are international in character. This aspect of religion prepares the ground, then, for ethnonationalist mobilisation; but this ground may be occupied by alternative political forces.

The ideological contribution of religion

In assessing the ideological contribution of religion to nationalism, it is important to revert to a long-standing distinction between two types of religion: the *universalistic* religion whose message, it is claimed, is valid for all humankind and which is open to engaging in proselytist or missionary activity, and the *ethnic* religion whose message relates to a specific group. Of course, not all ethnic religions are particularly supportive of nationalism: tribal or folk religions may have local or regional focuses, ones that impede larger-scale ethnonational integration. Like tribal languages or local patois, they tend to be seen by nation-building élites as dysfunctional to the ethnonational project and as, at best, dispensable. Of course, one person's region is another person's nation; but this is not the place to deviate into a discussion of the issues of scale and definition.

The importance of major ethnic religions for nationalism, however, is clear. Hinduism has been central to the growth and development of Indian nationalism (van der Veer 1994), and Shinto has played a major role in promoting Japanese nationalism (Brown 1955: 114–117; Fridell 1983). The role of religion in the Jewish nationalist movement and in contemporary Israeli nationalism is well known (see Cohen 1987: 42–63). The reasons for this kind of association are obvious: the sacred religious tracts are also revered national texts, and religious tradition and ethnonational myth are inextricably intermingled. By contrast, to the extent that they embrace missionary ambitions and realise their objectives of conversion over a wide geographical area, universalist religions undermine their own capacity to contribute to processes of nation formation. It does not follow that universalistic religions tend to promote only patterns of transethnic loyalty that conflict with ethnonational ones. There are three ways in which they may depart from their

universalistic logic: by falling victim to doctrinal secession, to organisational fragmentation, or to frontier conflict. Although the second and to some extent the third of these processes belong to the political rather than to the ideological domain it is appropriate to discuss them at this point.

Doctrinal secession – withdrawal from the parent religion because of a conflict over fundamental religious beliefs – need not be associated with any kind of ethnonational protest, but it very frequently is. The Protestant Reformation itself is a good example: the reformers were in general geographically distant from Rome, and there was an important political dimension to their protest. In fact, there were several strings to this secession, with Lutheranism dominant in Germany and Scandinavia, Calvinism in the Netherlands, Scotland and parts of Hungary, and a distinctive variant, Anglicanism, in England. Earlier, even before the reformation, the Hussite secession, though ultimately crushed by the military and political might of the Habsburgs, provided Czech nationalism with an evocative historical myth that was rediscovered in the nineteenth century (at a time when almost all Czechs were Catholic). At the end of the eighteenth century, the Methodist secession from the Anglican Church was to find particular appeal in Wales, where it was of long-term significance for nationalism. Though less traumatic in impact than the divisions that were to emerge within Christianity, Tibetan and Theravada Buddhism were regional variants of one of the great religions of Asia, and were associated with ethnonational distinctiveness in their territorial domains. But perhaps the clearest example of all is the emergence of Sikhism out of Hinduism in the fifteenth century – a development that amounted, in effect, to the creation of a new ethnic religion (see Ahmed 1996).

Doctrinal secession led to organisational secession, but was not a precondition for this. Thus, the Reformation in Europe was associated not just with the rise of Protestantism but also with the rise of national churches. The new Protestant monarchies were entirely independent of each other, each constituting a separate church and sharing doctrinal perspectives and ritual practices in varying degrees. Their appearance was crucial in the development of state-centred nationalism in these countries. The phenomenon of galicanism in southern Europe – the attempt, especially in France, to establish organisational autonomy for the Catholic Church under the control of the king – was less significant, but not without implications for French nationalism. In Orthodox Europe, organisational secession was more politically loaded: in the last century of Ottoman rule, the Orthodox patriarchate of Constantinople was forced to recognise ‘autocephalous’ (in effect, independent) Orthodox churches in Greece (1850), Serbia (1879) and Romania (1885), and an independent Bulgarian exarchate was established in 1872 (Petrovich 1980). The trend has indeed continued into the more recent period: there were movements for the independence of the Macedonian Orthodox Church in the 1960s and of the Montenegrin Orthodox Church in the 1990s (Bruce 1996: 97).

