St. Francis and the Sultan, 1219-2019:

A Commemorative Booklet

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Quae placuerint Domino (RnB 16.8)

800

Colloquium Sancti Franciscii cum Sultano
اجتماع القديس فرنسيس مع السلطان

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—Br. Russel Murray, OFM
Animator General for Evangelization
Curia Generale dei Frati Minori

To Reverend Father Michael Anthony Perry, OFM

Minister General of the Franciscan Order of Friars Minor

Having just returned from my visit to the United Arab Emirates, I am writing to thank you for your work of preparation and that of all the Friars Minor for this eight hundredth commemoration of the meeting of Saint Francis with the Sultan of Egypt in 1219, that has borne fruit in a remarkable way in the recent visit to Arabia.

As the Saint was inspired to visit God's Muslim people those centuries ago, I would ask you to persevere earnestly in your work of presence among and service to all God's holy people, wherever they may be found.

Mindful that the work of the Friars is rooted in the bonds of friendship with Muslim communities established by your holy Founder, I would ask you to continue on this path of mutual esteem, free of any suggestion of proselytizing that would alienate those who do not know Christ Jesus as Lord.

With renewed gratitude for your work and your witness to God's love for all men and women, I willingly bestow upon you my Apostolic Blessing, as a pledge of grace and peace.

—From the Vatican, 9 February 2019 Francis

Letter of the General Minister of the Order of Friars Minor on the 800th Anniversary of the Encounter between St. Francis and Sultan al-Malik al-Kāmil

My dear brothers of the Order of Friars Minor,
all brothers, sisters and friends of our Franciscan Family,
and all my Muslim sisters and brothers,
May the Lord give you all His peace!

Eight hundred years ago, our Seraphic Father St. Francis set sail for Egypt, finally fulfilling a long-held dream of reaching out to Muslims. He arrived at the camp of the crusading army, among Latin Christians who through years of preaching and the rhetoric of holy war had been taught to scorn Muslims. Those same Muslims had every reason to scorn Francis, assuming that he, like most in the crusader camp, was an enemy and not a bearer of peace. We today celebrate what no one at that moment could have foreseen: that a Spirit-filled man with nothing of his own crossed the battle lines unarmed to request a meeting with the Sultan, was received with grace by that Sultan, enjoyed an extended period of hospitality with the Muslim leader, and emerged from the visit to reflect anew on the mission of the Friars Minor. Francis returned safely to his homeland profoundly moved by the encounter and crafted a new and creative vision for his brothers about how they could go among the Muslims, about the things Friars could do and say "that would please God" (quae placuerint Domino, RnB 16.8). The anniversary of Francis's encounter with al-Malik al-Kāmil at Damietta in 1219 beckons us to ask again what deeds and words, amid the pluralism and complexity of the world today, would be pleasing to God.

Discerning the signs of the times (Mt 16:3), the Church

increasingly highlights interreligious dialogue as an essential element of the mission of the Church today. The Second Vatican Council exhorted the Christian faithful to engage in "dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life" (Nostra Aetate, 2). In particular, the Council taught that the Church regards the Muslims "with esteem," and urged Christians to work with their Muslim sisters and brothers to promote social justice and moral welfare, peace and freedom, for the benefit of all (Nostra Aetate, 3). St. John Paul II carried this mission of dialogue forward in his ministry as Bishop of Rome, most especially when he called religious leaders of the world to our spiritual home, Assisi, to witness there the transcendent quality of peace. For those who gathered to pray for peace, the "permanent lesson of Assisi" consisted in Francis's "meekness, humility, deep sense of God, and commitment to serve all" (John Paul II, Speech at Assisi, 27 October 1986). Popes Benedict XVI and Francis likewise invited religious leaders to make pilgrimage to Assisi and pray there for peace, and Pope Francis invoked the intercession of the Poverello during his own trip to Egypt, praying that Christians and Muslims truly call one another brothers and sisters, living in renewed fraternity under the sun of the one merciful God (Francis, Speech at the International Peace Conference, 28 April 2017). It is thus the universal Church calling the Franciscan family to animate this interreligious fraternity in the peaceful spirit of our Seraphic Father. The Church calls us to raise up this seminal moment in our history, the journey of St. Francis to Egypt, to open ourselves anew to the transformation the Saint of Assisi experienced, and to walk together with Muslims and people of all faiths as fellow travelers, as builders of civility, and most fundamentally, as sisters and brothers, children of Abraham, our father in faith.

I encourage the Franciscan family to celebrate this anniversary as a moment when the light of the Gospel can open one's heart to see the imago Dei in a person one regards with fear and distrust, or even worse, in a person one has been urged to hate. To that end, a number of resources have been prepared to assist all those inspired by this encounter to commemorate it in a fitting way. Accompanying this letter are intercessions that I encourage Friars to use during the Liturgy of the Hours throughout the anniversary year, intercessions that could be used in a variety of ministerial settings when appropriate. In April, the General Curia will make available an online resource book, prepared by the Special Commission for Dialogue with Islam, that provides historical background, Franciscan and Muslim perspectives on the encounter and other materials to commemorate Damietta. Our fraternity in Istanbul, a community of Friars primarily dedicated to ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, will host a gathering in October of Friars working in Muslim-majority countries. The Pontifical University Antonianum has likewise organized several public events in different countries over the course of the anniversary year. Whether academic or pastoral, I encourage you to actively participate in these and other events, and further, to consider creatively how your local community might commemorate Damietta in light of your local reality.

This anniversary offers a unique opportunity for collaboration between different branches of the Franciscan family. A number of Friars, Sisters and scholars of the Franciscan movement, and promoters of Muslim-Christian dialogue have prepared publications for release during this anniversary; I invite you all to take time this year to study and prayerfully reflect on how, in your local situation, the courage and openness to the Spirit seen in the Nile Delta so long ago might live afresh in you. The General Curia is eager to share the news of such efforts to build bridges

of interreligious understanding, so please inform us of the events and initiatives to commemorate Damietta in your community and in the various Entities of the Friars Minor.

We live in a time when people of various faiths traffic on the demonization of Muslims and incite others to fear them. Aside from study and prayer about the themes of encounter and dialogue, I encourage followers of Francis who lack much personal exposure to Islam to recall the experience of our founder by taking a simple and concrete step: meet a Muslim. Get to know him or her, beyond the pleasantries of a cup of tea and social nicety. Try to learn and appreciate what experience of God animates him or her and allow your Muslim friend to see the love God has poured into your heart through Christ. Despite the Second Vatican Council's insistence that Muslims, with us, "adore the one and merciful God" (Lumen Gentium 16), many voices somehow sadly insist that dialogue between Christians and Muslims is impossible. Many contemporaries of St. Francis and the Sultan agreed, seeing conflict and confrontation as the only response to the challenge of the other.

The examples of Francis and the Sultan witness a different option. One can no longer insist that dialogue with Muslims is impossible. We have seen it, and we continue to see it in the lives of many Franciscans and their Muslim brothers and sisters who, with sincere and loving hearts, share the gifts that God has given them through their respective faiths. Fidelity to Francis's vision involves sharing with humility. Indeed, the distinctively Christian gift we have to share with our Muslim sisters and brothers is not merely a humble Christian, but the experience of a humble God. Unique in his age, Francis praised God by saying, "You are humility" (PrsG 4), and spoke about the "sublime humility," the "humble sublimity" of God (LtOrd 27). The Christian heart's quest for God finds rest in the humility of the crib and the cross,

signs of a God who stoops down in service and humbles himself for love of us. Francis invites us to reflect that divine humility to those we meet by taking the first step in service and in love. Moreover, fidelity to Francis' vision calls us to receive the beliefs and believers of other faith traditions with a sense of reverence (OFM General Constitutions, art. 93.2; 95.2), with hearts and minds open to the presence of God in such an encounter.

I recognize that there are some in the Franciscan family, who live as minorities in the lands of their birth or adoption, find themselves caught up in political and sectarian strife, and may feel the threat of violence, as do many today in the land Francis once visited. In some countries, Christians and Muslims share the pains of social injustice and political instability. I invite you to reflect on another of the names Francis used in his Praises of God: "You are patience" (PrsG 4), or as Muslims invoke God: Yā Sabūr – "O Patient One!" Francis himself learned the virtue of patience through his ministry among lepers, through the challenges of his travels, and through trends he saw in the Order at the end of his life, when his own brothers abandoned some of the ideals he cherished. Francis meditated at length on the patient love Christ showed in his passion, coming eventually to identify patience as an attribute of a merciful God. "You are patience." God follows a schedule unknown to us, and God stirs the hearts of women and men in ways unknown to us. Francis struggled to understand God's plan for those who failed to follow Christ as Lord, and Francis found refuge in the prayer of praise that God is patience. May God grant the grace of patience to each of us as we learn to live together.

To our Muslim sisters and brothers, let me say how warmly we Franciscans remember the hospitality shown to our Holy Father Francis when his life was at risk. The interest many Muslims have shown in commemorating this anniversary testifies to the desire

for peace expressed anytime a Muslim greets a fellow believer. I pray that this year will deepen the brotherhood we share under the God who created all things in the heavens and on the earth and that this bond continues to strengthen long after 2019. God could have made us all the same, but God did not (Al-Shūrā 42.8). With you, your Franciscan sisters and brothers are eager to show the world that Christians and Muslims can and do live alongside each other in peace and harmony.

In conclusion, let us never forget that the example of St. Francis was a life of ongoing conversion. As a youth, he was repulsed by lepers, but an act of mercy changed his heart and "what had seemed bitter to me was turned into sweetness" (Testament, 3). That moment, the beginning of Francis's life of penance, is intimately linked to Francis's experience at Damietta in 1219. Francis's heart had been opened by lepers before, and when he found himself in the presence of a Muslim he had been taught to hate, it was opened once more. The biblical call to conversion (Heb., shuv; Aram. tuv) is echoed in the Qur'an's repeated command to turn to God (tūb), to avert evil with goodness and acts of charity to society's most vulnerable. Believers today—regardless of the name they use for God and the manner in which they worship—are called to the same courage and openness of heart. Amid the groanings of the world for interreligious understanding, may our humble, patient, and merciful God show all of us the deeds and words that are most pleasing to God.

Rome, 7th January 2019
Peace and all good,
Br. Michael A. Perry, OFM
Minister General and Servant

Prot. 108704

Introduction

By all standards, it was an extraordinary event: in the year 1219, in the midst of the Fifth Crusade, St. Francis of Assisi crossed enemy lines to gain an audience with the Sultan of Egypt, al-Malik al-Kamil. While the substance of their conversation is unknown, it is clear that Francis engaged the Sultan peacefully and respectfully, in stark contrast to the prevailing Christian practice of defaming Islam and its Prophet, thereby earning the Sultan's admiration. Indeed, it would appear that in this encounter both individuals gained a greater appreciation for and understanding of each other's faith and values. Although their encounter did not end the crusade or subsequent conflicts between Western Christendom and Islamic powers, it nevertheless now serves as an important paradigm for dialogue between Christians and Muslims, and, by extension, for dialogue between people of all faith traditions.

In recognition of the continuing relevance of this encounter, I am happy to present to you this volume as the Franciscan community worldwide commemorates the 800th anniversary of St. Francis' meeting with Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil (1219-2019). It provides articles that explicate the historical encounter through the lives and faiths of Francis and the Sultan, explore their meeting through the eyes of an artist and film director, and provide a Muslim perspective on interreligious dialogue. Catholic and Franciscan foundations for interreligious dialogue are represented by excerpts from papal encyclicals, the documents of the Second Vatican Council, and the Constitutions of the Order of Friars Minor. A sample interreligious prayer service can be adapted for various uses in your communities. Suggestions for additional reading are also included.

In the time of Francis and al-Malik al-Kamil, major conflicts couched in religious terms occurred between Western Christendom and the Islamic powers in and around the Mediterranean Basin. In today's world, however, sectarian and internecine conflicts are not confined to those involving Christians and Muslims, nor are they limited by geography, but sadly occur throughout the world and include Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, and others. Thus, the story of St. Francis and the Sultan is perhaps more significant now than it was eight hundred years ago. Today, Christianity and Islam are the two largest religions in the world, together accounting for more than half of the world's population. The example set by St. Francis and the Sultan is a poignant and timely reminder that Christians and Muslims, in spite of the conflicts of the past and the contemporary challenges faced by both communities, are particularly called to enter into genuine dialogue as faithful adherents of our respective religions to listen to one another and learn from one another that together we may foster true peace and justice for all people regardless of religion, and ensure that the beauty and bounty of God's creation may be enjoyed by all.

It is my hope that this book will be part of your observance of this important commemoration, that you will find it informative and helpful, and that you will share it with your partners in dialogue.

With peace,
Michael D. Calabria, OFM
Special Commission for Dialogue with Islam

Healing the Violence of the Contemporary World: A Franciscan Paradigm for Dialogue with Islam

Michael F. Cusato, O.F.M.

Francis's Early Attempts to Go Among the Muslims

Some General Background

When we turn to examine the vision of Francis with respect to the Islamic world, it is important to situate him within the context, albeit very generally, of the broader relationship between the Church and Islam in the High Middle Ages. With a few notable exceptions, like the efforts of Peter the Venerable to engage in dialogue with Muslim texts and scholars, that relationship was frequently tense and often very bloody.[1] This ongoing

1. For an orientation to the relationship between East and West, between Christianity and Islam, in the Middle Ages, one can consult, for example, in English, the following titles: R. Stephen Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols: The Ayyubids of Damascus, 1193-1260* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1977); Benjamin Kedar, *Crusade and Mission: European Approaches toward the Muslims* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); John V. Tolan (ed.), *Medieval Christian Perceptions of Islam: A Book of Essays* (New York: Garland, 1996); idem, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Tomaz Mastnak, *Crusading Peace: Christendom, the Muslim World and Western Political Order* (Berkeley, CA: University of Califormia Press, 2002); Richard Fletcher, *The Cross and the Crescent: Christianity and Islam from Muhammad to the Reformation* (London: Viking, 2003). On medieval Islam, cf. J.J. Saunders, *A History of Medieval Islam* (London-New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965); Dominique Sourdel, *Medieval Islam*, trans. J. Montgomery Watt (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983); Michael

strife between the two cultures is symbolized or encapsulated in two historical events that occurred at two different times in two different geographical locales. Taken together, they provide a backdrop to the world into which Francis of Assisi was born.

The first event is the so-called Reconquista: the attempt of Christianity to roll back militarily, through armed force, Muslim control of the Spanish mainland: a presence which had been an established fact since the incursions from North Africa in the early eighth century. Ideologically, as the name itself indicates, it was the Christian effort to "retake" (take back), through conquest, of lands which it claimed belonged under Christian (and not Muslim) rule. More specifically, the Reconquista consisted of a series of see-saw battles that took place from the mid-11th into the early 13th centuries (a period spanning over 150 years). During this time, Christian armies inexorably pushed the line of control farther and farther south down the peninsula so that, by around the year 1200, Christian Spain consisted of most lands down to the city of Seville.[2]

The second situation is the better known (and perhaps more infamous) series of military campaigns launched by the papacy against Muslim territories in the Holy Land: the land that was considered holy to the three religions of Judaism, Christianity

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Brett, "'Abbasids, Fatimids and Seljuqs," *The New Cambridge Medieval History, IV (c. 1024-c.1198), Part II*, eds. D. Luscombe and J. Riley-Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 675-720; Stephen Humphreys, "Zengids, Ayyubids and Seljuqs," ibid, 721-52; and Francesco Gabrielli, *Arab Historians of the Crusades,* trans. E.J. Costello (New York: Dorset Press, 1989 [1957]).

2. See most recently: J. O'Callaghan, *Reconquest and Crusade in Medieval Spain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

and Islam. These are, of course, the crusades.[3] The First Crusade was initially called by Urban II in 1095 as an effort to come to the aid of the embattled Byzantine Christian Empire against the Seljuk Turks—recently converted to Islam—who were advancing westward through Asia Minor and were perceived as a threat to the political integrity of that Empire. Shortly thereafter, however—and before the actual sending of the crusaders to the East—Urban extended the mission of these crusaders. Henceforth, the aim would be to push on beyond Asia Minor and advance all the way down the coast in order to regain control of the Holy Places in Jerusalem and to place them once again under Christian control, which had been lost back in 638. The crusaders wrested Jerusalem from Muslim forces in 1099 in an extraordinarily bloody siege and, in the process, established along the coast four Christian principalities of Edessa, Antioch, Tripoli and the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. In 1144, a Second Crusade was launched in response to the loss of the Kingdom of Edessa to Muslim armies; this is the crusade preached by Bernard of Clairvaux in France with great fervor but which failed to recover

3. The literature on the crusades is extraordinarily vast but also occasionally uneven, depending on one's working knowledge of medieval Islam or even the ideological orientation of the author. The classic studies are: Stephen Runcimann, *A History of the Crusades*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951-54); Kenneth Setton (Gen. Ed.), *A History of the Crusades*, 6 vols. (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1959-1969); Hans Eberhard Mayer, *The Crusades*, trans. J. Gillingham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972); Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Crusades: A Short History* (London: The Athlone Press, 1987); and most recently, Christopher Tyerman, *God's War: A History of the Crusades* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2006).

the lost principality. Then, with the dramatic capture of the city of Jerusalem and surrounding areas in 1187 by the great Muslim warrior, Saladin, the papacy called the Third Crusade—the so-called crusade of the three kings (Frederick I Barbarossa, Phillip II Augustus of France and Richard I Lion-heart) in 1189. With Frederick drowning in Asia Minor and the two other sovereigns squabbling with each other from Sicily to the Levant, this crusade netted virtually nothing except a Christian toehold on the coast in the city of Acre. It was to redress this disaster that Innocent III—the pope contemporaneous with Francis—launched the Fourth Crusade in 1204 from Venice. This venture ended in great scandal as the crusaders took two detours along the way: the first, to plunder the coast of Yugoslavia (in order to recoup losses incurred from a poor turnout of crusaders and the consequent loss of revenue by the Venetian shipbuilders) and then on to conquer the city of Constantinople, exiling its Byzantine rulers and establishing the Latin Empire of Constantinople (an occupation that would last until 1261). They never bothered to go further East.

To recap: the Reconquista in Spain and the crusades launched against Muslims in the Middle East, both bound by a religious ideology hostile to Islam and intent upon displacing or even destroying it as the enemy of Christ and his Church.

It is not without interest that, at the same time as the Franciscan movement was beginning to take shape and to grow, Innocent III had launched a massive military campaign against the Moors in Spain in order to capitalize on recent gains and to take advantage of Muslim internal divisions. For, in July 1212, Christian armies won an overwhelming victory in southern Spain at the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa. Word of this monumental

battle quickly spread to Europe, galvanizing Christian hopes for an eventual and complete victory against Islam—a victory that was usually thought of almost exclusively in military terms.

