

Franciscan-Muslim Relations

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Now – Then – And Again Now

INTRODUCTION:

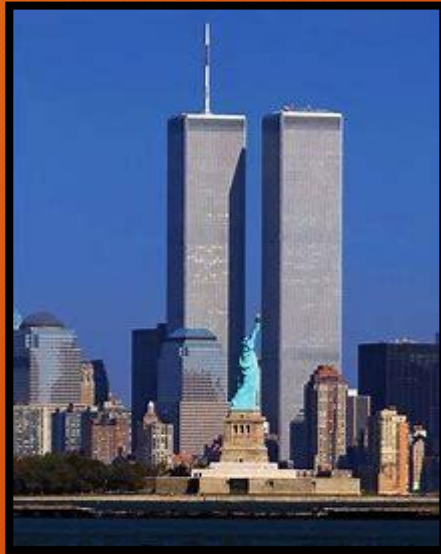
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- Where are we today?
- &
- How did we get here?

A. A STARTING POINT (Western Perspective):

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- 1. September 11, 2001



1. September 11, 2011

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- a. Some Statistics

- i. 4 Planes

- ii. 3 Targets = 3 Symbols

- **Twin Towers** (Economic capital of the USA) - New York City
 - **Pentagon** (Defense establishment) - Washington D.C.
 - **Capitol Building** (Political hub) - Washington DC (forced down in **Sharpsville, PA**)

Sept. 11, 2001

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NEW YORK CITY

Sept. 11, 2001

6



PENTAGON



SHARPSVILLE, PA

Sept. 11, 2001

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- 3. Fatalities = **2,977** passengers + **19** hijackers
 - a. NYC = **2,753** passengers + crew
 - b. Pentagon = **184** passengers + crew
 - c. Pennsylvania = **40** passengers + crew
 - d. not including those who died in the aftermath due to lingering injuries

Starting Point (Western Perspective)

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- 2. THE RESPONSE OF THE UNITED STATES & ITS ALLIES to 9/11
 - - a. Attack against **Afghanistan** (where Osama bin Laden was in hiding)
 - b. Attack against **Iraq**
 - i. No connection to 9/11
 - ii. Larger US ambitions (**oil**) in the Middle East
 - iii. In the background: the Israeli agenda



Starting Point (Western Perspective)

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- c. Incarceration in **Guantanamo Bay**
 - i. Indiscriminate sweeps off the Afghanistan “battlefield”
 - ii. Outside the jurisdiction of American courts
 - iii. “Enhanced interrogations”



Starting Point (Western Perspective)

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Water-Boarding



Torture



Extraordinary Renditions to Black Sites

- 3. The Response back home in the USA:
 - a. The Patriot Act (1 and 2)
 - i. loss or weakening of customary civil liberties = to root out enemies at all cost
 - ii. Heightened, intrusive airport security
 - iii. Demonization of “The Other” as “potential enemies” to the Homeland

Starting Point (Western Perspective)

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Iraqi Shiite



Saudi Sunni



Sikh from India



Hijab



Niqab



Burqa



Starting Point (Western Perspective)

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- b. Select Retaliatory Incidents against “Muslims” in the USA and elsewhere:
 - i. Sikh Temple (Oak Creek, Wisconsin) - August 2012
 - aa. 6 killed
 - bb. White supremacist, Wade Michael Page
 - cc. he killed himself on site



Starting Point (Western Perspective)

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- ii. NYC Subway - 27 December 2012
 - aa. Erika Menendez pushed Indian immigrant onto subway tracks to his death
 - bb. Boasted she has been targeting “Indians and Muslims” since 9/11



Starting Point (Western Perspective)

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- iii. Quebec City - 29 January 2017
 - aa. 6 shot and killed in a city mosque
 - bb. Perpetrator sentenced to life in prison with no possibility of parole



Starting Point (Western Perspective)

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Starting Point (Western Perspective)

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2. Interesting US stat:

- 2000 = **354** reported incidents of hate attacks on Muslims
- 2001 = **1501** attacks (in the span of **four months after 9/11**)
- Countless incidents of “vigilante justice” against innocent civilians because they “looked like” Muslims...

