The Religious Challenge
to the Secular State

One of the more puzzling features of the *fatweh* in which Osama bin Laden proclaimed war on the American and European West in 1996 was his comparison of Western presence in the Middle East with the Crusades and colonialism. This may have surprised many Westerners who were not used to hearing issues of international relations expressed in cultural terms—especially not in images derived from the Middle Ages and the colonial era. Most Americans and Europeans thought that this kind of cultural oppression was buried in the unhappy past.

To many in the non-Western world, however, these images aptly characterized the present. When the Ayatollah Khomeini railed against American and European influence in Iran, what he had in mind was a new kind of colonialism. Though Iran had never been colonized by European powers, the domination of Western cultural and economic control seemed like colonialism all the same.

The ayatollah and many other leaders of what used to be known as the "third world" of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East regarded Western influence as an intrusion that did not end with European political and military retreat in the mid-twentieth century. They regarded it as having continued for the next forty years of the Cold War era under the guise of political ideology and economic control and into the twenty-first century in the form of American-orchestrated globalization. The new secular nationalism that was Europe's legacy in the developing world began to be perceived by many in those regions as

morally vacuous and politically corrupt—the worse features of the colonial past.

THE LOSS OF FAITH IN SECULAR NATIONALISM

In the celebrations following the first stages of elections that threatened to bring Islamic nationalists to power in Algeria in the 1990s, a jubilant supporter of the Islamic Front spied a foreigner on the streets of Algiers and grabbed her by the arm. "Please give my condolences to President Mitterrand," the Algerian said.[1] Behind this amusing bit of sarcasm is an impression shared by many Muslims in Algeria: that the nation's ruling party, the National Front, which came to power during the war of independence with France and which controlled the country afterward, was, in a cultural sense, an extension of French colonial rule. Independent Algeria was seen as not entirely independent, but rather a vestige of a past that was itself in need of liberation. An Islamic Algeria would finally mark the country's true freedom from colonialization.

In the middle of the twentieth century, when Algeria and many other former colonies in the developing world gained political independence, Europeans and Americans often wrote with an almost religious fervor about what they regarded as these new nations' freedom—by which they meant the spread of nationalism throughout the world. Invariably, they meant a secular nationalism: new nations that elicited loyalties forged entirely from a sense of territorial citizenship. These secular-nationalist loyalties were based on the idea that the legitimacy of the state was rooted in the will of the people in a particular geographic region and divorced from any religious sanction.

The secular nationalism of the day was defined by what it was—and what it was not. It distanced itself especially from the old ethnic and religious identities that had made nations parochial and quarrelsome in the past. The major exception was the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 as a safe haven for Jews, but even in this case the nation's constitution was firmly secular, and Israeli citizenship was open to people of all religious backgrounds—not only Jews but also Christians and Muslims. In general, mid-twentieth-century scholars viewed the spread of secular nationalism in a hopeful, almost eschatological, light: it was ushering in a new future. It meant, in essence, the emergence of mini-Americas all over the world.

Hans Kohn, his generation's best-known historian of nationalism, observed in 1955 that the twentieth century was unique: "It is the first

period in history in which the whole of mankind has accepted one and the same political attitude, that of nationalism."[2] In his telling, the concept had its origins in antiquity. It was presaged by ancient Hebrews and fully enunciated by ancient Greeks. Inexplicably, however, the concept stagnated for almost two thousand years, according to Kohn's account, until suddenly it took off in earnest in England, "the first modern nation," during the seventeenth century.[3] By the time of his writing, in the mid-twentieth century, he cheerfully observed that the whole world had responded to "the awakening of nationalism and liberty."[4]

Not only Western academics but also a good number of new leaders—especially those in the emerging nations created out of former colonial empires—were swept up by the vision of a world of free and equal secular nations. The concept of secular nationalism gave them an ideological justification for being, and the electorate that subscribed to it provided them power bases from which they could vault into positions of leadership ahead of traditional ethnic and religious figures. But secularism was more than just a political issue; it was also a matter of personal identity. A new kind of person had come into existence—the "Indian nationalist" or "Ceylonese nationalist" who had an abiding faith in a secular nationalism identified with his or her homeland. Perhaps none exemplified this new spirit more than Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt and Jawaharlal Nehru of India. According to Nehru, "there is no going back" to a past full of religious identities, for the modern, secular "spirit of the age" will inevitably triumph throughout the world.[5]

There was a cheerful optimism among the followers of Nehru after India's independence, writes the political scientist Donald Smith: "The Indian nationalist felt compelled to assert that India was a nation," even though some "embarrassing facts"—such as divisive regional and religious loyalties—had to be glossed over.[6] The reason for this compulsion, according to Smith, was that such people could not think of themselves as modern persons without a national identity. "In the modern world," writes Smith, "nationality and nationalism were the basic premises of political life, and it seemed absolutely *improper* for India to be without a nationality."[7] A similar attitude predominated in many other new nations, at least at the beginning.

Leaders of minority religious communities—such as Hindu Tamils in Ceylon and Coptic Christians in Egypt—seemed especially eager to embrace secular nationalism because a secular nation-state would ensure that the public life of the country would not be dominated completely by the majority religious community. In India, where the Congress Party

became the standard-bearer of Nehru's vision, the party's most reliable supporters were those at the margins of Hindu society—untouchables and Muslims—who had the most to fear from an intolerant religious majority.

The main carriers of the banner of secular nationalism in these newly independent countries, however, were not members of any religious community at all, at least in a traditional sense. Rather, they were members of the urban educated elite. For many of them, embracing a secular form of nationalism was a way of promoting its major premise—freedom from the parochial identities of the past—and thereby avoiding the obstacles that religious loyalties create for a country's political goals. By implication, political power based on religious values and traditional communities held no authority.

The problem, however, was that in asserting that the nationalism of their country was secular, the new nationalists had to have faith in a secular culture that was at least as compelling as a sacred one. That meant, on a social level, believing that secular nationalism could triumph over religion. It could also mean making secular nationalism a suprareligion of its own, which a society could aspire to beyond any single religious allegiance. In India, for example, political identity based on religious affiliation was termed *communalism*. In the view of Nehru and other secular nationalists, religion was the chief competitor of an even higher object of loyalty: secular India. Nehru implored his countrymen to get rid of what he called "that narrowing religious outlook" and to adopt a modern, nationalist viewpoint.[8]

The secular nationalists' attempts to give their ideologies an antireligious or a suprareligious force were encouraged, perhaps unwittingly, by their Western mentors. The words used to define *nationalism* by Western political leaders and such scholars as Kohn always implied not only that it was secular but that it was competitive with religion and ultimately superior to it. "Nationalism [by which he meant secular nationalism] is a state of mind," Kohn wrote, "in which the *supreme loyalty* of the individual is felt to be due the nation-state."[9] And he boldly asserted that secular nationalism had replaced religion in its influence: "An understanding of nationalism and its implications for modern history and for our time appears as fundamental today as an understanding of religion would have been for thirteenth century Christendom."[10]

