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Islam and the Myth of the Other: The Noble Colloquy between St. Francis of Assisi and Sultan al-Malik al-Kāmil

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Introduction

This article aims to explore a profound ethical challenge confronting heterogeneous, multi-denominational, and ethnically variegated societies as they confront modernity, seek bonding capital, and come to terms with their own diversity. It does so by deconstructing the dialogue between St. Francis of Assisi and Sultan al-Malik al-Kāmil in 1219.[1] That striking colloquy provides intriguing insights on a wide range of issues, including celebrating transculturalism in the spirit of *convivencia*, advocating for mutual respect, and emboldening humanitarianism.[2] Even more remarkably, this exchange occurred when the crusades were raging – at the apex of intense hostility between Muslim and Christian communities. At that time, Pope Honorius III demanded that crusaders, from far and wide, eradicate "evil" Muslims and liberate Jerusalem. Yet, despite that, St. Francis was eager to go among the Muslims, and eventually, met with Sultan al-Kāmil. The sultan, as Fareed Munir writes, was peace-loving, sagacious and a "man of honor,"[3] indeed, no less magnanimous and courageous than Francis. The hospitality he showed to Francis, by hosting and attentively listening to him for nearly three weeks, is profound.[4] Ultimately, that experience changed both men, and presumably others present. Bernard Lonergan describes such encounters as a "conversion" of sorts.[5] Explaining, he says, "each individual [life] in their own specific horizon . . . reflects the confines of one's vision and conceptualization of life." Naturally, competing horizons often lead individuals or groups into social

[1]A. Vauchez, *Francis of Assisi: The Life and Afterlife of a Medieval Saint* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 2012), 84.
[2]F. M. Chak, "*La Convivencia*: The Spirit of Co-existence in Islam," *Islamic Studies* 48/4 (2009), 567-590.
[3]F. Munir, "Prophet Mohammad of Arabia and St Francis of Assisi in the Spirituality of Mission," *Spirit and Life: A Journal of Contemporary Franciscanism* 9 (Special issue: *Islam and Franciscanism: A Dialogue*)(2000), 34.
[4]Munir, "Prophet Mohammad of Arabia," 34.
[5]B. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 236.

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contestation.[6] Particularly so, when "what in one is found intelligible, in another is unintelligible."[7] Yet, what is essential is the prospect of movement from one horizon to another. This creates a new, shared horizon that involves what Lonergan describes as an "about-face," or the development of a fresh consciousness.

Considering that, the encounter between Francis and al-Kāmil deserves a closer reading – in both spirit and deed. For it allowed a new horizon to be visualized by both larger-than-life personalities. By doing so, the wings of those who have an interest in perpetuating unforgiving exclusionary binaries of life, binaries of good versus bad and us versus them, are clipped. Of course, engagement does not necessitate the forsaking of our personal convictions. It may very well involve an honest, sincere attempt to present oneself as representative of one's unique faith, whether as an image of Christ, or witness of Truth, as in Islam, through the concept of *da'wa*.[8] Yet, to *insist* on conversion or the aspiration of it as the basis of dialogue would be disingenuous. Instead, both Francis and al-Kāmil seem to represent another way; neither heathen, nor convert, but brothers in humanity nonetheless.

From the outset, it is essential for any complex, heterogeneous society to manage its diversity towards consensus. Encouraging the whole breadth of society toward broadly recognized shared values and a mutually-agreeable social contract that upholds, respects, and even respectfully challenges law, is critical for social bonding and cohesion. Nevertheless, in Muslim societies, producing a coherent, relevant and socially acceptable Islamic narrative that is inclusive, pluralistic and celebratory of variety also requires reconciling the twin currents of permanence and change. Both of these shift by the interplay between the foundational, contextual, and individual spheres of inquiry.[9] This is not an impossible task, since any precursory reading of Islamic civilization reveals the substantive precedence of such cosmopolitanism.[10] While this challenge is not new, it is certainly perplexing. A solution could lie in reinventing the non-territoriality of autonomy as reflected in the Ottoman millet system.[11] Yet, to achieve this, every successive generation must enunciate a path forward, whether through its intellectuals, religious leaders, activists, or a combination thereof, to steer society. These pathfinders must have their fingers on the pulse of the present moment, which requires a clear understanding of "self," space/context, and the faith – as defined by the sources of legitimacy, in light of a clear understanding of *maqāṣid* (goals).[12] That, too, is still not enough, because the challenge of application yet remains. In entirety, this is no easy task – to present a pluralistic, multi-denominational, expansive and

[6]P. Rout, "St Francis of Assisi and Islam: A Theological Perspective on a Christian-Muslim Encounter," *al-Masāq: Islam and the Medieval Mediterranean* 23/3 (2011), 205-215.
[7]Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 236.
[8]Munir, "Prophet Mohammad of Arabia," 39-40.
[9]F. M. Chak, "Dynamics of Ideological Rivalry in Muslim Polities," *Hemispheres: Studies on Cultures and Societies* 29/3 (2014), 45-57.
[10]See J. Cesari, "Global Islam: Between Fundamentalism and Cosmopolitanism," in *Douze siècles de la vie d'un Royaume*, ed. A. Azzouzi (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008), v. 49-69.
[11]E. Ceylan, "The Millet System in the Ottoman Empire," in *New Millennium Perspectives in the Humanities,* ed. J. Upton-Ward (New York: Global Humanities Press, 2002), 244-266.
[12]J. Auda, *Maqasid Al Shariah: An Introductory Guide* (Herndon, VA: IIIT Publications, 2008), 3-7.

inclusive Islamic ethos, which must also be mainstream and rooted in the sources of legitimacy of Islamic civilization. This is the need of the hour: to articulate a viable, legitimate and pluralistic expression of the faith in our day and age. In both theory and practice, all faith-based traditions need considerable work in this regard.

