

ELIE KEDOURIE MEMORIAL LECTURE

Nation and Covenant The Contribution of Ancient Israel to Modern Nationalism

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I AM GRATEFUL TO THE BRITISH ACADEMY and to Mrs Sylvia Kedourie for their invitation to give this Memorial Lecture in honour of her husband, the late Professor Elie Kedourie. It affords me an opportunity to acknowledge the eminence of a scholar who, among his many achievements, was one of the seminal contributors to the great debate about the origins and nature of nationalism, that central phenomenon of the modern world. Professor Kedourie's work in this field continues to exert a wide influence, and his trenchant critique remains the most forceful and concise statement of the argument against nationalism and all its works.

Of course, not all those who subscribe to his critique have been convinced by Professor Kedourie's positive theses. But my purpose here is not to engage in a general survey of the field, much less of a critique of it. Instead, I wish to put forward a specific argument about a crucial aspect of modern nationalism—which, for want of a better term, I shall call 'covenantal'. To support this argument, I shall need to turn back to two of Professor Kedourie's most important theses: the secular nature of modern nationalism, and what we might term its religious lineage. By building on his theses, I hope to be able to acknowledge and demonstrate my continuing debt to Elie Kedourie's powerful insights into the nature of nationalism.¹

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¹ For Kedourie's influence, see the essays in Sylvia Kedourie (1998).

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My overall aim is twofold. First, I shall try to show some cultural affinities between the covenantal and prophetic ideals of ancient Israel, as revealed in the Hebrew Bible, and some of the main themes and goals of modern nationalism. Second, I hope to suggest possible causal links between the two in certain political frameworks and Christian traditions, notably through the post-Reformation return to the Old Testament, which helped to shape what I regard as the earliest form of nationalism, a ‘covenantal’ form, in early modern Western Europe.

I: Nationalism and the Hebrew Bible

It may be helpful to start with definitions of some vexed but indispensable terms in this field of study. Accordingly, I define *nationalism* as an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a human population some of whose members deem it to constitute an actual or potential ‘nation’; *nation* as a named and self-defining human population whose members cultivate shared symbols, memories, myths and values, inhabit an historic homeland, disseminate a distinctive public culture, and observe common laws and customs; and *national identity* as the continuous reproduction and reinterpretations of the pattern of values, symbols, myths and memories that compose the distinctive heritage of nations, and the identification of individuals with that heritage.²

A secular doctrine

In the well-known first sentence of his celebrated book on *Nationalism*, Professor Kedourie claimed that ‘Nationalism was a doctrine invented in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century.’ (Kedourie, 1960: 1). He went on to argue that, despite the legend of the French Revolution, the first full exposition of the doctrine of nationalism was that of Johann Gottlob Fichte in his *Addresses to the German Nation* of 1807–8, in which he set out his programme for a truly German national education by, in Kedourie’s words, ‘fashioning in man a stable and infallible good will’. (Kedourie, 1960: 83) Here, Fichte was only following through to its political conclusion the teaching of his master, Immanuel Kant, that ‘the good

² For definitions of these terms, see especially Deutsch (1966: chap. 1); Connor (1994: chap. 4); and A. D. Smith (1973: section 1) and (2002).

will, which is the free will, is also the autonomous will', that is, one that obeys only the laws of morality within the human soul, as opposed to the laws of God or nature (Kedourie, 1960: 24). By extension, nationalism for Fichte is, in Kedourie's words, 'a method of teaching the right determination of the will', and hence of national self-determination. (Kedourie, 1960: 81) It is in this radical sense that nationalism is revealed as a thoroughly secular doctrine.

It would, of course, be possible to adduce an earlier statement of an exemplary political nationalism during the French Revolution. Professor Kedourie admitted that its celebrated declaration that 'The principle of sovereignty resides essentially in the Nation' is 'one prerequisite without which a doctrine such as nationalism is not conceivable'. (Kedourie, 1960: 12–13) And we could go further, and argue that in documents such as Rousseau's *Considérations sur le Gouvernement de Pologne* of 1772 (admittedly unpublished at the time) there is not only a foretaste of Fichte's passion for the moulding power of national education, but a consuming ardour for the nation and its distinctive character. Thus, in the section on Education, Rousseau writes:

It is education that must give souls a national formation, and direct their opinions and tastes in such a way that they will be patriotic by inclination, by passion, by necessity . . .

This love is his whole existence; he sees nothing but the fatherland, he lives for it alone; when he is solitary, he is nothing; when he has ceased to have a fatherland, he no longer exists; and if he is not dead, he is worse than dead. National education is proper only to free men; it is they only who enjoy a collective existence and are truly bound by law. . . .

And, after condemning the uniform slavery of modern Europeans, Rousseau urged the Poles: 'At twenty a Pole ought not to be a man of any other sort; he ought to be a Pole' (Watkins, 1953: 176).³ But, in a sense, this only serves to confirm Kedourie's basic contention, that nationalism is a thoroughly secular doctrine, in which humanity, not the divine, is the measure of all things. This is, if anything, underlined by Rousseau's

³ For Rousseau's definition of 'civil religion' in his *Du Contrat Social*, IV, chap. VIII, see Watkins 1953: 142–55, especially 147–8, where we read:

The second [sc. species of religion], limited to a single country only, gives that country its special patrons and tutelary deities. Its dogmas, its rites and its external cult are prescribed by law; outside of the single nation which follows it, it regards everything as infidel, foreign and barbarous; it extends the rights and duties of man no farther than its altars.

eulogy of the work of three ancient legislators—Moses, Lycurgus and Numa Pompilius—in which he contrasts the petty egotism of modern European nations with the heroic souls of the ancients. Here I am concerned only with his description of the work of Moses:

The first [sc. Moses] conceived and executed the astonishing project of creating a nation out of a swarm of wretched fugitives, . . . who were wandering as a horde of strangers over the face of the earth without a single inch of ground to call their own. Out of this wandering and servile horde Moses had the audacity to create a body politic, a free people; . . .

To prevent his people from melting away among foreign peoples, he gave them customs and usages incompatible with those of the other nations; he overburdened them with peculiar rites and ceremonies; he inconvenienced them in a thousand ways in order to keep them constantly on the alert and to make them forever strangers among other men; and all the fraternal bonds with which he drew together the members of his republic were as many barriers keeping them separate from their neighbours and preventing them from mingling with them. That is how this peculiar nation, so often subjugated, so often dispersed and apparently destroyed, but always fanatical in its devotion to its Law, has nevertheless maintained itself to the present day, scattered among but never intermingled with the rest; and that is why its customs, laws and rites subsist, and will endure to the end of time, in spite of the hatred and persecution of the rest of the human race. (Watkins, 1953: 163–4)

Leaving aside the exaggerations of this passage, it is clear that Rousseau is intent on presenting a purely secular version of the sacred history of the Jews. It is no longer the Covenant with the Lord that has formed the children of Israel into a nation, and Moses is no longer the servant of the Lord, not even the greatest of the prophets, as he is called in the last chapter of the book of Deuteronomy. He has become a national hero, a nation-builder, and the nation, as David Bell points out, is envisaged as a construct (Bell, 2001: 39). This, then, is an early example of what Professor Kedourie called the ‘transformation of religion into nationalist ideology’, many examples of which he then went on to describe and deplore (Kedourie, 1960: 76).⁴

⁴ To create his subversive secular narrative, Rousseau has exaggerated the plight of the Jews after the Exodus, as well as their degree of separation and devotion to the Law thereafter; on which, see Bell (2001: chap. 1). Baron (1960: chap. 2) and Cohler (1970) discuss Rousseau’s views on nationalism.

The religion of nationalism

And yet, this is only one aspect of nationalism. Nationalism may be a secular ideology, both in its German Romantic and its French republican varieties, but it is at the same time a special form of religion. This is already manifest in Rousseau's advice to the Poles to keep alive and nurture their national spirit through collective activities like festivals, games and schooling, as it is in his obvious admiration for the devotion to the Law and the longevity of the Jewish people, as well as the importance which he and later nationalists ascribe to rituals and ceremonies in national perpetuation. For Kedourie, too, secular nationalism can annex and use the powerful and tenacious loyalties of a long-held faith, and in this connection he cites the modern Egyptian, pan-Arab, Armenian and Greek cases. But I think we can go further. Nationalism, as he also concedes, may act as a substitute for traditional religion. But it can do so, only because it constitutes itself as a form of religion. A religion of this world, certainly, and in that original sense of the term, secular; but a religion with a divinity of its own, the nation, a separation of the elect, the members of the nation, a distinction between sacred national and profane objects and symbols, a strong emphasis on national ritual and self-sacrifice, and a powerful belief in national history, destiny and posterity. As the Petition of the Agitators of 1792 put it: 'The image of the *patrie* is the sole divinity whom it is permissible to worship.'

This form of religion clearly differs from the traditional soteriological kind analysed by Max Weber in his multi-volume *Religionssoziologie*, in which human salvation is sought from a source external to the phenomenal world, a transcendent cosmic power that guides and shapes our world. Rather the religious aspect of nationalism resembles the kind of societal religion defined and treated so extensively by Emile Durkheim in his *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1915). Here Durkheim emphasises the role of religion, in accordance with the word's etymology, in binding together a group of people into a moral community by means of beliefs and rituals relating to the distinction between sacred and profane things. In fact, Durkheim's analysis fits the religion of nationalism rather more closely than it does the totemism of the Australian tribes. Nationalism, as an ideology, is self-reflexive; its object of worship is the community defined as a nation, and the worshippers of that community form a sacred communion of believers ready to sacrifice themselves on the altar of the nation for the sake of national defence and regeneration. Moreover, the communal religion of nationalism elevates the people, this particular people, and

identifies them closely with a specific ancestral territory and its distinctive landscapes. This it does, not because this happens to be the spot where the community dwells, an accident of nature, but because in the nationalist vision homeland and people belong together and endow each other with genuineness, originality, and ‘authenticity’. Here is the heart of the inner-worldly religion of nationalism: a world of autonomous, unified and exclusive peoples drawing sustenance from their intimate ancestral landscapes and regenerating themselves through the rediscovery and dissemination of their authentic cultures.⁵

It should be clear from the foregoing that I am not using the term ‘religion of nationalism’ in the sense in which several scholars describe the contemporary manifestations of ‘religious nationalism’, notably in the Islamic, Hindu and Buddhist traditions, but also of the Christian revival in America. These manifestations are, to my mind, more reminiscent of what Professor Kedourie terms the use of religion by a nationalism, which seeks to harmonise traditional religious beliefs and precepts with its own postulates, so as to intensify and extend itself among traditional believers. In this sense, traditional religions, suitably emended, may act as ‘carriers’ of collective sentiments and activities, redirected of course to new political ends, as Tilak used the cult of the dread goddess Kali in India for anti-British political ends. Nationalism may need these carriers if it is to extend its hold among traditional believers, but it does not require them for its own formation; and it is with that formation that I am chiefly concerned here.⁶

Religious origins of nationalism

Since the Second World War, if not earlier, the scholarly consensus has come to regard both nations and nationalism, the ideology and movement, as modern—that is, chronologically recent and structurally novel. For many scholars, the ideology dates from the late eighteenth-century Western revolutions, with most nations seen as creations of a modern nationalism. In this perspective, both nations and nationalism are regarded as products of the ‘modernisation’ of society and the revolution

⁵ For Weber’s *Religionssoziologie*, see Weber (1965); and for Durkheim’s theory, see Durkheim (1915). Though Durkheim wrote very little on nations and nationalism, much of his thought presupposes the nation as the form of modern society and nationalism as its cohesive force; on which, see Mitchell (1931); also Llobera (1994).

