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9/11 – 100 years on

It will be very interesting, in 100 years time, to see whether 2001 has entered the list of significant anniversaries in the long history of conflict between Christians and Muslims. Obvious entries which already figure in that list include 634 (the Muslim conquest of Jerusalem) and 636 (the battle of the Yarmuk between the Arabs and the Byzantines); 711 (the first Muslim expedition into Spain) and 732 (the battle of Tours or Poitiers between Muslim Berbers and Arabs and the Franks under Charles Martel); 1071 (the battle of Manzikert between the Byzantines and the Seljuk Turks, which led to the establishment of Seljuk rule throughout most of Asia Minor); 1085 (the reconquest of Toledo by Alfonso VI of Castile); 1099 (the Crusaders' conquest of Jerusalem) and 1187 (the battle of Hattin between Saladin and his Crusading opponents); 1389 (the battle of Kosovo, which led to the conquest of Serbia by the Ottoman Turks); 1453 (the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottomans); 1492 (the reconquest of Granada by Ferdinand and Isabella and the final end of Muslim rule in Andalusia); 1526 (the battle of Mohacs, an Ottoman land victory, leading to the partitioning of the Kingdom of Hungary and laying the foundation for the first Ottoman siege of Vienna in 1529); 1571 (the battle of Lepanto, a naval victory over the Ottomans by the Holy League of Spain, Venice, and the Papacy); 1757 (the battle of Plassey, opening the doors for the establishment of British power in India); 1798 (Napoleon's invasion of Egypt); 1917 (the British occupation of Jerusalem) and 1920 (the French occupation of Damascus); and 1993 (the destruction of the ancient bridge in Mostar by the Bosnian Croats) or 1995 (the massacre of 8,000 Bosnian Muslims by Bosnian Serbs in Srebrenica).

According to Anthony Pagden (*Worlds at War*, OUP 2008), even this impressive list is only a small part of the much longer, 2,500 year, struggle between East and West which includes the battles of Marathon (land, 490 BC), Thermopylae (land, 480 BC) and Salamis (sea, 480 BC), and the destruction of Persepolis by Alexander the Great (330 BC), to which one might add the battle of Carrhae (53 BC, between Rome and the Parthians) and the long struggle between Rome and Sassanian Persian Empire, which culminated in the Sassanian conquest of Jerusalem and much of the eastern half of the Byzantine Empire in 614.

If, in 2111, the year 2001 has been added to this list, it will probably be as much because of some of the immediate consequences of the event, particularly the occupations of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003), the bombings in various European cities such as Madrid (2004), London (2005) and Glasgow (2007), the NATO operation against Libya (beginning March 2011), and the killing of Usama bin Laden in Abbotabad, Pakistan (May 2011) as because of the events of 11th September 2001 themselves. In particular the spurious link made in the United States between Usama bin Laden and Saddam Hussain, which there is a suspicion

was made by a coincidence of interests between the oil industry and the Zionist lobby in the US, and which is about as plausible as a suggestion of a link between Ian Paisley and Slobadan Milosevic, will be unlikely to have been forgotten in the Muslim World.

It has also been interesting to see the different approaches by various Western countries to the idea of military intervention in different parts of the Islamic World. In Afghanistan the US led, and the UK and others, including France and Germany, followed, under the auspices of NATO. In Iraq, the US led, and the UK and rather fewer others followed, with France and Germany declining to become involved. In Libya, by contrast, France led, the UK and others followed, with the US endeavouring to play a much more back-seat role.

The intervening years have also seen speculation that, ironically, it might have been the US entertainment industry which first sowed the seed of the idea of the idea of flying aeroplanes into the twin towers of the World Trade Center, particularly an episode of the X Files which was first broadcast in March 2001. We have also witnessed the uncomfortable mirror-images of celebrations by some in the Muslim World, particularly among the Palestinians, at the discomfiture of the United States on 11th September 2001, and by some in the United States, shouting 'USA, USA', in New York, Washington DC and many other parts of the US, at the death of Usama bin Laden on 2nd May 2011.

News editors have had to think hard about the appropriate word to describe the death of bin Laden: was it a shooting, a murder, an assassination, an execution, simply a death, or what? Perhaps 'extra-judicial killing' is the most appropriate term, a view which matches well the very thoughtful meditation on this theme by Abdal Hakim Murad on the BBC's 'Thought for the Day' on 4th May 2011 (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00gscph>), in which he highlighted the obvious contrast between the ways in which some of the perpetrators of the worst acts of World War II had been dealt with (the Nuremburg Trials), and the treatment of Usama bin Laden, a view which was then echoed by the comment of Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, at his news conference on the following day.

