CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Terror and God

On November 13, 2015, a gang of Belgian and French youths of North African and Middle Eastern ancestry slipped into Paris for a night of sheer horror. Several attempted to create havoc at the Stade de France, a sports arena where soccer teams from France and Germany were in a friendly competition with President François Hollande in attendance. One of the attackers, barred from entry, exploded his bomb outside. Other members of the group raided a series of cafés in a trendy section of central Paris, killing ordinary Parisians out for a pleasant evening. The terror of the evening culminated with an invasion of the Bataclan, a music hall in the same district, where heavily armed young killers sprayed the crowd with bullets and ignited hand grenades. The police arrived to stop the carnage, but not before the night's grim tally had risen to over 130 killed, including 7 of the assailants who were said to be related to ISIS, and over 300 wounded.

The larger impact of the attack, however, was not just the damage done to lives and property but also to the confidence with which most Parisians, and most people everywhere who witnessed the scene remotely through television and social media, viewed the world. As in other acts of terrorism, the news images of the bloodied victims projected from the scene portrayed common sites—in this case, a sports arena, a music hall, and several streetside cafés in the midst of evening business,—their cheerful familiarity appearing oddly out of place with the surrounding carnage. Many who viewed these pictures saw symbols

of their own ordinary lives assaulted and vicariously felt the anxiety—the terror—of those who experienced it firsthand. After all, the wounded could have included anyone who has ever been to a sports arena, a music hall, or a café—which is to say virtually anyone in the developed world. In this sense, the blast was an attack not only on Paris but also on normal life as most people know it.

This loss of innocence was keenly felt by Americans as they watched in horror the televised images of the September 11, 2001, assaults on the World Trade Center in New York. But even in the years immediately prior to the destruction of the World Trade Center, Americans had been targets of a diverse series of terrorist attacks: ethnic shootings in California and Illinois; the attack on American embassies in Africa; abortion clinic bombings in Alabama and Georgia; the bomb blast at the Olympics in Atlanta and the destruction of a U.S. military housing complex in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia; the tragic destruction of the federal building at Oklahoma City; and the 1993 explosion at the World Trade Center, which was an eerie forecast of the terror to come scarcely eight years later. These incidents and a host of violent episodes associated since then with American religious extremists—including both Muslim radicals and Christian militants—have brought Americans into the same uneasy position occupied by many in the rest of the world. Increasingly, global society must confront religious violence on a routine basis.

The French, prior to the Paris attacks, had dealt with the assault on the headquarters of the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* and with subway bombs planted by Algerian Islamic activists; the British have experienced bomb blasts in the London subways perpetrated by jihadi extremists and explosions on trucks and buses ignited by Irish Catholic nationalists; and the Japanese have contended with nerve gas placed in Tokyo subways by members of a Hindu-Buddhist sect. In India residents of Delhi have suffered car bombings by both Sikh and Kashmiri separatists and an attack on the Indian parliament and hotels in Mumbai by Muslim extremists; in Sri Lanka whole sections of the city of Colombo have been destroyed both by Tamils and by Sinhalese militants; and in Myanmar the Muslim sections of towns have been ravaged by angry Buddhist nationalists. In Uganda the extremist Christian group the Lord's Resistance Army, led by Joseph Kony, has terrified the countryside; and in Nigeria the Boko Haram has left a savage trail of blood. Egyptians have been forced to live with militant Islamic attacks in coffeehouses and riverboats; Indonesians witnessed the bombing of Bali

nightclubs by Al-Qaeda–affiliated activists; Algerians have lost entire villages to attacks perpetrated allegedly by supporters of the Islamic Salvation Front; and Israelis and Palestinians have confronted the deadly deeds of both Jewish and Muslim extremists. In Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria terrorist attacks by both Sunni and Shi'a militants have become a way of life.

In addition to their contemporaneity, all these instances share two striking characteristics. First, they have been violent—even vicious—in a manner calculated to be terrifying. And, second, they have been linked in some way to religion.