⁶ On contemporary ‘religious nationalisms’ in Islam, Hinduism, Judaism and Christianity, see especially Juergensmeyer (1993), Van der Veer (1994) and Kepel (1995).

of thought known as the Enlightenment. There is much to commend in this view. Without doubt, it represents a major advance on its predecessor, the perennialist perspective which defined as nations most pre-modern named political and ethnic communities. Clearly, many nations *have* been formed in the last two hundred years, and in many cases the nationalist movements of their intelligentsias have indeed helped to shape and direct them.⁷

Many nations, but not all of them. Even some of the champions of the modernist orthodoxy had their doubts, most notably with regard to England. Thus, in a footnote to his *Nations and Nationalism*, Ernest Gellner puzzles over ‘the early emergence of national sentiment in England’ centuries before the coming of the industrial order, which may be due, he thinks, to the rise of an individualist, mobile spirit (Gellner, 1983: 91, footnote 1). And in his *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, Eric Hobsbawm speaks of membership of an historic state acting directly ‘upon the consciousness of the common people to produce proto-nationalism—or perhaps even, in the case of Tudor England, something close to modern patriotism’ (Hobsbawm, 1990: 75). But suppose this early patriotism is due neither to individualism nor to an historic state inducing this common consciousness, what other grounds might we invoke that makes England such a challenge to modernist orthodoxy? And are there other cases which cast doubt on the dominant paradigm?

I think there are such cases, and that we may even speak of a form of nationalism, the ideology and movement, *avant la lettre*. Nationalism, after all, appears in different historical forms, and the modern Western secular form is but one of these, albeit the best-known. Here I am aligning myself with a growing number of historians for whom the modernist perspective is too restrictive, both because it dismisses the possibility of cases of pre-modern nations, and because it rules out a priori the possibility of a pre-modern form of nationalism. In its largely secular form nationalism may have emerged in the late eighteenth-century West, but this should not make us frame our definition and our account of it in narrowly ethnocentric terms.⁸

⁷ There is a large literature on modernist theories of nationalism. The key works here are Kedourie (1960) and (1971); Gellner (1964: chap. 7) and (1983); Nairn (1977); Breuilly (1982/1993); Hobsbawm (1990); and Anderson (1983/1991). For a critical review, see A. D. Smith (1998).

⁸ Here I include Susan Reynolds (1984: chap. 8), John Gillingham (1992), Patrick Wormald (1984) and Adrian Hastings (1997). See also Len Scales (2000), and some of the essays in Zimmer and Scales (2005), especially by Susan Reynolds, Patrick Wormald and Sarah Foot; see also Hutchinson (2000).

This, I believe, is where the second of Professor Kedourie's theses, about the religious origins of nationalism, can help us. On the one hand, as we saw, nationalism is a form of secular, that is, inner-worldly religion, and as such opposed to the traditional kind of transcendental religions, even when it forms alliances with them. On the other hand, the religion of nationalism draws on many of the motifs, beliefs and rituals of traditional religions and uses them for its own political purposes; and these essentially pre-modern traditions have remained relevant in the forging of nations and the formation of nationalisms. For example, in 1817, German student and gymnastic organisations garlanded themselves with oak-leaves and marched up to the Wartburg Castle, by torchlight, lit fires, burned 'un-German' books, listened to sermons, and with joined hands, to the tolling bells of the nearby church of Eisenach, swore to uphold their Bund. Their model for this display of nationalist exaltation was the Lutheran liturgy and service, including the singing of various Protestant hymns. In the same spirit, at the ruins of the castle of Devin in 1836, where the Moravian king Svatopluk had resided in the ninth century, a Slovak students' festival celebrated with popular songs the memory of an obscure nobleman named Pribina who ruled the city of Neutra around 830. And, lest we should be misled into thinking these fantasies were simply effusions of the spirit of Romanticism, we can observe similar borrowings and models at various points in the French Revolution where, for all its anti-clerical fervour, Catholic motifs were interwoven with secular patriotic messages; examples include the staging at Notre-Dame of the semi-sacred cantata, *Prise de la Bastille*, based in part on the apocryphal book of *Judith*, during the great *Fête de la Fédération* in July 1790, the liturgy for the funeral of Marat in 1793, where the procession accompanying his body sang 'O coeur de Jesus, coeur de Marat', and the celebration of the feast of the Supreme Being in 1794, which saw Robespierre descend from a cardboard and plaster mountain topped with a tree of liberty.⁹

Of course, as these examples indicate, nationalism has been shaped by more than one cultural tradition. But, if we focus specifically on its religious aspect, that is, nationalism as an inner-worldly religion of the people, where should we go to seek its source and formative process? Professor Kedourie himself was minded to discover it in the drive for

⁹ On the Slovak festival, see Kohn (1960: 15–16), and for the *fêtes* of Revolutionary France, Kohn (1967: Part I) and Schama (1989: 491–513). For the artistic dimensions of these festivals, see Herbert (1972). Marat's death and David's painting of *Marat Assassiné* (1793) are discussed in the essays in Vaughan and Weston (2000). For Germany, see Mosse (1975: chap. 3).

religious uniformity in Europe from the time of the later Roman empire, and in the later millennial tradition of antinomian heterodox Christian sects like the Franciscan Spirituals and the Anabaptists. Other scholars like Adrian Hastings have looked to Christianity's sanctioning of vernacular worship and Bible translation, and its adoption of the national political ideal of ancient Israel as recorded in the Old Testament which the Church had taken over and reinterpreted. For Hastings, therefore, nations and nationalism were at root Christian phenomena, products of a vernacularising Judeo-Christian tradition.¹⁰

It is true that Christian millennialism draws on the messianic idea of ancient Israel; and that messianism, in one form or another, has played an important, if variable, part in modern nationalisms—in some cases more than others. But the messianic age and the coming of the Messiah can also impede the rise of nationalism, which depends on autoemancipation and human political engagement. This applies even more to millennialist beliefs, which often reject this world and in any case depend on divine intervention rather than self-help. As for Christianity's vernacularising tendency, this did not preclude the dominance of certain transterritorial (and transethnic) languages. But the fundamental difficulty with these accounts is that Christianity, for all its territorial and ethnic compromises on the ground, is a universalist, and universalising, world religion which for much of its history has been purveyed through clerisies, liturgies and languages which were transterritorial and supranational in both the Greek East and the Latin West. Nations and nationalism, on the other hand, are founded on principles of cultural diversity and uniqueness, and contain strong ethnic, ethnopolitical and territorial components. This means that we need to look for a source and a model of cultural individuality, ethnic specificity and territorial attachment, beyond a universalising Christianity, both in historical time and in ideological scope; and that, as a number of scholars from Hans Kohn to Liah Greenfeld and David Aberbach have argued, brings us back to the Jewish root of the Christian tradition in the Hebrew Bible, to the Prophets, the Psalms, and above all, the Pentateuch and its Torah.¹¹

¹⁰ See Kedourie (1971: Introduction); and Hastings (1997: esp. chaps. 1–2, 8). Hastings (1999) presents his views on chosen peoples; and see the symposium on his contribution in *Nations and Nationalism* (2003).

¹¹ For some earlier analyses of the general influence of the Old Testament on nationalism, especially in England, see Kohn (1944: chaps. 1 and 4), Greenfeld (1992: chap.1) and Aberbach (2005), the latter also highlighting the importance of biblical poetry for national sentiment.

The Biblical Covenant

Central to the laws and narratives of the Pentateuch is the ideal of the Covenant between God and His people, seen as a specific cultural community of descent. This Covenant took two forms: on the one hand, God's unconditional promise to Noah not to bring another flood to destroy humanity and His choice of Abraham's seed and His grant of the land of Canaan to his descendants, and on the other hand a *conditional* grant of election of the whole people of Israel in the Covenant given to Moses on Mount Sinai. Whereas the focus of the first is on a land and an ethnic community seen as an extended family, the later covenant is directed to the Torah and the creation of a 'kingdom of priests, and an holy nation' (Exodus, 19:6). God has chosen a particular people because of the love He bore them and their ancestors, the Patriarchs, and He will bless them *on condition that* they obey his laws and keep his commandments. As Moses reminds his people:

The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any other people; for ye were the fewest of all people; But because the Lord loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. (Deut.7:6–8)

This latter Covenant has a number of aspects. Conceived as a partnership between God and his people, but not as a contract for personal advantage, the Covenant is prior to all other pacts, open-ended and intergenerational. For the children of Israel, choosing to enter into the Covenant meant being intimate and at one with God through the collective observance of His righteous statutes and judgements. It also meant being His 'witnesses' and a 'servant whom I have chosen' (Isaiah 43:10). On the other hand, this elevated status brought with it much greater divine scrutiny and judgement. As the prophet Amos reminded the people: 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities' (Amos 3:2).

Exactly here lies the coiled spring of the ideal of covenantal ethnic election, which was to prove so energising for so many peoples. For election depends entirely on performance, the continuing conduct of the community in executing God's laws. This dynamic was reinforced by another antinomy: separation and engagement. On the one hand, the Covenant involved a quest for holiness through the separation of the chosen people from all other peoples; on the other hand, it contained a promise of bless-

ings on all peoples through the example, light and message of a righteous Israel. In the words of Isaiah: 'I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thy hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles' (Isaiah 42:6–7).

