



NŪR

Spring 2019

نور

SPECIAL EDITION:
THE SULTAN & ST. FRANCIS
1219-2019

The Magazine of The Center
for Arabic & Islamic Studies

مركز الدراسات العربية والإسلامية



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FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

This year Franciscan communities worldwide are commemorating a hallmark in the history of Christian-Muslim relations: the 800th anniversary of the remarkable encounter between Francis of Assisi and the Sultan of Egypt, al-Malik al-Kamil in 1219. Their encounter served as the inspiration for the foundation of St. Bonaventure's Center for Arab and Islamic Studies in 2015, and continues to serve as a poignant paradigm for peaceful and reverential relations between Christians and Muslims, and indeed between people of all faiths. This special of issue of *Nūr* celebrates this important story from a variety of perspectives, and highlights its enduring relevance in a world that all too frequently resorts to violence to settle challenges of religious, racial, ethnic and political diversity.

This issues begins with an article introducing the Sultan who is less known to most people than Francis, but whose story presents a person of keen intellect, deep faith as well as political acumen. Artistic renderings of the Francis-Sultan encounter are examined by Br. Robert Lentz, a Franciscan friar who painted his own, and now renowned icon of the sultan and the saint. Islamic Scholar Irfan Omar presents a cogent analysis of Islam's view of other religions based on the teachings of the Qur'an. Michael Cusato, a prominent Franciscan scholar reviews the final book written by Jan Hoeberichts (d. 2014), a Franciscan scholar, who devoted much of his life's work to Franciscan-Muslim relations.

Turning to the contemporary scene, CAIS intern, Amina Golden-Arabaty reviews *An American Family*, the memoir of Khizr Khan, an American Muslim, who rose to fame after his impassioned speech at the Democratic Convention in 2016. Highlighting the enduring legacy of the Francis-Sultan encounter, Amina also presents selections from remarks made by Pope Francis during his recent visits to the United Arab Emirates and Morocco. Finally, we have included a letter to Muslim communities worldwide observing Ramadan. This letter is distributed under the auspices of the Franciscan Special Commission for Dialogue with Islam which I chair. News about recent programs sponsored by CAIS complete this special issue.

When *Nūr* was first inaugurated in 2015, it was a newsletter just a few pages in length. Today, as you see, it has now grown into an attractive and bonafide magazine. This is in no small part due to the creativity of Amina Golden-Arabaty. Since 2016, Amina, an undergraduate journalism and mass communications major at St. Bonaventure, has labored tirelessly for CAIS in many different capacities, not only assuming responsibility for the design and production of *Nūr*, but assisting in organizing, advertising and hosting events, assisting in research, and representing CAIS and MSA (Muslim Students and Allies) at events on and off campus. As now a graduate of St. Bonaventure, Amina will be sharing her professional skills with a larger audience, one which will certainly benefit from her many unique gifts.

Once again, I wish to express my gratitude to all those who support CAIS in a variety of capacities. I hope you enjoy this special issue of *Nūr* and find your own way of honoring the example left by the Sultan and the Saint!

Michael D. Calabria, O.F.M., Ph.D.

Director of the Center for Arab and Islamic Studies

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السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ

مركز الدراسات العربية والإسلامية



Introducing the Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil

BY MICHAEL CALABRIA, O.F.M., PH.D.

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-Makin ibn al-'Amid (1205/6-1273/4 CE), and histories of

the the Ayyubid sultanate by Ibn Wasil (1207-1298 CE) and al-Maqrizi (1364-1442).¹ 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 1180.² At the time, Cairo was one of the largest cities in the Mediterranean,³ and was home to the Mosque-university of al-Azhar, one of the oldest universities in the world.

1 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-Athir for the Crusading Period from al-Kamil fi'l-ta'rikh, 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).

2 Al-Maqrizi, *A History of the Ayyubid Sultans of Egypt*, trans. 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 Ägypten und Seine Zeit* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1958), 24, n. 1.

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

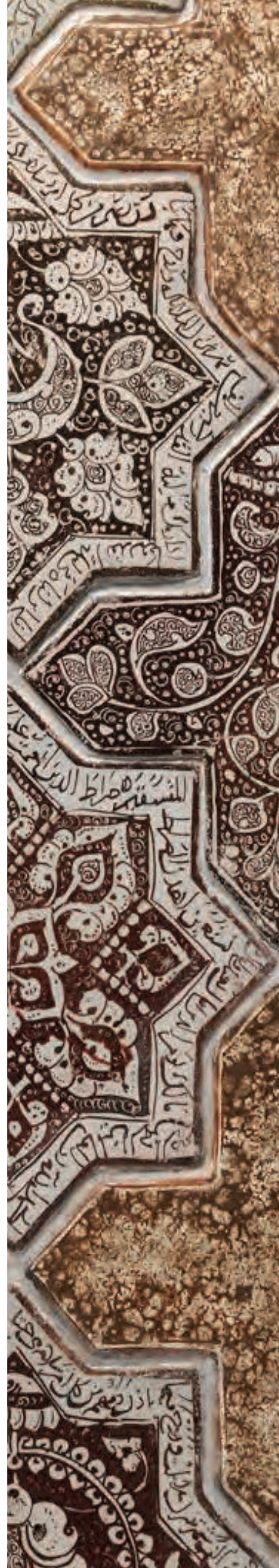
His family, the Ayyubids, was of Kurdish origin, and had risen to particular prominence when his uncle, Salah al-Din Yusuf ibn al-Ayyub ("Saladin"), became vizier in Egypt in 1169 during the final chaotic years of the Fatimid Caliphate that had ruled Egypt, North Africa and the Holy Land from 909-1171.⁴ 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 1187.⁵

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 of Jerusalem.⁶ 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

4 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).

