

Introduction

NATIONHOOD AND NATIONS LIE at the very heart of the biblical meta-narrative that forms the framework for Christian theology, with the one nation of Israel represented as chosen by God to further his purpose of redemption for the whole world. At the same time, the biblical canon gives us a view of history that denies the division of the world into nations in the beginning and in its consummation. Nations belong to the time “in between.” Here surely lies one of the reasons why the topic of nationhood has proven so difficult for theologians. Recognition of nations is an issue that has attracted both positive support and vicious attacks in the modern period. At the heart of this book is a subtle distinction between *nation* and *state*. This distinction lies at the heart of serious discussion of nationhood and nationalism. This book is neither simply “for” nor “against” something called “nationalism.” The reason why is very straightforward—there is no one single type of nationalism. It has proven extremely difficult to produce an overarching theory of nationalism, as the liveliness of the field of nationalism studies shows. Many theologians, unfortunately, seem slow to acknowledge this reality, preferring to hide behind generalizations against “nationalism.” The second reason why it isn’t possible simply to be for or against “nationalism” is that the discourse surrounding the term has moved in the twentieth century, especially since the Second World War, from being about independence to being about recognition. Of course, this is painting matters with a very broad brush indeed. Acknowledging this move on my part does not mean advocating ignoring the political realities. Since the formation of the United Nations and the process of the dismantling of the European empires across the world, more sovereign states (“nation-states”) have come into being than at any other time in history. The scholar of nationalism Walker Connor has surveyed the global data and concluded, wisely, that no more than 10 percent of all states in the world can be classified as true nation-states (i.e., states where the

overwhelming majority of the population comes from one nation).¹ It is this empirical reality—that most states encompass more than one group that could be historically conceived as nations—that has forced scholars and social and political theorists to face the reality that the idea of the “nation-state” is a modern myth insofar as it attempts to convey a cultural, linguistic, and ethnic homogeneity represented by the state’s official name.

If we turn from the empirical realities to Scripture, we also soon discover a dazzlingly complex array of perspectives, and the history of Christianity furnishes plenty of examples of how these have been worked out. It would be easy for the theologian who is not one-sidedly hostile to nationalism to move simply to read the biblical prophets and eschatological texts as being anti-imperial, given that Babylon is the empire constantly opposed to the nation of Israel from Genesis (as Babel) to Revelation. Much historic Protestant exegesis stayed within this mold by recasting Babylon as the Roman Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Empire, later therefore as the Napoleonic project. The late modern example of this is the European Union, yet the undeniable opposition of a world of nations to a global empire is treated in ironic fashion in the Bible, for the Roman Empire is understood as the providential setting for the birth and spread of the Christian faith. Rome becomes a historic type of the “empire of Antichrist,” thus furnishing generations of exegetes with material for discerning providential movements of history. The opposition in the New Testament, particularly in Revelation, is ultimately between two cities, not nations and imperialism. In these days of thoughtless anti-nationalism, it is important to recall this—the New Testament authors nowhere deny that the world will continue to be constituted by nations until the end of history. Rather, they affirm that it will be. John of Patmos speaks of the “ten kings” who will “make war” against the Lamb, at the same time attacking Babylon, “the city that rules the whole world.” Both the world of nations and that of imperialism are ultimately opposed to the reign of Christ. There is no room here for singling out the idea of a world divided into nations as the unique perpetrator of evil in the world, which is the position that too many Christian scholars are apt to state or imply these days. In addition, as the discourse on Babylon is clearly typological in the sense of not referring to a historical Babylon at the time of writing, exegetes cannot assume a historic global empire is what would transpire at the end of history. Plenty have assumed history will end this way of course, including Abraham Kuyper, whom we will meet later in this book.

1. Connor, “Ethnic Nationalism,” 91–97.

Defining anti-nationalism is rather difficult, because most people who use the term “nationalism” don’t have a clear definition of it to begin with. In strict terms, anti-nationalism can be sub-divided into opposition to subordinated, defeated nations recovering political independence, and opposition to peoples who have never been politically independent becoming so. In more subtle terms, but just as important, there exists a variant of the former case, which constituted opposition to subordinated, defeated nations gaining some form of recognition that falls short of clear political independence (e.g., devolution within the United Kingdom, or regional autonomy within Spain). In the “hard” case, who is being opposed are the defeated breaking free from the rule of their conquerors. In the “soft” case, what is being opposed is the request that the subordinated gain a measure of recognition within the state from the dominant, often historically conquering, national group. Why some Christian theologians have been anti-nationalist is an important question. These theologians tend to stay at the safe level of general theory, rarely venturing out to investigate real case-studies. Most theologians do not really look at the literature in nationalism studies, and in my time as member of the Association for the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism (ASEN), I have never met another theologian who has also been a member. Yet theologians continue to write a lot about nationalism polemically, though superficially. This is not a happy state of affairs. There are several features of the anti-nationalist discourse among Western Christian theologians. The first is the obvious elitism against popular beliefs. The second is the influence of Marxism on a number of Christian intellectuals who have influenced theologians. Many of these have been Roman Catholic, e.g., Charles Taylor and Alasdair MacIntyre, though John Milbank is Anglican. The third is the provenance of anti-nationalists from the imperial states, or those states that represented the European imperial and colonial projects. The fourth is a tendency for these kinds of thinkers to look back nostalgically to a past golden age of Christian thought, often the medieval period, “before nationalism,” though they spell this out in terms of being “before modernity.” In reality, what we may be seeing here is a rerun of some of the medieval conflicts between the religious orders, specifically the Dominicans against the Franciscans, the Cistercians and their offshoot the Knights Templar asserting their independence from both church and state, Thomists against Joachimists, and the Thomists, representing the Dominicans, acting as a latter-day intellectual Inquisition bringing to trial those deemed guilty of “heresy,” though using philosophical criteria.

