It is a solution that would delight Palestinians both inside and outside the Hamas movement. Needless to say, it has not been a solution enthusiastically embraced by Israeli Jews. Given that fact, and considering that Israel holds a preponderance of military power in the region, could any part of the radical Islamic Palestinian objective be achieved? As I suggested earlier, acts of terrorism tend to be strategically unproductive and do not usually lead to transformations of power. If one is not willing to wait, as Dr. Rantisi claimed he was willing to do, beyond his own generation and perhaps the next, symbolic action will have to be replaced by the kind of strategic planning aimed at achieving goals either totally or incrementally. Revolutionary changes can occur through a well-organized mass movement, as in Iran, or an effective military force, as in Afghanistan. Changes might also come about through political pressures, as in Sudan and Pakistan, where regimes have capitulated to religious nationalist ideologies in what have been incremental but virtually bloodless coups. But as noted earlier, none of these cases has involved terrorist acts as the primary means of achieving power.

There have been instances, however, where the power accrued through terrorist acts was converted into bargaining chips for negotiated settlements, and where formerly terrorist organizations were forged into effective political parties. An example of this process, which might be called the domestication of violence, was the negotiated peace settlement in Northern Ireland and the emergence of Sinn Féin as an effective force in local elections. Yet, as the bombing in the village of Omagh in August 1998 revealed, such compromises are not always accepted gracefully by renegade members of activist movements, who insist on continuing their violent paramilitary campaigns. After all, the ideology of cosmic war does not easily submit to accommodation. But as the Omagh incident also indicated, public support for a compromise solution may isolate perpetrators of acts of violence, and their continued terrorism may undercut their public support.

It takes a certain amount of trust for both sides to accept the other even when sporadic acts of violence continue. The attempted resolutions of the Northern Ireland and Palestine conflicts are interesting cases in point. In Northern Ireland, the British did not blame Sinn Féin for the Omagh violence, and both British and Sinn Féin leaders formed a united front against it. Hence the public perception of Omagh was that of a senseless act, one that was peripheral and counterproductive to the political purposes of the Northern Irish Catholic community. In Israel, however, when Hamas terrorist activities were renewed after the peace accords floundered, Israeli leaders publicly blamed the Palestinian peacemaker, Yasir Arafat, for the terrorism. Thus, perhaps inadvertently, the Hamas activists were given credibility by Ariel Sharon and other Israeli leaders by equating them with Arafat, and the legitimacy of the secular Palestinian leader was undercut by his being blamed for the acts of renegade activists whom he could hardly control. With Arafat weakened and Hamas emboldened by the effect of their incidents of terrorism, the spiral of violence continued.

Thus a negotiated compromise with activists involved in terrorism is fraught with difficulties. It is a solution that does not always work. A few activists may be appeased, but others may be angered by what they regard as a sellout of their principles. The case of Arafat and Hamas was complicated not only by the lack of cooperation from the Israeli side following the elections that brought Ariel Sharon into power, but also by the intractability of Hamas and its own fears of losing whatever leverage it had gained through its previous tactics. Some members of the movement advocated a shift of strategy and participation in Palestinian elections as a political party. It was a shift that the leadership of Hamas at that time rejected. One of their concerns was political: they knew that although they might have won in Gaza, their level of support in the West Bank was not sufficient to rout Fateh and the other parties that supported Arafat's Palestinian Authority. Another concern of the Hamas leadership was ideological: once one has entered into the rhetoric of cosmic war, the struggle cannot easily be abandoned without forsaking the will of God.

### *Defusing Cosmic War*

This observation, that the idea of cosmic war is a stumbling block to any possibilities of a negotiated settlement, leads to the fourth kind of response to terrorism: desacralization. These are instances in which the absolutism of the struggle is defused, and the religious aspects are taken out of politics and retired to the moral and metaphysical planes. As long as images of spiritual warfare remain strong in the minds of religious activists and are linked with struggles in the social world around them, the scenarios we have just discussed—achieving an easy victory over religious activists, intimidating them into submission, or forging a compromise with them—are problematic at best. It is possible to imagine that in some cases where religious politics had previously been strong, however, the image of cosmic war itself can been transformed.

