for the plot, the trial revealed that "local cells of Islamic extremists inspired through the internet" were responsible for the attacks.[60] A year after the attacks, at a large public event sponsored by the Spanish government, the emphasis was on multiculturalism, bringing the diverse elements of Spanish society together, including disaffected minority communities such as immigrant Moroccans, the group from which the attackers had sprung. In Sri Lanka, the government hunted down and brought to justice those Buddhist activists who were creating acts of terrorism against the government, but it also created a fund for the financial support of Buddhist schools and social services, and created a Ministry of Buddhist Affairs. One of the radical Buddhist monks who had been quite critical of the secular government told me that after these pro-religious measures, the government was finally beginning to "reflect Buddhist values."[61] In other cases, such as the British response to Irish terrorism, the government's stance in following the rule of law and not overreacting to terrorist provocations demonstrated its subscription to moral values. This made it difficult for religious activists—with the exception of the most extreme, such as Rev. Ian Paisley—to portray the government as a satanic enemy. It also increased the possibility of some sort of accommodation with religious activists on both sides of the Northern Ireland dispute—leading to the signing of a peace accord in 1998.

When government authorities abandon their own moral principles in responding to terrorism, they inadvertently validate the religious activists' most devastating critique of them: that secular politics are devoid of morality.

HEALING POLITICS WITH RELIGION

Given that the Enlightenment concepts that launched the modern nation-state were characterized by a fair amount of moralistic fervor, it is poignant that the governments of modern nations have so often been perceived as being morally corrupt and spiritually vacuous. Jean-Jacques Rousseau coined the term *civil religion* to describe what he regarded as the moral and spiritual foundation essential for any modern society that wanted to sustain an enduring political order. Such a "religion," Rousseau claimed, was to be based not on the "dogmas of religion" but on what he called the "the sanctity of the social contract."[62]

Despite the noble rhetoric of Enlightenment thinkers, their opponents at the time belittled the secularists' morality just as their modern

critics have done; and just as religious activists have done in our time, they accused the secularists of hypocrisy. As Darrin McMahon has pointed out, religious critics of thinkers such as Rousseau accused them, perhaps unfairly, of cloaking self-interest in the garb of high-minded abstractions.[63] It is this apparent hypocrisy—and what they regard as the inherent vacuousness of secular life—that has continued to disturb religious activists from the time of the Enlightenment to the present day.

This point was made clear to me in a direct way in a peculiar place—the federal penitentiary in Lompoc, California—where a convicted terrorist lectured me on my lack of moral and spiritual purpose. Mahmud Abouhalima accused American people in general, and me in particular, of secularism. He challenged our dedication to the virtue of tolerance when we have been unwilling to tolerate religious enthusiasts such as himself. He insisted that he knew what people like me lacked: "the soul of religion," he said, "that's what's missing." He went on to say that people in the secular world "are just living day by day, looking for jobs, for money to live." They were living, he said, "like sheep."[64]

I accepted that there was some truth to Abouhalima's analysis, but that most people did not want to live like sheep. Like him, they longed for a life of dignity and quiet pride. I interpreted what Abouhalima advocated to be not just religious doctrine, or even a "born-again" religious conversion, but a longing for vitality and meaning in life. What he wanted was a tough, grounded existence, not one simply floating toward a pointless death. I agreed with Abouhalima that religion at its best helps to give people that sense of purpose.

I wondered, though, to what extent Abouhalima was correct in his assessment that secular politics and modern social values have prevented individuals from having this kind of satisfying life. Can social and political institutions in society be blamed for our lack of spirituality? Answers to this question have been varied. Those who have responded "no" include those who have accepted the modernist assumption that private and public lives are separate, and that individuals are solely responsible for whatever integrity and morality they possess. Among those who have answered "yes" are modernity's critics, who have pointed to the deleterious effects of a consumer culture and its numbing assault on the senses by seemingly endless media images, and the cynicism with which most people view the moral integrity of those in public life. The American sociologist Robert Bellah argued that the bland multicultural climate that has overcome American society at the dawn of the twenty-first century has been fostered by what he regards

as the great agents of socialization—education and television—and encouraged through public policy.[65]

But even those who have condemned modern society for its aesthetic and ethical poverty may wonder if the entrance of religion into public life would help to leaven these negative influences. Several thoughtful observers of western society have suggested that indeed it might—if religion could enter the public arena in an undogmatic and unobtrusive way. A French theorist, Marcel Gauchet, has called for western society to recover the spiritual roots that it abandoned when it transferred the sense of sacrality from God to the nation.[66] An American theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr, has made a similar argument, even though Niebuhr was wary of religion's intrusion into politics.

