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# St. Francis and Islam: A Critical Appraisal for Contemporary Muslim-Christian Relations, Middle East Politics, and International Relations\*

Scott M Thomas

## Introduction

The dramatic meeting between St. Francis of Assisi and the Sultan Malek el-Kamel in Damietta, Egypt during the Fifth Crusade (1213-1221) has become an important part of the contemporary context for Muslim-Christian relations, Middle East politics, and international relations. St. Francis's meeting with the Sultan is well known among medieval historians, the Franciscans, and many other Catholics since it has been depicted in Christian art through the centuries. However, it was Pope John Paul II's World Days of Prayer for Peace, held in Assisi among the world's religious leaders, that has given Francis's encounter with the Sultan its relevance and prominence in international relations.

The first World Day of Prayer for Peace was in 1986, a year after John Paul II went to Morocco where he amazingly addressed 80,000 young Muslims as part of the UN's International Youth Year. John Paul II coined the term, 'the spirit of Assisi,' to reflect the city of Assisi, and its connection with St. Francis who has become 'a symbol of peace, reconciliation, and fraternity.'<sup>1</sup> This meeting encouraged existing Catholic lay movements, such as Focolare, Comunione e

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<sup>1</sup> *Testes Spei: Ioannes Paulus II ad Fratres Minores/Witness to Hope: John Paul II to the Friars Minor* (Roma: Curia generalis OFM, 2005).

Liberazione, and the Neocatechumenal Way, to develop their own inter-religious activities.<sup>2</sup> He dramatically held a second World Day of Prayer for Peace in 2002, a year after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Cardinal Ratzinger at the time also emphasized St. Francis's encounter with the Sultan as a model of dialogue for the Church.<sup>3</sup> When he became Benedict XVI he gave over 100 homilies, catechesis, and addresses focused on St. Francis.<sup>4</sup> His own World Day of Prayer for Peace was held in Assisi in 2012.

However, the relevance of going back to this Muslim-Christian encounter has been questioned. The reason for this is the minimal account of Francis's encounter with the Sultan in the sources, and the variety of issues of interpretation surrounding them. This argument is set out on the influential blog *The Immanent Frame*, the website of the Social Science Research Council (New York) after a conference brought together some of the latest biographers of the encounter.<sup>5</sup> It argues 'why bother with an event built on limited, contradictory, evidence? .... Why bother cherry picking through history for such positive models of Muslim-Christian relations? Why do we need St. Francis as a poignant example when the need is urgently clear?'<sup>6</sup> John Tolan asks, 'Why do we need to identify, in the course of history, model men and women whom we hold up as examples to follow. If we think we want must launch a new crusade or, on the contrary, that Europe should be more open to the Muslim world, why do we need

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<sup>2</sup> Brendan Leahy, *Ecclesial Movements and Communities: Origins, Significance, and Issues* (New York: New City Press, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Cardinale Joseph Ratzinger, 'Lo splendore della pace di Francesco,' 30 Giorni, 20/1 (Gennaio, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Benedetto XVI, *Maestri Francescani e Domenicani* (Roma: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2010); Benedetto XVI, Gianfranco Grieco, *Benedetto XVI e san Francesco: Storia, teologia, catechesi, spiritualità*, (Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> John Tolan, *Saint Francis and the Sultan: The Curious History of a Christian-Muslim Encounter* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), Paul Moses, *The Saint and the Sultan: The Crusades, Islam and Francis of Assisi's Mission of Peace* (New York: Doubleday 2009), Kathleen A. Warren, OSF, *Daring to Cross the Threshold: Francis of Assisi Encounters Sultan Malek al-Kamil* (Rochester, MN: Sisters of St. Francis, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> Nathan Schneider, 'St. Francis, the Sultan, and the promise of peace,' *The Immanent Frame: Secularism, religion, and the public sphere*, SSRC, February 18, 2010.

to recruit to our cause, posthumously, this little Umbrian from the thirteenth century?<sup>7</sup>

What can be said in response to these objections? This article argues that critical theory and social constructivism as they are developed in the theory of international relations offers a helpful perspective to examine Francis's encounter with the Sultan and its contemporary relevance. Critical theorists, mainly indebted to Marxism and the Frankfurt School, argue that how we live our lives, the kind of people we are, and our social relations are the social products of history, and so they ask how, and under what conditions, we might organise our lives differently.<sup>8</sup> Constructivists, contrary to scholars who emphasize realism or power politics, argue that agents and structures in international relations - the actors, events, and institutions, are shaped by the ideas, norms, values, and cultures of states and nonstate actors in ways that *mutually* constitute their social identities, social relations, and do so in ways that also *mutually* construct international relations - the world is what we make of it.<sup>9</sup> Constructivism is based on the premise that how states, how people, understand, interpret, the world around them - who is a friend, a rival, or an enemy, for example, or who is a militant, a moderate, or extremist, is based on their beliefs, values, conceptions about the world, and the identities they have about others as well as themselves.<sup>10</sup>

The argument of the article is set out in four parts. The first section examines the portrayal of Francis's encounter with the Sultan in the Franciscan

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<sup>7</sup> Tolan, 327.

<sup>8</sup> Critical theory in international relations can be criticized for the way it has ignored or marginalized religion and theology. For an attempt to begin to bring theological and spiritual insights into critical theory, in which this article can be seen as a further effort, see Scott M. Thomas, 'Living Critically' and 'Living Faithfully' in a Global Age: Justice, Emancipation and the Political Theory of International Relations' *Millennium* (LSE) 39, 2 (2010): 505-524.

<sup>9</sup> Nicholas Onuf, *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations* (reissued London: Routledge, 2012, University of South Carolina Press, 1989).

<sup>10</sup> Ian Hurd, 'Constructivism,' in Christian Reus-Smit, Duncan Snidal (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 298-315; Friedrich Kratochwil, *The Puzzles of Politics: Inquiries into the genesis and transformation of international Relations* (London: Routledge, 2011); Alexander Wendt, *The Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

sources. It briefly sets out the disputed events, focusing on the main questions - was Francis on a mission of peace, or did he support the Fifth Crusade, and the principle of the crusades to achieve the foreign policy goals of Christendom? Any study of the encounter raises the question of sources, and so it cannot be properly interpreted apart from the Franciscan Question, which began with Paul Sabatier, the Swiss Protestant pastor, and his path-breaking *Life of Saint Francis of Assisi* (1894): how best to read, interpret, and relate the early Franciscan biographies, with their *multiple perspectives* on the various *events* in the life of the historical Francis?<sup>11</sup>

The second section explains that the Franciscan Question argues Francis's own writings should be the interpretive key to his life, theology, and spirituality, and the interpretation of *other* Franciscan sources. The article follows this method. It also explains critical theory and social constructivism offer important perspectives to examine this encounter since the problem of *interpreting* the encounter with the Sultan - the multiple *images* in the sources (the Franciscan Question), is similar to the problem of the *images* through which *any* event is interpreted in international relations.

The third section argues the problem of interpreting both types of events are similar because they confront a similar problem of epistemology - what knowledge is, and how it is constructed. Critical theory and constructivism demonstrate the key relationship - encounter, conversion, and knowledge. Francis constructed knowledge of the world as a result of his conversion and own dramatic *encounters* - with war, and being a prisoner of war, with the leper, with the poor, and finally with the Sultan. He discovered *through* his encounters knowledge comes from the margins, the bottom, and not the top of society. This

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<sup>11</sup> 'Francis' Three Trips to the Moors,' in William R. Hugo, OFM, Cap., *Studying the Life of Saint Francis of Assisi: A Beginners Workbook* (New York: New City Press, 2011, second edition), 224-226; Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History: Questions of Interpretation and Method* (London: SPCK, 1995, second edition).

is the privileged position - for Francis, and arguably for us, to construct knowledge and understand what is going on in the world.

The fourth section argues that critical theory and constructivism challenge the secular ontology of international relations - i.e. moving beyond kings, princes, or great powers as the dominant actors towards a more holistic, conception of *what* kinds of actors are doing *which* kinds of events or activities that *constitute* international relations. These theories emphasize states and non-state actors socially construct international relations in *one* way, and *not* in some other way - as a clash of civilizations or as dialogue between them. The way Francis performed the gospel, 'acted out' the scriptures, offered a challenge to the existing ontology of international relations.<sup>12</sup> His theology and spirituality responded to many of the existing social criticisms of the crusades and the rise of the profit economy in the thirteenth century. He was only one, albeit the best known, and most influential, of the many people who were part of the religious renewal of the time in the poverty and peace social movements. However, he demonstrated the meaning of the imitation of Christ as no one had done before.

Thus, the article argues, for all these reasons, it is most likely Francis *opposed* the Fifth Crusade, he opposed the principle of the crusades, and he saw preaching and peaceful conversion as an alternative to the crusades. He held these views on foreign affairs - as contrary as they were to the official line, as a loyal, orthodox, Catholic, committed to the Catholic Church and its mission to spread the gospel throughout the world. These same reasons - that led to Francis's encounter with the Sultan, which challenged the prevailing epistemology and ontology that interpreted events in society and international relations, *still* offers us - a dialectic of choice, a contemporary challenge in how we interpret foreign affairs, and chose to live in a way that recognizes our global interdependence and responsibility for making a more peaceful world.

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<sup>12</sup> Lawrence S. Cunningham, *Francis of Assisi: Performing the Gospel Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004).