The desire of Francis and his fellow friars to go among the Muslims occurs against this general but increasingly antagonistic historical backdrop.

The Attempts of 1212 and 1213

Between 1212 and 1213, Francis attempted twice to "go among the Muslims" (to use the wording of the Early Rule). It is Celano in the *Vita prima* who first tells us about these voyages. Let's follow the account of 1 Cel 55:

> In the sixth year of his conversion, burning intensely with the desire for holy martyrdom, he [Francis] wanted to take ship for the regions of Syria to preach the Christian faith and penance to the Saracens and other infidels. After he had gone on board a certain ship to go there, contrary winds arose and he found himself with the rest of his fellow travelers in the region of Slavonia [Dalmatia]. But when he saw that he was deprived of attaining his great desire, after a short period of time, he begged some sailors who were going to Ancona [in Italy] to take him with them because it would hardly be possible for any other ship to sail for Syria that year. But they obstinately refused since he could not pay them … [so Francis] stowed away on the boat with his companion.[4]

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4. 1 Cel 55 (*FAED* 1: 229). All references to Franciscan sources, unless otherwise noted, are from *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, The Saint, The Founder, The Prophet,* eds. R. Armstrong, J.A. Hellmann, W. Short, 3 vols. (New York: New City Press, 1999-2001); future references will be

The account goes on to relate some miraculous happenings—consistent with the hagiographer's purposes—and then their eventual safe return to Italy.

The next year, however, in 1213, he started out on another journey—this time to Spain—with his eyes apparently set toward Morocco in order "to preach the Gospel of Christ to the Miramamolin and his people." But while still in Spain, a serious illness forced him to stop and then abandon this journey as well.[5]

Hence, two trips: one to Syria in the East and another to Morocco in the West. In both, Francis had every intention of connecting in some way with the Muslim world. But why? Up until this time, there hadn't been any direct indication in the initial layers of the Early Rule that Muslims played any significant role in the minorite charism. Celano (and Bonaventure after him) will frame Francis's motivation in terms of his desire for martyrdom.[66] I am going to contest that somewhat facile attribution: this is the hagiographer's attempt to align the saint with saintly behavior. Since Francis desired to follow Christ fully, he would have, therefore, desired to follow him even to the cross: the cross of martyrdom. But that this was the *historical* motivation of Francis, I seriously doubt. But since this *is* the testimony of all the hagiographical sources, on what evidence do I contest the traditional reading?

(*FAED*) followed by volume and page.

5. 1 Cel 56 (*FAED* 1: 230).

6. 1 Cel 55: "In the sixth year of his conversion, burning with desire for holy martyrdom …"; 2 Cel 30 (*FAED* 2: 265): "When the Christian army was besieging Damietta, the holy man of God was there with his companions, since they had crossed the sea in their fervor for martyrdom."

First, it is important to point out that Francis was not going among the Muslims within the context of any active crusade. There was no crusade or even any active preparations underway in 1212 and 1213. Hence, his motivation is not connected with the crusading movement of the Church. Indeed, one might even argue that his going might have been in direct reaction to the horrible bloodshed that had just occurred at Las Navas de Tolosa,[7] the proximity of that event with his attempts to engage with the Saracen world not being all together serendipitous.

More importantly, Celano *himself* actually gives us a very important clue to Francis's motivation. Indeed, he tells us quite plainly why he was going: "[he] went to Syria to preach the Christian faith and *penance*."[8] This may seem somewhat innocuous to us because we tend to assume that we know what these words mean. What does it mean to "preach penance"? What is the meaning of "penance" in the Franciscan lexicon? For Francis, penance (and the doing of penance) is not first and foremost equivalent to going to confession (the *sacrament* of penance); nor is it that which one does *after* confession in satisfaction for sin (as in the doing of *a* penance). And nor does it simply mean repentance: a turning away from sin. If it were any of these classic Christian meanings, Celano's statement would not make a lot of sense. Ask yourself: why would Francis go among the Muslims to "preach penance" if this were the meaning of that phrase?

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7. J. O'Callaghan, *Reconquest*, 66-74.

8. I Cel 55. I am not keen on the FAED translation of the Latin word *penitentia* as "repentance." It would be better to stay closer to the more literal translation of "penance," since it is a critical and richly-layered word in the Franciscan lexicon.

So what does it mean to do penance and to preach penance to others in the Franciscan world? The meaning goes back to the conversion of Francis: to his encounter with the lepers outside Assisi.[9] As he states in his Testament: "This is how God led me, brother Francis, to begin to do penance" (*facere penitentiam*, in the Latin). What happened to Francis in that seminal experience of his life? We are used to taking the hagiographer at his word and believing that in this encounter Francis saw Christ in the leper. He did. But we have to be careful not to turn the leper into an empty cipher, a mere vehicle for Francis's more important encounter with Christ. No, in this encounter Francis, perhaps for the first time in his life, came to see the leper no longer as a repulsive object but as a genuine human being, indeed a suffering human being: someone he had been taught by Assisi to ignore and despise as being of no account and as having no worth. Now suddenly, Francis had his eyes opened to the existence of a whole world of human beings living outside the city—and the compassion—of Assisi. But now, through the mysterious workings of grace, Francis began to realize that even the decaying flesh of a leper could yet serve as the tabernacle of his presence. In the Christian tradition, only grace has the power to so radically alter the way we see the world. As a result, from this point forward, Francis came to see that all men and women, even the seemingly most insignificant and repulsive among them, were creatures created by the same creator God; that all without exception have been offered the same grace of salvation; that all without exception have been endowed with the same inestimable dignity and

9. Cf. M. Cusato, "Hermitage or Marketplace?" *True Followers of Justice: Identity, Insertion and Itinerancy among the Early Franciscans.* Spirit and Life 10 (2000), 10-12.

worth; that all men and women without exception are brothers and sisters (*fratres et sorores*, in Latin) one to another, born of the same and gracious gift of God.

This is Francis's insight into the universal fraternity of all creatures. Thus: before there were butterflies, buttercups and beautiful fields, there were the bruised bodies of the lepers. It is often much easier to see God in nature than in human nature. But now: everything that threatens to rupture the bonds of this sacred human fraternity, placing one human being over another or against another, is what Francis means by sin: through greed and violence, through oppression and aggression, through indifference and neglect. This is what Francis meant when he described his life *before* this encounter with the lepers as being *in peccatis*: in sin. *This* is sin, for Francis: the degradation and destruction of the human person, not some privatized, overly moralistic infraction. And to understand what Francis means by sin is to understand what he means by doing penance for that sin. To do penance, for Francis, is to choose to distance oneself from every action, behavior and attitude that would divide and destroy the bonds of the human community and violate the sacred character of human life. And to understand what he meant by penance is to understand the nature of his—and his brothers'—penitential preaching.[10]

This was a message that Francis could take among the Muslims. This was the penance he wanted to preach and to live in their midst.

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10. Cf. M. Cusato, "To Do Penance / *Facere poenitentiam*," *The Cord* 57 (2007): 3-24.

Francis in the East

The Message to the General Chapter of 1219

After two unsuccessful attempts to connect with the Muslim world, Francis will succeed on his third try in 1219. In the intervening years, however, a Fifth Crusade had been announced by Innocent III at the Fourth Lateran Council in November 1215.[11] However, before we follow Francis to the East, we have some evidence that, before his departure, Francis may have left his brothers a kind of farewell message at the General Chapter of 1219 that is preserved, it would seem, in the first four verses of what is now Chapter 22 of the *Regula non bullata*.[12]

Expressing his desire to try once again to get to the Holy Land, Francis was apparently forced to justify his action, to explain his reasons, not only to Cardinal Hugolino (who had already

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11. Cf. M. Cusato, "The Tau: The Meaning of the Cross for Francis of Assisi," *The Cord* 57 (2007): 287-301; and also idem, "From Damietta to La Verna," 83-112.

12. It should be noted here that David Flood, a superb historian of early Franciscan history, believes that the entire chapter 22 of the RNB reflects a farewell speech given to the friars by Francis in which, knowing he might die, he urges them to hold fast to the fundamentals of minorite life. He calls this text the "Testament of 1219" (cf. D. Flood, *The Birth of a Movement* [Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1975], 45-46 and 95). My own approach, however, is to see the chapter as two messages to the friars delivered at two different times for two rather different purposes. I believe that only the first four verses go back to this farewell message in 1219 whereas the rest of the chapter (vv. 5-51) reflects another farewell sermon – his resignation sermon – given to the friars upon his return from the Holy Land at the Emergency Chapter of September 1220. The focus there would indeed have been upon the foundational themes of Franciscan life.

prevented him from going to France in 1217)[13] but also to the friars themselves. And so he does. He is not so much going—as the hagiographers would have it—in search of martyrdom. Francis was surely aware that it was possible he might not return; but he was willing to embrace that death if it might be the cost he would have to pay for fulfilling his mission. No, the message he shared with the friars reveals another, deeper motivation.

What was that message?

> Let all the brothers be attentive to what the Lord says: *"Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you"* (Mt 5, 44). For even the Lord Jesus Christ, whose footsteps we must follow (cf. 1Pt 2:21), called his betrayer "friend" and freely gave himself up to those who crucified him. Therefore, all those are our friends who unjustly inflict on us trials, anxieties, shame and injuries, suffering and torture, martyrdom and death. We should love them greatly, for out of what they inflict on us we have eternal life.[14]

It is important to clearly identify each element of the message:

- In verse 1, we read the counsel: "love your enemies" (drawn from Mt 5,44);
- In verse 2a, he picks up the same theme by stating: "the Lord called his betrayer" in the Garden of Gethsemane (Judas = the enemy) "friend";
- In verse 2b, he says of Jesus: "he gave himself up to those who would torture and crucify him";
- In verse 3, he claims: "those are our friends who unjustly harm, torture or even kill us";

13. Cf. AC 108 (*FAED* 2:216).
14. RNB 22, vv. 1-4 (*FAED* 1:79).

- And finally, in verse 4, he urges: "love them greatly" for through them you will gain eternal life.

What is the meaning of this message which, as it stands in RNB 22, is no longer in its original context of the General Chapter of 1219? The message is this: the one whom you (and almost everyone else, including the Church), think is your enemy (*inimicus*) is, in fact, your friend (*amicus*). Now, such a breath-taking assertion has nothing to do with warm feelings and affections (our usual interpretation of the word "friend"). This is not about friendship; it is not even about having a positive estimation of another. Quite the contrary: the word *amicus* is drawn from the account of the betrayal of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mt 26,50) in which Judas approaches Jesus in order to hand him over to his tormenters:

> And he came up to Jesus at once and said to him: "Hail, Master!" And he kissed him. And Jesus said to him: "Friend (*amicus*), why are you here?" Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him (Mt 26, 49-50).

We would do well to repeat the message: the one we think is our enemy is actually our friend. To understand the true import of Francis's words and to avoid the pitfall of equating the meaning of "friend" with "friend*ship*," it is better to associate the Latin word *amicus* (friend) with a word that is a little more familiar to us and more central in the Franciscan lexicon: *frater.* Seen in this light, the one we have been taught to see as our enemy—taught by society, taught by the Church—is actually our *fratres et sorores*, our brothers and sisters!

In this powerful, if brief, message, Francis is telling the brothers that he is going to the Holy Land in order to show by

the actions of his own life that the one whom the Church calls the infidel and the enemy *par excellence* is, in fact, a brother: part of the human family, a member of the human fraternity. Francis is going, in other words, to preach by his words but especially by his own deeds the message of penance: namely, that no one, not even the one most despised by the Church and considered to be the enemy of Christ, not even those who may have perpetrated heinous deeds against another, surrenders their creaturehood or exists outside of the human fraternity. But such creaturehood also entails responsibility: the responsibility of each member of that sacred fraternity—Christian and Muslim—to live in a manner that preserves and honors the bonds that indissolubly bind us all together. To do this is to do penance. Francis is going to the East to show this—and to live this—even if it might cost him his own life. And if it does—if, in the process of being utterly faithful to the life he has promised since his encounter with the lepers, treating every human person as a sacred creature of the human fraternity—then, having been faithful to his vow, he and all who follow him in this will gain eternal life. It is what every religious is promised on the day of his or her profession.

This is a profound message, utterly consistent with what Francis learned in the seminal experience of his conversion. Thus: Francis did not go to the Holy Land to provoke his own death.[15] Rather, he went in order to bring the message of penance

15. It is also quite different from the rationale attributed to him by the hagiographers: the thirst for martyrdom. It is problematic to take the hagiographers' language too literally and to attribute to Francis a burning desire for martyrdom. To do so, however, is to fall into the same trap that many in the West (and in the East) stumble into, believing that the rationale of Muslim suicide bombers, for example, is identical with a pursuit

and to live out, to its ultimate conclusion, his radical vision of the universal fraternity of all creatures.

Francis in Syria and Egypt

Having delivered this message to the friars, Francis then set out for the East. His intention was to bring this call of penance to two very different audiences: first, to the Christian crusaders gathering outside the Muslim stronghold at Damietta in Egypt, preparing a new and bloody assault upon the seat of Sunni power there; and second, to the Muslims in Damietta itself, including, if possible, the court of their leader, the sultan al-Kamil. [16]

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of martyrdom so as to reap the supposed rewards of paradise. Such a facile explanation conveniently turns such people merely into crazed fanatics, taking the shortcut (and bloody) route to heaven. Such simplistic assessments, however, rob us of the possibility of facing and coming to terms with the specific experiences of despair and oppression which are so often the fuel for such desperate and heinous acts. Those who kill – be they crusaders from the West or *shahadi* from the East – violate the sacral character of human existence and offend against the God who created all human life.

16. The journey of Francis to the East in 1219 – his experience in the camp of the crusaders, presence at the Christian defeat at Damietta and encounter with the sultan al-Kamil – has been receiving more attention from historians in recent years. The most notable works on this subject that have added new perspectives to our understanding are: Jan Hoeberichts, *Francis and Islam* (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1997); Kathleen A. Warren, *Daring to Cross the Threshold: Francis of Assisi Encounters Sultan Malek al-Kamil* (Rochester, MN: Sisters of St. Francis, 2003); Pauli Annala, "Frate Francesco e la quinta crociata," *Frate Francesco*, ns 69 (2003): 409-25 (Engl. trans. in: *Medieval History Writing and Crusading Ideology*, eds. R.M.S. Lehtonen and K.V. Jensen.

Although we do have a series of primary texts that tell us some things about Francis's time in the Holy Land, we still do not have a great deal of information about the specifics of his activities. This is primarily due to the fact that most of the texts that we do have are hagiographical in nature. For example, the texts from the hagiographical corpus are the following:

- 1 Cel 57
- 2 Cel 30
- LMaj IX, 7-8
- LMaj XI, 3

In addition, the *Chronicle of Jordan of Giano*, cc. 10-14,[17] gives us a few more historical specifics but these details are not particularly relevant to the two events we really want to know about here: the presence of Francis at the siege of Damietta and his sojourn in the tent of Malik al-Kamil. Fortunately, we do have four other non-Franciscan testimonies which shed some important light on these events: three literary texts and one non-literary source:

Studia Fennica Historica 9 [Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2005], 107-19); Raimondo Michetti, "François d'Assise et la paix révélée. Réflexions sur le mythe du pacifisme franciscain et sur la prédication de paix de François d'Assise dans la société communale du XIIIe siècle," *Prêcher la paix et discipliner la société*, ed. R.M. Dessì. Collection d'Études Médiévales de Nice 5 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 279-312; and James Powell, "St. Francis' Way of Peace," *Medieval Encounters* 13 (2007): 271-80.

17. The *Chronicle of Jordan* is found in the volume, *XIIIth Century Chronicles*, trans. P. Hermann (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1961), 20-72.

- Jacques de Vitry, *Letter VI* (1220);[18]
- Jacques de Vitry, *Historia occidentalis* (1221);[19]
- *Chronicle of Ernoul* (the continuation of the *Chronicle of William of Tyre*);[20]
- Inscription on the tomb of Fakhir ad-din al-Farisi, spiritual counselor to al-Kamil.[21]

Space does not permit any kind of exhaustive examination of these sources. Indeed, in many respects, the hagiographical testimonies are, for our purposes, somewhat negligible and will, for that reason, with the exception of one text, be passed over in silence. For, starting with 1 Celano and continuing into Bonaventure, the primary emphases of these texts will be Francis's purported desire for martyrdom and his near success in converting the sultan to Christianity. But our interests lie elsewhere. Our interest is in the history.

We can filter out of the record the following historical details. Francis and his companions left Italy for the East sometime after the General Chapter of 1219 probably around the end of June. They would have arrived by mid-August most probably

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18. *FAED* 1, 580-81 (Latin text found in: R.B.C. Huygens (ed), *Lettres de Jacques de Vitry (1160/1170-1240), évêque de Saint-Jean-d'Acre. Édition critique* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960), 131-33.
19. *FAED* 1, 580-81 (Latin text found in: R.B.C. Huygens (ed), *Lettres de Jacques de Vitry (1160/1170-1240), évêque de Saint-Jean-d'Acre. Édition critique* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960), 131-33.
20. *Chronique d'Ernoul et de Bernard le Trésorier* (Famagouste, Cyprus: Les Éditions l'Oiseau, 1974 [1871]).
21. Cf. A. Natali, "Gli Arabi e San Francesco alle crociate," *L'Italia francescana* 33 (1958): 154-62.

at Acre—the Christian stronghold in Palestine and seat of its Archbishop, Jacques de Vitry—traveling, in all probability, in the company of the crusader reinforcements from Italy. We know that Francis was accompanied by Peter Catania, Illuminato, Leonardo, Barbaro and several other friars,[22] joining up, most likely in Acre, with Brother Elias (the minister provincial of Syria sent overseas after the General Chapter 1217) and his new recruit to the Franciscan order, Caesar of Speyer (quite possibly an anti-crusade preacher).[23] From Acre, the friars would have traveled with the crusaders down to Damietta in Egypt. Beyond this, our details become quite sketchy for we do not know for certain whether Francis and Illuminato journeyed alone to the Christian encampment outside of Damietta (these are the only ones we know of from the historical record who did) or whether there was a larger contingent of friars that made the passage with them.[24] Whatever might be the case, we will focus on the testimony about Francis and Illuminato at Damietta.

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22. Cf. John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 49.

23. On the figure of Caesar of Speyer, see: M. Cusato, "An Unexplored Influence on the *Epistola ad fideles* of Francis of Assisi: The *Epistola universis Christi fidelibus* of Joachim of Fiore," *Franciscan Studies* 61 (2003): 253-78, esp. 259-62; and, more expansively, Adriano Gattucci, "Cesario da Spira," *I compagni di Francesco e la prima generazione minoritica*. Atti del XIX Convegno internazionale, Assisi, 17-19 ottobre 1991. Atti dei Convegni della Società internazionale di studi francescani e del Centro interuniversitario di studi francescani. Nuova serie 2 (Spoleto: Centro Italiano di studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 1992), 119-65.