The extreme form of this solution is one in which religion returns to what Casanova described as its privatization in the post-Enlightenment world.[55] That is unlikely, however. Few religious activists would be willing to retreat to the time when secular authorities ran the public arena and religion remained safely within the confines of churches, mosques, temples, and synagogues. Most religious activists regard the social manifestation of cosmic struggle to be at the very heart of their faith and dream of restoring religion to what they regard as its rightful position at the center of public consciousness. But this need not be an angry form of religion.

In the first decades of the twenty-first century, many Islamic countries witnessed a certain reaction against politicized religion. During the 2011 protests in Cairo's Tahrir Square at the beginning of the Arab Spring movement, religion came into the picture in interesting ways. In some cases sympathetic mullahs would urge the faithful into joining the protest as a religious duty. In other cases there was a remarkable display of interfaith cooperation. On one occasion when Muslim protestors were trying to conduct their prayers in the square and they were being attacked by government sympathizers, a cordon of Egyptian Coptic Christians who had joined the protests circled around their Muslim compatriots, shielding them. Later in the week a phalanx of Muslim protestors protected their Christian comrades as they worshipped in the public square. In protests in Iran, students demonstrated in support of moderate theologian Abdolkarim Soroush, who argued that interpretations of religion are relative and change over time.[56] He made a distinction between ideology and religion, and claimed that Muslim clergy had no business being in politics.[57] Similar statements have been made by such Islamic thinkers as Hassan Hanafi in Egypt, Rashid Ghannouchi in Tunisia, and Algeria's Mohammed Arkoun. For them, the image of struggle consists largely of a spiritual battle or a contest between moral positions rather than between armed enemies.

To some degree their position is similar to what René Girard recommended in his analysis of how religion can cure violence, by putting religious drama back in the box of cultural symbols. He regarded the rite of sacrifice as deflected violence—a token of what I call ritualized cosmic war. According to Girard, when religion conducts its business adequately, it provides for society a symbolic way of acting out violent impulses so that they need not be expressed in the real world.[58] One of Girard's colleagues, Mark Anspach, observed that Islam lacks the developed sacrificial ritual structure of many other religious traditions, and hence it has always skirted the danger of "the confusion of ritual and history," resulting in ritualized—albeit real—violence against its sacred enemies.[59] What Soroush and his fellow Islamic thinkers proposed, however, was a Muslim religiosity sufficiently vital and symbolically rich to do what Girard and Anspach argued all religion should be able to do: deflect violence through its ritual enactment. Moreover, Soroush's vision of Islam allows religion to play a significant albeit noncontrolling public role—a prophetic part in the public arena. This is a form of social activism that eschews political power in favor of moral suasion, and it transforms the idea of struggle into a contestation of ideas rather than opposing political sides.

Solutions such as the one that Soroush formulated in Iran do not require the image of cosmic war to be removed from public life or abandoned altogether. Rather, it is redirected to the battlefield of ideas. For such a transformation to come about, however, two conditions must be met: members of the activists' religious community have to embrace this moderate form of social struggle as a legitimate representation of cosmic war, and the opponents have to accept it without being threatened by it. Secular authorities can do little about the first criterion, since it requires a transformation of thinking and leadership within the religious movement itself, a transformation that may come about when it is clear that its struggle cannot be won, and the victory of cosmic war is only a hope for the distant future. But they can affect the second criterion by resisting the temptation to act like an enemy in a cosmic war and being open to a social role for religion on a less violently confrontational level.

When one is treated like an enemy, however, the temptation to respond like an enemy is considerable. This has been especially so when the provocations have been savage. As I have mentioned, French President Francois Holland instinctively spoke about war in his response to the Paris terrorist attacks in 2015, and after the September 11, 2001, assault on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, the U.S. government almost immediately declared a "war on terror," and began to conduct massive retaliatory military operations. But we have seen, such military strikes seldom destroy their targets completely, invite more terrorist acts in return, and play into the terrorists' scenarios of war in which there can be no easy compromise. Understandably, governments cannot afford to let acts of terrorism go unaddressed. But the tit-for-tat approach to terrorism has usually failed if for no other reason than that few governments have been willing to sink to the savage levels and adopt the same means of gutter combat as the groups involved in terrorist acts. Any response to the perpetration of violent acts, even in the form of retaliatory strikes, enhance the credibility of the terrorists' view of cosmic war within their own community.

