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**A Trajectory Towards the Periphery:
Francis of Assisi, Louis Massignon, Pope Francis, and Muslim-Christian Relations**

Scott M. Thomas

“If one day Muslim Americans will be forced to register their identities, then that is the day this proud Jew will register as a Muslim” (Khomami and Sidahmed 2016)

- Jonathan Greenblatt, head of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL)

“When we were at last together he railed against injustice, particularly injustice against the *lowly*. He told me he had made a vow – at age seventy-six – that if a certain Algerian who is wanted by both the French police and the Algerian terrorists comes to the Muslim-Christian pilgrimage in Brittany later this month and is arrested, he will enter prison with him” (emphasis added).¹

- Herbert Mason on Louis Massignon (1988, 102)

“Many times in our private conversations, Massignon told me how great was his debt to St. Francis of Assisi, whom he considered not only one of the most ‘compassionate’ men in the history of civilization, but also the first Western Christian to preach, by example, as well as by words, the principle of non-violence, as opposed to the war-like ideology of the Crusades to preach the principle that only with love should we confront those who appear to be our enemies.”

- Giulio Bassetti-Sani, OFM (1974, 33)

Louis Massignon (1883-1962) was one of the most important European scholars of Islam in the 20th century (Hourani 1991a; Hopwood 2003). He has been described by a leading scholar of Shi’ite Islam as “perhaps the greatest academic scholar of Islam that the [Western] world has ever produced” (Nasr 1987, 254; Bill and Williams 2002, 88). He was professor of sociology of Islam, who took a special interest in Islamic mysticism, at the Collège de France, and also was the most important Catholic scholar of Islam in the 20th century (O’Mahony 2008). His views on Islam were largely responsible for the Catholic Church’s more positive approach to Islam and Muslim-Christian dialogue after the Second Vatican Council (O’Mahony 2007).

Moreover, Massignon was not only an important figure in the modern history of Islamic Studies in the West, or a seminar figure in the Catholic Church’s approach to Islam. His “agenda as an Orientalist were part of the Catholic revival in France in the first half of the twentieth century” (Irwin 2007, 225). Perhaps, he was “the only Islamic scholar who was a central figure in the intellectual life

The author would like to greatly thank Anthony O’Mahony, and the anonymous reviews for their comments.

¹ Massignon’s is referring to the legend of the “Seven Sleepers of Ephesus” found in the Qur’an and ancient Christian sources. This tradition is commemorated at ancient Christian site in Brittany, France associated today with a Muslim-Christian pilgrimage founded by Massignon for reconciliation between Jews, Christians and Muslims shortly after armed struggle in Algeria started in the 1950’s (section 4). Herbert Mason, formerly University Professor of History and Religion, Boston University, was a life-long friend of Massignon’s, and translated into English Massignon’s *La Passion d’ al-Hallaj / The Passion of al-Hallaj* (Massignon 1982).

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Commented [ST1]: QA 1 Scott M. Thomas is Associate Professor of International Relations at the University of Bath, United Kingdom. He has published widely on religion and international relations, and is known for *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations* (Palgrave, 2005). His Franciscan writings include, ‘The Way of St. Francis: Catholic Approaches to Christian-Muslim Relations and Interreligious Dialogue,’ *The Downside Review* (2008), and ‘St. Francis and Islam: A Critical Appraisal for Contemporary Muslim-Christian Relations, Middle East Politics, and International Relations,’ *The Downside Review* (2018). He is an advisor to the Religion and International Relations Section of the International Studies Association

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of his time" (O'Mahony 2015). In other words, Massignon's thinking on Islam, Catholicism, Christianity, the Arabs, and the Middle East was part of the rich dialogue among French Catholic intellectuals – writers, theologians, and philosophers in the early 20th century².

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However, what makes Massignon's story so compelling for a scholar of international relations is that his Christian conversion in Baghdad – back to the Catholicism of his youth, was so intimately caught up with the story of the emergence of the modern Middle East. It took place in Baghdad, in Arabic, in a predominantly Muslim region (Iraq was then part of the Ottoman Empire), and through Arab Muslim friends. It was also caught up – he was arrested by Turkish soldiers as a French spy, with the events of Ottoman Empire's constitutional ("Young Turks") revolution (his closest friends were a part of it). Moreover, he gained first-hand experience of the duplicity of great power politics, as a political advisor to the French government, and as a member of the Sykes-Picot commission, which (secretly) divided up the Ottoman Empire among the great powers, and drew up the map of the modern Middle East (O'Mahony 2015).

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However, these aspects of Massignon background – Islamic scholar, political advisor, devout Catholic, and politically engaged French Catholic intellectual, come together in another aspect of his background. He was also deeply influenced by the life of Francis of Assisi, and his encounter with Malik al-Kamil, the Sultan of Egypt, during the Fifth Crusade. He consequently became a Franciscan tertiary, i.e. a member of the Third Order Franciscans, or the Secular Franciscan Order. Massignon is in good company. He is following Ramón Lull, the most famous scholar of Islam in the Middle Ages, also became a Franciscan tertiary for the same reason (Mayer 2009).

Massignon brings to the Franciscan story – a new optic, or a *rediscovery* of a very old one. He has argued St. Francis is well known for poverty, ecology, and animals, but perhaps the central concern of the most productive years of his life (1212-1221) was Muslim-Christian relations (Basseti-Sani 1969; Basseti-Sani 1974). He believed religion and culture were a crucial part of the solution – and, not only a part of the problems of war, poverty, and justice in North Africa, the Middle East, and in international relations (Petito 2011). These views, criticized, even ridiculed at the time by political "realists," and practical politicians – of all stripes, anticipated in many ways the "religious turn," and the "postsecular" sensitivity in the study of International Relations. Firstly, descriptively, this is the unexpected resiliency of religion in modern life (although Massignon lived during the incoming tide of secularism). This is the view of those scholars since the 1990s who have recognized the global religious resurgence, and are engaged in what is called the "religious turn" in the study of International Relations. It has challenged the bias of secularism, and religion's marginalization, and investigates the key role of religion in war, peace, reconciliation, and conflict resolution (Thomas and O'Mahony 2014), and is reflected in the existence, and contribution of this journal.

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Secondly, analytically, and this is the strongest connection to Massignon, the postsecular is a form of radical critique and theorizing on new models of politics, which recognize a positive role of

² e.g. Joris-Karl Huysmans, Charles de Foucauld, Paul Claudel, Charles Péguy, Leon Bloy, Georges Bernanos, Jacques Maritain, Gabriel Marcel, François Mauriac, and Jean Danielou (Charlton 1979, 269, 292, 300-304; Mason 1988, 14, 36, 75, 82; Schloesser 2005).

religion, theology, and spirituality in peace, democracy, freedom, justice, and inclusion (Mavelli and Petito 2012). Francis of Assisi's conversion (amidst the violence of Italy's city-state system), and dramatic encounter with the Sultan (during the crusades), offer an example of such radical critique and theorizing. It provides the elements of a "Franciscan model" of peacemaking, Muslim-Christian relations, and interreligious dialogue – encounter, conversion, knowledge, and transformation, which Louis Massignon came to articulate in his own "Franciscan" social practices in the mid-twentieth century – compassion, hospitality, and substitution, amidst the civil conflict in Algeria, and North African decolonization, which nearly brought the collapse of the Fifth Republic. This shows in the past how one's faith – for Francis, and Malik al-Kamil, and in the present, for Massignon, and those inspired by them, at an individual level, for Muslims and Christians in the West, there is a way "to practice an *inner* journey," and at the international level, practice an *outer* journey, with social, and foreign policy implications, which is "neither assimilating nor appropriating" – it is a way to understand *their* faith can be discovered, encouraged, and enhanced through the faith of another (O'Mahony 2008; Saxby 2006). Therefore, with the religious turn, and the postsecular sensitivity in International Relations, Francis's encounter with the Sultan, and Massignon's "Franciscan" approach to peacemaking, interreligious dialogue, and Muslim-Christian relations, now appears more perceptive, and forward looking. Massignon's approach continues to challenge and inform Christian engagement with the Muslim World and Islam since his death in 1962 (O'Mahony 2017). It offers a radical way forward in the twenty-first century for all people of faith, and all people of good will to engage with each other (Petito 2011), and it offers a radical way forward for the study and practice of International Relations.