## Francis's Encounter with the Sultan:

### Did Francis Support the Fifth Crusade, and the Crusade Principle?

What took place between Francis and Malik-al-Kamil (1180-1238), the Sultan of Egypt? During the Fifth Crusade (1217-1221) Francis, Br. Illuminato, and other brothers left Italy on a ship headed for Acre on the coast of Palestine, probably with Italian crusader reinforcements, and from there sailed to the city of Damietta, on the coast of Egypt. There they joined the crusader armies besieging the city to take back control of the Holy Land. The two Franciscan brothers went to Pelagius, Cardinal-bishop of Albano, the papal legate, and head of the Christian army. They asked permission to cross the crusader lines to preach to the Sultan. After the Cardinal was worn down by their persistence and good intentions, they were given permission to go, but without the Cardinal's blessing or under his orders. He did not want to be responsible for what he thought would be their certain death. They crossed the Muslim-Christian battlefield, probably in September 1219, during a truce while peace negotiations were conducted,<sup>13</sup> and gained an audience with the Sultan, perhaps for three weeks. Then they were safely escorted back to the crusaders, and sailed back to Europe.

This is what we know from the contemporary chroniclers who recorded the events. Jacques de Vitry, the bishop of Acre, was in the crusader camp when Francis arrived in July or August 1219 (writing in 1220 and again in 1223-1225), which is close to a primary source for the event. Another source is the *Chronicle of Ernoul*, or anonymous *Chronicle of the Crusade* (1227-1229). There is debate over who wrote this account, but if it were someone in the entourage of John of

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<sup>13</sup> This is why the Sultan asked if Francis was a messenger from the crusaders with a response to his latest peace offer. Al-Kamil agreed to leave the Kingdom of Jerusalem to the crusaders, if they agreed to leave Egypt. In other words, the Sultan offered them the *objective* of the crusade *without* violence, to regain the Holy Places in Jerusalem, and other lands that they had lost to Saladin in 1187. John of Brienne, king of Jerusalem (1217-1229), the secular leader of the crusade, wanted to accept these terms, but they were rejected by Pelagius, and the crusading military orders since they wanted outright military victory. *Francis of Assisi, Early Documents*; vol. I (New York: New City Press, 1999); hereafter FA ED I: 606; Christopher Tyerman, *God's War: A New History of the Crusades* (London: Allen Lane/Penguin, 2006), 630, 638; Michael J. Robson, *Francis of Assisi: the Legend and the Life* (New York: Continuum, 1997), 238-239.

Brienne at Damietta, the French nobleman who became king of Jerusalem, then it would be one of the few eyewitness accounts of Francis in Egypt. ‘What happened next has captured the imagination of his followers and admirers down to our own time.’<sup>14</sup> Other events are disputed regarding the encounter, and are presented below.

- Did the Sultan’s soldiers beat up Francis and Br. Illuminato before seeing the Sultan? (Henri d’Avranches, Celano, Bonaveture, but not mentioned by de Vitry, Ernoul).
- Did the Sultan ask if they wanted to become Muslims, and did they deny this, but say they want to convert him by preaching the gospel with ‘convincing reasons in the presence of the most learned teachers of your realm’ (Ernoul)?
- Was the encounter peaceful, Francis preached the gospel, the Sultan ‘listened attentively’ (de Vitry, Celano), and privately expressed his belief in the Christian God (de Vitry) or was the encounter confrontational (Bonaventure)?
- Did Francis challenge the Sultan and his Muslim clerics to a trial by fire (Bonaventure)?
- Did Francis oppose *specifically* the Fifth Crusade, or only the specific *timing* of the Fifth Crusade (Celano), i.e. he was opposed to a battle on ‘the day,’ but *not* to the crusade itself (Hoose, Tolan, Rega), or was Francis as a *general principle* ‘forbidding war,’ or at least forbidding the crusades (Moses, Warren, McMichael)?
- Did Francis go to the Holy Lands because of fervent desire to convert the Muslims, which compelled him to seek martyrdom (Celano, Bonaventure)?
- Did the Sultan offer Francis ‘many precious gifts’ that he rejected (Ernoul, Celano)?

One of the key disputed events surrounding Francis’s encounter with the Sultan is his prophesy, in Thomas of Celano’s second biography, the *Vita secunda*, in which Francis predicts the defeat of the crusaders in the battle of Damietta. This is the origin of the main debate - did Francis support war, the crusades, and the Fifth Crusade?

On the day of battle when our army was preparing to fight, hearing this, the holy man grieved very much. And he said to his companion, “If the clash takes place on such a day, the Lord has revealed to me that it will not result in triumph for the Christians. Truly, if I say this, I will be thought foolish; if I am silent, I will not escape my conscience. Therefore, what do you think?” His companion responded, saying, “Father, it should be unimportant to you how you are judged by men, because not just now have you begun to be thought a fool. Discharge your conscience, and fear God more than men.” The holy man, therefore, leapt up and approached the Christians with warnings to save them, forbidding the battle, announcing disaster.

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<sup>14</sup> Maurice Carmody, *The Franciscan Story: St. Francis of Assisi and his influence since the thirteenth century* (London: Athena Press, 2008), 55.



The truth is made into nonsense, they hardened their heart, and they refused to be directed.<sup>15</sup>

So, was Francis saying he was opposed to the *specific* battle of Damietta on 'this day' (so he disagreed with the timing, he could have supported the battle on another day), or was he making a general statement - he was opposed to war, the Fifth Crusade, and to the crusade *principle*, as a foreign policy objective of Christendom? We cannot know. Francis never discusses the issue in his (existent) writings. However, the event is still important to examine. It raises a general research question - how do culture and religion influence foreign policy? The *cultural* use of the encounter is widespread - then, and now, to promote a variety of Western or European foreign policy goals in the Middle East. So, how can these questions be satisfactorily examined?

## **St. Francis's Theology and Spirituality:**

### **Critical Theory and the Franciscan Question**

Any study of the Francis-Sultan encounter raises the question of sources, and this means the encounter cannot be properly interpreted apart from the Franciscan Question.<sup>16</sup> Robert Cox, a leading critical theorist, regarding the concept of theory in the positivist, mainstream, study of international relations, says 'Theory is always 'for one or for some purpose,' so the mainstream *images* of international relations, constitute the values, interests, and assumptions scholars, commentators, or policy makers use to interpret the world.<sup>17</sup> This sounds like a description of the Franciscan Question. The use of literary and historical criticism to *interpret* Francis's encounter with the Sultan, with the problem of the variety of images, interests, and perspectives (the Franciscan

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<sup>15</sup> Thomas of Celano, 'The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul (also called Vita secunda, or 2 Celano, 1245-1247), FA ED I: 265.

<sup>16</sup> Jacques Dalarun, *The Misadventure of Francis of Assisi* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2002).

<sup>17</sup> Robert W. Cox, 'Social forces, States, and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory,' *Millennium* 10, 2 (1981): 126-155.

Question), is similar to the problem of the *images*, theories, or paradigms, through which *any* event is *interpreted* in international relations.<sup>18</sup> In fact, this similarity may be strengthened if Raoul Manselli is correct, when he argues that one of the main things that distinguishes the quest for the historical Jesus from the quest for the historical Francis, is that while the first was mainly a question of philology, and literary criticism, the Franciscan Question is also about how power, interests, and perspectives, the competing factions *within* the Franciscan order, and how the papacy, Church politics, and 'secular' politics *outside* the order reshaped the life of Francis according to their various agendas and interests.<sup>19</sup>

One of the central tasks of critical theory is to probe *what* theory is in international relations, *whom* it is for, and what it is supposed to *do* in international relations. So questions critical theorists ask about *any* event in international relations are similar to those in the Franciscan Question: *what* is looking at Francis's encounter with the Sultan for, *who* benefits when it is looked at one way rather than another way? *How* are the Francis-Sultan encounter constructed, and *whose* interests are served by them? Indeed, critical scholarship shows the literary accounts reflect a variety of interests within the order, within the Church, and Tolan shows how the constructions of Francis's encounter with the Sultan in different centuries reflected Europe's changing perceptions of Islam and international security.

Critical theory challenges the mainstream forms of theory in international relations, what Cox has famously called 'problem-solving theory' - the concept of theory as it is used to explain (allegedly objectively) the workings of the international system to manage the *existing* international order - but for the *benefit* of whom?<sup>20</sup> Is it for the benefit of the princes, the popes, the bishops, the

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<sup>18</sup> Paul R. Viotti and Mark V. Kauppi, *International Relations Theory* (New York: Longman, fifth edition, 2012), 4, 12-14, on the concept of images in international relations.

<sup>19</sup> Raoul Manselli, "La povertà del vita di Francesco d'Assisi," in *La povertà del secolo XII e Francesco d'Assisi: atti del II. convegno internazionale, Assisi, 17-19 ottobre 1974* (Assisi, 1975), 255-328; Raul Manselli (ed.), 'We Who Were with Him,' *Greyfriars Review*, 14 (2000).

<sup>20</sup> Robert W. Cox, 'Social forces, States, and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory,' *Millennium* 10, 2 (1981): 126-155.

Roman Curia, or even 'Christendom' in the thirteenth century; is it for the benefit of the West, the great powers, in the contemporary international relations? Is the purpose of theory to explain the world or is it to change it?<sup>21</sup> So from a critical theory perspective, some priests, scholars, and even the faithful might not like the modern quest for the historical Francis - they prefer a pious, joyful, mystic, a St. Francis who preaches to birds, blesses animals, rather than a saint who works for peace among the city-states in Italy or meets Sultan of Egypt. Why would such a saint want to change anything? Dalarun asks, 'How can anyone imagine that such a [Franciscan] Order, such a huge success, such a spiritual legacy could have come from a weak dreamer who was also a pawn' of popes or bishops (Innocent III, Honorius III, Gregory IX), or eager, ambitious, Franciscans (Elias of Cortona has been the usual culprit in the Franciscan Question)?<sup>22</sup>

Jacques Dalarun has argued that there are 'at least three great and lasting strengths to [Paul Sabatier's] approach' which scholars of the Franciscan Question have adapted in the quest for the historical Francis: firstly, Francis's own writings as a key to his theology and spirituality; secondly, the legends, and their critical philological and literary examination; and thirdly, an interpretive renewal of his life, which includes his encounter with the Sultan.<sup>23</sup> This article can only briefly consider the first interpretive principle, and only refers to the others in relation to its argument.