5 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).

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





mother, the princess 'Adilyah, other than she died in 1211 (8 August / 25 Šafar 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.⁷

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 heir⁸ – 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 1211.⁹ 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 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 h a r - bors, 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..."¹⁰

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 'Adilyah, 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 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.¹¹ 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'état. The 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.

⁷ Stephennie Mulder, "The Mausoleum of Imām al-Shāfi'i," *Muqarnas*, vol. 23 (2006), 15–46.

⁸ Maqrizi, 136.

⁹ Maqrizi, 153.

¹⁰ 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/demontor-toise2000/hist9-hm>).

¹¹

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



As al-Kamil made plans to flee to Yemen where his son al-Ma'sud 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.¹²

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."¹³

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 (ṭariqah). 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 a God experienced as Beautiful, Merciful and Gentle, and who emphasized a life of itiner-

ancy, 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, topics also found in Franciscan hagiography.¹⁴ 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." Succinctly put, the term signifies that there is only one existence, one wajud 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 Acre with John of Brienne, then boarding a galley bound for Venice. Learning that the Euro-

¹² 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.

¹³ Maqrizi, 229.

¹⁴ 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.

peans 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-Mu'azzam, a sad turn of events given al-Mu'azzam's vital assistance during the Crusade. Now that al-Kamil was securely in possession of Egypt, al-Mu'azzam sought to expand his own realm northwards from Damascus.

By 1226, al-Kamil had more than al-Mu'azzam 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-Mu'azzam 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-Mu'azzam 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 Mu'azzam, 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

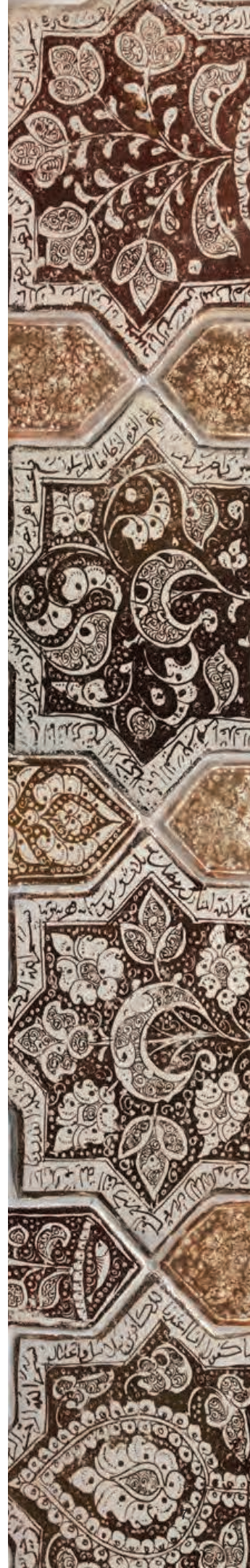
his father's son, and a truce was better than another conflict with the Europeans, particularly at a time when family relations were still considerably strained. In the end, al-Kamil concessions were modest in comparison to his earlier offers, but no less remarkable within the context of the thirteenth-century. In exchange for a ten-year truce, al-Kamil 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-Mu'azzam had before him, and like his brother, he too succumbed. Al-Malik al-Kamil Muhammad ibn al-'Adil, 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.



Michael Calabria, O.F.M., Ph.D.

Director of the C.A.I.S.





Pope Francis and Grand Imam of al-Azhar Ahmed al-Tageb

CROSSING LINES

Pope Francis Visits the U.A.E. & the Kingdom of Morocco

February- March 2019

.....
“Good relations between East and West are indisputably necessary for both. They must not be neglected , so that each can be enriched by the other’s culture through fruitful exchange and dialogue. ” - Pope Francis

“This visit is for me an occasion of joy and gratitude, for it allows me to see at first hand the richness of your land, your people and your traditions. I am also grateful that my visit offers a significant opportunity for advancing inter-religious dialogue and mutual understanding among the followers of our two religions, as we commemorate – at a distance of eight centuries – the historic meeting between Saint Francis of Assisi and Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil. That prophetic event shows that the courage to encounter one another and extend a hand of friendship is a pathway of peace and harmony for humanity, whereas extremism and hatred cause division and destruction.”

“Thank you. I interpret all these welcoming gestures as gestures of good will. Everyone does them according to their own culture.”

“No history is small, none. Every history is great and worthy, and even if it is bad, its dignity hidden, it can always emerge.”

“In the face of such crises that result in the deaths of millions of children--wasted away from poverty and hunger--there is an unacceptable silence on the international level.”



The pope was met by Morocco's King Mohammed VI

“Without freedom, we are no longer children of the human family, but slaves. As parts of such freedom, I would like to emphasize religious freedom. It is not limited only to freedom of worship but sees in the other truly a brother or sister, a child of my own humanity whom God leaves free and whom, therefore, no human can coerce, not even in God's name.”



