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'Faith in nation comes in different guises': modernist versions of religious nationalism

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Paper for NATIONS AND NATIONALISM

**‘FAITH IN NATION COMES IN DIFFERENT GUISES’ⁱ: MODERNIST
VERSIONS OF RELIGIOUS NATIONALISMⁱⁱ**

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It is usual to see in nationalism a modern, secular ideology that replaces the religious systems found in premodern, traditional societies. In this view, ‘religion’ and ‘nationalism’ figure as two terms in the conventional distinction between tradition and modernity and in an evolutionary framework that sees an inevitable movement—whether evolutionary or destructive—from the one to the other. (Smith 2003: 9)

The conventional understanding of the relationship between nationalism and religion, so succinctly summarised in the above-quoted paragraph from Anthony Smith’s *Chosen Peoples* (2003), is now increasingly often called into question. The persistence of religious practices and beliefs in virtually all contemporary societies, and the interweaving of religious and nationalist discourses across the world have driven many scholars to rethink the well-worn, ahistorical and Eurocentric opposition of modernity and tradition, as well as the concomitant understanding of the relationship between religion and nationalism (Juergensmeyer 1993; van der Veer 1994; Van der Veer and Lehmann 1999; Smith 2003; Spohn 2003). This paper adds to this line of debate by examining a particular version of nationalism which clearly defies any simplistic, dichotomising notions of the relationship between religion and nationalism.

One of the chief obstacles to the development of a more nuanced approach to the relationship between religion and nationalism is the prevailing understanding of secularisation, which also forms a central ingredient of the historical narrative that assumes a fundamental disruption between modernity and tradition. In most cases, secularisation is equated with a radical and linear decline of religious beliefs and practices, if not with a wholesale disappearance of religion from all aspects of human

life. However, even a cursory examination of debates about among sociologists of religion (e.g. Dobbelaere 1981; Tschannen 1992) would reveal that such an understanding of secularisation has long been regarded as seriously flawed and empirically unsustainable. While the period of European revolutions was indeed followed by a rise of secular nationalisms that demanded a disentanglement of religion and politics, it is also clear that this disentanglement often remained a political ideal rather than a reality. Instead of being wiped out, religious understandings of nationhood coexisted with secular ones and entered a range of different relations with them (Rémond 1999; McLeod 2000).

Ironically, both modernist theorists of nationalism as well as their critics tend to ignore these critical revisions of the secularisation thesis, and establish a sharp opposition between secular (and anti-religious) nationalism on the one hand, and religious (and anti-secular) nationalism on the other hand. Building on a review of recent debates on secularisation among sociologists of religion, this paper argues that these two varieties of nationalism in fact form the opposite ends of a continuum along which we can find a wide array of nationalisms which draw on religious ideas and symbols but are not necessarily inimical to the modernist, secular view of the world.ⁱⁱⁱ Unlike most cases of religious nationalism examined in nationalism literature so far, these *modernist religious nationalisms* acknowledge – though not necessarily approve of – the existence of secular states, and abide by their rules. After outlining the main traits of such modernist religious nationalism, the paper examines one of its most prominent manifestations: the Protestant modernist nationalism. It discusses the common interpretation of Max Weber's widely influential thesis about the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism, and points to its confluence with nineteenth-century Protestant nationalisms in Germany and Britain. The remainder of the paper examines recent cases of modernist religious nationalisms arising in post-Cold Eastern Europe, with a particular focus on Slovenia. Special attention is paid to the convergence of modernist religious nationalisms and the contemporary discourse on 'Europeanisation' in the region, and to the ways in which these discourses are being used to belittle particular religious traditions and nations as being incapable of European integration, democratisation or modernisation.

Religion, nationalism and secularisation

As a rule, proponents of the modernist approach to nations and nationalism are criticised for assuming a fundamental incompatibility and rivalry between nationalism and religion, ruling out the possibility of overlapping between the two. Yet as Smith (2003) rightly points out, things are more complicated than that. In many seminal works on nationalism published since the 1960s, religion is seen as somewhat paradoxically both conducive and opposed to the rise of nationalism. By and large, it is treated as a source that often provided the raw materials for the creation of modern nationalism, but remained fundamentally alien and even hostile to it. Confessional identities of the early modern period, initiated by the Reformation in the sixteenth century, are often acknowledged as being of immense importance to the formation of national identities. Yet at the same time, they are also regarded as significantly different from fully blown modern national identities: in a characteristic formulation provided by Heinz Schilling, these identities belong to ‘a transitional type of identification’, located half-way between mediaeval and modern secular identity (Schilling 1995: 11).