24. 2 Cel 30 says that Francis was flanked by "companions."

The Christian Siege of the Muslim Fortress at Damietta on 29 August 1219

However, a few historical details about the Christian crusaders in Egypt are in order.[25] Prior to Francis's arrival, in the years between the launching of the crusade in late 1215 and the siege of 29 August 1219, a series of events gives us a context for what is to follow.[26] On 27 May 1218, the combined Christian crusader forces left Acre for Damietta, the strategic fortress on the Lower Nile guarding the access to Cairo, the seat of power for the Sunni Ayyubids in Egypt. On 24 August of that same year, they were able to capture the famous Chain Tower in the middle of the Nile which had blocked Frankish passage down the Nile and access to Damietta itself. The Ayyubid sultan, al-'Adil, learning of this critical breach in the defenses at Damietta which had been entrusted to his son, al-Kamil Muhammad, gathered up his military forces outside of Damascus and set out for Egypt. He died en route a week later. The eldest of his three sons, al-Kamil, was thus proclaimed sultan. However, rebellion was in the wind. When word of a possible conspiracy reached him, involving his father's younger brother, al-Fa'iz Ibrahim and others in his inner circle,

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25. The definitive scholarly work on the Fifth Crusade is: James Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade, 1213-1221* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986).

26. The following historical details have been culled from the reconstruction of events done by R. Stephen Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols*, 155-70; but especially from, René Grousset, *Histoire des croisades et du royaume franc de Jérusalem*, vol. 3 (Paris: Plon, 1936) which is strongly based upon testimonies found in the chronicles contemporary to the period. See also: K. Setton (Gen. Ed.), *A History of the Crusades,* II: 397-428.

al-Kamil fled south from his camp at al-'Adiliya just south of the fortress of Damietta with his faithful counselors and set up camp at Fariskur. This, however, left Damietta in a state of panic and the crusaders, sensing their moment, on 5 February 1219 crossed over the Nile and advanced to the foot of the impregnable triple-walled fortress. The Christian army promptly pressed its advantage, establishing a siege of the city, trying to starve the Muslims into submission.

Only the arrival from Syria of reinforcements led by al-Kamil's younger brother, al-Mu'azzam, stabilized the situation for the Muslims. However, their combined forces could not break the siege. To gain time to consolidate his own power and spare Damietta, al-Kamil attempted to sue for peace. He offered generous terms to the crusaders: he would agree to leave the Kingdom of Jerusalem (ceding most lands west of the Jordan to the crusaders) in exchange for a Christian exodus from Egypt. In other words, he would have restored to them what they had lost to Saladin in 1187. Although the secular leader of the Fifth Crusade, John of Brienne, wished to accept these terms, the spiritual leader of the crusade, the papal legate Cardinal Pelagius and the military orders wanted outright military victory. Al-Kamil then proffered a second, even more generous, set of conditions for a truce; but it was similarly spurned by the crusaders, desiring nothing short of the annihilation of the Muslim forces and the death of the enemies of Christ.[27]

It is at this point that the reinforcements from Italy—and Francis and his companion—arrived at Damietta. The decision was quickly taken by Pelagius and his supporters in the Christian camp to launch a sneak attack on the Muslim encampment at

27. Setton, II: 397-418; Mayer, 210-18.

Fariskur. At this point, we turn to the text of 2 Celano 30 since it gives us an interesting perspective on what happened next. Indeed, it is our most revealing text:

2 Celano 30

How He Foretold the Massacre of Christians at Damietta

When the Christian army was besieging Damietta, *the holy man of God* was there with his companions, since they had crossed the sea in their fervor for martyrdom. When the holy man heard that our forces *were preparing* for war, *on the day of battle* he grieved deeply. He said to his companion: "If the battle happens on this day, *the Lord has shown* me that *it will not go well* for the Christians. But *if I say* this, they will take me for a fool, and *if I keep silent* my conscience won't leave me alone. What do you think I should do? His companion *replied*: "Father, don't give *the least* thought *to how people judge you*. This wouldn't be the first time people took you for a fool. Unburden your conscience, and *fear God rather than human beings*."

The saint leapt to his feet, and rushed to the Christians crying out warnings to save them, forbidding war and threatening disaster. But they took the truth *as a joke*. They *hardened* their *hearts* and refused to turn back. They charged, they attacked, they fought, and then the enemy struck back.

In that moment of battle, filled with suspense, the holy man made his companion *get up to look*. The first and second time he got up, he saw nothing, so Francis told him to look a third time. What a sight! The whole Christian army was in *retreat fleeing* from the battle

> carrying not triumph but shame. The massacre was so great that between the dead and the captives the number of our forces was diminished by six thousand. Compassion for them drove the holy man, no less than regret, for what they had done overwhelmed them…
>
> *Let the princes of the whole world take note* of this, and let them know: *it is not easy to fight against God*. that is, against *the will of the Lord*, stubborn insolence usually ends in disaster…[28]

This second account of Celano is highly interesting. First, we should clarify what the text was actually describing. The battle that Francis witnessed began as an ill-conceived night-time attack, incited by overly-eager clerics and lesser nobles who wanted to attack, against the counsel of Jean of Brienne, what they thought was al-Kamil's and al-Mu'azzam's encampment. When they arrived, they realized that they had already withdrawn their forces further south. But this was only a trick. For, as the crusaders returned northward, al-Kamil's forces now counter-attacked from the south. The Christian army was consequently routed and severely bloodied.

It is Celano's retelling of events through the eyes and actions of Francis, however, that concerns us. It should not surprise us that in his *Memoriale* (the so-called *Vita secunda*), Celano takes it upon himself to inject some of his own perspectives and preferences into the text at various points throughout his narrative; for by this time, he had become somewhat disenchanted with the directions taken by the Order and the values used to justify those actions. This account of the siege of Damietta is a case in point. Celano knows something about Francis at Damietta that

28. 2 Cel 30, *FAED* 2: 265-66.

he wanted to say; but, as the official hagiographer of the order, he could not say it openly and plainly. Indeed, one must remember that Celano is writing his work at precisely the same time that Louis IX of France was preparing to leave on crusade—to Egypt!—and with scores of Friars Minor at his side![29]

He, therefore, decided to construct an account that masterfully operates on two different levels at the same time. This is the genius of the account (and why most commentators have missed the extraordinary testimony that it contains). The first level is what we might call the literal sense: the text as it presents itself most plainly and obviously. But there will be another, second level—a more hidden, subtle level—which Celano builds into the text: and it is at this level that the real meaning and purpose of the passage—and where the historical Francis—is to be found.

How does he do this? Celano's account will be structured using two different concepts that operate at two levels. Those two concepts are prophecy and time.

The first thing we should notice is that 2 Celano 30 falls within a series of texts in the *Memoriale* that are placed under the rubric: "Of Francis' spirit of prophecy" (beginning with chapter 27 and continuing through chapter 54). This is an important clue. Celano, in other words, puts Francis's actions at Damietta within the framework of prophecy. Then, in the critical chapter 30, he has Francis "predict" the defeat of the Christian crusaders

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29. Cf. William Chester Jordan, *Louis IX and the Challenge of the Crusade: A Study in Rulership* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979); Jean Richard, *St. Louis: Crusader King of France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 85-106; and Jacques Le Goff, "Saint Louis and the Mediterranean," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 5 (1990): 21-43.

at Damietta if they would attack "on this day." The reaction of the crusaders: they mock him and then ignore his warnings. The Christian army then goes out to battle on that day, 29 August, and they are routed and miserably defeated. Francis the prophet has "predicted" the defeat.

But is the implication then that if they would attack on another day, it would go well? Is the aim of the passage to merely show that Francis, a holy man in communion with God, can predict the future? Or is there another meaning in this passage that Celano wants to convey? There is. There is the second level of meaning: the level of historical truth which was difficult for a Franciscan to say outright since Louis IX, king of France and friend of the friars, was at the very moment of Celano's writing (1247) making preparations to go to Egypt on crusade, to Damietta itself, to destroy Muslim power.

How does Celano accomplish this aim? Prophecy can be construed in two ways: it can be interpreted in the commonplace sense of "prediction"; but it can also be interpreted in the biblical sense of the prophets themselves: that is, as the challenge of the prophets to their people to go back to the roots of the covenant and to live according to and obedience to the will of God. It is in this second sense that the meaning of Francis's actions is to be found. Francis is warning the crusaders not to engage in battle because it is contrary to the will of God.[30] This interpretation of

30. In the hagiography of Late Antiquity, the themes of prophecy and martyrdom are sometimes linked whereby the one who speaks the harsh truths of the Gospel can virtually expect martyrdom as a result. I hope to explore this same connection in reference to Francis in a future article whereby the hagiographer's imputation of a "desire for martyrdom" by Francis is grounded neither in a ghoulish sort of masochism (provoking

Francis's actions is reinforced by a second item that Celano has woven into his scenario: a second clue that needs to be decoded.

For in addition to the account being structured according to two different meanings of the notion of prophecy, it is also structured using two different notions of time. For there is *kronos* (chronological time): that which is calculated in months, days, minutes, seconds, etc. And then there is *kairos* (what can be called christic time): time as measured according to one's lived fidelity to the will of God and the values of his Christ. How does Celano employ this second concept of time so as to bring out the historical truth of Damietta?

The key to unlocking the meaning of 2Celano 30 is to realize that Celano is going to play on the rally cry of the crusaders used since the time of the Second Crusade as preached by Bernard of Clairvaux in the 1140s.[31] That rally cry was based on the verse from 2 Corinthians 6:2 in which we read: "In an acceptable time I have heard you; on the day of salvation I have helped you. *Now* is the acceptable time, *now* is the day of salvation!"

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one's own death) nor in a slavish desire to literally imitate Christ to the cross.

31. This key point was suggested by a remarkable article written by James Powell ("Francesco d'Assisi e la Quinta Crociata: una missione di pace," *Schede medievali* 4 [1983]: 68-77), for which he received a fair amount of stern rebuke from a number of notable crusade historians. The opprobrium was due to the fact that he had dared to wonder whether Francis might have been opposed to the crusade. See: James M. Powell, "Francesco d'Assisi e la Quinta Crociata: una missione di pace," reprinted in *The Crusades, The Kingdom of Sicily, and the Mediterranean*, Variorum Collected Studies Series (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007), 68-77.

This cry was used to stir up the troops in the West to take up arms—and the cross of Christ—and to go to the Holy Land and fight for the Christian cause. For Bernard, the time was considered acceptable and right and a moment of salvation for the crusader because the cause, he believed, was right. And the cause was deemed right because it was believed to be the will of God.[32] As such, Bernard's rally cry for a crusade sanctioned by God reinforced what had been the original chant of the First Crusade: *Deus vult!* (God wills it!). But Celano is now going to depict Francis as turning that rally cry on its very head.

Francis tells the crusaders not to go ***on that day***. What looks like *kronos* (time) is actually *kairos* (time in Christ). Francis's preaching was meant to warn the crusaders that now was *no longer* the acceptable time; now was *no longer* the day of salvation. This bloody campaign of Christian against Muslim and Muslim against Christian was no longer—if it ever actually was!—the will of God: because the further destruction of the human fraternity could not possibly be, according to Francis, what God wants of us as human beings, members each one of us of the human fraternity of creatures.

This is the radical vision which Francis came among the crusaders to preach. He came to oppose with all his might this crusade, indeed all such crusades. Why is it then that crusade historians and so many others—do not read Francis's experience at Damietta in this same way? One simple reason: because the texts that we have—and the texts that they read—make no explicit allusion to the vision of human existence which Francis

32. Cf. H.E. Mayer, *The Crusades*, 99-100, for a translation of Bernard's letter to the English in which he uses the 2 Corinthians passage to great effect.

received through his encounter among the lepers and which became the foundational motivation of his entire vision. But without an understanding of that experience, historians will never truly understand Francis and the values that motivated his life. But with it, we have the key to appreciating the utter consistency of his words and actions.[33]

In sum, Francis went to the Holy Land to oppose the crusade as a blatant example of the violation of the sacrality of the human fraternity. Celano must have known this. Indeed, he found a way in 1247 (while Louis IX was preparing to go on crusade surrounded by Franciscan friars) to lift up this opposition to further bloodshed in the Holy Land through a clever recasting of the story of the siege of Damietta with two levels of meaning through the concepts of prophecy and time. Francis's opposition to this crusade and all crusades is an example of prophetic preaching, calling Christians back to the roots of the covenantal relationship between God and his creation in which all men and women are regarded as sacred creatures. And whereas the

33. As such, Francis's preaching against the crusade converges with other similar anti-crusade sentiment of his day. For example, already in 1194, Joachim of Fiore had also come to the same conclusion – but for completely different (exegetical) reasons – that the Holy Land and Islam itself would not (and could not) be conquered by the force of arms and military might but rather by the persuasive preaching of men devoted to evangelical poverty. According to Joachim, the military crusades no longer represented the will of God: now was no longer the acceptable time! While there is no direct link between these two men, still it is important to point out that there were important dissenting voices about the Church's crusading campaigns. See E. Randolph Daniel, "Apocalyptic Conversion: the Joachite Alternative to the Crusades," *Traditio* 25 (1969): 127-54, esp. 134-37.

crusades, including this Fifth Crusade, unfold according to chronological time, when seen through the lens of *kairos* (time in Christ), Francis was convinced that now was no longer "the acceptable time." The crusade ideology must be challenged and the crusade itself must be stopped as an offense to God. And all who continue in this manner are living *in peccatis*:[34] in grievous sin, oblivious to what they are really doing. It is no accident that Celano ends his Damietta account by reminding the political and religious leaders of his own day in the following words:

> *Let the princes of the whole world take note* of this and let them know: *it is not easy to fight against God*, that is, against *the will of the Lord.*[35]

They continue in such a manner at their own peril—as they indeed discovered too late to their misfortune.

The Encounter of Francis with the Sultan al-Kamil

We come now to the famous encounter of Francis with Malik al-Kamil Muhammad. But here our accounts are similarly grudging. For again they are either heavily hagiographical or stereotypically hostile towards Islam, frustrating our attempts to gather a clear picture of what might actually have happened in this momentous encounter. What can we glean from the sources?

After the staggering defeat of the crusader army—but without a formal truce having been declared—Francis and his companion, Illuminato, crossed the lines of battle and went over—as Jacques de Vitry would have it—"into the camp of our

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34. The phraseology used by Francis in the *Testament* to describe his state prior to the encounter with the lepers outside Assisi.
35. 2 Cel 30 (*FAED* 2: 266).

enemy."[36] It is not without interest to note the designation of the Muslim as the enemy (the *inimicus*), in contrast with Francis's "Testament of 1219" in which he calls such people an *amicus*: friend. Now, in virtually every account, we are told that when the two friars were sighted by Muslim soldiers, they were roughly treated and beaten—as one would treat a potential infiltrator or spy.[37] Nevertheless, the friars were apparently able to convince their captors that they simply wanted to have an audience with the sultan. Quite incredibly, they were led into the heart of the Muslim camp at Fariskur. This fact alone tells us something about the demeanor and the persuasive power of Francis of Assisi.

It is difficult to know exactly how long Francis and Illuminato might have been in the sultan's camp outside Damietta. The accounts are rather vague about this; but it is possible that they could have been present in the city up to a full three weeks (during the first three weeks of September 1219)—that is, until hostilities between the two sides resumed. [38] Now if we account for the hagiographical overlay of the accounts of Celano and Bonaventure and the ideological bias of Jacques de Vitry, what seems certain is that some kind of respectful dialogue between

36. Jacques de Vitry, *Letter VI* (*FAED* 1: 581); cf. Hannes Möhring, The Christian Concept of the Muslim Enemy during the Crusades," *Medieval History Writing and Crusading Ideology*, eds. R.M.S. Lehtonen and K.V. Jensen. Studia Fennica Historica, 9 (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2005), 185-93.

37. The rough treatment is reported by de Vitry (*FAED* 1: 584); 1 Cel 57 (*FAED* 1: 231); LMaj IX, 8 (*FAED* 2: 602); *Actus beati Francisci* 27 (*FAED* 3: 490); *Fioretti* 24 (*FAED* 3: 605).

38. This is the surmise of G. Golubovich, *Biblioteca bio-bibliografia della Terra Santa e dell'Oriente francescano* (Quaracchi: Collegio di S. Bonaventura, 1906), I: 94.

the men took place in the court of the sultan. The account of de Vitry as related in the *Historia occidentalis* is instructive:

> He [Francis] was so moved by spiritual fervor and exhilaration that, after he reached the army of the Christians before Damietta in Egypt, he boldly set out for the camp of the Sultan of Egypt, fortified only with the "shield of faith." When the Saracens captured him on the road, he said: "I am a Christian. Take me to your master." And so they dragged him before the Sultan. When that cruel beast saw Francis, he recognized him as a man of God and changed his attitude into one of gentleness, and for some days he listened very attentively to Francis as he preached the faith of Christ to him and to his followers. But in the end, fearing that some of his soldiers would be converted to the Lord by the efficacy of his words and pass over to the Christian army, he ordered that Francis be returned to our camp with all reverence and security. At the end he said to Francis: "Pray for me, that God may reveal to me the law and *the faith that is more pleasing to him*."[39]

Bonaventure's account is a little more dramatic, heightening the cruelty of the Muslims and, of course, the spiritual heroics of Francis:

> … they were met by the men of the sultan's army who fell upon them like wolves upon sheep and seized them fiercely. They ill-treated them savagely and insulted them, beating them and putting them in chains. Then, exhausted as they were by the ill-treatment they had received, they were dragged before the sultan by God's

39. Jacques de Vitry, *Historia occidentalis* (*FAED* 1: 584).

> providence, just as Francis wished. The sultan asked them by whom and why and in what capacity they had been sent and how they got there; but Francis replied intrepidly that they had been sent by God, not by anyone human, to show him and his subjects the way of salvation and proclaim the truth of the gospel message. He proclaimed the Triune God and Jesus Christ, the Savior of all, with such steadfastness, with such courage and spirit.… When the sultan saw his enthusiasm and courage, he listened to him willingly and pressed him to stay with him.[40]

There then follows in Bonaventure an episode unique in the mid-thirteenth century texts in which Francis challenged the counselors of the sultan to the ordeal of fire.[41] They, of course, refused. This is followed by the stereotypical *topos* of Francis and his companion being offered lavish gifts and their refusal of all such displays of generosity and temptations to wealth. Bonaventure, in fact, attributes some of the refusal on Francis's part to even accept things that the sultan told him to distribute to the poor because "he [Francis] could see no sign of a genuinely religious spirit in the sultan."[42] However, much of this seems to be western Christian bias against the one deemed "the infidel" and,

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40. LMj IX, 8 (*FAED* 2: 602-03).