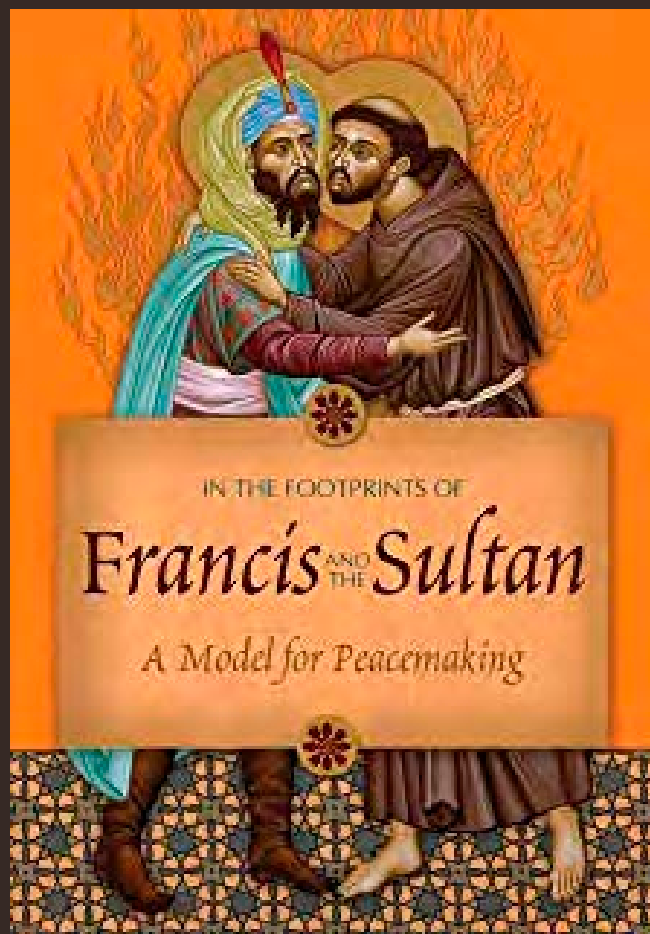
The meeting was sponsored by Council of Elders and was promoted as a key part of the UAE's declaration of 2019 as the “Year of Tolerance.”

“In the name of God and of everything stated thus far; Al-Azhar al-Sharif and the Muslims of the East and West, together with the Catholic Church and the Catholics of the East and West, declare adoption of a culture of dialogue as the path; mutual co-operation as the code of conduct; reciprocal understanding as the method and standard.”

“We call upon intellectuals, philosophers, religious figures, artists, media professionals and men and women of culture in every part of the world, to rediscover the values of peace, justice, goodness, beauty, human fraternity and coexistence in order to confirm the importance of these values and anchors of salvation for all and to promote them everywhere.”

Quotes by Pope Francis:
compiled by Amina
Golden-Arabyat

**For
more
information on
the
historical
encounter
between
the
Sultan
and
St. Francis,
see
these
two
published
documentaries.**



Franciscan Media, 2012

Unity Productions Foundation , 2017



Spotlight on Islamic Art

A Global Masterpiece

by Michael Calabria, OFM, PhD

Astronomy was a highly regarded discipline in Muslim societies including the Ayyubid Sultanate of al-Malik al-Kamil. The position of the stars not only helped to determine times and seasons, but also aided in travel and navigation. As is written in the Qur'an (6.97): "It is He who made the stars for you that you may be guided by them through the darkness of land and sea." This celestial globe, inscribed with the sultan's name, is both a masterpiece of metalwork and astronomical knowledge. Stars are rendered as inlaid silver dots and the figures of the constellations are finely engraved into the globe's copper surface. Remarkably, the globe presents the stars and constellations, not as if one is looking up at the night sky, but from the perspective of the Creator: looking down towards the earth.



Celestial Globe of al-Malik al-Kamil. Egypt or Syria, A.H. 622 (1225/26).

Copper alloy inlaid with silver and copper. Diameter 8 5/8 in. (22 cm.)

Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte, Naples.

See: *Jerusalem 1000-1400: Every People Under Heaven*, edited by Barbara Drake and Melanie Holcomb. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2016. Pp. 98-99.

Artistic representations of St. Francis and the Sultan

by Br. Robert Lentz, O.F.M.

While the Franciscan movement spread like wildfire in thirteenth-century Europe, it was by no means universally popular. Bishops and the diocesan clergy regarded the new mendicants with suspicion, bordering on hostility. After a thousand years of accommodation with Caesar, Francis and his first followers had stepped to one side and begun once again to live the Gospel simply. Their way of life challenged the wealth and worldly power that shored up medieval Catholicism. Some churchmen felt so threatened by their example that they condemned Franciscan poverty as a heresy.

Today this sounds ridiculous. We admire prophetic figures like Dorothy Day and Mother Teresa of Calcutta who went among the poorest members of society and shared their lot. Mother Teresa has already been canonized, and Dorothy Day's cause for canonization is being considered by Rome. During her lifetime, however, Dorothy said this about canonization: "Don't call me a saint! I don't want to be dismissed so easily."

In a 2013 book review in *The New Yorker*, Joan Acocella spoke in a similar way about St. Francis: "For the Church, Francis was too revered not to claim, too radical not to neutralize." Faced with hos-

tility on many sides, St. Bonaventure, the 7th Minister General of the Franciscan Order, toned down much of what had been prophetic in Francis' life when he wrote the official biography of the saint. By neutralizing what was too radical, he assured a future for the Order, and the Order gradually fell in line with the politics of its day.

One of the most controversial events in St. Francis' life was his peaceful encounter with Islam during the Fifth Crusade. Launched by Pope Innocent III during the Fourth Lateran Council, this crusade was one of many measures the council enacted against Muslims. When Francis accompanied the crusaders to Egypt, he ended up crossing over to the enemy camp, where he spent many days in peaceful conversation with the sultan, Malik al-Kamil. The two men came to respect one another and parted as friends. Given the official position of the Catholic Church, acknowledging this friendship might have destroyed the entire Franciscan movement.