Hence the first step in desacralizing the image of cosmic war is for terrorists' enemies to stop acting as enemies. Examples of attempts to respond to terrorism in a nonmilitary way may be found in some of the British reactions to the violence of the Irish Republican Army after initial military responses turned out to be a disaster, and in some Israeli attempts to reach across religious divides and embrace the peace process with Palestinians. When Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair befriended Gerry Adams, the leader of the IRA's political wing, Sinn Féin, and when Israel's Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin shook the hand of Palestine's Yasir Arafat, many in these prime ministers' respective countries were convinced that they had sold out to terrorists. Within Adams's and Arafat's camps were those who felt that the Sinn Féin and Palestinian leaders had also abandoned their principles. As we have seen, the Omagh tragedy and the Hamas suicide bombings, aimed at both the governments' and the bombers' own moderate leaders, were violent expressions of this displeasure. Yet the British and Israeli authorities persevered because they recognized the opportunity to support a peaceful solution over a violent one, and—for the most part—they continued on a path of reconciliation that rewarded those who favored a transformation from terror to cooperation.

## *Taking the Moral High Ground*

The most successful solutions are those that have been forged on a moral plane, respecting one's foes and following the rule of law, and bringing to justice those who have committed destructive acts without playing into the dramatic scenario of cosmic war. This approach undercuts the argument of many religious activists that secular authorities are bereft of moral principles. It makes it difficult for the authorities to be demonized, and increases the possibilities of a negotiated solution. This, then, is the fifth response to terrorism: when secular authorities embrace legal and moral values, including those associated with religion.

Case studies have demonstrated the utility of this approach. The U.S. government responses to the two largest acts of terrorism on American soil—9/11 and the Oklahoma City federal building bombing—provide an almost textbook comparison between two opposite responses to similar kinds of terrorist incidents. In both cases the activists believed that the U.S. government was responsible for perverting public order, and in both cases the perpetrators—the Al-Qaeda hijackers on one hand, Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols on the other—wanted both to punish the United States and symbolically show that a cosmic war was raging in which the American government was the enemy. In the case of 9/11, the response of President George W. Bush supported the Al-Qaeda perspective with the image of a "war on terror," where there was no middle ground: "Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists," Bush proclaimed to the nations around the world in his September 20, 2001, address to a joint session of Congress. Soon afterward he invaded Afghanistan in an attempt at a military solution in destroying Al-Qaeda. Only years later, however, under the Obama administration was Osama bin Laden captured and killed in the raid on his Abbottabad, Pakistan, safe house. The chief conspirator in the 9/11 case, according to the 9/11 Commission Report, was Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, who was captured in 2003 in Pakistan and transferred to the U.S. military detention facility in Guantanamo Bay, where for over a decade he was detained without a trial. In the case of the Oklahoma City federal building bombing, however, there was no invasion and no "war on terror"; the culprits were identified and captured with days of the bombing. The incident was regarded by both the government authorities and the press as a crime rather than an act of war, and eventually both conspirators were put on trial. McVeigh was sentenced to death, and his execution was carried out in 2001; Nichols was sentenced to life in prison without parole. There was no noticeable increase in Christian terrorism in sympathy with the Oklahoma City bombers since the incident, but Muslim terrorism in support of Al-Qaeda and affiliated organizations increased seemingly exponentially after the war on terror was proclaimed around the world. It is true that the cases are not quite equivalent; Al-Qaeda was a substantial organization and McVeigh's ties to Christian extremist movements were looser, though there were such ties. Still, the responses were so opposite in scale and intensity that it would be surprising if they did not have a considerable impact on the trajectory of terrorist activities related to the two movements of Muslim and Christian extremists, respectively.

Another case of a measured governmental response was the reaction of the Spanish government to the Madrid commuter train attacks in 2004. Suspects related to the attack were arrested and put on trial, and instead of branding a large international organization such as Al-Qaeda 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