41. Ibid, 603. In the *Actus* account (*FAED* 3: 491), the story of the ordeal of fire comes to be coupled with another test of fire involving sexual temptation at a local inn.

42. Ibid.; and hinted at in *Actus* 27 (*FAED* 3: 490) and *Fioretti* 24 (*FAED* 3: 605-06).

therefore, virtually incapable of any good deed, except perhaps wonderment in the face of such obvious holiness.[43]

So what actually happened? Here is where we enter into the realm of pure conjecture. It should be obvious that there was, at the very least, a respectful exchange of ideas among these two men and their counselors about the faith which grounded their lives and inspired their actions. Indeed, if the *Chronicle of Ernoul* is in any way accurate in its testimony about this encounter (or encounters), a certain group in the court of the sultan would have preferred to simply execute the two Christians who had come to announce their faith (and, according to the text, to prove that Islam was a false religion).[44] The sultan, however, overruled them; he listened and they apparently dialogued. Al-Kamil was known to be respectful and desirous of religious exchanges. He apparently had at his court several men of acknowledged spiritual stature. His court, in other words—not unlike the court of Frederick II in the Kingdom of Sicily—was ecumenical in tone and in its religious and intellectual interests.[45]

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43. In the same accounts found in *Actus* 27 and the *Fioretti*, the Sultan is depicted as desiring baptism but was unable to receive it due to his position as leader of his people. As such, he spared both himself and Francis and his companions from death. Moreover, according to these accounts, on his deathbed, he called several friars to his side and did indeed receive the sacrament. One should be, quite naturally, suspicious of the veracity of such accounts.

44. *Chronicle of Ernoul*, 431-35 (*FAED* I: 605-07); the original text is also reprinted in G. Golubovich I: 12-13.

45. An illuminating description of the open intellectual exchanges promoted by al-Kamil at his court is given in: *A History of the Ayyubid Sultans of Egypt, translated from the Arabic of al-Maqrizi*, ed. R.J.C. Broadhurst (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980), 229-30.

Beyond that, however, what we say is by way of deduction. Nevertheless, it is not negligible to point out that the two friars left the camp, indeed were given safe passage back to the crusader camp, with their heads still attached. That is an important sign: it is a sign that neither Francis nor Illuminato directly attacked the religion of Islam nor did they slander the prophet. Rather, as Jacques de Vitry notes in reference to the preaching of other friars to Muslims elsewhere:

The Saracens gladly listened to the Friars Minor preach as long as they explained faith in Christ and the teaching of the gospel; but as soon as their preaching attacked Mohammed and openly condemned him as a liar and a traitor, then these ungodly men heaped blows upon them and chased them from their cities; they would have killed them if God had not miraculously protected his sons.[46]

But we also have a text which sheds light on how Francis wanted his friars to conduct themselves while on mission: chapter 16 of the *Regula non bullata*. We don't know exactly when this text was drafted and inserted into the Rule. Was it, for example, *before* the missionary push of 1219 (when Francis went to Egypt, Giles went to Tunisia and Berard and his companions traveled to southern Spain and Morocco) or was it *after* Francis had returned from the East? Several scholars, myself included, place this important text *after* his return.[47]

The context for this admonition about how the friars ought to present themselves "among the Saracens and other non-believers" (and the whole reason that it was written) seems to be the

46. Jacques de Vitry, *Historia occidentalis* (*FAED* 1: 582-83).

47. Jan Hoeberichts, *Francis and Islam* (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1997), 49-59 and esp. chapter 3, 61-134.

fate of the mission of Berard and companions in Morocco. The testimonies that we have of that mission are clear. In Seville, after preaching against the prophet and the religion of Islam, they were at first jailed but then released. Once having arrived in Morocco, they followed the same pattern. After having been jailed, they were released through the intercession of Peter, the brother of the Portuguese king, Alfonso II. Once released, they continued their offensive preaching, were seized, tried and then beheaded on 20 January 1220. They are known as the proto-martyrs: the first martyrs of the Order of Friars Minor.

Now it is true that there is a late testimony claiming that when Francis heard the news he exclaimed: "Now I truly have five friars."[48] However, I would prefer to read this exclamation through the lens of the typical anti-Muslim bias of most Christian, including Franciscan, commentators. I would rather hold up the text of chapter 16 of the Early Rule as Francis's definitive response to this tragic event; indeed, on what *not* to do. For this is his advice:

> As for the brothers who go [among the Muslims], let them live spiritually (*spiritualiter*)[49] among the

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48. *Nunc possum veraciter dicere, quod habeo quinque fratres*. This oft-quoted saying is actually a late text found in the *Passio sanctorum martyrum*, embedded within the *Chronica XXIV generalium ordinis minorum,* Analecta francescana III: 21.

49. The Latin word *spiritualiter* (literally: "spiritually") means more than "in a spiritual manner." Rather, in the early Franciscan lexicon (and preserved in the tradition of the Spiritual Franciscans), the word evokes a fidelity to the way of life (*forma vitae*), as expressed in the Early Rule, was intended to be lived as a contrast to the values and behaviors prevalent in the world. To live in the latter manner was to live *carnaliter* ("according

> Saracens and non-believers in two ways: one way is NOT to engage in arguments or disputes but rather to be subject *to every human creature for God's sake* and to acknowledge that they are Christians. The other way is to announce the Word of God, when they see that it may please the Lord, in order that they may believe in almighty God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Creator of all, the Son, the Redeemer and Savior, and be baptized and become Christians because *no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being reborn of water and the Holy Spirit.* They can say to them these and other things which please God because the Lord says in the Gospel: *Whoever acknowledges me before others I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father. Whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father*. Wherever they may be, let all my brothers remember that they have given themselves over and have abandoned their bodies to the Lord Jesus Christ. For love of him, let them make themselves vulnerable to their enemies, both visible and invisible, because the Lord says: *Whoever loses his life because of me will save it in eternal life…*[50]

A few brief remarks about this passage. First, my reading of this text is that it presents a counter-strategy, as it were, to the missionary zealotry that had characterized the approach of

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to the flesh," "in a worldly manner"). Thus, in this context, the friars are being reminded to simply live their way of life: the vision of the early community, cognizant of the dignity and sacredness of each member of the human fraternity, regardless of religious creed or path.

50. RNB 16, vv. 5-11 (*FAED* 1: 74).

Berard and companions in Morocco. There, they went into Muslim territory on the attack, on the offensive, against Islam and the Prophet. Francis's approach, as borne out by the results of his encounter with al-Kamil Muhammad, was to adopt a two-fold posture. First was the way of exemplarity: that is, live the life of the Friars Minor among the people and acknowledge, if asked, that the motivation of their living in peace and the explanation of their way of life (*forma vitae*) are the life and values of Jesus Christ. They live this way, in other words, because they are Christians. The second was the way of direct testimony: to preach the Word of God, if so prompted by the Spirit, so as to give witness to the triune God, salvation in Christ and their view of the necessity of baptism into Christ. Francis put the emphasis not on the denouncing of the other faith but rather on giving a testimony "of the hope that is within you" (1 Pt 3:15). In other words, explain why it is you believe in Jesus Christ, why it is you see the world as you do, rather than berating the other for his or her belief, misguided as it may seem for a Christian of the Middle Ages. Note too, however, the echoes to the farewell message of 1219: that such witness of exemplarity and testimony might cost them their lives. Nevertheless, in order to witness, quietly or more vocally, among the people, they must be ready to make themselves vulnerable, handing themselves over to those who are said to be their *inimici* (their enemies). In doing so they will give witness that they are, in fact (even without the others knowing it), their *amici* (friends): fellow creatures in the human fraternity created by the same "Creator of all." The emphasis on that phrase by Francis is an important key to understanding how he saw the other as inseparably connected to himself. This is the substance of the leper experience now extended to its most logical (and,

to some, offensive) conclusion. This is the shocking revelation of God to Francis which made of him a *pazzo*: a crazy man, a prophet.[51]

Finally, we also know that after this encounter, al-Kamil, true to his past efforts, but perhaps strengthened by the respectful exchange with Francis, continued to try to peacefully negotiate with the crusaders, again offering generous terms of compromise—but again to no avail. One should remember that it was the Christian side that was the aggressor in this fight and not vice-versa. Hence, generosity to an aggressor is not what one would expect on the part of the victim of aggression; and yet magnanimity (perceived as weakness by his own councilors) will consistently be the watchword of al-Kamil's actions towards these Christian invaders.

Indeed, there is a famous episode recounted by Ernoul in his chronicle in which al-Kamil is reported to have offered hospitality in his tent to the defeated military leader, John of Brienne, after their crushing defeat in August 1221 (this time outside al-Mansura, the new stronghold of al-Kamil south of Fariskur). Faced with such lavish hospitality, the chronicle reports, John began to weep. When asked the reason for his tears, he simply pointed beyond the Muslim camp to his own soldiers out on the plain: tired, bloodied and starving. Al-Kamil responded by ordering that the crusaders his ostensible "enemy"—be fed to their contentment.[52]

Whether the story is apocryphal or not is difficult to say; but it seems consistent, does it not, with the measure of the man.[53]

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51. AC 18 (*FAED* 2: 132-33).

52. AC 18 (*FAED* 2: 132-33).

53. It is also useful to recall that it is with al-Kamil that Frederick II

In sum, that something important, even sacred, occurred under the tent of the sultan is underscored by one precious testimony contained in a non-textual source: the tomb of one of al-Kamil's spiritual counselors, Fakhir ad-Din al-Farisi. For there is, on the exterior of the sarcophagus, an inscription which makes mention of an encounter that he himself was privy to witness between a Christian monk and the sultan's court which deeply marked his whole life—so deeply that he had its mention placed on his own tomb almost as a kind of epithet. For it says of him:

He had well-known virtues. And his experience with Malik al-Kamil and what happened to him because of the [Christian] monk (*râhib*) are also well known.[54]

Something of extraordinary value and weight occurred under that tent: something which presaged hope and the salvation of humanity for those who would avail themselves of it. Would that our own leaders in our own time learn the way of Francis, Illuminato, al-Kamil and al-Farisi and engage in the way of dialogue and understanding.

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reached a ten-year truce in 1229 allowing Christians to gain access to the Holy Places in Jerusalem and elsewhere in exchange for the promise of no open hostilities or bloodshed. Cf. K. Setton (Gen. Ed.) *A History of the Crusades*, III:451-57.

54. Cf. A. Natali, "Gli Arabi e S. Francesco alle crociate," *L'Italia francescana* 33 (1958): 159 (based on a transcription from the Arabic found in: Martiniano Roncaglia, *Fonti arabo-musulmane su S. Francesco in Oriente?* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1953).

Introducing the Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil

Michael D. Calabria, OFM

Introduction

Although there has been a growing bibliography of books, articles, documentaries and artwork about St. Francis' encounter with the Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil, with few exceptions, these treatments have tended to focus on Francis' character and motivations, and the medieval texts that relate the encounter. This is understandable since the encounter is absent from the Muslim sources of the period. Al-Malik al-Kamil has thus remained a more secondary figure for western readers, our image of him formed primarily by the writings of Thomas of Celano, Jacques de Vitry, and St. Bonaventure among others, as well as the artwork by Giotto (and workshop) in the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi and Santa Croce in Florence, the Bardi Dossal, and other works.

While medieval Muslim artists have left us no image of Sultan as it was not the custom to do so, there are a number of contemporaneous or near contemporaneous historical works in Arabic—Muslim and Coptic that chronicle the Ayyubid period (1171-1260 CE) and provide insight into the man who ruled Egypt capably for twenty years at a critical point in thirteenth century when Islamic realms from Egypt to Syria faced the Crusader threat from the west, as well as the Mongol invasions from the east. Most notably these sources include the extensive history by Ibn al-Athir (1160-1233 CE) titled *al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh* ("The Complete History"), a chronicle by al-Makīn ibn al-'Amīd (1205/6-1273/4 CE), and histories of the the Ayyubid sultanate

by Ibn Wasil (1207-1298 CE) and al-Maqrīzī (1364-1442).[55] An important Coptic perspective on the relationship between the Ayyubid sultans and their Christian subjects is provided by *The History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria.*

Drawing upon such sources, I hope to provide a fuller image of al-Malik al-Kamil, information about his years as an Ayyubid prince before his ascension as Sultan of Egypt in 1218, as defender of Egypt during the invasion of the European Christians in 1218-1221 (known in the West as the Fifth Crusade), as the ruler of Muslims, Christians, and Jews, and as the senior member of the Ayyubid Dynasty until his death from illness in 1238. It is important to reiterate that the "success" of the Francis-Sultan encounter depended upon *both* of the individuals involved.

Al-Kamil's Path to Power

Al-Malik al-Kamil Nasir al-Din Muhammad was born in Cairo's corridors of power on 19 August 1180.[56] At the time, Cairo was

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55. Excerpts from these sources may be found in: Francesco Gabrieli, *Arab Historians of the Crusades* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1993). See also: *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athīr for the Crusading Period from al-Kāmil fi'l-ta'rīkh, Part 3: the years 589-629/1193-1231,* trans D.S. Richard (Ashgate, 2010); and al-Makin ibn al-'Amid, *Chronique des Ayyoubides (602-658 / 1205-6-1259-60),* traduction par Anne Marie Eddé et Françoise Micheau (Paris: Académie des inscriptions et belles-Lettres, 1994). For a modern work on the period, see: R. Stephen Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols: the Ayyubids of Damascus, 1193-1260* (Albany: SUNY, 1977).

56. Al-Maqrizi, *A History of the Ayyubid Sultans of Egypt,* tarns. R.J.C Broadhurst (Boston: Twayne, 1980), 229. Other sources give the year of his birth as 1177. See: Hans Gottschalk, *Al-Malik al-Kamil von Egypten und Seine Zeit* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1958), 24, n. 1.

one of the largest cities in the Mediterranean,[57] and was home to the Mosque-university of al-Azhar, one of the oldest universities in the world. His family, the Ayyubids, was of Kurdish origin, and had risen to particular prominence when his uncle, Salah al-Din Yusuf ibn al-Ayyub ("Saladin"), became vizier in Egypt in 1169 during the final chaotic years of the Fatimid Caliphate that had ruled Egypt, North Africa and the Holy Land from 909-1171.[58] Two years later, Salah al-Din wrested Egypt from control of the Fatimids, and in time unified much of the Middle East under his rule, and succeeded in driving the Latin Christians from Jerusalem in 1187.[59]

Vital to Salah al-Din's success at Jerusalem and throughout his reign was his brother al-'Adil (1145-1218), the father of al-Kamil. Al-'Adil served Salah al-Din well as an effective military commander and able administrator. During the Third Crusade (1189-1192), al-'Adil, served as Salah al-Din's chief negotiator with Richard I ("the Lionheart") of England, and had frequent contact and considerable rapport with the English king. A chronicler of Salah al-Din's reign, recounts that Richard even proposed that peace in the Holy Land could be achieved if al-Adil were to marry his sister Joanna, and then jointly rule the Kingdom

57. André Raymond, *Cairo.* Willard Wood, trans. (Cambridge: Harvard, 2000), 63.

58. Salah al-Din's uncle Shirkuh had held this post for two months before his death in March 1169. See: Anne-Marie Eddé, *Saladin,* trans. Jane Marie Todd (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2011).

59. According to Ibn al-Athir, Eastern Christians were not required to leave the city as long as they paid the required tax (*jizya*), and many bought the property left behind by the Latins (as in Gabrieli, 146).

of Jerusalem.[60] Al-'Adil and Salah al-Din agreed to the offer, but Joanna scoffed at the idea of marrying a Muslim. We know little of al-Kamil's mother, the princess 'Adiliyah, other than she died in 1211 (8 August / 25 Śafar 608 AH). Al-Kamil arranged for her burial beside that of the renowned Imām al-Shāfi'i (d. 820 CE), in a great domed mausoleum he constructed in the year of her death.[61]

After Salah al-Din's death in 1193, a power struggle ensued between his sons, which ultimately allowed their uncle, al-'Adil, to claim the sultanate for himself in 1200. Al-Kamil was appointed viceroy and designated al-'Adil's heir[62] —not an insignificant position in a family of nineteen sons! By all accounts, al-'Adil was a capable and prudent ruler. Rather than risking an all-out war against the Franks in 1204, he concluded a six-year truce with them, and ceded Jaffa and Nazareth to avoid further conflict. When the Knights Hospitaller provoked confrontation with al-'Adil in Syria, he once again opted for a truce in 1207 over armed confrontation. A third truce was concluded with the Franks in 1211.[63] Al-'Adil's tendency to avoid warfare with Crusader forces unless necessary and advantageous was a strategy he passed on to his son al-Kamil, judging from his actions during the Fifth Crusade, as I will relate. Nevertheless, as viceroy al-Kamil prepared for the very real possibility of an attack on Cairo, by strengthening and completing the walls of Salah al-Din's citadel in 1207/8 (604 AH), creating the most formidable

60. Gabrieli, *Arab Historians*, 226-231.

61. Stephennie Mulder, "The Mausoleum of Imam al-Shafi'i," *Muqarnas,* vol. 23 (2006), 15-46.

62. Maqrizi, 136.

63. Maqrizi, 153.

fortress in the medieval Middle East, larger than the renowned Krak des Chevaliers in Syria.

When a new crusader force began to disembark at Acre on the Levantine coast in September 1217, al-'Adil led his forces from Egypt into Palestine to meet the challenge. Realizing he was outnumbered, however, he retreated towards Damascus but not before sending word to his son al-Kamil:

> The enemy has set out from Acre for Egypt with many ships. Take heed to the harbors, and do not encounter him, and evacuate the cities before him for a distance of three days, for if he invades, he will cover a distance of four days in one day, slaying and taking captives and pillaging…"[64]

Thus, when the Crusader ships began to arrive on the Egyptian coast at the end of May 1218, it was al-Kamil who alone faced the challenge of repelling the foreigners and defending his father's realm. Damietta occupied a strategic position on the Egyptian coast where the eastern branch of the Nile met the Mediterranean Sea. In addition to its obvious proximity to the Holy Land, Damietta was a commercial center for the production of textiles, highly-prized by Europeans. (It is highly likely that Pietro di Bernandone himself had acquired Damietta textiles for his patrons.) From his camp at 'Adiliyah, a few miles south of Damietta, al-Kamil directed his forces on the east side bank of the Nile. Crucial to the defense of the city was the fortified tower located in the river's shallows near the west bank of the Nile opposite the city, close to the crusader camp. From here a chain

64. Sawirus ibn Muqaffa', *History of the Church, part 9: Mark III—John VI* (AD 1167-1216), vol. 3, part. 2, 222 (https://sites.google.com/site/demontortoise2000/hist9-htm).

stretched eastwards across the river to the city, barring access to the river and to the walls of the city. Capturing this tower was the first objective of the Crusaders, and they succeeded in doing so on 25 August 1218.