In his official biography of Francis, Bonaventure therefore introduces a story in which Francis challenges Islamic holy men to a trial by fire in the sultan's presence. When the Muslims refuse to step into the flames with him, Francis

clearly demonstrates how false their religion is. The story does not occur in earlier Franciscan documents, or in accounts by Jacques de Vitry and crusaders who were in Egypt at that time. Once told by Bonaventure, however, it was repeated for centuries. Franciscan censors destroyed whatever other earlier biographies they could find. Because Bonaventure's biography was the only official account of St. Francis' life, until recent times artists have depicted the trial by fire in churches throughout Europe.



In the tempera painting by Taddeo Gaddi, created one hundred years after St. Francis' death, Francis stands ready to step bravely into raging flames while cowardly Muslims remonstrate with their sultan as he commands them to do the same.

In the next century, a few years after Constantinople had fallen to the Ottoman Turks, Beno-

zzo Gozzoli painted a fresco in which Francis is already standing on live coals, while the sultan and other members of his court look on with silent amazement. The calm strength and dignity of the Christian ascetic have astonished the foppish Muslims.



Another image from that century, a French manuscript miniature, depicts Francis and the sultan glaring at one another. In this instance, the sultan is a wild looking barbarian rather than a stylish fop. The Christian saint stubbornly defies him.



A final example comes from 19th century Italy. Here Niccolò Monti de Pistoia depicts a simple-minded, innocent Francis before a hostile sultan and his courtiers. There is a smok-

ing brazier next to the sultan's throne and a foolish-looking Sufi seems to be trying to sneak away from the ordeal by fire.



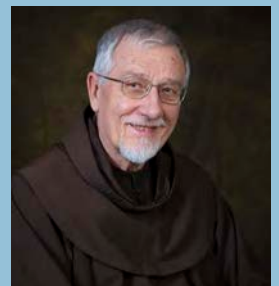
These are a small handful of efforts across the centuries to illustrate St. Bonaventure's story. Taken as a whole, they reflect not only the hostility that Europeans felt towards Islam but also their sense of superiority over people in the Middle East. There is nothing in them to challenge European prejudices. In fact, such paintings have even fostered hostility towards Islam within the Order Francis founded.

It has been 12 years since I painted my icon of the encounter between Francis and the sultan (see inside cover). After 800 years in which Bonaventure's official biography held sway over the Franciscan world, I had a new advantage of fresh approaches to thirteenth century documents by Michael Cusato, OFM, and other modern scholars. While I no longer accepted the veracity of the trial by fire, I felt I had to find some way to acknowledge the persistent symbol of flames over so many centuries. My solution was to take the flames from Bonaventure's story and raise them above the ground so that they might become an Islamic "halo" behind the two men. In the midst

of these flames, traditional Christian halos also surround the heads of the two men. Both the flames and the round halos are fashioned from the same 23-karat gold leaf, since divine light is one. The days the two men spent together in holy dialog were bathed with this light, as each one spoke of God, learning how filled the other already was with God's light.

Without doubt, the flames behind the two holy men are the most striking feature of my icon. 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 belong 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.

I also see two men embracing one another in the middle of these iconic 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.



Br. Robert Lentz, O.F.M.

ISLAM & INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE:

A Muslim Perspective

By Irfan A. Omar, Ph.D.

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"¹ even if we tried 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."² 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."³ 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 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 acknowledgment 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 shari'ah); 2) it is a religion which maintains the unity of the divine godhead; includes belief in the oneness of God (tawhid); 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

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

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

3 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.

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

moral framework for living righteously (ihsan).⁴ 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.

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.⁵ 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" (iman) 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 kitab) 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)'.⁶

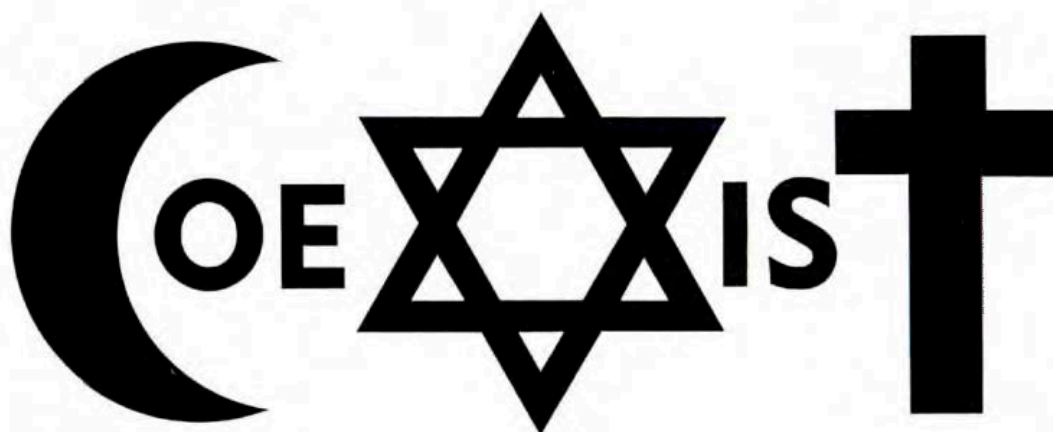
Mahmoud Ayoub, a pioneer in interfaith dialogue, argues that the "ideal relation envisioned by the Qur'an between Muslims and Christians is not only one of accommodation and co-existence but of amity and mutual respect."⁷ The Qur'an 5:82b addressing Muslims says:

. . . 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

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" (iman). Afsaruddin notes that similarly, in Q. 5:66, Jews and Christians are described as "moderate." On the 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.⁸



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

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,

⁴ Mahmoud Ayoub, "Introduction," in *A Muslim View of Christianity*, p. 2.