The use of Francis's *own* writings are the 'best source of acquaintance with him,' and so their recovery in our era - some writings were only found in the twentieth century, has helped us to *know* more about Francis (and Clare it should be said) than people did in the Middle Ages or early modern Europe.<sup>24</sup> What we

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<sup>21</sup> Robert W. Cox, 'The Point is Not Just to Explain the World but to Change it,' in Reus-Smit and Snidal (es.), *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 84-93.

<sup>22</sup> Dalarun, 33.

<sup>23</sup> Dalarun, 30

<sup>24</sup> Michael J.P. Robson, 'The writings of Francis,' in Michael J.P. Robson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Francis of Assisi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 34-49; Thaddée Matura, OFM, *Francis of Assisi: The Message in His Writings* (Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 2004).

now know should make his life *more* challenging and not less so. This is why McMichael argues that Francis's *own* writings - what they say about Francis's theology and spirituality is the proper interpretive principle to *begin* to examine his meeting with the Sultan or his views on war and peace.<sup>25</sup>

In this regard, it is noteworthy that there is no scholarly consensus on Francis's views on war, peace, Islam, or the crusades. It is also clear that after the death of Francis, regardless of his meeting with the Sultan, the papacy used the friars to preach the crusades.<sup>26</sup> It is interesting that while many Franciscan scholars argue Francis *was* opposed to the specific Fifth Crusade, and to the crusades in general, this is often *not* the view of other scholars, especially crusade or medieval historians.<sup>27</sup> So, for example, it is argued, 'none of the sources recording the saint's life attribute to Francis a single remark that can be interpreted as critical of the crusades, and nothing of the kind can be found in his own writings. To the contrary, there are grounds for arguing that St. Francis *embraced* the knightly ideal of the crusading age and never *dissociated* himself from the crusades (emphasis added).'<sup>28</sup> Also, it is 'money and women who inspire disgust in him, far more than war' (allegedly as part of a ascetic tradition that rejects riches and sexuality).<sup>29</sup>

The reason many historians miss Francis's opposition, according to Franciscan scholars, is that they have not interpreted the documentary sources in terms of the theology and spirituality of Francis's *own* writings briefly examined in this section; and, I argue, crucially, what these writings say about his *encounters*.

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<sup>25</sup> Steven J. McMichael, 'Francis and the encounter with the Sultan, Michael J.P. Robson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Francis of Assisi*, 131.

<sup>26</sup> Michael J. Robson, *The Franciscans in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: Suffolk, Boydell Press, 2006), 72-74.

<sup>27</sup> B. Z. Kedar, *Crusade and Mission: European Approaches toward the Muslims* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), Christopher T. Meir, *Preaching the Crusades* (Cambridge, 1994).

<sup>28</sup> Tomaž Mastnak *Crusading Peace: Christendom, the Muslim World, and the Western Political Order* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 185; Tolan 303-307; Maier, 8-17, 161.

<sup>29</sup> Tolan, 305.

What can only partly be defended here is the view that to arrive at these conclusions scholars do not have a clear interpretive methodology. They seem to quote almost haphazardly from the Franciscan sources without using the literary and historical criticism that is now part of the Franciscan Question to interpret them. The rest of this section briefly examines some of the distinctive characteristics of Francis's theology and spirituality used to support the argument of the article.

Many scholars point to Francis's servant Christology (the poverty and humility of Christ), and the Sermon on the Mount as crucial to his interpretation of the gospel life.<sup>30</sup> This is reflected in the early *Rule* (1209/10-1221), i.e. the rule that Francis wrote, and received only *oral* approval (i.e. without the papal seal) from Pope Innocent the III (1209/10). It was adapted, and a later version, the Later *Rule* finally received approval (with the papal seal) from Pope Honorius III (1223). The early *Rule* is crucial; it contains some of the original teachings of Francis, 'the simple form of life which Francis brought to pope Innocent III,' on how he interpreted the Gospel way of life (famously expressed in Matt. 19:21, Matt. 16: 24, and Luke 14: 26). However, it *also* reflects the decrees and reforms of the Innocent III's Fourth Lateran Council (1215), which Francis saw himself and his brothers broadly implementing.<sup>31</sup>

Many of Francis's writings contain the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount. They are to greet everyone with the greeting of peace, which was very important to Francis. He says in his *Testament* that the Lord specifically revealed this greeting to him (given the strife within Italy's city-states, and the wars between them), and they should resist evil (in the way he understood the Sermon on the

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<sup>30</sup> Robson, 'The writings of Francis,' 34-49.

<sup>31</sup> 'The Earlier Rule,' in FA ED I, 63, and footnotes. However, while this is the case, Hoebrichts points out the influence of the decrees of the Fourth Lateran Council *can* be found on preaching, the Eucharist, confession, penance, etc., but the call for a new crusade is strikingly absent from *any* of Francis's writings. Francis may have been more selective regarding papal documents than is usually acknowledged. Jan Hoeberichts, *Francis and Islam* (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1997), 3-4.

Mount).<sup>32</sup> The early Franciscan way of going about the world was in peace, humility, and poverty. Poverty, despite the later debates in the order over its meaning, was only meant to be a physical symbol of an inner spiritual poverty modelled on the humility and self-emptying of power and authority (*kenosis* in Greek) of Christ on the cross (Phil. 2:7). Crucially, this is how the cross and the incarnation relate to peace and poverty. Poverty and humility only symbolized the real goal, giving up wealth, status, and domination over others - in society and the world, and so Francis's encounter with the Sultan stems from this theology and spirituality. 'This is basic for those who say that Francis and the early Franciscans were persons of peace and reconciliation, and thus persons who rejected the use of violence. The message of peace and reconciliation were to be lived by the brothers in community and in the world.'<sup>33</sup>

Chapter 16 in the early *Rule* does not deal directly with the encounter with the Sultan, but more generally with the friars' mission to Muslims and other non-believers. This goal was at the urging of Innocent III at the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), which was convened for 'the recovery of the Holy Land and the reformation of the Universal Church.' According to Prince Peter of Portugal (1320-1367), 'the desire for martyrdom characterized the lives of the early brothers who were initially received with kindness by the Muslims and were martyred mainly because of their unbending zeal.'<sup>34</sup> So the two approaches to mission were set out in the early *Rule*.

'As for the brothers who go, they can live spiritually among the Saracens and nonbelievers in two ways. One way is not to engage in argument or disputes but to be subject to every human creature for God's sake and to acknowledge that they are Christians. The other way is to announce the Word of God, when they see it pleases the Lord, in order that [unbelievers] may believe in almighty God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the Creator of all, the Son, the Redeemer and Saviour, and be baptised and become Christians because no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and the Holy Spirit.'<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> McMichael, 'Francis and the encounter with the Sultan,' 133.

<sup>33</sup> Robson, 'The Writings of Francis,' 40.

<sup>34</sup> FA ED I: 74, and footnotes.

<sup>35</sup> 'The Earlier Rule (1209/10-1221), in FA ED I: 74, and footnotes.

There is no consensus when this text was drafted and inserted into the early *Rule* (was it *before* the missionary expansion of 1219 when Francis went to Egypt, Giles went to Tunisia, and Bernard and his companions went to Spain and Morocco, or was it *after* Francis returned from his encounter with the Sultan?). Many scholars connect it to the Franciscan mission to Spain and Marrakesh, Morocco that ended in martyrdom (the brothers had directly criticised Islam and Mohammad, but *only* after many warnings were they executed). Marrakesh is often contrasted with Damietta, for Francis expressly did *not* do this when he went to see the Sultan. Honourous III, importantly, *omitted* the first type (preaching through deeds) from the later *Rule* (1223), which may reflect the growing 'clericalization' of the order. However, Francis's guiding principles of preaching and mission are *consistent* with his servant Christology, for the brothers are 'to be subject to every human creature for God's sake.'<sup>36</sup>

The early *Rule* of 1221, in Chapter 22, opens with an admonition that includes, 'Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you.' It could have been written right *before* Francis left for Damietta as a 'farewell speech' given to the friars by Francis at the General Chapter of 1219, *expecting* he would die (martyrdom) or it may be a synthesis of Franciscan discipleship and mission *after* his encounter with the Sultan.<sup>37</sup> Both cases emphasize it is not a 'friend' (as in warm affection), but to treat those society has socially constructed - and in Francis's time also those the Church has socially constructed - as the 'enemy,' now should be treated as a friend, a part of the human fraternity (see section three).<sup>38</sup> Thus, the concept of 'enemy-turned-friend' Francis *already* experienced in his encounters with the leper, the poor in Assisi, was now *extended* to the Sultan.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> McMichael, 'Francis and the encounter with the Sultan,' 141; see also 'The Constitutions of the Capuchin Friars Minor' (1990), 4, 175.

<sup>37</sup> 'The Early Rule (1209/10-1221),' in FA ED I, 79 (footnote); Michael, F. Cusato, 'Healing the Violence of the Contemporary World: A Franciscan Paradigm for Dialogue with Islam,' in *Spirit and Life: A Journal of Contemporary Franciscanism*, 12 (2008): 15-16.

<sup>38</sup> Michael, F. Cusato, 'Healing the Violence of the Contemporary World,' 1-38.

<sup>39</sup> McMichael, 'Francis and the encounter with the Sultan,' 134.