The loss of the chain tower would have come as a hard blow to al-Kamil. If the invaders were able to cross the Nile, they could launch a direct assault on the city walls. To prevent ships from entering the Nile, al-Kamil built a pontoon bridge across the river, and when that failed, he had large ships sunk in the river.[65] Even as the Sultan grieved the mounting casualties, more devastating news came to him: on 31 August 1218, al-'Adil, had died within a day's march from Damascus. At age thirty-eight, al-Kamil was now the sole ruler of Egypt and Sultan of the Ayyubid confederation of states ruled by his many brothers. Al-Kamil would survive the European invasion, but only with the aid of two of his brothers: al-Mu'azzam 'Isa who ruled Palestine, the Transjordan and Central Syria (including Damascus), and al-Ashraf Musa who controlled northern Syria and the Jazira (upper Mesopotamia). Ironically, these same brothers presented the greatest challenges to al-Kamil's sovereignty as sultan after the Crusade.

The Defender of Egypt

Intermittent warfare, some of it quite intense, continued between the Egyptian and European forces throughout much of the fall and winter of 1218/1219 as al-Kamil tried to prevent the Crusaders from crossing the Nile. Moreover, winter storms and disease took their toll on the Crusader camp. For al-Kamil, the situation turned from bad to worse when, in early February of 1219, he was nearly driven from power in a *coup d'etat.* The

65. Ibn al-Athir, *al-Kamil fi'l-Tarikh,* 324.

turmoil in the Sultan's camp allowed the Crusaders to cross the Nile and take their positions around the walls of Damietta on land and sea to begin the siege. Now the city was completely cut off from reinforcements and supplies.

As al-Kamil made plans to flee to Yemen where his son al-Mas'ud ruled, he was saved from this desperate situation by the fortuitous arrival of his brother al-Mu'azzam and the Syrian army originally led by their father. Having saved his brother's throne, al-Mu'azzam returned to Syria in early March 1219, destroying the walls of Jerusalem en route to deprive the crusaders of a stronghold should they take the city. The stalemate between the Egyptian and Crusader forces continued for the next several months as the defenders of Damietta and the city's inhabitants, some 80,000 men, women and children, were now slowly starved into submission while the Europeans suffered from the summer's heat, disease, the departure of some forces, and division in the ranks of the senior commanders.

In August 1219, there was a new arrival in the European camp: Francis of Assisi and another "Lesser Brother," Illuminato. Soon after the Crusaders suffered heavy losses on August 29, Francis made his way to the Sultan's camp at Fariskur and stood face-to-face with al-Malik al-Kamil, who was just about a year or two older than he. It would not have been the first time the sultan had met Europeans. As viceroy of Egypt during his father's reign, he negotiated commercial treaties with the Italian maritime republics, six with Venice alone between 1205 and 1217. Moreover, he would have been quite familiar with Christianity since Christians comprised a significant minority among his subjects, primarily Coptic Christians, but also Melkites, Armenians, and Greeks, particularly in cosmopolitan Cairo. His own personal physician

was a Copt. Soon after his father assumed the sultanate in Egypt, al-Kamil had to address matters affecting the Coptic community. A Christian account describes al-Kamil's reign as 'blessed' as the Sultan granted non-Muslims extensive social and legal freedom, and that he was particularly 'gracious and good' toward his favorite group, Coptic monks.[66]

Moreover, like many Muslim rulers of his day, the Sultan was a cultured and learned man. Muslim historian al-Maqrizi wrote that: "Al-Kamil much loved men of learning, preferring their society…He loved discussions with Muslim divines, and had a good number of curious problems on jurisprudence and grammar with which he would examine scholars, and those who answered rightly he advanced and gave them his favor. He gave lodging with him in the Citadel to several men of learning…Beds were set up for them beside his so that they might lie on them and converse through the night. Learning and literature flourished under him, and men of distinction resorted to his court."[67]

The Sultan's apparent interest in Francis could very well have been due to his resemblance to the *fuqarā*—"the poor ones," the mystics of Islam called *Sufis*—literally the ones who wore patched woolen garments. In his appearance, manner and speech Francis' Order of poor, itinerant "lesser brothers" would have seemed to him more like a Sufi brotherhood (*ṭarīqah*). Not unlike medieval Christendom, the Islamic world of the 12th and 13th centuries had given rise to numerous mystics—male and female—who spoke of the oneness of existence, who expressed a burning desire for

66. For more on al-Kamil's relationship with the Copts, see: Werthmuller, *Coptic Identity and Ayyubid Politics in Egypt, 1218-1250* (Cairo: AUC, 2010), 86 ff.

67. Maqrizi, 229.

a God experienced as Beautiful, Merciful and Gentle, and who emphasized a life of itinerancy, contemplation, and spiritual and material poverty.

We know that al-Kamil was particularly drawn to a Sufi poet of his day, 'Umar ibn al-Farid, called "the Prince of Lovers" on account of his sensual pining for the presence of God. Stories related about al-Farid speak of his habit of stripping off his clothing, his ability to communicate with animals, and his tearful fits of desire for the divine, *topi* also found in Franciscan hagiography.[68] Al-Kamil would also have been familiar with a sufi master called *al-shaykh al-akbar,* "the Greatest Shaykh," Ibn al-'Arabi, who passed through Egypt at least twice during al-Kamil's lifetime. Ibn al-'Arabi is the sufi most associated with the concept of *al-wahdat al-wajud,* "the oneness of being." Sucinctly put, the term signifies that there is only one existence, one w*ajud* that is God. Thus, although humans perceive multiplicity in the phenomenal world—different peoples, races, classes, religions, etc.—true existence belongs to God alone. Every person and thing only reflects the existence of the One, and thus all is one in the One. Given his attraction to Sufi spirituality exemplified by Ibn al-'Arabi and al-Farid, it is no wonder that the Sultan took interest in Francis.

After Francis

After his chance encounter with the unusual and humble Christian holy man in September 1219, Al-Kamil never saw him again. After the fall of Damietta in November 1219, Francis seems to have left Egypt by February 1220, perhaps sailing to

68. Michael D. Calabria, OFM, "Ibn al-Farid: Francis' Sufi Contemporary," *Spirit and Life,* vol. 13 (2009)—*Mirroring One Another, Reflecting the Divine: the Franciscan-Muslim Journey into God,* 53-73.

Acre with John of Brienne, then boarding a galley bound for Venice. Learning that the Europeans were resupplying Damietta for an attack on his base at al-Mansourah and then Cairo as well, al-Kamil once again offered terms as he had done repeatedly throughout the conflict, but now he increased the scope of those terms. According to the chronicler Ibn Athir:

The Muslims offered them the surrender of Jerusalem, Ascalon, Tiberias, Sidon, Jabala, Lattakia and all that Salah al-Din had conquered from the Franks on the coast, which has been previously recorded, not including Kerak, if they would give up Damietta. (Ibn Athir, ¶ 329).

Once again the offer was rejected. In spite of their initial success in capturing Damietta, the overly ambitious Crusader army was completely defeated in August 1221. Two years since his father's passing and his own ascension to the throne as sultan, al-Kamil had triumphed over the crusaders, having won with the day without conceding a thing. Instead, Damietta returned to his sovereignty, and the Europeans evacuated Egypt, agreeing to a truce for eight years.

At the hands of the Europeans and his own traitorous commanders, al-Kamil had nearly lost everything in the first few months of his sultanate. He had repeatedly attempted to survive by making generous offers to the Europeans, something he had undoubtedly learned from his father, but the papal legate, Cardinal Pelagius had rebuffed them every time. He had indeed snatched victory from near defeat, but not without help from his brothers, al-Mu'azzam and al-Ashraf. Ironically, conflicts with his brothers and their sons would occupy him for remaining sixteen and a half years of his reign, more than his European enemies.

Another Crusade

Al-Kamil's conflict with the Europeans of 1218-1221 was soon followed by clashes with his brother al-Muʿazzam, a sad turn of events given al-Muʿazzam's vital assistance during the Crusade. Now that al-Kamil was securely in possession of Egypt, al-Muʿazzam sought to expand his own realm northwards from Damascus.

By 1226, al-Kamil had more than al-Muʿazzam to worry about, however; he had received word that plans for another crusade were underway. Unknown to him, that very year in Italy, the Christian ascetic who had come to him in 1219 died. This latest crusade was to be led by the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II who, having failed to take part in the Fifth Crusade as promised, was now under considerable pressure from Pope Honorius III to fulfill his crusader vow and reverse the defeat of 1221. With his father's gift of diplomacy, al-Kamil dispatched his emir Fakhr al-Din ibn al-Shaykh to Frederick's court to negotiate an alliance against al-Muʿazzam in exchange for Jerusalem and all of Salah al-Din's conquests in Syria—the very same offer he had made during the previous crusade, and which the papal legate had rejected. The Sultan's generous offer reflects the seriousness with which he regarded the threat from al-Muʿazzam and his Turkic allies from Central Asia.

In spite of nearly losing his throne in 1219, al-Kamil had emerged as a competent and skillful leader. He secretly had sent his emir Fakhr al-Din to discuss terms with Frederick who had arrived in Acre in September. With the death of Muʿazzam, al-Kamil was in a much stronger position than when he first approached Frederick for an alliance, and could have abandoned negotiations; but he was his father's son, and a truce was better

than another conflict with the Europeans, particularly at a time when family relations were still considerably strained. In the end, al-Kamil concessions were modest in comparison to his earlier offers, but no less remarkable within the context of the thirteenth-century. In exchange for a ten-year truce, al-Kāmil ceded to Frederick Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Nazareth and other villages en route to Jerusalem. Muslims maintained control over al-Haram al-Sharif with the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa mosque, although remarkably the Christians were still allowed to visit these places. Muslim residents of Jerusalem were to be given autonomy with respect to their laws and customs, and represented by a resident official (*qadi).* Moreover, the Muslims retained Hebron, Nablus, the Jordan Valley, Tiberias, etc.

In the remaining eight years of his life, al-Kamil continued to assert his authority as sultan and senior member of the Ayyubid clan, leading military campaigns to the sultanate's northern and eastern frontiers. At the end of February 1238, the Sultan fell ill of dysentery in Damascus as his brother al-Muʿazzam had before him, and like his brother, he too succumbed. Al-Malik al-Kāmil Muhammad ibn al-ʿAdil, Sultan of Egypt for twenty years, died on 9 March 1238. With al-Kamil's death, the Ayyub dynasty lost its strong senior member. The contention between brothers, uncles, nephews and cousins intensified as they fought for the thrones of both Damascus and Cairo even as Crusader forces returned to Damietta in 1249.

Islam and Inter-Religious Dialogue: A Muslim Perspective

Irfan A. Omar

Introduction

Islam as a religion arose within the milieu where, among the Arabs, there were Christian and Jewish communities who professed monotheism not practiced by other tribes. People who eventually became Muslims were always aware of many of the figures that were part of Jewish and Christian heritage such as Abraham and Hagar. After the rise of Islam these figures became integral to the belief system of the new religion even though they were now seen through a slightly different interpretative lens. This was seen as a natural development because Islam's view of itself was that it is a continuation of these earlier religions. Historically speaking, Islam, while recognizing these religions, sought to engage with their adherents and even referred to them as part of the family of religions (*ahl-i-kitāb*). This is the context in which one must locate Islam's position on interreligious dialogue. In this sense, Islam has been dialogical from its very inception. But this is the ideal side of the history of Islam. In the political realm, Islam has also been used as a tool for confrontation with, and conquest of, others. This "other" has been often conveniently labeled as a "religious" and/or a "cultural" other. Though the Qur'an speaks of differences as real, it condemns the use of the notion of "difference" as a pretext to demonize or subjugate others. The Qur'an sees differences and diversity of peoples, cultures, languages and even religions as a strength (indeed, a "mercy" from God) rather than as a problem.

Since the rise of Islam in the seventh century, Muslims have encountered many religious and cultural ideas as well as communities. The religious movement of Islam when it expanded out of Arabia spread rather rapidly in different directions, mostly as a result of political, religious, and cultural outreach. As the Arab armies marched out of the Arabian Peninsula, they received little resistance. They were given easy access in many parts of the newly acquired lands partly due to the fact that Muslims, generally speaking, did not seek to abolish pre-existing religious practices, customs, and ways of life. They believed they were guided by the quranic mandate to uphold religious freedom and to protect religious communities regardless of their "denomination" and cultural heritage. Muslims sought to create what was called the "dar al-Islam" or the abode of peace by seeking political dominion. With the rise of the Umayyad dynasty in 661 C.E., Muslim caliphate virtually became an empire. Preservation of political power was their central aim; religious and/or spiritual matters were not a real concern for these Muslim rulers. In many parts of West Asia and North and West Africa, Muslims became politically in-charge of their new subjects, but all other spheres of life in these newly acquired lands were to remain largely unaffected. They believed that political peace and stability was a necessary requirement for each community to have the freedom to practice their religion. These early Muslims were apparently confident that because the Qur'an mandates them to recognize other religions and to create conditions where they can be freely practiced, that they were best suited to be the "guardians" of the state. In this, anyone who threatened or was determined to be a threat to the polity/state could be eliminated regardless of their religious or cultural affiliation. Thus, history is witness to as much

intra-Muslim fighting as it is to inter-religious alliances, between Muslims and Christians (and in India, between Muslim and Hindu rulers).

This fact of history essentially deconstructs the neat dichotomization that seems to prevail in the minds of many who lend themselves to believe in misleading theories of a perpetual clash between civilizations which are supposedly homogenous and monoliths. It is ironic in a way but it is important to note that much of the past and even contemporary violence in the name of religion has been largely intra-Muslim and intra-Christian, often carried out with the help of alliances with the supposed other. Thus, we can confidently say that throughout the medieval period Muslims engaged with Christians, Buddhists, Jews and Hindus and others at various levels. There were conflicts and wars of conquests but there were also numerous interactions for peaceful purposes such as for commerce and learning. Muslims helped co-create, together with Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, and Hindu scholars and thinkers, a culture of intellectual and scientific inquiry across Asia and Europe.[69] For centuries the Arabo-Persian cultural milieu provided the context for such intellectual debates and dialogues that drew all kinds of people, giving rise to "la convivencia" or the collaborative and relatively peaceful co-existence between Jews, Christians, Muslims, and others, most notably in Baghdad and in Andalucia but also in many other places where Arab-Muslim culture became influential.[70]

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69. Tarif Khalidi, *Classical Arab Islam: Culture and Heritage of the Golden Age* (Princeton, N.J.: Darwin Press, 1985) and F.E. Peters, *Allah's Commonwealth: A History of the Near East 600-1100 A.D.* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1973).

70. See the excellent work by Maria Rosa Menocal which discusses

Today Muslims along with leaders, practitioners, and activists from many other traditions, continue to strive to engage in dialogue and discussion for the sake of creating and maintaining peace. The increase in religious violence has compelled many to seek common wisdom and engage in a joint struggle against hateful narratives which are on the rise. No religion has been immune to having groups which have committed ghastly acts against others. In some cases, these "other-ized" victims belong to a different religious tradition but in other cases, they may be individuals and groups belonging to a sect within the same religion. Therefore, all believers must take responsibility to address the culture of hate that seeks to capitalize on by creating an "other" on the basis of "difference" often resulting in violence in the name of religion. In a globalized world any injury that afflicts one human being or community or any other living being, affects all of us, and in many more ways than previously imagined.

The Imperative of Dialogue

Christians and Muslims belong to two largest religions on earth thus they have a greater share of responsibility in addressing these pressing concerns. Over three billion people practice some form of Christianity or Islam. Both these religions claim to be "universal" and to have an ethical base laying out a clear path towards God, the truth (also known as "Al-Haqq" in the Qur'an) and a clear path towards attaining social and personal peace. A consensus has emerged in the last few decades where religious leaders, practitioners, men and women, groups and organizations, belonging to various religions (but especially within

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this rich world of co-existence and collaboration, *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 2002).

Christianity and Islam) have come to recognize that interreligious dialogue is to be regarded as one of the core responsibilities of the faithful.[71] It has been argued that dialogue is imperative rather than a matter of choice if we are to reverse the present slide towards greater conflict between the extremists (erroneously dubbed as a "clash of civilizations").[72]

Since September 11, 2001, there has been a remarkable movement of ideas and people towards building coalitions across religions and cultures in order to combat bigotry in the name of religions. The coming together of many more Muslims and Christians and other religious communities across the globe to collaborate on building peace is the most hopeful sign. These efforts are a marked improvement on some of the first steps initiated in the 1960s by the Vatican and the World Council of Churches (WCC) that established formal processes for inter-religious dialogue between academics and religious leaders.[73] The

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71. Numerous statements and documents may be cited in support of this, however, among the recent efforts The Common Word statement (http://www.acommonword.com/) on the Muslim side and various Papal statements (https://dimmid.org/index.asp?Type=B_BASIC&SEC=%7BB56CE535-6DC7-41DA-AA53-AF4C926E2CA5%7D) on the Christian/Catholic side should be noted (accessed 1 May 2018).

72. For a critique of the idea of "clash of civilizations," see Chiara Bottici and Benoît Challand, *The Myth of the Clash of Civilizations* (London & New York: Routledge, 2010). Perhaps a more appropriate way to identify conflict and violence in the name of religion is to label it as "the clash of fundamentalisms," as the title of a book by Tariq Ali seems to suggest. See *The Clash of Fundamentalisms: Crusades, Jihads and Modernity* (London: Verso, 2003).

73. The documentation of these early meetings is found in *Meeting*

efforts have now expanded manifold and an increasing number of Muslims and Christians are committed to respectful engagement as part of their responsibility to their faith, civic duty, and/or to peace in general. One significant example of this commitment can be seen in the document called "A Common Word" issued by 138 Muslim scholars and addressed to various Christian leaders and heads of churches around the world. "A Common Word" seeks to invigorate dialogue between Christians and Muslims by building on the past initiatives from both sides. It invokes the scriptures of these two traditions calling the faithful to, in the words of the Qur'an, worship God without being distracted by the glitter of the world. Most importantly it is a call to collaborate for justice for all God's creatures.