The argument developed by Eric Hobsbawm in his *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (1990) is a case in point. Hobsbawm accepts that religion and national consciousness can be tightly intertwined, pointing out that both are methods of establishing commonality among people who otherwise have little in common. Nevertheless, he keeps treating religion as inherently inimical to nationalism, arguing that ‘modern nationalism has usually [...] treated it with considerable reserve as a force which could challenge the “nation’s” monopoly claim to its members’ loyalty’ (1990: 68). A similarly hesitant acknowledgment of links between nationalism and religion can be found in Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (1983). Anderson clearly singles out Protestantism as one of the key factors contributing to the erosion of the sacred imagined community and the rise of new, national imagined communities. Yet while acknowledging that the new print languages adopted by Protestant reformers laid the bases for national consciousness, he also emphasises that at its origins, the fixing of these print languages was largely unselfconscious and was not underpinned by nationalist impulses. At the very most, then, nationalism should be seen as an unintended consequence of Protestantism.

Ernest Gellner’s work on nationalism is another case in point. He does not deny the connections between religion and nationalism, and is particularly keen to

acknowledge the link between Protestantism or 'Protestant-type' attitudes and nationalism (Gellner 1968: 308; 1983: 41-42; 1997: 22-23). In his last, posthumously published book on nationalism, he even states that 'Protestant-type' religious movements 'may favour identification with a culture, albeit legitimated by linkage to a faith and a path of salvation' (Gellner 1997: 22-23). Nevertheless, he believes these links do not jeopardise his main argument, and insists that the merging of polity and culture, i.e. nationalism, is by and large characteristic only of industrialised, that is modernised societies. This is not to say that religions, or other elements of pre-modern high cultures, cannot become a part of the 'idioms of modern nations'. However, in doing so, they must dissolve themselves as religions if they are to attract the entire society: 'the price these high cultures pay for becoming the idiom of entire territorial nations, instead of appertaining to a clerkly stratum only, is that they become secularized' (Gellner 1983: 78).

One may well agree with Anthony Smith's claim that in modernist approaches, 'nations and nationalism are treated as wholly recent and novel phenomena, and a secular, anthropocentric, and anticlerical modernity is always conterposed to tradition and traditional society with its emphasis on custom and religion' (2003: 10). Yet to argue, on the basis of that, that all modernist theorists also necessarily deny the possibility of religious nationalism is going a step too far. In principle, most proponents of the modernist approach to nationalism would probably agree with many of the claims usually fostered by their critics – for example with the claim that religion was not only involved in the creation of nations, but remains a constitutive element of modern national identities to the present day. However, they would also insist that the position of religion in a modern society is significantly different from the position held before the advent of secularisation.

Why, then, does the polarisation of the debate on nationalism and religion persist? Arguably, one of the major reasons for the current confusion is a rather unspecified and simplistic understanding of 'secularisation'. For most participants in the debate, secularisation seems to equal a wholesale decline, if not outright disappearance of religion. Secular nationalism is therefore seen as entirely incompatible and in fact hostile to religion; if secular nationalism is to triumph, religion necessarily has to wither away. However, even a brief scan of debates among sociologists of religion would reveal a far more complex picture of secularisation. A steady trickle of works

sceptical of the radical version of the secularisation thesis (Luckmann 1967; Bellah 1967; Bell 1977), and even rejecting it as a social myth (Glasner 1977), emerged already in the late 1960s and the 1970s. By the 1990s, this strain of criticisms has managed to attract substantial support, and lead to a major reshuffling of classical theories of secularisation. The ‘disappearance thesis’, according to which modernisation was bound to lead into a general decline in the prestige of religious symbols, doctrines and institutions in all spheres of life, was discredited. Instead, more complex, multi-level models for the analysis of secularisation were devised (see for example Dobbelaere 1981). It was noted that although secularisation generally leads to a declining authority of religion at least in some social spheres, it does not automatically amount to a wholesale disappearance of religion (Tschannen 1992). To sum up, the revised version of the secularisation theory acknowledges that secularisation is not necessarily a linear, universal and inevitable process, but rather ‘a historically variable and contingent outcome’, and ‘an episodic, uneven, and perhaps even reversible process’ (Gorski 2003: 121).

Another important point to note is that many sociologists of religion acknowledge the existence of persistent alliances between religion and nationalism. These are facilitated by the fact that religion is becoming increasingly detached from established religious institutions, and ‘may be invested with highly diverse meanings and used for a wide variety of purposes [...] both within and outside the framework of religious organizations and, where they exist, state religions’ (Beckford 1989: 171). Rather than being rejected by secular nation-states, then, religious beliefs and practices may easily be co-opted and supported by them, in particular if they are seen to play a major social role, for example functioning as an instrument of national defence or survival (Martin 1978; Bruce 1996). According to David Martin (1978), the link between nationhood and religion is of enormous importance, and functions as a necessary condition for the flourishing of religious attachment in most European countries. The fact that Christianity may be in contradiction or competition with nationalism is, in his view, no obstacle to that:

Christianity may be a religion which rejects the worship of Caesar or the exaltation of the ethnic group, but in order to retain even the possibility of suggesting more worthy objects of praise, it must be positively related to the national consciousness, particularly as this is highlighted in a myth of national origin. (Martin 1978: 101)

Also several historians of nineteenth century, significantly influenced by the debates among sociologists, began to challenge the standard accounts of how secularisation actually happened, and raised the question of whether it really led to a linear decline of religion and religious varieties of nationalism. According to Hugh McLeod (2000), the general tendency of recent historical examinations has actually been to accentuate the continuing significance of religious beliefs and of the churches throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century; although the rise of nationalism and racism has indeed potentially weakened the appeal of religious affiliations, many varieties of nationalism continued to contain a strong religious ingredient. According to some authors, the growth of the modern nation-state actually led to a strengthening rather than demise of Christianity, since it provided the churches with better means to Christianise the people (Turner 1988).