B. The Broader Context (Muslim Perspective)

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- 1. 9/11, perpetrated by a **handful of Muslims**,
 - a. is better seen to actually be a **response**
 - b. to perceived **grievances**
 - c. personal, familial, ethnic, economic or religious

- It was not the First Act in this play
- Everything did not start on 9/11
- These events had a broader context

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The Broader Context (Muslim Perspective)

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- 2. What was that context?
 - a. We can go as far back as the “**Reconquista**” and **Crusades** (Middle Ages)
 - b. Or, more recently and more importantly:

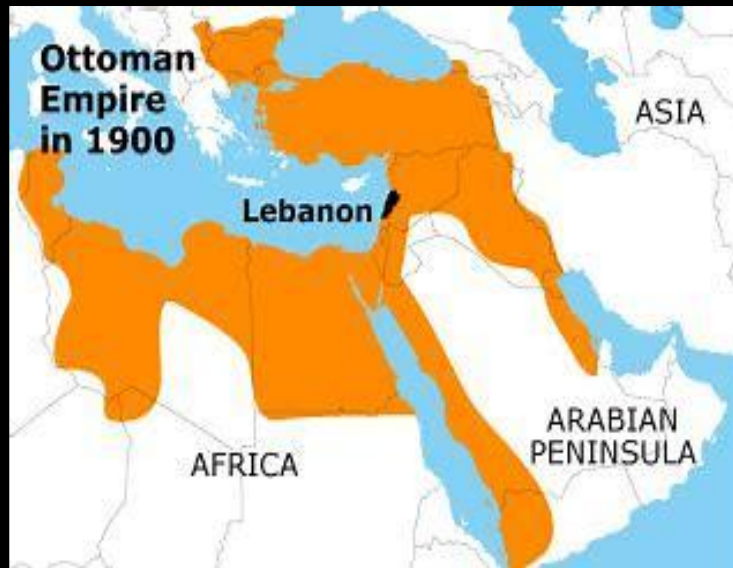
The Broader Context (Muslim Perspective)

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- i. **Collapse of the Great Ottoman Empire during World War I**
- ii. **Carving up of the Middle East after the war = League of Nations Mandates (between France and Britain)**
- iii. **Emergence of a handful of “independent states”**

The Broader Context (Muslim Perspective)

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Post-WWI Middle East (1923)



The Broader Context (Muslim Perspective)

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iii. The Establishment of Colonial Rule by Western Powers, ruled through local indigenous Puppet leaders and their families

- aa. **authoritarian & oppressive** of their own peoples
- bb. generally **corrupt and greedy**

The Broader Context (Muslim Perspective)

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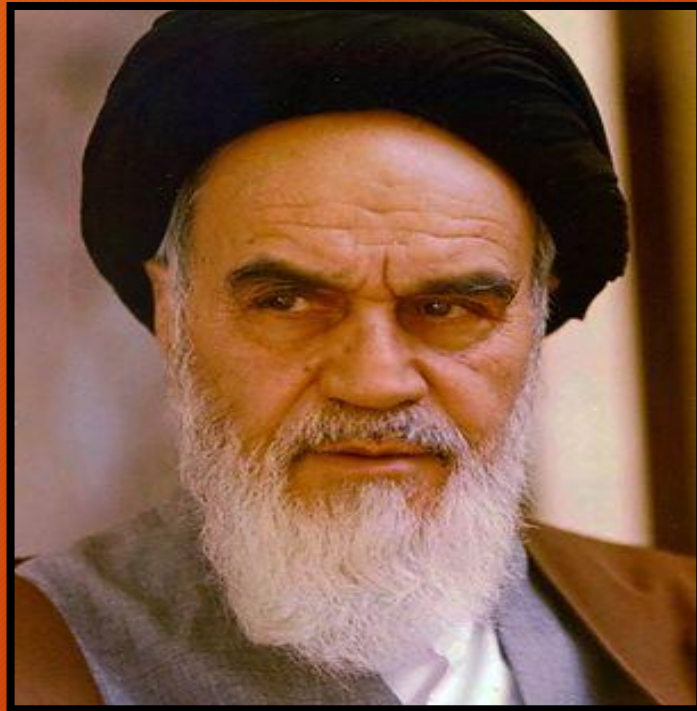
- c. **Economic Exploitation** of the Oil-Rich Middle East by West:
 - i. **Iran** = Pahlavi Dynasty