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**TOWARDS ANOTHER WAY OF LIVING IN THE WORLD:
Francis of Assisi (1182/3-1226) and the Italian City-State System**

What is most significant from the viewpoint of the study of International Relations is that Francis of Assisi's transformative life story begins with a war, the main type of event that led to the creation of this scholarly area after World War I. In this case it was a **war between city-states**, Francis, before he was a saint, was a soldier, and then a prisoner of war in Assisi's war against Perugia (1202) in the Italian city-state system. Francis is not the only soldier who renounced war, and **became a saint**, e.g. Martin of Tours was one of Francis's mimetic models. What is far more significant is the prolonged period of war – *internally* between factions, and *externally* between Assisi and Perugia. In spite of the peace treaty (1203), there was *still* an on-going, horrific, bloody, and violent period of raids, looting, and armed combat for many years (Fortini does not spare us the details and stories omitted in other accounts)³.

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³ Arnaldo Fortini (1899-1970), a historian, lawyer, and poet, was mayor of Assisi before and during World War II. He also held the Chair in Franciscan Studies at the University of Perugia. He had full access to Assisi's historical archives to write his biography of St. Francis (Fortini 1981), which Hugo argues can be classified as primary sources, even though his *interpretations* of them need to be

What scholars call “international anarchy” is often considered to be the central problem of international relations. This does not mean chaos, but investigates how order can be achieved with the lack of a central political authority, which leads to the fear, insecurity, and uncertainly making war, and the preparation for war, an almost inevitable part of any international system (in this case the Italian city-state system). Historians who focus on the peace treaty, Fortini argues, underplay the persistence of anarchy and violence. This “minimizes the importance of Assisi’s internal and external war on the origins of the new Franciscan movement. The war accompanied Francis’s spiritual crisis, as well as that of his first companions,” and “it continued until the approbation of the rule [i.e. the *Early Rule*, 1209/10-1220], and may well have been the factor that determined its existence” (Fortini 1981, 166). The rise of early capitalism, a money economy, growing trade (e.g. Francis and his father often attended the trade fairs, especially in Provence), and growing wealth, poverty, and inequality characterized these times. So, for Francis and his early brothers something was profoundly wrong with the way they were living.⁴ This article argues Francis and the early Franciscan movement performed the gospel in a way that demonstrated a cultural – or, really *counter-cultural*, critique of Christendom, which was also reflected in Massignon’s faith, life, and vocation.⁵

Francis’s life story establishes the elements of a “Franciscan model” of peacemaking, Muslim-Christian relations, and interreligious dialogue elaborated in this article – encounter, conversion, knowledge, and transformation. It all begins with *encounter* - it was these military events – being a soldier, and a prisoner of war, and the *encounter* with Christ, speaking to him from the cross in the dilapidated Church of San Damiano outside Assisi’s city walls (the “San Damiano Cross”) that sparked Francis’s conversion journey. His desire still to be a chivalrous knight after his convalescence led him to head for Apulia in southern Italy to join the papal forces against the Holy Roman Empire. He stopped in route in Spoleto where that night he had the famous “dream of Spoleto,” i.e. another *encounter* with Christ, which led him to finally give up his military ambitions (the question in the dream was does he want to follow the heavenly Lord or only the earthly prince, who is really only the servant). He returns to face Assisi’s disgrace, dejection, and humiliation, waiting for the new vocation God would show him. In other words, Francis’s conversion was more than a single “event” (e.g. the San Damiano Cross), but a series of events, responding to the persistence of anarchy and violence, his even *deeper* conversions, new *knowledge*, and deeper *transformations* (e.g. “the dream of Spoleto”), which became central to his concept of peace, and the origins of the new Franciscan movement (e.g. Francis’s “peace greeting”).

Francis’s unexpected *encounter* with the leper, a riskier encounter, was another event, which was pivotal in his conversion journey, and influenced his theology and spirituality (McMichael 2012).

carefully evaluated (Hugo 2011, 50, 103-104, 121, 127, 130, 149; Fortini and Conroy (1983).

⁴ Tony Judt’s *Ill Fares the Land: A Treatise On Our Present Discontents*, begins with the sentence, “Something is profoundly wrong with the way we live today” (2010, 1).

⁵ Francis’s counter-cultural critique of Christendom has to be balanced with another similarity between Francis and Massignon – they both *desired*, and *received*, the support of the papacy: for Francis (~~the~~ Innocent III, Honorius III, and Gregory IX, who before becoming pope, as Ugolino di Conti, Cardinal Bishop of Ostia, at the special request of Francis, was made Cardinal Protector of the Order), and for Massignon (Pius XI, Pius XII, John XXIII, and Paul VI).

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He speaks dramatically about it, which occurred *after* “the dream of Spoleto,” in his *Testament* (1-3), written shortly before he died. Francis did not forget it was through living “among the lepers” that he had understood what the Lord wanted to reveal to him (new knowledge), and so it not surprising he would admonish the brothers later on to “live spiritually” among Muslims (deeper knowledge) (Gallant 2006). This is why some scholars connect the *encounter* with the leper, and his *encounter* with Christ in the event of the *Stigmata* (the wounds of Christ) on Mount La Verna in the Tuscan Apennines to his *later* encounter with the Sultan of Egypt (Hoebrichts 1997; Dalarun, Cusato, and Salvati, 2006). “Francis extended his experience of reconciliation beyond the Christian world to the Muslim world. Just as he went among lepers, he later went among Muslims, and in both cases he went among them in a spirit of peace and compassion” (McMichael 2012, 130). Louis Massignon’s faith, life, vocation, and social activism has been described in a similar way (Gude 1996).

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**DISCOVERING ONE’S OWN FAITH THROUGH THE FAITH OF ANOTHER:
The Encounter between Francis of Assisi and Malik al-Kamil, Sultan of Egypt**

The encounter between Francis and Malik-al-Kamil Mohammad (1180-1238), the Sultan of Egypt, and the nephew of Saladin, occurred during the siege of Damietta, Egypt, at the height of the Fifth Crusade (1217-1221). The encounter, which once seemed unbelievable, is now regarded as “probably one of the best attested episodes, historically speaking, even if the exact significance is not obvious” (Vauchez 2012, 87). All accounts indicate Francis wanted quite deliberately, even felt *compelled*, to make contact with Muslims for some time – seeking, even expecting martyrdom. Francis had made various failed attempts to meet Muslims before 1219 (Morocco, Syria). Pope Innocent III called for the Fifth Crusade at the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) to reform the Church, and recover the Holy Land. What we know is that Francis and Brother Illuminato left Italy on a ship bound for Acre, Syria probably with Italian crusader reinforcements. “What happened next has captured the imagination of his followers and admirers down to our own time” (Carmody 2008, 55-57).