What is the bearing of these theories and findings for the current debates about religious nationalism among nationalism scholars? Firstly, they suggest that a substantial part of the recent debates among nationalism scholars is somewhat misplaced. If secularisation does not mean a wholesale disappearance of religion, then the fact that classic, modernist approaches to nationalism insist on the confluence of secularisation and the rise of nationalism is not, in itself, a problem. What is problematic is only the belief – shared not just by modernist theorists but often also by their critics – that secularisation necessarily wipes out religious varieties of nationalism. Contrary to what many critics of modernist approaches to nationalism seem to suggest, this belief is not only wrong when applied to the non-Western world, but does not match the empirical record for Western Europe either: even today, many European states maintain close links with religious institutions, and cannot be seen as entirely disassociated from religion. Obviously, there is no need to ‘step outside the magic circle of the modern West’ to grasp the link between religion and nationalism (Smith 2005: 415).

Secondly, if secularisation does not necessarily lead into a disappearance of religion, the modern situation need not be reduced to a black-and-white confrontation of fully secular, anti-religious nationalisms, and uncompromisingly anti-secular religious nationalisms. In addition, we need to acknowledge also the existence of a wide array of *modernist* religious nationalisms situated somewhere between these two extremes. This term should cover all those varieties of religious nationalism which acknowledge

– though not necessarily approve of – the existence of secular states, and abide by their rules. This abidance does not automatically mean a whole-sale disassociation of religion and religious nationalism from the state, but can include various forms of cooperation between the two, as long as they are regulated primarily by the state rather than religious institutions themselves. Unlike anti-secular religious nationalisms which seek to ‘rescue the nation from the profane Western ‘nation-state’ and its materialist corruptions’ (Smith 2003: 415), the modernist versions of religious nationalism normally acknowledge the legitimacy of the modern, secular nation-state. Sometimes, they are also prepared to embrace the ‘materialism’ of capitalist societies, as well as other aspects regarded as characteristic of Western modernity, ranging from democracy to gender equality.

Weber’s thesis and Protestant nationalisms in nineteenth-century Europe

In response to modernist and secularist discourses and policies, virtually all major religions have become involved in such modernist varieties of religious nationalism. The Second Vatican Council clearly sought to bring the Catholic Church up-to-date with modern times, however limited the success of this attempt might have been, and the Islamic tradition had diversified into a range of forms, some of them expressly open to modern values and ideas, including the secular state. However, historically, various religions have not been equally willing to enter into an alliance with the secular state, nor were they all equally supportive of various aspects of modernisation. Most importantly, these historically arising differences between religions have slowly been transformed into a rule: only some religions – most notably Protestantism – came to be considered as intrinsically compatible with the exigencies of the secular state and the demands of the modern society, while others began to be regarded as stumbling blocks, inherently hostile to modernisation and progress.

Throughout the nineteenth and well into the early twentieth century, the classification of religions with regard to their elective affinities with modernity constituted a major preoccupation of European intellectuals, acquiring particular prominence with the publication of Max Weber’s *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904-5) and R. H. Tawney’s *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (1926). Since Weber, many have sought to explain modern developments by reference to religion, and what Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt wrote in 1968 remains almost equally

valid today: ‘Many seek in the Protestant ethic or some equivalent the key to an understanding of why some non-Western countries have achieved modernization while others have not’ (Eisenstadt 1968: 3). Several scholars investigating the transformation of the Islamic tradition in the twentieth century have followed this line of enquiry, likening Islamic reform movements and their impact on Muslim societies with Protestant Reformation and its effects on the development of the modern Western culture (Rodinson 1973 [1966]; Gellner 1968; Bocock 1971; Goldberg 1991; Khan 2003). Some have even gone as far as to claim that much like Calvinist theology, certain doctrines advocated by the Muslim reformist movements display affinities with modern capitalism (Bocock 1971: 369). In a similar vein, Japanese social scientists understood Weber’s theory as a plot for a successful modernization of their own country, and looked for functional equivalents to Protestantism in Japan (Schwentker 2005). Analogous debates about modernity and Protestantism developed also in relation to South Korea (Hong 2001) and Latin America (Gill 2004).