Inter-religious dialogue is now common place among academics, but it has also been adopted by many civic and community organizations. Many churches, synagogues, temples, and mosques have introduced this important dimension of religious life to their members as indeed is warranted due to the many current conflicts which invoke religious language and symbolism. Initiatives for dialogue can be found among the religious institutions of Hindus, Muslims, Jews, Christians, Bahai's, Buddhists, and Quakers and others. This was not the case in the mid-twentieth century when there were few calls for dialogue among believers of different faiths, and even fewer realized the need to do so. As we celebrate this proliferation of interreligious dialogue, we must also remember as well as acknowledge those earlier efforts made by the Vatican and the World Council

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in Faith: Twenty Years of Christian-Muslim Conversations Sponsored by the World Council of Churches, ed. Stuart E. Brown (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1989).

of Churches during the sixties and the decades leading up to the second Parliament of the World's Religions held in 1993 in Chicago.[74] Increasingly secular elements in societies in many parts of the world are also realizing that ignoring religious sensitivities and relegating religion to a lower position of importance in analyzing socio-political developments does not help make these "religious" conflicts go away.

The way of dialogue often emerges after painful experiences of dehumanization of the "other," and in many cases, it is followed by violence of one kind or another. Once the situation has reached that point, it is not always easy to walk back towards reconciliation. It is much harder to be convinced of the need to recognize and respect the "other" and be willing to enter into dialogue. The importance of initiating dialogue *before* negative stereotyping begins is therefore self-evident. Dialogue should be an ongoing activity to promote mutual understanding and cooperation. Regular dialogue prevents misinformation and misunderstanding to grow, diminishes fear and anxiety about the unknown. More importantly, it minimizes the chances of violence, hostility and bigotry against the imagined other. Dialogue helps form stronger interethnic and intercultural relationships necessary to fight against common problems facing humanity. Dialogue can also channel religious passion in the

74. The Parliament of the World's Religions was first organized in 1893 and was revived in the early 1990s as a powerful recognition of the need to gather, converse, share, and learn about the various religious, cultural and spiritual communities of the world. The Parliament gathering continues to take place roughly every five years since the 2nd Parliament was convened in 1993. https://parliamentofreligions.org/parliament/1993-chicago/chicago-1993 (accessed 1 May 2018).

service of humanitarian, instead of sectarian causes, as well as prevent narrow interpretations of what it means to be religious today. Religion does indeed play a major role in people's lives and it manifests itself in society in one form or another. Therefore, a key factor in securing peace is to channel religious sentiments in the direction of constructive causes. The path of true dialogue begins when members of each of the religions present feel a sense of fulfillment in being partners with a religious other. They understand that being religious in the world includes working with others who may invoke God differently yet seek common goals. Dialogue matures where each individual can feel empowered to work for peace and justice on the basis of the teachings of his/her faith and also feel supported and inspired by others from across religious lines. Such a path of interreligious dialogue and commitment ensures disallowing exclusive appropriation of humanistic values by non-religious and/or a-religious forces. Humanistic interreligious action and cooperation complements secular efforts in combating all kinds of political, social and economic ills and vice versa. Neither should be seen as replacing the other in the task of peacemaking and activism for justice. Any individual or group which actively promotes basic pluralistic values that are central to freedom and democracy in the world should be seen as helping the cause of interreligious peacebuilding.

Humanizing Dialogue: Goals and Pre-requisites

It is a fact that dialogue means different things to different people.[75] For some, dialogue is a means to an end; for others it

75. As for the understanding and interpretations of various definitions of dialogue opinions vary. Some say it is syncretism of all religions; others have argued for a common platform of believers against

is an end in itself. Eugene Blake defines dialogue as not merely talking with one another. It is rather "a living relationship in which we as individuals and communities lose our suspicion, fear and mistrust of each other, and enter into new confidence, trust and friendliness."[76] Therefore ". . .true dialogue presupposes that the participants have no intention of changing the other's religion nor even of instilling doubts regarding the faith of the others."[77] Dialogue is a form of "sharing" which involves not only listening but arriving at a certain understanding. In other words, it is a free and open exchange of meaningful communication between two or more individuals. A similar perspective is found in the thought of the Catholic theologian Hans Kung for whom the goal of any interreligious encounter is to establish communication through a "genuine dialogue conducted with accurate knowledge and trust with a view to long-range effects." Such a dialogue is often marked with complete openness, which in Kung's mind is a stage that transcends tolerance.[78] This openness is possible only when

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non-believers. And there are yet others who have ruled out any possibility of a meaningful dialogue between people of different religious traditions. Some approach dialogue simply as a way of opening a channel of communication with the 'other'; this could be for the purpose of genuine understanding or for the hope of getting converts to one's own version of truth.

76. Stanley J. Samartha and John B. Taylor, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue: Papers at the Broumana Consultation, 12-18 July, 1972* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1973), p. 8.

77. Maurice Borrmans, *Guidelines for Dialogue Between Christians and Muslims*. Tr. R. Marston Speight. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1990), p. 42.

78. Hans Kung, "A Christian Scholar's Dialogue with Muslims." *The Christian Century*, 102: 30 (October 9, 1985): p. 892.

we are able to humanize dialogue by entering into it to hear other human beings in conversation as opposed to thinking of dialogue as "a confrontation between ideas."[79] For any of these types of dialogue to happen, there needs to be acknowledgement, a sort of fresh beginning; a beginning that begins with an acknowledgement that Christians, Muslims, and members of other religious communities, all have violated (and continue to do so) the teachings of their respective religious scriptures.[80] In this new age of dialogue, there has to be a time for each community, group, and individual to acknowledge these violations openly and to reach out in as many ways as possible with gestures that bring healing and show resolute stance against bigotry in the name of any teaching purported to be in the name of religion.

Dialogue must also be preceded by one's commitment to its basic principle, i.e. the acknowledgement and recognition of the other as they are. This recognition does not imply that one must agree with the position others have taken, and neither should they be prevented from defining themselves. Rather a key principle in dialogue is simply to acknowledge that others have a different perspective as well as the right to share and explain that different perspective. Thus, dialogue requires that each person recognize the right of others to self-definition.[81]

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79. Mahmoud Ayoub, "Muslim Views of Christianity: Some Modern Examples," *Islamochristiana*, 10 (1994): p. 70.

80. To paraphrase the American actor, Robin Williams, we have all "violated our own standards faster than we could lower them."

81. See the resource on "Rights, Responsibilities, and Skills of Dialogue" often used in beginner interfaith meetings at http://www.theinterfaithobserver.org/journal-articles/2011/9/14/rights-responsibilities-and-skills-of-dialogue.html (accessed 1 May 2018).

Interreligious dialogue is meant to give us a reason to learn about pursuing our own religious search for meaning or God by finding out how others seek the same. As a result of an inter-religious encounter we affirm our religious identity and in fact expand it to materialize our meaningful participation in a pluralistic society. This is simply to acknowledge that we exist in relation to others who are different, and we learn as a result of these encounters with the other/others. From the moment we realize ourselves as "religious" we recognize at the same time that there are others who hold a similar view of their selves. By coming into conversation about this difference we deepen our understanding of ourselves as well as others. We learn in relation to others; if there were no others, there would be no "us". Therefore, I am enriched as an individual and as a member of a religious tradition because of my interactions with other individuals and members of a different religious tradition. I learn about myself mainly because of others. There will be no awareness and understanding of the self without the other.[82] The quality of my understanding of the self depends on how I choose to see the other. I could see the other in ways that are resentful and competitive, or I could see the other in complementary terms. I could keep a safe distance from the other and learn only the superficial aspects about this person or group; this would perhaps be enough to tolerate the other, but it also makes me susceptible to develop and maintain false, made up, and imagined view of this other. Because I lack substantive and accurate information about the other, I would

82. Irfan A. Omar, "Submitting to the Will of God: Jews, Christians, and Muslims Learning from Each Other," in *Heirs of Abraham: The Future of Muslim, Jewish, and Christian Relations*, eds. Bradford E. Hinze & Irfan A. Omar (Eugene, OR: Wifp and Stock Publishers, 2012), p. 131.

be forced to think of this person/group in any fashion I wanted depending on my circumstances. If the other is not clearly known or if my knowledge is vague about this other, then it becomes easier for me to create any image of the other. There would be nothing to contradict my view because of the distance and material ignorance. This often leads to prejudice and conflict.

Islam's View of Other Religions

The ideology of the other usually divides human groups into "them" and "us" where "them" seem quite different from "us", which is a false dichotomy. As already noted, even though Islam acknowledges differences it puts the most positive spin on it by calling it a "mercy" from God. Differences are seen as a blessing rather than as a problem to be overcome. The Qur'an says, "And one of His signs is the creation of heavens and the earth and the diversity of your languages and your colors; most surely there are signs in this for the learned" (30:22). The Qur'an further states that God constituted human beings into communities and nations so as to enable them to recognize one another and in fact learn from one another. The Qur'an is emphatic about the notion that people should engage with each other in most respectful ways to learn about one another and one another's faith tradition. The aim is to arrive at a better understanding and to practice the humanistic and ethical values that would lead one to live righteously. Each person whatever faith he or she may belong to can help oneself as well as others in achieving this goal.

A contemporary scholar of Islam, Mahmoud Ayoub, rightly notes in one of his articles that "diversity is a divinely instituted law of human society which no one can alter"[83] even if we tried

83. Mahmoud Ayoub, "Nearest in Amity: Christians in the Qur'an and Contemporary Exegetical Tradition," in *A Muslim View of Christianity:*

our best. Ayoub draws this conclusion from the Qur'an which highlights this view in several places: "Had your Lord willed, He would have made humankind one single community" (see verses Q. 11:118-19; 16:93; 42:8). Therefore, the differences between people are there so that each human being will see "us" in "them" and "them" in "us", so to speak. In a way, diversity is humanity's best measure of itself, because it allows one to keep things in perspective. Once the realization occurs that in fundamental terms they are no different from us, the particularities of each become less significant, and the common core of being human can be appreciated. This appreciation is understood in the Qur'an as a sort of "olympics of good works."[84] Thus the Qur'an 2:148 asserts:

For each there is a direction to which he (or she) turns; compete therefore with one another in the performance of good works. Wherever you may be, God shall bring you all together (on the Day of Judgment); surely God has power over all things.

Similarly, Q. 5.48 also emphasizes the diversity of faiths and communities as a strength and invites them to "compete with each other in goodness."[85] Thus many quranic scholars have vigorously argued that the Qur'an makes a strong case for dialogue across religious, cultural, national and social boundaries. In addition, they see the Qur'an as being very specific in its

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Essays on Dialogue by Mahmoud Ayoub, ed. Irfan A. Omar (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2007), p. 189.

84. Ernest Hamilton, "The Olympics of 'Good Works': Exploitation of a Qur'anic Metaphor," *The Muslim World*, 81 (January 1991): pp. 72-81.

85. Fazlur Rahman, "A Muslim Response," in *Christian Faith in a Religiously Plural World*, eds. Donald G. Dawe & John B. Carman (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1978), p. 74.

reasons for suggesting dialogue. These include developing pathways that would lead to collaboration in working for the common good ("competing for goodness" does not exclude collaboration with others). Another verse, Q. 49:13 repeats this same message:

> O humankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other, (not that you may despise each other). Verily, the most honored of you in the sight of God is (one who is) most righteous.

Inter-religious dialogue is an imperative for Muslims. In the Qur'an, as hinted above, first comes the acknowledgement of the previous scriptures. The Qur'an 10:94 reads, "if you are in doubt concerning that which We [i.e. God in the Qur'an] have sent to you then enquire of those who have been reading the scriptures before you." This is a confirmation of the previous messages and as such acknowledges the close relationship that exists between the Jewish, Christian and the Islamic messages. In fact, the Qur'an elsewhere (e.g. Q. 2:285) notes that all of the messages from God are united in the core of their teachings and no distinction should be made between them; they are expressions of the "primordial truth" and are all from the same divine source. While each of these prophets and messengers came from their own peoples and spoke in their own languages they nevertheless upheld the same core principles as Prophet Muhammad who was the recipient of the revelation that became the Qur'an. This means that other religions which are not mentioned in the Qur'an may as well be divinely "revealed". But we must not impose this terminology on these religions and develop language and lexicon to study and refer to other religions in the way they want to be referred to and how they see themselves. Nevertheless, the

quranic acknowledgment helps Muslims understand the context for cultivating and maintaining respectful attitude towards other religions. The Qur'an provides criteria for identifying what these core principles are that would constitute a "true" religion: 1) It is a belief system rooted in a "revealed scripture" or text. It may also be understood as a "way" or a path, enshrined in "law" (in Islam this is referred to as *sharīʿah*); 2) it is a religion which maintains the unity of the divine godhead; includes belief in the oneness of God (*tawhīd*); 3) it upholds the notion of accountability or what Abrahamic religions refer to as a belief in the "Day of resurrection" (*yawm al-qiyama*) where each soul will account for their actions in life; and, 4) a religion which provides a moral framework for living righteously (*ihsān*).[86] This is a quranic criteria as interpreted by Muslim scholars; no doubt, it has helped inform many decisions in history that resulted in avoiding or at least minimizing conflicts between Muslims and people of other faiths. The idea of "criteria" for what in God's view is a true religion is addressed in many places in the Qur'an. However, two verses stand out. When it comes to the question of a quranic theology of pluralism, one must consider these two important verses that are said to be a mirror of each other because the wording in these verses is nearly identical. In Q. 2.62 it reads:

> Surely those who have faith, the Jews, Christians and Sabians: those [among them] who have faith in God and the last day and perform works of righteousness, will have their reward with their Lord. No fear shall come upon them, nor will they grieve.

86. Mahmoud Ayoub, "Introduction," in *A Muslim View of Christianity*, p. 2.

It appears again in Q. 5:69 with slight variation (reverses the order of two groups, "Christians and Sabians"). It is important to note that first of these was revealed at the beginning of Prophet Muhammad's career in Medina and again towards the end of his prophetic career, suggesting its message to be an overriding one.[87] In other words, it is argued that these two verses (supported by many other passages with similar message) define Islam's attitude towards other religions and their adherents. These two verses also point to the quranic distinction between "faith" (*imān*) and "religion", the former being universal while the latter viewed as a particular form or an expression that is acquired as a result of a series of historical and hermeneutical stages. Thus, faith can be found manifested in many religions as the qur'anic usage of the word "islam" (i.e. "those who submit to the will of God") seems to imply. The above acknowledgment of other religions is followed by an "invitation" to other peoples of faith. Thus Q. 29:46 reads,

> Do not dispute with the people of the book (*ahl-i kitāb*) except in the fairest manner. . .and say, 'we have faith in that which was revealed to us and that which was revealed to you. Our God and your God is one God; to him we are submitters (*muslims*)'.[88]

Mahmoud Ayoub, a pioneer in interfaith dialogue, argues that the "ideal relation envisioned by the Qur'an between Muslims and Christians is not only one of accommodation and co-existence but of amity and mutual respect."[89] The Qur'an 5:82b addressing Muslims says:

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87. Mahmoud Ayoub, "Islam and Christianity: Between Tolerance and Acceptance," in *A Muslim View of Christianity*, p. 34.

88. Cf. Q. 16:125.

89. Mahmoud Ayoub, "The Islamic Context of Muslim-Christian

> …you shall find the nearest in amity to those who have faith to be those who say we are Christians. This is because there are among them learned persons and monks, and they are not arrogant….

Similarly, the Qur'an in 5:44-46 refers to the Torah and the Gospel as "sources of guidance and light." Like in other places, the Qur'an consistently shows reverence for Jewish and Christian scriptures and many of their other beliefs. In this, the Qur'an recognizes the plurality of religions as the starting point for dialogue. The purpose of dialogue is then to create conditions that will result in the recognition of a common purpose and inspire collective action on the basis of faith and for the sake of the common good. Another verse clarifies this further:

> Say you: 'We believe in God, and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to [all] prophets from their Lord. We make no difference between one and another of them, and we bow to God [in Islam]' (Q. 2:136).

Asma Afsaruddin in her insightful essay on "The Hermeneutics of Inter-Faith Relations" introduces one of the most interesting arguments for dialogue from the Qur'an. She notes that in the Qur'an 2:143, Muslims are identified as *umma wasat* or the "middle community," which implies that they are those who avoid extremes and act in moderation in matters of belief and practice. This is, in effect, a sign of "righteousness" (*taqwa*) and "God-consciousness" (*imān*). Afsaruddin notes that similarly, in Q. 5:66, Jews and Christians are described as "moderate." On the

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Relations," in *A Muslim View of Christianity*, p. 20.

basis of this similarity, it is arguable that for the Qur'an Jews and Christians are to be characterized as righteous and faithful. If being righteous is dependent on and linked with being moderate, then both Muslims and these other communities are on par insofar as they continuously strive to bridge the gap between belief and practice. For Afsaruddin, the quranic passages suggest that the key factor in being righteous is moderation, not our differences in "theological doctrine or denominational affiliation." The Qur'an, in this way, seems to mandate a religiously pluralist society. [90]

Each person has the right to believe in the truth of their way or religious system. Each religion makes such claims. The heart of the matter in Islam is not whether others' claims are less or equal to one's own but rather what the religion demands from me in relation to one's own truth claims and where it places the emphasis for the believer. The emphasis of the Qur'an is not on requiring from a believer to first and foremost make claims of superiority of the religion but something very different. The Qur'an asks its reader to take the task of cultivating and practicing humility in the service to God with utmost seriousness. This may be cultivated through pilgrimage, prayer, fasting, and other acts of worship, and also by showing kindness to one and all, which in itself is a product of humility. This allows the believer to give of oneself and share the resources with others. This message is made plain in numerous verses. If one understands the quranic message to be one of "superiority" over other religions, it becomes even more imperative that a believer in the

90. Asma Afsaruddin, "The Hermenuetics of Inter-Faith Relations: Retrieving Moderation and Pluralism as Universal Principles in Qur'anic Exegeses." *Journal of Religious Ethics,* 37, 2 (2009): p. 331.

Qur'an would follow the central teachings of the Qur'an which is basically asking one to be humble on earth, which would make the belief in superiority somewhat unnecessary. The Qur'an (e.g. 22:69) is clear on the subject of making judgments of this kind: "God will judge on the day of resurrection on matters that you [people of different religions] differ." Based on numerous verses in the Qur'an which speak of our responsibility, one can say that for each believer and each human being (no matter their religion) the task is to live righteously, which includes refraining from judgments against others and their religions.

Conclusion

From the forgoing it is clear that Muslims are asked by the Qur'an not to judge others and their religions. They are asked instead to engage in respectful dialogue in order to exchange ideas and learn together. Muslims are *not* asked to agree with anyone's religious beliefs or to seek to try and change others' views. The Qur'an instructs its reader to maintain the beliefs and practice them as faithfully as possible following in the footsteps of Prophet Muhammad. Nevertheless, Muslims according to the Qur'an must be respectful of other's beliefs and, if they contradict with their own beliefs, respectfully disagree with them. It should be noted that "respect" does not mean "agreement" and disagreement does not have to be in the form of disrespect. In fact, disagreement with another is an ideal opportunity to engage in dialogue with that person or group with the aim of mutual growth and learning.