A series of debates exist over nearly every event associated with Francis’s encounter with the Sultan (Hoeberichts 1997, Warren 2003, Saxby 2006, Tolan 2009, Moses 2009). This has implications for how Francis, and al-Kamil are interpreted, and what relevance this encounter has for Muslim-Christian relations: (i) did the Sultan’s soldiers beat up Francis (and Br. Illuminato) before seeing the Sultan, (ii) was Francis on a “peace mission,” variously interpreted as ending the Fifth Crusade, the *principle* of the crusades, or “peacemaking” as peaceful conversion, (iii) was the encounter a type of early “interreligious dialogue,” (iv) did Francis challenge the Sultan and his Muslim clerics to a “trial by fire,” (v) did Francis go to the Holy Land with a desire to convert the Muslims, which compelled him to seek martyrdom, (vi) did the Sultan offer Francis many gifts, which he rejected, and (vii) did the Sultan offer him an ivory horn, which was used in the call to prayer? The evidence simply cannot definitively answer any of these questions. This article argues, Francis of Assisi, as a devout, orthodox, Catholic, and as part of his wider counter-cultural critique of Christendom, probably opposed the crusades, and preached the gospel to the Sultan since he saw

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peaceful conversion as an *alternative* to their violence. Moreover, Francis and al-Kamil, were both – surprisingly, transformed by the encounter, and discovered how one’s own faith could be encouraged, even strengthened, through the faith of another.

What do we know about Francis and the Sultan – and, how do we know it?

Francis’s own life and writings, what they reveal regarding his theology and spirituality, it is argued in Franciscan Studies, is the proper *interpretive principle*, which should be used to evaluate any other *documents*, regarding his views, on war, peace, the economy, and any *events* – like the encounter with the Sultan. This article critically argues – from the perspective of International Relations theory, such contested “events” in Franciscan history or Christendom’s “international affairs” are really types of social action, constructed – like *any* event in international relations, for specific social, cultural, and political purposes (section 3).

Francis’s experiences of war, and being a prisoner of war - serious illness, losing close friends, and the “dream of Spoleto” challenged his, and medieval society’s existing, accepted, *cultural* meanings of personal success, meaning, and purpose – being a knight, the crusades, was not rejected, but *transformed*, and given a higher purpose, – being a knight of Christ, now devoted to Lady Poverty; and, he renounced the worldly values of power, money, and prestige – and, the violence often need to gain them (section 1). The way Francis performed the gospel life was reflected his “servant Christology,” and the principles of the Sermon on the Mount (Robson 2012a; Sheldrake 1995, 66, 120,134, 153). Early Franciscan spirituality symbolized the self-giving Christ, living in poverty, humility, and simplicity in the world. This was the basis of just and peaceful relationships, and the source of salvation for all those seeking forgiveness and reconciliation. The friars were to meet everyone with “the greeting of peace,” which he says in his *Testament* the Lord *specifically* revealed to him (given the persistent, and multiple levels of anarchy and violence *within*, and *between* Italian city-states (Polidoro; Schmucki). The early Franciscan way of going about the world was peace, humility, and poverty (minority), and being subject to all - this is why there were called the friars *minor*. After Spoleto there is no known incident of Francis ever again condoning violence, quite the opposite - he promoted reconciliation between individuals, cities, and all of creation – and, as part of the rapid expansion of Franciscan missions, this is also why he was eventually so determined to go to the Islamic world (McMichael 2012; Daniel 2012).

What is known about Malik al-Kamil also should be *interpreted* in the context of Muslim politics, the geopolitics of what might be referred today as the Middle East, and early Muslim-Christian relations. Al-Kamil is now emerging as a devout, virtuous, even enlightened ruler, with an interest in theology, and Sufi mysticism, even though he was an orthodox Sunni Muslim (Cusato 2008; Moses 2009). This is very important since Massignon was also greatly interested in the Islamic tradition of mysticism, (section 4). This may explain the *physical* evidence, the gift of the ivory horn, if it is authentic, used to call the faithful to prayer. The Sultan was affected by the brothers’ simplicity, their goodness, he received them with kindness (Munir 2008), was willing to listen to Francis, and perhaps was open to hearing the gospel, when it was presented in a way that did not insult Mohammad (contrary to the preaching of the zealous friars in Morocco, who were executed in 1220, the first

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Franciscan martyrs). Al-Kamil has been called a “peacemaker” (or political realist) by some scholars since as part of the truce negotiations (1219) he agreed to leave the Kingdom of Jerusalem to the crusaders, if they agreed to leave Egypt. In other words, the Sultan offered them the objective of the crusade without violence, to regain the Holy Places in Jerusalem (although the duty to protect pilgrims as key idea for the crusader movement remained open), and other lands that they had lost to Saladin in 1187. Apparently, in Islamic chronicles, al-Kamil is known as the “one who opposed those Muslims who were in favor of the Fifth Crusade” (Munir 2000). However, even given the influence of mysticism, before establishing al-Kamil’s “peacemaking” intentions, or support for interreligious dialogue, more information is needed on his foreign-policy decision-making: (i) domestic politics, since he was in rivalry with his brother for power and influence; and, (ii) geopolitics, since the Sultan’s army, and the Islamic world, were in fear and disarray with the growing Mongol threat (Munir 2008; Moses 2009).

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What were the Encounter's Outcomes?

Francis did not convert the Sultan (interreligious dialogue), nor did he end the Fifth Crusade (peace mission). Francis and al-Kamil, however, it can be suggested, were unexpectedly *transformed* by their encounter. Across the religious divide, across different civilizations, at a decisive point in the Fifth Crusade – Francis and al-Kamil discovered how one’s own faith could be encouraged, even strengthened, through the faith of another (Saxby 2006; Gallant 2006; McMichael 2012). We still know less about al-Kamil (in the West), but the legacy of Muslim respect for St. Francis, and his encounter with the Sultan is responsible to this day for the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Places in Jerusalem (De Beer 1981).

Francis’s encounter with the Sultan influenced his thinking on religious practices: (i) regarding religious books, (ii) prayer, which is why he might have received a horn from the Sultan (Hoeberichts 1997, 89), and, praise, reverence, and thanksgiving (i.e. the Islamic the names of God, which so impressed Ramón Lull and Massignon, and (iii) perhaps, also doctrine, since both Islam and Christianity affirm God as “all-powerful,” and “the creator of all,” attested to in Francis’s early writings, and the *Early Rule’s* Chapter 16 (Lehmann 1988; Francis of Assisi, 1999a).

Francis’s encounter with the Sultan - in addition to his life, and writings, also needs to be interpreted amidst the early expansion of Franciscan missions – doctrine and missionary practice, were *reflexively* worked out at the same time, i.e. they were both part of the struggle to determine what it meant to live faithfully in the world. This reflexivity is reflected in the *Earlier Rule* (1209/10-1221)⁶, which famously (Chapter 16) set out two approaches to mission: (i) “not to engage in argument or disputes but *to be subject to every human creature for God’s sake* and to acknowledge that they are Christians,” and (ii) “to announce the Word of God, when they see it pleases the Lord, in order that [unbelievers] may believe in *almighty God*, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the *Creator of all*, the Son, the Redeemer and Savior” (Francis of Assisi 1999; 74; Chapter 16: 5-7).