Certainly, to deny that multiple readings of the Qur'ān and Prophetic traditions exist is dishonest. Likewise, a similarly diverse array of readings exist regarding the encounter of St. Francis and Sultan al-Kāmil. Yet, it is precisely because of that multiplicity that a concerted effort needs to be initiated, *within* each faith-based community, to rescue it from reactive or simplistic binaries of us versus them or of well-meaning discourses that are thinly veiled attempts at proselytizing. Whether by extremist Evangelicals, Zionists, ISIS, the "alt-Right," or any person or group advocating exclusivist narratives, those discourses should be shunned. Consider the reports about the debates between the Prophet Muḥammad's son in law, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, and the much despised *Khawārij*.[13] That conflict involved tension about the meaning of divine writ and the implications of interpretation. In one report,

> members of the Khawarij accused ʿAli of accepting the judgment and dominion (*hakimiyya*) of human beings instead of abiding by the dominion of God's law. Upon hearing that, ʿAli called on the people to gather around him and brought out a large copy of the Qur'an. Ali touched the Qur'an while instructing it to speak to the people and inform them about God's law. Surprised, the people who had gathered around ʿAli exclaimed, "What are you doing? The Qur'an cannot speak, for it is not a human being![14]

In response, ʿAlī declared that this was the point – the Qur'ān does not speak on its own. Instead, human beings, with their choices, opinions and understanding, are the interlocutors who give it effect. Abou El Fadl mentions that this parable points to the dogmatic superficiality of "proclamations of God's sovereignty that sanctify human determinations."[15] Such proclamations often falsely equate one's own interpretation with God's will, without the faintest acknowledgement of differing interpretations. Granted, some interpretations are so far out of touch with reality that they can be readily dismissed – and this is where consensus and consultation emerges in the Islamic tradition. However, advocating violence against those who differ is entirely unacceptable, even criminal. And, while recognizing that the contestations over meaning are enduring, in all faith-based communities this should heighten the urgency of propagating inclusivist narratives.

Lastly, this article aims to encourage research into developing such a broadened embrace, which, at least for the Islamic tradition, is firmly rooted in the *maqāṣid al-sharīʿa*, that upholds and maintains Islam's ontology, axiology and larger civilizational paradigm.[16] No social challenge is

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[13]K. Abou El Fadl, *Islam and the Challenge of Democracy* (Princeton University Press, 2004), 12; for a summary and bibliography concerning the *khawārij,* a group of rebels that emerged during the conflict between ʿAlī and Muʿāwiya, see G. Levi Della Vita, "Khāridjites," *Encyclopaedia of Islam,* Second Edition.

[14]Abou El Fadl, *Islam and the Challenge of Democracy*, 12.

[15]Abou El Fadl, *Islam and the Challenge of Democracy*, 12.

[16]Jasser, *Maqasid Al Shariah: An Introductory Guide,* 3-7.

more urgent today, in order to prevent the polarization of young adherents towards either outright rejection or exclusivist applications of their faith. Now, in our global village, the need for such an understanding – for all communities, is ever more indispensable. And, in our appraisal of this objective, this article is organized as follows: first, the historic parley between two kindred spirits, namely Francis of Assisi and al-Malik al-Kāmil, is discussed; second, the subsequent sections overview the two dominant opinions of conversion and martyrdom concerning that encounter, and then puts forward a new interpretation – a third way; third, this section highlights the spirit of transculturalism from the Islamic tradition, as exemplified by al-Kāmil, but well-established in Islamic sources of legitimacy; lastly, the final section highlights the major findings of our research, puts it all together, and charts a path forward for all faith-based communities to reach out to like-minded humanitarians. In essence, there is a need for a new transcultural and religious partnership between faith-based and/or value-orientated communities.

Kindred Spirits: St. Francis and Sultan al-Kāmil

The meeting between St. Francis of Assisi and Sultan al-Malik al-Kāmil was an extraordinary event whose impact continues to reverberate today. Eight hundred years later, the Franciscan order continues to have a noteworthy presence in Jerusalem, in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Monastery of Saint Savior, among other places.[17] Moreover, even after several centuries, interest in this encounter has not abated with both specialists and laymen producing numerous books, articles and fictional accounts. Yet, this apparent familiarity masks a deeper obliviousness. Key lessons of this encounter, and descriptions thereof, have not been dutifully noted, discussed and advocated for. Instead, much about this important event has been misread, whimsically written, or has fallen under the sway of missionary posturing.[18] As Jason Welle indicates, historical events are often contested – not necessarily in their occurrence, but in their meaning properly deduced. For instance, Welle mentions competing descriptions of the former Christian named Anselm Turmeda, who converted to Islam, taking the name ʿAbdullāh al-Tarjumān (d. ca. 1427). He is described as a "Christian martyr saint, as a rationalist skeptic, as an icon of Catalan nationalism, as a fraudulent plagiarist, as one whose powerful intellect freed him to preach the truth of Islam and demolish Christian falsehoods, and most recently, as a model of cultural or religious symbiosis who proffers hope for the ecumenical and interreligious future."[19] Then, Welle compares a similar range of opinions in Tolan's book on Francis, in order to illustrate how the "preoccupations of various writers, preachers, and artists shaped their portrayal of the encounter between Francis and Malik al-Kāmil" – without passing critical judgement.[20] And this, consequently, is what Welle rightly frowns on: those who shy away from taking a stance or highlighting the strength and weaknesses of various discourses. All of us, as

[17]Jasser, *Maqasid Al Shariah: An Introductory Guide,* 3-7.
[18]See J. Tolan, *Saint Francis and the Sultan: the Curious History of a Christian-Muslim Encounter* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). Tolan gives a strong review of the various ways this encounter has been described.
[19]J. Welle, O.F.M., "Two Friars Who Went Among the Muslims and the Realms of their Memory: Francis of Assisi and Anselm Turmeda/ʿAbdullāh al-Tarjumān," *The Muslim World* 107/3 (2017), 572-592: 587.
[20]Welle, "Two Friars," 589.

much as we may pretend otherwise, interpret facts. Hence, let there be contestation of what those facts amount to "so long as the search occurs with scholarly legitimacy, rigor, and authenticity."[21]

Especially now, in such turbulent times of expanding nativism and populism, it is not merely fanciful to believe that all societies need more people like Francis and al-Kāmil, two exceptional individuals who – outside the narrow confines of personal aggrandizement, self-righteousness or moral posturing – sincerely commit to better understanding others through transculturalism. Henceforth, in the following sections, this study aims for a deeper appreciation of this event and to highlight critical lessons that can be learned. To do so requires first a better appreciation of the personalities of Francis and al-Kāmil. We begin by focusing on the works of André Vauchez, Paul Moses and Michael F. Cusato. Approaching Francis through the prism of these specialists does not infer that others offer nothing new, but for our purposes, Vauchez and Cusato offer highly scholarly, rather than esoteric and emotional, accounts. Both painstakingly overview the dominant debates, classify them and offer their unique input, or leave the reader to decipher. Whereas Vauchez's account is meticulous and authoritative, Moses is journalistic and reasoned, and Cusato – who happens to be the translator of Vauchez's *tour de force* – is distinctive and provocative. All provide compelling arguments for their understanding of Francis and the reasons behind his constant aspiration to "go East" – as it were, to the Muslim world.