The Broader Context (Muslim Perspective)

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- Contemporary Iran - Shia (1979 →)



The Broader Context (Muslim Perspective)

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- ii. Iraq



The Broader Context (Muslim Perspective)

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- Contemporary Iraq - Sunni /Shia (1979 [1972] →) - Secular Islam

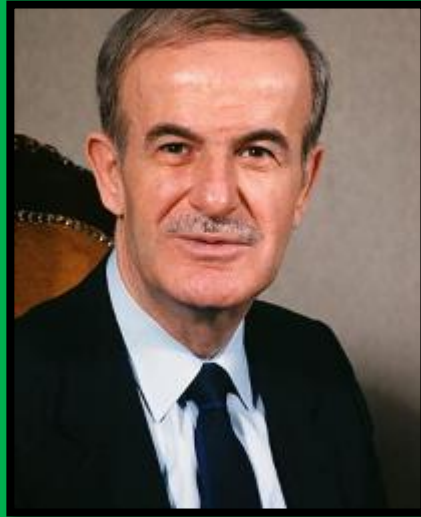


President Sadaam Hussein - Sunni



Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi = Shia

- iii. **Syria** = al-Assads (Alawite sect of Shia) = Secular Islam



The Broader Context (Muslim Perspective)

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- iv. Saudia Arabia (Radical Sunnis = Wahabi)



The Broader Context (Muslim Perspective)

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- 3. Series of Post-2001 ***Counter-attacks*** around the world:
 - a. **France:**



The Broader Context (Muslim Perspective)

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- i. **Charlie-Hebdo Killings** - 7 January 2015 - 12 dead



The Broader Context (Muslim Perspective)

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- ii. **The Bataclan Niteclub** - 13 November 2015 - 130 dead



The Broader Context (Muslim Perspective)

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- **iii. The Nice Esplanade Truck Attack** - 14 July 2016 - 86 dead



The Broader Context (Muslim Perspective)

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- b. London

- i. **King's Cross /St. Pancras Subway Station** (7 July 2005) - 52 dead



The Broader Context (Muslim Perspective)

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ii. **Murder of Lee Higby, British soldier** - 22 May 2013



The Broader Context (Muslim Perspective)

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- c. **Madrid Train Bombing** - 11 March 2004 - 193 dead



The Broader Context (Muslim Perspective)

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- d. United States
- - i. **Fort Hood Shooting** - 2009 - 13 dead



The Broader Context (Muslim Perspective)

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- ii. **San Bernardino (CA) Health Clinic Attack** - 2 December 2015 - 14 dead



The Broader Context (Muslim Perspective)

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- iii. **Pulse Niteclub** (Orlando, Florida) - 12 June 2016 - 50 dead



The Broader Context (Muslim Perspective)

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- 4. The **Cycle of Violence** continues unabated:
 - a. Rise of ISIL / ISIS (Iraq - Syria)
 - b. Western Attempts to force Regime Change in Syria
 - c. Further Repressions in the USA (Donald Trump' Muslim Ban...)

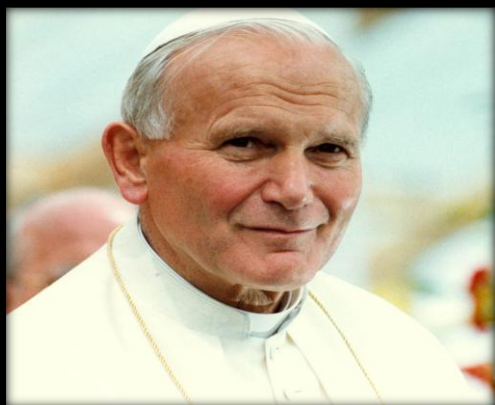
C. Into this Grim Context: A Glimmer of Hope?