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Concerning the Thomists opposing the Franciscans, this has contemporary relevance in that the Franciscans championed the notion of subjective natural rights (which were already found in the Decretalists a couple of centuries earlier, much to the dismay of their latter-day critics).² Notions of natural rights have often gone hand in hand with modern forms of nationalism. Milbank's attack on John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham fits here, though not quite from an orthodox Thomist angle, more from a "Cistercian" Templarist attempt to appropriate Thomas symbolically. At the same time there is an anti-Joachimist subtext at work. This book does not deal with philosophers, except in passing. To be precise, Taylor and MacIntyre, mentioned above, have dealt with nationalism tangentially, but never really written on nationhood. This is hardly surprising given their background in the neo-Marxist New Left of the postwar period.³ In saying all this, it is vitally important to acknowledge the timing of these interventions. Anti-nationalism has emerged in the academy partly as a reaction to the Second World War. When viewed in this light, it is easy to see anti-nationalism as the right-thinking approach to political and social theory. At the same time, however, anti-nationalism among European intellectuals has undeniably arisen in reaction to the dismantling of the European empires and the independence of peoples formerly ruled by them, forming new "nation-states." There is undeniably a darker side to anti-nationalism among Western Christian thinkers in this respect that has not truly been acknowledged in scholarship. The most significant form of anti-nationalism in Western thought since the Second World War has undoubtedly been anti-Zionism.

The theological conflicts over recognition of the State of Israel since its foundation in 1948 are conflicts over nationhood as a theological and biblically rooted concept. To be precise, what so many Christian theologians are uneasy about is the idea that theology should be required to give a theological account of the survival of a nation that was deemed cursed and rejected by God for having mostly rejected the view that Jesus is the Messiah. Scattered abroad after the fall of the temple in A.D. 70 and the quashing of the revolt of Shimon Bar Kochba by the Romans in A.D. 135, Jews were divided between a remnant who remained in Palestine and a Diaspora spread across the world. Though the hope of returning home to the land of their ancestors was kept alive down the centuries by many Diaspora Jews, and many successive waves of Jews made their way back at

2. Tierney, *The Idea of Natural Rights*.

3. Smith, *Charles Taylor*, 13; MacIntyre, *Marxism*.

specific points in history, spurred on by apocalyptic prophecies, the practical plan of founding a Jewish state once again (as opposed to imagining how the law might work in a reconstituted Jewish state) belonged to the modern period, the period of modern European nationalisms. Paradoxically, this was also the time of the greatest secularization of Jewry as well as the greatest assimilation, particularly in Germany, the country where Jews would suffer the worst persecution in their history. Mention of Germany brings us to an interesting irony in the never-ending debates over Israel/Palestine, which is that Germany as a nation-state only came into being in 1870, and was split between 1949 and 1989. Yet the *idea* of Germany is a very old one, indeed its very name is found in Tacitus' *Germania*, as that of a people who successfully resisted Roman conquest.⁴ Germany is a good example of a nation that pre-existed its state, as an idea formed by language and territory. As such, it is wholly unsurprising that the classic theory of nationalism, that a nation needs to acquire its own state in order to be truly recognized as a nation, should have been articulated by German theologians and philosophers in the Enlightenment, such as Herder and Hegel. The sentiment is sometimes made or implied that the only entities that deserve to be considered nations are those that have ancient roots. Conservative political theorists and theologians of a politically conservative bent often do this, decrying the anticipation of new nations in the form of ideas.⁵ Yet by this logic, most of the world's nations shouldn't exist. If those advancing such an argument are Christians, by sheer logic they should only affirm as valid those nations also named in the Bible. Of course, none of them do this, which shows their position to be absurd and arbitrary. There is no objective cut-off point at which a new nation may not be formed. Anti-Zionists, people who oppose the existence of the Jewish State of Israel, sometimes do so on the basis that it was new and disruptive in the Middle East. They seem to ignore the newness of the German state, the Jews' foremost modern opponent. Israel as a state existed in antiquity, unlike Germany. By the same token, Zionists who oppose the possibility of a Palestinian state on the basis that Palestinian national consciousness is a relatively recent phenomenon are incoherent, for they never in practice oppose the existence of existing nation-states of recent provenance. In the same way, those who oppose the formation of a Palestinian nation-state on the basis that it is a nation that has never had a state, and that therefore

