Preface

The question of the recognition of nations as such, whether or not they have states of their own, is one that has been important in the modern era, and which is associated with forms of nationalism. As such it has been understood to belong to a variety of general theories of political ethics. Rarely has the challenge of recognition been considered within the challenge of the recognition of the modern State of Israel, and of the Jews as a distinct national group. Naturally, there are chronological reasons for this—the State of Israel was founded in 1948, so for most of its history Christian theologians and ethicists could not have considered recognition of nations as part of the set of arguments that arise when considering the State of Israel. It is well-known that many Christian discourses on nationalism have been indebted hermeneutically to re-readings and reinterpretations of the history of Israel in the Old Testament. Such discourses at their best tend to mix aspects of what we would now call liberation theologies with more traditional, deontological ethics and prophetic discourses warning the people of divine judgment, while encouraging them to accept divine grace and mercy for corporate national sins. This mixture has appealed especially to nations that have been subordinated and rendered stateless by other, imperialistic nations. The pairing of Israel and Babylon has been reconfigured across world history many times. In theological terms, it is highly significant that it was Israel that was the chosen nation, a small nation, and one that did not even begin with a state of its own, but issued from a Sumerian commanded to become a nomadic wanderer, at least for a season. Christian theologians and ethicists have often found it difficult to balance these different aspects of biblical discourse on the nation of Israel and, in practice, many have been deeply suspicious of what the Canadian Catholic philosopher Charles Taylor calls the politics of recognition. There is all too often an underlying sense that if Christians who are concerned for a subordinated nation demand proper

recognition as nations—challenging the self-designation of the state to which they belong as a "nation-state"—that the bonds of trust within that state will break down, and serious conflict will escalate to unmanageable proportions. The parallels between the cry for recognition by members of subordinate nations and the struggle for recognition in a direct, state formation, as with the history of Israel, is one that often gets neglected by modern English-speaking theologians and ethicists these days. Undoubtedly this is because debates about the State of Israel tend to be stuck around debates about US foreign policy and Israel's relation to the Palestinians. This book is partly an attempt to get beyond this perspective by confronting readers with the necessity of recognition of Israel as part of the Christian necessity for recognition of *all* nations. It does so by pulling the rug from beneath the debates about the USA to look at the British, and therefore European, origins of imperialist discourses on nationhood that tend to put a Gentile imperial nation in the place of Israel in world history. Britain is a very good case to look at for two reasons. First, Britain's was the last empire to rule the Holy Land before 1948. This contrasts with the fact that the USA has never actually governed the Holy Land as part of a territorial empire. Second, the British Empire was the largest empire in world history, and it is precisely at the time of its withdrawal from British Mandate Palestine that it started to disintegrate. Most historians ignore this, because they don't think in Christian terms about the Holy Land being at the center of the world map. The important question then is, when did the British Empire start? I deconstruct this question by looking to its core—English imperialism within the British isles. This leads me back to the English conquest of Wales, which is the nation into which I was born. Thus I inhabit a (partial) perspective within the argument I unfold, looking to the universal horizon provided by the existence of the State of Israel as part of divine providence. This kind of exercise is an important one for the very integrity of Christian theology and ethics precisely because of its very nature; it is best conducted when carried out by as many people from as many countries as possible. It could just as well be conducted by someone uncovering the history of discourses around Ireland, Scotland, Native Americans, or African slaves and their descendants, especially in the West. These connections have, from time to time, been made by historians and cultural theorists, but theologians and ethicists, especially in state institutions, have not really made them.

That said, this book did not only start as a project about the interrelationship of recognition of nations and providence. The questions

that ultimately led me to write it were also linked to missiology. There is a popular genre of Christian missionary preaching that tells its audience the reason for the incarnation as follows: God created the world, then human beings turned away from him. Therefore, God formed a people, a nation—Israel—so that they might be faithful to him and be an example of righteousness to the rest of the world. They failed in this task, so God sent his Son to become a man and redeem human beings from their sinful and failure-prone tendencies. This story is told in various ways that are problematic. The problem that came to interest me was that it seemed to imply God formed a nation only to permanently discard it when its people did not live up to his standards. In came the church instead. Preachers who make this argument for the incarnation rarely give evidence of realizing that the very same logic they use to argue that God has discarded the nation of Israel for good could be used to justify discarding the Christian church for good, because it too has such a checkered history. I also began to notice how this kind of preaching effectively means that nations are not taken seriously as part of the divine plan for world history. This struck me as very odd because in the Bible, God is said to have placed people in nations since the time of the sons of Noah. On the ethical side, one worries that the story gave excuses for privatizing the scope of Christian ethics; for limiting it to the church and individuals' lives. The point, it seems, was to be saved *out of* the life-world of nations. Contemporary popular discussions in the West of how Christian should relate to life outside the church never get to this point. They talk about all kinds of other issues—culture, the workplace, etc.—and break down the issues by ethical topic or sphere of life, but never according recognition of the largest population unit permitted in the Bible apart from the church, namely nationhood. Something somewhere has gone very wrong with modern Western Christian ethics, at least in the English-speaking world. Perhaps this is the effect of its being written in English, the language of modern political and cultural imperialism. It is most certainly the effect of decades of chanting the mantra "we dislike nationalism," and of projecting all things to do with nationalism dishonestly onto Nazi Germany, while invoking Karl Barth's work for the confessing church in the process. Most theologians and ethicists who think like this—and there are a lot of them around—are not familiar enough with Barth's writing on nationhood. I have covered that in depth in another book—*Nations and Nationalism in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Oxford University Press, 2013). In the present book, I shall be embarking upon a more adventurous constructive project, albeit one that proceeds

via comparative analysis of select theologians and social theorists dealing with both the State of Israel and with Wales and England in relation to Britain. Of course, some readers won't like it. One-nationism dies hard in Britain, especially in troubled times. There are many reasons for this tendency, which I don't explore in this book for reasons of space, as well as because it would take me into the territories of law and constitution, which, while important, wouldn't essentially undo my argument. My hope is that readers may have enough patience with my writing—which, I realize, proceeds down rather intricately woven paths of analytic criticism of several thinkers—to agree that the challenges of recognition lie deeply embedded in broader debates handled in the book. Indeed, recognition is a universal issue, and has become very important in the world post-1948 with the formation of the United Nations, the decline of colonialism, the surge in the number of independent states, anti-racist campaigns, the rise of indigenous people's movements and movements for national and ethnic minorities and linguistic rights. Recognition is in reality a basic requirement of Christian theology and ethics, but many in these disciplines and fields behave as if this were not the case. I live for the day when nobody will be able to be taken seriously, let alone imagine that they could be uttering theological wisdom, when they try to tell me "Wales is not a nation." Until then, what needs to be said is that such refusal of recognition fundamentally goes against the grain of the biblical witness and good missiology and Christian ethics. It will ensure that those who speak in this manner will have no capacity for being taken seriously by any other peoples or stateless minority nations that have endured imperialism and colonialism down the centuries.