In addition to Francis's *own* writings as an interpretive principle, what is also important is the way they bear witness to the various *encounters* in his life that shaped his vision, theology, and spirituality. Crucially, in his encounters - with the poor, the marginalized, the outcast, Francis gained astounding insights into the breath of the humility of the incarnation, demonstrated later in the encounter with the Sultan.<sup>40</sup> Francis's *encounter* with war and being a prisoner of war as result of Assisi's war against Perugia (1202) was the event, along with the *encounter* with Christ on the cross, speaking to him in the dilapidated Church of San Damiano, that sparked his conversion. His desire still to be a chivalrous knight after his convalescence led him to head for Apulia in southern Italy to join the papal forces against the Holy Roman Empire. He stopped in route in Spoleto where that night he had a famous dream, another *encounter* with Christ (1 Celano, 7-8), which led him to finally give up his military ambitions (the question in the dream was does Francis want to follow the heavenly Lord or only the earthly prince, who is really only the servant). He returns to Assisi in disgrace waiting for the new vocation God would show him.

Francis's unexpected *encounter* with the leper is another event that was pivotal in his conversion, and influenced his theology and spirituality.<sup>41</sup> He speaks so dramatically about this event in his *Testament*, which occurred *after* the dream of Spoleto. This is why McMichael says some scholars seek to connect the *encounter* with the leper to his *later* encounter with the Sultan at Damietta (Jan Hoebrichts and Michael Cusato). 'In 1219, Francis extended his experience of reconciliation beyond the Christian world to the Muslim world. Just as he went among lepers, he later went among Muslims, and in both cases he went among them in a spirit of peace and compassion.'<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Kenan B. Osborne, OFM, *The Franciscan Intellectual Tradition: Tracing its Origins and Identifying its Central Components* (Franciscan Institute, 2003), 32-38.

<sup>41</sup> McMichael, 'Francis and the encounter with the Sultan,' 141.

<sup>42</sup> McMichael, 'Francis and the encounter with the Sultan,' 130.



A critical approach to the legends is the other key interpretive principle of the Franciscan Question. 'Each source has its own perspective, and therefore each has its own agenda that one should be aware of in any discussion of life of Francis.'<sup>43</sup> The questions asked here are similar to those asked by critical theory - *who* determines *what* events, and *which* actors, are significant or *when* they matter in international relations; and, significant for *what* ends, and for *whom* in international relations? Only a few brief points can be made about the literary and historical criticism of the legends, and how this relates to Francis's views on war and peace.

A lack of theological awareness, especially of eschatology, and the way culture interacts with theology, underlies the view that Francis *did* support the Fifth Crusade (may be not on 'this day,' but some other day), and that he *did* support the principle of the crusades.<sup>44</sup> Francis's goals are even presented as *worse* than the crusaders; they only wanted to use military force to expel Muslims from the Holy Places, Francis 'wanted their total submission to the Christian faith,' and short of this, it was a duty, a necessity, 'to crusade against the enemies of the faith.'<sup>45</sup> The same lack of awareness is evident in the view - since Francis did not criticize bishop Pelagius, but even sought his blessing before he embarked on his mission, to argue he *effectively* supported the Fifth Crusade since he *supported the clergy* who support it. In fact, Francis simply could have been indifferent to the crusades, or he didn't strictly oppose them.<sup>46</sup> So, it is argued, silence about the crusades in Francis's writings, and what we know of the event means it is *not* possible to argue Francis was opposed to the Fifth Crusade or was anti-crusade (e.g. Hoose, Tolan, Mastnak, Maier). Perhaps, he was opposed,

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<sup>43</sup> McMichael, 'Francis and the encounter with the Sultan, 131.

<sup>44</sup> e.g. Maier and Tolan in contrast to Powell. The Latin text may not even support this interpretation. J. Hoeberichts notes that in Celano's Latin text Francis is 'forbidding war' (as bellum), and not just the battle of Damaietta, (as pugnam), *Francis and Islam* (Quincy, II: Franciscan Press, 1997), 97; Moses, 113-116.

<sup>45</sup> Maier, 16-17.

<sup>46</sup> Powell, "St. Francis's Way of Peace," *Medieval Encounters*, 13, 2 (2007): 271-280.

but kept silent because he highly respected the clergy?<sup>47</sup> However, any argument from silence can cut both ways (e.g. he silently *disagreed* with the crusades?). However, if silence is going to be used, then it should cut the argument in a way that is *consistent* with what Francis's *own* writings say about his theology and spirituality, and pro-crusade historians do not do this.

All the theological arguments used to interpret Francis's prophesy of the battle of Damietta in Celano's *Vita secunda* cannot be presented here. What can be said is this. The very phrases Francis used (such as 'this day') are clearly rooted in the eschatology of the times.<sup>48</sup> What Francis proclaimed was *not* entirely new. A variety of counter-eschatologies (to papal pro-crusade eschatology) advocated peaceful conversion as an alternative to the crusades, and were espoused by the new poverty and peace movements (see section four).<sup>49</sup> The fact some historians, especially crusader historians, often ignore the impact of *culture* - eschatological ideas, or underplay the impact of these religious renewal movements, has not helped their interpretation of Franciscan sources. Francis, like these renewal movements, turned this religious symbolism of war on its head (as he did the concept of chivalry, courtly love, with Lady Poverty); and, argued, now is no longer the acceptable time, now is no longer the day of salvation since what looked like *kronos* (chronological time for a crusade) is actually *kairos* (a special time in Christ). Now are not the acceptable time for war but a time for

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<sup>47</sup> He says in his *Testament*, 'We should honor and venerate theologians, too, and the ministers of God's word, because it is they who give us spirit and life.'

<sup>48</sup> James Powell, "Francesco d'Assisi e la Quinta Crociata Una missione di pace," *Schede Medievali*, 4 (1983): 68-77; James Powell, 'St. Francis of Assisi's Way of Peace,' *Medieval Encounters* 13, 2 (2007): 271-280; Kedar, *Crusade and Mission*, 116-131.

<sup>49</sup> Francis's preaching of peaceful conversion as an alternative to the crusades converged with the ideas of Joachim of Fiore, the Cistercian abbot and mystic, but on the basis of very different eschatology. Joachimite eschatology identified the Arabs with 'the beast', the Anti-Christ, in the Book of Revelation (13:3), and indicated if in the *past* crusades were necessary to fight the Anti-Christ, *now* a New Age is being inaugurated to reclaim the Holy Places through peaceful preaching led by the mendicant orders, especially the Franciscans. So within the order, especially among some of the 'Spirituals,' Joachimite ideas fused with the Franciscan tradition of non-violent conversion to produce 'apocalyptic conversion as an alternative to the crusades' (Musto). The early *Rule*, under the influence of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) criticized Joachimite eschatology. The Church and the order fiercely persecuted the 'spiritual' Franciscans. Musto, 92-94; Moses, 105-119; E. Randolph Daniel, 'Apocalyptic Conversion: the Joachite Alternative to the Crusades,' *Traditio* 25 (1969): 127-154.

peace to end the bloodshed between Muslims and Christians.<sup>50</sup> A eschatological reading of the prophesy in Celano's *Vita secunda* is missed by a literal reading of the text by pro-crusade historians.

Another key event that is a matter of dispute is Francis's *confrontation* with the Sultan's advisors by challenging them to a trial by fire to determine which religion is true. It is the most dramatic of a number of examples that show how some historians have haphazardly used Franciscan sources apart from the Franciscan Question's interpretive principles. Bonaventure inserted this event into the *Legenda major* (1263) as a dramatic confrontation to demonstrate Francis's courage and the superiority of Christianity.<sup>51</sup> So Francis proclaimed the gospel in a confrontational way, telling the Sultan he must convert or be damned - the orthodox Catholic theology of the time (to suggest he also desired martyrdom, as Celano's *Vita prima* indicates). Bonaventure's biography, and Giotto's frescos of the encounter in the upper basilica of San Francesco (based on the *Legenda major*) indicate for all to see, 'Franciscan mission as a glorious victory in a confrontation between Francis and Saracen clerics.'<sup>52</sup>

The modern quest for the historical Francis goes back to the interpretation of Francis's life by Bonaventure in his *Legenda major* (1263). He became Minister General in 1257, and this biography replaced Celano's as the official biography. The general chapter in 1266 voted to destroy all other accounts of Francis's life. It has been argued since Sabatier's *Life* (1894) that a series of crises - including heresy, criticism of the principle of mendicant begging, threatened the very survival of the Franciscan Order in the thirteenth century (e.g. Joachimite eschatology among the Spiritual Franciscans). This is why Bonaventure presents

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<sup>50</sup> Moses, 105-119; Cusato, 'Healing the Violence of the Contemporary World,' 1-38.

<sup>51</sup> Maier, 9-17; Mastnak, 194-195, Maier sees the hagiographic *topos* or literary convention going back to the *Chanson de Roland*, of a Christian envoy traveling to a Muslim court to convert them, as evidence that Francis *supported* the Fifth Crusade. However, section four argues that Francis *transformed* these literary conventions as part of his *cultural* critique of Christendom. Maier also takes two others 'trial incidents,' allegedly going back to Br. Illuminato at face value from *The Assisi Compilation* (also called *The Legend of Perugia, 1244-1260*), as evidence to claim Francis supported the crusades. For contrary arguments see Moses, 142-143, 208; Tolan, 135-146.

<sup>52</sup> Tolan, 145.

a more *confrontational* picture of Francis's encounter with the Sultan to affirm the order's orthodoxy and good relations with the Catholic Church. The *Legenda major* says they were going out as sheep among wolves, and the Sultan's soldiers beat them up (in contrast to de Vitry and Ernoul).<sup>53</sup>

However, if the meeting with the Sultan was so confrontational, then why were they not executed (Hoose says for strategic necessity)?<sup>54</sup> Why did the Sultan give gifts of the ivory horn, and offer more worldly gifts (to entice the brothers into sin, in the hostile accounts, or as a sign of Arab hospitality? Section three explains it all depends on how 'the Other' is constructed; physical *observation* cannot explain events, they can only be interpreted)? Bonaventure saved the Franciscan Order from oblivion or almost certain suppression. Unfortunately, he did so by burying or reshaping what took place between Francis and the Sultan (i.e. Francis had a peaceful dialogue with the Sultan, and was impressed by Islamic spirituality).