Where the Psalms plumb the depths of individual intimacy and redemption by a compassionate God, the Prophets both expand upon the covenantal ideal, and relate it to divine promises of collective deliverance and restoration. Jeremiah tells us that the Lord will bring the people back from the north country, 'and with them the blind and the lame'; He will bring them again to their land, where they will all know the Lord (Jeremiah 31:8, 34). Amos promises a restoration of the 'tabernacle of David that is fallen' and a rebuilding of 'the waste cities' and a replanting of the vineyards (Amos 9:11, 14), while the post-Exilic Prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, speak of the return of the exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem and rebuilding of its Temple, destroyed by the Babylonians. Each of them recalls an earlier deliverance, the model of divine power and justice, the Exodus from Egypt and the redemption from slavery and Pharaonic oppression; in Haggai's words: 'According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear not' (Haggai 2:5).¹²

Cultural affinities with nationalism

While we may recognise the ancient Jewish roots of the Christian traditions, what relevance, we may ask, can they have to a modern ideology like nationalism? How can we conceivably span an interval of some three thousand years, with all its vast intervening economic, social and political changes across Europe and the Middle East? Here I shall attempt to answer these questions by following a modified version of the method advocated by Max Weber, namely of establishing a *cultural affinity* between two disparate phenomena, in this case biblical Israel and modern nationalism, and then supporting it, as far as the historical data will allow, by a *causal explanation* which, in the nature of things, can only be partial.

¹² For the ancient Jewish Covenant in its biblical and post-biblical settings, see Nicholson (1988) and Novak (1995); Walzer (1985) gives an original account of the energising role of Exodus politics. More theological accounts are provided in Gillman (1992) and Sacks (2002). Covenanted peoples and their histories, with special reference to the Ulster-Scots, Afrikaners and Zionists, are analysed by Akenson (1992); and on myths of ethnic election, see A. D. Smith (2003: chaps. 3–5) and the essays in Hutchinson and Lehmann (1994).

In attempting this, I am all too conscious of the many lacunae in the historical records which permit of only the sketchiest of reconstructions.¹³

Two words of caution are in order. Inevitably, the burden of any explanation in such a case falls, as Professor Kedourie recognised, on continuities and changes in cultural traditions, and these are open to misinterpretation, especially by those of us who are not specialists in particular historical periods. Yet, that is not, I think, sufficient reason for not attempting to put forward generalisations and explanatory models, even where this involves a considerable degree of speculation. We are dealing here with religious traditions that were widely accepted in medieval and early modern Europe, at least by the educated classes, however much they were reinterpreted; and, as Edward Shils reminds us, ‘tradition, when it is accepted, is as vivid and as vital to those who accept it as any other part of their action or belief. It is the past in the present but it is as much part of the present as any very recent innovation’ (Shils, 1981: 12).

Second, in treating of the ideals of ‘ancient Israel’, I shall sidestep the vigorous current debates between conservatives and revisionists on the dating of different parts of the Hebrew Bible and the degree of historical accuracy that they convey. Here I am concerned solely with ‘biblical Israel’, a construct not of the Higher Biblical Criticism, but a living tradition of various Jewish and Christian communities from the onset of the Middle Ages to the Reformation and beyond. Hence, this is a picture of ancient Israel shorn, for example, of the much later insights of archaeology and epigraphy, but it is one that lived in the consciousness and memory of countless generations of Jews and Christians in Europe.¹⁴

Let me start with the argument from cultural affinity. At the outset, I defined nationalism as an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity for a human population some of whose members deem it to constitute an actual or potential ‘nation’. Specifically, the core doctrine of nationalism holds that humanity is divided into nations, each with its own character, history and destiny; that the nation is the source of political power; that to be free, human beings

¹³ Weber (1965) uses the concept of an ‘elective affinity’ between certain ideals and their ‘bearer’ strata in his sociology of religion. Here I use a modified version, to signal a *cultural* affinity (without any element of choice) between separate sets of ideas and practices in different epochs and geocultural areas.

¹⁴ For the debate with the biblical ‘revisionists’, who regard the composition of the Pentateuch as post-Exilic, and even of Hellenistic date, see the essays in Day (2004); see also Ahlstrom (1986) and Davies (1995). The revisionist archaeological evidence is presented in Finkelstein and Silberman (2001); for a detailed critique, see Dever (2003).

must belong to and give their first loyalty to a nation; that nations must seek maximum autonomy and self-expression; and that a world of peace and justice can only be founded on a plurality of free nations (See A. D. Smith, 1973: section 1).

Put like this, it is obvious that no legislator and no prophet in ancient Israel, or anywhere else, conceived of his people, let alone of humanity, in these abstract ideological terms. But, if we move to the concrete level of specific nationalisms, we find significant cultural affinities between some of the key concepts employed by these nationalisms, and the covenantal and prophetic ideals of ancient Israel as purveyed in the Hebrew Bible. Perhaps the most obvious of these is the long perceived parallel between the Exodus narrative of the departure of the Israelites from Pharaonic Egypt and their liberation from slavery and oppression, and the many modern ideologies and movements of national liberation from foreign oppression. But this affinity has recently been examined by Michael Walzer, Simon Schama and others, and here I want to focus specifically on the ideals of the Covenant itself, although it will be necessary later to link these to the Exodus narrative from time to time (Walzer 1985; Schama, 1987: ch. 2).

The covenantal ideals in question include the strong belief in Israel's conditional election; second, its fervent attachment to the Promised Land; third, its continual urge for a spiritual and political unity that so often eluded it; and finally, its promise of collective redemption and restoration to the Land of Israel.

Undoubtedly, the most potent of these ideals was the biblical belief in *ethnic election* contained in the Covenant. Its counterpart in modern nationalism is the aspiration for national individuality and uniqueness, entailing a special status and mission among the nations. Here the *locus classicus* is Herder, who called on his fellow-Germans, along with many East European ethnic communities, to cultivate their own languages and cultures, in order to rediscover their true identities, for 'Each nationality contains its centre of happiness within itself, as a bullet the centre of gravity.' Inveighing against Enlightenment cosmopolitanism, Herder invoked the divine plan, claiming that: 'God did not permit Himself such an amalgamation; therefore he has instructed each national group after its own manner' (Ergang, 1976) [1931]: 84, 97, citing Herder, J. G., *Sammtliche Werke*, ed. B. Suphan, E. Redlich *et al.* (Berlin, 1877–1913), 17, 59; 18, 206). He therefore went on to exhort his fellow-Germans: 'Let us follow our own path . . . let all men speak well or ill of our nation, our language, our literature: they are ours, they are ourselves, and let that be enough' (Berlin, 1976: 182, citing Herder, *Werke*, 18, 206).

For Schleiermacher, too, each nation is unique and has its own mission, because this is part of God's plan:

Each nationality is destined through its peculiar organisation and its place in the world to represent a certain side of the divine image . . . For it is God alone who directly assigns to each nationality its definite task on earth and inspires it with a definite spirit in order to glorify himself through each one in a peculiar manner. (Cited in Ergang, 1976: 250)

These ideals of chosenness and mission were expressed in a heroic past of unity and simplicity, which would guide Germany's rebirth. For Herder himself, German regeneration had to be sought in the poetry of the 'crude songs' that 'are the mirror of the ancient German soul and of the simplicity of their character'. For others like Friedrich Schlegel this required recapturing in colourful prose political memories of

Germany in early times when its liberty and its original character were untrammelled, as well as its cultural development in the Middle Ages. This meant that I had to pay especial attention to the medieval state, to the unity of Christianity, to the Holy Roman Empire, and to the spirit of knighthood. (Friedrich Schlegel, *Lectures of 1812*, cited in Kohn, 1965: 61)

The Germans were by no means unique in these respects. Even earlier, English authors like Richard Hurd, John Brown and Tobias Smollett, as Gerald Newman has demonstrated, pointed to the honesty, purity and sincerity of the English, which can be related to the Protestant heritage of a chosen island people, who owed their free institutions to their 'Saxon ancestors'. *Per contra*, their counterparts across the Channel prized the sociability and refinement of the French national character, but, as in Germany, also lamented its decline into effeminacy. As antidote, artists and writers began to seek out golden ages of French greatness in the Middle Ages or the Renaissance, exhorting the French to return to the virtues of their ancestors, like Bayard, St Louis and Du Guesclin, or even Clovis's Franks. In this latter vein, Ange Pithou, in *Le triomphe des parisiens*, published shortly after the fall of the Bastille, called on his countrymen:

Frenchmen, you have reconquered your liberty, that liberty of which the first Franks, your ancestors, were jealous; you will again become like them, strong and healthy; like them you will let your beards grow, and you will wear the long hair that they favoured. (Quoted in Bell, 2001: 153)

Such expressions of French heroic mission became ever more insistent in the next century, as during the Syrian crisis of 1840, when *Le National* exhorted its countrymen:

France, noble France, awake! . . . resume your task, the task of 89 and 1830, and since you are forced to draw the sword of Fribourg and Marengo, draw the sword! The time has come. Think of supreme mission and the grandeur of your destiny. (*Le National*, 4, 7, 8 October 1840, cited in Gildea, 1994: 116)¹⁵

Such instances could be multiplied many times over. Belief in a national mission and destiny, coupled with a desire for national regeneration and unity, has become a staple of every nationalism across the globe. I am not arguing that these ideals are simply updated equivalents of the Covenant with ancient Israel. That would be both anachronistic and reductive, collapsing 'nationalism' into 'religion'. Rather, I seek to establish a cultural affinity between different phenomena, far removed in time and place, but nevertheless interrelated through living cultural traditions.

For it is, in fact, possible to demonstrate that these biblical motifs of chosenness, homeland, unity and ethnic regeneration find strong parallels in modern European nationalisms. Take the second ideal of the Promised Land. Ancient Jewish attachment to the Land of Israel finds its counterpart in the nationalist ideal of the homeland and of ancestral poetic landscapes.

Thus, one of the founders of the Swiss Helvetic Society, Franz Urs Balthazar, declared in 1763 that 'the character of the Swiss nation found its complete expression in its untamed Alpine landscape'; and a few years later, Johann Caspar Lavater in his *Schweizerlieder* urged Switzerland to ' . . . hold fast with constant hand the newly tied bond of unity, because in this world there is no country like you, you Fatherland of Heroes' (Lavater, *Schweizerlieder*, 1767, cited in Kohn, 1944: 383; Zimmer, 1998: 647).