Rupert Emerson's influential *From Empire to Nation,* written several years later, shared the same exciting vision of a secular nationalism that "sweeps out [from Europe] to embrace the whole wide world."[11] Emerson

acknowledged, however, that although in the European experience "the rise of nationalism [again, secular nationalism] coincided with a decline in the hold of religion," in other parts of the world, such as Asia, as secular nationalism "moved on" and enveloped these regions, "the religious issue pressed more clearly to the fore again."[12] Nonetheless, he anticipated that the "religious issue" would never again impede the progress of secular nationalism, which he saw as the West's gift to the world. The feeling that in some instances this gift had been forced on the new nations without their asking was noted by Emerson, who acknowledged that "the rise of nationalism among non-European peoples" was a consequence of "the imperial spread of Western European civilization over the face of the earth." The outcome, in his view, was nonetheless laudable: "With revolutionary dynamism . . . civilization has thrust elements of essential identity on peoples everywhere. . . . The global impact of the West has . . . run common threads through the variegated social fabrics of mankind, . . . [and it] has scored an extraordinary triumph."[13]

When Kohn and Emerson used the term *nationalism* they had in mind not just a secular political ideology and a religiously neutral national identity but a particular form of political organization: the modern European and American nation-state. In such an organization, individuals are linked to a centralized, all-embracing democratic political system that is unaffected by any other affiliations, be they ethnic, cultural, or religious. That linkage is sealed by an emotional sense of identification with a geographical area and a loyalty to a particular people, an identity that is part of the feeling of nationalism. This affective dimension of nationalism is important to keep in mind, especially in comparing secular nationalism with religion. In the 1980s, the social theorist Anthony Giddens described nationalism in just this way—as conveying not only the ideas and "beliefs" about political order but also the "psychological" and "symbolic" element in political and economic relationships.[14] Scholars such as Kohn and Emerson recognized this affective dimension of nationalism early on; they felt it appropriate that the secular nation adopt what we might call the spirit of secular nationalism.

Secular nationalism as we know it today—as the ideological ally of the nation-state—began to appear in England and America in the eighteenth century. Only by then had the idea of a nation-state taken root deeply enough to nurture a loyalty of its own, unassisted by religion or tradition, and only by then had the political and military apparatus of the nation-state expanded sufficiently to encompass a large geographic region. Prior to that time, as Giddens explains, "the administrative

reach" of the political center was so limited that rulers did not govern in "the modern sense."[15] Although there were embryonic forms of secular nationalism before then, the power of the state had been limited.[16] Until the advent of the nation-state, the authority of a political center did not systematically and equally cover an entire population, so that what appeared to be a single homogeneous polity was in fact an aggregation of fiefdoms. The further one got from the center of power, the weaker the grip of centralized political influence, until at the periphery entire sections of a country might exist as a political no-man's-land. For that reason, one should speak of countries prior to the modern nation-state as having frontiers rather than boundaries[17]

The changes of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries included boundaries; the development of the technical capacity to knit a country together through roads, rivers, and other means of transportation and communication; the construction of the economic capacity to do so, through an increasingly integrated market structure; the emergence of a world economic system based on the building blocks of nation-states;[18] the formation of mass education, which socialized each generation of youth into a homogeneous society; and the rise of parliamentary democracy as a system of representation and an expression of the will of the people. The glue that held all these changes together was a new form of nationalism: the notion that individuals naturally associate with the people and place of their ancestral birth (or an adopted homeland such as the United States) in an economic and political system identified with a secular nation-state. Secular nationalism was thought to be not only natural but also universally applicable and morally right.

Although it was regarded almost as a natural law, secular nationalism was ultimately viewed as an expression of neither God nor nature but of the will of citizens.[19] It was the political manifestation of the Enlightenment view of humanity. John Locke's ideas of the origins of a civil community[20] and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's social-contract theories required little commitment to religious belief.[21] Although Locke and Rousseau had religious sensibilities and allowed for a divine order that made the rights of humans possible, these ideas did not directly buttress the power of the church and its priestly administrators. Their secular concepts of nation and state had the effect of taking religion—at least church religion—out of public life.

The medieval church once possessed "many aspects of a state," as one historian put it, and it commanded more political power "than most of its secular rivals."[22] By the mid-nineteenth century, however, Christian

churches had ceased to have much influence on European or American politics. The church—the great medieval monument of Christendom with all its social and political diversity—had been replaced by *churches*: various denominations of Protestantism and a largely depoliticized version of Roman Catholicism. These churches functioned like religious clubs, voluntary associations for the spiritual edification of individuals in their leisure time, rarely cognizant of the social and political world around them.[23]

At the same time that religion in the West was becoming less political, its secular nationalism was becoming more religious. It became clothed in romantic and xenophobic images that would have startled its Enlightenment forebears. The French Revolution, the model for much of the nationalist fervor that developed in the nineteenth century, infused a religious zeal into revolutionary democracy; the revolution took on the trappings of church religion in the priestly power meted out to its demagogic leaders and in the slavish devotion to what it called the temple of reason. According to Alexis de Tocqueville, the French Revolution "assumed many of the aspects of a religious revolution."[24] The American Revolution also had a religious side: many of its leaders had been influenced by eighteenth-century deism, a religion of science and natural law that was "devoted to exposing [church] religion to the light of knowledge."[25] As in France, American nationalism developed its own religious characteristics, blending the ideals of secular nationalism and the symbols of Christianity into what has been called "civil religion."[26]

The nineteenth century saw the fulfillment of Tocqueville's prophecy that the "strange religion" of secular nationalism would, "like Islam, overrun the whole world with its apostles, militants, and martyrs."[27] It spread throughout the world with an almost missionary zeal and was shipped to the newly colonized areas of Asia, Africa, and Latin America as part of the ideological freight of colonialism. It became the ideological partner of what came to be known as nation building. As the colonizing governments provided their colonies with the political and economic infrastructures to turn territories into nation-states, the ideology of secular nationalism emerged as a byproduct. As it had in the West during previous centuries, secular nationalism in the colonized countries during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries came to represent one side of a great encounter between two vastly different ways of perceiving the sociopolitical order and the relationship of the individual to the state: one informed by religion, the other by a notion of a secular compact.

In the West this encounter, and the ideological, economic, and political transitions that accompanied it, took place over many years, uncomplicated by the intrusion of foreign control of a colonial or neocolonial sort. The new nations of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, however, have had to confront the same challenges in a short period of time and simultaneously contend with new forms of politics forced on them as byproducts of colonial rule. As in the West, however, the challenge they have faced is fundamental: it involves the encounter between an old religious worldview and a new one shaped by secular nationalism.

When Europeans colonized the rest of the world, they were often sustained by a desire to make the rest of the world like themselves.[28] Even when empires became economically burdensome, the cultural mission seemed to justify the effort. The commitment of colonial administrators to a secular-nationalist vision explains why they were often so hostile to the Christian missionaries who tagged along behind them: the missionaries were the liberal colonizers' competitors. The church's old religious ideology was a threat to the new secular ideology that most colonial rulers wished to present as characteristic of the West.[29]

In the mid-twentieth century, when the colonial powers retreated, they left behind the geographical boundaries they had drawn and the political institutions they had fashioned. Created as administrative units of the Ottoman, Hapsburg, French, and British empires, the borders of most Third World nations continued to survive after independence, even if they failed to follow the natural divisions between ethnic and linguistic communities. By the middle of the twentieth century, it seemed as if the cultural goals of the colonial era had been reached: although the political ties were severed, the new nations retained all the accoutrements of Westernized countries.

The only substantial empire that remained virtually intact until 1990 was the Soviet Union. It was based on a different vision of political order, of course, one in which international socialism was supposed to replace a network of capitalist nations. Yet the perception of many members of the Soviet states was that their nations were not so much integral units in a new internationalism as colonies in a secular Russian version of imperialism. This reality became dramatically clear after the breakup of the Soviet Union and its sphere of influence in the early 1990s, when old ethnic and national loyalties sprang to the fore.