4. Tacitus, *Agricola and Germania*.

5. Lockwood O'Donovan, "A Timely Conversation," 377–94; O'Donovan, "A Response to Joan Lockwood O'Donovan," 395–97.

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“Palestine” is only “an idea,” are obviously inconsistent, for they in practice don’t oppose the existing German state simply because before 1870 (i.e., very recently in history) there had never been a unified German state. That a nation has never had its own state is also not a reason that it should never have one in the future. Thus the argument that distinguishing nationhood as an idea from the state as a concrete reality is morally dubious or wrong also falls down.

The conclusion to draw from all this is a discourse, whether theological or not, that is negative and unwilling to recognize the State of Israel has little or nothing genuinely positive to say either about Israel or about Palestine either. This is the central problem underlying the exposition of four Western European mainline Protestant theologians advanced in this book: Reinhold Niebuhr, Rowan Williams, John Milbank, and Karl Barth. Of these, only Karl Barth emerges in a largely favorable light. This is because he distinguishes properly between nationhood and statehood, thus allowing for theological recognition of both nation-states and stateless nations.⁶ In plain words, Barth allows for the possibility that the God of the Bible, the God of Israel and the nations, recognizes both nation-states *and* stateless nations as entities in which he has, with the witting or unwitting cooperation of human beings, placed human beings to live in order to seek him (Acts 17, recapitulating Genesis 10). As such, from reading the entire Bible, it should be clear the Bible implies God is ready to judge and pardon not only nation-states but also stateless nations. We see this clearly in the outpouring of the Spirit on Jewish and Gentile members of the nations in Acts 2. Every one of those nations was in fact stateless, not possessing a government of their own, but ruled by the Roman Empire. The descent of the Holy Spirit on all the nations of what was then the known world signaled God’s own chosen way of resolving the curse laid on the descendants of Noah when they were scattered at the destruction of the Tower of Babel. It is crucial to realize recognition, while implied in Barth’s treatment, is definitely part of a universal missiology. The peoples present at Pentecost typologically represent all the nations in world history, just like in all orthodox Christian exegesis. By contrast, Barth shows no interest in genealogies of nationhood in his work, in stark contrast to the European elites since the Reformation, who attempted to graft their own national legends of origin onto the Table of Nations in Genesis 10–11.⁷ In

6. I investigate Barth’s developing construction of nationhood at length in my book, *Nations and Nationalism in the Theology of Karl Barth*.

7. Kidd, *British Identities*.

connection to this tradition, Herder and Hegel were the originators of the philosophy of the politics of recognition of nations in the modern period.⁸ Heidegger's Nazi commitments, and his refusal to repent of them, were responsible for removing primordialist, ontological conceptualizations of nationhood from respectable intellectual discourse. The German tradition continued to be mined, however, now in a more narrowly self-conscious, pragmatist vein. For this reason we now turn briefly to Charles Taylor, whose own philosophical work on secularity and recognition is deeply indebted to reading Hegel in this fashion.

Charles Taylor is the main modern theorist of the politics of recognition. In his seminal essay "The Politics of Recognition," he argues that the demand for recognition of distinct cultures is pressed due to being considered linked to a cultural group's identity. The underlying view is as follows.

Our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or a group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or the society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being. . . . Due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need.⁹

It is easy to see here the next step imaginable, namely that recognition of persons or national cultures is a vital human right. The idea of human needs and rights is normally applied to persons. Taylor's two great works on the history of modern ideas of recognition are *Sources of the Self* and *A Secular Age*. Although the former discusses changes in philosophical anthropology, much of what is said is profoundly illuminating for the purpose of understanding the rise of modern nationalist philosophies. This is partly because the same philosophers are involved in both ideological trajectories. Taylor argues that there are key characteristics to the rise of modern Western notions of the self: the focus on inwardness, the affirmation of ordinary life, and harkening to the voice of nature. Regarding the affirmation of ordinary life, he makes the usual, rather tiresome "catholic" charge that Puritanism was to blame for the demise of old conceptions of meaningful order. His treatment of Puritan thought is superficial and deeply misbegotten. For example, he expresses surprise that Puritanism

8. Barnard, *Herder's Social and Political Thought*, 55–63.

9. Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," 26.