The third set of circumstances in which religion may promote ethnonationalism arises at interdenominational interfaces. It frequently happens that major political borders fail to coincide with lines of religious division, leaving large minorities on the ‘wrong’ side of a border in terms of their religious affiliation. Some such

minorities conform to pressures from their political rulers. Most of the Orthodox leaders of Polish Western Ukraine recognised the pope as their head in 1596 (becoming 'Greek Catholics' or Uniates), a change whose consequences are still to be felt in the Ukraine (Johnston 1992). The Orthodox Romanians of Transylvania followed the same path in 1697 (Oldson 1992). In these cases, later nationalist movements (Ukrainian and Romanian) had to cope with what was essentially a negative consequence of religion, which disrupted their unity (Hann 1993). But the consequences could also be supportive of ethnonationalism: for Polish Catholics in Protestant Germany and Orthodox Russia down to 1918, for Irish Catholics in the United Kingdom before 1922 and to some extent for Belgian Catholics in the Protestant Netherlands in 1815–30, the Catholic Church offered a reassuring bulwark against a hostile culture. The Orthodox minorities in the Balkans, already mentioned in connection with their struggle for autocephalous status, also had an interest in encouraging political ethnonationalism, and the two movements tended to reinforce each other (Jelavich and Jelavich 1977: 14–16).

There is a risk, in thus discussing the relationship between religion and ethnonationalism in the domain of ideology, of confusing cause and effect. The discussion above has focussed on the impact of religion on nationalism; but the symbiotic nature of this relationship should be borne in mind. Ethnic religion may well promote ethnonationalism, but ethnonationalism is also likely to encourage ethnic religion; and although the pursuit of autocephalous status may encourage political nationalism, it is also in part a consequence of the latter (just as linguistic differentiation may be a consequence rather than a cause of political separatism). Except in the case of ethnic religions, the processes just discussed *may* encourage nationalism, but they cannot fully define its contours: they may help to separate members of the nation from persons of other denominations, but they also link them with the rest of what is claimed to be a universal church. We need, therefore, to look further in accounting for the more intense patterns of ethnonationalism with which universalistic religions are sometimes associated.

The political contribution of religion

The discussion above of the impact of religion on nationalism in the ideological sphere has already taken us close to the issue of political organisation: the defence of religious values by clerical élites may, in certain geopolitical circumstances, encourage the endorsement of nationalism. This was, as we have seen, an important factor in the nineteenth century in the case of Irish and Polish nationalism (taking the form of defence of Catholicism against alien creeds), and in a much more complex way in the case of Serbian, Romanian and Bulgarian nationalism (where the Islamic Turkish political rulers posed little threat to their Orthodox minorities in the area of religion, but the Greek phanariot religious élites of the Ottoman empire were a rather more considerable cultural threat). Catholicism played a similar role in Quebec, where it helped to reinforce the identity of the Francophone community against Anglophone, Protestant Canada (Grand'Maison 1970; Guindon 1988).

But religion can play a more direct role in ethnonationalism even when it is removed from the context of its beliefs and practices: simple religious labelling can have significant ethnic connotations, and can play a classical boundary defining role of the kind discussed by *Conversi* (1999). It could be argued that being Irish, Polish or Lithuanian implies being Catholic; that being Russian, Bulgarian or Serbian implies being Orthodox; or that being English, Finnish or Estonian implies being Protestant. But these associations weaken as the intensity of religious belief weakens, as movement to other religions (or altogether out of religious adherence) proceeds, and as long-established immigrants of alien religious backgrounds seek assimilation. Nevertheless, the echoes of this image of an intimate link between religion and national identity persist, even in the case where it has by now become most tenuous, England.⁹

This linkage is especially problematic in the case of 'lapsed' adherents of the national religion. Does exiting from religious belief imply opting out of national identification? The answer, of course, is 'no'; national identification is much more emotionally profound and more complex in its origins than rational subscription to confessional principles. Atheistic Muslims in Bosnia and non-believing Protestants in Northern Ireland seem capable of the most intense forms of ethnic attachment. But in such cases there is typically a perception of loose affiliation – genealogical rather than ideological in character – to a denominationally defined community, to the ancestral faith, though consciousness of this may be other-imposed, or it may itself be a consequence and not merely a cause of conflict (*Lynch* 2000). Efforts to monitor ethnicity in Northern Ireland have thus moved away from religious adherence to identification with a culturally defined religious community as the only feasible way of taking account of the large numbers who now claim to have no religious belief.¹⁰