However, the trial by fire has been reflected in Christian art through the centuries. Christian imagery and symbolism before mass literacy were vitally important to spread the gospel. Sections three and four examine how we live in a socially constructed world of international relations. Art and culture help to construct the social world - including who are our friends, rivals, or enemies as a part of international security. Francis's theology, spirituality, and the way he performed the gospel undermine such kinds of *cultural and conflictual foundations* of politics, foreign policy, and international relations.

### **The Leper, the Poor, the Sultan, and Conversion:**

#### **Challenging the Construction of Knowledge in International Relations**

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<sup>53</sup> Bonaventure, 'The Major Legend of Saint Francis,' FA ED II: 602-603.

<sup>54</sup> Adam L. Hoose, 'Francis of Assisi's Way of Peace? His Conversion and Mission to Egypt,' *Catholic Historical Review*, 96, 3 (2010): 49-469.

Crusader historians often miss the importance of Francis's conversion for his ideas on the crusades and Christian missions. Crucial to his conversion was the unexpected encounter with the leper.<sup>55</sup> This is correct. What is incorrect is the attempt to *separate* Francis's personal piety and spirituality from his social, political, and economic life to demonstrate he was *not* against a militant, crusading, Christianity. So the turning point of Francis's conversion was his attitude toward lepers, 'not toward military life, which was secondary to his desire for a penitential life of humility.' This life was a rejection of wealth and worldly glory; but, conversion, a life of penance, did not interfere with a person's status in life. Conversion was not an alternative to war, or a peaceful alternative to war. It had nothing to do with military service, or the foreign policy aspirations of Assisi or Christendom. So Francis's conversion is interpreted in a limited way to argue he held the accepted views of foreign affairs of the day - hostility towards Islam, a clash of civilizations, and so his preaching Muslim conversion was *not* a peaceful alternative to the crusades.<sup>56</sup>

This section also interprets Francis's conversion to legitimate a specific view of his on foreign affairs - with opposite conclusions. A full textual analysis cannot be presented, but such different conclusions are reached because of the way critical theory and constructivism demonstrates the relationship between conversion, encounter, and knowledge. This relationship is as relevant for interpreting historical events, like Francis's encounter with the Sultan, as it is for contemporary Muslim-Christian relations or events in international relations. It is also consistent with the interpretive principles of the Franciscan Question.

What is the basis for the approach to knowledge adopted by critical theorists and constructivists? Firstly, one of the defining features is that they reject naturalism, i.e. the main claim of positivist, mainstream, social scientific approaches to politics or international relations. This assumes that the same

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<sup>55</sup> Hoose, 'Francis of Assisi's Way of Peace?', 451.

<sup>56</sup> Hoose, 'Francis of Assisi's Way of Peace?', 455; see also, Frank M. Rega, *St. Francis of Assisi and the Conversion of the Muslims* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books, 2007).

methods of the physical or natural sciences can be applied to the study of action by human beings. This 'explanatory' view of theory seeks to explain (allegedly objectively) a world 'out there,' a world *separate* from our minds, and separate from our theories. It develops a correspondence theory of truth, in which the 'truth' of a theory or a concept is determined by how it matches or corresponds to the world.<sup>57</sup> Famously, this positivist approach to the social sciences is reflected in a similar approach to history that goes back to the German historian Leopold von Ranke. It is based on the belief that history is the search for objective truth about the past (history 'how it really was' or 'what really happened at Damietta, Egypt?').<sup>58</sup>

In contrast, critical theorists, constructivists, argue that the 'truth' about the world cannot be gained in this way, a (alleged) correspondence between our theories, concepts and some (objective) conception of world. The reason is that we are a part of what we are investigating; we all live in a social world as well as a physical or natural one. So our theories, concepts, - ideas, beliefs, values, passions, and interests, 'constitute' the world, construct what the world is like - for 'in the social sciences some of the most important concepts are *constitutive* (and are used recursively) of the social world rather than simply mirroring or describing it [like in the correspondence theory of truth].'<sup>59</sup> What we call the world is constructed by us with concepts we use every day - the state, sovereignty, crusades, holy places, religious violence, extremism, fundamentalism, the clash of civilizations, the Islamic threat, or even the international community.

Similarly, historians are a part of the way they construct the past since activities are constructed as 'facts,' as 'events,' which are *inevitably*

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<sup>57</sup> Ken Booth, 'Critical Explorations,' in Ken Booth (ed.), *Critical Security Studies and World Politics* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2005), 10; Ken Booth, *Theory of World Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 193-194, 244-246.

<sup>58</sup> George Darnes and Marvin L. Krier Mich, *In the Spirit of St. Francis & the Sultan*, New York: Orbis Press, 2011), 153.

<sup>59</sup> Friedrich Kratochwil, 'History, Action and Identity: Revisiting the "Second" Great Debate and Assessing its Importance for Social Theory,' *European Journal of International Relations* 12, 1 (2006): 7-8.

interpretations. They are assembled and then narratively arranged according to some interest, purpose, or perspective to tell a story called the 'history' of that event (Johnson compares the events surrounding the historical Jesus to those founding the United Nations!).<sup>60</sup> This is why 'facts' or 'events' do not speak for themselves any more for a historian than they do for a scholar of international relations. Benedetto Croce famously argued, all history has 'the character of "contemporary history" because, however remote in time events there recounted may seem to be, the history in reality refers to present needs and present situations wherein those events vibrate.'<sup>61</sup> This is an apt description of the current interest in Francis's encounter with the Sultan by those who think it is relevant to how the West engages with the Islamic world.

Secondly, critical theory's approach to knowledge may have strong resonances with the Franciscan intellectual tradition. The Franciscans have been influenced less by the Greek conception of ideas and knowledge, and more by a relational understanding of knowledge. In the Greek, rationalist, tradition knowledge is formed by the private mind. It is something worked out through ideas and concepts. It is something done, almost autonomously, by the individual, self-sufficient, human being. This tradition has strongly influenced Western philosophy and Christian theology.

However, Francis's original insights, and his various encounters led to a relational anthropology that underlies conversion, what knowledge is, and how it is constructed. It is much closer to the Hebraic (or Jewish) - you could even say, biblical tradition, which is very different from the Greek rationalist tradition. Francis's distinctive insights are rooted in the beauty of creation (as a gift from a loving God as creator and father).<sup>62</sup> There is a mutuality or relatedness between

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<sup>60</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (San Francisco: Harper, 1996); Rodney Bruce Hall and Friedrich Kratochwil, 'Medieval Tales: neorealist "science" and the abuse of history,' *International Organization*, 47, 3 (1993) 479-481.

<sup>61</sup> Benedetto Croce, *History as the Story of Liberty* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1941), 19.

<sup>62</sup> Ilia Delio, OSF, *A Franciscan View of Creation*, Franciscan Heritage Series (Franciscan Institute, 2003).

the creation and all creatures.<sup>63</sup> Preferences are for love over knowledge, as a key to the human journey (i.e. knowledge in the Greek rational sense), so a journey towards God is through the Other.<sup>64</sup> Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas (whom John-Paul II has called 'the philosophers of dialogue'), point out in different ways that in the Hebraic tradition knowledge is *relational*, human existence is always 'coexistence' (e.g. the famous 'I-Thou' relationship by Martin Buber).<sup>65</sup> So knowledge is arrived at through an *encounter* with 'the Other' - opening up, allowing the Other the power to influence us.<sup>66</sup> So there is no genuine encounter that does not lead to conversion and transformation.<sup>67</sup>

Therefore, a critical, relational, approach to knowledge really means there is no autonomous knowing. A Franciscan way of seeing the world is reflected in what can be called a 'conversionary epistemology.' This is a conception of knowledge rooted in insights - dare it be said, which are fearful, painful, gained from Francis's own dramatic *encounters* - war and being a prisoner of war, with the leper, with the poor, and finally with the Sultan. This kind of conversion radically rejects the separation of facts and values, the observer and the observed (naturalism and positivism), 'all the way down' - down to a person's very inner being - as a knight or merchant (Francis) or as a noble (Clare), or any of us

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<sup>63</sup> Mary Beth Ingham, *The Harmony of Goodness - Mutuality and Moral Living According to John Duns Scotus* (Franciscan Institute, second edition, 2012).

<sup>64</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. Smith/Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), in Mary Beth Ingham, *Scotus for Dunces: An Introduction to the Subtle Doctor* (Franciscan Institute, 2003), 137, 149.

<sup>65</sup> Dawn Nothwehr, O.S.F., *The Franciscan View of the Human Person: Some Central Elements*, Franciscan Heritage Series (Franciscan Institute, 2004).

<sup>66</sup> Daniel Warner, 'Levinas, Buber and the Concept of Otherness in International Relations: A Reply to David Campbell', *Millennium*, 25, 1 (1996): 111-28 and David Campbell, 'The Politics of Radical Interdependence: A Rejoinder to Daniel Warner', *Millennium*, 25, 1 (1996): 129-41.

