

**Franciscans and Muslims:
Lessons from the Past and Prospects for the Future
Franciscan Federation
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Day 1: The Encounter Between Francis and the Sultan: Historical Focus

Good Morning, Good People! May God give you Peace!

What a delight to be with you to address together such a critical issue of our time. I assure you, I find it extremely humbling to stand before you! I say this as someone who has been fortunate to attend many of these Conferences over the years; as someone richly blessed by the offerings. May this Conference too, be a blessing for each of us, our congregations and our world.

I assume we all agree that the 13th century message and vocation of the humble, revolutionary of Assisi could not be more relevant or challenging. Has there been a time since Francis when his wisdom has been so needed? Has there been a time when his priorities have so rightly begged again for the attention of the entire world? The reality we awake to each morning highlights the message of Francis in the most obvious of ways: the deteriorating condition of our planet; the indifference towards the poor, and the growing injustice they endure; the prominence of suspicion and fear of the “other,” and the readiness to engage in war to settle differences.

Francis of Assisi’s bold peacemaking actions certainly come to a climax in his dramatic appearance in the Muslim camp on the banks of the Nile in the midst of a brutal war. This story is our focus during these days as we Franciscans seek a new and bold response to what is ours to do in rebuilding the house of God in our time. This morning we focus on the historical background of the story.

I will proceed in this way,:

- 1) My Personal Connection with this Story and How it has Come into its Own**
- 2) The Basic Story and Some Additional Background**
- 3) The Motivation that took Francis into the Muslim Camp and What this says about our Franciscan Identity and Charism for Today’s Challenges**

Following this, Michael will open up related pieces from the Muslim tradition. We move then to sharing at tables and an open forum.

Part 1: My connection with the story

In the Fall of 2000, shortly after arriving as a student at St. Bonaventure University, I met with Sr. Margaret Carney, Director of the Franciscan Institute. She asked me a question that changed my life! “What do you plan to focus on during your time here?” This was my first clue that I might be in over my head, as I thought I had come to engage in Franciscan Studies! The next day I spoke with Margaret again, to say that I would like to focus on interreligious interaction, specifically Muslim-Christian. One year later, 9-11 happened. As you may remember, the news media that year was flooded with every manner of information about the centuries-long clash between Muslims and Christians, between East & West. At the end of the year, it was apparent to me that very little, if anything, had changed since Francis of Assisi dared to enter the Muslim camp in Egypt, eight centuries earlier. Indeed, in 2002, it appeared that the majority of Christians in the West knew little about Islam or Muslims and that a great deal of ignorance, judgement and fear was still rampant.

As I finished my final year at the Institute, I realized what a uniquely privileged voice our Franciscan tradition has to offer to this discussion. All this was part of my deliberation as I pondered the title for my final paper. 800 years and so little, if any, progress?! 800 years and still so much ignorance? 800 years and where were the connections, understanding, acceptance? The paper’s title seemed to write itself: *Francis of Assisi Encounters Sultan Malek al-Kamil: Will Their Message Finally Be Heard?*

An interesting twist regarding my subtitle. First, I sincerely *hoped* and *prayed* that I, myself, would hear their message and choose to do something about what I heard. Secondly, Michael Cusato encouraged me to have my paper *published*. Prior to 9-11 although there were books on the encounter existing in other languages, with the exception of Jan Hoerberichts,’ *Francis and Islam*, (translated from the Dutch) there were no documented works available in English. Michael knew that getting the story out would spark responses and there would be even more work done on the topic. More importantly, Francis’ message **would** get out. Michael was right! My paper was published as a small

book. Articles began to appear. In 2006 St. Anthony Messenger Press, decided to make a film of the story. I was hired as the consultant.¹ After some delay that video, *In the Footprints of Francis and the Sultan: A Model for Peacemaking*, came out in 2012. Then, Paul Moses wrote one of the first popular volumes, entitled, *The Saint and the Sultan*.² Because of Paul many have read the remarkable story. Then, more authors published. And, as most of you know, last year a Muslim publishing house,³ released a documentary on our story – our shared story: *The Sultan and the Saint*. This was accomplished through great partnership with the Franciscan Action Network. Congratulations to Sr. Marie Lucey who recently was part of a group which presented the film at the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi and also met with Pope Francis about the film and its message!⁴

The good news is: both the films and the writings on the encounter are being well used and discussed in various settings.