So far, most nationalism scholars have failed to appreciate the full implications of this long-standing tendency to explain the world history, social differences, and thus also progress and backwardness, in terms of religion. Most importantly, they failed to notice that since the nineteenth century, this intellectual tradition has developed an influential nationalist inflection. In fact, it became deeply implicated in the rise of the most explicitly and decidedly modernist religious nationalisms so far: the Protestant nationalisms of nineteenth century Europe. Unlike fully secular nationalisms, which seek the roots of progress and development in the Enlightenment, these nationalisms were based on another version of the modernist narrative – one which locates the beginnings of modernity in Protestantism.^{iv} Consequently, proponents of modernist Protestant nationalisms believed that Protestant nations were best equipped for development and progress, including things such as industrialisation, adoption of democracy and religious pluralism.

Many would probably be tempted to ascribe these arguments directly to Max Weber and his followers. However, various theories about the relationship between religion and economy can be traced back to the sixteenth century, and in Weber’s time, beliefs in the link between Protestantism and economic progress were in fact a commonplace. Rather than standing at the beginning of this discussion, Weber then simply reinforced an existing trend of argumentation, instilling it with new and original ideas

(Münch 1993: 53; cf. Nipperdey 1993: 76; Kitch 1967). Although his scholarly work was detached from the heightened, passionate debates on this issue, he certainly began writing his essay on *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*

with the assurance that it was the conventional opinion of his contemporaries that there was a close connection between religion and society. They especially believed that the differences between Protestants and Catholics had a strong impact on social structure and social status [...] The burden of proof was not with those who held this assumption but with those who would deny it. (Nipperdey 1993: 73)

It should certainly be noted that Weber carefully avoided claims about a straightforward, necessary connection between Protestantism and modernity (Nipperdey 1993: 79), and that his thesis operates largely at the level of unintended consequences (Bruce 1990). Nevertheless, much of its popular reception and subsequent scholarly debate continues to understand the relation between modern developments, especially capitalism, and Protestantism as an almost automatic causal relationship. Regardless of what Weber himself thought and wrote about the issue, this ‘common interpretation’ of his thesis, namely the belief that the rise of industrial capitalism was facilitated by Protestantism and therefore occurred earlier in predominantly Protestant countries, has taken on ‘a life of its own’ (Delacroix and Nielsen 2001: 510). Despite various criticisms levelled at such interpenetrations of Weber’s theory, beliefs about Protestantism being the well-spring of modernity continue to permeate much of the contemporary sociological and economic writing.

Two of the best-known historical cases of modernist Protestant nationalism, based on this common interpretation of Weber’s thesis, can be found in late nineteenth-century Britain and Germany. In Britain, Protestantism provided the linchpin of national identity throughout much of the nineteenth century (Colley 1996; McBride and Claydon 1998; Clark 2000). In this period, Britishness was defined primarily in opposition to Roman Catholicism, and Britain was believed to be a chosen nation, destined to defend and propagate reformed Christianity (Wolffe 1991; cf. Arnstein 1982; Griffin 2004). Some of the main objections against Catholicism were based on the belief that Catholicism was a religion of the past, bound to dissipate with the advancement of modernisation, and give way to a more progressive religion – Protestantism. In the Protestant vision of history, the global march of civilisation was linked to Protestantism, while Catholicism was regarded as the retrograde religion, as ‘the primitive that Protestantism leaves behind’ (Griffin 2004: 5).

Several major exponents of anti-Catholicism in nineteenth-century Britain have attempted to explain the variations in progress and backwardness in terms of religious differences. According to J. E. C. Welldon (1854-1937), Bishop of Calcutta, ‘wherever there was a country that was stationary and retrogressive it was Catholic, wherever there was a people which was progressive and Imperial it was Protestant’ (quoted in McLeod 2000: 236). In a similar vein, Richard Paul Blakeney (1820-84), author of *Popery in its Social Aspect* (1852), argued that economic success was inversely related to the influence of Catholicism in a particular country or region, providing as examples the contrast between Catholic Ireland and Protestant Scotland, as well as, within Ireland itself, Protestant Ulster and the Catholic south (Wolffe 1991: 120- 121). Finally, Hensley Henson (1863-1947), Canon of Westminster, who later became Bishop of Durham, maintained that Britain was more Christian than other European countries, because Protestantism, with its rationalism and propensity for freedom, was more in tune with the modern age (quoted in McLeod 2000: 235).

In much of the nineteenth-century Germany, similar views held sway. Anti-Catholicism began rising already in the mid-nineteenth century, along with the revival of popular Catholicism (Gross 2005), reaching its peak during the *Kulturkampf*. In this period, Protestantism was becoming more firmly associated with the German national character and its progress, thus excluding Roman Catholicism as backward, uncivilised and, fundamentally, un-German (Münch 1993: 58; cf. Smith 1995a; Stayer 2000; Gross 2005 and Healy 2003 for extended examinations of particular aspects). Such views were particularly popular among the so-called liberal Protestants – Protestants by birth, but largely unbelievers. In their view, the beginning of everything valuable in German history and character should be sought in the Reformation. By contrast, the Roman Catholic Church stood as the main enemy of the newly established German nation-state: it was seen as an alternative, supranational source of loyalty, and functioned as a symbol for everything the proponents of progress detested: ‘backwardness’, ‘superstition’, ‘mediavellism’ (Blackbourn 2002: 213). As such, it was often accused of being a ‘brake on civilisation’, a form of ‘pathology’, a symbol of ‘stagnation’ (*ibid.*). The popular liberal periodical *Gartenlaube*, for example, often served as an outlet for various anti-Catholic sentiments, including complaints about the Catholic population’s ‘educational deficit’ and backwardness (Gross 2005: 151).