Still, that, is not enough. We need to further unravel this unique encounter by appreciating the inclusivist personality of al-Kāmil. As Moses states, "the fact that al-Kamil, a great sultan of Egypt and a nephew of Saladin, was so tolerant of Christians that he allowed one of them to preach to him in the midst of the Crusade…opens the door to respect, trust and peace."[22] Munir has taken some initial steps to describe the sultan's spirituality of mission, but there remains a dearth of research available on al-Kāmil in English and nearly all of it comes from Christian scholars.[23] Merely incidental, even obscure, references are scattered throughout texts. Worse, some writers with vested interested attempted to diminish his personality and presence, in unnecessary attempts to further venerate Francis. Of course, this, is altogether unwarranted yet understandable considering the context in which the encounter took place. Here, Moses, Vauchez, Cusato, Welle and Munir stand apart by readily acknowledging the sultan's kindness and the impact the encounter had on Francis. Vauchez considers it unsurprising that al-Kāmil welcomed and honored Francis, as Muslim hospitality is well-known.[24] Still, it is unfortunate that so much of what is written about the sultan seems to undermine his convictions and courageousness. Nevertheless, this study makes a solid attempt to reveal key aspects of al-Kāmil by scouring several sources, including Ibn al-Athīr – one of the most important historiographic accounts of medieval times. According to his account, one thing is certain: al-Kāmil was a devout, practicing Muslim committed to his faith.[25] That, indicatively, is crucial to recognize, since al-Kāmil was

[21]Welle, "Two Friars," 588.
[22]P. Moses, *The Saint and the Sultan: The Crusades, Islam and Francis of Assisi's Mission of Peace* (Doubleday Religion/Image Publishers, 2009), 11.
[23]Munir, "Prophet Mohammad of Arabia."
[24]Vauchez, *Francis of Assisi*, 88.
[25]Munir, "Prophet Mohammad of Arabia," 37.

magnanimous because of his faith, not in spite of it. This simple point would serve people well to better grasp in today's times.

Conversion or Martyrdom?

To begin, the eminent Vauchez – author of *Francis of Assisi: The Life and Afterlife of a Medieval Saint* – proposes two possibilities for Francis's urge to "go East" towards the Muslim world: conversion or martyrdom. For Vauchez, both explanations seem rather unconvincing. Actually, Vauchez seems rather perplexed at the circumstances surrounding Francis's eagerness to travel the Muslim world. His own interpretation seems ultimately to be a mid-way point between both dominant perspectives. On the one hand, Francis wanted to preach and therefore did seek conversion of al-Kāmil. On the other hand, he was ready for martyrdom, though did not actively seek it.

In support of his position on conversion, Vauchez mentions, in several instances, Francis's commitment to the Catholic faith, devotion to Jesus, and aspiration to proselytize.[26] This, almost as if to reassure the reader that, indeed, Francis could not but only seek conversion since by Catholic edict, Muslims were infidels – even "beasts" – and any rapprochement with them was foolhardy. This sentiment is somewhat contradicted by Vauchez's own careful assessment that Francis was against the Crusades. This, Vauchez acknowledges, is slightly bewildering, at least at first glance, since accepting that would put into disrepute the Catholicism that Francis embodied. Would not disagreement with a papal edict cast into doubt Francis's fidelity to the Church? Vauchez states that Francis "certainly never thought about the Crusade as a combatant – his status as a religious prohibited him from taking up arms no less than his personal approach, founded on the rejection of violence; nor could he serve as a military chaplain. He seems rather to have seen here an opportunity to test the Gospel ideal of the Friars Minor."[27] In fact, Jacques de Vitry complains bitterly, in his letter of 1220 to the Pope, that several members of his entourage, clerics as well as laymen, fascinated by the personality and example of Francis, abandoned the bishop during the siege of Damietta in order to follow Francis and enter into his order. This is what perplexes Vauchez and others about Francis's motives to go "East." Why did he seemingly disobey Catholic edicts and diametrically oppose the pope's vision?

For Vauchez, Francis aims to seek martyrdom and he quotes several instances in which the faithful throughout history have done just that. Faithful Catholics, especially those in his order "are marked by the desire to follow the example of the apostles who had given their lives to witness to their faith and diffuse it throughout the world."[28] Moses, too, mentions how the Franciscans were under the ever watchful papal eye, with potential accusations of heresy.[29] Yet again, Vauchez seems irritated that many writers readily discount the martyrdom theory, perhaps since it is often equated with sin. He mentions that "some commentators are doubtful today, fearing to attribute to their hero a suicidal attitude or irresponsible behavior. For my part, I tend

[26]Vauchez, *Francis of Assisi,* 85-88.
[27]Vauchez, *Francis of Assisi,* 88.
[28]Vauchez, *Francis of Assisi,* 88.
[29]Moses, *The Saint and the Sultan*, 7.

to think that martyrdom did enter into his perspective, keeping in mind what we know of his mindset and his cultural formation. Were not the majority of saints that one heard about in the liturgy and whose images one could contemplate in the churches of Umbria martyrs, beginning with Saint Rufino, the first bishop of Assisi, whose relics had been the object of a solemn translation into the cathedral of his native city?"[30]

Irrespective of the depth of Vauchez's research and knowledge, he misses something that Cusato – his translator and former student – recognizes. The reasoning behind Francis's aspiration to go East is not satisfactorily addressed and this is where Cusato's reading of the texts is lucid. He, too, believes that traditional commentaries that describe Francis' penchant for engaging with Muslims revert solely to conversion or martyrdom. Cusato argues that instead, Francis wished to exemplify another way, which revolved around the Franciscan concept of "doing penance" (*facere paenitentiam*).[31] Penance is something essential for Franciscans and was part and parcel of a life committed to "preaching" the Gospel through actions and not just words. Hence, Francis was not, necessarily, aiming to convert al-Kāmil – or readying himself for martyrdom in proof of his firm convictions. In place of this, for Cusato, Francis wished to live in penance, which "requires that human beings cease engaging in the kinds of destructive and bloody acts which were currently tearing apart this sacred fraternity."[32]

In support of his theory of penance, Cusato mentions two transformative events that shaped Francis: First, the time that he spent with the crusaders – which undoubtedly allowed him to witness the depravity of war; second, his meeting with the lepers in the countryside of Assisi. Both altered his consciousness in remarkable ways. As to the crusades, it is without question that Francis was opposed to war, violence and, specifically, the crusades. After having spent time with the crusaders, he evidently witnessed considerable barbarism. Yet, even more convincingly, Cusato writes "what is most curious – and telling – is that Francis never once, in all his writings, ever mentions or propagates the idea of the crusade, in spite of the fact that it was the main reason for the [Fourth Lateran Council] and was the beloved project of both Pope Innocent III and his successor, in 1216, Honorius III."[33] As such, the crusades would have been the precise converse of his vision of universal fraternity and thus diametrically opposed to his life of penance.

