When we first distributed the call-for-chapters of this book, we were certain that it was going to be about civil religion. By the early 21st century, Robert Bellah and Robert Wuthnow’s works have certainly established their concept, and it is no wonder that in recent years a relatively large number of books have been published bearing the term “civil religion” in their title.

Indeed, civil religion explains social phenomena that have puzzled scholars throughout history. Take, for instance, the strange case of Magda Goebbels, as described by James O’Donnell (1978) in *The Bunker: The History of the Reich Chancellery Group*. During the last weeks of the Third Reich she refused any offer to escape despite the Red army’s advances, and insisted to remain in Berlin with her entire family even when all the wives and families of the Nazi leadership had been evacuated. Every evening, on the last days of April 1945, Magda would prepare her six children for bed in the family room that Hitler had made available to them in the *Fuhrerbunker*: twelve years old Hela, eleven years old Hilda, nine years old Helmut, seven years old Holde, five years old Hedda, and three years old Heide. She knew how to keep them calm when putting them to sleep with a bedtime story or a song. But on the evening of May 1, 1945, the children were about to experience something else. Mother Magda did not only tell them the regular bedtime story; she did not only give them the regular good night kiss. Tonight was special, and the father, Joseph Goebbels, joined his wife to make sure that nothing went wrong. Together they drugged their six children with morphine, and then broke cyanide capsules in their mouths.

As loving parents, the Goebbels made sure that their offspring would never have to suffer life without the Fuhrer. Once the young ones were dead, father and mother Goebbels went on to commit their own suicide. Joseph and Magda were both Catholics, but Christianity had nothing to do with their satanic act. One might wonder, then, which religion sanctioned such an act, and which god commanded this couple to murder their children. In the case of the Goebbels family, and in fact – of the whole Third Reich, the puzzle can be solved within the conceptual boundaries of civil religion. The devotion and sacrifice found in true believers is no different in
the case of civil religion than that which can be found in the most fervent religious believers. This parallel between religious fervor and civic ardor will shed light on the martyrdom of national patriots throughout history.

As the chapters for this volume were submitted and we read more and more of them, trying to decide which of them were most suitable for this volume, it struck us that there seemed to be more than just a simple paradigm. Some of the papers extended the concept of civil religion and others challenged it. We found that our inquiry into civic religion and its utility in politics called for a broad spectrum of multi-dimensional answers. We therefore chose to call our book *Comparative Perspectives on Civil Religion, Nationalism, and Political Influence*, a title that would reflect the broad range of case studies we have included and would give expression to the multifaceted connection between civil religion, patriotism and politics.

Eyal Lewin  
Ariel University, Israel

Etta Bick  
Ariel University, Israel

Dan Naor  
Bar Ilan University/Ariel University, Israel

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