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- 1. Important Distinctions for us in the West to make:
 - a. **Radical Islam** (in its various forms) - *jihad* as military weapon of war to counter perceived enemies
 - b. **Islam as a World Religion** - *jihad* as a spiritual weapon of the inner conversion of the heart
 - c. Islam, unlike RC Church, has **no central authority** speaking authoritatively for all of Islam

- 2. Dedication to the search for **common ground** / sensible solutions / ways out of the impasse
 - a. Efforts led especially by men and women in **faith-based organizations**
 - b. Watchword is **dialogue unto mutual understanding (Vatican II legacy)**

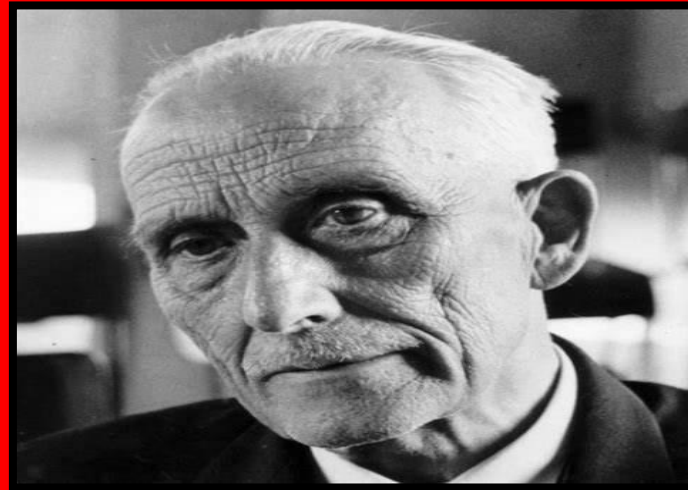
- c. Overtures made by religious leaders, especially by two popes:
 - John Paul II (Spirit of Assisi) and Francis I (recent overtures)



- d. Response of Muslim Community (in the USA)?
 - i. Negligible, unfortunately
 - ii. Interest is most alive in academia (on university campuses)

- 3. And one of the most important efforts towards dialogue is being led by the **Franciscan Family** - why us?
 - a. Background - a century of rediscovery

i. The Life Journey of **Louis Massignon** (1883-1962)



- aa. French academic who went and lived in the Middle East
- bb. **Personal relationships** established with receptive Muslims and open-minded Catholics in the Middle East
 - <1> leads to his conversion to Christianity
 - <2> eventually leads to his conversion to Roman Catholicism
- cc. Became an established scholar of Islam in Parisian academic circles

- dd. In the early 1930s, the **figure of Francis of Assisi** became an important bridge for him between Catholicism and Islam
 - <1> becomes a Third Order tertiary
 - <2> Encounter of Francis with al-Kamil becomes central

- <3> he goes to Damietta with Mary Kahil and they take a private vow of **Badaliya** = offering their lives in a prayer of surrender on behalf of Muslims
 - <a> **not** that they be converted to Catholicism
 - but that they know and follow the will of God for them