THE MEANING OF RELIGIOUS TERRORISM

The ferocity of religious violence was brought home to me early one morning in the midst of the conflict in Iraq when the enormous blast of a suicide bomb at a military installation across the river from the hotel in which I was staying in Baghdad shook me awake. An hour later I traveled down the same street where the explosion occurred and urban life was proceeding apace as if nothing had happened. In Northern Ireland I received the news that a car bomb had exploded in a Belfast neighborhood I had visited the day before. The following day firebombs ripped through several pubs and stores, apparently in protest against the fragile peace agreement signed earlier that year. These were disturbing repetitions of other close calls, including one that I had experienced in Israel. A suicide bombing claimed by the militant wing of the Palestinian Muslim political movement, Hamas, tore apart a bus near Hebrew University the day after I had visited the university on (I believe) the very same bus. The pictures of the bomb crater in the Baghdad street, the mangled bodies on the Jerusalem pavement, and the images of Belfast's burned-out pub, therefore, had a direct and immediate impact on my view of the world.

What I realized then is the same thing that all of us perceive on some level when we view pictures of terrorist events: on a different day, at a different time, perhaps in a different bus, one of the bodies torn to shreds by any of these terrorist acts could have been yours or mine. What came to mind as I heard the news of the Baghdad, Belfast, and Jerusalem bombings, however, was not so much a feeling of relief for my safety as a sense of betrayal—that the personal security and order that is usually a basic assumption of public life cannot in fact be taken for granted in a world where terrorist acts exist.

That, I take it, is largely the point: terrorism is meant to terrify. The word comes from the Latin *terrere,* "to cause to tremble," and came into common usage in the political sense, as an assault on civil order, during the Reign of Terror in the French Revolution at the close of the eighteenth century. Hence the public response to the violence—the trembling that terrorism effects—is part of the meaning of the term. It is appropriate, then, that the definition of a terrorist act is provided by us, the witnesses—the ones terrified—and not by the party committing the act. It is we—or more often our public agents, the news media—who affix the label on acts of violence that makes them terrorism. These are public acts of destruction, committed without a clear military objective, that arouse a widespread sense of fear.

This fear often turns to anger when we discover the other characteristic that frequently attends these acts of public violence: their justification by religion. Most people feel that religion should provide tranquility and peace, not terror. Yet in many of these cases religion has supplied not only the ideology but also the social identity and the organizational structure for the perpetrators. It is true that some terrorist acts are committed by public officials invoking a sort of "state terrorism" in order to subjugate the populace, and in fact the numbers of people killed by perverse secular authorities far outweighs the number of victims of religion-related terrorism. The pogroms of Stalin, the government-supported death squads in El Salvador, the genocidal killings of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and Kosovo, and government-spurred violence of the Hutus and Tutsis in Central Africa all come to mind. The United States has been accused of terrorism in atrocities committed in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and there is some basis for considering the U.S. nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of World War II, killing hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians, as terrorist acts.

But the term *terrorism* has more frequently been associated with violence committed by disenfranchised groups desperately attempting to gain a shred of power or influence. Although these groups cannot kill on the scale that governments with all their military power can, their sheer numbers, their intense dedication, and their dangerous unpredictability have given them influence vastly out of proportion with their meager military resources. Some of these groups have been inspired by purely secular causes. They have been motivated by leftist ideologies, as in the cases of the Shining Path and the Tupac Amaru in Peru, and the Red Army in Japan; and they have been propelled by a desire for ethnic

or regional separatism, as in the cases of Basque militants in Spain and the Kurdish nationalists in Turkey.

But more often it has been religion—often in combination with social, political, and other factors—that has been tied to terrorist acts. The common perception that there has been a rise in religious violence around the world in the last decades of the twentieth century and the first decades of the twenty-first century has been borne out by those who keep records of such things. In 1980 the U.S. State Department roster of international terrorist groups listed scarcely a single religious organization. Almost twenty years later, at the end of the twentieth century, over half were in some way related to religion.[1] They were Jewish, Muslim, and Buddhist. If one added to this list other violent religious groups around the world, including the many Christian militia and other paramilitary organizations found domestically in the United States, the number of religious terrorist groups would be considerable. According to the RAND–St. Andrews Chronology of International Terrorism, the proportion of religious groups in the late 1990s increased from sixteen of forty-nine terrorist groups to twenty-six of the fifty-six groups listed the following year.[2] For this reason U.S. government officials frequently proclaim terrorism in the name of religion and ethnicity, as one of them put it, "the most important security challenge we face in the wake of the Cold War."[3]

