

In a paper of about 1500 words (6 pages, typed, double spaced), explain and evaluate Anthony Smith's argument concerning the relationship of religion and nationalism in Chosen Peoples. Explain which author, Benedict Anderson or Anthony Smith, provides a more useful and compelling account of the relationship between religion and nationalism.

Your paper should clearly state Smith's research question (what is he trying to discover through his research) and his thesis (his answer to that question). To do this, your paper should carefully consider Smith's understanding of the relationship between religion and nationalism. How does he define these two terms? You will need to discuss Smith's interlocutors. Who are the theorists that he argues against? Why are their theories wrong or inadequate, in Smith's view? What are the reasons that Smith gives to defend his own point of view?

You will also need to discuss the evidence that Smith presents. What are his sources? How did he select his sources? In a book of this scope, it would be difficult to use all of the relevant sources. What were Smith's principles of selection? Why does he choose the particular examples (Switzerland, Ethiopia, Armenia, Israel) that he uses to illustrate his points? Does he have good reasons for his selection? If he had chosen other examples, would his argument still stand? How does he analyze his sources? (In other words, what is his methodology?) How does he put together the evidence to build his arguments?

Your paper finally needs to evaluate Smith's enterprise. Is his thesis coherent and convincing? Why or why not? How well does he use his evidence?

Your paper should be typed, double spaced, in the standard 8.5" x 11" page format. Number each page. Choose an interesting title and place it, centered, at the top of the first page of your paper; do not include a separate title page. Include your name and the course number on the first page as well. When citing or referring to works that have been assigned for this course, please use parenthetical citations at the end of the sentence. If the author of the work is obvious from the context, you need only indicate the page number; if not, include the author's name and then give the page number. If you cite a work that has not been assigned, you must give the full bibliographical reference for that work using the latest edition of the Turabian Manual. However, this assignment does not call for outside research, but for a careful analysis of Smith and Anderson; you do not need to make any references to works that have not been assigned.

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Nationalism, The Chosen One

Smith has studied the patterns of tradition and modernity that result from the cause/effect relationship between religion and nationalism. In his book, *Chosen Peoples*, he argues “nationalism [is] a modern, secular ideology that replaces the religious systems” (Smith 9). Smith has chosen to limit his study by focusing on monotheistic faiths, particularly the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Based on the behaviors observed in this focus group, Smith identifies the origins, development, and persistence of nationalism to be rooted in themes of community created by religion. Smith and Anderson arrived at the same conclusion: the phasing out of religious ideas caused nationalistic waves to effectively wash over the globe.

In Smith’s study of the Judaeo-Christian religion, he observed how the the importance of practicing one’s faith evolved over time. Smith recognizes two perspectives of religion, former and functional types. The former type of religion is “a quest for individual and collective salvation in a supraempirical cosmos that guides and controls our everyday world” (Smith 25). This mindset was most prominent before the Enlightenment Era. Before the age of scientific discovery and exploration, people used religion to explain feats of nature, justify territorial claims, and instill hope in the broken-hearted. As the Enlightenment Era diverged into the Age of Imperialism, imagined communities united people not only by faith, but more prominently by political ideology and general moral values. The more modern, functional definition of religion is “a system of beliefs and practices that distinguishes the sacred from the profane and unites its

adherents in a single moral community of the faithful” (Smith 26). Smith’s definition of religion here is similar to Anderson’s idea of sacral cultures: communities that have restrictive “ideas about admission to membership” (Anderson 9) have a set expectation. In the case of religious communities, members are presumed to obey commandments or behavioral rules, attend mass and holy events, participate in fellowship with other members, and actively read the text to be recognized as “strategic strata in a cosmological hierarchy of which the apex was divine” (Anderson 9). The difference between Smith’s former and functional definitions is that the former refers to Weber’s perspective of archaic religious practices, while the functional “stresses importance of the moral community...sanctity and moral regulation for social cohesion” (Smith 27). With respect to religion post-Enlightenment Era, consistent and appropriate behavior unites the community, as it is a factor used in admittance to the group, as well as evidence of common beliefs.

Religious communities, unifying members of an imagined community, became the foundation for nations’ populations. Smith defines nation as “a named human population occupying a historic territory and sharing common myths and memories, a public culture, and common laws and customs for all members” (Smith 24). This definition can be interpreted as a community, large or small, imaginary or tight-knit. Smith continues by describing national identity as “the maintenance and continual reinterpretation of the pattern of values, symbols, memories, myths and traditions that form the distinctive heritage of the nation, and the identification of individuals with that heritage and its pattern” (Smith 24-25). National identity is frequently tied to the history of the nation, or community. This history can be documented in myths, folktales, or writings, but also in the historicization of nature and naturalization of history. Historicization of nature is when “land or terrain and its natural features” are claimed to be “part