Secondly, Cusato highlights the transformative effect that Francis's meeting with the lepers had on him. He writes that Francis wandered the countryside "having become disillusioned with the empty glories promised in war and plundering, having returned from the mercenary venture towards Apulia discouraged and depressed."[34] While there, he came upon a group of disfigured and frightening lepers. The very sight of which hitherto petrified him. Rather than flee, he "gave compassion" (*fecit misericordiam*). And, thus, this came to represent a fundamental discernment in his life: that all men and women, without exception, were human beings endowed with the same

[30]Vauchez, *Francis of Assisi,* 89.
[31]M. F. Cusato, O.F.M., "The Loneliness of Francis of Assisi: The Reception by the Franciscan Order of the Encounter of Francis with the Sultan in the First Half of the 13th Century," *The Muslim World* 109/2 (2019), 14-68.
[32]Cusato, "The Loneliness," 20.
[33]Cusato, "The Loneliness," 22.
[34]Cusato, "The Loneliness," 19.

inestimable dignity and worth innate to God's creatures. The doing of penance implies the "conscious decision to separate oneself from all those willful acts and pernicious attitudes which end up tearing at and rupturing the fabric of the human fraternity of creatures, setting human beings against each other and over one another, in a constant state of antagonism..."[35] In other words, Cusato describes Francis as embodying the very meaning of what being a Christian is and that through his acts of love and devotion he wished to reveal that "all humans were offered the same promise" through the love of God, through Jesus Christ.[36] Yet, the problem with this description is that it amounts to a superficial difference with Vauchez – who also insists on the necessity of conversion in order to be saved from eternal damnation. It is entirely plausible, that just as Francis did not believe in the Crusade – while still committed to his own faith, he did not insist on Muslims needing to convert.

Thirdly, Vauchez, Cusato, Rout and Moses, all stress that Francis's interaction with Muslims deeply impacted him. Cusato outlines the various marks these encounters left on Francis, including Francis's encouragement that Christians emulate the Muslim call to prayer, the "democratization" of prayer, and the blessing Francis invoked upon his friend al-Kāmil when Francis drew the *chartula.*[37] By deconstructing all of these, Cusato puts forth a unique rationale behind Francis's motivations, which was to bear witness to his faith through his love and admiration of all. Nothing demonstrates this better than the *chartula,* which contains, according to Cusato, an image of the sultan. Cusato hypothesizes for the danger about to befall al-Kāmil and that Francis weeps for this and for al-Kāmil's failure to accept Christ's offer of salvation. One might add that the tears falling upon the bearded figure on the *chartula* could very well represent something altogether different: the sadness Francis felt for the violence being committed, in the name of God, by both communities towards each other. Those tears could very well represent his remarkable impression of a "man of God" in the person of al-Kāmil, who like him wishes to reconcile both communities – even with their different theologies – in service to the Creator. For Francis, his convictions were clear, yet he was not bogged down by peculiarities or differences that separate people. Overall, "Francis's vision was for a universal fraternity of creation and, in that, all men and women, without exception, including Muslims. This led him to oppose the crusades as a means for resolving human conflict. Henceforth, "he went to Damietta to propose and live out another alternative. But having failed on the Christian side of the conflict, he now went across 'enemy lines' to propose that vision to the Muslims."[38]

Neither Heathen nor Convert

This study views the primary aspiration of Francis to go among the Muslims as neither martyrdom nor conversion. Both offer unconvincing explanations of why, specifically, Francis, wished to engage with Muslims, when he could have attempted to reconcile several other Christian denominations that were chastised as heretical. His efforts could have proven more

[35]Cusato, "The Loneliness," 20.
[36]Cusato, "The Loneliness," 19.
[37]Cusato, "The Loneliness," 26-36.
[38]Cusato, "The Loneliness," 26.

fruitful elsewhere. Moreover, there is evidence that he ignored opportunities to go to those Christian sects that had been declared heretical and instead chose to focus on Muslims.[39] This is what is so interesting and this is where many completely miss the mark since this is not satisfactorily explained. Vauchez seems convinced that because Francis was Catholic, it is inconceivable that Francis did not adhere to papal authority or the interpretation of scripture prevalent in his day. Yet Francis did just that by clearly opposing the crusades – even predicting their loss in battle.[40] Actually, this is one of the major reasons why so many Christian writers have described this event as "curious," "strange," "perplexing" or "confounding."

To explain that seemingly inexplicable inclination to engage Muslims, this study differs from Vauchez's conversion or martyrdom account and, slightly, with Cusato – in that Francis, through penance, sought conversion. More closely, it resembles the opinion of Moses's ecumenical approach, with an important distinction. Here, what is required is a third way – that Francis wished to open a new space – between an us/them binary and desired to recognize the legitimacy of the Islamic faith. It is plausible to assume that Francis, in a reversal of theology, had come to a point that recognized the potential of Islam as an equal partner – especially with the likes of al-Kāmil. Francis's commitment to his faith and being a man of undoubtedly great virtue and stature did obviously impact the sultan in such a manner as to open the doors to cooperation between these two faith traditions, a cooperation that continues to this day. A friendship struck – if I may use such a word – between two sincere individuals, who knew full well the opposition within their own ranks. That led to a remarkable and lasting bond – even if a miniscule one – between like-minded believers in both camps. That, as Cusato describes, was the purpose behind the careful selection of Francis's successor, since he wanted to ensure that this conciliatory, respectful approach survived.[41]

It is entirely conceivable that Francis, while "doing penance," and perhaps even hoping to seek the conversion of al-Kāmil, left transformed and entirely comfortable with accepting the Islamic expression of monotheism and worship as legitimate. Recall historically that for Muslims, this has not been difficult to do. In fact, it is part and parcel of Islamic normative behavior to recognize both Jews and Christians as *People of the Book* and this fact should not go unnoticed.[42] Now, however, Francis too viewed Muslims as "people of a Book" in his own right. In fact, he left that momentous meeting changed and in awe of Muslim prayer and devotional norms. This is not the attitude of someone who solely seeks to convert, but rather of someone who has – in some ways – converted his own thinking. Secondly, it is indisputable that Francis would be willing to sacrifice his happiness, life, liberty and, even comfort, for God. In that line, it is not difficult to accept that he would be willing to accept martyrdom, yet he did not consider the Muslims his enemies and he even used the language of *frater* with regard to them. Of course, Francis may have primarily been doing penance and seeking to mend a broken world, but not only for the glory of his personal faith. He was much too big for that and too generous to think only his

[39]Moses, *The Saint and the Sultan*, 40-43.
[40]Moses, *The Saint and the Sultan*, 102-106.
[41]Cusato, "The Loneliness," 36-42.
[42]Munir, "Prophet Mohammad of Arabia," 31-2.

interpretation would be correct. Instead, Francis, in the raging fires of hate, presented a magnanimous image of a devout man of God, who actively sought an alliance with other men of God – even from outside his particular faith persuasion.