Even in the twenty-first century, the nation-state continues to be critical to world politics, not only for ideological reasons but also for economic ones: despite the growing power of transnational corporations,

nation-states remained the essential units of the global economic system. In the past, religion had little role to play in this scheme, and when it did become involved, it often threatened it.[30] Contemporary religious politics, then, is the result of an almost Hegelian dialectic between two competing frameworks of social order: secular nationalism (allied with the nation-state) and religion (allied with large ethnic communities, some of them transnational). The clashes between the two have often been destructive, but, as we shall see, they have also offered possibilities for accommodation. In some cases these encounters have given birth to a synthesis in which religion has become the ally of a new kind of nation-state. At the same time, other liaisons with contemporary political trends have led to a different vision: religious versions of a transnationalism that would supplant the nation-state world.

THE COMPETITION BETWEEN TWO IDEOLOGIES

The encounter between religion and secularism is linked to the very terms used to describe these two ways of looking at the world. Prior to the European Enlightenment the words "religion" and "secularism" scarcely existed. As the scholar of comparative religion Wilfred Cantwell Smith has pointed out, the word "religion" began to be widely used in modern Europe and America only in the nineteenth century. Though it appears in ancient Roman writings, the term did not reappear until the Renaissance, and then only occasionally, coming into prominence only in the last two centuries.[31] Before that time and in most parts of the world even today, words that translate as "tradition," "community," and "faith" have been used for what we think of as religious customs, groups, and devotion. It was unthinkable that "religion" in this sense might be separate from other parts of life.

The Enlightenment ushered in a new way of thinking about religion—a narrower definition of the term that encompassed institutions and beliefs that were regarded as problematic, and conceptually separated them from the rest of social life, which was identified by a new term, "secular." What many people in Europe were afraid of at the time was the economic and political power of the clergy, and the fanaticism associated with the terrible wars of religion of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These would be controlled in a society in which "religion" had its limitations within "secular" society.

It is interesting to note that the terms "religious" and "secular" came from the church. In the Middle Ages the Roman Catholic Church had

made a distinction between those clergy associated with religious orders that were separated from the world, and were "religious," from those clergy who officiated in local parishes in society and were "secular." After the Enlightenment, the whole church and all of its customs, practices, and beliefs were conceptually encompassed by the term "religion." Everything else—including the moral basis for public order, social values, and the idea of moral communities—was secular. Before the Enlightenment, and in most parts of the world down to the present time, all of these moral elements of social and political life have been conceived as being part of tradition, customs, and practices of religion.

Perhaps it is useful, then, to think of religion in two senses, in post- and pre-Enlightenment ways of thinking. One is the narrow idea of religious institutions and beliefs that is contrasted with secular social values in the modern West. The other is the broad idea of moral values, traditional customs, and spiritual sensibility that includes much of what the secular West regards as public virtue and purposeful life—values shared by most thoughtful and concerned citizens within a society.

Hence the elusive term "religion," in the broad sense, can point to a moral sensibility toward the social order that in many ways is remarkably similar to the civic values of those who feel most ardently about secularism. This is especially so in the non-Western world. In traditional India, for instance, the English term "religion" might be translated as the word for moral order—*dharma*—as well as for belief *(mazhab)*, fellowship *(panth)*, or community *(qaum)*. As *dharma*, Hindu thought is like political or social theory, the basis of a just society. The Enlightenment thinkers who were most insistent on secularism did not see religion in this way; what they saw was an arrogant religious hierarchy keeping the masses enslaved to superstition in order to avoid justice and reason. They thought of religion as competitive with Enlightenment values, yet religion as *dharma* looks very much like that moral ground on which the Enlightenment thinkers were able to build the edifice of a just society. In ways that might surprise them, religion—at least in its broad sense, as a conveyer of public values—and secularism as a social ideology might well be two ways of talking about the same thing.

If so, how should we describe this similarity between religion and secularism that put them in competition in the West several centuries ago and more recently elsewhere in the world? Our terms are important because they color how we think about Western history and how we think about contemporary world affairs. Because the functions of traditional religious and secular social values are so similar, it might be useful to

designate a general category that includes both terms: a "genus" of which religion and secularism are the two competing "species." Wilfred Cantwell Smith recommended enlarging the idea of "traditions" to include secular humanism; Benedict Anderson suggested "imagined communities" for all national societies; and Ninian Smart offered "worldviews" as the common term for nationalism, socialism, and religion.[32] Their choices have the benefit of including a wide range of concepts, from attitudes toward sexuality and natural science to views about the cosmos, and they explicitly include both what we call *religion* (in both narrow and broad senses) and what we call *secularism*. Because our discussion is focused on conceptual frameworks that legitimize authority, however, we might consider a phrase with more political connotations, such as *ideologies of order*.

I use the word *ideology* with a certain amount of trepidation, knowing that it comes freighted with meanings attached to it by Karl Marx and Karl Mannheim and that a great deal of controversy still lingers over its interpretation today.[33] The term is useful for our purposes, however, because it originated in the late eighteenth century in the context of the rise of secular nationalism.[34] A group of French *idéologues,* as they called themselves, sought to build a science of ideas based on the theories of Francis Bacon, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and René Descartes that would be sufficiently comprehensive to replace religion, in the broad sense, and provide a moral weight to counter the violent excesses of the French Revolution. According to one of the *idéologues,* Destutt de Tracy, whose book *Elements of Ideology* introduced the term to the world, "logic" was to be the sole basis of "the moral and political sciences."[35]

The French originators of the term "ideology" would be surprised at the way it has come to be redefined, especially in contemporary conversations, where it is often treated as an explanatory system that is specifically "nonscientific."[36] But in proposing their own "science of ideas" as a replacement for religion, the *idéologues* were in fact putting what they called *ideology* and what we call *religion* (in the broad sense) on an equal plane. Perhaps Clifford Geertz, among modern users of the term, has come closest to its original meaning by speaking of ideology as a "cultural system."[37] Geertz includes both religious and political cultural systems within this framework, as well as the many cultural systems that do not distinguish between religion and politics. Religion and secular nationalism could both be considered cultural systems in Geertz's sense of the word, and, hence, as he uses it, they are ideologies.

I would prefer, then, to call both religion and secularism ideologies and have done with it. But to make clear that I am referring to the original meaning of the term and not to political ideology in a narrow sense, or to a Marxian or Mannheimian notion of ideology, I will refer to what I have in mind as *ideologies of order.* Both religious and secular frameworks of thought conceive of the world in coherent, manageable ways; they both suggest that there are levels of meaning beneath the day-to-day world that give coherence to things unseen; and they both provide the authority that gives the social and political order its reason for being. In doing so, they define for the individual the right way of being in the world and relate persons to the social whole.

Secular nationalism is the social form of secularism that locates an individual within the universe. The idea of a secular nation ties him or her to a particular place and a particular history. A number of social scientists have argued that the phenomenon of secular nationalism is linked to the innate need of individuals for a sense of community. Karl Deutsch has pointed out the importance of systems of communication in fostering a sense of nationalism.[38] Ernest Gellner argues that the political and economic network of a nation-state can function only in a spirit of nationalism based on a homogeneous culture, a unified pattern of communication, and a common system of education.[39] Other social scientists have stressed the psychological aspect of national identity: the sense of historical location that is engendered when individuals feel they have a larger, national history.[40]

But behind these notions of community is a more stern image: that of order. Nationalism involves loyalty to an authority who, as Max Weber observed, holds a monopoly over the "legitimate use of physical force" in a given society.[41] Giddens describes nationalism as the "cultural sensibility of sovereignty," implying that, in part, the awareness of being subject to an authority—an authority invested with the power of life and death—gives nationalism its potency.[42] Secular nationalism, therefore, involves not only an attachment to a spirit of social order but also an act of submission to an ordering agent.