of a community's history" (Smith 135). This is an imagined concept because land and natural features can never be owned by people. Two examples of historicization of nature include the historical development of the Egyptian community near the Nile River as well as the Chinese community near the Yellow River. Naturalization of history is "to regard our history as part of nature, as an extension of the community's terrain and its natural features" (Smith 136). Two examples of naturalization of history include the Lake of Lucerne forming the Swiss *Eidgenossenschaft* and ancient monuments (e.g. Egyptian Pyramids) that are naturally preserved for years to come. However, the historical imprint of a nation lies not on land or in textbooks. The community [nation] and its history [national identity] are visible only when members demonstrate bold, unwavering nationalism. Smith clarifies nationalism as "an ideological movement for the attainment and maintenance of autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a population some of whose members deem it to constitute an actual or potential 'nation'" (Smith 24). Nationalism is the burning fire in each heart of each citizen, the loyalty embroidered on each soldier's uniform sleeve, the proud smiles that greet the national flag as it's raised each morning. These are all memories that any citizen of the nation has either experienced or witnessed themselves. Smith summarizes his thoughts of the nation by listing four main characteristics, or underlying dimensions, as such: community, history, destiny, and territory. Nations will adjust to meet the goals of its citizens, fighting to thrive in the complex and ever-changing global arena.

Smith research explores how the relationship between religion and nationalism is cause-effect. He analyzes this relationship in three levels-- official, popular, and basic. The first level, the official, is "concerned with conventional and elite-sponsored designations both of the nation and nationalism, and of religion" (Smith 28). The official level focuses on how the nation presents itself to the world via territorial claims, historical documentation and artifacts, and

communicating national goals. Smith uses the French Revolution and the Kemalist Revolution as evidence of the transition from religious to nationalist communities at the official level (Smith 29). The next analysis occurs at the popular level, “[C]oncerned with ‘popular’ expressions and manifestations of religious sentiments and national ideals...attention is focused on religious beliefs and practices of the ‘people’” (Smith 29). The popular level studies the persistence of ideas through the behavior of community members. For example, Smith elucidates on the Islam faith amongst Turkish peasantry, and Hinduism in rural India. The underlying, or basic level uncovers “elements of the heritage of memories, myths, symbols, values, and traditions of the community... furnish ‘deep cultural resources’ on which members of the nation can draw for the maintenance of their national identities” (31). Smith says the elements in the basic level form the aforementioned underlying dimensions of the nation [community, territory, history, destiny]. All of these dimensions are reflected in the concept of the divine covenant, an agreement between God and man for the betterment of the community. This concept affected several different religions, eventually nations. It influenced the Armenians to create and defend their own kingdom/territory, adopt Christianity, invent their own alphabet, and foster a cult of martyrdom. This created a “deep cultural resource for Armenians” (Smith 68). After receiving their divine covenant, Ethiopians enacted a dynastic myth of election, “non-covenantal relationship, concerned with outward forms” (Smith 75). The Boers were less committal, and had to constantly be reminded of their covenant in their search for a Promised Land. These communities’ obedience to religious commitments impacted the success and well-being of their populations. As religious populations grew into larger societies, Smith deems it only inevitable that the groups evolve into nations with even stronger community bonds. Note that all the groups observed at the basic level, and in Smith’s work, are all of the monotheistic kind. Targeting this

particular faith in the study does not necessarily invalidate the cause-effect theory of religion and nationalism, but rather creates a specific behavior pattern for societies based on that faith.

Smith provides a better account of the relationship between religion and nationalism. Smith's thesis of *Chosen Peoples* is that "cultural resource and sacred foundation [are] drawn from earlier religious belief-systems" (Smith 255). He identifies four types of cultural resources and sacred foundations- myth of ethnic election, attachment to sacred lands, golden ages, and sacrifice for destiny. In his book, he directly traces the origins of nationalism to these four types and monotheistic faiths. Smith addresses other works, such as Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, by debunking the effects of solidarity, sacrifice, print capitalism and mass communication on the collapse of religion-based societies. This is convincing in that Smith is very clear and thorough when he makes connections between religion and nationalism. Smith frequently uses bullets and numbered lists to separate his points, which were elaborated in shorter subsequent sections. This style made Smith's writing easier to read. On the contrary, Anderson's work was a bit more difficult to read. Anderson's stance on the relationship between religion and nationalism seems to change throughout the book, but it is not explicitly stated. At the beginning of his book, *Imagined Communities*, Anderson provides a disclaimer that "the appearance of nationalism towards the end of eighteenth century was [not] 'produced' by the erosion of religious certainties," (Anderson 8). However, Anderson goes on to say that nationalism derives its character traits of pride, unity, and exclusiveness from religious practices; it is unclear if this is an allusion to a cause-effect relationship until Anderson summarizes his thoughts at the very end of his book. Both authors recognize that religious mindsets have diverged into patriotic thoughts. Today, people feel pride for their nation; united not only by language but by shared political and economic beliefs, and approved membership into a

community that is entirely imaginary. Instead of martyrs, the world frequently recognizes war heroes, veterans, patriots-- an idea that Smith addresses in *Chapter 9: The Glorious Dead*.

Smith believes nations “combine elements of faith and ethnic communities to produce a new synthesis, which draws much of its strength and inspiration...from older religious beliefs, moral sentiments, and sacred rites” (23). Confining the study to a particular kind of faith narrows the scope of nations that Smith’s ideas apply to, but this only makes his research specifically relevant, thus more accurate than a general analysis. Both Smith and Anderson maintain the idea that shared religious doctrines promote ideas of unity, which plant seeds of community that grow into nationalist minds.

Works Cited

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. Revised ed. New York: Verso, 1991. Print.

Smith, Anthony D. *Chosen Peoples*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. Print.