Arguably, both the German *Kulturkampf* as well as the British ‘anti-Catholic crusade’ of the nineteenth century can be seen as particular strategies of nation-building, based on a combination of modernist and religious nationalist narratives, aimed at creating a common national high culture suffused with values largely synonymous with those of liberal Protestant nationalism (cf. Smith 1995a: 3). In both cases, this nation-building was primarily aimed at assimilating the Catholic populations, especially peripheral ones: Poles in the case of the German Empire (Trzeciakowski 1990), Irishmen and Irishwomen in the case of Britain. Most importantly, in both Germany and Britain, religion remained of major importance despite, and perhaps because of, the rise of nationalism. While this modernist version of religious nationalism was particularly prominent in the nineteenth century, a similar confluence of nationalist, religious and modernist discourses could be found also in some parts of the post-Cold-War Eastern Europe. However, this time, religious nationalism became intertwined with a new version of modernisation theory: the theory of Europeanisation. In line with this theory, some nations and some religious traditions were seen as inherently more ‘European’, and thus more open to European integration than others.

Modernist religious nationalisms in post-Cold-War Eastern Europe

The dissolution of the Cold War arrangement of the world went hand in hand with a resurgence of old narratives and preoccupations, ranging from nationalism and racism to pre-World War II geopolitical concerns. The division of Europe into two socially, economically and politically opposed halves, implementing two different models of modernisation, one socialist or communist and the other liberal-capitalist, was replaced by an older mental mapping pitting civilised, progressive Western Europe against underdeveloped Eastern Europe or the Balkans (cf. Wolff 1994; Todorova 1997). Striving for the same goals and competing for the same resources, countries of Europe East and West were again seen as parts of the same developmental continuum, projected onto geographical space, stretching from the developed West to the underdeveloped East, or alternatively, from the civilised Europe to the chaos and barbarity of the Balkans.

The rise of this old-new geopolitical mapping was accompanied by a renewed interest in modernisation theory and explanations of unequal development, and a

return of well-worn questions such as why some countries have achieved modernization later than others. Religion was among the obvious contenders for the throne. For Grace Davie (2000: 4), it is precisely religious traditions that can explain the existing differences in development between Europe and the Balkans, as well as prospects for and limits of further European enlargement:

Countries that belonged, and continue to belong, to Western rather than Orthodox Christianity may well find it easier to realise their political and economic aspirations. Despite their real economic difficulties, their aim is to re-establish Western traditions; they are not learning something totally new. (Davie 2000:4)

Closely similar arguments were propounded by a number of intellectuals engaged in the debate about Central Europe in the late 1980s. The legacy of Western Christianity was seen as one of the pillars of Central European culture, which was believed to be fundamentally different from that characteristic of the realm of Eastern Christianity (Schöpflin 1989: 13-14, 19-20; Duray 1989: 98). Last but certainly not least, the old divide between Latin and Orthodox Christianity was highlighted as a major civilisational split also in the infamous thesis about the clash of civilisations (Huntington 1996), according to which Eastern and Western Europe are significantly more divided by the old split between Eastern and Western Christianity than by the Iron Curtain.

Amidst all these arguments, the newly restored nationalist narratives in Eastern Europe had no shortage of resources to draw upon when trying to define the distinguishing elements of individual national identities. All across the region, religion became intertwined with nationalism, and religious differences were often seen as being of paramount importance to national identities (Borowik 1997; Ramet 1998; Spohn 1998; Tomka and Zulehner 2000; Perica 2002; Merdjanova 2002; Flora *et al.* 2005). It has less often been acknowledged, however, that religion was also regularly used to prove a distinctly European or Western character of a particular nation, as well as its propensity – or lack of it – towards modernisation, democracy, pluralism and capitalism. In the Balkans, people would often tend to explain the progress and backwardness by reference to religion: particularly Orthodoxy and Islam were often mentioned as factors hindering development and transition to democracy (Bremer 2002). In Croatia, for example, Catholicism was not only used to delineate Croats from their predominantly Orthodox eastern and southern neighbours, but also

‘to prove similarity, continuity and participation in what is seen as glorious aspects of European traditions’ (Povrzanović Frykman 2002: 171).

A similar confluence of Eurocentric, modernist and nationalist discourses on religion occurred in Slovenia as well. Yet unlike in other cases, where the main dividing line was drawn between Latin and Orthodox Christianity, this case often involved drawing a line between countries that experienced Protestant Reformation and those without such a legacy. According to a substantial part of contemporary Slovenian intellectuals, politicians and other opinion-makers, Protestant Reformation crucially contributed to the formation of modern values, norms, practices and institutions. With that, it also helped the Slovenian nation to follow the highest civilisational standards and fostered its integration into modern European culture and civilisation.