Throughout this study we will be looking at this odd attraction of religion and violence. Although some observers try to explain away religion's recent ties to violence as an aberration, a result of political ideology, or the characteristic of a mutant form of religion—fundamentalism—these are not my views. Rather, I look for explanations in the current forces of geopolitics enhanced by a strain of violence that may be found at the deepest levels of religious imagination. Religion may not be the cause of the anger that leads to violence in most places around the world, but it can vastly complicate the way that anger is expressed.

Within the histories of religious traditions—from biblical wars to crusading ventures and great acts of martyrdom—violence has lurked as a shadowy presence. It has colored religion's darker, more mysterious symbols. Images of death have never been far from the heart of religion's power to stir the imagination. One of the haunting questions asked by some of the great scholars of religion—including Émile Durkheim, Marcel Mauss, and Sigmund Freud—is why this is the case. Why does religion seem to need violence, and violence religion, and why is a divine mandate for destruction accepted with such certainty by some believers?

These are questions that have taken on a sense of urgency in recent years, when religious violence has reappeared in a form often calculated to terrify on a massive scale. These contemporary acts of violence are often justified by the historical precedent of religion's violent past. Yet the forces that combine to produce religious violence are particular to each moment of history. For this reason, I will focus on case studies of religious violence both within their own cultural contexts and within the framework of global social and political changes that are distinctive to our time.

This is a book about religious terrorism. It is about public acts of violence at the end of the twentieth century and first decades of the twenty-first, for which religion has provided the justification, the organization, and the worldview. In this book, I have tried to get inside the mindset of those who perpetrate and support such acts. My goal is to understand why these acts are often associated with religious causes and why they have occurred with such frequency at this juncture in history. Although it is not my purpose to be sympathetic to people who have done terrible things, I do want to understand them and their worldviews well enough to know how they and their supporters can morally justify what they have done.

What puzzles me is not why bad things are done by bad people, but rather why bad things are done by people who otherwise appear to be good—in cases of religious terrorism, by pious people dedicated to a moral vision of the world. Considering the high-sounding rhetoric with which their purposes are often stated, it is perhaps all the more tragic that the acts of violence meant to achieve them have caused suffering and disruption in many lives—not only those who were injured by the acts, but also those who witnessed them, even from a distance.

Because I want to understand the cultural contexts that produce these acts of violence, my focus is on the ideas and the communities of support that lie behind the acts rather than on the "terrorists" who commit them. In fact, for the purposes of this study, the word *terrorist* is problematic. For one thing, the term makes no clear distinction between the organizers of an attack, those who carry it out, and the many who support it both directly and indirectly. Are they all terrorists, or just some of them—and if the latter, which ones? Another problem with the word is that it can be taken to single out a certain limited species of people, called "terrorists," who are committed to violent acts. The implication is that such terrorists are hell-bent to commit terrorism for whatever reason—sometimes choosing religion, sometimes another ideology, to justify their mischief. This logic concludes that terrorism

exists because terrorists exist, and if we just got rid of them, the world would be a more pleasant place.

Although such a solution is enticing, the fact is that the line is very thin between "terrorists" and their "nonterrorist" supporters. It is also not clear that there is such a thing as a "terrorist" before someone conspires to perpetrate a terrorist act. Although every society contains sociopaths and others who sadistically enjoy killing, it is seldom such persons who are involved in the deliberate public events that we associate with terrorism, and few studies of terrorism focus exclusively on personality. The studies of the psychology of terrorism deal largely with social psychology; that is, they are concerned with the way people respond to certain group situations that make violent public acts possible.[4] I know of no study that suggests that people are terrorist by nature. Although some activists involved in religious terrorism have been troubled by mental problems, others are people who appear to be normal and socially well adjusted, but who are caught up in extraordinary communities and share extreme worldviews.