Scholarly attempts to define religion also stress the importance of order, though in a post-Enlightenment context where religion is thought of in the narrower sense, the orderliness is primarily metaphysical rather than political or social[43] In providing its adherents with a sense of conceptual order, religion often deals with the existential problem of disorder. The disorderliness of ordinary life is contrasted with a substantial, unchanging divine order.[44] Geertz sees religion as the effort to integrate

messy everyday reality into a pattern of coherence at a deeper level[45] Robert Bellah also thinks of religion as an attempt to reach beyond ordinary phenomena in a "risk of faith" that allows people to act "in the face of uncertainty and unpredictability" on the basis of a higher order of reality.[46] This attitude of faith, according to Peter Berger, is an affirmation of the sacred, which acts as a doorway to a truth more certain than that of this world.[47] Louis Dupré prefers to avoid the term *sacred* but integrates elements of both Berger's and Bellah's definitions in his description of religion as "a commitment to the transcendent as to *another reality.*"[48] In all these cases there is a tension between this imperfect, disorderly world and a perfected, orderly one to be found in a higher, transcendent state or in a cumulative moment in time. As Émile Durkheim, whose ideas are fundamental to each of these thinkers, was adamant in observing, religion has a more encompassing force than can be suggested by any dichotomization of the sacred and the profane. To Durkheim, the religious point of view includes both the notion that there is such a dichotomy and the belief that the sacred side will always, ultimately, reign supreme.[49]

Even on the metaphysical level, religion, like secular nationalism, can provide the moral and spiritual glue that holds together broad communities. Members of these communities—secular or religious—share a tradition, a particular worldview, in which the essential conflict between appearance and deeper reality is described in specific and characteristically cultural terms. This deeper reality has a degree of permanence and order quite unobtainable by ordinary means. The conflict between the two levels of reality is what both religion and secular nationalism are about: the language of both contains images of chaos as well as tranquil order, holding out the hope that, despite appearances to the contrary, order will eventually triumph and disorder will be contained.

Because religion (in both broad and narrow senses) and secular nationalism are ideologies of order, they are potential rivals.[50] Either can claim to be the guarantor of orderliness within a society; either can claim to be the ultimate authority for social order. Such claims carry with them an extraordinary degree of power, for contained within them is the right to give moral sanction for life-and-death decisions, including the right to kill. When either secular nationalism or religion assumes that role by itself, it reduces the other to a peripheral social role.

Earlier in history it was often religion that denied moral authority to secular politicians, but in recent centuries it has been the other way around. Secular political authorities now monopolize the authority to

sanction violence. Political leaders attempted to do so long before the advent of the nation-state but usually in collusion with religious authority, not in defiance of it. Seldom in history has the state denied so vehemently the right of religious authorities to be ultimate moral arbiters as in the modern period, and seldom before has it so emphatically taken on that role itself. The secular state, and the state alone, is given the power to kill legitimately, albeit for limited purposes: military defense, police protection, and capital punishment. Yet all the rest of the state's power to persuade and to shape the social order is derived from this fundamental power. In Weber's view, the monopoly over legitimate violence in a society is the very definition of a state.[51] In challenging the state's authority, today's religious activists, wherever they assert themselves around the world, reclaim the traditional right of religious authorities to say when violence is moral and when it is not.

Religious conflict is one indication of the power of religion to sanction killing. The parties in such an encounter may command a greater degree of loyalty than do contestants in a purely political war. Their interests can subsume national interests. In some cases such a religious battle may preface the attempt to establish a new religious state. It is interesting to note, in this regard, that the best-known incidents of religious violence throughout the contemporary world have occurred in places where it is difficult to define or accept the idea of a nation-state. At the end of the twentieth century, these places included Palestine, the Punjab, and Sri Lanka; in the twenty-first century they include Iraq, Somalia, and Lebanon, areas where uncertainties abound about what the state should be and which elements of society should lead it. In these instances, religion has often provided the basis for a new national consensus and a new kind of leadership.

Islam, Judaism, and Christianity have provided religious alternatives to secular ideology as the basis of nationalism. So also has Hinduism, Sikhism, and perhaps most surprisingly, Buddhism. In Thailand, for example, the king must be a monk before assuming political power—he must be a "world renouncer" before he can become a "world conqueror," as Stanley Tambiah has put it.[52] Burmese leaders established a Buddhist socialism, guided by a curious syncretic mix of Marxist and Buddhist ideas, and even the protests against that order in Burma—renamed Myanmar—had a religious character: many of the demonstrations in the streets were led by Buddhist monks.[53] Thus in most traditional religious societies, including Buddhist ones, "religion," as Donald Smith puts it, "answers the question of political legitimacy."[54] In the modern

West that legitimacy is provided by nationalism, a secular nationalism. But even there, religion continues to wait in the wings, a potential challenge to the nationalism based on secular assumptions. Perhaps nothing indicates this potential more than the persistence of religious politics in American society, including the rise of the Christian militia and the American religious right.[55] Religion, like secular nationalism, has provided a faith in the unitary nature of a society that authenticates both political rebellion and political rule.

When the mullahs in Iraq told me that America was the enemy of Islam, they were equating a secular state with religion. It is a comparison that would have startled many of the twentieth-century proponents of secular nationalism. Scholars such as Kohn and Emerson and nationalist leaders such as Nasser and Nehru regarded secular nationalism as superior to religion in large measure because they thought it was categorically different. Yet it seems clear in hindsight that to believe in the notion of secular nationalism required a great deal of faith, even though the idea was not couched in the rhetoric of religion. The terms in which it was presented were the grandly visionary ones associated with spiritual values. Secular nationalism, like religion, embraces what one scholar calls "a doctrine of destiny."[56] One can take this way of looking at secular nationalism a step further and state flatly, as did one author writing in 1960, that secular nationalism is "a religion."[57]

Talal Asad has made this point in a different way by showing how secularism has become a natural successor to religion in the evolution from premodern to modern societies. In Asad's view, secularism is a sort of advanced form of religion that relocates the sphere of the sacred in communal values, such as human rights. Hence religion and secularism are closely intertwined.[58] A scholar of comparative religion, Ninian Smart, has gone further to specify the characteristics that make secular nationalism akin to a certain kind of religion—"a tribal religion."[59] Employing six criteria to define the term, he concluded that secular nationalism measured up on all counts: on doctrine, myth, ethics, ritual, experience, and social organization.

This structural similarity between secular nationalism and religion is complemented by what I regard as an even more basic, functional similarity: they both serve the ethical function of providing an overarching framework of moral order, a framework that commands ultimate loyalty from those who subscribe to it. A further point, one that will be explored later in this book, bears mentioning here: nowhere is this common form of loyalty more evident than in the ability of nationalism and religion,

alone among all forms of allegiance, to give moral sanction to martyr-
dom and violence.