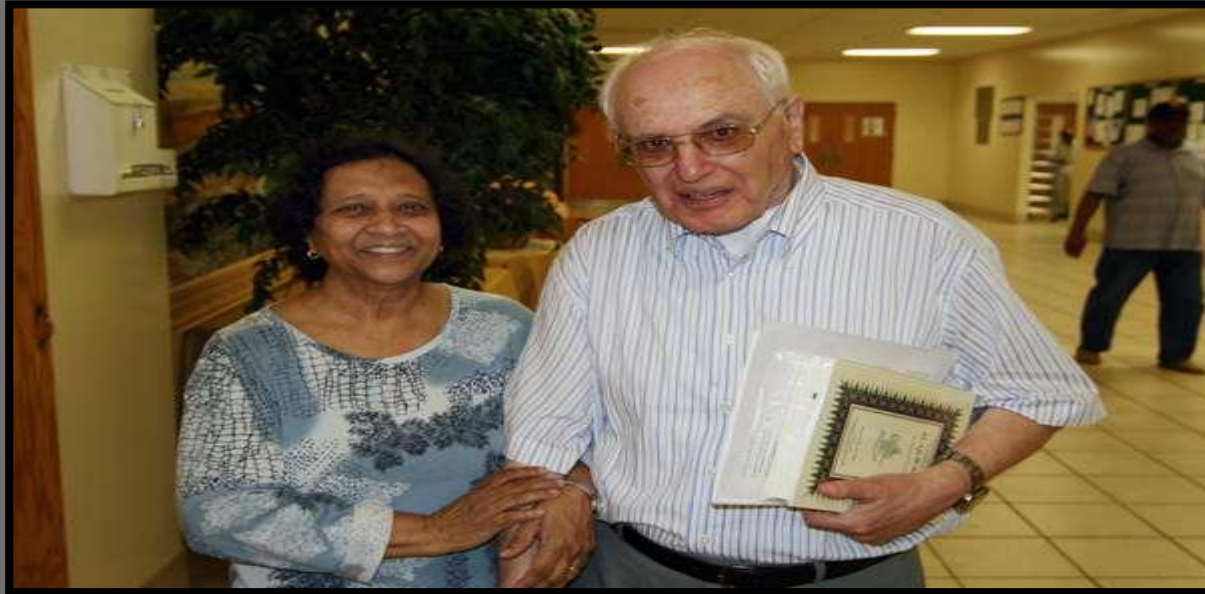
- ii. One of his students was an Italian Franciscan, **Giulio Basetti-Sani**, who wrote several books on the various connecting points between Christianity and Islam and saw the **Encounter of Francis** as the key prism to approach Interfaith Dialogue



- iii. Third Important Figure: Gwenolé Jausset, O.F.M.
 - aa. *Dieu est courtoisie*
 - bb. *Rencontre sur l'autre rive*
 - cc. *Assise ou Lépenle?*
 - dd. *Le Defi de la Rencontre*



- iv. Fourth Important Figure: **Jan Hoeberichts** (d. 2014)



- aa. Dutch Franciscan missionary in Pakistan
- bb. Like Massignon, it was his **exposure to and interaction with Muslims** in that country, that convinced him that **the way of Francis** was the key to interfaith dialogue and co-existence with Muslims
- cc. He eventually left the Order, married Fidelis (former religious sister) who worked with and served Muslims = **partnership in a common vision**

- dd. Author of several important books which **were translated into English**
 - **<1>** *Saint Francis and Islam (1983)*
 - **<2>** *Sultan and the Saint (2013)*

- b. Two remarks:
 - i. Note that most of this work was being done prior to 2000.
 - ii. But the Encounter would remain a relatively insignificant part of the Francis story
 - iii. The events of 9/11 would be a watershed for how this story came to new prominence
 - iv. And the fact that Jan's works were translated into English and known in the English-speaking world would be significant

- c. In the aftermath to the events of 9/11, with
 - The unleashing of war against Afghanistan and Iraq; and
 - The unleashing of the forces of hatred, suspicion and retaliation against Muslims = **the aftermath against Muslims**

- Two American historians realized this event in the life of Francis needed to be looked at again more closely



- **John Tolan:**
 - ❑ American historian of medieval Islam
 - ❑ Lives and teaches in Nancy (France)
 - ❑ Famous book: *The Sultan and the Saint*
 - ❑ Believes our stress on the Encounter is exaggerated



- Michael F. Cusato, O.F.M.
- ☐ Franciscan friar and priest
- ☐ Specialist in Medieval Franciscan History
- ☐ Author of 4 articles on the Encounter
- ☐ Primary Consultant for “The Sultan and the Saint” (PBS film)

- This Encounter of Francis of Assisi with the sultan, al-Malik al-Kamil, would:
 - Become a critical story for **building bridges** between the two religions
 - Become a critical story for **reinterpreting** the life of Francis himself