Most of the people involved in acts of religious terrorism are not unlike Dr. Baruch Goldstein, who killed over thirty Muslims as they were praying at the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron. Goldstein was a medical doctor who grew up in a middle-class community in Brooklyn and received his professional training at Albert Einstein College of Medicine in the Bronx. His commitment to an extreme form of Zionism brought him to Israel and the Kiryat Arba settlement, and although he was politically active for many years—he was Rabbi Meir Kahane's campaign manager when he ran for the Israeli parliament—Goldstein did not appear to be an irrational or vicious person. Prior to the attack at Hebron, his most publicized political act had been a letter to the editor of the *New York Times*.[5] If Goldstein had deep and perverse personality flaws that eventually surfaced and made him a terrorist, we do not know about them. The evidence about him is to the contrary: it indicates that, like his counterparts in Hamas, he was an otherwise decent man who became overwhelmed by a great sense of dedication to a social vision shared by many in the community of which he was a part. He became convinced that this vision and community were profoundly assaulted, and this compelled him to a desperate and tragic act. He was certainly single-minded about his concerns—even obsessed over them—but to label Goldstein a terrorist prior to the horrible act he committed implies that he was a terrorist by nature and that his concerns were simply a charade. The evidence does not indicate either to be the case.

For this reason I use the term *terrorist* sparingly. When I do use it, I employ it in the same sense as the word *murderer:* it applies to specific persons only after they have been found guilty of committing such a crime, or planning to commit one. Even then I am somewhat cautious about using the term, since a violent act is "terrorism" technically only in the eyes of the courts, more publicly in the eyes of the media, and ultimately only in the eyes of the beholder. The old saying "One person's terrorist is another person's freedom-fighter" has some truth to it. The designation of terrorism is a subjective judgment about the legitimacy of certain violent acts as much as it is a descriptive statement about them.

When I interviewed militant religious activists and their supporters, I found that they seldom used the term terrorism to describe what their groups had done. Several told me that their groups should be labeled militant rather than terrorist. A Lutheran pastor who was convicted of bombing abortion clinics was not a terrorist, he told me, since he did not enjoy violence for its own sake. He employed violence only for a purpose, and for that reason he described these events as "defensive actions" on behalf of the "unborn."[6] In Iraq, a Sunni leader in the region that would later be dominated by ISIS claimed that the militant activists in his community were simply defenders of the faith. Activists on both sides of the struggle in Belfast described themselves as "paramilitaries." A leader in India's Sikh separatist movement said that he preferred the term *militant* and told me that *terrorist* had replaced the term *witch* as an excuse to persecute those whom one dislikes.[7] One of the men associated with the Al-Qaeda network essentially agreed, telling me that the word terrorist was so "messy" it could not be used without a lot of qualifications.[8] The same point of view was expressed by the political leader of the Hamas movement with whom I talked in Gaza. He described his movement's suicide attacks as "operations."[9] Like many activists who used violence, he likened his group to an army that was planning defensive maneuvers and using violence strategically as necessary acts. Never did he use the words terrorist or terrorism.

This is not just a semantic issue. Whether or not one uses the word terrorist to describe violent acts depends on whether one thinks that the acts are warranted. To a large extent the use of the term depends on one's worldview: if the world is perceived as peaceful, violent acts appear as terrorism. If the world is thought to be at war, violent acts may be regarded as legitimate. They may be seen as preemptive strikes, as defensive tactics in an ongoing battle, or as symbols indicating to the world that it is indeed in a state of grave and ultimate conflict.

In most cases in this book, religious language is used to characterize this conflict. When it is, what difference does religion make? Do acts of violence conducted by Hamas have different characteristics from those conducted by secular movements, such as the Kurds? The question is whether religious terrorism is different from other kinds.

In this book it will become clear that, at least in some cases, religion does make a difference. Some of these differences are readily apparent—the transcendent moralism with which such acts are justified, for instance, and the ritual intensity with which they are committed. Other differences are more profound and go to the very heart of religion. The familiar religious images of struggle and transformation—concepts of cosmic war—have been employed in this-worldly social struggles. When these cosmic battles are conceived as occurring on the human plane, they result in real acts of violence.