<sup>67</sup> David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981). Paul Rout uses the concepts of the Catholic theologian, Bernard Lonergan, conversion, encounter, and 'horizon,' a geographical expression, regarding a set of decisions and judgments that lead to a move from one horizon to another one, which is deeper, broader, and richer, to describe Francis's encounter with the Sultan. Their encounter was a type of 'conversion' (intellectual, moral, or religious) that enabled them to forsake war and achieve reconciliation. Paul Rout, OFM, 'St Francis of Assisi and Islam: A Theological Perspective on a Christian-Muslim Encounter, *Al-Masaq: Islam and the Medieval Mediterranean*, 23, 3 (2011): 205-215.



as scholars, students, workers, activists, or policymakers.<sup>68</sup> Francis's encounters transformed how he constructed knowledge of what was going on in the world. Perhaps, Rowan Williams's evocative phrase 'the wound of knowledge' also expresses this relationship - how fear, pain, suffering - all a part of genuine conversion, are related to knowledge and spirituality.<sup>69</sup> This kind of knowledge is gained *initially* by encounters, like those Francis experienced, that lead to 'falling upward,' i.e. only those who have 'gone down,' and experience the fear, pain, suffering, rejection, and humiliation (e.g. Francis's time as a prisoner of war, or his return to Assisi after the dream of Spoleto), can 'come up' again, by being open to new knowledge, understandings, and broader horizons.<sup>70</sup> Francis discovered *through* his encounters knowledge comes from the margins, the bottom, and not the top of society. This is the privileged position to construct knowledge and to understand what is going on in the world. Over many years, a conversionary epistemology and a relational conception of knowledge contributed to Francis's even *deeper* conversions towards peace, reconciliation, and the fraternity of creation and all creatures.<sup>71</sup> This is why - for Francis, or for any of us - seeing the world differently is already a way to begin to change it.<sup>72</sup>

Therefore, Francis preformed the gospel *not* in ways that endorse theory as 'foreign policy problem-solving' - Western security, the Islamic threat, reclaiming the Holy Places in Jerusalem, or today what to do about 'religious civil

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<sup>68</sup> Chris Brown, 'Turtles All the Way Down': Anti-Foundationalism, Critical Theory and International Relations,' *Millennium*, 23, 2 (1994): 213-236.

<sup>69</sup> Rowan Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge: Christian Spirituality from the New Testament to St. John of the Cross* (London: Darton, Longman, Todd, 1979).

<sup>70</sup> Richard Rohr, OFM *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life* (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 2011). Lonergan acknowledges conversion (moral, intellectual, and religious) involves 'modalities of transcendence.' He says, 'Only the critical realist [in contrast to the naïve realist, empiricist, and idealist] can acknowledge the facts of human knowing and pronounce the world mediated by meaning to be the real world; and he can do so only inasmuch as he shows that the process of experiencing, understanding, and judging is a process of self-transcendence.' However, he does not seem to emphasize sufficiently the pain, suffering, that accompanies new life; a deepening pain, Rowan Williams call it, which comes before healing - in a word, the cross that is necessary before any resurrection. Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1971), 238-239.

<sup>71</sup> Pierre Brunette, OFM, *Francis and His Conversions* (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1997).

<sup>72</sup> Scott M. Thomas, *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations* (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 250.

wars' or 'religious terrorism.'<sup>73</sup> Theory conceived by critical theorists, as 'everyday social practice,' is theory as a form of the moral life; for each of us, every day, in our life style, in what we consume, how we travel, implement a theory of international relations. Every day we all live out 'the local politics of world politics.'<sup>74</sup> Crucially, the concept of theory as everyday social practice shows how a conversionary epistemology relates to the Franciscan Question - this is *why* it is important to interpret Francis's views on war or the crusades, or his encounter with the Sultan, with his *own* writings and his *various* encounters (contrary to a limited view of Francis's conversion and spirituality). How conversion, encounter, and knowledge are related helps us to see why it is unlikely that Francis supported the Fifth Crusade, or any crusade, and why he preached peaceful conversion to achieve the foreign policy goals of Christendom.

### **Francis and the Sultan:**

#### **Challenging the Ontology of International Relations**

Ontology is about the nature of being, what kinds of entities, categories, exist or are said to exist, and the relations between them. One of the results of Francis's conversionary epistemology, section three pointed out, was a vision of the mutual relatedness of all things. So, Francis's canticle, 'brother sun, sister moon' is not only charming poetry; it is an accurate statement of Franciscan metaphysics. The core reality of the world, the deep ontological principle underlying it, is that the creation and all creatures are ontological siblings. So a Franciscan 'metaphysics of peace' clearly emerges from the theology and spirituality in Francis's own writings and his various encounters. Therefore, if Francis challenged the existing social rules, norms, practices *within* Assisi

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<sup>73</sup> Monica Duffy Toft, Daniel Philpott, Timothy Shah, *God's Century: Resurgent Religion and Global Politics* (New York: Norton, 2011), 121-173.

<sup>74</sup> Ken Booth, 'Critical Explorations,' 1-10; Marysia Zalewski, 'All these theories yet the bodies keep piling up': theory, theorists, theorizing,' in Steve Smith, Ken Booth, Marysia Zalewski (eds.), *International theory: positivism & beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 340-353.

society, and *between* Italy's city-states, then it is *unlikely* he did not also challenge those that constituted the foreign affairs of Christendom. This section shows that historians who argue Francis supported the crusades ignore the metaphysics of peace that was part of his *cultural* critique of Christendom - the crusades, civic violence, and economic oppression, which challenged the existing ontology of international relations.

Ontology in international relations is about what the kinds of *actors*, agents, conceived by theorists and policy makers (and each of us) are doing which *activities* that now constitute international relations? There is no objective social reality, section three also pointed out, for a correspondence theory of truth to plainly and clearly give us knowledge of events in history or international relations. Our theories, concepts, not simply mirror the social world - they *make social reality what it is*. This is why critical theorists, constructivists, emphasize 'social ontologies' - states and non-state actors are *mutually constitutive*, and through their *social interactions* construct the social world of international relations. Arguably, the deeper Franciscan principle of mutuality underlies this concept of international society and is reflected in this kind of constructivism.

Therefore, the crusades did not simply exist, they *constituted* relations with the Islamic world in one way, through ideas, norms, and social practices - chivalry, courtly love, indulgences, religious vows, rites of penance, and *not* in some other way. In other words, rules, norms, do not only *regulate* warfare or relations between political communities - such as the just war, the truce of God, or papal arbitration, they also *constitute*, construct, *what* social and political reality *is*, in one way and not some other way.<sup>75</sup>

Critical theorists might ask *who* is doing foreign affairs during the Middle Ages on behalf of *whom* - those who work (labourers, peasants, but also the new

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<sup>75</sup>Rodney Bruce Hall and Friedrich Kratochwil, 'Medieval Tales: nenorealist "science" and the abuse of history,' 479-491; Tal Dingot Alkopher, 'The Social (and Religious) Meanings that Constitute War: the Crusades as Realpolitik vs. Socialpolitik,' *International Studies Quarterly*, 49 (2005): 715-737.

merchants, bankers, lawyers, notaries, school masters that dominated the spread of urban life), those who fight (the kings, princes, knights, the military religious orders), or those who pray (the clergy, the popes, the Roman Curia, the religious orders)? What is the *final purpose* of international relations - peace, security, or justice, for our state, religion, or community, or is it to promote mutuality, the common good, or universal fraternity? The answer to these kinds of questions influences *which* actors, and *what* issues are considered important to understand medieval history or international relations. The way the Middle Ages were constructed by medieval historians often ignored or marginalized the widespread criticism of the crusades by active social movements.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, Francis fits into *whose* history of the Middle Ages - the vivid history of popes, kings, ladies, knights, and crusaders; or does he fit into the history of those on the margins - lepers, the poor, the peasants, the workers, the monks, the friars, hermits, heretics, third orders, lay confraternities, represented in the religious renewal and the poverty and peace movements? It turns out that this question is *crucial* to any evaluation of Francis's views on war and peace.

In Francis's lifetime a variety of actors, secular and religious (concepts which do not fit the social life of the times) challenged the existing ontology of international relations - the religious renewal movements of the laity, overlapping with the new poverty and peace movements.<sup>77</sup> The popular sense was that the Church leadership was bankrupt, and there was laxity in the monasteries. This new religious consciousness merged with the new forms of power in the West - the crusader ideal, and the rise of the urban, profit economy, to produce 'original forms of prophetic protest and positive peacemaking.' The new forms of

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<sup>76</sup> Musto, 80; Norman F. Cantor, *Inventing the Middle Ages* (New York: Quill/William Morrow, 1991); Christopher Tyerman, *The Invention of the Crusades* (New York: Palgrave, 1998).

<sup>77</sup> e.g. the Humiliati, the Poor Lombards, the Poor Catholics, the Reconciled Poor, the Waldes of Lyons, and the Great Devotion or the Great Hallelujah, the movements of religious renewal that swept through northern Italy. Musto, 80-82; Lester K. Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe* (London: Paul Elck, 1978), Herbert Grunmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages* (1935), trans. By Steven Rowan (University of Notre Dame, 1995); Gary Dickson, 'Medieval Revivalism,' in Daniel E. Bornstein, *Medieval Christianity, People's History of Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg/Fortress Press, 2010), 147-178.

peacemaking '*linked* criticism of the urban money economy with violence of the feudal classes.' This occurred since the profit economy was seen as a new form of exploitation - recall Francis really was *fanatically* opposed to money, and the 'power of the feudal classes had always been linked to violence and to the exploitation of the poor.'<sup>78</sup>

The first aspect of the poverty and peace movements was to criticise - *culture*, values, lifestyle, i.e. the existing ideals of chivalry, knighthood, what it meant to be successful, honourable, patriotic, and even religious (think of the ridicule, rejection, and humiliation Francis faced after the dream of Spoleto). This is what made power and violence a part of the 'Christian goals' of Europe. A deeper conversion involved transforming culture by living out, by 'performing the gospel' (Laurence Cunningham) in daily life, living out a *cultural* critique of the 'Christian culture' of the Middle Ages.<sup>79</sup> It is also why culture then, and now, is part of the changing ontology of international relations.<sup>80</sup> Francis's theology and spirituality examined in the second section *reinforced this cultural critique of Christendom* - a critique of the popular romance literature, the ballads of the troubadours, which influenced his youth, and were still a part of his theology of Lady Poverty, and the way he performed the gospel life. However, he transformed the meaning of chivalry, courtly love, and being a crusader, literally, a person who bears the cross. He served not an earthly king but the Most High King (the dream of Spoleto), and he extended 'courtesy' (literally courtly behavior) for nobility to every leper, beggar who crossed his path. He compared his band of brothers to the Knights of the Round Table, and their itinerant

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<sup>78</sup> Musto, 80-81; Giacomo Todeschini, *Franciscan Wealth: From Voluntary Poverty to Market Society* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2009).