The links between Swiss chosenness, Alpine Confederation and unity were actually conceived in biblical terms by the historian Johannes von Muller, in his *History of the Swiss Confederation of 1786*, when he wrote:

It is strange how the Bible seems to fit no other people better than you. What was originally a community of free shepherds grew into a Confederation of as many cantons as there were tribes in biblical times. This Confederation received three laws from God. If you keep them faithfully, you are invincible: to remain always, in war and peace, closely united by your patriotic habits and the joy of common festivities, one nation like one family; not to think of commercial

¹⁵ On the rise of English nationalism, see Newman (1987) and for Britishness, Colley (1992). See also Trumpener (1997). For a general historical sociology of English identity, see Kumar (2003). Among many works on French nationalism, see Herbert (1972), Best (1989, especially the essays by Conor Cruise O'Brien and Hew Strachan), Gildea (1994) and Bell (2001); and especially the essays in Nora (1997–8). On German nationalist ideology, apart from Kohn (1965), see the works by Mosse (1963 and 1975) and James (2000).

profits as Tyre did, nor of conquest, but to dwell on your inherited lands with your herds in innocence and freedom; to regard the imitation of foreign principles and habits as the end of your constitution. (Johannes von Muller, *Sammtliche Werke*, ed. Johannes Georg Muller, 40 parts in 7 vols. (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1831–5), 7, Pt. 1, p. XXXIII, cited in Kohn, 1957: 28–9)

Nor were such ideas confined to the neo-classical and Romantic eras. In the late nineteenth century, as Oliver Zimmer has pointed out, Swiss distinctiveness was increasingly tied to its Alpine habitat, so it is no surprise to find Ernest Bovet, a professor of French at Zurich University, writing in 1909 of an almost mystical link between them:

A mysterious force has kept us together for 600 years and has given us our democratic institutions. A good spirit watches our liberty. A spirit fills our souls, directs our actions and creates a hymn on the one ideal out of our different languages. It is the spirit that blows from the summits, the Alps and the glaciers. (Ernest Bovet, 'Nationalité', *Wissen und Leben*, 21 (1909), 431–5, cited in Zimmer 1998: 652)¹⁶

Similar sentiments can be found in Greek nationalism, especially after the turn towards Byzantium from the mid-nineteenth century. The Greeks, of course, were doubly chosen: by the golden age of Athens and the sacred realm of Constantinople, as the fount of democracy and the sole bearer of Orthodox Christianity.

For the first, we may cite Adamantios Korais' belief in innate Greek superiority, despite the Greeks' current lamentable backwardness. In the Report which he delivered in 1803 to a French audience in Paris, and which Professor Kedourie included in his anthology of nationalist writings, we read that:

The Greeks, proud of their origins, far from shutting their eyes to European enlightenment, never considered the Europeans as other than debtors who were repaying with substantial interest the capital which they had received from their own ancestors. (Adamantios Korais, *Lettres inédites de Coray à Chardon de la Rochette* (Paris, 1877): 451–90, cited in Kedourie, 1971: 158–9)

For the second myth of ethnic election, we must look to the potent prophetic tradition that kept alive the belief in a Byzantine imperial restoration, to the propagation of the *Megali Idea* after 1844, and to the

¹⁶ On Swiss nationalism, see Kohn (1957) and Steinberg (1976). The growth of the *Eidgenossenschaft* is described by Im Hof (1991: chap. 1) and the Helvetic Society and the development of modern Swiss nationalism are analysed by Zimmer (2003). On the Alpine dimension, see Schama (1995: 479–81, 490–3) and Charlton (1984: 45–9); for its links with Swiss national identity, see Zimmer (1998).

five-volume *History of the Greek Nation* penned by Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos from 1860–77. Here the historian seeks to integrate ‘our medieval Empire’ and ‘our medieval forefathers’ into the history of a Greek nation that has been active over a period of three thousand years, and thereby to fuse the nation with its Orthodox heritage and its continuity of faith and ritual. The implication was clear: the Greeks would realise their mission and destiny by uniting all Greek-speakers outside Greece within the new Greek state and by restoring their homeland. In line with the ancient prophetic hope of redemption through territorial restoration, many Greeks came to believe that national regeneration could only be achieved through restoration of the empire and the reconquest of the Byzantine imperial capital.¹⁷

In Catholic Poland, likewise, a heightened sense of chosenness raised messianic expectations and the hope of redemption through the restoration of their state. This was particularly true of the Polish exiles in Paris and other cities after 1830. Already in the Warsaw of the 1831 revolt, Kazimierz Brodzinski declared:

God wished to have the nations as separate individualities, like human beings, in order that they might be his instruments to influence the whole of mankind and to establish the necessary harmony of the world. The Polish nation, I declare, is through an inspiration from Heaven the philosopher, the Copernicus of the moral world. Misunderstood, persecuted, the Polish nation will continue its existence, it will find men who will profess its faith, and its crown of thorns will be changed into a crown of victory and national glory . . . Its mission has been to stand guard in the midst of storms on the frontier which divides barbarism and civilisation. (Cited in Kohn, 1960: 39–40)

But, nowhere was this messianic theme of chosenness for suffering and ultimate triumph more poignantly expressed than in the poems and writings of Adam Mickiewicz. In *Forefathers’ Eve*, he expressed it succinctly: ‘Now is my nation on the Martyr’s throne’. In *The Books of the Polish Nation and of the Polish Pilgrims*, he spoke in prophetic terms of the resurrection of the Polish nation, which will cause all the wars in Christendom to cease, and he likened the Pole to a pilgrim who has made a vow to journey to the holy land. Speaking of the Poles in particular, Mickiewicz averred that ‘The Slav nationality has received a special mission; through

¹⁷ Korais’ Report is translated in Kedourie (1971: 153–88). For the Greek Enlightenment and neo-classicism, see especially Campbell and Sherrard (1968: chap. 1) and Kitromilides (1979) and (1989). The Byzantine ideal is assessed by Kitromilides (1998); cf. the sociological analysis in Roudometof (2001: chaps. 1, 2, 4).

it, it exercises a magic influence on the souls and draws them towards truth and towards God' (Kohn, 1960: 42, 50).

These mystical outpourings must, of course, be seen in the context of a people which had lost its independent kingdom, whose homeland had been partitioned, and whose hopes of political salvation were repeatedly dashed; its nationalism, perhaps for that very reason, was all the more imbued with biblical and Christian motifs and imagery.¹⁸

What of the Jews themselves, whose ancestors had entered into the original Covenant and bequeathed its model to so many after them? Though, after the devastation of the First Crusade in 1099, there had been a trickle of returnees to Zion in the Middle Ages, notably Yehudah Halevi and much later Isaac Luria and his followers in Safed and elsewhere, calls for national restoration of the Jews to Israel were rare indeed until the mid-nineteenth century. Then, under the impulse of the Greek, Serb, Polish and German movements, rabbis Yehudah Alkai and Zvi Kalisher, and the ethical socialist Moses Hess, began to urge their fellow-Jews to enter what Hess called the 'Sabbath of History' by returning to the land of their forefathers and foremothers. In their writings and those of their immediate successors, Peretz Smolenskin and Moshe Leib Lilienblum, the nationalist message has clear covenantal overtones. Thus Moses Hess writes: 'Each people must become, like the Jewish people, a people of God', thereby exemplifying just that nationalist transformation of religious beliefs which Professor Kedourie castigated (Hess, 1862/1958: 50, 74).

For Smolenskin, too, the Jews

... have always been a spiritual nation, because one whose Torah was the foundation of its statehood. From the start our people has believed that its Torah took precedence over its land and over its political identity. . . . (Peretz Smolenskin, *Maamarim* (Jerusalem, 1875–77/1925–26), cited in Hertzberg, 1960: 147).

For Eliezer Ben-Yehudah, on the other hand, the unique creativity of the Jewish people could not be severed from the homeland: 'The nation cannot live except on its own soil; only on this soil can it revive and bear magnificent fruit, as in days of old!' (Eliezer Ben-Yehudah, *HaShahar* x, 145 (Vienna, 1885), cited in Hertzberg, 1960: 165).

¹⁸ The basic work on Polish history is Davies (1981, esp. Vol. II, I, chap. 1 for the growth of a Polish nation). For the Romantics and Pan-Slavists in Poland, see Kohn (1960: Part I, chap. 2); see also Peter Brock 'Polish nationalism' in Sugar and Lederer (1969: 310–72).

Here we already have a new covenant, not one between man and God, but between humanity and the land, one which entails the radical disruption of the *Galut* (exile) and an end to homelessness. This meant a new set of values, more concrete and physical, centred on human labour and nature, but still inspired by a powerful ethical imperative stemming from the Covenant and the Prophets. Thus, in Herderian vein Micha Berdichevski called on the Jews: 'Let us sing our song of life in our own way, and so achieve our essence, our immediacy': 'The wholeness of heart, man's purity, is the ultimate end.' But he went on to insist that a holy people must live on its own soil: '. . . a beaten, tortured and persecuted people is unable to be holy' (Micha Berdichevsky, *Ba-Derekh*: ii, 47, cited in Hertzberg, 1960: 299, 301).

If we recall that holiness in the Torah requires separation from other peoples, and that nationalism translates holiness into authenticity and uniqueness, then we have in these prophetic utterances of the early Zionists the clearest expression of cultural affinities with the covenantal ideal of the Torah. But they are not alone in this. For later socialist Zionists, from Aaron David Gordon and David Ben-Gurion to Berl Katznelson, the Bible, the Land, its heroes and the prophecies of national restoration remained the bedrock and spring of their thought and actions.¹⁹

II: Reformation and Nationalism

Ethnic election in medieval Christian traditions

Even if we were to concede the striking affinities between ancient biblical myths and ideals, and those of modern nationalisms, what possible historical links could there be between two such temporally distant cultural phenomena? Is there any evidence that these affinities were anything more than the expression of nationalists who had been steeped in biblical religion, and who sought, more or less consciously, to harmonise the two and fit their nationalism into a biblical mould? Of course, such a possibility begs the question of why they should try to do so, and why biblical ideals

¹⁹ On early Zionism, see Vital (1980). Zionism and Judaism are discussed in Luz (1988) and Mendes-Flohr, 'In pursuit of normalcy: Zionism's ambivalence towards Israel's election' in Hutchinson and Lehmann (1994: 203–29); also the controversial account in Sternhell (1998). For a key early text, see Hess (1958) [1862]. On Berdichevski, see Ohana (1995) and for Ben-Gurion's practical messianism, see Tsahor (1995). The best Reader on Zionism remains Hertzberg (1960). For Zionism as a form of diaspora nationalism, see A. D. Smith (1999a: chap. 8).

should continue to matter so much to secular nationalists. For, undoubtedly, as we saw, there were powerful instances of nationalists seeking to ground their secular ideals on biblical foundations, both of the Old Testament and the New. In fact, by the eighteenth century, there was already a long tradition of returning to the Hebrew Bible and to ancient Jewish beliefs for illumination and legitimation, for what Colin Kidd has termed ‘Mosaic history’ and its ‘ethnic theology’ (Kidd, 1999: chap. 2).