This leads to yet another question: when religion justifies violence, is it simply being used for political purposes? This question is not as simple as it may first appear. It is complicated largely because of the renewed role that religion plays in various parts of the world as an ideology of public order—especially in movements of religious nationalism—in which religious and political ideologies are intertwined. As the cases in this book will show, religion is not innocent but it does not ordinarily lead to violence. That happens only with the coalescence of a peculiar set of circumstances—political, social, and ideological—when religion becomes fused with violent expressions of social aspirations, personal pride, and movements for political change.

For these reasons, questions about why religious terrorism has occurred at this moment in history have to be raised in context. By "context" I mean the historical situations, social locations, and world views related to violent incidents. To understand these, we will explore not only the mindset of religious activists who have committed violence but also the groups that have supported them and the ideologies to which they subscribe.

SEEING INSIDE CULTURES OF VIOLENCE

Terrorism is seldom a lone act. When the Kouachi brothers attacked the headquarters of the *Charlie Hebdo* satirical magazine in Paris many in their Algerian immigrant community felt vindicated for what they saw as efforts by the magazine to humiliate their community and their religion. When Anders Breivik unloaded his weapons on a youth camp in

Norway he imagined that huge numbers of Christian white supremacist Europeans would approve of his efforts to stop multiculturalism and the spread of Muslim culture, and perhaps some did. When Dr. Baruch Goldstein entered the Tomb of the Patriarchs carrying an automatic weapon, he came with the tacit approval of many of his fellow Jewish settlers in the nearby community of Kiryat Arba. When angry Buddhist mobs in Myanmar attacked mosques and shops of their Muslim neighbors in Myanmar, the militant monks who goaded them stood silently by. When Rev. Paul Hill stepped from a sidewalk in Pensacola, Florida, and shot Dr. John Britton and his security escort as they prepared to enter their clinic, he was cheered by a certain circle of militant Christian anti-abortion activists around the United States. When Mohammad Atta and other members of the Al-Qaeda network boarded commercial airlines in Boston and Newark which minutes later plunged into the twin towers of the World Trade Center, eventually causing them to crumble into dust, they came as part of a well-orchestrated plan that involved dozens of co-conspirators and hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of sympathizers in the United States, Europe, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere throughout the world.

As these instances show, it takes a community of support and, in some cases, a large organizational network for an act of terrorism to succeed. It also requires an enormous amount of moral presumption for the perpetrators of these acts to justify the destruction of property on a massive scale or to condone a brutal attack on another life, especially the life of someone one scarcely knows and against whom one bears no personal enmity. And it requires a great deal of internal conviction, social acknowledgment, and the stamp of approval from a legitimizing ideology or authority one respects. Because of the moral, ideological, and organizational support necessary for such acts, most of them come as collective decisions—such as the conspiracy that led to the release of nerve gas in the Tokyo subways and the ISIS organization's carefully devised bombings.

Even those acts that appear to be solo ventures conducted by rogue activists often have networks of support and ideologies of validation behind them, whether or not these networks and ideologies are immediately apparent. Behind Yitzhak Rabin's assassin, Yigal Amir, for instance, was a large movement of Messianic Zionism in Israel and abroad. Behind the Tsarnaev brothers' assault on the Boston Marathon was a community of support for Chechnyan independence in Russia. Behind convicted Oklahoma City federal building bomber Timothy McVeigh was a sub-

culture of militant Christian groups that extends throughout the United States. Behind the Norwegian defender of Christendom, Anders Breivik, who went on a murderous rampage at a youth camp near Oslo in 2011, was a European subculture of hatred toward Muslim immigrants.[10] The 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center was initially thought to be the work of only a small group of individuals linked to a blind Egyptian sheikh; only later was it found to have wider connections to the worldwide Al-Qaeda network of Islamic activism associated with Osama bin Laden. In all of these cases the activists thought that their acts were supported not only by other people but by a widely shared perception that the world was already violent: it was enmeshed in great struggles that gave their own violent actions moral meaning.