⁵ Mahmoud Ayoub, "Islam and Christianity: Between Tolerance and Acceptance," in *A Muslim View of Christianity*, p. 34.

⁶ Cf. Q. 16:125.

⁷ Mahmoud Ayoub, "The Islamic Context of Muslim-Christian Relations," in *A Muslim View of Christianity*, p. 20.

⁸ Asma Afsaruddin, "The Hermeneutics of Inter-Faith Relations: Retrieving Moderation and Pluralism as Universal Principles in Qur'anic Exegeses," *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 37, 2 (2009): p. 331.

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 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.⁹ 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 peace and justice.¹⁰ In the context of our troubled world today, the quranic acknowledgment 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 acknowledgment 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 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'afun) and those who are the oppressors (mutakabbirun). 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.



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⁹ 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.

¹⁰ 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.

Photo taken by Liam McGurl, School of Communication, SBU

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Love
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Peace
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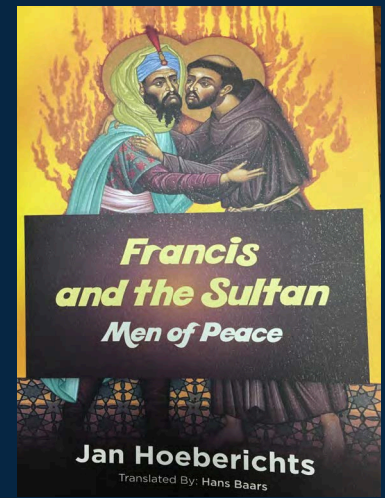
FEATURED BOOK REVIEWS

Francis and the Sultan—Men of Peace

A Review of Jan Hoeberichts' Final Work
by Michael Cusato, O.F.M., Ph.D.

These are the words dictated by Francis of Assisi as he was preparing himself to leave the earth, a few days before his death in 1226. In some respects, they can similarly be ascribed to Jan Hoeberichts, Dutch historian, to characterize his final book, written in Dutch and recently translated into English: *Francis and the Sultan: Men of Peace*. No one had done more in the English language, since the late 1990s, to bring the encounter of Francis with al-Malik al-Kamil in August 1219 outside Damietta to the forefront of Franciscan history than had Jan, prior to his unexpected passing on 4 January 2014. Beginning with his ground-breaking volume, *Francis and Islam*, written in 1994 and first published in English in 1997, Jan Hoeberichts has left us with four interlocking volumes in which he used this famous encounter as the lens through which to understand the spirituality of the saint of Assisi. This his final volume represents both a summation of the strands of material found in these other books but set forth in a magisterial synthesis with penetrating spiritual reflection. It is indeed his Testament.

Jan tells us in his prologue that he needed to take stock of the scholarship done on the encounter since the publication of his first volume on the subject. Then, in the first four chapters, he proceeds to survey the early years of the fraternity, including the writing of the Early Rule. Not the most successful section of this new work, it does allow him to emphasize three themes which have become paramount to him for understanding of the minorite charism. Different



from other scholars on the Rule, Hoeberichts places the emphasis squarely on chapter 14: the sending of the friars out on mission, which he characterizes, specifically, as missions of peace. Our author then couples this oft-overlooked emphasis with the hagiographical accounts of the friars' proclamation of peace throughout the communes – and the curious, befuddled reactions it evinced in their listeners. A second theme is the decision of the friars “to be submissive and subject to all.” This is not so much an attitude of interior humility as it is a pledge to remain at the service of others in a ministry of quiet presence rather than – as the hagiographers would prefer to emphasize – a ministry of verbal preaching. And third: the upheaval of the value-system of Francis and passed on to his followers is indelibly rooted in his encounter among lepers. Henceforth, all creatures without exception are recognized as possessing an innate and sacred dignity since every created being has ultimately come from the loving hand of God.

The next two chapters – five and six – cover ground previously plowed to great effect in his previous volumes: the three attempts of Francis to “go among the Muslims.” Those familiar with Jan’s previous writings will recognize most of the content here. But one exception to be noted is his additional material on the life of al-Kamil himself. In brief, the themes

lifted up by Hoeberichts in the early chapters of his volume – the hunger for peace and fraternity among all God’s creatures; a willingness to place himself at the service of others; the eschewing of noisy and confrontational proclamation in favor of a quiet fraternal presence; and the honoring of the dignity of God’s presence within every human person he might encounter, even the one defined by the Church as the “enemy,” the “adversary,” and the “infidel”- all now would come to maturity and fruition during Francis’ experience in the Levant. Moreover, given his own experience in Damietta and the news received from Morocco about the execution of the five friars who insisted on denouncing the religion and the prophet: both converged to prompt Francis to insert an additional paragraph into the Rule about how the friars ought to “go among the Muslims.” Such reflection resulted in the innovative chapter 16 added to the Early Rule in the wake of these events in the East.

Hoeberichts is particularly keen to underscore both the open nature of Francis’ attitude in going to the East and how the encounter at Damietta thoroughly transformed him for the rest of his life. On this latter issue – the post-Damietta transformation of Francis - Jan is both insightful and original, confronting the hagiographical assumptions – and usually our own as well – that it was Francis who had something to teach Muslims and not the other way around. Indeed, this was the real “success” of the 1219 mission: the radical re-assessment in Francis about his pre-conceived ideas about “the infidels.” Far from reinforcing the trope that such people were “unbelievers,” Francis discovered a people dedicated to praying regularly and fervently.