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specifically, and Calvinism more generally, held a “strong affinity for ancient Israel” as “paradoxical in a faith which starts from a central focus on the Epistle to the Romans.”¹⁰ He seems not to have noticed that Paul agonizes over the salvation of the nation of Israel at length in Romans, thus implying a continuity between Israel before Christ and after. Taylor is only able to comprehend the Puritan focus on Israel as driven by the extrinsic consideration of a felt need to “rectify the disorder in the world,” “a people beleaguered and embattled.” Thus Israel is only considered a model for moral imitation, not the nucleus of the elect people of God to *join* as in Romans 9–11. Taylor therefore misses the deep connection between predestination (which he mentions) and election (which he doesn’t), thus falling back on the fake picture of Calvinism that owes so much to Max Weber. Reading the rise of Calvinist orthodoxy and Puritanism as part of the history of the Western understanding of nations would put these traditions in a better light. Taylor devotes a whole chapter to John Locke, ignoring the fact that Locke was hostile to the Native Americans, unlike many Calvinists and Puritans, regarding them as lesser breeds before the law.¹¹ Taylor also devotes a chapter to the Deist notion of the natural moral sense, looking at Lord Shaftesbury, Frances Hutcheson, and David Hume.¹² There is no mention of the polygenetic theory of human origins, coupled with the theory of original polytheism, and racism, of Hume.¹³ Hume cannot represent a genuine advancement in Western understanding of the origins and recognition of national cultures. What all this tells us is that Taylor’s discussion of the affirmation of ordinary life needs to be judged in the light of the affirmation of the life of nations as an end wholly separable from the life of the church. This change is characteristic of deism. The church at best is an instrument for advancing the natural religion, but in reality, other religions will do for this task. The turn to hearkening the voice of nature is one that Taylor investigates via Voltaire, Hume, Rousseau, Kant, and Herder. Here again, if we look at this theme insofar as it pertains to understanding the nature, relations, and purpose of nations in history, we cannot draw such positive conclusions about these thinkers. In his subsequent work *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Taylor

10. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 229.

11. *Ibid.*, 234–47; Ruston, *Human Rights and the Image of God*, 251–66.

12. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 248–65.

13. Kidd, *The Forging of Races*, 93–95.

singled out Rousseau, Herder, and Hegel as the originators of the modern idea of recognition, without using that term explicitly.¹⁴

In *A Secular Age*, Taylor distinguishes three forms of secularity or secularization that have occurred in the West side by side.¹⁵ The first is the privatization of religion in and by common institutions and practices. The second is the shift from trusting religious authority to trusting the internal rationality of spheres of life as the main guide to public and private action. The third is the change in the social conditions of belief. Belief in God used to be inescapable; now it is an option. (This is reminiscent of Peter Berger's theory about the collapse of the sacred canopy and the heretical imperative to be religious in modern society.) *A Secular Age* focuses on the third type of secularity. The key shift that Taylor identifies as responsible for making belief in God optional is the rise of deism.¹⁶ In the Enlightenment Christian belief became optional, but only for the elites. By the late twentieth century it was so for everybody. Taylor's focus is on the rise of modern views of the self, so he is really quite weak on nationhood and politics. The period of secularization is the period of the increasing rejection of the biblical metanarrative about the life of nations. Taylor virtually ignores this, despite pointing out that deism had no time for particular providences regarding nations and individuals. He characterizes eighteenth-century Evangelicalism as a reaction against deism, yet this is one-sided.¹⁷ Evangelicalism was also continuing earlier Puritan traditions, and evangelical preachers such as Jonathan Edwards were self-conscious in developing theologies of divine providence over the history of the world's nations. Indeed, it is an important question as to how vital a role this kind of perspective played in the spread of revivals and missions from the eighteenth century onwards. This is part of the wider problem with Taylor's work, which is its anti-Protestant attitude, seeing the Protestant Reformation as an inevitable way station on the way to deism and atheism. He sides with the currently fashionable theory that Western theology went downhill because of those who supposedly took side with Duns Scotus against Thomas Aquinas (John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, Fergus Kerr, David Burrell, plus thinkers who aren't metaphysicians, such as Alasdair

14. Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*.

15. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 1–4.

16. *Ibid.*, 221–69.

17. *Ibid.*, 263.