We have also seen thoughtful reflections on the significance of the events of 9/11 in print, and just to mention two, Rowan Williams' *Writing in the Dust: Reflections on 11th September and its aftermath* (Hodder and Stoughton, 2002) raises a number of highly significant questions, not least as a result of the fact that the then Archbishop of Wales happened to be in Trinity Church on Wall Street, just a short distance from the World Trade Centre, when it was attacked; while Stanley Hauerwas and Frank Lentricchia's *Dissent from the homeland: essays after September 11* (Duke University Press, 2003) also raises a number of probing and challenging questions, particularly the very telling comment of Stanley Hauerwas himself that 'America is a country that lives off the moral capital of our wars' (p. 186).

Muslim reflections too have made significant contributions to the discussion, particularly some of those in *The New Crusades: constructing the Muslim enemy* (edited by Emran Qureshi and Michael A. Sells, Columbia University Press, 2003), and *The Empire and the Crescent: global implications for a new American century* (edited by Aftab Ahmad Malik, Bristol: Amal Press, 2003).

Embarrassment among many Christians about the paraphrase of the New Testament by President George W Bush in his statement 'You are either with us, or you are with the terrorists', to the Joint session of Congress on 20th September 2001 (cf Matthew 12:30, 'He who is not with me is against me'), gave way to

considerable relief with the election in November 2008 of Barack Obama, with his far greater experience of the World of Islam, on the basis of his own autobiography, and considerably more nuanced approach to the Muslim World, as exemplified in his speeches in Cairo in June 2009 and Jakarta in November 2010. Even the President, however, is not able to control the activities of citizens of the United States such as Pastor Terry Jones, whose threat to burn a copy of the Qur'an in public on the ninth anniversary of 9/11, in September 2010, was not carried out, but who, according to some news reports, has subsequently carried out a burning of a kerosene-soaked Qur'an, in private, in March 2011.

The shooting of (Sikh) Balbir Singh Sodhi in Arizona, along with the attempted shooting of a Lebanese-American and some of the members of an Afghan family, who were all Muslim, on 15th September 2001, by Frank Roque, together with the murder of (Coptic Christian) Adel Karas in California on the same day and the shooting of (Hindu) Vasudev Patel by Frank Stroman in Texas, a few days later, also illustrate the problems of religious and sartorial ignorance in the US, and of right-wing extremism in particular. Roque, who was convicted and sentenced to death in 2003 but had his sentence commuted to life imprisonment in 2006, is reported to have shouted 'I stand for America all the way' as he carried out his shooting, while Stroman is reported as commenting 'I did what every American wanted to do after September 11th but didn't have the nerve', and was a member of the white supremacist Aryan Brotherhood. He was executed on 21st July 2011 despite the last-minute calls for clemency, or at least a postponement of the lethal injection, from (Bangladeshi-born) Rais Bhuiyan, his third victim, who lost the sight of his right eye but survived the attack by Roque. More recent events in Norway, with the bombing in Oslo and shootings on Otoy Island by Anders Brevik towards the end of July 2011, also illustrate the tragic potential of right-wing ultra-nationalist sentiment in a European context, given his manifesto's visceral distrust of multiculturalism in general and Islam in particular.

Worldwide, many problems remain, with events in the first six months of 2011, the so-called 'Arab Spring', making abundantly clear the tensions and difficulties which exist within many Arab societies, not least about the role which it is appropriate for religion to play, and the two assassinations which have taken place recently in Pakistan, that of the (secular) governor of the Punjab, Salman Taseer, in January 2011 and the (Roman Catholic Christian) Minister for Minority Affairs, Shahbaz Bhatti, in March 2011 illustrate some of the problems, both political and religious, which exist in that country. In Europe the murder of Theo van Gogh in the Netherlands (2004), the controversy about the Danish cartoons of the prophet Muhammad (2005), and the lecture by Pope Benedict at Regensburg (2006) serve as three examples of some of the issues, political, religious and cultural, which exist in that continent.