Niebuhr was suspicious of religion because it absolutizes and moralizes political calculations that realistically are made for reasons of self-interest. Yet he could see a political role for what he called the "illusions" of religion in providing the ties that bind people together "in spite of social conflict." He described these as "the peculiar gifts of religion to the human spirit." Niebuhr claimed that secular imagination is not capable of producing them, for they require "a sublime madness which disregards immediate appearance and emphasizes profound and ultimate unities."[67]

I agree with Niebuhr that what religion provides society is not just high-mindedness, but also a concern with the quality of life—a goal more ennobling than the simple accretion of power and possessions. For that reason religious rhetoric has entered into political discourse at times when the moral and spiritual roots of a community have been challenged or have been in danger of being severed. In an era of globalization, traditional societies have been uprooted by transnational forces that have undercut familiar social identities, challenged established authority, and eroded the security that traditional institutions have provided. Especially within the religious cultures of violence that we have examined in this book, people have criticized these aspects of the global era and the vacuousness of modern secular life. They have sought religion as a balm for their fractured existences. For some, religion—like art, education, or sports—can be an escape from political turmoil. It provides a sense of identity and the reassurance of traditional authority.

Other people have found a safe harbor in other forms of public life during times of social turbulence. During the height of the conflict in Bosnia in the mid-1990s, for instance, mosques stayed open and the symphony orchestra of Sarejevo kept to its concert schedule, performing

to audiences of mixed ethnic identities. In Palestine it has been higher education and sports along with religion that have symbolized this unity beyond the violence of ethnic conflict. When I asked a member of Hamas where the future generation of Palestinians and Israelis might come together, he told me, "it would be in a university." He could imagine a situation in which his son and the child of one of his Israeli opponents might relate to one another someday as friends and fellow students on a neutral arena—"perhaps on your campus of the University of California," he suggested.[68]

"I miss soccer," a young Hamas supporter told a journalist who interviewed him in an Israeli prison for the documentary film *Shaheed* (Martyr). The young man had been designated to be a suicide bomber but was intercepted by the Israeli police before he could demolish himself and his target, a crowd of innocent Israeli bystanders. He explained to the interviewer that he hated the Jews. "I despise them," he said. "They took our land." But when asked about Israel's soccer team, he said that he greatly admired Israeli players and knew many by name. When the journalist asked him what he would do if he were asked to carry out his suicide mission in a soccer stadium—one that was filled with his enemies, Zionists and nonbelievers—the young man seemed genuinely troubled. "On a soccer field?" he asked, his sensibilities clearly offended. "No," he said, "I couldn't do that."[69]

In the mind of the erstwhile suicide bomber, soccer rose above the turmoil of terrorism, just as higher education and symphony concerts have provided neutral planes beyond ethnic, religious, and ideological tensions. Religion can also provide such a neutral space: in Israel, rabbis and mullahs have shared ideas almost as extensively as their political counterparts have. Though religion has scarcely been perceived as being neutral in the same way that art, education, and sports have been, virtually every religious tradition has projected images of tranquility that are even more profound and unifying. It is, after all, for the sake of the tranquil and universal ideal of sacred transformation that one struggles in the battles of a cosmic war. In a curious way, then, the goal of all this religious violence is peace.

As we have seen in the case studies in this book, religious ideas have given a profundity and ideological clarity to what in many cases have been real experiences of economic destitution, social oppression, political corruption, and a desperate need for the hope of rising above the limitations of contemporary life buffeted by the transnational forces of the global era. The image of cosmic struggle has given these bitter experi-

ences meaning, and the involvement in a grand conflict has been exhilarating for some participants. It has even been empowering. Persons and social movements engaged in such a conflict have gained a sense of their own destinies. In such situations, acts of violence, even what appear to those of us outside the movements as vicious acts of terrorism, have been viewed by insiders in cultures of violence as both appropriate and justified.

Why, in a few extreme instances, violence has accompanied religion's renewed political presence is something that this book has tried to explore. My conclusion is that it has much to do with the nature of the religious imagination, which always has had the propensity to absolutize and to project images of cosmic war. It also has much to do with the social tensions of this moment of history that cry out for absolute solutions, and the sense of personal humiliation experienced by men who long to restore an integrity they perceive as lost in the wake of virtually global social and political shifts.

To some extent it is also related to the role that violence has played in public life. Since public violence is a display of power, it appeals to those who want to make dramatic statements and reclaim public space. In moments of social transition and uncertainty it can simultaneously hold both political currency and religious meaning. It can be used to remind the populace of the godly power that makes a religious ideology potent, and it can be used to render divine judgments. It can create man-made incidents of fear on heaven's behalf, as if its perpetrators could discern the mind of God.

This is one of history's ironies: that although religion has been used to justify violence, violence can also empower religion. Perhaps understandably, therefore, in the wake of secularism, and after years of waiting in history's wings, religion has made its reappearance as an ideology of social order in a dramatic fashion: violently. In time the violence will end, but the point will remain. Religion gives spirit to public life and provides a beacon for moral order. At the same time it needs the temper of rationality and fair play that Enlightenment values give to civil society. Thus religious violence cannot end until some accommodation can be forged between the two—some assertion of moderation in religion's passion, and some acknowledgment of religion in elevating the spiritual and moral values of public life. In a curious way, then, the cure for religious violence may ultimately lie in a renewed appreciation for religion itself.