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MacIntyre and Stanley Hauerwas, who favor this metanarrative because it seems to defend a Thomistic version of ethics.)¹⁸

In *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Taylor lists three modern malaises that grip social critics.¹⁹ The first is individualism, or the loss of meaning. The second is the primacy of instrumental reason, the eclipse of ends. The third is the claim that these two together lead to loss of freedom to act in the best way. It is possible to imagine this argument being translated into a critique of nationalism as follows. For “society” substitute “medieval Christendom.” Supplement individualism with nationalism. Put instrumental reason in a nationalist context. The result is the claim that nationalism hampers our freedom to act in the best way, for right ends. Self-fulfillment is basic to the ethics of authenticity for individuals. It is easy to imagine a theological critique of nationalism as hampering true human freedom to attain the good. Taylor never gets this far, basically because he isn’t explicitly interested in a theological engagement with the politics of recognition. Taylor’s prescription for healing the malaise of the culture of authenticity is learning that identities are forged through dialogue with others. Rowan Williams follows him in this respect, though focusing more on the recognition of shared common goods through “conversation.”²⁰ According to Taylor’s prescription, more dialogue and more education is needed. Taylor’s arguments are hardly original. If we transpose his argument from individuals to nations, it quickly becomes more questionable. The idea that nations are going to avoid conflict thanks to more dialogue depends on a whole host of practical factors. For “dialogue” between nations often means diplomacy and the exchange of intelligence. It is, as such, intimately bound up with surveillance, these days on a global scale. It is worth realizing that in the book of Genesis, God allows nations to be formed by the sons of Noah *after* the Deluge, which was itself a punishment for the fact that human beings had filled the earth with violence, i.e., war and conflict. Nations are now permitted to exist, like languages after Babel, to confound and confuse people, so that mass anarchy becomes near-impossible due to the obstacles and boundaries encountered. We have no prior knowledge of what an unfallen world of national diversity would look like. (Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the cast of mind of many a theologian specializing in politics is more infra-lapsarian than supra-lapsarian.) That dialogue between nations, be they nation-states or stateless nations, is necessary is

18. Ibid., 295.

19. Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 10f.

20. Williams, *Lost Icons*, 91–105.

obvious. The problem with a purely philosophical account such as Taylor's is that it appears distant from any authoritative metanarrative. Given that, for Herder, the discourse on recognition of nations was based on reading the Bible, the effacement of the Bible from Taylor's work is a real problem, an obstacle to understanding the purposeful ordering of history.

There is a need for theology to take recognition seriously. The reason is as follows. At the end of Matthew's Gospel, the risen Jesus gives his disciples the Great Commission:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matt 28:18b–20)

Because most English speakers only read the New Testament in one version of English, not in *koine* Greek, and because English has become such a loose and, in many instances, sloppy language, the full extent of the meaning of the Great Commission is not always grasped. When Jesus says "make disciples of all nations," he is not vaguely saying "make some disciples *from* each nation." He is saying that all nations as such must obey his authority, and as such the authority of the Father, the God of Israel, which is encapsulated in the Torah and fulfilled in the teaching of Jesus. Read theologically, this must encompass every nation that has ever and will ever exist. The complication, of course, is what counts as a nation. As we have seen, this is highly disputed. All missiology involves communication and reception of the message being communicated in myriad ways. The practical truth of the matter is that a missiology that declines to recognize nations unless they have states of their own is one that declines the difficult challenge of recognition of how identities came to develop as they have done, and as such, will be much less capable of being listened to and respected by its prospective audience. Mission always occurs in particular places among particular peoples. The fact that it obviously transcends these does not absolve it of the ongoing challenge of recognition. Recognition is a very difficult topic in Christian theology because it necessarily lies beneath the surface of explicitly theological and ethical discourse. It cannot simply be an aim in itself, obviously, but it must as a discourse and process of engagement be allowed to permeate theological discourse and be woven into its ethos. In ethical terms, it involves taking seriously the requirement to respect the existence of cultural matrices and settings,

rather than dismissing them as obstacles to Christian belief and practice. It requires laying aside imperialisms that hope, openly or covertly, that the subordinated, the defeated, “the natives,” the “indigenous,” will “come round” to the elite way of seeing the world in order to be considered to have “arrived.” It involves acknowledging that by virtue of human beings being continuously “placed,” replaced, and displaced from national belonging in the course of history, we all have at least one view from somewhere, even several, and that the perspective of what counts as “good” or “right” theology and ethics is quite often that of the historically imperialist nations. As has often been remarked, the Hebrew Bible has been used both by empires and by subordinated, defeated nations to envision theopolitical discourses and strategies. This is where the second main theme of this book comes in.

If the first theme of the book is that anti-nationalism and anti-Zionism are often two sides of the same coin, and involve taking leave of a serious, providential reading of the Bible as well as a willingness to understand history in broadly providential terms, the second theme is that such an approach tends to also involve a reluctance to recognize subordinated Gentile nations, especially those that have lost independence. I made the argument very briefly that anti-nationalists also have little to say to Palestinian nationalism. That said, I do not pursue the question of Palestine at length in this book. To do so would require a book of its own, as it would involve looking at many different theologians, and indeed at the whole history of the range of Christian approaches to the question. At present, we have no such monograph. Instead, I propose to locate my second theme from the perspective from which I originally became interested in the topic of nationhood, which is the identity of Wales as a stateless nation. This is deliberately in order to enable the reader to understand where I am coming from, and not to get the impression that my argument has come out of an attempt to forge a general discourse about nationhood. This may sound too labored, given that I have already promised discussion of how selected theologians handle the specific nation-State of Israel. However, even then, it is possible for the theologian to talk only about Israel and not to attend closely to the parallels between discourse around Israel and those around Gentile nations closer to home. Precisely because nationalisms differ so much, one must take the plunge and discuss particular examples if one is to say anything meaningful and contribute to a wider discussion. Of the four main theologians selected, only Rowan Williams really speaks about Wales, and he does so within the context of speaking about Britain. His work has affinities with those of John Milbank, who writes