Theseventhchapter—ontheFranciscan and non-Franciscan sources shedding light on the events of the sojourn in the East is an important element in this new book, if only because it brings to the fore the cultural matrix which Christians (and, for their part, Muslims as well) brought to bear

on their “read” of the Other. These western constructs - taught in the schools, proclaimed from the pulpits and passed on in hagiographical topoi - all created within the listener negatives attitudes towards the Other which were extraordinarily hard to surmount. There is truth in the terms Jan uses to describe these constructs: religious propaganda. A softer touch might have used a term like “cultural matrix” to describe the same thing. Indeed, seeing the dynamic in this light helps us understand why the friars had such difficulty in understanding and carrying forward Francis’s radical vision of the Muslim-as-brother or sister in the years after his death.

Perhaps the most original section of the volume is Hoebericht’s treatment of some of Francis’ insights found in his writings towards the end of the saint’s life. This occurs most notably in two sets of writings: the Letter to the Minister and in a phrase that we find sprinkled across several of his later letters. The connections made here by Jan are stunning and original: perhaps the gem of the volume.

The epilogue brings us to our own time and demonstrates how Francis’ vision of a peaceful world is being championed by various Franciscan entities. Although these pages could have been more succinct, it is good to realize that such ventures exist in our own day.

There is, to my mind, one glaring omission in the book: the important testimony on the back-side of the Chartula with its figure sketched by Francis himself possibly of the sultan confessing the cross of Christ.

While we are grateful to have an English translation of the Dutch original, it must be said that the text could have used the input of a native English speaker for greater precision. Additionally, the formatting of the text is quite sloppy. A new edition would benefit from closer attention to these matters.

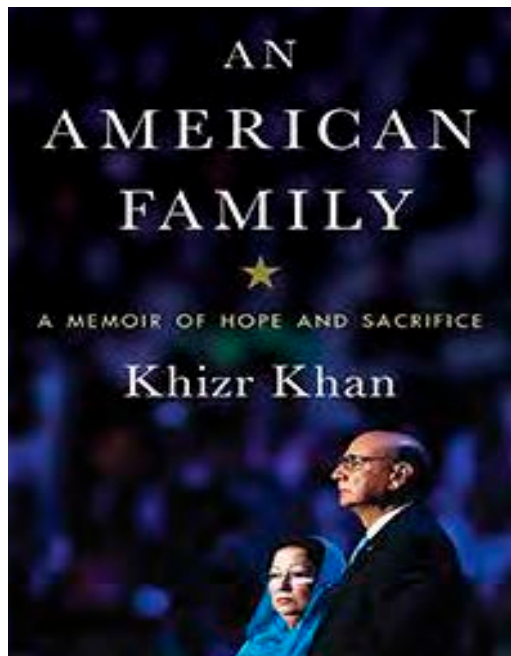
That said: this is a wonderful volume for the synthesis it offers us – the pinnacle of a lifetime of research and reflection on a seminal and heretofore muted event in early Franciscan history. It is

filled with penetrating insights and trenchant observations by a master in the field. The former Franciscan has shown himself, once again, to have remained to his last days most profoundly Franciscan. This is Jan’s personal testimony – a witness of faith – that ended up becoming his own Testament to us all.

“For this is a reminder, an admonition, an exhortation and my testament which I leave you...”



Michael Cusato, O.F.M., Ph.D. is the author articles on medieval Franciscan history and is one of the leading authorities on the Francis-Sultan encounter. He served as director of the Franciscan Institute and dean of the School of Franciscan Studies at St. Bonaventure from 2003-2011.



Book Review:

An American Family By Khizr Khan

A Memoir of hope and sacrifice

Reviewed by Amina Golden-Arabaty

In 2016 at the Democratic National Convention, Khizr Khan and his wife took to the stage to address the events following the death of his middle son, U.S. Army captain Humayun Khan, in 2004. They received national attention after his speech that essentially criticized Republican candidate at the time, President Donald Trump. The Khans were not very politically public prior to their speech but had a strong negative reaction to the idea of banning Muslims from entering the country, which was later implemented.

Holding his pocket-sized copy of the constitution, Khan stood on stage with his wife and shared the various struggles he discusses in his memoir. They told the story of their son's life of service to his country and the ROTC program that had "completed him as a person, [so] he wanted to give back." He rose to the rank of captain and served in the Iraq war where he was killed in an explosion at the age of 27. He was posthumously awarded the Purple heart and Bronze Star Medal while also being interred at Arlington National Cemetery.

Khizr Khan later wrote a timeless story of triumph over life's hurdles. His memoir paints the image of the home-grown oppression of his youth in Pakistan and narrates his inspirational journey to the present. It wasn't until later in life that he found himself fighting the systematic oppression he encountered when raising his family in America. His love for the US constitution inspired him to come to the United States. Once an American citizen, he found his way to Harvard law school where he rediscovering the Islam he was taught in Pakistan, recognizing its tolerant mode rather than just the "brutal theocra-

cy" as it was in Pakistan: "this was not the Islam that I recognized, that most Muslims who studied the teachings of the Prophet (PBUH) would recognize. This was the politicized thuggery of frightened, desperate men, a deliberate perversion of religion in order to maintain control over an illiterate and oppressed population."

This timely story has much in common with other stories of immigrants today fleeing their homes, looking for peace--a story we find in history books as well. In fact, when Muslims were still an oppressed and tortured minority in Arabia, some of them migrated to the Kingdom Abyssinia in the year 615 when the conditions became unbearable. They were freely welcomed by the Christian King who granted them freedom from persecution, allowing them to worship as they pleased.

This is a reason why Khan talks about wanting to raise his children in America, the place that granted him freedom from oppression and allowed him to better himself while contributing to American society as a whole. He was a loving father to his children and instilled in them the ideals and values that brought him and his wife, Ghazala Khan, to the life they have and the life they have been able to provide their children.