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⁶ The *earlier* Rule (1221) also reflects Pope Innocent III’s decrees, and reforms at the Fourth Lateran Council (1215). This is the rule that Francis initially wrote, and received only *oral* approval (i.e. without the papal seal) from Pope Innocent the III (1209/10), which Francis and the brothers agreed to at the famous Chapter meeting in Assisi at Pentecost (1221). The later version, the *Later Rule* finally received approval (with the papal seal) from Pope Honorius III (1223).

scholarly debate exists over when Chapter 16 was drafted, and inserted into the early *Rule* – those who argue it was *after* Francis’s encounter with the Sultan, fits with this section’s argument on how he was transformed by the encounter. Those who argue it was *before* the encounter connect Chapter 16 to the Franciscan mission to Spain and Marrakesh, Morocco, which ended in martyrdom (the brothers directly criticized Islam and Mohammad, but *only* after many warnings were they executed). So, “Marrakesh” is often contrasted with “Damietta,” for Francis expressly did *not* offer these criticisms when he visited the Sultan. Moreover, the *early Rule* (1221), which reflects Pope Innocent III’s decrees and reforms of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), which Francis agreed to implement, *omits* any reference to his call for a Fifth Crusade (Hoerberichts 1997, 3-4). The opening of Chapter 22, opens with an admonition from the Sermon on the Mount, “Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you.” If this was written *after* his encounter, then it indicates his Muslim hosts were the “enemies-turned-friends,” a part of the human fraternity. What Francis *already* experienced in his encounters with the leper, the poor in Assisi, he now *extended* to the Sultan (Cusato 2008; McMichael 2012). This interpretation fits with the article’s “Franciscan model” – seeing the world, and interpreting what is going on in it - domestic society and international relations, through a radical Franciscan social epistemology and social ontology (section 3).

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A “FRANCISCAN MODEL” OF PEACEMAKING, MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Seeing the world differently is already a way of beginning to change it (Thomas 2005, 250). Any study of the encounter between St. Francis and al-Kamil raises the question of sources, and it cannot be properly interpreted apart from the “Franciscan Question,” which began with Paul Sabatier, the Swiss Protestant pastor, and his path-breaking *Life of Saint Francis of Assisi* (1894): how best to read, interpret, and relate the early Franciscan documents, with their *multiple perspectives* on the various *events* in the life of the historical Francis (Dalarun 2002). Robert Cox, a leading critical theorist, argues, “Theory is always for someone or for some purpose,” and so the *images* of international relations, constitute the values, interests, and perspectives scholars use to interpret the world (Cox 1981). Therefore, the use of literary and historical criticism to *interpret* Francis’s encounter with the Sultan, with the problem of its variety of images, interests, and perspectives (the Franciscan Question), is similar to the difficulties of the *images*, theories, or paradigms, through which *any* event is interpreted in international relations (Thomas 2005, 72-96). In other words, both types of “events” relate to the basic problems of epistemology and ontology that underlies approaches to explaining or understanding the meaning and significance of social action in history, politics, or international relations. This similarity offers a crucial perspective for examining the Franciscan tradition, and Louis Massignon’s “Franciscan model” of peacemaking, interreligious dialogue, and Muslim-Christian relations (section 4).

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Towards a “Franciscan” Social Epistemology:

How did Francis gain knowledge of his world, and how do we gain knowledge of ours?

The mainstream approach to epistemology or constructing knowledge in the social sciences is based: firstly, on naturalism, i.e. the idea the same methods to investigate the physical or natural sciences can be applied to the study of social action by human beings (i.e. the methods are the same for explaining a volcanic eruption like Mount Vesuvius, or a political eruption like a revolution); and, secondly, it is based on positivism, i.e. the idea that "facts," objects, things, even in the social world, easily can be separated from "values" (Thomas 2010). These assumptions indicate there is (allegedly) some objective view of what is going on in the world, a world *separate* from our minds, and separate from our theories. It is based on a "correspondence theory" of language, a correspondence theory of truth, so the "truth" of a theory or a concept is determined by how well it matches or corresponds to events which take place in the world (Booth 2005; Booth 2007). This positivist approach to the social sciences is reflected in similar approaches to history as the discovery of "what actually happened" (Evans 2000, 8, 16-28).

In contrast, critical theorists, social constructivists, emphasize the concept of social epistemology, which underlies the concepts used in this section to develop a "Franciscan model" of Muslim-Christian relations and interreligious dialogue. These scholars, indebted to the "linguistic turn" in philosophy, interrogate the connection between facts and values, words and things, and symbols and what they symbolize in international relations. They argue the "truth" about the social world cannot be gained through an (alleged) "correspondence" between our theories, concepts, and some (objective) conception of events in the world. The main reason, which Massingnon would appreciate, is that language is bound up with what "constitutes" the world, how people see, and interpret the world, rather than merely being a *reflection* of it (Lindbeck 1984; Thomas 2005, 86-91). Most critical theorists, constructivists, do *not* doubt the world exists, nor do they doubt it exists "independent" of our minds, but they *do* doubt we can get behind the ideas, words, concepts, or even doctrines (i.e. language) of *statements* about the world in order to compare them to see if they "correspond" to an objective conception of the world (Kratochwil 2000).

Our theories, concepts - beliefs, values, passions, and interests, "constitute" the world, construct what the social world is like, so "in the social sciences some of the most important concepts are *constitutive* (and are used recursively) of the social world rather than simply mirroring or describing it" like in the correspondence theory of truth (Kratochwil 2006, 7-8). What for St. Francis constituted "the world" - really, his "social world," was constructed by the concepts, social practices, he and his contemporaries used every day - war, crusades, martyrdom, pilgrimage, missions, holy wars, holy places, and Muslims as fanatics, demons, heretics, idolaters; and, we also construct our world with the concepts we use every day - the state, sovereignty, refugees, migrants, religious violence, radical Islamism, and Muslims as "moderates" or as "radicals" or "extremists," and a "clash of civilizations" (or a dialogue between them).

The concept of social epistemology is part of the challenge to scientific (positivist) approach to history that has distorted the quests for the historical Jesus and historical Francis of Assisi. (Vauchez 2012, 234-238; Johnson 1996; Hall and Kratochwil, 1993). The search for objective truth remains a popular conception of history (e.g. "what really happened at Damietta, Egypt?" (Darness

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and Krier 2011). All history has the character of “contemporary history,” since the way the past is recounted, refers to present needs, and present situations (Croce 1941). This is an apt description of the interest in Francis’s encounter with the Sultan. The rise of Islam in world politics has meant an “event,” which “merited barely a footnote in the history of the Crusades,” has become important for Franciscans, the Catholic Church, and all people concerned about Islam and international politics (Dwyer 2000). Critical theorists and constructivists argue “events,” do not simply exist – in the past, or in contemporary international affairs, they are *inevitably* socially, religiously, and politically constructed. The multiple accounts of the Fifth Crusade, and the role of Francis indicate this – first it is a minor “event,” and after the crusaders’ defeat, it is constructed as a “major event” – back then, to show Francis as a model of the renewal of the Church, and now, as a peacemaker, and supporter of interreligious dialogue, and Muslim-Christian relations (e.g. John-Paul II’s “spirit of Assisi meetings”).⁷

The concept of a social epistemology clarifies the new kinds of knowledge religious actors can bring to analyzing what is going on in the world – in Francis’s world, and in our own. The concept of a conversionary epistemology describes this “Franciscan” way of seeking the world, and constructing knowledge of it - encounter, conversion, knowledge, and transformation. This set of concepts is rooted in insights, which are fearful, painful, gained from Francis’s own dramatic *encounters* – Assisi’s war against Perugia, and being a prisoner of war, with the leper, with the poor – and, ultimately with the Sultan, ostensibly the enemy of Christendom. Francis, over many years, constructed knowledge of the world as a result of his encounters, even *riskier* encounters, *deeper* conversions, as he identified with the leper, the poor, the lowly, in Assisi, Umbria, and other parts of Italy; and, through them, made the discovery – deeper, more challenging, *knowledge* about how the world really works comes from “the Other” – those on the margins, the periphery, and not the top of society. This led to even *deeper* transformations in how he engaged with the world around him – eventually meeting the Sultan, ostensibly the enemy of Christendom. Indeed, Franciscan Studies now emphasizes Francis’s *conversions* (plural), rather than a single event (section 1), a continual process, which can be described by this concept of social epistemology, or conversionary epistemology (Brunette 1997; Horan 2008; Horan 2014).