specifically about England. Milbank's work is expressly opposed to that of Reinhold Niebuhr, whose manner of handling Israel is connected to how he handles his native America. Other theologians are brought into these discussions as well. In addition, there is a third, subordinate theme to the book, namely how "social theory" or sociology, represented by certain key figures, has handled the same issues. I have attempted to link the so-called social theorists to the theologians to explore their affinities. For example, Niebuhr is paired with Mark Juergensmeyer. Rowan Williams is juxtaposed to the debate between Adrian Hastings and Anthony Smith (the latter could profitably be assimilated to Barth's outlook). The purpose of this is to show an alternative, more concrete way of handling the relationship between theology and social theory than that given by John Milbank. Indeed, the whole question of Israel and nationhood is revealed in chapter 4 to be at the bottom of Milbank's entire approach. It follows, therefore, that the reader may justifiably invert the order of importance of the three themes of the book if they so wish. It would be possible to re-read the book attending primarily to the intersection of theology with social theory, and only then to look at the specific examples of Israel, Wales, and Britain. The reason that the book has been structured as it has been is to give it the broadest concrete horizon, rather than swamping the reader with method. Without further ado, a synopsis of each chapter follows.

PLAN OF THIS BOOK

The book's first chapter opens not with a consideration of nations and nationalism, but with the idea of "religious resurgence" as a recent global threat insofar as it poses a challenge to secularization. The paradoxical claim is advanced that many academics are involved in an alternative religious resurgence of their own against secularism, and that this masks anti-nationalism. At the same time, the anxiety over popular religious resurgence is contrasted with the almost total lack of critique of the "resurgence" of Western esotericism and occultism in society, and at the academic level the adherence of some scholars whom I deem part of the "alternative" resurgence to discourses grounded in some key Western esoteric thinkers such as Hegel. This is the real source of the attack on "religious resurgence" and "fundamentalism"—the long history of attacks on exoteric, confessional Protestant theologies; specifically, reformed, Pietist, and Pentecostal theologies. Naturally, no assumption is made here that there are only two religious discourses involved in late

modernity. I am being selective precisely because two of the four main theologians handled in this book, John Milbank and Rowan Williams, have clearly demonstrable affinities with aspects of the Western esoteric tradition that emerged within Western Christendom. The point is that when anxieties are expressed about “religious resurgence,” “religious violence,” and “religious nationalism,” it is religions of revelation that are being criticized. Only after discussions of secularization are recast briefly in this light does the discussion turn to nations and nationalism. Against the contemporary anti-American mood, I propose that the focus can be profitably moved to consider British imperialism. The reason is that anti-Americanism arises today partly as a reaction against the State of Israel, yet it was *Britain*, not the United States, that was the last imperial power to rule over the Holy Land. The remainder of the chapter is occupied with a discussion of the work of Philip Jenkins—a British (Welsh) scholar of religion, largely sociological in his approach, who works in the United States—regarding his handling of religious resurgence and Israel/Palestine. Jenkins is a prolific author whose works are aimed at the more popular end of the academic market and at the popular book market. This is precisely why a consideration of his work matters, for he has made certain global themes visible in a particularly concrete way fitting for such a broad audience. Jenkins embodies what I have called “the religious resurgence of academics” well, thus forming a suitable case-study of a social theorist of religion and theology handling religion and nationalism.

The second chapter turns to Reinhold Niebuhr, the most prominent liberal Protestant theologian to support Zionism in the United States in the mid-twentieth century. Only a minority of theologians, clergy, and laity in the mainline churches ever supported Zionism. Some argue that because Niebuhr’s Zionism was not grounded in dogmatic theology and biblical exegesis, it was not transmitted to the next generation of mainline Protestants. Furthermore, the structure of his thought left open the possibility of an anti-Zionist approach. This chapter assesses the tensions between theology and ethics in Niebuhr’s Zionism, and links it to his conception of both Israel and America as messianic nations with civilizational missions. First, it assesses Niebuhr’s support for a Jewish return to Palestine in relation to Protestant and Jewish relocation of the Promised Land. The second section argues that Niebuhr’s Zionism was integral to his Christian realism. The third section probes his shift from viewing Jews as a messianic people to understanding America as a messianic nation, subsuming Israel under America’s civilizing mission. The fourth section