Reading his story and looking through his poetic lens I was really able to step back and see the greater picture he was trying to convey. As a senior close to graduation, I took comfort in recognizing how much of my life I still have to live, God willing of course. In the times of pure poverty and desperation he found himself buried under regret, grief, sorrow and defeat but grew from it to be stronger and more resilient.

Despite Khan's efforts to make a statement, one they felt their son would have wanted them to make, Trump vaguely responded and joked with a reporter about Khan's wife for not saying a word but standing silent as if oppressed. She in turn wrote an op-ed in the Washington post responding to this, acknowledging his ignorance and lack of

an understanding with regards to Islam.

This timely issue about the place of Muslims in America society is not specific to the US but must be addressed when the opportunity presents itself, as Khan did. His words truly inspired me because even in time of total doubt and desperation, he was able to grow and inspire the rest of the world to do so in a similar way. By raising these issues and bringing them to the attention of the public, we make it harder for these injustices to occur under the radar and helps push all of humanity together in unity, love, and fraternity.

The theme of hope echoed throughout his memoir and is an ideal that he not only passed along to his children and grandchildren but also to me. It is easy to lose hope in times of contention, but his perseverance is what allowed him to survive and thrive. Through a universal story of immigration, this wise, patriotic man wrote a poignant book about his family's hardships intermixed with the narrative of an appeal to the ideals on which our country was founded--ideals everyone should remember and emulate. When we take the time to get to know another, the other is no longer feared. His story is real and reveals deep emotional heartache that is relevant to all people. He also shows the true meaning of the American Dream: dignity and love.



Amina Golden-Arabaty, Senior CAIS intern
& MSA President

Ramadan 2019

To our Muslim brothers and sisters throughout the World:

As-salaamu ‘alaykum! Peace be upon you!

On behalf of the Special Commission for Dialogue with Islam of the Order of Friars Minor, it gives me great pleasure once again to extend our greetings to you at the beginning of Ramadan. This is a holy time as you commemorate and celebrate God's revelation of the Qur'an as a guide to humanity (al-Baqara 2.185). It is a time of great contrasts: the rigorous fasting of the daytime and the generous feast (iftar) of the evening, when carefully prepared dishes and desserts contrast with the simple sweetness of dates and the purity of water with which you break the fast; when thousands gather together for prayer in mosques, and each individual prays in the quiet of their hearts "that you may be more conscious (taqwa)" of God (al-Baqara 2.183). It is a special time spent with one's family and friends, and a time when strangers are welcomed to the table; and it is particularly during this quintessential Islamic month of fasting that Muslims welcome people of all faiths to share iftar at the end of the day.

This year, in the months preceding Ramadan, Muslims have shown extraordinary hospitality and generosity to His Holiness, Pope Francis, during his visits to the United Arab Emirates in February, and to the Kingdom of Morocco in March, as in his previous visits to the Holy Land, Turkey, the Central African Republic and Egypt among other countries. In these visits, Pope Francis has often spoken of his desire to follow the example of St. Francis of Assisi who, bearing a "message of peace and fraternity" traveled to Egypt in 1219 where he was warmly received by the Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil. As was the case for St. Francis and the Sultan, these visits have provided Pope Francis and Muslim leaders with opportunities to likewise demonstrate the fraternity that God desires for Christians and Muslims as "descendants of the same father, Abraham." (General audience, April 3, 2019)

Indeed, as His Majesty Muhammad VI, King of Morocco, reminded us during the Pope's recent visit, the fraternity shared by Christians and Muslims dates back to the early Islamic era. Several years before the Hijra, when Muslims were experiencing persecution in Mecca, the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) sent them to seek refuge with the Negus, the Christian king of Abyssinia who gave them his protection.

Tragically, in today's world, both Muslims and Christians are still forced to flee from their homes due to persecution, war, and injustice. Even those who have fled the arenas of war are not entirely safe as seen so tragically in the recent events in Christchurch, New Zealand and Sri Lanka. In his recent visits to the Emirates and Morocco, Pope Francis has continued to speak on behalf of migrants and the world's vulnerable. In Morocco he exhorted the Christian community to, "continue to be neighbors to those who are often left behind, the little ones and the poor, prisoners and migrants," citing works of charity as "a path of dialogue and cooperation with our Muslim brothers and sisters, and with all men and women of good will" (Rabat, March 31, 2019). The concern for the poor, the needy and the migrant are, of course, foundational to Islam, as expressed so emphatically in the Qur'an.

It is not righteous that you turn your faces to the East or West; but it is righteousness to believe in God, the Last Day, the Book, and the Messengers; to spend of your substance out of love for Him, for your kin, for the orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves...(al-Baqara 2.177)

We see the values that Muslims and Christians share, as well as their common concerns, in the remarkable document signed by the Grand Imam of al-Azhar, Ahmad al-Tayyeb and Pope Francis in Abu Dhabi in February. In this historic text titled A Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together, the faithful – both Muslims and Christians – are addressed as "believers," and are exhorted equally to protect the creation and support all people, especially the poor, the destitute, the marginalized, and those most in need, including orphans, widows, refugees, exiles, and the victims of wars and torture, without distinction. While acknowledging the issues and challenges Muslims and Christians together face in the world – political, economic, technological and environmental – this document, the result of Muslim-Christian fraternity, can help to significantly advance dialogue "among believers and non-believers, and among all people of good will."