Putting all these developments of the past ten years together, two important observations should be made. Firstly, in attempting to analyse all of these tensions and difficulties, it is very important to distinguish between specifically 'Christian-Muslim' factors and those which relate to the wider relationship between the World of Islam and the West. Not everything which happens in the West, in other words, is caused or inspired by Christianity, any more than everything which happens in the World of Islam is caused specifically by Islam. Social, economic, and political factors are all important, and it is vital that proper attribution of responsibility is allocated to the different issues, so that the responsibility for a controversy such as the Danish cartoons, for example, is laid at secular, rather than explicitly Christian, opinion.

Secondly, there is in any case, huge diversity within each of what, for obvious enough reasons of convenience, given their usefulness as short-hand terms, are

often called 'The World of Islam' and 'The West'. France is not Germany, which is not the UK, which is not the USA, and Egypt is not Syria, which is not Pakistan, which is not Indonesia, and so on. Each of these countries has its own religious, cultural and political demography, history and religious tradition, and despite the common ground which they may share, which is the origin of the concepts 'World of Islam' and 'West', they nevertheless are all very different, and they should not therefore be too quickly assimilated into being elements of the wider cultural units.

Finally, there are two key universal questions which all of these events over the past ten years highlight. Firstly, within individual nations, since, for better or worse, the world is currently organised into essentially national units, attitudes towards religious diversity are absolutely crucial. In practice, even if the degree of formal acknowledgement of this fact varies hugely, almost all the nations of the world demonstrate a considerable degree of internal religious diversity (i.e. Sunni/Shi'i, Catholic/Protestant etc), with even a country such as Saudi Arabia, which is commonly portrayed as being religiously uniform, in practice displaying considerable diversity, with according to some accounts perhaps as much as 15% of the population being Shi'i). Most nations then also manifest some degree of wider inter-religious diversity (i.e. representation of the different religious traditions of the world, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh etc). Attitudes towards religious diversity, both internal and wider, are therefore extremely important for the future all over the world.

Secondly, the relationship between religion and the state, and particularly the use of state power to further or enforce particular religious policies, is again now a universal issue. Are particular religious ideas and policies to be encouraged by governments, or indeed is coercion to facilitate their acceptance legitimate? This is a debate which will be hugely influenced by different views on whether religion is primarily an individual, a community, or a state matter, and hugely differing opinions will be expressed in, and by, highly individualistic societies such as the United States and others such as Iran where there is an ongoing, and possibly increasing, stream of opinion which argues that religion is inherently a state matter, which therefore gives the state the right to impose particular interpretations of religion and enforce its practice. It is thus interesting to note that while in Saudi Arabia, traditionally thought of as the most conservative Muslim-majority society in the area of gender relations, there are moves to liberalise regulations whereby men and women at university should physically study separately, in Iran, which has traditionally had a more liberal policy in this area, there are now moves towards re-asserting gender segregation on university campuses.

The events of 9/11 (or, if one wishes to resist calendrical imperialism, 11/9) have thus undoubtedly had a huge impact on world affairs over the past decade, in the United States, in different parts of the Muslim World, particularly Afghanistan and Iraq, and many other parts of the world too. In a longer-term, century-long, perspective they will probably come to be seen in a slightly different light. 100 years is a long time, however, and in the meanwhile, their legacy will continue to have a large impact.

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Biography:

Professor Hugh Goddard is the Director of the HRH Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Centre for the Study of Islam in the Contemporary World in the University of Edinburgh (www.alwaleed.ed.ac.uk). He was previously Professor of Christian-Muslim Relations in the University of Nottingham, and is the author of *Christians and Muslims: from Double Standards to Mutual Understanding* (1995), *Muslim Perceptions of Christianity* (1996), and *A History of Christian-Muslim Relations* (2000).

Abstract:

The events of 11th September 2001 have undoubtedly had a considerable impact in the past ten years, in the United States, in the Muslim World, and elsewhere, in the fields of politics, religion and culture. It will be interesting, however, to see how they are remembered in 100 years time, and almost certainly it will be the consequences of the event, as much as the events themselves, which will be remembered, in terms of the occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq, the bombings in several European cities, and the extra-judicial killing of Usama bin Laden in Pakistan in May 2011. This paper investigates the legacy of these events, and the questions which they and what has followed from them raise.

Key words:

Christian-Muslim Relations; World of Islam and the West; Usama bin Laden; George W Bush; 11th September 2001.