This is a significant feature of these cultures: the perception that their communities are already under attack—are being violated—and that their acts are therefore simply responses to the violence they have experienced. In some cases this perception is one to which sensitive people outside the movement can readily relate—the feeling of oppression held by Palestinian Muslims, for example, is one that many throughout the world consider to be an understandable though regrettable response to a situation of political control. In other instances, such as the imagined oppression of America's Christian militia and Myanmar's 969 Buddhist movement, the members' fears of Muslim hoards poised to take over their cultures or the allegations of collusion of international governments and the United Nations to deprive individuals of their freedoms are regarded by most people outside these movements as paranoid delusions. Still other cases—such as those involving Sikh militants in India, Jewish settlers on the West Bank, Muslim politicians in Algeria, Catholic and Protestant militants in Northern Ireland, and anti-abortion activists in the United States—are highly controversial. There are sober and sensitive people to argue each side. In many cases, such as in the terrorist acts perpetrated by ISIS and Al-Qaeda, specific political grievances are magnified into grand spiritual condemnations.

Whether or not outsiders regard these perceptions of oppression as legitimate, they are certainly considered valid by those within the communities. It is these shared perceptions that constitute the cultures of violence that have flourished throughout the world—in neighborhoods of Jewish nationalists from Kiryat Arba to Brooklyn where the defense of Israel is part of daily conversations, in mountain towns in Idaho and Montana where religious and individual freedoms are thought by Christian militants to be imperiled by an enormous governmental conspiracy,

and in pious Muslim communities around the world where Islam is felt to be under siege by the secular forces of modern society. Although geographically dispersed, these cultures in some cases are fairly small; one should bear in mind that the culture of violence characterized by Hamas, for example, does not implicate all Palestinians, all Muslims, or even all Palestinian Muslims; nor are Jewish extremism and Christian militancy supported by any other than a tiny fraction of the world's Jews and Christians. Yet in each of these religious traditions pockets of militancy persist.

I could use the terms *communities* or *ideologies* of terrorism to describe the character of these groups rather than "cultures" of violence, but what I like about the term *culture* is that it entails both things—ideas and social groupings—that are related to terrorist acts. Needless to say, I am using the term culture beyond its narrow meaning as the aesthetic products of a society.[11] Rather, I employ it in a broad way to include the ethical and social values underlying the life of a particular social unit. The task that I have set for myself in trying to understand these cultures of violence is to get inside the worldviews of those who are within them, to enter into the minds of terrorists.

One way of thinking about this approach to studying cultures of violence is to describe it as *epistemic worldview analysis*, a term that I have used in discussions on methods with my colleague Mona Kanwal Sheikh, who has interviewed members of the Pakistan Taliban.[12] What we like about this term is that it encompasses the idea of "episteme" as described by Michel Foucault: a worldview, or a paradigm of thinking that "defines the conditions . . . of all knowledge."[13] It also involves the notion of a nexus of socially embedded ideas about society. Pierre Bourdieu calls this a "habitus," which he describes as "a socially constituted system of cognitive and motivating structures."[14] It is the social basis for what Clifford Geertz described as the "cultural systems" of a people: the patterns of thought, the worldviews, and the meanings that are attached to the activities of a particular society. In Geertz's view, such cultural systems encompass both secular ideologies and religion.[15]

The cultural approach to the study of terrorism that I have adopted has advantages and disadvantages. Although it allows me to explore more fully the distinctive worldview and moral justifications of each group, it means that I tend to study less closely the political calculations of movement leaders and the international networks of activists. For these aspects of terrorism I rely on other works: comprehensive surveys such as Walter Laqueur's *Terrorism* (revised and republished as *The Age*

of Terrorism) and Bruce Hoffman's *Inside Terrorism*, which covers both historical and contemporary incidents;[16] studies in the social psychology of terrorism by Walter Reich and Jerrold Post;[17] political analyses such as Louise Richardson's *What Terrorists Want*, Martha Crenshaw's work on the structure of terrorist organizations in Algeria, and Peter Merkl's analysis of left-wing terrorism in Germany;[18] and the contributions of Paul Wilkinson and Brian Jenkins in analyzing terrorism as an instrument of political strategy.[19]

These works leave room for other scholars to develop a more cultural approach to analyzing terrorist movements—efforts at reconstructing the terrorists' worldviews from within, what I have called epistemic worldview analysis. This research has led to a number of significant case studies, including analyses of the Christian Reconstruction movement by Julie Ingersoll, the Christian Identity movement by James Aho, Irish paramilitarists by Martin Dillon, Sikh militants by Cynthia Keppley Mahmood, Jewish activists by Ehud Sprinzak, Hamas suicide bombers by Paul Steinberg and Anne Marie Oliver, and the Pakistani Taliban by Mona Kanwal Sheikh.[20] These and other works, along with my own case studies and some interesting reportage by international journalists, make possible an effort such as this one: a comparative cultural study of religious terrorism.