   Though it may be true that other entities, such as the Mafia and the
Ku Klux Klan, also sanction violence, they are able to do so convincingly
only because they are regarded by their followers as (respectively) quasi-
governmental or quasi-religious organizations. For that reason, I believe
the line between secular nationalism and religion has always been quite
thin. Both are expressions of faith, both involve an identity with and a
loyalty to a large community, and both insist on the ultimate moral le-
gitimacy of the authority invested in the leadership of that community.
The rise of secular nationalism in world history, as Benedict Anderson
observes, has been an extension of "the large cultural systems that pre-
ceded it, out of which—as well as against which—it came into being."[60]
Anderson, in observing the ease with which secular nationalism is able
to justify mass killings, finds a strong affinity between "nationalist imag-
ining" and "religious imagining." This affinity leads to a blurring of the
lines between them. Secular nationalism often evokes an almost religious
response and it frequently appears as a kind of "cultural nationalism" in
the way that Howard Wriggins once described Sinhalese national senti-
ments.[61] It not only encompasses the shared cultural values of people
within existing, or potentially existing, national boundaries but also
evokes a cultural response of its own.

   The implication of this position—that secular nationalism has a cul-
tural dimension—is that there is no such thing as a concept of national-
ism that stands above culture. The Western notion of secular national-
ism is precisely that: a Western construct. Perhaps in time, as Kohn and
Emerson prophesied, the concept will spread throughout the globe, not
because it is inherently universal but because it has been deliberately
adapted to particular situations and clearly accepted within certain re-
gions as a legitimate expression of indigenous sentiments. In contrast, in
many regions during the 1950s there was superficial acceptance of a con-
cept that was promoted by leaders of new nations who may have gen-
uinely believed in the idea of secular nationalism but who also found it
useful in buttressing their own legitimacy at home and enlisting eco-
nomic support and fostering political liaisons abroad.

   The proposition that the Western notion of secular nationalism is a
European construct has been bandied about from time to time in West-
ern intellectual circles. At least one scholar, a Christian theologian, sug-
gested that the idea of a secular basis for politics is not only culturally
European but specifically Christian. In an arresting book, *Christianity in*

World History, Arend Theodor van Leeuwen argued that the idea of separating out the things of God from the things of people in such a way as to deny the divine nature of kingship was first formulated in ancient Israel and then became a major motif of Christianity.[62] As Christianity spread across Europe, it brought the message of secularization with it: "Christianization and secularization are involved together in a dialectical relation," van Leeuwen claimed.[63] By secularization, van Leeuwen did not mean secularism—the worship of worldly things—but rather the separation of religious and temporal spheres.[64] The great liaison between the medieval church and state was something of a mistake, from this point of view, and the Enlightenment brought Christianity's secularizing mission back on track. In general, van Leeuwen proclaimed, "the revolutionary history of the West up to the present time is rightly held to have been a continuous, ongoing process of secularization"; and, he added, it is a process that "nothing has been able to halt, let alone reverse."[65]

Van Leeuwen noted that the encounter between Western (implicitly Christian) secular culture and the traditional religious cultures of the Middle East and Asia "begins a new chapter in the history of secularization."[66] Secular culture was, in his mind, Christianity's gift to the world, and he fully expected that as a result of the encounter Hindus would shed their "myth of *sanatana dharma*" (traditional duties) and Muslims their "myth of the all-embracing authority of the *shari'a*" (religious law), just as Christians had fled from pagan gods and the ancient Israelites had abandoned the Tower of Babel.[67] This result was inevitable, van Leeuwen thought, for "once the ontocratic pattern of the pagan religions has been disrupted fundamentally, there can be no returning to a pre-Christian situation."[68] Still, in the short run, van Leeuwen anticipated trouble: "Never in the past," he wrote, "has there been such an encounter" as the present one between Christianity "in such a thoroughly secularized phase" and "the great pre-Christian societies and the post-Christian Muslim world." Van Leeuwen concluded, somewhat darkly, "We do not know what may happen."[69]

As it turned out, the encounter between Islamic and other traditional religious societies and the secular West was as unpleasant as van Leeuwen feared. Van Leeuwen's thesis about the Christian origins of modern Western secularism is increasingly regarded as true, especially in developing countries, by people who have never heard of van Leeuwen and who once were uncritically accepting of Western nationalism as the wave of the future. The finer points of van Leeuwen's argument are still problematic, however. The long history of secularism is doubtful. The

idea that secularism was uniquely Christian can be challenged by the ob-
servation that most other religious traditions have as complicated a pat-
tern of church/state relations as Christianity has. In ancient India and in
many Buddhist countries, for instance, a distinction similar to that made
by the ancient Hebrews and early Christians was drawn between priestly
and secular authority. Moreover, the instances of religious complicity
with the state are at least as frequent in Christian history as they are in
the history of other traditions. Yet van Leeuwen is correct in saying that
the particular form of secular society that has evolved in the modern
West is a direct extension of its past, including its religious past, and is
not some supracultural entity that came into being only after a radical
juncture in history.

   Van Leeuwen thus stated some years ago what today is taken to be a
fact in many parts of the world: the secular nationalism of the West is a
mask for a certain form of European Christian culture. This point of view
is adopted increasingly by many who have never read van Leeuwen but
who agree with his premise: that the rise of specific political ideologies is
part of a much larger unfolding of ideas in world history, ideas that in
most cases are colored in particular religious hues. Although Christian re-
ligious activists in the United States also object to the secularization of
their country's politics, this position is most frequently heard among the
religious and political leaders of previously colonized countries.

THE MUTUAL REJECTION OF RELIGION AND SECULARISM

In places like the United States and Europe, where secular nationalism,
rather than religion, has become the dominant paradigm in society, reli-
gion has been shunted to the periphery. This transposition is most dra-
matically illustrated by the clublike church religion that is common in the
United States. Yet, even there, attempts have been made to assimilate
some aspects of religion into the national consensus. The reasons for
doing so are varied: coopting elements of religion into nationalism keeps
religion from building its own antinational power base; it provides reli-
gious legitimacy for the state; and it helps give nationalism a religious
aura. To accomplish these goals, national leaders have borrowed various
elements of a society's religious culture. The secular nationalism of the
United States is to some extent colored by a religiosity such as this, as
Bellah has pointed out in his analysis of the "civil religion" sprinkled
throughout the inaugural addresses of American presidents and the rhet-
oric of other public speakers.[70]

Despite these attempts to coopt it, and despite its relegation to the periphery of society, church religion occasionally intrudes into the political sphere. In what Jaroslav Krejci calls "the American pattern" of society—the attempt to blend "ethnopolitical relationships" into a homogeneous whole—some religious groups resist the blending.[71] This resistance was seen dramatically during the civil-rights movement of the 1960s, when the African American church and its clergy became central political actors, and religious movements such as the Black Muslims arose as vehicles of protest. In a different way the ascendance of an Evangelical Protestant political activism some thirty years later was a new assault on the presumptions of secular nationalism in the United States. Secular nationalism in Europe is also not completely immune from religion. In what Krejci calls "the European pattern," where strong ethnic and religious communities are supposedly insulated from political life, the insulation sometimes wears thin.[72] The events in Eastern Europe in the early 1990s and the xenophobic Christian responses to Muslim immigrants in the twenty-first century are cases in point.

So the West has found that religion does not always stay tightly leashed. But if accommodating religion has been difficult for the West, efforts to bridle religion in the new nations in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East have been a thousand times more problematic. There, the need to deal with religion is much more obvious. Given religious histories that are part of national heritages, religious institutions that are sometimes the nations' most effective systems of communication, and religious leaders who are often more socially devoted, efficient, and intelligent than government officials, religion cannot be ignored. The attempts to accommodate it, however, have not always been successful, as the following examples indicate.