Protestant Nationalism in Slovenia

The rise of Protestant (primarily Lutheran) movements in sixteenth-century Carniola^v constitutes a major episode in the dominant version of the contemporary Slovenian national narrative. It is cherished primarily for its contribution to the creation of Slovenian national language and literature, but often also for facilitating the nation’s transition into modernity. The Protestant preacher Primož Trubar (1508-1586) is widely considered as one of the most important Slovenians. His portrait features on one of the Slovenian banknotes, and is bound to appear also on the Slovenian one-euro coin. Finally, the Slovenian national calendar, which came into effect in 1991, lists 31 October, the day on which Luther nailed his 95 theses on the door of the Wittenberg Church in 1517, as a holiday: the Day of Reformation. However, despite all the public praise for Protestantism, most of the contemporary Slovenian population is Catholic. The sixteenth-century Lutheran reform movement did not last long: by the mid-seventeenth century, the population of Carniola was successfully re-catholicised, and remained predominantly Catholic until today. At the last population census in 2002, 57.8% of the interviewees declared themselves as Catholic, and only 0.8% as Protestant (Šircelj 2003: 173). The dominant version of contemporary Slovenian religious nationalism is linked to Catholicism: by essence, Slovenians are believed to be a Roman Catholic nation (cf. Velikonja 1999). Arguably, two distinct religious nationalisms are at work in present-day Slovenia: one linked to Catholicism, the other to Protestantism.

This dual structure of Slovenian religious nationalism and the prominent role accorded to Protestantism in the Slovenian national narrative are far from being new phenomena. Protestant reformation had featured as a major, if often disputed, element of the Slovenian national narrative virtually ever since the formation of Slovenian nationalism in the nineteenth century. The interpretation of its role in national history has been subject to a range of heated discussions in both scholarly circles and the wider public, and has gone through a series of re-evaluations. The debates were habitually couched in terms of modernisation, with competing interpretations coming from liberal circles on the one hand and Catholic circles on the other hand. In the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century, Slovenian liberals were regularly associating Protestantism with progress and modernisation, and regarded the Protestant movement in Carniola as a precursor to their own political ideas and agendas. Views put forward by Ivan Cankar (1876-1918), a famous Slovenian writer, poet and dramatis, are a characteristic example of this pre-war liberal stance. In a lecture on Trubar delivered in 1908, Cankar argued that all contributions to ‘spiritual and social progress’ among Slovenians were coming exclusively from Protestants; whoever remained Catholic after the Reformation was, in his opinion, either ignorant or cowardly (quoted in Zadavec 1984: 100).

Predictably, the Catholic side was adamantly against such an interpretation. Some Catholic opinion makers, most notably Bishop Anton Martin Slomšek (1800-1862), acknowledged the contribution of Protestant reformers to the formation of Slovenian language and literature. However, they also insisted that he was a heretic, leading the nation away from its true faith. In their view, Protestantism was foreign to the traditionally Catholic Slovenian soul and, hadn’t it been for the Catholic Church, would have led to a wholesale assimilation of Slovenians into German culture. Well into the second half of the twentieth century, the Slovenian Catholic circles believed Protestantism and Catholicism belonged to the opposite sides of the tradition-modernity divide, with Catholicism defending traditional values against the onslaught of liberalism, rationalism and capitalism. Some of the most vigorous criticisms of Protestantism have been voiced by Janez Evangelist Krek (1865-1917), a Catholic priest and one of the foremost ideologues of the People’s Party in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century. Krek was a Christian socialist profoundly hostile to liberalism, rationalism, secularisation and capitalism. For him, Protestantism was

intimately linked with these modern developments, and was to be feared precisely because of that, as well as because it was associated with the threat of Germanisation (cf. Rogel 1977: 34-35).

After the Second World War, both liberal and Catholic interpretations of Protestantism were sidelined, and another, Marxist narrative, occupied the centre-stage. This narrative was most clearly laid out in the works written by Edvard Kardelj (1910-1979), one of the chief ideologues of Tito's Yugoslavia. As Carole Rogel observed, Kardelj did concede that Protestantism contributed to the development of a Slovenian national consciousness, yet otherwise had little praise for Slovene religious reformers. Particularly in the 1939 edition of his *Development of the Slovenian National Question*, Trubar 'is depicted as an opportunist, an agent of the Protestant nobility, who like Luther – although less brutally – turned against the peasant-plebeian democratic revolution of the sixteenth century' (Rogel 1984: 53).