In other words, Francis neither sought martyrdom nor conversion nor solely to do penance for a broken world trying to build bridges and access people's hearts *only* to show the beauty of salvation through Jesus. Rather, he actively sought a partner, from the Muslim faith – a faith that so impressed him that he emulated it – for a mutual project. He sought that they both would respect each other's differences, and work together, as well as in their respective communities, to undermine narratives of hatefulness and resentment. This precisely is what I believe Francis came to conclude and in that wonderous act, behaved as if there were no "Other," not in the Leper, the Bogomil, Cathar, or the Muslim.

Sultan al-Kāmil and the Myth of the Other[43]

The ubiquitous idea of self-perception being predicated on the manufacture of a rival persona, or alter-image, poses serious challenges to the concepts of globalism, inter-dependence and all peoples' shared humanity. Simply put, "I am who I am, precisely because I am not you." Whether in social anthropology or social psychology, analysis is on uniqueness vis-à-vis others or group identification leading to a sense of "belonging," which then leads to objectify the "Other."[44] Be it a narcissistic cult of authenticity, which, in its quest for uniqueness, develops exclusion, or analyzing others prior to distinct formation of self-identity, it is clear; there is always the "Other" – those who exist outside the realm of all-inclusive acceptability. G.W.F. Hegel states: "On approaching the other it has lost its own self, since it finds itself as another being; secondly, it has thereby subdued that other, for it does not regard the other as essentially real, but sees its own self in the other."[45] Here, Hegel argues that identity formation results in a clash of self-consciousness, between two or more people, that often may require debasing the other. Similarly, the pioneering literary masterworks of Simone de Beauvoir took the idea of the "Other" and applied it to the manner in which men made women the "Other" in order to establish patriarchy.[46] Edward Said too, in his monumental work *Orientalism*, eloquently articulates the manner in which Arabs and Muslims are denigrated in the construction of a European self-identity.[47] More specifically, this tendency is nowhere better witnessed then the numerous descriptions and images of the encounter between Francis and al-Kāmil. Take, for instance, Gustave Doré's *François devant le Sultan*.[48] In that image, a towering Francis is depicted as hovering over a seated, emasculated sultan. In other images, such as the well-known "Bardi dossal,"

[43]Chak, "*La Convivencia*." This section largely relies on this article.
[44]M. R. Leary and J. P. Tangney, *Handbook of Self and Identity* (New York: Guilford Press, 2003), 3; see also J. E. Cote and C. Levin, *Identity Formation, Agency, and Culture* (New Jersey: Psychology Press, 2002), 19–24.
[45]G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit,* trans. A.V. Miller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 12.
[46]S. De Beauvoir, "Women: Myth and Reality," in *Feminisms and Womanisms*: *A Women's Studies Reader,* eds. A. Prince and S. Silva Wayne (Toronto: Women's Press, 2004), 59–65.
[47]E. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1979), 8–18.
[48]G. Doré, *François devant le Sultan*, in *Histoire Des Croisades*, ed. J.-F. Michaud (Paris, 1826), gravure 50, i. 402.

al-Kāmil appears mesmerized.[49] And this, unfortunately, is how it often was depicted, that either al-Kāmil was debased, or he was depicted as secretly wishing to convert. As Tolan writes, for "Michaud, Doré, and other Europeans of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Francis of Assisi's mission to the sultan of Egypt was an act of naïve audacity, yet a noble and admirable act which exemplified Europeans' good intentions towards the Muslims, who needed evangelizing and civilizing."[50] Why must it be so?

Quite the opposite, al-Kāmil was a courageous, thoughtful and devout Muslim, who, in the same breath, was cultured and pluralistic.[51] This should come as no surprise, since according to the Qur'ān and the *Sunna*, one finds strong evidence against a concept of the "Other" as a dialectical clash between "in" and "out" individuals or groups, premised on race, culture or religion. Arguably, Islam encourages the development of "identity" on love of God, through the Qur'ān and the Prophet Muḥammad – manifested through faith and adherence to principles – and opposes identity premised on hatred of a concrete, tangible other. Reasonably, it emphasizes commonality and "inter-connectedness." Of course, one must acknowledge that some Muslims, both past and present may articulate a sharply different viewpoint, and this fact places the need for contextual analysis in dramatic relief. Yet, both theoretically and in practice – as testament to the ecumenical character of al-Kāmil – the main Islamic sources support co-existence. Recall that al-Kāmil honored Francis, knowing full well the atrocities committed by crusaders on helpless Muslims. Nowhere is al-Kāmil's magnanimity better revealed than his treatment of defeated Christian soldiers at Damietta. As Moses writes, "the sultan, whom they had labeled a 'cruel beast' and a 'perfidious' Muslim, had spared their lives and treated his would-be destroyers with kindness. How was that possible? They were not slaughtered, as Jerusalem's inhabitants were when the Crusaders conquered the city in 1099."[52] The account of Oliver of Paderborn is unambiguous in its praise for the sultan during this episode. Al-Kāmil is "likened to a gracious father who saved the trapped Crusaders, visited them in their misery, heard their complaints, cared for their sick, and excelled all other noblemen with his wisdom."[53]

Hence, for al-Kāmil, self-identity in Islam did not require the construction of a wicked, wretched and heathen alter-image in a sweeping tangible form – be it race, culture or religious persuasion. Granted, the Qur'ān and the Prophetic sayings arguably mention oppression, ignorance and insulting behavior of the "disbelievers."[54] Yet these remain an abstraction without form; emphasis is on what one does. For instance, the Qur'ān mentions that there are "disbelievers" from "*among* the People of the Book," but it does not lay a sweeping indictment on all of them.[55] It specifies. Disbelievers are described as such based on their behavior

[49]Tolan, *Saint Francis and the Sultan*, 94.
[50]J. Tolan, *Saint Francis and the Sultan*, 3.
[51]Ibn al-Athīr, *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athir for the Crusading Period from* al-Kamil fi'l-Ta'rikh, trans. and ed. D. S. Richards, 3 vols. (New York: Routledge, 2010), iii. 171-184.
[52]Moses, *The Saint and the Sultan*, 175.
[53]Moses, *The Saint and the Sultan*, 175.
[54]Qur'ān 4:140.
[55]Qur'ān 2:105.