In Egypt, following the revolution of 1952, Gamal Abdel Nasser was caught in a double bind. Because his support came from both the Muslim Brotherhood and the modern elite, he was expected to create a Muslim state and a modern secular state at the same time. His approach was to paint a picture of an Egypt that was culturally Muslim and politically secular, and he cheerfully went about "Egyptizing along with modernizing," as a professor in Cairo put it.[73] The compromise did not work, and especially after Nasser attempted to institute "scientific socialism," which the Muslim Brotherhood regarded as anti-Islamic, the Brotherhood became Nasser's foe. It attempted to overthrow his government, and Nasser jailed its members and executed its leader, Sayyid Qutb.

Nasser's successor, Anwar al-Sadat, repeated the pattern, which turned out to be a tragic and fatal mistake. Like Nasser, Sadat raised Muslim expectations by currying favor with the Muslim Brotherhood. In 1971, he released many of them from jail, but by 1974 he and the Brotherhood were at loggerheads, and again the organization was outlawed. Sadat attempted to assume the mantle of Islam by calling himself "Upholder of the Faith," announcing that his first name was really Muhammad rather than Anwar, and promoting religious schools. None of these attempts worked. His wife was thought to be an improper role model for Muslim women, and Sadat himself was accused of being a Muslim turncoat. With this image in mind, members of the al-Jihad, a radical fringe group of the Muslim Brotherhood, assassinated Sadat in 1981. His successor, Hosni Mubarak, tried to steer more of a middle course, making no promises to the Muslim activists but making no new secular or socialist departures either.[74]

In India, three generations of prime ministers in the Nehru dynasty—Jawaharlal, his daughter Indira Gandhi, and her son Rajiv—all tried to accommodate religion as little as possible. Yet at times they were forced to make concessions to religious groups almost against their wills. Nehru seemed virtually allergic to religion, putting secularism alongside socialism as his great political goal. Nonetheless the Indian constitution and subsequent parliamentary actions have given a great deal of public support to religious entities.[75] Special seats have been reserved in the legislature for Muslims and members of other minority communities; religious schools have been affiliated with the state; and temples and mosques have received direct public support. In general the Indian government has not been indifferent to religion but has attempted to treat—and foster—each religion in the country equally. As Ainslie Embree puts it, "Advocates of secularism in India always insisted . . . that far from being hostile to religion, they valued it."[76]

Even so, these concessions have not been sufficient to stem the tide of religious politics in India. The 1980s was a decade of tragedy in that regard. Hindu nationalists wanted more and more access to power, prompting defensiveness on the part of Muslim and Christian minorities and a bloody rebellion on the part of the Sikhs. The assassinations of Prime Minister Gandhi and her son Rajiv did not put an end to their sense of dissatisfaction, and the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party displaced the Congress Party in providing national leadership from 1998 to 2004, when it was defeated by a revived Congress Party led by

Rajiv Gandhi's widow, Sonia, who stepped aside to allow an economist, Manmohan Singh, to become prime minister.

These attempts to accommodate religion in secular nationalism lead to a double frustration: those who make these compromises are sometimes considered traitors from both a spiritual and a secular point of view. Moreover, these compromises imply that spiritual and political matters are separate—an idea that most religious activists reject and see as a capitulation to secularism. They sense that behind the compromises is a basic allegiance not to religion but to the secular state.

This suspicion about secularism's competition with religion has led to the conclusion that secular nationalism is "a kind of religion," as one of the leaders of the Iranian revolution put it. The Iranian leader, Abolhassan Bani-Sadr, wrote this in a matter-of-fact manner that indicated that what he said was taken as an obvious truth by most of his readers.[77] Bani-Sadr went on to explain that it was not only a religion but one peculiar to the West, a point echoed by one of the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.[78] Behind his statement was the assumption that secular nationalism responds to the same needs for collective identity, ultimate loyalty, and moral authority that religion has traditionally responded to and that this similar response makes secular nationalism de facto a religion. One of his colleagues went further and stated that the Western form of secular nationalism is Christian. He claimed that the West is "not as secular as it pretends," for it has "Christian governments."[79] For evidence, he offered the fact that the word *Christian* is used in the title of socialist parties in Europe.[80]

Others have given a more sophisticated version of this argument, saying that although secular nationalism in the West may not be overtly Christian, it occupies the same place in human experience as does Islam in Muslim societies, Buddhism in Theravada Buddhist societies, and Hinduism and Sikhism in Indian society. Thus it is a religion in the same sense as Islam, Theravada Buddhism, Hinduism, and Sikhism. One might as well call it Christian nationalism or European cultural nationalism, they declare, and make clear what seems to many Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikhs to be perfectly obvious: that it competes in every way with religion as they know it.

Behind this charge is a certain vision of social reality, one that involves a series of concentric circles. The smallest circles are families and clans; then come ethnic groups and nations; the largest, and implicitly most important, are global civilizations. Among the global civilizations are Islam, Buddhism, and what some who hold this view call "Christendom"

or simply "Western civilization."[81] Particular nations such as Germany, France, and the United States, in this conceptualization, stand as subsets of Christendom/Western civilization; similarly, Egypt, Iran, Pakistan, and other nations are subsets of Islamic civilization.

From this vantage point, it is a serious error to suggest that Egypt or Iran should be thrust into a Western frame of reference. In this view of the world they are intrinsically part of Islamic, not Western, civilization, and it is an act of imperialism to think of them in any other way. Even before the idea of a "clash of civilizations" gained popularity, religious activists around the world asserted that their views about religious politics reflected basic differences in worldviews. They were anticipating the thesis that the Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington propounded in the mid-1990s.[82]

One notable pre-Huntington adherent of the "clash of civilization" thesis was the Ayatollah Khomeini, who lamented what in prerevolutionary Iran he and others referred to as "West-toxification" or "Westomania."[83] According to Khomeini, Islamic peoples have been stricken with Westomania since the eighth century, and partly for that reason they readily accepted the cultural and political postures of the shah. More recent attempts to capitalize on Westomania, he maintained, have come from the insidious efforts of Western imperialists.[84] The goal of the Islamic revolution in Iran, then, was not only to free Iranians politically from the shah but also to liberate them conceptually from Western ways of thinking.

When the leaders of some formerly colonized countries continue to espouse Western ideas—including, especially, the idea of secular nationalism—they are accused by other indigenous leaders of perpetuating colonialism. "We have yet to be truly free," a Buddhist leader in Sri Lanka remarked in reference to the Western-style government in his country.[85] In some Middle Eastern Islamic countries, the injury of the colonial experience was compounded with the insult of having lost their connection with a great Islamic power, the Ottoman Empire. At the end of the First World War, the old empire came under the jurisdiction of Britain and other European powers, which carved the region into secular nation-states. Countries such as Iraq and Jordan were lines drawn in the sand. Hence secular nationalism was for them literally the legacy of colonial rule.