The late 1980s saw a gradual demise of Marxist interpretations, and a resurgence of pre-war nationalist discourses, including the two competing versions of Slovenian religious nationalism: the Protestant and the Catholic one. The 400th anniversary of the first translation of the Bible in 1984 and the 400th anniversary of Primož Trubar's death in 1986 were both accompanied by a series of commemorative events and publications dedicated to Protestantism, including the first translation of Weber's *Protestant Ethic* into Slovenian. The celebrations reached also into various forms of mass culture, culminating in the screening of the TV series *Primož Trubar* (1986) and the film *Heretik* (1986). These developments coincided with the general rise of nationalisms all across the Yugoslav federation, as well as with the increased public prominence of major religious institutions – in Slovenia primarily the Catholic Church. Arguably, the Protestant nationalism of post-Cold-War Slovenia was to an extent fuelled by the wish to curb the rising influence of the Catholic Church. Not surprisingly, the conflict between the promoters of Protestantism and their opponents was often mapped onto several other layers of ideological conflict: liberal vs. conservative, communist vs. anti-communist, secular vs. Catholic, modern vs. traditional.

Throughout the 1990s, proponents of Protestantism repeatedly associated Protestant Reformation with 'the most progressive trends' (Unknown author 1995: 3) and 'civilisational progress' (cf. STA 1996: 2), and Protestant nations were often singled

out as ‘economically, culturally, socially and civilisationally very developed’ (Grgič 1997: 31). According to the Bishop of the Evangelical Church in Slovenia, Geza Erniša, Europe would have been far more backward were it not for the Protestants (quoted in Žunec 2003: 64). In the view of the Slovenian prime Minister, it was thanks to Protestant writers and intellectuals that Slovenians ‘have entered into historical and civilisational development’ (quoted in Mlinarič 2002: 3). A particularly often mentioned aspect of development and modernisation allegedly brought by Protestantism was capitalism. Oto Norčič, a distinguished Slovenian economist and the first president of the Slovenian Protestant Society, argued that Protestant families living in sixteenth-century Carniola were ‘bearers of the early development of capitalism in Slovenia’. Had the Habsburg Empire not opted for Catholicism, argued Norčič, these families would have secured a much earlier development of industrial capitalism in the region (Norčič 1999: 16). Instead, ‘the Counter-reformation pushed us back into ideological and material subordination, which has fatally slowed down or even stopped the cultural and socio-economic life and further production of religious and non-religious books for two 200 years’ (*ibid.*).

In sum, virtually every imaginable aspect of modernity, ranging from capitalism to gender equality, was accredited to Protestantism. According to a renowned Slovenian sociologist of religion and founding member of the Slovenian Protestant Society, Protestantism has, together with the Enlightenment, fundamentally contributed to the formation of modern societies and the Western civilisation. Neither the modern democratic state nor the modern notion of human rights could exist without the Protestant and humanistic understanding of the human being as an individual, and without the associated notion of individual responsibility and freedom (Kerševan 2002a: 23). These were also the main reasons for marking the contribution of Protestantism with a national holiday:

‘As long as we live in a modern society, which respects every human being as a person, in a society with ideals of human freedom, equality, solidarity, in a society which treasures personal responsibility and eagerness to work – we live in a society which respects Protestant values.’ (Kerševan 2002b: 12)

Apart from reviving elements of nineteenth-century discourses, ideas promoted by the supporters of Protestantism since the late 1980s onwards included also an important new element. Protestantism was not only seen as conducive to economic

and social developments such as the spread of democracy, tolerance, individualism, respect for human rights, and capitalism, but was also regarded as a movement that played a paramount role in bringing the Slovenian nation into the realm of Europe and the Western civilisation. According to the current president of the Slovenian Protestant Society, Viktor Žakelj, Slovenians ‘spiritually became a part of Europe already with Trubar’ (quoted in Žolnir 2003: 4), and several scholars, state representatives, politicians and journalists have claimed that the translation of the Bible into Slovenian was the event with which Slovenians ‘entered the family of European nations’ (Zadravec 1994: 10). The activities of the Protestants were believed to be a proof of the fact that Slovenians belonged to Europe already in the sixteenth century (cf. Žolnir 2003: 4). In the light of that, argued some, the current integration into Europe is somehow redundant and ‘degrading’ (Norčič 1999: 16).

This congratulatory narrative did not remain unchallenged. The Slovenian Catholic circles subscribed to a substantially different, far less laudatory understanding of the role of Protestantism in the Slovenian past. Franc Rode, Archbishop of Ljubljana and Slovenia’s metropolitan in the period from 1997 to 2004, insisted that Protestantism was, to an extent, an expressly German movement, and as such alien to the Slovenian nation. Similarly as Slomšek in 1862, he acknowledged that Protestantism was instrumental in strengthening the Slovenian culture and national awareness, but added that this was, ‘thanks to God’, everything Slovenians gained from the movement (1996: 417). Catholic authors loudly disputed the claims about the privileged link between Protestantism and European culture, arguing that Slovenians entered Europe already when they adopted Christianity. They also repeatedly accused the supporters of Protestantism of being intolerant, of dividing Slovenians into ‘progressive Protestants and backward Catholics’, of abusing Protestantism to denigrate Slovenian Catholics, and of ignoring the fact that the present-day Catholic Church has largely adapted to the exigencies of the modern world (e.g. Ocvirk 1993: 3; Rozman 1996: 11; Granda 2005: 3). However, this competing narrative, firmly rooted in the Catholic version of Slovenian religious nationalism, usually remained limited to expressly Catholic outlets. In the mainstream media, the Protestant nationalist interpretation of sixteenth-century developments and their consequences for Slovenians held sway.