of duplicity,[56] spreading corruption and mischief throughout the earth,[57] and usurping the rights of orphans,[58] not simply because they happen to be non-Muslims. Rather, the developing understanding of mission among Muslims in the ʿAbbāsid period shows a unifying trend and a powerful cosmopolitan current.[59] The behavior of al-Kāmil does not grow out of a vacuum and, indeed, reflects these trends, which are well rooted in the lifetime of the Prophet. Consider the "Pact of the Virtuous" – a historic event in which Muḥammad participated. In Arabic, this pact is known as *ḥilf al-fuḍūl* and was the result of ʿAbdullāh ibn Judʿān, chief of the Taym tribe, inviting all stakeholders to his home to collectively strategize on ways to end to incessant conflicts and oppression.[60] Tariq Ramadan, commenting on this, states "Chiefs and members of numerous tribes thus pledged their collective duty to intervene in conflicts and side with the oppressed against the oppressors, whoever they might be and whatever alliances might link them to other tribes. This alliance…was special in that it placed respect for the principles of justice and support of the oppressed above all other considerations of kinship or power."[61] From this, Ramadan deduces a primary lesson and quotes the Prophet Muḥammad, who said: "I was present in Abdullah ibn Judan's house when a pact was concluded, so excellent that I would not exchange my part in it even for a herd of red camels; and, if now, in Islam, I was asked to take part in it, I would be glad to accept."[62] Here, it is striking to note the manner in which the Prophet acknowledges the legitimacy of principles, specifically those of justice and ending oppression, above and beyond whether the expression of those principles come from Muslims or not.

Further elaborating, Ramadan suggests that:

> the message of Islam is by no means a closed value system at variance or conflicting with other value systems. From the very start, the Prophet did not conceive the content of his message as the expression of pure otherness versus what the Arabs or the other societies of his time were producing. Islam does not establish a closed universe of reference but rather relies on a set of universal principles that can coincide with the fundamentals and values of other beliefs and religious traditions (even those produced by a polytheistic society such as that of Mecca at the time).[63]

Hence, there is a strong Islamic narrative that rejects exclusionary and isolationist diatribes, which al-Kāmil aptly demonstrates.

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[56]Qur'ān 5:61.
[57]Qur'ān 11:116.
[58]Qur'ān 4:2.
[59]Munir, "Prophet Mohammad of Arabia," 32.
[60]See, for details, Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan al-kubrā,* ed. M. ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭā, 11 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2002), vi. 367, *Ḥ.* 13080.
[61]T. Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 20–21.
[62]Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet*, 21; Ramadan mentions that this *ḥadīth* was reported by Ibn Ishāq and Ibn Hishām and confirmed as authentic by various sources, including al-Ḥumaydī, and partly by Imam Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal.
[63]Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet*, 22.

Islamic Spirit of Transculturalism[64]

This section aims to corroborate the assertion that an Islamic civilizational paradigm that draws inspiration from the sources of theological authority and legitimacy in Islam – the Qur'ān and *Sunna* – is inclusive. Al-Kāmil was doing precisely what the Qur'ān commands. Contrary to popular perceptions, the spirit of peaceful co-existence and mutual tolerance are thoroughly mandated throughout the Qur'ān and *Sunna* and, therefore, the actualization of this mandate must be worked for. That plurality is evident in Muḥammad's behavior and exemplified in several others after him, including al-Kāmil. Taking a step further, and across religious lines, this study calls for such a partnership with likeminded communities, in order to establish a sustainable, just peace on Earth. Arguably, it is reasonable to put forth, that in the unique encounter of Francis and al-Kāmil, that was precisely the partnership they wanted to forge. Both knew full well that they would face daunting challenges, and would have to work against detractors from within and outside their own communities. Irrespective of how intimidating this project was, they were not deterred.

In light of that, and to substantiate the Islamic spirit of transculturalism, consider the qur'ānic verses that declare that God, after having created every single soul, asked them to testify that there is nothing worthy of worship except Him. The Qur'ān states: "When your Lord drew forth from the children of Adam, from their loins, their descendants, and made them testify concerning themselves [saying]: 'Am I not your Lord?' they said: 'Yes! We do testify!' [This was] lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection: 'Of this we were unaware.'"[65] Indicative in these verses is the declaration that all of humanity – past, present and future generations – were, at once, drawn forth from Adam's children and asked to give witness to God. This incidence, imbuing every human being with intrinsic goodness and recognition of the Divine, holds significant philosophical ramifications from which the origins of tolerance and spirit of co-existence spring up. Implicit is that every single human being had an indistinguishable spiritual experience and this represents an unequivocal endorsement of an inherent kinship in the entire human family. Moreover, it suggests that within all of humanity exist the same seeds of spirituality that were first planted when God created our souls and asked us to offer our loyal testimony. That means the attributes necessary for tolerance lie in the inherent "connectedness" of every individual towards one another. The momentous significance of this qur'ānic verse is, precisely, in laying the foundation for understanding a key component in human nature and human beings' intrinsic relationship towards one another.

From that point onwards, the Qur'ān further develops the preceding philosophical outlook by declaring, firstly, that every nation was sent a guide in their own language[66]; secondly, by stating: "And certainly We raised in every nation a messenger saying: Serve Allah and shun the Satan"[67]; and, thirdly, in the manner in which the Qur'ān refers to itself as the "Reminder."[68] Collectively, these qur'ānic verses develop a narrative of an inter-connected humanity and also share two implicit assumptions: the inherent togetherness in the human family and a gradual, evolutionary process towards the perfection of faith. In support of this, the Qur'ān states: "This

[64]Chak, "*La Convivencia*."
[65]Qur'ān 7:172.
[66]Qur'ān 14:4.
[67]Qur'ān 16:36.
[68]Qur'ān 3:58. This reference, called the "Reminder," is mentioned in 68 verses in the Qur'ān.

day have I perfected for you your religion and completed My favor on you and chosen for you Islam as a religion … surely Allah is Forgiving, Merciful."[69] Upon closer examination, one can only perfect something already created or already set in motion. This setting in motion began with the spark of divinity from which every human soul began which planted the seed of spirituality in each one of us. That seed, then, was watered and nurtured, through the ages, by a series of Prophets and Messengers ending, according to Islamic theology, with the Prophet Muḥammad.

From the beginnings of human life, according to the Islamic belief, this gradual development of faith was initiated on earth by the prophet Adam and would end with the prophet Muḥammad. This assertion too is an indispensable characteristic for nurturing tolerance and mandating peaceful co-existence. It does so by pointing to the "unity of truth" by declaring that all nations and their divinely ordained messengers were essentially saying the same thing in different times and to different degrees. This is clear when considering the importance of the Qur'ān referring to itself as the "Reminder." After all, one can only remind someone of something they have previously been told.