Perhaps, Rowan Williams’s evocative phrase “the wound of knowledge” expresses these relationships - how fear, pain, suffering, rejection, and humiliation are all parts of genuine encounter

⁷ Perhaps, the earliest account (1220) is by Jacques de Vitry, the bishop of Acre, who was in the crusader camp when Francis arrived (1219). Written when the crusaders expected victory, it depicts the encounter as a minor “event,” but his second account, written after the crusaders’ defeat (1223-1225), constructs the encounter as a “major event” to show St. Francis as a model of Church renewal, and now, with the rise of Islam, as a peacemaker, or precursor of interreligious dialogue. Similarly, the gifts the Sultan offered Francis (an objective, observable event) – were they a genuine demonstration of “hospitality,” as a type of Arab *social practice*, rooted in the Islamic *tradition* (e.g. MacIntyre, Massignon), or did this show the devious Sultan trying to undermine the Franciscan practices of poverty and simplicity (the view of St. Bonaventure and other Franciscan writers)? In other words, empirical observation cannot answer these kinds of questions regarding social actions, and the answers have to be *interpreted* in view of a variety of other factors. In fact, the different accounts reflect various interests within the order, within the Church, and the way Francis’s encounter with the Sultan is depicted through the centuries (Tolan 2009) offers a barometer of Muslim-Christian relations, and Europe’s changing perceptions of Islam and international security

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and conversion (Williams 1979).⁸ Any such encounters lead to what can only be called a kind of “conversion” for what is radically rejected is the separation of facts and values, the observer and the observed (naturalism and positivism), “all the way down” (Brown 1994), i.e. down to a person’s identity and very inner being - as a knight or merchant (Francis) or as a noble (Clare). This kind of knowledge is gained *initially* by *encounters*, like those Francis experienced, that lead to “falling upward,” i.e. only those who have “gone down,” and experience – in some way, at some time – fear, pain, suffering, rejection, failure, and humiliation (e.g. Francis’s time as a prisoner of war, his return to Assisi after the dream of Spoleto)⁸ can “come up” again, and be open to new knowledge, understandings, and broader horizons (Rohr 2011; Rout 2011).

Thus, Pope Francis, it can be argued, has helped the Catholic Church recover this perspective as a trajectory towards the periphery. The title of the first collection of his homilies at Santa Marta, “truth is an encounter,” recognizes St. Francis’s key insights on encounter, conversion, knowledge, and transformation (Bergoglio 2014; Ferrara 2015).⁹ Moreover, this is also a recovery of a central message of the Second Vatican Council (Faggioli 2013). The idea knowledge comes from the margins is also increasing recognized in the theory of International Relations (Enloe, 1996; Blainey and Inayatullah 2007).

Towards a “Franciscan” Social Ontology:

who did Francis include or exclude in understanding his world, and who do we include?

The concept of social ontology helps clarify why the radicalism of Franciscan metaphysics is relevant to international relations. For Francis, and his brothers, God is both Creator and Father, and so all people, all creatures, and creation are ontological siblings. This is the core reality of the world, the deep ontological principle underlying it. Francis’s famous poem, “Brother sun, Sister moon,” in not only charming poetry, but a profound statement of Franciscan metaphysics (Delio 2003; Ingham 2012). It powerfully underlies Francis’s *cultural* critique of Christendom, and a key *interpretive*

⁸ Anthony Spadaro, in the Introduction to Pope Francis’s homilies at St. Martha Chapel, similarly says Pope Francis’s answer to the question, “how can we discern the right path,” is “the way of Jesus Christ: abasement, humility, even humiliation” (Spadaro, 2015, xlv).

⁹ However, perhaps this is not as clear as it could be in the English title of the collection of homilies (Bergoglio 2015). The English title (*Encountering Truth*) is translated *differently* from its Italian title (*La verità è un incontro*). The Preface by Federico Lombardi, the Director General of Vatican Radio, in the Italian is the *same* as the title of the book (*La verità è un incontro*), and is translated into English as “truth is an encounter,” whereas this *same* phrase (in Italian) for the *English* book title is translated *differently* as “encountering truth” (which has perhaps a slightly different connotation). Does this matter? The phrase, “the truth is an encounter” (rather than “encountering truth”) is arguably more consistent with the message of the homilies, and Pope Francis’s trajectory towards the periphery (Ferrara 2015). This article’s social epistemology, and “Franciscan model” – encounter, conversion, knowledge, and transformation, also fits this interpretation.

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principle for his views on war, peace, poverty, and Muslim-Christian relations. It is also the source of Massignon's Franciscan metaphysics, and social and political action (section 4).

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The concept of a social epistemology – the discovery that knowledge comes from the margins, the periphery, helps clarify why the optic of social ontology is relevant for the past - examining medieval social history, and for the present: at all times, a key question of international theory is - what kinds of *actors*, doing which *activities*, are socially and politically *constructed* by *whom*, and in whose *interests* - to be a part, or to be excluded, from domestic politics or international affairs? The new social movements of religious reform and renewal among the laity in the thirteenth century engaged with the poverty and peace movements to offer a prophetic witness and criticism of the crusades. This was part of a general criticism of the way the new urban money economy in the cities was linked to **the violence and oppression of the feudal classes** (section 1; Lawrence 1994; Dickson 2010). The profit economy was simply seen as a new form of exploitation (Little 1978; Todeschini 2009). On this reading, Francis fits into whose history of the Middle Ages - the vivid history of popes, kings, ladies, knights, and crusaders; or does he fit into the history of the lowly, those on the margins, the periphery - lepers, the poor, the peasants, the workers, the monks, the friars, hermits, third orders, and lay confraternities? (Cantor 1991). St. Francis, and the early Franciscan movement became the best known representative of these new types of religious renewal and social movements.

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The concept of social ontology, rather than seeing St. Francis anachronistically, or retrospectively, as a reformer or social activist (Dubois 1905), helps us to better understand Francis's social agency, the way he performed the gospel in his day, and challenged some of Christendom's main social, and cultural practices - martyrdom, crusades, missions; however, rather than reject them, Francis *transformed* their meaning and significance as part of his counter-cultural critique of Christendom. In the Middle Ages – as in any age, ideas, concepts, theologies, and social practices do not simply mirror the social world (the correspondence theory of truth), but socially and politically construct it. They *make social reality what it is*. This means that martyrdom, crusades, and missions, from a constructivist viewpoint, did not simply exist, they *constituted* relations with the Islamic world in one way, through ideas, theologies, and social practices - chivalry, courtesy, courtly love, indulgences, religious vows, rites of penance, and *not* in some other way (Hall and Kratochwil 1993; Alkopher 2005).

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Francis, by the way he performed the gospel, rather than *reject* some of these medieval social practices, *transformed* their meaning and significance: he served not an earthly king, but the "Most-High King" ("the dream of Spoleto," section 1), and he extended "courtesy" (literally courtly behavior for nobility) to *every* leper, beggar, or lowly person who crossed his path. Regarding chivalry, the crusades, he compared his band of brothers to the Knights of the Round Table, and their itinerant preaching to their quests for adventure (Whitstable 2006). He transformed (violent) crusading, to (non-violent) peaceful conversion – part of the existing criticism of social violence by the poverty and peace movements. This was the reason for going to visit the Sultan unarmed, and without any crusader protection. In his mind he remained a "crusader" ("cross-bearer"), but he had transformed its

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meaning, for “surely a crusader against the standard type familiar in the world of Francis” (Cunningham 2004).