But if the identification of religion with 'the nation' is problematic for the confessionally uncommitted, it is much more difficult for those who subscribe to other faiths. In many cases, the weakening of the bonds between religion and nationality have eased this problem. English Catholics were once a suspect minority (*Clayton and McBride* 1998); now their ethnonational loyalty is generally accepted. But the evidence of certain other religious minorities (typically small, and geographically marginal) is instructive. Can one be a Protestant Pole, a Protestant Lithuanian, an Orthodox Estonian or a Muslim Bulgarian provided one's mother tongue is that of the majority? Not, apparently, in all cases. Thus we find a tendency, at least in the past, for Protestants in Polish Masuria to identify as 'Masurs' or even as Prussians or Germans rather than Poles (*Blanke* 1999); for Protestants in Lithuanian Klaipeda to identify as 'Memellanders' rather than Lithuanians (*Misiunas* 1968); for Orthodox residents near Estonia's eastern frontier to be described as 'Setus' rather than Estonian (*Hurt* 1904; *Jääts* 2000); and for Muslims in Bulgaria's Rhodope Mountains to be described as 'Pomaks' (*Apostolov* 1996; *Konstantinov* 1997) – even though these groups traditionally spoke, respectively, dialects of Polish, Lithuanian, Estonian and Bulgarian.

We do not need to rely on the dramatic cases of Northern Ireland or former Yugoslavia, then, for evidence of the capacity of religious differences to promote

ethnic differentiation: there are circumstances where religious denominational and ethnic boundaries seem entirely to coincide. It has even been suggested that nationalism has been assisted in the past by variations in intensity of belief in unidenominational societies. The images of the Catholic Bretons remaining true to the faith of their fathers in secular France, of the religious zeal of the Catholic Flemish within secular Belgium and of the traditional Catholicism of the Slovaks within secular Czechoslovakia, for instance, are said to have had some impact on Breton, Flemish and Slovak nationalism, and an image of this kind occasionally flickers elsewhere, as in the case of the Basques.

There is, however, a more fundamental factor that commonly underlies apparently denominationally based nationalism: religion may be a surrogate for some other characteristic, such as ethnic or at least regional origin. Thus, in Northern Ireland being a Protestant is not simply a matter of religious belief: it evokes memories of the British heritage among those who see themselves as descendants of seventeenth-century Scottish or English colonists, and acts as a badge of differentiation in respect of the 'native Irish' Catholic population with its indigenous Gaelic roots. In the Balkans, the gap between Croats and Serbs, which divides a single linguistic community, coincided with the long-established frontier between the Habsburg and Ottoman empires, whose Christian populations became divided in loyalty between Rome and Constantinople (with the descendants of those Serbs who converted to Islam constituting a third group, the ethnic Muslims). Before the establishment of independent Poland and Lithuania, the Masurs and Memellanders had been separated for centuries from the main areas of Polish and Lithuanian settlement through their political and administrative inclusion in Lutheran East Prussia. The Setus, though speaking Estonian, had lived for centuries in Russia proper, just outside the boundary of the Baltic provinces. Outside Europe, East Timorese nationalism set a predominantly Christian population against its Islamic Indonesian rulers, but the legacy there of long-established Portuguese rule that helped solidify the frontier between East Timor and the west of the island (and, indeed, the rest of Indonesia), with its Dutch heritage, was, perhaps, the critical factor.

In each of these cases, then, religion pointed to a long history of separate paths of geopolitical orientation; it was seen as a marker of the ethnic community to which one belonged. These examples might be multiplied if we were to include cases where ethnic communities are defined not only in religious denominational terms but also linguistically. In Sri Lanka, the two sides also compete in terms of origin myths – the issue of who first settled the island. In Israel, the conflict owes much of its bitterness to similarly conflicting settlement myths. The capacity of religion to function as an agent of political activism in these instances may be seen as a special case of its more general potential as an instrument of mobilisation: it offers political élites a powerful weapon in generating committed mass support, especially to the extent that it promotes values of self-sacrifice and group solidarity in respect of other religious groups (Hasenclever and Rittberger 2000).