We can, I think, go further and specify linkages between biblical ideals and modern nationalism, both general and specific. The more general linkages find their expression in the beliefs and practices of medieval Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christianity that preserved some of the traditions of biblical Israel. I am thinking in the first place of the tradition of sacred kingdoms and sacred kingship, highlighted by the practice of anointing with oil, such as was used in the ampulla for the kings of France crowned at Rheims, and of the many sculptured and stained glass images of sacred kingship exemplified by Israel’s kings, David and Solomon, in churches, abbeys and cathedrals across Europe; and of the many Christian sovereigns who like Alfred and Henry VIII sought in David and Solomon, Hezekiah and Josiah, models of virtue and sanctity. Of course, this is a different, even a counterposed tradition, to that of the popular covenant, and it was sometimes denounced by prophets like Hosea for whom the sole king of Israel was the Almighty Himself: ‘I gave thee a king in my anger, and took him away in my wrath’ (Hosea 13:11).²⁰

But what of those biblical motifs that spring from the covenantal tradition itself—motifs of election, homeland, unity and regeneration—that I have identified as having close parallels in modern nationalism? Can these too be found in the various traditions of medieval Christianity? To a certain extent I think they can, but their significance before the Reformation is often unclear. For example, a tradition of holy lands modelled on the Holy Land of Israel can be found in several parts of medieval Europe—in Hungary, Russia, Bohemia, France and Spain. Increasingly, this betokened a growing, if uneven, attachment to one part of medieval Christendom above others, an allegiance to the territorial kingdom identified with a dynasty and a people. Yet this was rarely accompanied by any drive for ethnic and territorial unity in a feudal Europe that, after the dis-

²⁰ Sacred kingship in western Europe, notably France and England, is analysed and illustrated by Strayer (1971: chap. 16), Beaune (1985), Guenée (1985: I, chap. 4) and John Guy, ‘Monarchy and counsel: models of the state’, in Collinson (2002: 113–42). On kingship in ancient Israel, see Talmon (1986: section 1).

integration of the Carolingian and Ottonian empires and the reduction of Byzantine territories, remained a patchwork of overlapping loyalties. Only towards the end of the medieval period, in the Spanish, French, Scottish and English kingdoms, was there any discernible movement towards territorial, if not yet social, unification. As for the biblical ideals of redemption and restoration, these tended to be spiritualised and translated into an otherworldly setting. Redemption of souls took the place of restoration of land and rebirth of community.²¹

However, what does retain its hold over the hearts and minds of many people in medieval Christian Europe is the myth of ethnic election, of the chosenness of a kingdom and its people. It was particularly marked in France from the thirteenth century onwards. Thus in his papal bull *Rex glorie* of 1311, Clement V claimed that God had divided the world into political territories based on language and ethnic descent, and that among these the kingdom of France held a special place:

In the same way that the Israelites are known to have been granted the Lord's inheritance by the choice of Heaven, to carry out the hidden wishes of God, so the kingdom of France has been selected as the Lord's special people, marked with signs of honour, and chosen to carry out God's commands. (*Regestum Clementis V*, ed. cura et studio monarchorum Ordinis S. Benedicti, 8 vols. (Rome, 1885–92), no. 7501 cited in Housley, 2000: 235)

France's holiness was the result of the exemplary faith of its people and its 'most Christian king', but also of the virtue of its ancestors, the quality of its saints, especially St Denis and St Louis, the number of its holy relics and its vast array of great abbeys and cathedrals (See Beaune, 1985; Strayer, 1971: chap. 16).

Similar beliefs could be found across the Channel. In 1377, Adam Houghton, Edward III's Chancellor, claimed before Parliament that England was favoured by God, and that the English were the new Israelites and their kingdom the *heritage de Dieu*. His vision presented the Englishman of the fourteenth century (in the words of M. Wilks cited by Norman Housley) as a '*piers plowman*, the tiller of the soil of a landed church, a co-worker with Christ in the green fields of England', in analogy with the ancient Israelite in occupation of his sacred soil (cited in Housley, 2000: 238). This kind of English 'territorial patriotism' was particularly marked in the reigns of Richard II and Henry V, especially in the

²¹ On the Holy Land and holy lands in medieval and early modern Europe, see the essays in Swanson (2000), especially that of Housley; for interpretations of the role of sacred territories, see Hastings (2003) and A. D. Smith (1999b).

celebrations after Agincourt—though only a few years later it was to be matched by Joan of Arc’s belief that an attack on the ‘saint royaume de France’ was an affront to God Himself (Housley, 2000: 236, 238).

Far away at the other end of Europe, in the reign of Ivan III, the Great, in the latter half of the fifteenth century, Muscovite Russia, its ruler, its land and its people, became the focus of an increasingly fervent belief in divine election. The belief itself went back to Kievan Rus, indeed to not long after Vladimir’s conversion to Christianity. But it was only several centuries later, after the fall of Constantinople in 1453, that it became the fulcrum of an elite national identity that saw in the Muscovite Russian kingdom the last bastion of Orthodox Christianity, the only truly Christian state. This in turn engendered the notion of Tsarist Russia as the Third Rome, an ideal most clearly formulated in the epistle of Philotheos, Abbot of Pskov, to Vasili III at the beginning of the sixteenth century, when he wrote of the Russian kingdom and Church: ‘Two Romes are fallen, but the third stands fast; a fourth there cannot be. Thy Christian kingdom shall not be given to another’ (cited in Zernov, 1978: 49).

It was in this spirit that Ivan IV Grozny used Byzantinesque ritual for his coronation as Tsar in 1547, and launched a crusade against the Muslim Khanate of Kazan in the name of Christian Orthodoxy; and in this same spirit that Church Councils in 1547 and 1549 canonised many Russian holy men and national heroes. In the succeeding Times of Troubles, from 1598 to 1613, the concept of ‘Holy Russia’, recorded in song and legend, took root among the people, and began to be applied to the whole land and people, not just the monarch, forming one basis for the defence of Russia against the invading Poles in 1610. At the same time, the myth of Holy Russia as the Third Rome under the Tsar as ‘father of his people’ signalled the predominance of a dynastic myth of election and mission at the expense of a truly covenantal ideal of the whole Russian community tested by God.²²

Reformation and covenant

It was the Reformation that began to change all this, and which provides a more specific link between biblical Israel and nationalism. It turned what till then had been a mainly descriptive myth of ethnic election into

²² On the Russian sense of ethnic election going back to Kievan Rus, see Milner-Gulland (1999); for the Muscovite period and the ideal of the Third Rome, see M. Cherniavsky: ‘Russia’, in Ranum (1975: 118–43), Crummey (1987), and Hosking (1997: 6–8, 47–56).

a prescriptive and active ideal. It reconnected that ideal to its original Old Testament covenantal framework. And, by injecting a new popular fervour, it began a shift from a more or less exclusively dynastic myth to a communal ideal, in which a whole people or nation could become the elect—in theory, if not yet always in practice—or at least, could be seen as *an* elect nation, in virtue of its possessing a reformed church and godly members.

Two immediate objections to this argument need to be considered. The first is that the Reformation was a European, not a national, movement, and it had been preceded by various attempts at reform within the Catholic Church, not to mention Lollardy in England and the more radical Hussites in Bohemia, the latter indeed coupled with a strong assertion of a Czech national identity. Foxe's *Actes and Monuments*, first published in 1560, which used to be read as a tract of English nationalism, was in point of fact concerned with all those reformers in Europe who were suffering at the hands of the Catholic powers, and envisaged the end of Days in the battle against the anti-Christ. On the other hand, insofar as his 'Book of Martyrs' was particularly concerned with the origins and plight of *English* Protestants and was the product of the *English* Marian exiles, Foxe's focus was inevitably on England as *an* hoped-for elect nation and on the sufferings of its English martyrs. In its effects, too, its English dimension was unmistakable, and it soon became for later generations of Protestants the major English religious text after the vernacular Bible. More generally, despite their pan-European dimensions, the various magisterial reformations and especially the Reformed churches in each state soon became embedded in different ethno-linguistic cultures and modified by varied political traditions and circumstances (Loades, 1982; MacCulloch, 2004).

There is a second, perhaps more fundamental objection, namely, that the rise of both nations and nationalisms from the sixteenth century can be explained in political and economic terms as the long-term outcome of the consolidation of a network of competing and exploitative territorial states in western Europe, as aristocratic fragmentation was gradually replaced by centralised monarchies and bureaucracies in Spain, France, England, Denmark and Sweden, supported by a growing commercial bourgeoisie. There is much truth in this view. Not only did these political trends fracture the unity of Christendom, even before the onset of the Reformation. They also helped to bring into the political community the upper middle strata of merchants and traders on whose support so many monarchs relied, notably for financing their wars. It is also true that in

several cases, such as England, Denmark and Sweden, Protestant Reformation was carried out under the auspices of a centralising state and monarchy, though there was often a tension between the assertion of royal Supremacy and the evangelical drive of the godly. At any rate, as we saw, there was here a markedly greater recourse to the ideal of sacred kingship, ultimately derived from the biblical kings and their anointed status; both Henry VIII and Elizabeth I of England consciously looked to these role models as the source of their *imperium*.²³

In the same vein, Anthony Marx has gone so far as to credit centralising states with the formation of both nations and an exclusionary nationalism. To bolster their position against rival aristocrats and clergy, he claims that state elites used a strategy of mobilising the masses into a homogenous political community or nation, by persecuting and excluding religious minorities like the Catholics, Protestants, Jews and Moors. As a result, he places the origins of nationalism further back than modernists allow, namely to the late sixteenth century, especially in England and France. But, quite apart from the fact that religious exclusion was nothing new, as heretics and Jews knew only too well, Marx's analysis, and more broadly the political perspective, leaves out a vital element. Nationalism is a dynamic ideological movement, and national identities are often vivid, albeit changing, assertions of a distinctive sense of national community. These facets cannot easily be accounted for by the slow, uneven growth of centralised states, the victory of their elites over rivals, and the gradual religious homogenisation of the masses. The latter provide the base, not the coiled spring, of the ideology and the movement of nationalism. For that we need to look elsewhere.²⁴

My suggestion is that we look for the breakthrough to the later development of the Reformation, as it turned increasingly from its early evangelical, Lutheran phase to a Reformed, especially Calvinist and Zwinglian, Old Testament and covenantal outlook. Of course, concern with human sinfulness—the legacy of St Augustine to all the reformers—humanity's predestined status, justification by faith and individual

²³ On this political theory of nationalism, with special emphasis on the links between the state and warfare, see Tilly (1975, Introduction, and essay by Finer). For the example of England, see Collinson (2002); also Marshall (2003: chap. 5).