argues that Niebuhr's natural theology, which was the basis for his understanding of history and divine transcendence, constrained what he could say concerning the "biblical myths" of covenant and election regarding Israel. The fifth section argues that Niebuhr located his Zionism within his reconstruction of natural law and subjected it to his critique of nationalism and religion. As his Zionism was not theologically grounded, his support for Israel could not be persuasive theologically for subsequent generations of mainline Protestants. In the last two sections, I argue that Niebuhr's method had a major influence on American postliberal theology and on Mark Juergensmeyer's sociological assessment of apocalyptic violence as religious resurgence since the end of the Cold War. As Niebuhr's argument for Zionism was kept outside the bounds of theology, it failed to be registered properly by postliberalism, and his denial of the election of Israel opened the door to denial or ignoring by Christians of the implication of Judaism as politics, and therefore of Zionism, in the challenges of modernity. The result is that postliberalism with its heavy focus on narrative, drama, and nonviolence, is powerless to diagnose the ills of anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism that are so prevalent in forms of religious resurgence around the world.

The third chapter steps back from the theme of Israel to look at Wales as a stateless nation, a nation that lost its state due to conquest by England. This furnishes a suitable case for probing the origins of British imperialism because Wales was the first country to be taken over by England, and as such, this moment logically constitutes the true origin of what became British imperialism (with England being represented by "Britain"). The chapter investigates how Rowan Williams handles Wales in relation to Britain. The texts I assess are two pieces on Welsh devolution and British identity, one written in 1979 and the other in 2009. I do so in relation to the paper to which Williams responds at the 1979 colloquium on Welsh devolution, by the distinguished Welsh Reformed theologian and historian R. Tudur Jones. A continuation and modification of Jones' approach is suggested, drawing on Dutch Reformed theologians, Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck. Noting the low priority given to Israel in their work, I turn to analyze critically the debate on nationhood between Hastings and the sociologist Anthony D. Smith, who has argued that ancient Israel in the Bible is a nation analogous to modern nations, and that as such, nationhood is an ancient pre-modern concept, which has been incarnated in new political theories since the Enlightenment.

Chapter 4 mounts an original critique of John Milbank's approach to theology and social theory, building upon and criticizing the existing literature on his work. I argue that his work from *Theology and Social Theory* onwards, which constitutes a concerted attack on the social sciences, is really a theological attack on Protestant and Jewish political discourses flourishing in modernity. This becomes clear in his approach to modern Israel, and in the privileging of a pre-Enlightenment "Christian" Kabbalah and Hermeticism, a theological resourcing from the heart of Western esotericism, one that constitutes a highly idiosyncratic instance of "academic religious resurgence" against certain forms of popular religiosity. The peculiarly English setting of this turn is uncovered, and the problem of the fascination with pagan sources, myths, and legends of British origin that veer close to at least a dubious parallelism, if not in practice a replacement, of ancient Israel's place in the Christian metanarrative. This launches the final part of the chapter, a radical questioning of the much-vaunted "radical orthodoxy" of Milbank's project. This leads onto a similar scrutiny of Rowan Williams' theology.

The fifth chapter explores in more depth the trajectory taken by Rowan Williams in between the 1979 paper on Welsh devolution and the 2009 essay on British identity. Rowan Williams' political thinking is shown to have been secular from his first publication on politics, the 1979 paper. I then analyze critically Williams' reading of Hegel in the three papers he wrote in the 1990s as he climbed the Anglican episcopal ladder. Reading Hegel enables Williams to resacralize his secular political theory. I argue that Williams strives to read Hegel in a non-esoteric style, concealing Hegel's esoteric and pagan roots discussed by Gillian Rose and Andrew Shanks, to whom he is indebted for his reading of Hegel. This challenges Williams' insistence that Hegel's theology is compatible with the construction of Christian doctrine in general, and of a Christian political theology specifically. Williams' Hegelian political theology can be understood as a managerial discourse directed against more "orthodox" Protestant and Catholic theologies. Rowan Williams' Hegelian outlook is framed by an apophatic approach to eschatology and the doctrine of creation "out of nothing." His eschatology is strongly rooted in pneumatology but lacks a strong christological focus. Political projects as the outcome of human transformation are placed in the foreground. The resolution of theological, ethical, and political debates through biblical exegetical debates is deferred eschatologically, which is paradoxical as the *eschaton* is understood apophatically. There are political concerns behind this approach, as there

are for Williams' elusive approach to the doctrine of creation "out of nothing." This apophatic approach to the doctrinal limits of history enable both concealment and management of exegetical debates on the beginning and end of history, be they Christian or Islamic. This analysis, along with the analysis provided in the first article submitted, enables a critical analysis of Williams' 2008 lecture on Islamic law in England and Western countries. While his concept of community as applied to Islam shows the influence of J. N. Figgis, it is arguable that his approach is also influenced by Gillian Rose. The lecture demonstrates how Williams' political theology is characterized by viewing Anglicanism as having the right and responsibility to manage other Christian and Islamic discourses. This is relevant to his outlook on Israel/Palestine.