One of the most enduring images I have of Ramadan is the iftar, the much-anticipated meal at the end of a day of fasting. I fondly recall invitations to break the fast – not only from friends – but from complete strangers, policeman on duty and shopkeepers in Cairo among them. Around the world, Franciscan friars, sisters and lay people of all faiths are fed generously at the table in mosques and Muslim households. The iftar table thus

becomes a symbol of the gathering of "believers."

The city of Jerusalem also serves as a place where believers gather, the children of Abraham – Muslims, Christians and Jews – each with equal devotion and fervency. To this end, while in Morocco, Pope Francis signed an appeal with His Majesty Muhammad VI to protect and promote Jerusalem (al-Quds) as:

the common patrimony of humanity and especially the followers of the three monotheistic religions as a place of encounter and as a symbol of peaceful co-existence, where mutual respect and dialogue can be cultivated. (Rabat, March 30, 2019)

The encounters between different representatives of Muslim communities and countries with Pope Francis exemplify the deeply-felt fraternity that Muslims and Christians can experience in spite of the differences that have defined us for too long. During this Ramadan, we pray for the safety and security of your communities, and that this time may offer a most blessed encounter with God (swt) and a peaceful encounter with all who may benefit from your faith and fraternity. As the Holy Qur'an reminds us:

Everyone has a direction to which he turns. So vie with one another in good deeds. Wherever you are, God will bring you together. Truly God is Powerful over all things. (al-Baqara 2.148)

We wish you a most blessed Ramadan. Ramadan Mubarak! Ramadan Kareem!

Michael D. Calabria, O.F.M.,

Special Assistant for Dialog with Islam

Members of the Special Commission for Dialog with Islam.

Manuel Corullón, O.F.M.

Ferdinand Mercado, O.F.M.

Jamil Albert, O.F.M.



NEWS

FROM

CAIS

The Center for Arab & Islamic Studies hosted a series of events, lectures, and poetry workshops by scholars and professionals from on and off campus. Filling almost every space provided, students, staff, faculty and off campus friends/donors attended. SBU's MSA Muslim Students & Allies club was and continues to work with the center and co-hosted some of the events.

**PEARLS ON A STRING:
ISLAM & RELIGIOUS
PLURALISM IN
MUGHAL INDIA**

**SPECIAL EVENT BY THE CENTER
FOR ARAB AND ISLAMIC STUDIES**

**When: February 13, 2019
4-5 p.m.**

Where: Plassmann 207A

This is the first in a series of events sponsored by CAIS and MSA commemorating the 800th anniversary of St. Francis' encounter with the Egyptian Sultan in 1219. Fr. Michael Calabria, Director of the Center for Arab and Islamic Studies will illustrate the way in which Muslim leaders incorporated Hindu and Christian elements into court culture.



On February 14th, 1556, Akbar "the great" was crowned emperor of the Mughal Empire, ushering in a brilliant era of religious pluralism and cultural confluences.

Space is Limited. Please RSVP by Friday, February 8th to Amina Golden: goldenal5@bonaventure.edu



St. Francis and the Sultan Icon

with Br. Robert Lentz



Br. Robert Lentz OFM will be speaking on his icon of St. Francis and the Sultan, and the importance of their encounter in 1219; this year being the 800th anniversary.

Refreshments will be served.

Please RSVP to Amina Golden:
goldenai5@bonaventure.edu

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This is the second event of the CAIS special events series. It will be located in 206 Plassmann Hall on March 13th from 4-5pm.



Poetry with Victor Jackson

Creating Your Own Imaginative Narrative

Hosted by Muslim Students & Allies (MSA)

When:
Tuesday
April
9th

Where/when:

● **SWAN 209**
11:30 am
workshop

● **Doyle Hall,**
Trustees room
7pm

Lecture

Through art and poetry he confronts and seeks to dismantle systems of oppression, systemic injustice, and an ever growing culture of anti-Black and anti-Muslim violence.

Sponsored by St Bonaventure's MSA, SGA, CAIS & the School of Arts & Sciences



SBU Third Annual Wear A Hijab Day

Sponsored by the
Muslim Students & Allies club
(MSA)

When: Friday,
March 29th

Where: Hickey
Dining Hall

Time: 11:30 -1 pm

Free scarfs!

(first come,
first served)

The most common areas where Hijab discrimination tends to take place are in employment, public facilities and education.

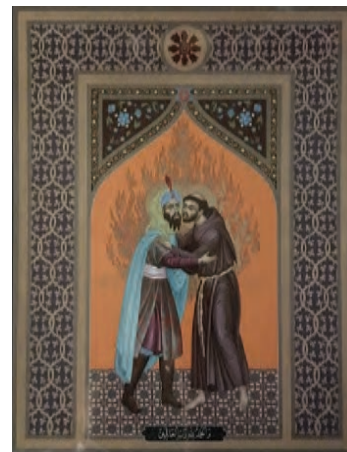
The Center for Arab and Islamic Studies

Our mission:

Inspired by the historical encounter between Francis of Assisi and the Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil in 1219, the Center for Arab and Islamic Studies at St. Bonaventure University seeks to promote an understanding of Arab and Islamic cultures, an appreciation of both their historical and contemporary significance in the global community, and respectful relations between Muslim and Christian people.

The mission of CAIS comprises four main areas:

- On-campus instruction
- Off-campus instruction
- Community outreach/engagement
- Scholarship



"St. Francis and the Sultan"
by Robert Lentz, O.F.M.

Nur: The Light Magazine ©

Design and layout by

Amina Golden-Arabaty

YES! I would like to share St. Bonaventure's Vision and help promote an understanding of Arab and Islamic studies by making a gift to the Center for Arab and Islamic Studies.

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