²⁴ Marx (2003) concentrates on Spain, France and England. But Spain became a counter-case, a failed nationalism, because there was no need to mobilise the people after the expulsion of the Jews and Moors. In France, nationalism was delayed by the Religious Wars and the suppression of the Calvinists, despite the presence of much national sentiment among the elites. For a critique, see A. D. Smith (2005).

salvation through God's Grace, were always paramount for the godly, as they sought some assurance that they might escape perpetual damnation. Nevertheless, a much greater emphasis on the discipline of the Puritan community and its elders living under the rule of law and the Ten Commandments, widespread translation and more intensive study of the Old Testament, a belief in God's providence, the salvation of the elect and the priesthood of all believers, prepared the way for a return to, and identification with, the Israelite model of covenantal election. And it was not long before not just churches and small communities, but whole peoples were identified as the special recipients of God's Grace, provided that they repented of their sins and sought to fulfil the divine precepts, as foreshadowed in the Covenant with Israel.

Three Elect Nations

We see this particularly clearly in the later evolution of Protestant ideals of national election in England, especially during the Civil War. Protestants may have been in a minority at first, but their experience of Marian persecution predisposed them to identify their own sense of election with that of a beleaguered England. Already in 1554, one pamphleteer had prayed: 'O lord, defend thy elect people of Ingland from the handes and force of thy enemies the Papistes' (cited in Loades, 1982: 304). This same sense of insular identity, coupled with consciousness of England's unique institutional and legal continuity, also encouraged a certain religious self-confidence which found early expression in the future Bishop of London, John Aylmer's, marginal exclamation of 1559 that 'God is English' (cited in Williamson, 1979: 5).

The growing Anglican conformism which followed the Elizabethan Settlement of 1559, punctured periodically by a series of Catholic plots and fed by growing anti-Papist and anti-Spanish sentiment in the 1580s and 1590s, helped to create a favourable national environment for the Puritan minority and their sense of special election. But, as Christopher Hill demonstrates, the idea of the election of all the English people was a recurring theme. It reappeared in John Field's *A godly Exhortation* of 1583: 'God hath given himself unto us'; and Thomas Cartwright's *An Answere unto a letter of Master Harrison's* tells us that 'The Lord is in covenant to that people to whom he giveth the seals [i.e. sacraments] of his covenant', as 'he doth to our assemblies in England'. This was echoed in 1591 by George Gifford: 'God hath put his covenant of mercy in England' (all cited in Hill, 1994: 267).

By the 1620s, this sense of identity between fervent Protestant religion and an English elect began to pervade the gentry, partly as a result of the 'Arminian' policies pursued by Charles I's government, which were seen as a Trojan horse 'ready to open the gates to Romish tyranny and Spanish monarchy'. By 1642, this close identification of English nationhood with Puritan destiny had become widespread in Parliament; according to Anthony Fletcher, 'Civil war was a forcing house of national identity' (Fletcher, 1982: 315–16).

What of *nationalism*? Can we discern a movement for autonomy, unity and identity for an actual or potential nation in this period? If there is such a movement, it is to be found among the godly Puritans in Cromwell's New Model Army and in the Commonwealth that was inaugurated after Charles's execution. It is to be discovered in the fervour of the Cromwellian wars prosecuted against England's enemies, notably in Ireland, in the dual cause of God's England and England's God. As Cromwell himself put it in 1653 to Parliament: 'Truly you are called by God as Judah was, to rule with Him, and for Him . . .' (cited in Kohn, 1944: 176). For Cromwell, the interests of Christians and those of the Nation were one and the same, 'the two greatest concernments that God hath in the world' (cited in Greenfeld, 1992: 75).

Milton, for all his pan-European Protestantism, went even further. In *Areopagitica*, he exclaims:

Consider what Nation it is whereof ye are, and whereof ye are the governours: a Nation not slow and dull, but of a quick, ingenious and piercing spirit . . . this Nation chos'n before any other . . . [When] God is decreeing some new and great period . . . What does he then but reveal Himself . . . as his manner is, first to his English-men? (John Milton, *Areopagitica*, IV, 339–40, cited in Greenfeld, 1992: 76)

This was in great part a nationalism inspired by Old Testament ideals of covenantal election. Cromwell's soldiers went to war to 'fight the Lord's battles' with psalms on their lips, and with bibles consisting of mainly Old Testament quotations on war and soldiering, but God's battles were England's wars, as they had been Israel's long ago, serving the unity and godly superiority of England's commonwealth. Milton interpreted English covenantal election and the unity it inspired in almost mystical and prophetic terms. Describing England as a 'Nation of Prophets, of Sages, and of Worthies', he exclaimed:

For now the time seems come, wherein Moses the great Prophet may sit in heaven rejoicing to see that memorable and glorious wish of his fulfilled, when

not only our seventy elders, but all the Lord's people are become Prophets. (John Milton *Prose Works* (London, 1884–89), 3. 315, cited in Kohn, 1944: 171).²⁵

But England was not alone in drawing so deeply from the well of biblical covenantalism. It found a spiritual companion and rival across the sea in the United Provinces. If anything, the earlier Dutch revolt against the repressive Catholic Habsburg armies, had set the goals and tone of a covenantal nationalism. Already in the 1570s, the 'beggars' songs' (*Geuzenliederen*) compared William of Orange to Moses and David, and the king of Spain to Pharaoh; while the Dutch people were described as 'God's elect' or 'God's people', in opposition to the arrogant and cruel 'foreign nation' of the Spaniards. The *biddagsbrieven* of the same period, the official proclamations of prayer and fast days, were also saturated with biblical imagery, and the God they addressed was that of the Old Testament. Philip Gorski cites the example of one such proclamation in 1575 by William of Orange:

His Excellency, following in the footsteps of Christian Princes, who, in times of danger and distress have sought refuge in the Almighty God, and, together with their people, have humbled themselves before His almighty hand and have repented and turned away from their previous and sinful lives . . . [knowing that] God has never left his people in their moment of need, but has always stood by them and delivered them. (Cited in Gorski, 2000: 1441–2)

Another *biddagsbrief* of 1580 drew on the Exodus saga to beg God to

turn away the horrible plagues, the great destruction and the long-lasting war from these lands . . . and liberate these lands and their good inhabitants from all which leads to their ruin and from this accursed and eternal slavery. (Cited in Gorski, 2000: 1442)

However, it was somewhat later, after the first truce of 1609–21, that the full force of Dutch covenantal nationalism became apparent. This was largely, but not only, the work of Calvinists, supported by the House of Orange in their struggle with the Arminians and Remonstrants. Their goals were to impose religious conformity and unity, along with strict moral discipline, including sumptuary laws and compulsory observance

²⁵ For the lively debates about a Puritan nationalism in England, see Kohn (1940) and (1944: chap. 4); Hill (1977); the essays by David Loades and Anthony Fletcher in Mews (1982); and more recently, especially Greenfeld (1992: chap. 1) and the vigorous critique in Kumar (2003: chap. 5). For a vivid analysis of the role of the Bible in the seventeenth-century English Civil War, see Hill (1994); for Cromwell's Soldiers' Bible, see Calamy (1997). Milton's statement about Moses refers to the Book of Numbers (chap. 11), where Eldad and Medad prophesy in the camp and Moses wishes that all the Lord's people were prophets.

of the Sabbath, and to create an autonomous Church and strong government committed to carrying on the war with Spain, a programme that Gorski argues is derived from the Pentateuch (Gorski, 2000: 1445; Green, 1964: 325–8).

Even more striking is the use of the Exodus and Mosaic motifs by so many Dutch rhetoricians, preachers, writers and artists of the early to mid-seventeenth century. The biblical narrative possessed an added poignancy for the many Dutch Protestants who had fled Alva's persecution in the southern Netherlands and crossed the water barriers to the free lands of the north—hence the peculiar importance of the parallel with the departure of the Jews from Egypt. In 1612, Joost van den Vondel published his play *Passcha ofte De Verlossinge Israels uit Egypten*, in which he compared William of Orange to Moses:

O wondrous fate that joins Moses to Orange
 The one fights for the law, the other beats the drum
 And with his own arm, frees the Evangelium
 The one leads the Hebrews through the Red Sea flood
 The other guides his people through a sea . . . of tears and blood.
 (Vondel, *Passcha*: 58, cited in Schama, 1987: 113)

The Exodus narrative, and its leader Moses, also figured in several Dutch paintings—by artists like Hendrik Goltzius, Abraham Bloemart, Cornelis van Harlem, Ferdinand Bol, and Rembrandt. For, as Simon Schama points out, just as the Jewish slaves in Egypt had been liberated, separated and reshaped by Moses in the wilderness, so the Dutch had been moulded and separated as a people by the brutality and Catholic fanaticism of Alva and Philip II and by the long years of hardship and war. Little wonder that the narrative of ancient Israel's Torah appeared to so many Dutch to fit and explain their own predicament.²⁶

Perhaps the most vivid expression of this covenantal message is to be found in the history compilation entitled the *Nederlantsche Gedenck-Clanck* (The Netherlands Anthem of Commemoration) composed by the Zeelander Adriaan Valerius in 1626, part of whose closing prayer reads:

. . . O Lord when all was ill with us You brought us up into a land wherein we were enriched by trade and commerce and have dealt kindly with us, even as you led the Children of Israel from their Babylonian prison; the waters receded before us and you brought us dry-footed even as the people of yore, with Moses

²⁶ On the Dutch revolt, see Parker (1985); also MacCulloch (2004: 309–13, 367–78) and Green (1964: chap. 14). On Calvin, see Rublack (2005: chap. 3), and Green (1964: chap. 10). For Dutch national identity and Dutch art, see Schama (1987: 106–17), and Westermann (1996: chap. 5)

and with Joshua, were brought to their Promised Land. O Lord, you have performed wondrous things for us. And when we have not heeded you, you have punished us with hard but Fatherly force so that your visitations have always been meted out to us as a children's punishment. You have not counted the sins of your people against them but have freed us from the yoke of the Moabites even as it was with Deborah and with Barach whose power went before us in the field and that of stout-hearted Gideon who fought against the violence of the Midianites. (Cited in Schama, 1987: 98)

An accompanying engraving shows the seven sister-provinces and the princes of Orange-Nassau kneeling in prayer before the Dutch hat of liberty on a pole beneath a banner inscribed with the biblical holy tetragrammaton in a cloud of glory (ibid.: 98–9, with illustration). This close patriotic analogy of 'Netherlands–Israel' became a standard motif in Dutch political life throughout the seventeenth century, widely assimilated by the public through cheap pamphlets and prints. At the same time, the programme of the Calvinists turned it into a veritable covenantal movement on behalf of the Netherlandish nation aimed at cleansing the republic of enemies within and fighting those without, whether they be Catholic Spain or Protestant England or Indians overseas (Gorski, 2000: 1446–7; Green, 1964: 325–8).