Scholars who argue Francis supported the crusades, and other social practices of his day (Kedar 1984; Meir, 1994; Mastnak 2002, Tolan 2009) ignore this article’s integrated, and interpretive approach to history, theology, spirituality, politics, and international relations, and how it can be applied to the early Franciscan movement (Sheldrake 1995; Frykenberg 1996). The way Francis, and his brothers, and Sister Clare, and her sisters, performed the gospel demonstrated another way of living in the world (section 1): an alternative to the culture of chivalry, the civic violence *within* Italian city-states, and *between* them, and the violence of the crusades, with a refusal to bear arms or take oaths, two basic requirements of feudal relationships. These principles became part of the Franciscan Third Order *Rule* of 1221, the religious order Louis Massignon felt so compelled to join (Peterson 2012).

(4)

**LOUIS MASSIGNON – THIRD ORDER FRANCISCAN,
AND THE STRUGGLE TO LIVE FAITHFULLY IN THE WORLD:
A ‘Franciscan Model’ of Interreligious Dialogue and Muslim-Christian Relations**

Massignon’s close friend, the poet Paul Claudel, played a key role in the French Catholic intellectual revival. Massignon wrote to him the very first account of his conversion (1908) in Bagdad (Gude 1996, 124). His conversion back to Christianity – the Catholicism of his youth, is a remarkable example of the “Franciscan model” set out in this article. Massignon’s conversion, like Francis’s, began in the context of violence, and encounter. The concept of social epistemology articulates this “Franciscan way” of seeing the world, and interpreting what is happening in it: “the wound of knowledge” (Williams), and “falling upward” (Rohr) reflect the suffering, rejection, and humiliation necessary for “coming up” again (conversion) to new knowledge, understanding, which almost *inevitably* is knowledge from the periphery (section 3). Massignon, like Francis, had his own dramatic, military, political, encounters - his arrest as a French spy by jumpy Ottoman soldiers, the threat of execution before morning, suicide attempts, illness, malarial fever, all in the run-up to the multi-religious and ethnic albeit Sunni Muslim Ottoman Empire’s “Young Turks” constitutional revolution (Gude 1996, 51; Latham 2008). **Amidst it all, the Arab, the Muslim, hospitality shown to him,** to the extreme point of providing for his dramatic escape from capture, allowed him to return to France (Gude 1996, 28-31). This is the kind of conversion, which radically rejects the separation of facts and values (naturalism and positivism), “all the way down” (Brown), to a person’s inner being: Massignon (age 27) being a dissolute, morally lax, sexual libertine, and a young man enthralled with adventure, the Maghreb, the desert, Arabic, and Sufi mysticism. Years later he described his time in the Middle East before his conversion as a self-styled European researcher, whose main tie to the region – an implicit criticism of T. E. Lawrence (i.e. Lawrence of Arabia), was his thirst for adventure, exploration, “the secular rage to understand.”¹⁰

¹⁰ T.E. Lawrence, in one of his conversations with Massignon, apparently said to him, “you love the Arabs more than I do,” and with this comment Massignon knew there could be no attempt at sharing

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It was Claudel who first suggested to Massignon he consider becoming a lay member of the Franciscans. Only after studying and meditating on the link between Islam and Francis did Massignon finally become a member of the Secular Franciscan Order (November 1931). He and Mary Kahil, a close, Egyptian, Melkite Catholic friend from his youth (Gude 1996, 78), went to Egypt two years later (February 9, 1934), and prayed at the abandoned Franciscan church in Damietta, Egypt where Francis had met the Sultan. They took a vow of al-*Badaliya* (the Arabic word signifying “substitution” or “to be in the place of”) to ritualize their shared commitment to Islam, and offer their lives in prayer and fasting for Muslims, “not so they would be converted, but so that the will of God might be accomplished in them and through them.” Massignon met Pope Pius XI later that year in private audience, and he blessed their offering at Damietta.¹¹

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Peacemaking, Interreligious Dialogue, and Muslim-Christian Relations

Massignon adopted the name “Abraham” (“Ibrahim”) as part of his vows to become a Secular Franciscan. It is often argued he did this in recognition of the Patriarch’s central role in the history of Judaism, Christianity and Islam (Gude 1996, 124; Griffith 1997). Much of Massignon’s scholarly activity, even before his conversion, was engaged in his “correspondence theory,” i.e. finding similarities, convergences between these monotheistic religions. So this view is partly correct, but his conception of the “Abrahamic faiths” was also based on the way Abraham was central to how he interpreted his conversion (Mason 1988, 26; Griffith 1997). Massignon was seeking to demonstrate – what Francis arguably learned in his encounter with the Sultan, and what he had encountered through Muslim friends in Iraq: how God can work in lives of people of other faiths, and what God expects of them. What does it mean to be faithful *within* another religious tradition, one different from your own?

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Massignon’s “Franciscan model” of Muslim-Christian relations was based on the link between Abraham and a radical Franciscan social ontology and metaphysics (section 3): firstly, the concept of the “Abrahamic faiths” – Jews, Christians, and Muslims are all children, descendants, of the Patriarch, so he believed in the *ontological unity* of the Semitic peoples, a unity which pre-dates the existing (and artificial) states in the Middle East, and the (artificial) modern international system; and, secondly, this meant any rivalry between them in the Maghreb, in his mind French North Africa, and the Middle East was for him a type of “sibling rivalry,” i.e. within the family, rather than a rivalry between enemies (O’Mahony, 2008). “If the Jews arriving in Palestine and the Arabs already there were to live in peace, it was essential that they come to understand their *shared* history as children of Abraham and respect each other’s cultures” (Gude 1996, 168-169). The key to the “Abrahamic Model” – was not rejecting, but *transforming* it, as the “Abrahamic faiths,” with the unity of Semitic peoples – what *they* share in the region, and what *they* have in common, rather than in relations with

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his life with Lawrence (Hourani, 1991b; Massignon 1989a). [I HAVE CHECKED THESE AQ9 REFERNCES AND THEY ARE CORRECT – SORRY COULD NOT PUT COMMENT HERE FOR SOME REASON?](#)

¹¹ This led to the formal foundation of the Badaliya prayer association in 1947. Cardinal Montini (later Paul VI) joined the Badaliya Prayer Association, and John-Paul II was also inspired by it to formulate his own “spirit of Assisi” meetings in the 1980s (Gude 1996, 133-135).

the Western powers (which are only interested in geopolitics, and the region's resources, and not the people of the region). This understanding of the "Abrahamic faiths" was always associated for Massignon in a personal way to his conversion. His idea of a "Abrahamic" connection, however, was rejected by the Church fathers at the Second Vatican (*Nostra Aetate*). This concept, as an affirmation, was considered to be based on a profoundly weak grasp upon the ecclesial reality of revelation. Throughout his life Massignon sought a wider recognition by the papacy, and the Catholic Church of his idea of a "genealogical" relationship between the Abrahamic religions (O'Mahony 2010).

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However, Massignon's concept of the Abrahamic faiths has been expanded to recognize the "Global Family of Adam and Eve." A radical Franciscan social ontology, and metaphysics linked to peace making, Franciscan Muslim-Christian dialogue, and interreligious dialogue (Arafat 2000). A "Exodus motif" relates to Abraham's *call* (Gen. 12), rather than to Moses crossing the Red Sea (i.e. the Exodus motif in liberation theology). Those who engage in Muslim-Christian dialogue, like Abraham, need to "leave behind us at least something of our own self," as we seek to encounter God/Allah, which was the path of Abraham (Mooren 2000). Such an Exodus motif, now connects this radical "Abrahamic" social ontology – being Abrahamic siblings, to a conversionary epistemology – radically, all the way down, to "le point vierge," i.e. what Massignon called the virgin point of person: it is through encounter, conversion, and new knowledge, one's own faith is discovered, renewed, enhanced through the encounter, the openness to the faith of another. It is a "Abrahamic path" of openness to "the Other."¹² Moreover, Massignon, and some Muslim scholars argue this was the path of Mohammad and of Francis of Assisi (Massignon 1989; Mooren 2000).