Conclusion: religion and conflict

This chapter has argued, then, that religion has had a major impact on politics in a number of respects: through its historical linkage with the world of politics, as expressed in the image of the traditional monarch who personified the union of political and religious life; by moulding the shape of public policy; by providing a cadre of competent élites; and through its contribution to mass political culture. With political modernisation and the growth of secular values, strains between clerical and secular priorities were fought out in a number of domains, with different outcomes in different contexts. But while this aspect of religion – the political implications of the religious message and the societal consequences of religious organisation – may have been of some significance for ethnonationalism, there are other aspects of religion whose role is even greater. Religion can play a major role in the creation and maintenance of ethnonational boundaries when the religion in question is an ‘ethnic’ one; but universalistic religions can also play this role. The reality is that the spatial boundaries of such religions frequently cut across established political borders, creating zones of potential conflict and denominationally distinct pockets. In these circumstances, religion may acquire considerable ethnic significance, and it may act as an effective ethnonational marker by coinciding with some other defining characteristic – whether this is more visible, as in the case of language, or, more importantly, less visible, as in the case of descent or region of origin.

When we turn to look at the capacity of religion to lead to violent political conflict the balance sheet is rather more modest than that associated with, say, language-related conflict. One survey of the position in the early 1990s identified 20 such conflicts (though one of these was in reality a cluster of five). Only two of these were categorised as non-ethnonational in character, deriving from attempts to enforce strict religious law (in Sudan and Afghanistan). Of the remaining cases, three were identified as ones where religion was closely linked to efforts to establish independence or an ethnic state (Tibet, Palestine and the Punjab), and in the remaining 15 cases religion was identified as only one factor in the conflict, alongside territorial, political and ethnic issues. The instances where religion was regarded as most significant included Kashmir and four other Indian cases, Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Sri Lanka and Lebanon (O’Brien and Palmer 1993: 66–67). Additional cases could be added to this list if we move to a different time period.

		Salience of religion	
		High	Low
Salience of language	High	Bulgaria Sri Lanka Israel	Spain Finland Belgium
	Low	Northern Ireland Bosnia Lebanon	Great Britain South Africa Rwanda

Figure 11.1 Religion, language and ethnic conflict: a typology.

The relationship between conflicts of this kind and linguistic-based conflict is summarised in Figure 11.1. This assumes that states where ethnonational conflict is an issue may be classified along two dichotomous dimensions: high or low salience of religion, and high or low salience of language (an obvious but functionally necessary oversimplification). Cross-classifying these gives us four categories. The easiest category to illustrate is the top right-hand one. There are so many cases of ethnonational conflict based primarily on language that it is easy to find examples, and those included here draw attention to three different types of context: a state dominated by one linguistic group but with indigenous minorities (Spain); one dominated by one linguistic group but with a minority related linguistically to an adjacent state (Finland); and one straddling the line of division between two major languages (Belgium). There are also many instances where linguistic divisions are reinforced by religious ones, and the three examples given here again illustrate different contexts: in Bulgaria the Bulgarian-Orthodox versus Turkish-Muslim division is the predominant one (if we leave aside the Pomaks); in Sri Lanka the Sinhalese-Buddhist versus Tamil-Hindu division is the most obvious, but the Tamil-speaking Muslims constitute an important additional group; and in Israel and the territories it occupies the Hebrew-Jewish versus Arabic-Muslim is the major line of conflict, but there are non-Hebrew-speaking Jews on one side and non-Muslim Arab speakers on the other.