To conclude, I would repeat a phrase uttered by a contemporary scholar, Maulana Wahiduddin Khan which encapsulates Islam's theology of pluralism in a nutshell: "Follow One [religion], Respect All". The quranic view for the basis for dialogue can be

summed up in the following words: Each individual is asked by God to seek knowledge of God and of oneself. We cannot know ourselves without the other and without collaborating with others, which is, in effect, dialogue. Therefore, dialogue with an "other" is part of one's search for God. The basis for such a dialogue is our common humanity and the call from our respective religions to learn and to live righteously which includes working to promote peace and justice, nonviolently.

A cursory look at the history of dialogue between Muslims and Christians will reveal that we have come a long way in building a foundation for dialogue through outreach, community interactions, as well as through scholarly studies on and about historical interactions between Christians and Muslims.[91] But with the kind of world we are living in today, it is also obvious that we have a long way to go. The momentum to keep moving forward has been established. Numerous Muslim scholars both in the past and present have articulated their views on the quranic emphasis for dialogue across religious, cultural, national and social boundaries. The Qur'an, they argue, even identifies the primary modality for interaction; that is collaboration between religious communities toward a common goal of establishing

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91. Among the many studies on a whole host of themes on Christian-Muslim relations one that stands out is the ongoing multi-volume research effort on *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographic History* which seeks to document the history using "original sources" in order to illustrate "the development in mutual perceptions…." This massive collection, it is hoped, will "contribute to improved recognition between Christians and Muslims in the future." This description is from the verso page in volume 1, covering the period from 600-900 C.E. (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2009), p. iv.

peace and justice.[92] In the context of our troubled world today, the quranic acknowledgement of and invitation to other religions discussed above may be viewed as a way to create a true unity of difference in this otherwise homogenizing world. As globalization seeks to erase differences, Islamic principles can be seen as seeking to safeguard them. The religious and other kinds of differences are real, and they are a blessing from God. What we need is not eradication of differences but an even greater acknowledgement and respect for them. In this, believers and activists from different religions may find strength and inspiration to work together for justice and peace which every humanistic and religious tradition seeks to uphold. It can be argued that the cause of justice is greater than any other cause in this world. The Qur'an instructs Muslims to uphold justice at all costs. The Q. 4.135 reads:

> O you who believe, stand out firmly for justice as witnesses to God even though it be against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it be against rich or poor for God can best protect both. Follow not the lusts (of your hearts) lest you swerve, and if you distort or decline to do justice, indeed God is well-acquainted with all that you do.

Similarly Q. 5:8 reads: "O you who believe, be steadfast to God as witnesses for justice, and let not your abhorrence of a people induce you to act inequitably; rather, be equitable, for this is

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92. See the excellent work by Muhammad Shafiq & Mohammed Abu-Nimer, *Interfaith Dialogue: A Guide for Muslims* 2nd edition (London & Washington: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2011) in which they list the model programs and areas of urgent cooperation and collaboration between Muslims and other communities of faith.

nearer to God-fearing…." These passages from the Qur'an imply that universal principles are greater than communal and even family interests. There is a clear injunction here to collaborate with all those who stand up for justice and peace. The lines are drawn here along the path of principles rather than along communal and religious identities. It might be interesting to note that in regard to justice the quranic distinction is not made between people of one religion against another but rather between those who are oppressed (*mustad'afūn*) and those who are the oppressors (*mutakabbirīn*). The Qur'an clearly identifies a Muslim as one who upholds justice regardless of one's religious and familial loyalties. Therefore, in order to work for justice, Muslims must make alliances with all those who likewise are called towards peace and justice by their respective traditions. They must search for common ground and strive to work for social justice for all of God's creation. As mentioned above the reference to "A Common Word" found in Q. 3:64 invites the "People of the Book," to "come to an agreement between us and you, that we shall worship none but God, that we associate no partners with him, that we erect not from ourselves lords and patrons other than God…." In the spirit of the Qur'an's intent, this invitation should by no means be limited to Jews and Christians, but should be extended to all people of faith and those with no faith; anyone who shares the common vision of working towards peace and justice. Any such common alliance against injustice and violence requires dialogue with, and understanding of others, hence the imperative of inter-religious dialogue.

How I Met St. Francis

Alex Kronemer

I met Saint Francis forty years ago. It happened in the dimly lit Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi. I was nineteen and starting a semester abroad in Italy. That day my group was in the middle of a whirlwind tour of several famous churches. Assisi was the sixth or seventh on the list and remember feeling a creeping *ennui* as we entered the church to the same buzz of tourists as the others, the same dimly lit interior, the same vague scents of incense and dust. It had been raining hard during the days before—a gray, cold rain that had us doing tip-toing twentyyard dashes from our tour bus to the various churches. But on that day the clouds had parted, the sun was shining, and I thought I'd duck out from the tour and soak in a little of the beautiful landscape that I hadn't seen much of up until then. As the tour guide droned on about one of Giotto's frescos, I eased myself to the back of the group and made my escape. That was when I met Francis.

Of course, I knew about St. Francis already—at least a few things—mainly from the birdbaths and figurines depicting his purported kindness to birds and small animals, enough anyway for my testosterone-soaked teenage sensibility to regard him as a boring, milquetoast figure. There was no reason to miss such a beautiful day looking at frescos of him.

But as I was making my way out, my gaze lifted quite by accident and lighted on the strange fresco of St. Francis meeting some Arab personage. The unexpected image stopped me. What was this? I scanned the two-sided paper brochure that I'd been handed when I entered the basilica for a description. All it said was that it depicted the meeting between Francis and the Sultan

of Egypt during the Fifth Crusade. It wasn't much of a description, but I was easily able to imagine the fearlessness Francis must have possessed to do it. I couldn't imagine myself taking the same terrible risk, though I wished I could. In short, I was in sudden awe of him. The timid animal lover fled my imagination. The kitsch and gauzy hagiography obscuring the man of dynamism, courage, and audacious faith fell away.

By that time, my tour had caught up with me, and I remained in the church, not leaving until the honk of the bus horn brought me running out. Then it was on to another church and another, and then to a semester in Rome, and my encounter with Francis—the real Francis—faded from memory.

I graduated from college, went on to study theology at Harvard Divinity School, and in time I become a documentary film maker specializing in stories about Muslim culture, history, and peoples.

About ten years into that work, I was researching a film we were making on the rise and fall of Islamic Spain and came across a brief mention of St. Francis's encounter with the Sultan. I was suddenly transported back to that afternoon in Assisi and instantly knew that one of our next films had to be about the encounter.

And through my research for that film, *The Sultan and the Saint,* which has now been produced, I've come to know Francis more deeply from his writings, of course, and from some of the fine scholarship recently done about him. But mostly, I have come to know St. Francis from the *living connection* to him that I have encountered in the Franciscans we've interviewed and talked to in the course of making the film. That is where our true insights have come from. That is the heartbeat of the film. *That* is

what has helped us bring St. Francis of Assisi to life to address the conflicts of our day.

It is truly an amazing thing to witness. The film we made informs. But like my own meeting with St. Francis all those years ago, the story of the encounter inspires.

Eight hundred years ago a simple Christian friar rejected the angry rhetoric of his time and reached deep for a new understanding of Christ, and found not the anger and violence that was being preached at the time in his name but rather incredible love. That was the missing ingredient in my early understanding of him that allowed him to vanish from my thoughts for so many years—his message of audacious love.

Love caused him to embrace the leper and see in *all people*—even a supposed enemy -a common humanity.

Love inspired his early movement.

Love brought him to the Crusades on a mission of peace.

And love helped him see the humanity of the Muslim ruler that the West was at war with.

That love was so great and so in evidence that it was reciprocated by that same leader, Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil, on the battlefields, when the Christian army was trapped and defeated, and instead of going for the kill, the Sultan fed them and gave them safe passage home.

And as our film shows, that love made all the difference and change world history.

Today we live in another time of anger, violence, distrust, and division. But Francis is also back through the efforts of the Franciscan community toward Muslims, through the new scholarship about Francis, and through our film. He is alive again, encouraging us, inspiring us, showing us the way.

And I believe he will again make the difference.

Almost eight million people watched the film on its debut broadcast in the United States. It has been adopted by hundreds of religious and civic organizations in the US who are trying to end divisions and forge bridges of peace and understanding. Egypt has hosted several screenings of the film to help reconcile the divisions between Muslims and Christians there.

Francis is indeed alive today. But his legacy will ultimately be up to we who are inspired by him. It may be difficult for any one of us to muster the courage and greatness of faith that he showed. But if we can put together the best of who we are, he can again change world history for the better.

My Icon Revisited

Robert Lentz, OFM

It has been twelve years since I painted my icon of the encounter between Saint Francis of Assisi and Sultan Malik al-Kamil. For eight hundred years Franciscans and others have interpreted the significance of that encounter in a variety of ways. While new approaches to thirteenth century documents by Michael Cusato, OFM,[93] and other modern scholars certainly influenced my design in 2006, my personal experience with devout Muslims was equally important. The result was an image very different from what others had painted in the past.

93. See: Michael F. Cusato, OFM, "Healing the Violence of the Contemporary World" in this volume.

In 2007, I presented a paper with the title, *One Flame, One God*, at a conference in Colorado. That paper explained in great detail how the design of the icon originally evolved in my mind. As a piece of art, however, the icon must ultimately stand on its own. Here I simply want to reflect on what I see in the icon now, as I gaze at it, twelve years later.

Without doubt, the flames behind the two holy men are the most striking feature of the icon for me now. While I still recognize them as a symbol of holiness in traditional Islamic art, today my mind is filled with countless images of burning homes and other buildings in lands ISIS has ravaged since I painted the icon. I see hundreds of thousands of homeless children and adults living as refugees in one of the greatest forced migrations of history. I see ruined churches, monasteries, and mosques that belonged to peoples whose faith was not that of their enemies. I see Russian, Syrian, and American planes dropping bombs out of desert skies, in a conflict that seems endless.

Tribalism is nothing new in human history. Great civilizations struggle to rise above its primitive force and they experience moments of glory when they succeed. It remains a darkly magnetic force underneath whatever glory human beings achieve, however. When people no longer feel confident and secure, it re-exerts its influence on their lives and leads them to do terrible things.

Tribal violence that followed the collapse of the European colonization of Muslim lands has now spawned tribalism equally violent and frightening in the lands of the former colonizers. With the presidential election of 2016, tribalism in the form of White Christian nationalism has taken control of the United States. Wherever we turn in our present world, we see people

ready to burn down whatever belongs to "them"—to build walls to keep "them" out—to protect one's tribe from "them." While physical flames are largely confined to Middle Eastern countries, the destructive flames of hatred and fear gnaw at the heart of the Western world.

In the icon I see two men embracing one another in the middle of flames. They seem oblivious to the flames as they gaze into one another's eyes. They have recognized another person of worth in the other. The other is no longer one of "them," but a neighbor, a fellow human being.

Religion and its identifying symbols are important aspects of tribalism. In the great tribal conflict of our time, that between Islamic and Christian societies, this has certainly been true. Ironically, for either group, tribalism is the antithesis of what their religions teach. Both Christianity and Islam teach a universal ideal, based in each case on divine love and compassion. When either Muslims or Christians become tribal, they become, in effect, idolaters. The religion they flaunt becomes a blasphemous prop for their egos.

According to Georgios Mantzaridis, one of the foremost Orthodox theologians of our day, "National elements, when they are set up as absolutes, turn themselves into idols. Thus national consciousness coincides with the worship of idols, and since national consciousness is always delineated by space, it becomes polytheistic. Those who have national consciousness cannot have monotheism."[94] What Mantzaridis says about nationalism is equally true of tribalism, its more primitive expression.

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94. Georgios Mantzaridis, *Time and Man,* St. Tikhon's Monastery Press, 1995, p.20.

During the U. S. presidential campaign of 2016, sociologists pointed out that some of the most zealous supporters of Donald Trump's xenophobia lived in areas where there were actually very few immigrants. Their fear fed on ignorance, creating a monster that did not exist in reality. Fear of what is different lies behind many tribal attitudes. Such fear can lead people to commit horrific acts of violence against others, dragging the perpetrators down to the level of beasts in the process.

As I look at the two men in the icon, I see individuals who have risen above the idolatry of national consciousness. Their encounter led neither to abandon his faith for that of the other, though each listened respectfully to the other over the space of many days. While we do not know al-Kamil's thoughts, it is clear that St. Francis continued on his way a better Christian. The good he discovered in the sultan and in other Muslims spurred him towards greater depths in his own spiritual life.

I see a quiet joy that emanates from the two men. It is a joy many of us in the United States no longer expect to encounter. We are numb from political scandals, lies, violence, and the omnipresent polls that claim to tell us what we think. Glutted by consumerism and afraid of losing our material comforts, we see anyone who challenges our privilege as an enemy. We have lost our souls.

When I first painted the icon, in 2006, the world was full of violence but we remained a mostly optimistic people. Having succumbed to the White Christian nationalism of Donald Trump and his followers, optimism has become a rare commodity for us today in the United States. Gazing at the two men in the icon and recognizing their quiet joy, I am challenged to resist the darkness that has settled over our country. I remember the eyes of my many Muslim friends throughout the world and the goodness they reflected. I have hope.

ECCLESIAM SUAM (selections)
ENCYCLICAL OF POPE PAUL VI
ON THE CHURCH
AUGUST 6, 1964

What the Encyclical Intends

3. The aim of this encyclical will be to demonstrate with increasing clarity how vital it is for the world, and how greatly desired by the Catholic Church, that the two should meet together, and get to know and love one another.

Peace A Matter of Special Urgency

16. What we cannot, however, fail to mention here is the fact that We are acutely conscious ofOur duty to pay particular attention to the serious problem of world peace. It is a problem which demands Our continuous personal involvement and practical concern, exercised of course within the limits of Our own ministry and entirely divorced from any set political theory and from considerations of Our own personal and purely temporal advantage. Our aim must be to educate mankind to sentiments and policies which are opposed to violent and deadly conflicts and to foster just, rational, and peaceful relations between States. We will do Our utmost to promote harmonious relations and a spirit of cooperation between nations, and We will do so by proclaiming principles which represent the highest achievement of human thought, and such as are best calculated to allay the selfishness and greed from which war takes its rise. Nor, if We are allowed the opportunity, will We fail to use our good offices in settling national disputes on a basis of fraternity and honor. We

do not forget that this service, besides being one dictated by love, is in fact a plain duty. It is a duty which the awareness of Our mission in the modern world renders all the more imperative when we consider the advances that have been made in theology and in international institutions. Our mission is to bring men together in mutual love through the power of that kingdom of justice and peace which Christ inaugurated by His coming into the world.

Best of Possible Approaches

78…it seems to Us that the sort of relationship for the Church to establish with the world should be more in the nature of a dialogue, though theoretically other methods are not excluded. We do not mean unrealistic dialogue. It must be adapted to the intelligences of those to whom it is addressed, and it must take account of the circumstances. Dialogue with children is not the same as dialogue with adults, nor is dialogue with Christians the same as dialogue with non-believers. But this method of approach is demanded nowadays by the prevalent understanding of the relationship between the sacred and the profane. It is demanded by the dynamic course of action which is changing the face of modern society. It is demanded by the pluralism of society, and by the maturity man has reached in this day and age. Be he religious or not, his secular education has enabled him to think and speak, and conduct a dialogue with dignity.

79. Moreover, the very fact that he engages in a dialogue of this sort is proof of his consideration and esteem for others, his understanding and his kindness. He detests bigotry and prejudice, malicious and indiscriminate hostility, and empty, boastful speech.

If, in our desire to respect a man's freedom and dignity, his conversion to the true faith is not the immediate object of our dialogue with him, we nevertheless try to help him and to dispose him for a fuller sharing of ideas and convictions.

80. Our dialogue, therefore, presupposes that there exists in us a state of mind which we wish to communicate and to foster in those around us. It is the state of mind which characterizes the man who realizes the seriousness of the apostolic mission and who sees his own salvation as inseparable from the salvation of others. His constant endeavor is to get everyone talking about the message which it has been given to him to communicate.

Its Proper Characteristics

81. Dialogue, therefore, is a recognized method of the apostolate. It is a way of making spiritual contact. It should however have the following characteristics:

1) Clarity before all else; the dialogue demands that what is said should be intelligible. We can think of it as a kind of thought transfusion. It is an invitation to the exercise and development of the highest spiritual and mental powers a man possesses. This fact alone would suffice to make such dialogue rank among the greatest manifestations of human activity and culture. In order to satisfy this first requirement, all of us who feel the spur of the apostolate should examine closely the kind of speech we use. Is it easy to understand? Can it be grasped by ordinary people? Is it current idiom?

2) Our dialogue must be accompanied by that meekness which Christ bade us learn from Himself: "Learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart." (56) It would indeed be a disgrace if our dialogue were marked by arrogance, the use of bared words or offensive bitterness. What gives it its authority is the fact

that it affirms the truth, shares with others the gifts of charity, is itself an example of virtue, avoids peremptory language, makes no demands. It is peaceful, has no use for extreme methods, is patient under contradiction and inclines towards generosity.

3) Confidence is also necessary; confidence not only in the power of one's own words, but also in the good will of both parties to the dialogue. Hence dialogue promotes intimacy and friendship on both sides. It unites them in a mutual adherence to the Good, and thus excludes all self-seeking.

4) Finally, the prudence of a teacher who is most careful to make allowances for the psychological and moral circumstances of his hearer, (57) particularly if he is a child, unprepared, suspicious or hostile. The person who speaks is always at pains to learn the sensitivities of his audience, and if reason demands it, he adapts himself and the manner of his presentation to the susceptibilities and the degree of intelligence of his hearers.

82. In a dialogue conducted with this kind of foresight, truth is wedded to charity and understanding to love.

Modes of Dialogue

84. Consider now the form which the dialogue of salvation takes, and the manner of exposition .

85. It has many forms. If necessary it takes account of actual experience. It chooses appropriate means. It is unencumbered by prejudice. It does not hold fast to forms of expression which have lost their meaning and can no longer stir men's minds.

The Crucial Question

86. We are faced here with a serious problem: how is the Church to adapt its mission to the particular age, environment, educational and social conditions of men's lives?