This book begins with case studies of religious activists who have used violence or who justify its use. The first half of the book contains chapters on recent acts of terrorism related to almost all of the world's major religious traditions—Christians in Europe who have opposed Muslim immigrants, and those in America who supported abortion clinic bombings and militia actions such as the bombing of the Oklahoma City federal building; Catholics and Protestants who justified acts of terrorism in Northern Ireland; Muslims associated with the rise of ISIS in Iraq and Syria, the Al-Qaeda attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City, and Hamas targets in the Middle East; Jews who supported the persecution of Palestinians, the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, and the attack in Hebron's Tomb of the Patriarchs; Hindus linked to assaults on Muslims in the Indian state of Gujarat, and Sikhs identified with the killing of India's prime minister Indira Gandhi and Punjab's chief minister Beant Singh; and the Buddhist militants affiliated with Southeast Asian anti-Muslim violence and with the nerve gas attack in Tokyo's subways.

Since these case studies are not only about people directly involved in terrorist acts but also about the worldviews of the cultures of violence

that stand behind them, I have interviewed a number of people associated with these cultures. In the chapters that follow, however, I have chosen to focus on only a few. In some cases I have highlighted the established leaders of political organizations, such as Ashin Wirathu, Abdul Aziz Rantisi, Tom Hartley, and Simranjit Singh Mann. In other cases I have chosen outspoken activists who have been convicted of undertaking violent acts, such as Mahmud Abouhalima, Michael Bray, and Yoel Lerner. In yet other cases I have selected members from the lower echelons of activist movements, such as Takeshi Nakamura and Yochay Ron, and victims of the violence, such as the ISIS refugees in Kurdistan, Iraq, and Palestinian victims of a firebombing on the West Bank. The interviews that I have chosen to describe in detail are therefore diverse. But in each case—in my opinion—they best exemplify the worldviews of the cultures of violence to which the individuals have been associated.

In the second half of the book I identify patterns—an overarching logic—found within the cultures of violence described in the first half. I try to explain why and how religion and violence are linked. In chapter 7 I explain why acts of religious terrorism are undertaken not only to achieve a strategic target but also to accomplish a symbolic purpose. In Chapters 8 and 9, I describe how images of cosmic confrontation and warfare that are ordinarily found in the context of heaven or history are tied by the perpetrators of religious violence to this-worldly political battles, and I explain how the processes of satanization and symbolic empowerment develop in stages. In chapter 10, I explore the way that religious violence has provided a sense of empowerment to alienated individuals, marginal groups, and visionary ideologues.

In the last chapter of this book I return to questions directly about religion: why anyone would believe that God could sanction terrorism and why the rediscovery of religion's power has appeared in recent years in such a bloody way—and what, if anything, can be done about it. I have applied what I have learned about religious terrorism to five scenarios in which violence comes to an end.

In order to respond to religious terrorism in a way that is effective and does not produce more terrorism in response, I believe it is necessary to understand why such acts occur. Behind this practical purpose in writing this book, however, is an attempt to understand the role that violence has always played in the religious imagination and how terror could be conceived in the mind of God.

These two purposes are connected. One of my conclusions is that this historical moment of global transformation has provided an occasion

for religion—with all its images and ideas—to be reasserted as a public force. Lurking in the background of much of religion's unrest and the occasion for its political revival, I believe, is the virtually global devaluation of secular authority and the need for alternative ideologies of public order. It may be one of the paradoxes of history, graphically displayed in incidents of terrorism, that the answers to the questions of why the contemporary world still needs religion and of why it has suffered such public acts of violence, are surprisingly the same.