Islamic revolutionaries in Iran have also regarded the secular government under the shah as a form of Western colonialism, even though Iran was never a colony in the same sense that many Middle Eastern and

South Asian countries were. The heavy-handed role of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency in Iranian politics and the force-feeding of Western ideas by the shah were regarded as forms of colonialism all the same. According to one Iranian leader, Abolhassan Bani-Sadr, the religious character of Western nationalism made it a competitor with Islam. He claimed that Western nationalism suffers from a pretension of universality so grand it has religious proportions, and this claim to universality makes its cultural and economic colonialism possible by allowing a "national entity" from the West to assume that it has "prior rights to the rest of the world."[86]

These leaders regard as especially pernicious the fact that the cultural colonialism of Western ideas erodes confidence in traditional values. For that matter, they maintain, it also undermines traditional religious constructs of society and the state. Concerns over both these matters and over the erosion of religion's influence in public life unite religious activists from Egypt to Sri Lanka, even those who bitterly oppose one another. A leader of the religious right in Israel and a spokesperson for the Islamic movement in Palestine, for instance, used exactly the same words to describe their sentiments: "Secular government is the enemy."[87]

Though secular nationalism has been criticized by proponents of every religious tradition, some commentators have focused on Islam as if it were unique. According to the historian Bernard Lewis, "the very notion of a secular jurisdiction and authority . . . is seen as an impiety, indeed as the ultimate betrayal of Islam."[88] He goes on to say that "the righting of this wrong is the principal aim of Islamic revolutionaries."[89] Ignoring other political, economic, and cultural goals of Islamic activists, Lewis asserts that their main purpose around the world is to rid their societies of what they regard as the corrosive influence of Western secular institutions.

Indeed, some religious revolutionaries—although certainly not all of them—adopt this point of view and deny the possibility that secular institutions can exist in a religious society, but these criticisms of secular politics come from every religious tradition. A supporter of the Christian militia in the United States, for instance, said that the American legal system should be based on the Bible. A leader of the Jewish religious right in Israel asserted that "secular government is illegitimate."[90] A similar sentiment was echoed by one of his rivals, a Muslim leader in Palestine, who declared that "a secular state is anti-Islamic" and that "no such thing exists in Islam."[91] Some would go so far as to denounce the very idea of secular society. When secular ideas are described in articles

published by the Palestinian Hamas movement, they are dubbed *al-muniya*, which means "knowledge that does not come from Islam."[92] By implication, it is no knowledge at all.

One of the reasons secular ideas and institutions are so firmly rejected by some religious leaders is that they hold these ideas and institutions accountable for the moral decline within their own countries. The moral impact of Western secularism in Sri Lanka was devastating, according to the calculations of some leaders of Buddhist monastic organizations. One of them, in discussing this matter, carefully identified the evils of the society around him and then laid them fully at the feet of the secular government. "We live in an immoral world," the bhikkhu (monk) stated, giving as his examples of immorality gambling, slaughtering animals for meat, and drinking *arrack* (a locally produced alcohol that is popular in the countryside).[93] In each case the government was implicated: the state lottery promoted gambling, the state encouraged animal husbandry, and it licensed liquor shops. The institutions of government were all suspect, the bhikkhu implied: "People in public office are not to be trusted."[94]

Interestingly, one of the concepts that most disturbed the bhikkhu was an activity that most Westerners regard as a cardinal strength of the secular political system: the ability to respond impartially to the demands of a variety of groups. The political expediency of giving in to the demands of particular interests, such as those of the Tamils, was cited by the bhikkhu as evidence of the government's immorality. He felt that such politicians were incapable of standing up for truth in the face of competing, selfish interests, and their impartiality indicated that they ultimately cared only about themselves. He scoffed at secular politicians who cloaked themselves in Buddhist rhetoric. "They are the enemy of Buddhism," he said.[95]

Secular nationalists within developing countries are thought to be enemies in part because they are in league with a more global enemy, the secular West. To some religious nationalists' way of thinking, there is a global conspiracy against religion, orchestrated by the United States. For this reason virtually anything the United States does that involves non-Western societies, even when its stated intentions are positive, is viewed as part of a plot to destroy or control them. During the 1991 Gulf War, Islamic political groups in Egypt initially condemned the Iraq's secular leader, Saddam Hussein, for invading Kuwait. But when the United States sent troops to defend the Kuwaitis, militant Egyptian Muslims began to defend him. They claimed that American military and economic

control was the major obstacle to "the liberation of the Third World" and prohibited the establishment of a pan-Islamic consciousness that would unify Arab Muslim people.[96]

At the extreme of this critique of secular power is the notion that the United States is not just power-hungry but evil. The Palestinian Islamic movement Hamas issued a communiqué stating that the United States "commands all the forces hostile to Islam and the Muslims." It singled out George H. W. Bush, who, it claimed, was not only "the leader of the forces of evil" but also "the chief of the false gods."[97] As the communiqué indicates, this line of reasoning often leads down a slippery slope, for once secular institutions and authorities begin to loom larger than life and are seen as forces of evil, the conclusion rushes on, inevitably and irretrievably, that secular enemies are more than mortal foes: they are mythic entities and satanic forces.

An early example of this process of satanization occurred during the Iranian revolution when both the shah and President Jimmy Carter were referred to as *Yazid* (in this context, an agent of Satan). "All the problems of Iran," Khomeini elaborated, are "the work of America."[98] He meant not only political and economic problems but also cultural and intellectual ones, fostered by "the preachers they planted in the religious teaching institutions, the agents they employed in the universities, government educational institutions, and publishing houses, and the Orientalists who work in the service of the imperialist states."[99] The vastness and power of such a conspiratorial network could be explained only by its supernatural force.

The process of satanization indicates that secular nationalism is seen as a religious entity, albeit a sinister one, and this view can be explained, in part, by the "fallen-angel" syndrome: the higher the expectations, the more severe the recriminations when expectations are not met.[100] Many members of formerly colonized countries had maintained such high expectations of secular nationalism, and put such great faith in it, that their disappointment in its failure was also extreme. Where anticipation of secularism's performance had assumed messianic proportions, the anger at the lack of performance reached satanic depths.

Hence the loss of faith in secular nationalism is part of a profound disappointment: the perception that secular institutions have failed to perform. In many parts of the world the secular state has not lived up to its own promises of political freedom, economic prosperity, and social justice. Some of the most poignant cases of disenchantment with secularism have been found among educated members of the middle class who

were raised with the high expectations propagated by secular-nationalist political leaders. Some of them were propelled toward religious nationalism after trying to live as secular nationalists and feeling betrayed, or at least unfulfilled. Many of them also felt that Western societies betrayed themselves: the government scandals, persistent social inequities, and devastating economic difficulties of the United States and the former Soviet Union made both democracy and socialism less appealing as political models than they had been during the more innocent 1940s and 1950s. The global mass media, in their exaggerated way, brought to religious leaders in non-Western nations the message that there was a deep malaise in the United States caused by the social failures of unwed mothers, divorce, racism, and drug addiction, the political failures of various political scandals, and the economic failures associated with trade imbalances and the mounting deficit.