87. To what extent should the Church adapt itself to the historical and local circumstances in which it has to exercise its mission? How is it to guard against the danger of relativism which would make it untrue to its own dogmas and moral principles? And yet how can it fit itself to approach all men and bring salvation to all, becoming on the example of the Apostle Paul "all things to all men," that all may be saved? (58)

Preliminary Conditions

Since the world cannot be saved from the outside, we must first of all identify ourselves with those to whom we would bring the Christian message-like the Word of God who Himself became a man. Next we must forego all privilege and the use of unintelligible language, and adopt the way of life of ordinary people in all that is human and honorable. Indeed, we must adopt the way of life of the most humble people, if we wish to be listened to and understood. Then, before speaking, we must take great care to listen not only to what men say, but more especially to what they have it in their hearts to say. Only then will we understand them and respect them, and even, as far as possible, agree with them.

Furthermore, if we want to be men's pastors, fathers and teachers, we must also behave as their brothers. Dialogue thrives on friendship, and most especially on service. All this we must remember and strive to put into practice on the example and precept of Christ. (59)

A Message for Everyone

93. Speaking generally of the dialogue which the Church of today must take up with a great renewal of fervor, We would say that it must be readily conducted with all men of good will both inside and outside the Church.

94. The Church can regard no one as excluded from its motherly embrace, no one as outside the scope of its motherly care. It has no enemies except those who wish to make themselves such. Its catholicity is no idle boast. It was not for nothing that it received its mission to foster love, unity and peace among men.

DECLARATION ON THE RELATION OF THE CHURCH TO NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS
***NOSTRA AETATE* (selections)**
PROCLAIMED BY HIS HOLINESS POPE PAUL VI ON OCTOBER 28, 1965

1. In our time, when day by day mankind is being drawn closer together, and the ties between different peoples are becoming stronger, the Church examines more closely her relationship to non-Christian religions. In her task of promoting unity and love among men, indeed among nations, she considers above all in this declaration what men have in common and what draws them to fellowship.

One is the community of all peoples, one their origin, for God made the whole human race to live over the face of the earth.(1) One also is their final goal, God. His providence, His manifestations of goodness, His saving design extend to all men,(2) until that time when the elect will be united in the Holy City, the city ablaze with the glory of God, where the nations will walk in His light.(3)

Men expect from the various religions answers to the unsolved riddles of the human condition, which today, even as in former times, deeply stir the hearts of men: What is man? What is the meaning, the aim of our life? What is moral good, what sin?

Whence suffering and what purpose does it serve? Which is the road to true happiness? What are death, judgment and retribution after death? What, finally, is that ultimate inexpressible mystery which encompasses our existence: whence do we come, and where are we going?

2. From ancient times down to the present, there is found among various peoples a certain perception of that hidden power which hovers over the course of things and over the events of human history; at times some indeed have come to the recognition of a Supreme Being, or even of a Father. This perception and recognition penetrates their lives with a profound religious sense.

Religions, however, that are bound up with an advanced culture have struggled to answer the same questions by means of more refined concepts and a more developed language. Thus in Hinduism, men contemplate the divine mystery and express it through an inexhaustible abundance of myths and through searching philosophical inquiry. They seek freedom from the anguish of our human condition either through ascetical practices or profound meditation or a flight to God with love and trust. Again, Buddhism, in its various forms, realizes the radical insufficiency of this changeable world; it teaches a way by which men, in a devout and confident spirit, may be able either to acquire the state of perfect liberation, or attain, by their own efforts or through higher help, supreme illumination. Likewise, other religions found everywhere try to counter the restlessness of the human heart, each in its own manner, by proposing "ways," comprising teachings, rules of life, and sacred rites. The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in

many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. Indeed, she proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself. (4)

The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men.

3. The Church regards with esteem also the Muslims. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and allpowerful, the Creator of heaven and earth,(5) who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honor Mary, His virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with devotion. In addition, they await the day of judgment when God will render their deserts to all those who have been raised up from the dead. Finally, they value the moral life and worship God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting.

Since in the course of centuries not a few quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Moslems, this sacred synod urges all to forget the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for

the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom.

5. We cannot truly call on God, the Father of all, if we refuse to treat in a brotherly way any man, created as he is in the image of God. Man's relation to God the Father and his relation to men his brothers are so linked together that Scripture says: "He who does not love does not know God" (1 John 4:8).

No foundation therefore remains for any theory or practice that leads to discrimination between man and man or people and people, so far as their human dignity and the rights flowing from it are concerned.

The Church reproves, as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against men or harassment of them because of their race, color, condition of life, or religion. On the contrary, following in the footsteps of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, this sacred synod ardently implores the Christian faithful to "maintain good fellowship among the nations" (1 Peter 2:12), and, if possible, to live for their part in peace with all men,(14) so that they may truly be sons of the Father who is in heaven.(15)

NOTES

1. Cf. *Acts* 17:26
2. Cf. *Wis*. 8:1; *Acts* 14:17; *Rom*. 2:6-7; 1 *Tim*. 2:4
3. Cf. *Apoc*. 21:23f.
4. Cf 2 *Cor*. 5:18-19
5. Cf St. Gregory VII, *letter XXI to Anzir (Nacir), King of Mauritania* (Pl. 148, col. 450f.)
6. Cf. *Gal*. 3:7
7. Cf. *Rom*. 11:17-24
8. Cf. *Eph*. 2:14-16

9. Cf. *Lk*. 19:44
10. Cf. *Rom*. 11:28
11. Cf. *Rom*. 11:28-29; cf. dogmatic Constitution, *Lumen Gentium* (Light of nations) AAS, 57 (1965) pag. 20
12. Cf. *Is*. 66:23; *Ps*. 65:4; *Rom*. 11:11-32
13. Cf. *John*. 19:6
14. Cf. *Rom*. 12:18
15. Cf. *Matt*. 5:45

DOGMATIC CONSTITUTION ON THE CHURCH
***LUMEN GENTIUM* (selections)**
SOLEMNLY PROMULGATED BY HIS HOLINESS
POPE PAUL VI
ON NOVEMBER 21, 1964

16. …those who have not yet received the Gospel are related in various ways to the people of God.(18*) In the first place we must recall the people to whom the testament and the promises were given and from whom Christ was born according to the flesh.(125) On account of their fathers this people remains most dear to God, for God does not repent of the gifts He makes nor of the calls He issues.(126); But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator. In the first place amongst these there are the Muslims, who, professing to hold the faith of Abraham, along with us adore the one and merciful God, who on the last day will judge mankind. Nor is God far distant from those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God, for it is He who gives to all men life and breath and all things,(127) and as Saviour wills that all men be saved.(128) Those also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and

moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience.(19*) Nor does Divine Providence deny the helps necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God and with His grace strive to live a good life. Whatever good or truth is found amongst them is looked upon by the Church as a preparation for the Gospel.(20*) She knows that it is given by Him who enlightens all men so that they may finally have life. But often men, deceived by the Evil One, have become vain in their reasonings and have exchanged the truth of God for a lie, serving the creature rather than the Creator. (129) Or some there are who, living and dying in this world without God, are exposed to final despair. Wherefore to promote the glory of God and procure the salvation of all of these, and mindful of the command of the Lord, "Preach the Gospel to every creature",(130) the Church fosters the missions with care and attention.

General Constitutions of the Order of Friars Minor (1988) (Selections)

"The brothers should detect the seeds of the Word and the secret presence of God in today's world and in a goodly number of elements in other religions and cultures. They should undertake a study of these religions and cultures with a sense of great reverence." (art. 93.2)

"By a kind and reverential presence among them, the friars are to work with believers of other religions in order to build up the people God has given them.

As followers of St. Francis and of the first missionaries of the Order, the friars are to be especially concerned to go humbly and devoutly among the nations of Islam, for whom also no one is all-powerful except God." (art. 95.2-3)

"In announcing the Gospel, the friars are to work with patience and humility and show a great reverence for the consciences of all. Setting aside any kind of proselytizing, they are to expect nothing from their listeners except what the Lord shall give them." (art. 104)

Suggested Elements for Use in a Prayer Service

Commemorating the Encounter between St. Francis and the Sultan

As a way of honoring the peaceful witness of St. Francis and Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil, Christians and Muslims are encouraged to come together as they did, i.e., each praying according to their respective beliefs and traditions. By praying in the presence of each other in this way, Christians and Muslims may give full voice to the fulness of their faiths, each community knowing that it is respected in the integrity of its faith by the reverent presence of the other.

To facilitate this faithful and peaceful sharing, the following elements (readings, prayers, etc.) are suggested for use in a common celebration. In this same spirit of faithfulness and peacefulness, special care should be taken to select a venue in which both Christians and Muslims are comfortable praying. While a "neutral" venue may suffice, this need not necessarily be the case. What is important is that each community feel and know that it is welcomed

Opening

It would be appropriate for those who will lead this commemorative Service, Christian and Muslim together, to enter the prayer space formally and/or to be seated in a place from which they may be seen to lead the Service together. An appropriate song, i.e., one that all those participating in the Service may sing, may be used at this time, as a way of creating a sense of respectful community.

It would likewise be appropriate to give some introduction to the Encounter being commemorated, for the sake of those present who may not be familiar with it. The following passage, inspired by the

Franciscan Brothers of the International Fraternity for Dialogue (Turkey), may be used for this purpose, or those preparing this Service may use/compose another text they deem more appropriate.

In 1219, in Damietta, Egypt, a most extraordinary encounter took place.

St. Francis of Assisi crossed the battle-line that divided Christian-Crusaders and Muslim defenders to speak with Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil. He set out unarmed, handing himself over to the power of men and the power of God. Because he was unarmed, he was also disarming. He found a respectful welcome in the tent of the Sultan. With mutual respect and reverence, they spoke with one another as Brothers about the pace God willed for all His children. In this same spirit of respect, reverence and peace, they parted as friends—and as more than friends. They parted as brothers, each committed to walk the blessed path of peace.

As we journey further into this third millennium of the Common Era, at a time when we are witnessing a resurgence of the violence that marked the age in which St. Francis and Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil lived, it is important than ever to remember their encounter and recommit ourselves to walk the blessed path of peace, for the sake of peace for all people—for the sake of peace among all God's children.

A Franciscan Prayer

Prayer: "The Praises of God (St. Francis)"

This prayer of St. Francis may be sung or prayerfully recited. An antiphon, e.g., "Salve Sancte Pater," may be sung in between each part of this prayer, as a way of expressing our desire to following St. Francis' example of faithful and reverent engagement of Muslims "for whom no one is all-powerful except God. (CCGG, §3)"

You are the Holy Lord, the Only God, who works miracles.
You are Strong,
You are Great,
You are the Most High,
You are King Eternal,
You are Holy Father, King of Heaven and Earth.

You are Love, Charity;
You are Wisdom, You are Humility,
You are Patience, You are Beauty, You are Gentleness;
You are Security, You are Quiet, You are Joy;
You are our Hope and Joy, You are Justice,
You are Temperance,
You are all our Riches unto sufficiency.

You are our Charity, You are our Hope,
You are Protector, You are our Sweetness,
You are our Eternal Life,
Great and Admirable Lord, God Omnipotent, Merciful Saviour.

A Christian Reading

One or more of the following passages from the New Testament may be read at this time. If two or more readings are used, a Psalm or an appropriate hymn may be sung between them.

Luke 6.20-31
Romans 4.16
1 Cor. 12.14-20
1 John 4.7-12

Prayer: "Lord, You are Tenderness"

The Franciscan Leader may offer the following prayer, composed by Bro. Gwenolé Jeusette, OFM. A simple antiphon, e.g,. "Ubi Caritas," may be sung in between each part of this prayer, as a way of expressing our commitment to live Christ Jesus' teaching that it is by our love that the world will know that we are His disciples. (John 13, 35)"

O Father, you who are tenderness, at this moment when hatred and love struggle against one another in the storm of our world, your sons and daughters dispersed throughout the nations and religions cry to You for help to bring the peace that they are unable to bring themselves.

You who clams the storms, we know that, if violence explodes because of extremists, it finds seeds in injustice. It spreads because the violent have heard the cry of the poor whom we have left by the side of the road. Makes us understand how materially advanced societies are keeping men and women locked in misery so that we may enjoy our comfortable lives and be secure in our alliance with those who dominate our world.

"God, destroyer of war: as you are called in the Book of Judith, destroy fanaticism as soon as it filters into the hearts of believers of all religions. Dissolve the fear that engenders the hatred that they think is blessed by God. Teach us how to free our fanatic brothers from their arrogant convictions, and keep us so small and open to you and to them that they will no longer fear us.

Never allow our hearts to transform themselves into a ghetto. Destroy the root of contempt everywhere so that the seed of fundamentalism will never find in us a soil where it can develop!

Help us to see our own limitations clearly before we criticize the weaknesses of others and fill us with a love that not judge the

faith of other people on the basis of deviations but on the examples of its most worthy representatives.

O Lord of the Feast, tear once and for all from the heart of Your Church all desire of domination and give to everyone the grace of a friendship on the other bank of the river of our faith. Make us leap over to the other shore where we can dance with those whom you have prepared to welcome us. Make us dance with joy, hope and love, without ever losing ourselves personally in someone other than you who live and reign yesterday, today and forever, for all eternity. Amen.

Song: "Prayer of St. Francis"

This or another appropriate song may be sung by the Christian community gathered for this Service. The words of this popular English-language hymn are reproduced below.

Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me bring your love;
Where there is injury your pardon, Lord;
And where's there doubt true faith in you.

Where there's despair in life, let me bring hope;
Where there is darkness, only light;
And where there's sadness, ever joy.

O Master grant that I may never seek
So much to be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved as to love with all my soul.

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
In giving to all that we receive;

And in dying that we're born to eternal life.

A Muslim Prayer

It would be most appropriate for Muslims participating in this Service to use or develop a prayer that they believe best represents the integrity of their faith. The readings listed below are offered solely by way of an aid to them.

Passages from the Qur'an:

Al-Baqara 2.136

Al-Nisa' 4.124-126

Al-Hujarat 49.13

A Reading from Emir 'Abd al-Qadir (1808-1883)

"If you think and believe that He is what all schools of Islam profess and believe—He is that, and He is other than that! If you think that He is what the diverse communities believe—Muslims, Christians, Jews, Mazdeans, polytheists and others—He is that and He is other than that!...No one knows Him in all His aspects; no one is ignorant of Him in all His aspects." (*Mawqif*, 254)

A Reading from Ibn al-'Arabi (1165-1240)

"My heart has become capable of every form. It is a pasture for gazelles, a convent for Christian monks, a temple for idols, the Ka'aba of the pilgrim, the tablets of the Torah, and the book of the Qur'an. I follow the religion of Love. Whatever way Love's camels take, that is my religion & my faith." (*Tarjuman al-Ashwaq, poem 11*)

A Moment of Reflection

A representative from the Christian community and from the Muslim community may wish to offer a reflection or reflections at this time.

A Commitment to Peace

At this moment, it would be appropriate for those Christians and Muslims gathered for this Service to affirm their faith-filled desire and mutual commitment to be agents of peace. The below elements are suggestions as appropriate ways for them publicly to express this desire and give common voice to this commitment.

Commitment to Peace

The below ten points are adapted from the Ten Commitments to Peace that were used at the 25th Anniversary Service commemorating the Spirit of Assisi. All those present may recite them together. Their leaders and/or representatives from their communities may also wish to sign a book in which these commitments are recorded, as a witness to their common commitment to peace.

As Muslims and Christians, we commit ourselves to proclaiming our firm conviction that violence and terrorism are opposed to all true religious spirit and we condemn all recourse to violence and war in the name of God or religion. We undertake to do everything possible to eradicate the causes of such violence and terrorism.

As Muslims and Christians, we commit ourselves to educate people about respect and mutual esteem in order to achieve peaceful coexistence and solidarity among members of different ethnic groups, cultures and religions.

As Muslims and Christians, we commit ourselves to promote the culture of dialogue so that understanding and trust may develop among individuals and peoples as these are the conditions of authentic peace.

As Muslims and Christians, we commit ourselves to defend the right of all human beings to lead a dignified life, in accordance with their religious and cultural identities.

As Muslims and Christians, we commit ourselves to engage in dialogue with sincerity and patience, without considering what separates us as an insurmountable wall, on the contrary, recognizing that facing our differences can become an occasion for greater reciprocal understanding.

As Muslims and Christians, we commit ourselves to pardon each other's errors and prejudices of the past and present, and to support one another in the common struggle against egoism and abuses, hatred and violence, and in order to learn from the past that peace without justice is not true peace.

As Muslims and Christians, we commit ourselves to stand at the side of those who suffer poverty and abandonment, speaking out for those who have no voice and taking concrete action to overcome such situations, in the conviction that no one can be happy alone.

As Muslims and Christians, we commit ourselves to make our own the cry of those who do not surrender to violence and evil, and we wish to contribute with all our strength to give a real hope of justice and peace to the humanity of our time.

As Muslims and Christians, we commit ourselves to encourage all initiatives that promote friendship between peoples, in the conviction that, if a solid understanding between peoples is lacking, technological progress exposes the world to increasing dangers of destruction and death.

As Muslims and Christians, we commit ourselves to ask the leaders of nations to make every possible effort so as to build, at both national and international levels, a world of solidarity and peace founded on justice.

Exchange of Peace

All those present may offer one another a sign of peace that is respectful of each other's respective religious and/or cultural customs.

Closing

It would be appropriate for there to be some way of concluding this commemorative Prayer Service, e.g., with a blessing, a dismissal, and/or a song, or some other way to formally bring this privileged time to a fitting conclusion.

Contributors

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Michael F. Cusato, OFM, PhD is the author of numerous articles on medieval Franciscan history, with a particular emphasis on the historical contextualization of the Franciscan sources (most notably the *Early Rule* and the *Sacrum commercium*), the stigmatization narratives, the encounter of Francis of Assisi with the Sultan Malik al-Kamil and the role of apocalyptic thought in Franciscan self-understanding. He has also contributed important studies on figures such as Elias of Cortona, Caesar of Speyer, John of Parma, Arnald of Villanova and Angelo Clareno. He serves as the English-language translator for the works of André Vauchez (on Francis of Assisi with Yale University Press and Catherine of Siena with Paulist Press). He served as director of the Franciscan Institute and Dean of the School of Franciscan Studies at St. Bonaventure University, USA from 2003-2011. He served as a consultant for the 2017 film about St. Francis in

Egypt titled: *The Sultan and the Saint* (Unity Productions). He is currently living in Washington, DC as a private researcher.

Alex Kronemer is the co-founder of Unity Productions Foundation (UPF), a non-profit production company dedicated to working for peace and interfaith understanding through film. He has been the Executive Producer on all of UPF's award winning films and docudramas and is the writer and director of *The Sultan and the Saint* (2017).

Robert Lentz, OFM is an artist-in-residence at St. Bonaventure University, USA. Besides painting many hours each day, he teaches apprentices, writes, and conducts workshops on art and spirituality throughout the United States. He is active in promoting dialog between Muslims and Christians and is committed to the indigenization of Byzantine iconography in the various cultures embraced by the Church.

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