Scotland provides yet a further example of a 'covenantal' type of nationalism. Starting with the formation of the first Covenant in late 1557, the Scots Reformation of 1559–60 adopted the Calvinist Confession of Faith and the Book of Discipline in a revolution against an absentee Queen Mary who was a Catholic. In the 1560s, in his *History of the Reformation in Scotland*, John Knox claimed 'the Scottish church to be the purest and best reformed of any Protestant church'. At the same time, he drew upon the analogy of the decline of ancient Israel which fell apart into two kingdoms, Israel and Judah, to bemoan the failure of Protestant England and Scotland to unite under a godly prince like King David (Williamson, 1979: 4).

But Covenant theology really came into its own only in the 1580s and 1590s in the politically oriented writings of Robert Bruce and John Davidson and in the theological idea of a 'covenant of works' advanced by Robert Rollock, principal of Edinburgh University. This was also the period when the covenant, renewed in 1580–1, 1590 and 1596, began to be seen as a symbol of national unity against the threat to the Kirk from Scottish sovereigns, and became a regular feature in Scots politics (Williamson, 1979: ch. 3; Hill, 1994: 274–7).

The best-known of these renewals was that of 1638, in response to Charles I's attempt to harmonise religion in both his domains, when an oath was sworn to stand to the defence of the King 'in the defence and preservation of the aforesaid true religion, liberties and laws of the kingdom . . .'; likewise, each was to behave 'as beseemeth Christians who have renewed their covenant with God' (cited in Mackie, 1976: 206). It was renewed yet again in 1643 during the English Civil War by a treaty with the English Parliament which took the form of 'The Solemn League and Covenant', to preserve the reformed religion 'according to the Word of God and the example of the best-reformed Churches', to extirpate Popery and Prelacy, and preserve peace between England and Scotland, the parties 'acknowledging their own short-comings and professing their desire to amend their own lives'. (ibid.: 212–13). Certainly, the idea of a double Covenant between God and people, and king and people, on the ancient Jewish model, had become by the seventeenth century, as in the Netherlands, a staple of political argument (Williamson, 1979: ch. 3).²⁷

There were, of course, other examples of covenantal nationalisms, notably those of the Ulster-Scots, the Puritan settlements in the northern United States, and much later, the Afrikaners. In the major cities of Switzerland, too, the Reformation led by Huldrych Zwingli and Heinrich Bullinger in Zurich, struck deep roots, embracing the concept of the Covenant of ancient Israel as firmly as the Scots. In other cases, such as parts of Bohemia, Hungary and Poland, there were strong Calvinist churches and widespread support, but here covenantalism was confined to large enclaves or what Schama calls 'conventicles'; it failed to feed or take over a whole society or state, and in some cases the Protestants were suppressed in bloody religious wars such as those of France and Bohemia (Schama, 1987: 96).²⁸

²⁷ On Scots national identity, apart from Williamson (1979), see Webster (1997) for the medieval period, and for the early modern period, Kidd (1993), Keith Brown, 'Scottish identity in the seventeenth century', in Bradshaw and Roberts (1998: 236–58), and MacCulloch (2004: 291–5, 378–82).

²⁸ On the Ulster-Scots and the Afrikaners, see Akenson (1992); also Bruce Cauten, 'The myth of divine election and Afrikaner ethnogenesis', in Hosking and Schöpfflin (1997: 107–31). On Hungary, especially Calvinist Transylvania, see Graeme Murdock, 'Magyar Judah: constructing a new Canaan in Eastern Europe', in Housley (2000: 263–74); for the religious wars in France, see Briggs (1998: 10–32), MacCulloch (2004: 306–9, 337–40) and Marx (2003: chaps. 2–3); on Switzerland, see MacCulloch (2004: 137–50, 172–9) and Im Hof (1991); and on Bohemia and the Hussites, see Joseph Zacek, 'Nationalism in Czechoslovakia', in Sugar and Lederer (1969: 166–206). For Calvinism, generally, see Rublack (2005: chap. 3) and MacCulloch (2004: 194–7, 237–52).

On the other hand, in cases where the Reformation was state sponsored and encompassed the whole community, the type of reformed religion tended to be less covenantal. The form that took hold in Denmark and Sweden from the 1530s, for example, was Lutheran and evangelical; it was centred on the more apolitical New Testament and did not turn to the political activism which, given the right circumstances, could be triggered by the covenantal ideal, although the Old Testament and the general parallel with ancient Israel were frequently invoked, especially in Sweden well into the eighteenth century (see Ihalainen, 2005: ch. 3).

In Denmark, Frederick II (1523–33) and Christian III (1536–59) were concerned, as in England, with the royal supremacy and the expropriation of Church lands, and the same was true of Gustav Vasa (reigned 1523–60) and his successors in Sweden. But their political revolutions were accompanied by more grassroots religious reform. In Sweden, this was a rather uneven process, largely inspired by the educational work of a few preachers. Pre-eminent among these was Olaus Petri, whose handbook of 1529 and other writings, coupled with the church ordinances in 1562 and 1571 of Laurentius Petri, helped to ensure widespread acceptance of evangelical doctrine and organisation at the general Church Council of 1593, which finally ratified Lutheranism as the national religion of Sweden. In Denmark, influenced by northern German Lutheranism, doctrinal reform was taken up much more enthusiastically, given the popular response to the Lutheran idea of the equality of all believers, and it was equally swiftly confirmed by Christian III's firm declaration in 1536 for a princely Lutheran church, and his sponsorship of a translation of the Bible into Danish in 1550. And yet, it was really only as late as the early nineteenth century, under the impulse of a more popular form of Pietism, that the Lutheran reform became linked to a truly nationalist ideology, that associated with the *folkelighed* mass movement of Nicolai Grundtvig (1783–1871) and his popular Folk High Schools of the 1840s.²⁹

The character of 'covenantal' nationalism

Despite gaps in the chain of evidence, I think a fair *prima facie* case can be made for the existence in the seventeenth century of what I have called

²⁹ On Denmark and its princely Lutheran Reformation since the 1530s, see Jespersen (2004: especially chap. 5 on the Church); also Oakley (1972: chap. 7). For the state-sponsored Lutheran Reformation in Sweden, see Scott (1977: 124–30, 153–6); and for the later monarchy, Ihalainen (2005: esp. chap. 3).

'covenantal nationalism'. We need to recall that nationalisms, though united around a core doctrine of national autonomy, unity and identity, take different forms in different periods and culture areas. As I argued earlier, the covenantal kind of nationalism takes a different form to both the civic-republican nationalisms of the French Revolution and its successors, and to the ethnic nationalisms of Germany and Eastern Europe, and much of Asia. It was, first of all, avowedly religious, not just in the generic and functional sense of nationalism as a this-worldly 'religion of the people', but in the substantive sense of a transcendental religion of salvation from the beyond, that is, through God's free gift of grace, as the various forms of Protestantism undoubtedly were. This meant that for Protestants, God, not the nation, was sovereign. At the same time, providence required nations: God worked His plan, above all through covenants with elect communities and nations, a doctrine proclaimed by some Puritan divines, and embraced, as we saw, by Herder and the Romantics. Second, the Protestant concept of equality was also religious: the priesthood of all believers and the primacy of the Bible reader in a community of the faithful, took the place of the citizen of the republic, or rather defined that citizenship of the commonwealth and its attendant duties.

Third, while all those who belonged to the ethnocultural community were seen as potential priests and members of the elect, not all of them were likely to achieve this status. Members of a nation possessed what Calvin termed 'general election'; a more limited, secondary election was reserved for the godly. The nation might well become *an* elect nation, but only the godly among them were eligible to constitute *the* elect. But, then, had not the ancient Jewish Prophets distinguished the righteous remnant of Israel who would be restored to their land from the mass of backsliding sinners who would perish in exile? And is not the same logic in evidence in many a modern nationalism, where the activist cadres of the movement have often seen themselves, or 'their' idealised peasants, as more 'authentic' and more 'truly national' than the rest of their co-cultural kinsmen?

There is another respect in which covenantal nationalisms differ from many of the later, more secular nationalisms. They build on, and depend upon, a pre-existing national community-in-the-making, and often a burgeoning sense of national identity, at least among the elites. This was true of England, Scotland and, by the 1560s, the United Provinces, for all their particularism and divisions. In contrast, though modernists often exaggerate the role of secular nationalisms, in many cases, par-

ticularly in Eastern Europe, they *have* helped to turn passive *ethnies* into active nations, while in the ex-colonial territorial states of Africa and Asia today, nationalists continue to try to create nations out of often heterogenous populations.³⁰

On the other hand, the similarity in *social* composition is rather greater than expected. In terms of size, the contrast that is often drawn between narrowly elite pre-modern movements and sentiments and modern mass nationalisms, is in this case hard to sustain. As W. J. Argyle demonstrated, most nineteenth-century European nationalisms outside France had very small active constituencies; those who manned the barricades in the 1848 revolts numbered in each case a few hundreds. These numbers were certainly exceeded by the armies fielded by the Puritan and Calvinist godly in the Netherlands in the 1570s to 1600s and 1620s to 1640s, or in Scotland and England in the 1640s. As for their social background, while the middle strata were certainly well represented in both covenantal and secular nationalisms, we know that Protestantism had a wide cross-class appeal. For example, in the case of the Netherlands, Geoffrey Parker cites figures of detected heretics in the province of Flanders from 1521 to 1565 for whom their social background is known, and these reveal that nearly half of the Reformed heretics came from the lower classes (Argyle, 1976; Parker, 1985: 60).