<sup>79</sup> Halverson argues Herbert Grundmann's still widely regarded, groundbreaking, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages* (1935), trans. by Steven Rowan (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1995) shifted the focus of medieval history to 'Christian culture,' away from mainly the study of doctrines and institutions; Herbert Grundmann, 'Religious Movements in the Middle Ages' (1935), in James L. Halverson (ed.), *Contesting Christendom: Readings in Medieval Religion and Culture* (Plymouth, UK: Rowan & Littlefield, 2008), 137-146.

<sup>80</sup> Yosef Lapid and Friedrich Kratochwil (eds.), *The Return of Culture and Identity in IR Theory* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1996).

preaching to their quests for adventure.<sup>81</sup> In other words, he performed the gospel *within* the constraints of history - the *cultural* models of power, status, and prestige that dominated Assisi society, but *transformed* them to fit a greater purpose. He remained a cross-bearer, but 'surely a crusader against the standard type familiar in the world of Francis.'<sup>82</sup> Historians who argue Francis supported the crusades ignore the way he performed the gospel life demonstrated a cultural critique of Christendom.

Peaceful conversion as an alternative to the crusades was the second aspect of the criticism by a variety of poverty and peace movements, and Francis's reason for visiting the Sultan typified this goal.<sup>83</sup> However, *whose* history of the Middle Ages, in defence of *what* interests (this is a problem with crusader historians who marginalize medieval peace movements)? Francis's encounter with the Sultan should not be evaluated as a separate event, as remarkable as it is, but as an event *within* a social movement. In fact, even *within* the Church the criticism of the crusades, preaching, and violent conversion go at least as far back as Peter the Venerable, the famous abbot of Cluny (1122).

In other words, Francis of Assisi was only one, albeit, the best-known, and most influential, proponent of the link between poverty and peace. So Francis's theology and spirituality, and the *other* Franciscan principles examined in the second section were all part of his response to the popular currents of the time. The way these movements performed the gospel *demonstrated* an alternative to the culture of chivalry, the civic violence between Italian city-states, and the violence of the crusades, with a refusal to bear arms or take oaths, two basic requirements of feudal relationships. These principles became part of the

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<sup>81</sup> B. Brooke, *The Image of St Francis: Responses to Sainthood in the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge, 2006), 15-16; Mark of Whitstable, OFM, Cap., *Gospel Chivalry: Franciscan Romanticism* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2006).

<sup>82</sup> Lawrence S. Cunningham, "Francis Naked and Clothed: A Theological Meditation," in Jay M. Hammond (ed.), *Francis of Assisi: History, Hagiography, and Hermeneutics in the Early Documents* (New City Press, 2004), 165-178, esp. 169.

<sup>83</sup> Musto, 83.

Franciscan Third Order *Rule* of 1221.<sup>84</sup> One of Francis's main interests was 'in establishing peace among the warring civic factions, an interest reflected in the Franciscan confraternities.'<sup>85</sup> Thus, Francis's metaphysics of peace, and his theology and spirituality offered a similar criticism of the crusades and the new market society made by the poverty and peace movements. However, in the way he performed the gospel life this criticism became part of the imitation of Christ as no one had shown before.

### **Francis and the Sultan: Agency and the Constraints of History**

What now can reasonably be said about Francis's encounter with the Sultan from the perspectives of critical theory and social constructivism, given the multiple images, interests, and perspectives in the Franciscan sources? What can be said regarding the contemporary relevance of this encounter for Muslim-Christian relations, Middle East politics, and international relations?

Perhaps, the most startling aspect of Francis's encounter with the Sultan - was that it happened at all in the midst of crusades. He was willing to cross the threshold - to the other whom was defined as the enemy; or, is this very much a *construction* of Western security and Western Christianity towards Islam, rather than one of Eastern Christianity? The Sultan's relations with Coptic Christians in Egypt before even meeting Francis are only now being explored. It is claimed Copts fought for al-Kamil along side Muslims during the Fifth Crusade even though Muslims or Latin Christians did not trust them. This research makes for a more complicated narrative than 'Muslims vs. Jews and Christians,' common among those evangelicals who are Christian Zionists.<sup>86</sup> For Francis (and for the

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<sup>84</sup> Ingrid Peterson, 'The Third Order of Francis,' Robson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Francis of Assisi*, 194-195; Musto, 84-85.

<sup>85</sup> Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy*, 207.

<sup>86</sup> C. Cannuyer, *Coptic Egypt: the Christians of the Nile* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2001), p. 16, in Steven Saxby, 'Francis and the Sultan: A model for contemporary Christian engagement with Islam,' in Anthony O'Mahony and Peter Bove, OSB (eds.), *Catholics in Interreligious Dialogue*:

Sultan), religion, culture, and identity, or at least their *existing* configuration, shaped how he conceptualized, until his conversion, his *initial* interests, Assisi's, and those of Christendom. Through his conversion and encounters - Francis constructed new knowledge - what was *really* going on in the world around him, which led to a startlingly new ontology - how through God the creation is related to all living creatures; so he came to engage the world in a new way - with joy, poverty, and peace.

Francis, in going to the Islamic world, like his brothers *were* seeking martyrdom, not in the sense that they pursued it, but they expected it, given Islamic stereotypes, the *cultural* expectations around them; and, given the existing eschatologies of the time (de Vitry calls Saracens 'disciples of the Anti-Christ,' along with Innocent III, Bernard of Clairvaux). Francis *did* go to preach the gospel, and this is borne out by the earliest chronicles (de Vitry and Ernoul). He did this according to the teachings of the Catholic Church, as he understood them at the time. 'Marrakesh' is often contrasted with 'Damietta' as approaches to Franciscan missions. The zealous, direct, preaching of the gospel is what Francis expressly did *not* do in Damietta (or else the Sultan would have killed them like the martyrs in Marrakesh). He also could have sent them back earlier to the crusaders, nor would he have offered them gifts. Therefore, the encounter *must* have been a 'peaceful dialogue' based on mutual respect. This became the early *Rule's* approach to deeds and preaching, and being subject to very human creature. The Sultan it appears did listen intently, and was deeply impressed with Francis's integrity, speaking, and spirituality.<sup>87</sup> Francis was possibly surprised by the Sultan's hospitality.

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Studies in Monasticism, Theology, and Spirituality (Leominster: Gracewing, 2006), 120-150; Moses, 66, 71, 72, 103- 104, 74.

<sup>87</sup> Fareed Z. Munir, Sultan al-Malik Muhammad al-Kamil and Saint Francis: interreligious dialogue and the meeting at Damietta, *Journal of Islamic Law and Culture*, 10, 3 (2008): 305-314.



The Sultan al-Kamil's interest in Sufi mysticism, religious ideas, and religious dialogue all reinforce this interpretation.<sup>88</sup> It also helps explain the *physical* evidence, the Sultan's gift of the ivory horn, which he used to call the faithful to prayer. It is argued, furthermore, that Francis was *also* impressed by Islamic spirituality, which may have influenced his *later* writings.<sup>89</sup> It is even argued Francis went to Mount La Verna (where he received the *stigmata*) because he was deeply depressed and discouraged by the news that Pelagius, Honorius III, and Frederick II planned another campaign to regain the Holy Land in 1224. He went to La Verna to do a 'Lent of St Michael,' i.e. prayer, fasting – but, 'on behalf of his Muslim brother al-Malik al-Kaṁil.'<sup>90</sup>

The contention that Francis opposed the crusades, and supported peaceful conversion is strengthened by another overall point - *whose* Middle Ages, which historical narrative, does Francis's life, the early brothers, and the encounter with the Sultan fit? Earlier, conflicting narratives were presented between a Middle Ages of kings, knights, and crusades, and one of peasants and labourers. However, Francis's theology, spirituality, and his various encounters can be seen as his response to the criticism of the crusades and the rise of the profit economy by the poverty and peace social movements. Moreover, the class divisions of medieval society were not reproduced among the early Franciscans. Rich and poor came together *within* the early brotherhood (although this became a later problem), and *within* the laity, they gave up arms, and the pledge of oaths to join the Third Order. So the early Franciscans showed a different way of

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<sup>88</sup> R. J. C. Broadhurst (ed.), *A History of the Ayyubid Sultans of Egypt* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980), 229-230, cited by Cusato, 'Healing the Violence of the Contemporary World,' 32; on the Sufi influence in the Sultan's court, see Moses, 137-139

<sup>89</sup> e.g. *Letter to the Rulers of the Peoples* (1220), *First Letter to the Custodians* (1220). Warren, 'Was Francis Influenced by Islam,' 69-102; Cusato 82-83, Moses, 160-162, 225-226; Leohard Lehmann, 'Francis's Two Letters to the Custodes, Proposals for Christian-Islamic Ecumenism in Praising God,' *Greyfriars Review*, 2, 3 (1988): 75-76.

<sup>90</sup> Michael Cusato, 'Of snakes and angels: The mystical experience behind the stigmatization narrative', in Jacques Dalarun, Michael Cusato and Carla Salvati, *The Stigmata of Francis of Assisi: New Studies New Perspectives* (St Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2006), 29-74.

performing the gospel. This reinforces the view that Francis opposed civic violence, the crusades in principle, and the abuses of early medieval capitalism.