Therefore, the history of religion per se, from a qur'ānic perspective, follows a certain pattern that is based on a dynamic process of faith, which is evolutionary. First, Adam was given Divine knowledge of the self, God and our responsibilities. Then, this spiritual process of enlightenment slowly continued throughout the ages with Abraham, Moses and Jesus, until it reached its climax with Muḥammad. This continuous development of faith, beginning with Adam and culminating with Muḥammad, included numerous other messengers and prophets. In total, according to Prophetic sayings, there were 124,000 prophets and messengers who were chosen to remind humanity of their purpose and were unanimously revealing the unity of God, humanity, and truth.[70] From this, it is plausible to extrapolate that Confucius, Buddha, Socrates, Zoroaster, and a host of others *could* be included in this category of messengers, as long as they came before the Prophet Muḥammad. This is further evidence of the inherent inclusivist vision embedded in Islamic sources of legitimacy. Granted, many Muslims may or may not accept this. However, the evidence is striking and one may argue persuasively for this inherent ethic.

While the Qur'ān recognizes the legitimacy of other faiths, it reserves for itself the designation of the "perfection of faith." Still, as Khaled Abou El Fadl affirms, this does not exclude the possibility of other frames of thought.[71] Throughout the qur'ānic discourse, the people of Judaic and Christian religious backgrounds are granted a special rank, as previously mentioned: "People of the Book," or *ahl al-kitāb.* Others, too, were accepted in this tolerant vision with particular titles of being "protected people," or *dhimmī.*[72] In addition, the Qur'ān clearly accepts the reality of diversity and peaceful co-existence by stating, "O humankind, God has created you from a

[69]Qur'ān: 5:3.
[70]Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad,* 19 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1995), xvi. 259-60 (v. 265-6), *Ḥ.* 22189; for discussion of the soundness of this report and its variants, see Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, *Silsilat al-aḥādīth al-ṣaḥiḥa,* 9 vols. (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Maʿārif, 1995-2002), vi. 358-369, *Ḥ.* 2668.
[71]K. Abou El Fadl, *The Place of Tolerance in Islam* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 15.
[72]Abou El Fadl, *The Place of Tolerance in Islam*, 16.

male and a female and made you into diverse nations and tribes so that you may know each other. Verily, the most honored of you in the Sight of God is he who is the most righteous."[73] From this verse, the Qur'ān asserts diversity as part of the Divine intent and purpose of creation. The Qur'ān further declares: "If the Lord had willed, He would have made humankind into a single nation but they will not cease to be diverse … And for this God created humanity."[74] Moreover, the Qur'ān, as Munir mentions, guided Sultan al-Kāmil's attitude of compassion to Christians, as one can see in the following *āya*s:

> And nearest among them in love to the believers (Muslims) wilt thou find those who say, We are Christians: Because amongst these are men devoted to learning and men who have renounced the world, and they are not arrogant. And when they listen to the revelation…thou wilt see their eyes overflowing with tears, for they recognize the truth: They pray: "Our Lord! We believe; write us down among the witnesses."[75]

That obvious endorsement of human diversity is further strengthened by the following verse specifying the notion of plurality of religious beliefs and laws:

> To each of you God has prescribed a Law and a Way. If God would have willed, He would have made you a single people. But God's purpose is to test you in what He has given each of you. So strive in the pursuit of virtue and know that you will all return to God in the hereafter, and He will resolve all the matters in which you disagree.[76]

Here, the Qur'ān explicitly endorses human diversity – racial, cultural and religious. The emphasis is on "the pursuit of virtue" – deeds, not verbal professions – and could be understood in a modern idiom to suggest, "you are what you do, not what you say." Then, to further reinforce this embracing perspective, the Qur'ān declares: "Those who believe, those who follow the Jewish Scriptures, the Christians, the *Sabians*, and any who believe in God and the final Day, and do good, all shall have their reward with their Lord and they will not come to fear or grief."[77] Taken together, these sacred verses indisputably indicate tolerance, plurality, peaceful co-existence and acceptance of the existence of other faiths as a reality. Granted, the Qur'ān clearly claims that Islam is the perfection of faith, though, in my view, this does not necessarily exclude the possibility that God would accept other paths to salvation. The Qur'ān insists on God's absolute right to bestow His Mercy on whomever He wishes.[78]

[73]Qur'ān 49:13.
[74]Qur'ān 11:118–119.
[75]Qur'ān 5:85–86.
[76]Qur'ān 5:49.
[77]Qur'ān 2:63.
[78]Abou El Fadl, *The Place of Tolerance in Islam,* 17.

Conclusion

"The most ominous of modern perversions is the shame of appearing naive if we do not flirt with evil."[79] This sharp criticism of modernity is useful for revealing the moral precepts and psychological coloring that dismiss ecumenicalism as wishful thinking. Pointedly, what alternative does humanity have? In fact, there is none. To ridicule attempts at inter-civilizational concord is to insist on the perversion of constant warfare, whether conventional, hybrid or cultural. Of course, reconciling diversity in our global village without succumbing to cultural hegemony is another challenge. This is where all levels of civil society, multilateral organizations and transnational institutions must endeavor for inclusivity and rigorously adhere to broad-based universal standards. Opening space, protecting the autonomy of individual freedoms but, also, converging on shared values, is essential to maintain both individual liberty and collective responsibility. In the encounter between St. Francis of Assisi and Sultan al-Malik al-Kāmil this is precisely the vision epitomized. Rather than seeking martyrdom, conversion or even solely penance, Francis and al-Kāmil arguably represented much more. Namely, that two people, from two warring communities, can reconcile – without the need to convert – and discourage absolutism in their own respective societies.

As Munir eloquently highlights, both Francis and al-Kāmil are extraordinary figures. On the one hand, Francis, from an Islamic perspective, "was a Muslim at heart." "[A]lthough a devout Christian, [he] could still appreciate the Muslim point of view. … [He was] sincere, honest, devoted to learning…[and] had truly renounced the fleeting and selfish ways of the world."[80] This does not annul Moses's accurate description of Francis as a devout Catholic, who, nonetheless disobeyed papal commands and put God first.[81] Al-Kāmil was likewise mocked for his compassionate attitude towards defeated Christians in Damietta.[82] Both had faced seemingly insurmountable challenges, yet that did not deter them from the task at hand, which was to call for – even if secretly – a new partnership between their communities. Of course, as all great historical figures, their personalities and decisions are open to a wide range of criticisms. That is hardly surprising. But this is where scholars, through critical analysis, must challenge those disparaging narratives that undermine the encounter or its important messages. Also, simply writing about the various interpretations of encounters is problematic, as Welle points out in his critique of Tolan.[83] Ultimately, this this responsibility should be shouldered by all, in their individual capacities, and this study recognizes that a primary lesson learned from this encounter is acknowledging "goodness" from all other sources. By doing so, Muslims, Christians, and perhaps even atheists, become the inheritors of a grander universalist message that abhors pigeon-holing entire peoples.