Nor is there any doubt about the *political* content of these covenantal nationalisms, which match in intensity and scope the political goals of modern nationalisms. While evangelical Lutheranism tended towards a more apolitical stance, dependent as it was upon a regnant prince, as in Denmark or large parts of Germany, the other Reformed Churches, and notably Calvinism and the Swiss reformers, always suspicious of princes, were ready to enter the political fray and seek political power wherever they could. Their religion of 'inner-worldly asceticism', to use Max Weber's phrase, had a clear social message and, where circumstances permitted, concrete political goals. Above all, it required freedom from external authority, except that of God. The Reformers' demands, as we saw, were for both internal reform and moral discipline of a society, and for the extension of that reformation to others, if necessary by force. Hence they sought a much greater degree of unity and organisation under

³⁰ For nationalism 'inventing' nations, see Gellner (1983) and Hobsbawm (1990); for a critique, see A. D. Smith (1991). For the growth of Netherlands unity in the mid-sixteenth century, prior to a Dutch nationalism, see Parker (1985: chap. 1). For Scots unity, forged by war, see Webster (1997); and for medieval England, see Davies (2000: chap. 2).

the law, a definite arena or territory in which to build their Reformed churches, and the restoration of the true church in place of the anti-Christ, the corrupt Roman church, in order to create the conditions for that assurance that they might be part of the elect that constituted their ultimate goal. It is exactly these ideological features that enabled the Reformed churches to galvanise peoples and societies, whose elites already possessed some sense of national identity, with a promise of much greater autonomy, unity and sense of identity, turning them into elect nations in covenant with God.

This is where the Pentateuchal model of biblical Israel was so relevant, and where the more intensive return to the study of the Old Testament in this period proved so fruitful. Here, if anywhere, was to be found the prototype of God's chosen people and the record of the Almighty's dealings with those He had chosen to follow His Torah. Its stories of exemplary heroes and heroines, and its emphasis upon holiness through separation and communal right conduct seemed especially relevant to often persecuted, but activist, churches of the godly seeking freedom from prince and Pope. It was not in the disputes over the Eucharist, nor in the doctrine of justification by faith, nor even in the more general attack on Papist abuses, but in the return to reading the Old Testament as a separate testament of God's will, and acting in its spirit, that the long-standing beliefs in covenant and ethnic election gained new dynamism and concreteness. Contrasting the 'wholly sacred' character of the New Testament with the 'this worldly' character of the Old Testament in the eyes of Calvinists and other Reformed churches concerned with right conduct, Simon Schama commented:

The result of all this was to rescue the Old Testament from its position in Catholic theology as a necessary preface, a 'second stage' in the teleology of original sin and eventual redemption, and to restore to the relation between the two books a kind of complementary symmetry. In the world view of Catholics, the exemplary nature of Old Testament stories was overshadowed by the distinction between Christians and, as it were, incipiently deicidal Jews. In the Calvinist mentality, the eventual Messianic chronicle *could only* be comprehended by the history of the Jews, through whom the Almighty had worked his will. (Schama, 1987: 94–5, italics in original)

Indeed, ancient Israel came to have great significance for Calvin, both as a mixed church and as a covenanted people; while the Covenant, as we saw, was particularly important to the Swiss Reformers like Zwingli and Heinrich Bullinger.

Not, I hasten to add, that this return to the Old Testament boded any greater toleration, let alone compassion, for the descendants of God's chosen in the reformers' midst. Not all the reformers were as vituperative in their condemnation of the Jews as the later Martin Luther. But they all operated within the old medieval Catholic framework whose goal was to preserve the Jews in their separate and inferior status as a witness to their perverse 'blindness', until they too would ultimately be converted to the true faith. Even Calvin, whose interest in and use of biblical Israel and the Mosaic Law in Geneva is well-documented, did not depart from the traditional Christian view of the Jews as collectively guilty of deicide. On the other hand, in several passages, he evinced a greater sympathy with Biblical Jews, insofar as he endowed his own followers with a providential role in history similar to that of ancient Israel. Commenting on a bleak chapter of Jeremiah, he ruminated:

When we see that we are like the Jews, we have a mirror in which to know our rebellion against God . . . Thus . . . let us learn not to condemn the Jews at all, but ourselves, and to know that we are not worth any more, and that if there was such brutality then that the word of God served for nothing, that today there is just as much [brutality] or more. (Jean Calvin, *Sermons on Jeremiah 16*, cited in Edwards, 1988: 63).³¹

Here, *in nuce*, Calvin exposes the coiled spring of covenantal election, which, in the more providential vein that Calvin evinced in his plans and actions, was to generate the energy and dynamism of a disciplined and regulated church and help to create unified godly communities and ultimately elect nations. For, while the sombre doctrine of double predestination might seem to breed a sense of passive acceptance, it also left open the hope, if not the assurance, of escape from damnation through election by God's grace, especially as Calvin always stressed God's providence. For the Swiss Reformers, even more, their emphasis on the Covenant showed that God had given his people the hope, and the means, of election.

To be sure, the Calvinist and Reformist sense of 'election' possessed rather different theological and social meanings from those of biblical chosenness. It stemmed from the need for 'justification' by faith through God's Grace, stressed by both St Paul and St Augustine, and it was originally oriented to individual rather than communal salvation. Yet this is

³¹ On the Jews and the Reformation, see Edwards (1988: chaps. 2 and 4). On medieval Jewry under Catholic Christendom, see Stow (1992), and on their legal status in medieval Europe, see Cohen (1994: chap. 3). For a sociological thesis about the decline of the position of the Jews, along with that of heretics and lepers, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, see Moore (1987).

only part of the story. It overlooks the religious and political context of the Reformist doctrine, not to mention the long history of ‘missionary’ election before the Reformation (A. D. Smith, 2003: ch. 5).

Theologically, for Calvin and the Swiss Reformers, justification by faith meant faith in the Word of God, and the Word of God was to be found solely in the Bible, the Old Testament as well as the New. Besides, an individual who believed himself of the saved would perform good works in gratitude and for the love of God. That way, the problem of ‘antinomianism’ could be avoided. An even surer way was for the godly to seek election through faith in God’s Grace by re-entering the Covenant in a Reformed church, as the Swiss Reformers had recommended; there they might succeed where ancient Israel had failed. In this respect, the this-worldly separation of the godly from sinners was not in principle different from Israel’s quest for holiness and intimacy with God through separation from idolators. Nor, for that matter, was the origin of election in both cases: God’s absolute choice and His free gift of grace.

Politically, moreover, the persecution and travail in which so many of the reformers and their conventicles so often found themselves appeared strikingly similar to the plight of the Jews under Pharaoh and their subsequent wanderings in the wilderness. As a result, their identification with ancient Israel and its sacred history from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land of Israel, seems hardly surprising. Hence, too, the shift towards understanding individual salvation of the godly in collective, and even national terms, became increasingly common. In this connection, Michael Walzer has highlighted the pivotal role of an energising ‘Exodus politics’ in the English and American revolutions. But, as Simon Schama points out, the role of the Exodus and Covenant ideals in stimulating godly nationalism was just as great and more immediate.³²

Yet, for all the radicalism of the later Reformation, we should not forget that the return to ancient Israel and its Covenant, was hardly novel. Not only was the biblical tradition of sacred kingship widely drawn upon in the Middle Ages; so was the idea of divine election of kingdoms and even of peoples. It was within these long-standing Catholic Christian traditions which went back to the Old Testament that the post-Reformation return to a more intensive study of the Hebrew Bible and a

³² Though we should add that ‘election’ in both biblical Israel and Calvinism was founded on God’s unfettered choice, rather than humanity’s assent; see Patrick Collinson, ‘The late medieval church and its reformation (1400–1600)’, in McManners (2002: 243–76, esp. 272). See Walzer (1985); and Schama (1987: 104). On ‘missionary’ election, see A. D. Smith (2003: chap. 5).

closer and more personal identification with ancient Israel and its Covenant must be located. Together, the older traditions and the post-Reformation innovations go a long way to accounting for the sacred, covenantal character of the first great outbursts of nationalism in Europe, which occurred over a century before the French Revolution; and perhaps more fundamentally, for the sacred elements in nationalism as a political 'religion of the people' (A. D. Smith, 2000, and 2003: ch. 2).

Conclusion

My argument here has been threefold. First, I have tried to demonstrate the cultural affinities between biblical Israel and its covenant, and the main themes of modern nationalisms. Second, I have suggested that the links between them are to be found in certain Christian cultural traditions, and more especially in the post-Reformation return to the Old Testament for study and guidance. Third, and as a result, I have argued that, in the context of competing territorial states, what I term 'covenantal' nationalism in certain early modern societies has proved to be the first kind of nationalism, to be followed over a century later by secularising nationalisms, both civic-territorial and ethnic-romantic in kind.

I am not, of course, arguing that the character of later secular nationalisms stems wholly from this covenantal nationalism, nor indeed from the covenantal tradition within Judaism and Christianity. Other cultural traditions have exercised considerable influence in shaping the tone and content of different kinds of secular nationalisms; and these traditions can in turn be traced back to alternative legacies from antiquity. What I am claiming is that the covenantal form of nationalism was the first type to appear, and that as a consequence, we find, as one might expect, biblical and covenantal elements in many subsequent nationalisms across Europe and America.

Nor am I claiming that the covenantal tradition provides a sufficient explanation for the incidence and timing of particular nationalisms. For this, we need to look at broader political factors, such as the fragmentation of Christendom consequent on the rise of a network of territorial states based on dominant *ethnies* in the later Middle Ages and early

Renaissance. Clearly, it was only in *this* particular social and political setting, which had already given rise to a sense of national identity among certain elites in a few such states, that the post-Reformation breakthrough to an intense biblical covenantalism could engender a dynamic sacred nationalism of the godly and elect. In other words, it was only under these political and social conditions that we could witness a fusion of a heightened sense of national identity with a dynamic covenantal ideal, of 'nation' with 'covenant'.

That the result gives rise to a mixed form of nationalism, combining the ideals of nation and biblical covenant, should not surprise us, nor cause us to reject the nationalist designation. There are few forms of nationalism that come unalloyed and pure. We habitually encounter liberal and fascist, conservative and socialist, romantic and pragmatic nationalisms; why not, then, religious forms of nationalism such as the covenantal? And if it be objected that they place God before the nation, the same can be said of socialist or indeed liberal nationalism, in that they see the ideal nation as a vehicle and example of human brotherhood or of freedom. And, as I said earlier, what could be more obvious and 'natural' than for the Protestant godly to think of their political lot in terms of the original people of God who saw themselves as an elect nation surrounded by idolators from whom they desired to separate in order to devote themselves to the worship of the one true God? Fleeing their own Pharaohs, whether Popes or Habsburgs, the Protestant godly saw in the biblical narrative of God's dealings with the children of Israel the image of their own travails and hopes of ultimate salvation as an elect nation of God-fearing souls. In making these equations between political *ethnies* and covenanted communities of believers, the Protestant godly provided a political model and a set of cultural themes which would help to energise and fertilise subsequent nationalisms. As a result, the Exodus and the Covenant of ancient Israel would turn out to possess much greater long-term significance for the shaping of nations and nationalism than anyone could have expected at the time.

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