In the penultimate chapter, we start by looking at Williams' Christology in relation to interfaith dialogue with Jews and Muslims, an approach developed explicitly to move Anglican interfaith concerns away from debates about John Hick's soteriological pluralism. His apophatic approach to theology serves both to continue some of the concerns of liberal Protestant "interfaith" approaches to Israel/Palestine, and to draw back from overt soteriological pluralism. Here the managerial apophasis analyzed in the 2008 lecture on Islamic law is revealed as explicitly functioning to hold an ambiguous attitude towards the position held by many Protestant and Roman Catholic Christians, that the future of Israel is underwritten by divine providence understood in prophetic terms. Williams' 2004 proposal for "a liberation theology for the Holy Land" is analyzed in relation to the discussion of his theology thus far. The deeper problem is found, as in 1979, in the reading of the Bible. I argue that Williams' apophatic approach to the Bible needs to be challenged in two ways. First, it needs to be redirected away from his preoccupation with it as cognitive technique to focusing on the Minor Prophets' call to be silent before God in light of the coming Day of the Lord, which I juxtapose with the threefold mystery taught by the New Testament as the revelation of Jesus Christ in history, the salvation of "all Israel," and the final resurrection of the righteous. This contrasts with the mystery cults that have been smuggled into the Christian tradition and left their traces on Hegel's esotericism. The second way in which Williams' apophatic approach to the Bible needs to be challenged is in a move to a more realist view of biblical narrative. I start from George Steiner's consideration that the biblical text is the homeland of the Jewish nation in exile. By analogy, I argue that Rowan Williams' theology has become somewhat exiled from the biblical text, and that this parallels his

“apophatic” and “free” approach to poetry, which is exiled from the mainstream metrical Welsh poetic tradition. This parallels the evasive attitude towards nationhood that has been discussed so far. In order to move on from this position, I argue for Petra Herdt’s view that realist reading of the Bible has never died out in Israel because of the synchronism of the language and the landscape, which can be inclusive of critical perspectives. Taking this particular sense of place seriously is an ecumenical venture for Christians. This enables a bridge into considering Karl Barth’s approach in *Church Dogmatics* III/1, III/3, and IV/2.

Against Williams’ view that Israel was formed at the exodus, Barth insists on the election of Abraham, and even goes back to the creation of Adam and Eve in Eden, which medieval Jewish exegetes understood to be a cryptic way of referring to the Holy Land. All of this is included within election by Barth. The formation of modern Israel is understood by Barth to be a secular parable of resurrection. Already this points to an “inclusive” reading of election, as Jesus includes both Jews and Gentiles. The history of Israel is, for Barth, included in the history of Jesus. It is a type of the history of God’s dealing with every nation. If Jesus is the New Adam, and the first Adam lived in the Holy Land and was exiled from it to the east, then this transforms our understanding of who may live in the Land. Barth’s doctrine of election is one of unconditional grace, which I argue corresponds somewhat on the political level to the Dutch Reformed concept of common grace. For Barth, the modern reunion of Jews in the Land with Jews from the Diaspora constitutes a secular parable of the resurrection and the kingdom of God. At the same time, he argues, as he did before 1945, that any nation intending to destroy the people of Israel will itself forever be frustrated, and that any new state founded with the intention of destroying Israel will never succeed. Barth clearly is arguing on the basis of God’s words to Abraham in Genesis 12:1–3, and other passages in the Old Testament. He clearly has Palestinian nationalism in mind. While this reads in a negative light, logically it shows a willingness to consider that a new Palestinian stateless nationhood has come into being and requires proper political expression as a neighbor of Israel and other surrounding nations. Thus while Barth never explicitly advocated the formation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel, he cannot either be said to be categorically opposed to it.

Finally, I show how Barth’s approach illuminates approaches discussed in this book. Barth connects back to Anthony D. Smith’s concept of nation as close to *ethnos*. He can accept stateless nations and nation-states,

nations that have lost their states, and nations that have never had states, because he accepts the fullness of the biblical witness concerning Israel. Similarly, postliberal readings of Barth also confuse Jews as a nation and Judaism due to wanting to espouse a two-covenant theology, thus casting Barth as a supersessionist, which he is not when it comes to the nation of Israel. The church cannot metaphysically replace Israel, because it is a spiritual community of those who are born from above, whereas Israel remains a nation, a community of first birth. In conclusion, Barth's approach is arguably one that can bring conceptual clarity and equal recognition to the national realities of Israel and Palestine, in the Christian reading of the Bible. At the same time, it allows for recognition of nations that have no state of their own.

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