The number of cases available for the bottom left category is low, and the three listed again illustrate rather different patterns: the bipolar pattern of Northern Ireland (though there are significant internal divisions on the Protestant side); the trilateral pattern of Bosnia (where the ethnonational focus of two of the three groups lies outside the territory); and the complex position of the Lebanon (with deep divisions within both the Christian and Muslim sides). Finally, it is difficult to find cases for the bottom right category, where ethnonational identification does not have a clear-cut linguistic or religious basis, and the instances given illustrate the problem. In Great Britain, it is difficult to find either a linguistic or a religious basis for Scottish nationalism, though neither of these issues is absent; in South Africa language and religion were of central importance, but they have now been overshadowed by ethnonational tensions whose roots lie elsewhere; and in Rwanda the sources of the deep Hutu–Tutsi division lie in social rather than in linguistic or religious factors.¹¹

This chapter began with a warning from Walker Connor about the risk of seeking to explain ethnonationalism in terms of ‘objective’ factors such as language and religion. While a good deal of evidence may be cited to show the close correlation, in many cases, between ethnonationalism and religion, explaining this relationship remains a fundamental challenge. It is, then, appropriate to close by recalling another of Connor’s pieces of advice, one expressed at the very end of his major anthology, when he again warned students of nationalism of the subject’s inherent complexity and of the need to treat as suspect ‘rational’ explanations of its nature (Connor 1994: 210). Religion is not a phenomenon to which the adjective ‘rational’ can comfortably be applied; but it is nevertheless a highly visible and clear-cut, if complex, social reality. Attempts to articulate its implications for nationalism,

including this one, are likely to be imperfectly successful. In this, however, the project tackled in this chapter is little different from others in this subtle and fascinating subfield of the social sciences.

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Notes

- 1 An account of this vast literature is both impossible here and in any case unnecessary; but see Fishman (1999) for an overview.
- 2 In Norway and Greece disagreement over linguistic norms (use of Nynorsk or Bokmål, or of Katharevousa or Demotic Greek) divided the community in the past, while in Ireland disputes between supporters and opponents of the revival of the Irish (Gaelic) language have taken place; but these tensions have been mild, and the opposing sides have clearly been drawn from the same ethnonational community.
- 3 For a critical discussion of Durkheim's definition, see Pickering (1984: 177–187); and for a more general discussion of the definition of religion see Aldridge (2000: 13–32). This approach is not incompatible with a broader 'social' understanding of religion, one that offers a crucial insight into Europe's post-Reformation religious conflicts (Thomas 2000).
- 4 Statistics regarding adherence to the major world religions are frequently provided in the same manner as statistics relating to languages, but this does not imply that the challenge in the two cases is the same. Park (1994: 36) lists the world religions as follows, in terms of percentage of the world population: Christians, 32.4 per cent; Muslims, 17.1 per cent; Hindus, 13.5 per cent; Buddhists, 6.2 per cent; and he lists six other religions, four groupings (such as 'tribal religions') and two non-religious groups (the non-religious, and atheists); see also Barrett (1982). Laponce (1987: 67–68) provides a similar listing in the case of languages, headed by Chinese, English, Hindi/Urdu, Spanish and Russian.
- 5 Calculated from *Statesman's Yearbook* (2001: 920, 928).
- 6 This should be distinguished from the much more specific form of 'civil religion' that Fawcett (2000: 9–10) has identified in the case of Ulster Protestants and Calvinist Afrikaners, and which was expressed in such para-religious offshoots as the Orange Order and the Broederbond. This quasi-religious quality may also help to explain the phenomenon of nationalist martyrdom.
- 7 Lawrence Stone (1969: 77) summarised the difference between the two main religions in a memorable expression: 'The Catholics were fearful of heresy because of Bible study, whereas the Reformers were fearful of superstition because of lack of Bible study'; but for an alternative interpretation based on the German experience see Strauss (1984).
- 8 See Rokkan and Urwin (1983: 85–86), for a comparative political perspective; Durkacz (1983) explores the significance of religion in language maintenance in Ireland, Scotland and Wales; Broudic (1995) provides a general survey in the case of Breton and Lachuer (1998) draws attention to the ambiguous role of the Breton clergy in the nineteenth century. The more general role of religion in the development of nationalism in England and its neighbours is reviewed in Hastings (1997).
- 9 Discussion of the distinction between English and British nationalism is being avoided here; for a discussion of the political significance of religion in this respect, see Colley (1991).
- 10 See Fair Employment Commission for Northern Ireland (1998: 5).
- 11 On these cases, see respectively O'Leary and McGarry (1996); Malcolm (1994); Odeh (1985); McCrone (1992); Marks and Trapido (1987); Uvin (1998).

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