But mass media or no, religious leaders in the new nations did not need to look any further than their own national backyards for evidence that the high expectations raised by secular nationalists in their own countries were not being met. "It is an economic, social, and moral failure," a Muslim leader in Egypt said, speaking of the policies of his nation's secular state.[101] Other new religious revolutionaries were disturbed not so much by the failure of the experiment in secular nationalism as by the failure to fully implement religious nationalism, except in Iran and Afghanistan

Among some followers the hopes for religious politics have been utopian. Christian revolutionaries in Latin America have spoken of instituting the "kingdom of God" promised in the New Testament. The "*dhammic* society" that the bhikkhu in Sri Lanka desired as the alternative to secular nationalism resembled a paradise: "The government would be supported by the people and trusted by them; it would uphold *dhamma* [moral teachings of the Buddha], and it would consult monks regarding proper policies."[102] In a Halakhic society, Jewish leaders in Jerusalem promised, Israel would become more harmonious, all its aspects integrated under religious law. "Man can't live by bread alone," one of the leaders reminded his supporters; "religion is more than just belief and ritual; it is all of life."[103] Another contrasted secular rule with the rule of God: "Secularism lacks God and idealism," he said, pointing out that the state "only has laws, and that's not enough. There is a need to be in touch with the God behind the justice and the truth that secular society espouses."[104] The vision of religious activists has been appealing in part because it promises a future that cannot easily fail: its moral and

spiritual goals are transcendent and not as easy to gauge as are the more materialistic promises of secular nationalists.

In many parts of the world, the profound disappointment in secular nationalism has led to disillusionment. Many have lost faith in its relevance and its vision for the future. In their own way, these critics of secular nationalism have experienced what Jürgen Habermas has dubbed a modern "crisis of legitimation," in which the public's respect for political and social institutions has been deflated.[105] Perhaps many religious leaders never really believed in the moral validity of secular nationalism, and over time they were able to convince the masses of people within their societies of its invalidity, not for moral reasons but because great numbers of them no longer saw secular nationalism as an expression of their own identities or related to their social and economic situations. More important, they failed to see how the Western versions of nationalism could provide a vision of what they would like themselves and their communities to become. Secular nationalism came to be seen as alien, the expression of only a small, educated, and privileged few within non-Western societies. As both capitalist and formerly socialist governments wrestled with their own constituencies over the moral purpose of their nations and the directions they might take, their old, tired forms of nationalism seemed less appealing elsewhere.

Yet even though secular nationalism does not easily accommodate religion and religion does not accept the ideology of secular nationalism, religion can sometimes be hospitable to the institution of the nation-state—albeit on religion's terms. Religious activists are well aware that if a nation is based from the start on the premise of secular nationalism, religion is often made marginal to the political order. This outcome is especially unfortunate from many radical religious perspectives—including Jihadi militants, messianic Jewish Zionists, and Christian militias—because they regard the two ideologies as unequal: the religious one is far superior. Rather than starting with secular nationalism, they prefer to begin with religion.

According to one Sinhalese writer, whose tract *The Revolt in the Temple* was published shortly after Sri Lankan independence and was influential in spurring on the Buddhist national cause, "it is clear that the unifying, healing, progressive principle" that held together the entity known as Ceylon throughout the years has always been "the Buddhist faith."[106] The writer goes on to say that religion in Sri Lanka continues to provide the basis for a "liberating nationalism" and that Sinhalese Buddhism is "the only patriotism worthy of the name," worth fighting for

or dying for.[107] In India, Hindu nationalists have been equally emphatic that Hindutva, as they call Hindu national culture, is the defining characteristic of Indian nationalism. Similar sentiments are echoed in movements of religious nationalism elsewhere in the world.

The implication of this way of speaking is not that religion is antithetical to nationalism, but that religious rather than secular nationalism is the appropriate premise on which to build a nation—even a modern nation-state. In fact, most references to nationhood used by religious activists assume that the modern nation-state is the only way in which a nation can be construed. (The major exception is the global jihad movement, which envisages a transnational Islamic state.) The term *religious nationalism* refers to the contemporary attempt to link religion and the nation-state. This is a new development in the history of nationalism, and it immediately raises the question of whether such a linkage is possible: whether what we in the West think of as a modern secular nation—a unified, democratically controlled system of economic and political administration—can in fact be accommodated within religion.

It is an interesting question and one to which many Western observers would automatically answer no. Even as acute an interpreter of modern society as Giddens regards most religious cultures as, at best, a syncretism of "tribal cultures, on the one hand, and modern societies, on the other."[108] Yet by Giddens's own definition of a modern nation-state, postrevolutionary Iran would qualify. The Islamic revolution in Iran solidified not just central power but also systemic control, a dominance over the population that in some ways was more conducive to nationhood than the monarchical political order of the shah. The Iranian case will be explored later in this book, but suffice it to say here that at least in this instance a new national entity came into being that was quite different from previous kinds of Muslim rule. It was also different from the secular regime that the shah ineptly attempted to build. The shah dreamed of creating Kemal Ataturk's Turkey in Iran and bringing to his country the instant modernity that he perceived as Ataturk's gift to Turkey. Ironically, it was Khomeini—with his integrative religious ideology and his grass-roots network of mullahs—who brought Iran closer to the goal of a unified nation.

Does religion lose some essential aspects in accommodating modern politics? Some religious leaders think that it does. In favoring the nation-state over a particular religious congregation as its major community of reference, religion loses the exclusivity held by smaller, subnational religious communities, and the leaders of those communities lose some of

their autonomy. For that reason, many religious leaders are suspicious of religious nationalism. Among them are the transnational activists associated with the global jihad movement, religious utopians who would rather build their own isolated political societies than deal with the problems of a entire nation, religious liberals who are satisfied with the secular nation-state the way it is, and religious conservatives who would rather ignore politics altogether. Some Muslims accused Khomeini of transforming Islam into a political ideology and reducing it to a modern political force.[109] Moreover, most Islamic rebellions are aimed in the opposite direction: to rid Islam of what many activists regard as the alien idea of the nation-state.[110] Yet, even if that is their aim, one of the curious consequences of their way of thinking is the appropriation of many of the most salient elements of modern nationhood into an Islamic frame of reference. Rather than ridding Islam of the nation-state, they too are creating a new synthesis.

Perhaps the most brazen of the new religious activists are those who move beyond the nation-state to think in transnational terms. The Aum Shinrikyo movement in Japan, for example, imagined a global apocalypse in which their movement's leaders would survive to become the rulers of a unified postwar world. As I have mentioned, the global jihad movement associated with Osama bin Laden, Khalid Sheik Mohammad, and others also has had a transnational agenda. Though the movement targeted what it regarded as corrupt governments—including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iraq, the United States, and many European countries—the diverse network of activists associated with the jihadi cause have come from a variety of national backgrounds. Its organizations have defied national boundaries. Moreover, for all of its carefully orchestrated violence against what it regarded as evil powers—including the destruction of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, the subsequent attacks on the transportation systems of London and Madrid, and the many bombings in Iraq—no clear plans for alternative governments or politics have emerged. Rather, the rhetoric of bin Laden and his associates, including Ayman al-Zawahiri and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, have referred only obliquely to a future transnational Islamic polity. They have been clear, however, about what they do not want: a secular nation-state. From this point of view, even religiously defined nation-states are insufficient, and religious regimes such as Afghanistan's Taliban are welcomed only because they are stepping-stones toward some inchoate vision of a broader Islamic political entity. What made the Taliban so useful, from their perspective, was the safe haven that it provided for leaders in the transnational Islamic struggle.

Modern movements of religious activism, therefore, are subjects of controversy within both religious and secular circles. The marriage between those old competing ideologies of order—religion and secular nationalism—has produced the mutant offspring of contemporary religious politics. This is an interesting turn in modern history, and one fraught with dangers, for the radical accommodation of religion to the ideologies of nationalism and transnationalism may not be good either for religion or for political order. The rebellious religious movements that emerged in many parts of the world in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have exhibited both the dangers and the possibilities inherent in religious activists' appropriation of the instruments of political power, including global networks and the enduring notion of the nation-state.