Conclusions

For too long, nationalism theory remained trapped in a highly restrictive understanding of secularisation, equating it to a wholesale decline, if not outright disappearance of religion. Therefore, secular nationalism was long regarded as entirely incompatible and in fact hostile to religious nationalism. This paper has challenged this conviction. As Anthony Smith rightly argued, ‘faith in nation comes in different guises’ (Smith 2005: 415). However, not all of these guises can be reduced to a black-and-white opposition of anti-secular religious nationalism and anti-religious secular nationalism. Quite to the contrary: as this paper aimed to show, several varieties of religious nationalism have accepted the existence, if not the legitimacy, of the secular state, and even fostered many modernising developments.

The cases discussed in the paper clearly show that nationalism is never a uniform and homogenous story people tell about the nation to which they belong. Instead, it consists of a number of separate, even competing stories that various groups within this nation tell about themselves (Smith 1995b, quoted in McLeod 2000: 241). Or, as Katherine Verdery argued: the nation should be conceived as a symbol ‘having multiple meanings, offered as alternatives and competed over by different groups manoeuvring to capture the symbol’s definition and its legitimating effects’ (Verderey 1996: 228). While a dominant version of nationalism in a particular period may be secular, this does not preclude the existence of a religious nationalism attached to the same nation. In fact, secular nationalism, and thus also the secular state, can easily enter into an alliance with religious nationalism, provided that the latter is prepared to play by its rules.

Another conclusion to be drawn on the basis of arguments developed in the paper is that the field of nationalism studies, and particularly the study of religious nationalism, could profit from a more thorough and sustained consideration of developments in the study of religion. The critical revision of secularisation theory, which no longer sees secularisation as a linear, universal and inevitable process, does not only allow for a better understanding of the varieties of religious nationalism, but could also serve as the basis for rekindling the well-worn debate about the relationships between pre-modern religious communities and modern nations. In addition, sociologists of religion have by now examined a range of new religious movements. Many of these have developed nationalist inflections, and could be of interest to nationalism scholars as well.

The final conclusion concerns the evaluation of modernist religious nationalisms. Given that their ideals – modernity, democracy, individualism, religious freedom etc. – largely coincide with values and norms constitutive of present-day democratic societies, one may be tempted to embrace this variety of religious nationalism as not being entirely harmful, perhaps even beneficial. However, as clearly evident from the cases discussed in the paper, modernist religious nationalisms have often tended to adopt an exclusivist stance, restricting the propensity for modernisation to some religious and national communities and denying it to others. In nineteenth-century Europe, Protestant nationalism went hand-in-hand with anti-Catholic prejudices, and a similar confluence of ‘liberal’ Protestantism and anti-Catholic sentiments remains active in some parts of Europe even today. Catholic nationalisms, particularly when bordering or competing with and Orthodox Christian nationalisms, are not immune to such exclusivist thinking either, nor are the Orthodox nationalisms when confronted with Islamic nationalist competitors. In each case, the susceptibility for democracy, individualism, modernity, human rights, gender equality or other modern values is seen as particularly compatible with some religious and national traditions, and alien to others. The recent debates about Turkey’s accession to the EU are a case in point: very often, Turkey, being a predominantly Muslim country, was seen as inherently incapable of adopting the norms of the EU. This does not imply that all modernist religious nationalisms are of necessity so exclusive. However, they should not be regarded as inherently harmless either, regardless of their proclaimed support for liberal values and democracy.

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ⁱ This phrase is borrowed from Anthony Smith (2005: 415).

ⁱⁱ The author wishes to thank the anonymous reviewers of this journal and Oliver Zimmer for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

ⁱⁱⁱ A note of clarification is needed at this point. The categories of 'religious nationalism' and 'secular nationalism', as used in this paper, do not refer to discrete species of nationalisms, nor are they meant

to suggest that nations can be divided into secular and religious ones. As the cases discussed further in the paper attest, the same nationalism can develop both religious and secular varieties which can coexist in a range of different relationships stretching from competition to mutual reinforcement. I thank one of the anonymous reviewers for alerting me to this potential misunderstanding.

^{iv} This also means that the dichotomy between religion and nationalism is not, as some scholars of religious nationalism would suggest, a necessary element of the Western discourse on modernity. Instead, it is an element of only *one particular version* of the modernist narrative – a version which became dominant in the twentieth century. The alternative version, which permeated the debate on modernisation in the nineteenth century, did not see any necessary contradiction between religion and modernity. Quite to the contrary: it was based on the belief that modernity itself has arisen from, and has been crucially facilitated by religion.

^v Sixteenth-century Carniola was a part of the Austrian circle of the Holy Roman Empire which covered most of the territory now belonging to Slovenia.