Conclusion

Abstract: This chapter addresses the question of religion and nationalism in today’s Greece and Turkey with the tool of “sacred synthesis.” It argues that the privileged status of both religions vis-a-vis their respective nation-states has been cherished. It also summarizes the theoretical findings of this study, in particular how the application of the Kedourie’s model would be pertinent to the cases of two nation-states that emerged in the periphery of Western Europe. Despite countervailing pressures by Europeanization and globalization, a clear break between religion and nationalism appears unlikely in both countries, as long as the “sacred synthesis” remains a key feature of public education and identity discourse.

Keywords: Greece; Kedourie; nationalism; religion; secular replacement; secularism; synthesis; Turkey

The “Sacred Synthesis” revisited

This study has highlighted a hitherto little studied common feature of Greek and Turkish nationalisms, namely their parallel struggle regarding the role of religion in their respective national identities. The two nation-states, Greece and Turkey, emerged from the Ottoman Empire with a lag of almost one century and faced strikingly similar challenges that the passage of time did not fundamentally alter. Both of them emerged from a process of intellectual fermentation (Neo-Hellenic Enlightenment vs. Tanzimat) related to the Enlightenment that advocated nationalism and problematized the relationship between the nation and the West. This produced heated debates about the role of religion in the formation of national identity and its relationship with the future state.

When the wars of independence broke out, nationalist leaders had to put aside their secularist agenda and fight with the help of powerful primordial religious symbols in order to maximize popular support for the national cause. Only after the successful completion of the independence wars, the establishment of nation-states and the consolidation of autocratic rule could comprehensive programs for the subjugation of religious institutions to the state be realized. State builders in both Greece and Turkey departed from secularist beginnings and considered religion an obstacle to the establishment of a modern, centralized, and Westernized nation-state. While this drive was expressed in Greece in terms of severing bonds with the Ecumenical Patriarchate and establishing a state “national church,” in republican Turkey it went on to complete state control of Sunni Islam and to one of the most radical and comprehensive secularization programs in the modern era.

Both nationalisms have pursued the rehabilitation and glorification of their two respective ethnonyms against their medieval antecedents which indicated religious affiliation. The term “Hellene” was disconnected from its negatively colored pagan content that had pushed it into oblivion in the Middle Ages and came to represent the “glory of classical civilization” whose legatee the Greek nation-state claimed to be. The term “Turk” was disengaged from its pejorative uncouth meaning that had led to its ostracization in the elite circles of the Ottoman Empire and stood for the glory of a nation “famous for its military virtue and formation of strong states” whose latest achievement was the modern Turkish state itself. Both nationalisms also engaged in language purification programs, aiming to rid national languages of foreign and religious