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The concept of the "Abrahamic faiths" provided Massignon with the basis for a set of religious, or spiritual activities, or social practices that combined his deep spirituality, scholarly study of Islam and Christianity, and social and political activism: (i) venerating key figures, (ii) common religious practices, and (iii) sacred sites, sacred spaces, for pilgrimage, especially Jerusalem, and the Holy Land.

Firstly, for Massignon the veneration of key figures – as suffering intercessors, common religious practices – prayers, fasting, pilgrimages, was an important link between Islam and Christianity, and was reinforced by his scholarly theory of correspondences. He recognized the "soft power" of religion, i.e. the way moral, religious, or spiritual example and spiritual authority can generate the kind of mimetic desire, which can change or even transform outlooks and behaviour (Haynes 2016). Massignon recognized the ambivalence of the sacred, i.e. the powerful role of sacred actors, intercessors, martyrdom, and redemptive suffering in religion, politics, and spirituality – for peace or violence. A key correspondence for him was between the Virgin Mary (Catholicism) and Fatima (Islam), the daughter of Mohammad, and they are now *global* models, sources of pilgrimage,

¹² The Abraham Path Initiative (API), now funded by the World Bank, was created by William L. Ury co-founder of the Harvard Program on Negotiation. It is a long-distance walking trail across the Middle East which connects the sites visited by the patriarch Abraham as recorded in ancient religious texts and traditions (<http://abrahampath.org>). Leon McCarron, a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, has recent hiked the path, written a book, and made a film documentary about the journey (McCarron 2017).

and inspiring women for all those suffering trials, tribulations, and oppression (Bill & Williams, 47-74). Massignon religious approach anticipates the “spirit of Assisi,” the interreligious prayer meetings for peace started by Pope John-Paul II in 1986, the year *after* he went to Morocco, and amazingly addressed 80,000 young Muslims as part of the UN’s International Youth **Year (John Paul II 2005)**. Massignon’s approach also anticipates the annual meetings of religious leaders at the Davos World Economic Summit, and now before the opening session of the U.N General Assembly.

Secondly, for Massignon the legend of the “Seven Sleepers of Ephesus,” i.e. common sacred sites, for pilgrimage - during times of war, violence, and terrorism, was a key example of common religious practices, and correspondences between religions. It is found in the *Qur’an* (Surah 18), and in ancient Eastern Christian sources. **The** greater visibility of Christian persecution in the Middle East is only now making Westerners, and Western Christians more aware of what Massignon always knew - the deep spiritual resources of Eastern Christianity in the Middle East (O’Mahony 2004; O’Mahony 2010a; O’Mahony, 2013). Coincidentally, a church commemorating them, the Church of Notre Dame, was built in Vieux–Marché, Brittany, a village not far from Massignon’s summer home. Massignon, in conjunction with the Badaliya prayer association (founded after visiting Damietta, Egypt) organized the first pilgrimage of Muslims and Christians to Vieux–Marché in 1954, to pray for reconciliation and mutual understanding in response to the growing violent conflict in French Algeria. It became an annual event for him until he died.¹³ **The** legend was a key part of his work for Muslim-Christian reconciliation during the worst violence in North Africa. These saints were venerated in both traditions, and pointed towards a powerful eschatological hope for justice especially articulated among Shi’ite Muslims, and Christians for all the poor and oppressed (O’Mahony 2004b). Massignon always considered Sunni as the “orthodox” expression of Islam, however, it was Shi’ism which gave expression to his mystical and political concerns for justice across the region (O’Mahony 2003).

Thirdly, sacred sites, and sacred spaces were another aspect of Massignon’s “Abrahamic” approach to Muslim-Christian relations and interreligious dialogue. He argued Jerusalem, and the Holy Places, figured prominently in any solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict (Gude 1996,188). Massignon was committed to what can only be described as a radical form of “religious transnationalism” – the Holy Land for him was just that – a “holy land,” and this meant it was not “an object for the privileged [great powers] to carve up, but the seamless garment of worldwide reconciliation, a place of intimate sharing among all” – all the people of Abraham should “have renounced the cult of idols” – rather than be seduced by them, the cult of narrow ethnic nationalisms, and modernization, as if power, wealth, and technology can solve complex problems of political and economic inequality (Gude 1996, 169). Therefore, all the peoples of Abraham should work together to share the Holy Land “as their joint home, and protect its integrity as the *religious space sacred* to Jews, Christians, and Muslims” (emphasis added) (Gude 1996, 164-165). This meant “the practice of *sacred hospitality* was incumbent upon them in *every* area of their lives” (emphasis added), and that Muslim-Christian understanding only would be achieved through *compassion* and costly sacrificial *substitution* (Gude 1996, 214-217). Perhaps, all these activities for peace, reconciliation, and

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¹³ Massignon’s annual *Badaliya Christmas newsletter* (December 8, 1954) mentions the beginning of the FLN’s national liberation struggle (Gude 1996, 190-191, 218-219).

interreligious dialogue, often dismissed during France's war with Algeria, terrorism, and violent decolonization, now appear more perceptive, forward looking, given the religious turn, and the postsecular sensitivity in international relations. Since Massignon's time, the role of sacred sites, sacred places in peacemaking and conflict resolution is becoming better-understood. (Hassner 2009, 2013; Pazos 2013; Appleby, Little, Omer 2015). Massignon was at times a bitter critic of Zionism and the State of Israel for its desire to hold possession of the Holy land for one of the Abrahamic faiths; he recognized the importance of Jerusalem as the first *Qibla* or orientation for prayer for Muslims was the Holy City and not the Arabian Holy Places (O'Mahony 1999).

However, Massignon would have been stood at a distance from the idea of religion primarily as an *instrument*, even for peaceful political purposes. His entire faith, life, and vocation indicate the real basis, and only basis, for peace was the struggle to live faithfully in the world. He only met Gandhi once, but was introduced to *satyagraha*, and his ideas on peace through Muslims (Massignon 1989b). The way Francis of Assisi performed the gospel demonstrated another way of living in the world, given the anarchy and violence of the medieval Italian city-state system (section 1). Similarly, Massignon developed his key "Franciscan" concepts, influenced by St. Francis and his meeting with the Sultan - compassion, hospitality, and substitution, as a way of responding to the evils, to the violence, of *his* world – the carnage of World War II, the occupation of France, great power politics, Western greed for oil, and the violence of decolonization in North Africa and the Middle East. However, these abstract concepts are only the beginning – what mattered to Massignon is how they could be embedded as types of *religious* social practices in the Abrahamic religious traditions in the Middle East.