So what is the contemporary relevance of the encounter? It has been argued that 'religious peacemaking is at least as old as St. of Assisi' because he visited the Sultan 'to speak about peace and conversion during a battle in the crusades.'<sup>91</sup> The idea Francis went to see the Sultan on 'a peace mission to end the crusades' (Hoeberichts, Moses, Warren) couldn't *literally* be the case. He was not a messenger from the crusader forces bringing a response to the Sultan's latest peace proposals. Francis *was* on a peace mission, only if it is acknowledged he opposed the crusades, and preached peaceful conversion as an alternative to the crusades. He was lucky; strictly speaking, the encounter probably took place during a *truce* between battles, which *is* slightly different than hyping up the encounter - as a peace mission *during* the crusades; nor is religious conversion a part of modern faith-based diplomacy or peacemaking.

However, if a peaceful dialogue took place, which is most likely, then this demonstrates how genuine dialogue involves conversion and transformation. Is it possible the motives or intentions of Francis and the Sultan *changed* during the course of the dialogue; is it possible he *grew spiritually* during the encounter; or do we have to reify sanctity, which is why the Franciscan Question makes the historical Francis a person with a far *more* interesting, challenging, spiritual journey? This is what a relational, conversionary, epistemology does; it can change who you are as it changes your knowledge, and how you engage with the world. Even more daringly, moreover, can such a dialogue, can a deeper journey to God, occur through 'the Other,' i.e. can a deeper appreciation of one's *own* identity and religious tradition be gained through another religious tradition? Did this happen in Francis's encounter with the Sultan? The legacy of *this* kind of encounter, and Muslim-Christian relations within Catholicism is famously expressed in the twentieth century - Charles de Foucauld, Louis Massignon, and

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<sup>91</sup> *God's Century*, 178.

Fr. Giulio Basetti-Sati, whose lives lived out the Franciscan model of peace, poverty, and fraternity - to go among, and be with others in Arab communities. This is why the Francis's encounter with the Sultan has rightly inspired John-Paul II's 'spirit of Assisi' and a variety of types of modern peacemaking and inter-religious dialogue.<sup>92</sup>

A short answer to why the encounter matters is because religion matters. Religion was certainly not the cause of the Arab Spring - the desire for dignity, democracy, and social justice, rather than Islamic slogans and issues, were clearly the most important factors. The conflicts between and *within* the variety of ethnic, secular, and religious visions are now there for all to see. It is now clear, however, religion - Islam, Christianity, is deeply rooted in the life-worlds - culture, religion, ethnicity, history, of the peoples in Arab states and societies. This is what informs how these goals are *conceived* and implemented, violently or peacefully as people struggle to live faithfully amid the problems of democracy, human rights, women's rights, education, and development already highlighted in the first *Arab Human Development Report (2002)*.

Therefore, this is an initial reply to Tolan and other critics - the global resurgence of religion, and engaging with religious groups, in the Arab world, and in the religious world of the global South - which, by 2050 will comprise 90 per cent of the people in the world, will remain a central feature of international relations in the twenty-first century. This is the main reason many people - Catholics, Anglican Franciscans, and others of many religious stripes, have turned to Francis, 'the little Umbrian,' in a global age for the meaning of hope, faithfulness, and reconciliation. It is not, as these critics wants to acknowledge, only because the 'world is haunted by interreligious violence and apocalyptic predictions of new clashes of civilizations.'<sup>93</sup> Like many secular policy makers, such critics don't understand religion, or why for most people in the world it will

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<sup>92</sup> Andrea Riccardi, *Sant'Egidio: Rome and the World*, Andrea Riccardi in Conversations with J.D. Durand and R. Ladous (London: St. Paulus, 1999), 99.

<sup>93</sup> Tolan, 324.

remain an important part of what it means to be modern in the twenty-first century.

However, the relevance of Francis's encounter with the Sultan is not based on testing out 'theories' by the 'facts' of history, to gain knowledge of 'what really happened at Damietta.' It does not consist in deriving some 'lessons of history,' moral tales for the present, and to apply them to Middle East politics or international relations. There is no uncontested account of what really happened in the past any more than there is any uncontested account of what is really happening in the Arab Spring, Middle East politics, or international relations. Each of us, as well as policy makers, rely on the way events are *narratively* constructed to tell us what is happening according to *some* interest, purpose, or perspective. If the West's new narrative is - 'the Arab Spring is turning into the Arab Winter,' then it is because the first narrative (being reproduced on Syria) - 'heroic rebels fighting for democracy against brutal dictators,' was always a woefully inadequate account of the complexities of religion and politics in the region.

'Rather, I claim that it is through historical reflection that we become aware of the "dialectic of choice" in which from the present the past is recollected and joined with the future by means of a political "project".... Precisely because we *know* that things could have been different, the more we deepen our understanding of the past, we begin to sense the opportunities forgone and thereby become aware of our *own* potential as agents.' This does not mean everything is now possible since historical awareness and the constraints of history clearly indicate this is not so.<sup>94</sup>

It is a proper appreciation of action and agency, *despite* the constraints of history, the existing powers and institutions - the popes, bishops, the Roman curia, emperors, chivalry, *amidst* poverty, inequality, and the rise of a market society, which is so evident in the life of Francis of Assisi. He *did* act, he was an

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<sup>94</sup> Friedrich Kratochwil, 'History, Action and Identity: Revisiting the "Second" Great Debate and Assessing its Importance for Social Theory,' 7-8.

agent, but he performed the gospel in a radically new way *amid* the constraints of history, which seems to have changed so many possibilities *within* history. The long legacy of the Franciscans in the Middle East testifies to the impact of this encounter. The Sultan al-Kamil's peace treaty of Jaffa with Frederick II in the Sixth Crusade (1229), was unique in the history of the crusades since not by war but through by diplomacy Jerusalem and Bethlehem were ceded to the kingdom of Jerusalem, with mutual respect established for holy places, and religious communities (effectively what the Sultan offered in the Fifth Crusade). The unique principle of the Franciscans Custody of the Holy Land was inspired by this encounter, even though the European great powers over the years have tried to manipulate the Custody by attempting to use religion to further their own political and nationalist purposes.<sup>95</sup>

What critical theory and constructivist approaches also indicate is that the problem with how the relevance of this encounter is presented, constructed - as a model of applied ethics, to apply Francis's inter-religious model, to the (allegedly objective) harsh realities of international relations, has the danger of reproducing old debates over ethics and international affairs. It makes it easier for policy makers to *dismiss* these religious efforts as misguided pacifism or religious idealism. It also too easily fits the encounter, and the lessons drawn from it, into the mainstream, social scientific approach to problem-solving theory - what to do about the Islamic threat, 'religious violence,' or the clash of civilizations.

So, in Francis's time - how the Islamic threat, the crusades were socially constructed, as in our time, a part of the problem may be with how scholars and policy makers *construct* violence as 'religious violence,' and, since the Arab Spring, construct social groups as 'Islamist,' 'religious,' or 'secular,' or 'militant' to legitimate (or really delegitimate) them? However, the stability, the spread, of democracy in the Arab world may depend more or how *any* political actors

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<sup>95</sup> Giuseppe Buffon, 'The Franciscans in the Holy Land: A Study in Modern History, Religion, and Politics.' in Anthony O'Mahony (ed.), *Christianity in the Middle East: Studies in Modern History, Theology, and Politics* (London: Melisende, 2008), 422-499.

engage in the public sphere - in ways that are sectarian, violent, intolerant, or anti-democratic, rather than if they are *specifically* religious actors. Secular ideologies can be just as dogmatic, passionate, and violent as religious ones. All this does is 'securitize' religion, i.e. a type of speech act that turns religion, according to the Copenhagen School of international relations, into a new kind of security threat, which is dealt with in extraordinary ways that often undermine human rights and political participation (with the threat of 'Islamism' or communism the West tolerated Arab dictators for years).<sup>96</sup> For Arab Islamists secular regimes like those of Syria, Iraq, and Tunisia have given secularism a bad name, even if the Islamic models on offer are not much better (Turkey is considered a separate case). The debate is not only over an Islamic state, since Islamic models in Iran, Sudan, or Pakistan, Sudan, or the Taliban do not inspire most Islamists; it is much more over the *meaning* of a civil state with Islamic values, and the meaning of faithfulness in social, political, and economic life.

So the problem is not with Islamic, Christian, or religious discourses in the public sphere - in the Middle Ages or our own time, but the *use* political actors make of them - for peace, dialogue, and fraternity; or for bigotry, violence, or intolerance, like *any* secular discourse.<sup>97</sup> This is demonstrated today in the striking images of Muslims and Christians in Egypt guarding each other's prayers in Tahrir Square, and in Syria where Muslims and Christians are fasting and praying together given the proximity of their religious festivals. What is ours to do? Francis's theology, spirituality, and encounters transformed how he came to see social life and what was going on in the world, and so how he engaged with the world. This is why, as this article has shown, theology and spirituality *do* matter, and they matter even more in a global age. We all are confronted with a

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<sup>96</sup> Carsten B. Lausten and Ole Waever, "In Defense of Religion: Sacred Referent Objects for Securitization," *Millennium*, 29, 3 (2000): 705-739.

<sup>97</sup> Jeroen Gunning and Richard Jackson, "What's so 'religious' about 'religious terrorism?'" *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 4, 3 (2011): 369-388; Mariano Barbato Chiara de Franco' and Brigitte Le Normand, "Is There a Specific Ambivalence of the Sacred? Illustrations from the Apparition of Medjugorje and the Movement of Sant'Egidio," *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 13, 1 (2012): 53-73.

similar dialectic of choice in how the decisions, choices, we make in our personal lives are a part of how we engage in our communities and in international affairs.