It is often stated, but frankly untrue, that Islam's interaction with other civilizations in some sense polluted the purity of the Islamic message. This is particularly pronounced when com-

[79]La más ominosa de las perversiones modernas es la vergüenza de parecer ingenuos si no coqueteamos con el mal. Nicolás Gómez Dávila, *Escolios a un texto implícito. Selección* (Bogotá: Villegas Editores, 2001), 78 (#928).
[80]Munir, "Prophet Mohammad of Arabia," 38.
[81]Moses, *The Saint and the Sultan*, 170.
[82]Ibn al-Athīr, *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athir for the Crusading Period,* iii. 171-184.
[83]Welle, "Two Friars," 589-91.

menting on the Greek influence on Islamic political thought, or when critiquing al-Fārābī (d. 339/950). Similar thoughts are echoed by those lamenting Persian intrusions into the Islamic canon. All this is nonsensical and, as previously mentioned, Islam is not a closed system in which that which mirrors its foundational ethos cannot be assimilated, even if originating elsewhere. In fact, Muḥammad clearly stated that "the wise statement is the lost property of the believer, so wherever he finds it, then he is more worthy of it."[84] Moreover, as mentioned, in the treaty known as *ḥilf al-fudūl*, the prophet himself praised actions by non-Muslims as a great instance of solidarity. Still further, Muḥammad entered Mecca under the security and protection of a pagan Arab. To add to that, in a sound *ḥadīth*, the prophet spoke about war prisoners of Badr saying, "Had Al-Mutʿim bin ʿAdī been alive and interceded with me for these mean and miserly people, I would have freed them for his sake."[85] Hence, all this is to make clear, that Islam – according to an authentic, pure reading of its texts and prophetic practice, does not promote a binary of "us" and "them" – even though some who profess the faith may do so.

Here, Abou El Fadl's thought is especially relevant. Citing the examples of the Qaramites and Assassins, he mentions how Islamic society castigated extremists, for "whom terror became a raison d'etre" through unmitigated infamy in the writings of all sorts of Muslims.[86] With the passage of time and strong social backlash, these groups learned to moderate their behavior. "The essential lesson taught by Islamic history is that extremist groups are ejected from mainstream of Islam; they are marginalized, and eventually, treated as heretical aberrations to the Islamic message."[87] This is an important social mechanism to deliberate upon as it was an internal social response to perceived extremist groupings that were compelled to moderate themselves due to social pressure. Now, the problem is that those social institutions that were effective in marginalizing those extremist projections have been dismantled following colonialism. Hence, as Abou El Fadl so eloquently puts it:

> there is a virtual anarchy in modern Islam: it is not clear who speaks with authority on religious issues. Such a state of virtual religious anarchy is perhaps not problematic in secular societies where religion is essentially reduced to a private matter. But where religion remains central to dynamics of public legitimacy and cultural meaning, the question who represents the voice of God is of central significance.[88]

Moreover, another worrisome irony is that those with whom we should all be seeking partnerships are shunned, defamed or demonized. In other words, those who should be at the forefront of this inter-religious/inter-civilizational partnership are targeted, arguably by those who wish to perpetuate binaries for vested interests. Statistically, minorities never had

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[84]Abū ʿĪsā l-Tirmidhī, *Jāmiʿ al-Tirmidhī, K. al-ʿilm* (39), *B. fi faḍl al-fiqh ʿalā l-ʿibāda* (19), *H.* 2687 (Eng. trans. *English Translation of Jāmiʿ at-Tirmidhī,* trans. Abu Khayali, 6 vols. [Riyadh: Darussalam, 2007], v. 81).
[85]Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, K. farḍ al-khumus* (57), *B. mā manna al-nabī ʿalā l-usārā min ghayr an yukhammis* (16), *H.* 3139 (Eng. trans. *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih Al-Bukhari,* trans. M. M. Khan, 9 vols. [Riyadh: Darussalam, 1997], iv. 230).
[86]Abou El Fadl, *The Place of Tolerance in Islam,* 6.
[87]Abou El Fadl, *The Place of Tolerance in Islam,* 17.
[88]Abou El Fadl, *The Place of Tolerance in Islam,* 7.

properties returned, their rights safeguarded and their dignity restored in the manner that has been promoted by the AK Party in Turkey.[89] Yet President Erdogan is widely attacked, without these facts being acknowledged.[90] Moreover, the Emir of Qatar, Shaikh Tamim, has that nation punching above its weight to ensure a responsible, mediating role in several global conflicts, but is currently facing a blockade by its neighbors – Saudi Arabia and UAE, the darlings of the United States and the European Union.[91] Consider also Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan, who has been mocked several times as "Taliban Khan," when in fact he is the first Prime Minister to take a strong stand against bigotry and reject the threats directed at Asia Bibi.[92] This is where all those who wish to seek this inter-religious/inter-civilizational partnership need to emerge to defend these potential partners, and jointly criticize their own politicians, media or special interest groups. Unfortunately, both the US and the EU have sidelined the exact democratic, representative groups who should be the ones that are supported.

Lastly, the wonderful encounter of two noble paragons of peace, Francis and al-Kāmil, is a cause for celebration. Admittedly their stance is challenging, yet the process of mutual understanding, respect and tolerance must continue to evolve. That means all faith-based communities must never expect a level of morality that they do not subscribe for others. This understanding that "goodness" alone is not the providence of the Muslim, Catholic, Franciscan, Jesuit, or any single community – this alone is important to embrace. Without it, we, collectively, will never live up to the ideals that these two personalities proudly embraced. That is the lesson that St. Francis of Assisi and Sultan al-Malik al-Kāmil attempt to teach their own communities and others.

[89]B. Macit, "The AK Party and Religious Minorities," *Daily Sabah* (July 2014), https://www.dailysabah.com/opinion/2014/07/05/the-ak-party-and-religious-minorities

[90]S. Oruc, "President Erdogan as a Target of the Western Media," *Daily Sabah* (December 2016), https://www.dailysabah.com/columns/saadet-oruc/2016/12/27/president-erdogan-as-a-target-of-the-western-media

[91]F. M. Chak, "Deconstructing the Gulf Crisis: Post-Colonialism and Competing 'Projects' in the Middle East," *Insight Turkey* (Spring 2019), forthcoming.

[92]M. Afzal, "Imran Khan and Pakistan's Hardliners," *Brookings Institute* (11 November, 2018), https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/11/07/imran-khan-and-pakistans-hardliners