Compassion

Massignon believed compassion was reaching out to "the Other," and participating in their suffering (Massignon 1989c). Did Massignon have a simple faith like Francis of Assisi? A "simple" faith need not be a "simplistic" one (even Francis commended to his brothers the theology and preaching of Anthony of Padua), but for Massignon, shockingly – like St. Francis, it was to hear the gospel, and to do it. So, compassion was a faithfulness to this experience – this transference of ourselves to others, which calls people "to go out from themselves towards the other [the "Exodus Motif" of Abraham], to love fraternally beyond their *milieu* and relationships in time and space here below, within a community directed towards the universal" (i.e. Francis's radical social ontology) (Gude 1996, 86). However, compassion was also based on actively gaining new knowledge, knowledge from the periphery, to interpret more effectively what is going on in the world. Massignon, in ways now made clear by critical theorists, social constructivists, and the linguistic turn in their study of international relations, was quite aware of how language, and speech acts, relate to suffering and compassion. "When called to by the suffering of others, the word he enacted was compassion. The turning of an indifferent ear by one not deaf was to him an act of falsehood. Cultivation of falsehood in defense of *national security* was an act of dishonor. Draining the *resources* of another community to enhance one's own was an act of injustice. And the use of any *language* to deceive was a betrayal of the essence of human intercourse. Language itself" – the speech acts we use (Matt. 15:18), "reveals

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what is in the heart" (Mason 1988, 18).

Hospitality

The Muslim social practice, the code of *hospitality*, saved Massignon's life. This is what led to the rediscovery of his Christian faith. He came to call it "sacred hospitality" (l'hospitalité sacrée), and defined it as "the acceptance, the *transfer* to ourselves of the sufferings of others" (Gude 1996, 86), the admission of 'the Other' to one's self" (O'Mahony 2006, 160).- Hospitality came to prefigure for him God's stance towards human beings. For Massignon to exercise the same hospitality and compassion he had been shown, now was a way for him to show God's compassion for others. Moreover, compassion, hospitality, for him were not abstract, free-floating, moral concepts (following Alasdair MacIntyre), emerging from (Western) Enlightenment rationality (Thomas 2005, 85-96, 118-119). What these concepts meant was first shown to him in a *specific* religious tradition, i.e. the social practices embedded *within* Islam, in Arabic, and in an Arab country (Iraq as part of the Ottoman Empire). Moreover, it was through the *faith* of Muslim friends, and their hospitality, his Christian faith had been restored. He discovered through his *encounters* - Francis's radical social ontology, "all other human beings" are to be his "brothers," especially "the most abandoned" (Gude 1996, 85-86).

Therefore, compassion, hospitality – and, with it, the sacredness of the guest, the stranger, the foreigner, and the right to asylum (highly contested political issues then, and now), came to guide Massignon's *less visible* social activity, as a university professor during the war in Algeria, and the violence of France's decolonization; teaching the Qur'an to North African migrant workers at the mosque in Paris, or voluntarily teaching them basic math and French (he did these things for over 30 years), visiting Algerian nationalists held as prisoners as a consequence of a violent struggle which put Frenchmen and Muslim on opposite sides which Massignon felt deeply as a personal wound, or helping to found social service organizations for migrants (Gude 1996, 221; Mason 1988, 83). These same principles "fearlessly" empowered – this what people, at the time acknowledged, his *more visible* social activism, interviews, public speaking – what secular liberal activists could understand, but also radical religious activities, perhaps, less puzzling, and more relevant in our age of postmodernism and postsecularism - fasting, prayers, and religious pilgrimages to promote Muslim-Christian unity over the war in Algeria, and violent French reprisals elsewhere in North Africa. In other words, compassion, hospitality, were not abstract concepts, but contributed to a radical "Franciscan" social ontology, "experiential knowledge of the sacred," and this is what "led him to bind himself to the most abandoned of people" (Gude 1996, 86). Encounter, conversion, and - *new* knowledge, for St. Francis, for Massignon, and Pope Frances, really did come from the margins, or the periphery, leading to even *deeper* transformations; and, given the French wars in North Africa, even *riskier* forms of social and political action.

Substitution

Massignon saw substitution as the ultimate expression of the hospitality he had found in Islam before his conversion, and this became the paradigm for his Christian life – to the end of his life (Gude 1996, 160. Francis's encounter with the Sultan, was interpreted by Massignon as a Christian example of the

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concept of *abdal* in Islam, or 'substitution' (Arabic *badal*, and plural *abdal* for 'substitute'). This is when another person's suffering ultimately saves humanity.¹⁴ God calls certain heroic persons, *witnesses* in each generation (Gude 1996, 162, 163, 164). These witnesses - religious, or even secular, freely acquiesce to a vocation of suffering, and become *substitutes*, intercessors, "for those whose evil lives wreak havoc on the world. Jesus was the first in a long line of chosen substitutes who accept personal suffering in atonement for human sin" (Gude 1996, 59, 109). Such witnesses were linked for Massignon by their thirst for justice, the reparative value of suffering, and the vindication of the oppressed (ultimately, at the last judgement) (Gude, 1996, 160).

Massignon's struggle was how to express concretely the vow of substitution, he took at Damietta, given the shifting events of French foreign policy and world politics around him. The concept of substitution, and the heroic persons he identified, were an increasing source of inspiration for him, as he became absorbed with the suffering of Muslims in France's violent, and torturous decolonization of North Africa and the Middle East (Gude 1996, 158-160, 123, 124). The religious value of "substitution" was personal – meeting another person in what Catholics would call "the communion of saints," carrying one another's burdens, putting oneself in another's place, even accepting another person's help (Griffith 1997). When the French government opened negotiations with the FLN at Evian in 1961, Massignon argued for prayer, meditation, substitution, and nonviolent witness. The "unity of the human race," he said, could not be achieved by "racial hatred" and practices of "bestial torture" (Gude 1996, 238).

Conclusion

This article has wrestled inevitably with the problem of multiple perspectives, and interpretations of key people, and events in the Franciscan tradition, and in modern international relations. One – the founder of this tradition, is very well known, far beyond Christian circles; and, the other, far less well known (at least in the English-speaking world). Both are increasingly controversial, and arguably have become more important with the rise of Islam in international relations. The article handles this problem with an integrated approach to the study of history, theology, spirituality, and international relations. It made a reasonable case for viewing Francis of Assisi, during the violence of the Italian city-state system, and the medieval crusades, to be engaged in a cultural, or really *counter-cultural*, critique of Christendom, which embraced the leper, the poor, the marginalized, and eventually the Sultan of Egypt. This critique, and "Franciscan" *trajectory towards the periphery*, was also reflected in the way Massignon, in increasingly risky ways, *lived* a set of modern "Franciscan" social practices, inspired by St. Francis – compassion, hospitality, and substitution, during French decolonization in North Africa, especially the war in Algeria, which for France was constituted as a security threat - it nearly brought the downfall of the Fifth Republic. This trajectory towards the

¹⁴ The concept of *badal* immersed Massignon in his study of the Sufi mystic and martyr, Mansur al-Hallaj, whom Massignon devoted his PhD dissertation, *La Passion d'al-Hallaj* (1922 edition), and studied the rest of his life. Tolan (2009) examines these Islamic sources, but omits the Catholic sources for this concept, which go back to Massignon's friends in the French Catholic intellectual revival (e.g. Huysmans and Charles de Foucauld).

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periphery, which gained for St. Francis, and for Massignon, the support of popes, is now reflected in Pope Francis's pontificate.

Undoubtedly, it was a Franciscan identity, which strongly contributed to the concern for peacemaking, for Islam, for Muslims, and Muslim-Christian relations. The "Franciscan model," however, set out in this article – reflected in Francis's life, and his encounter with Malik al-Kamil, and Massignon's life, and social and political action, indicates their concern of for Muslims, and Muslim-Christian relations, is rooted in a radical, more holistic, "Franciscan" type of social ontology and epistemology: it is through *initial* encounters, and then *riskier* encounters, and *deeper* conversions, Francis and Massignon made the discovery that knowledge about how the world works comes from the lowly, those on the margins, the periphery of society (social epistemology); which can transform, and expand *who* to engage with (social ontology), and *how* engaging with others, and *not* rejecting, but transforming, the meaning and significance of some of medieval society's social practices, and some of those of modern society, and can in time transformed the world.

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