I don't want to say that there is also bad news: but we still have miles to go with this powerful story. I was at a Ramadan evening two weeks ago – there were presentations on Islam, sharing the sunset prayer (7:46 p.m.), and the iftar dinner of breaking the fast. The Sister I was with (not a Franciscan), who admitted she thought she knew the important facts about St. Francis, was stunned that she had never heard of the story of Francis and the Sultan. In disbelief she exclaimed, "Why has this story not been held up for us as a model in dealing with the terrible conflicts of our times? We need such models. Why have we not heard of this compelling episode of his life?" Actually, Paul Moses responds to her question in his book: he calls it the great cover up! Indeed! It was not in the interests of either the Church or the Empire, nor ultimately the Franciscan Order, to make peace with the Muslims, nor highlight the peace mission of Francis. Defeat or conversion to Christianity were the only options on the table for the Christian leaders. Thus, the story was not circulated and was actually altered by Bonaventure to serve the purposes of the Church and the Order. (To explore that further, see the earlier film!)

¹ 2007.

² Published in 2009 by Doubleday, New York.

³ Unity Productions Foundation.

⁴ We Franciscans have a powerful tool to use at the service of the needed conversation and interaction between Muslims and Christians and all other faiths.

Many people are shocked when they hear about how this story was silenced for so long. They see the power in it to motivate and assist in breaking down myths, fears, separations, and suspicions about others. They are using the story to build relationships with Muslims and others. This is a story whose time has come to be told and there are now resources to help. This story provides us with a fabulous example for dealing with a culture that values safety, isolation and domination over others in preference to living together interdependently as brothers and sisters whose power (and we all have it) is placed at the service of others.

May our delving into the story these days allow us to better understand our radical call to be peacemakers, especially in the midst of a climate of profound fear of “the other,” and surface insights about how to do it.

I believe this audience has heard the story. Most of you have likely seen one or both of the films. A number of you use the films in interfaith discussion groups. Let’s now review the story with some additional background.

Part 2: The Story and Some Additional Background

1. Crusade Context: Remote and Recent: Pope Innocent III’s Call to Crusade

The all-consuming context of Francis’ time, and the previous **100 years**, was the war between the Christians and the Muslims. Francis actually lived through three crusades fought for the liberation of the Holy Land:⁵

The Third Crusade called by Pope Gregory VIII in 1187, the Fourth Crusade called by Pope Innocent III in 1198 (they year the merchants of Assisi stormed the Rocca and drove the nobility out of Assisi), and the Fifth Crusade called by Pope Innocent III in 1213.⁶

In such a climate, it is not hard to understand Francis’ original dream of becoming a knight.

After the appalling failure of the 4th Crusade, Pope Innocent III, wanting to avoid another Crusade catastrophe, broke with tradition and assumed leadership for the 5th Crusade,

⁵ This is in addition to other crusades against the Albigenses, the Moors, the Baltic countries and political opponents such as the Germans.

⁶ The 6th Crusade, called by Pope Honorius III was finally successful in re-capturing Jerusalem in 1229, to lose it to the Turks 15 years later in 1244.

putting all the influence and power of the papacy at its service. His comprehensive plan to secure the Holy Land rests on two strategies: securing adequate funding and personnel. It is hard to exaggerate the lengths he took to provide for the success of the Crusade. In the encyclical announcing the crusade, Pope Innocent does not rely on his own authority alone. He cries out for help on behalf of Jesus Christ, in whose name he speaks: “if anyone want to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me (Jesus). . . If anyone wants to follow me to the crown, let him also follow me to the battle, proposed as a test of faith for all people.”⁷

The Pope’s message was carried to the faithful by Crusade preachers with impassioned discourses about the desires of the Pope and the urgency of total response. An added incentive for all who cooperated was the promise of a plenary indulgence. This was afforded not only to those who went to the Holy Land, but also to those who contributed funds or stayed home to work so another could enter the battle. Never before had this privilege been offered to the laity; until this time the plenary indulgence was reserved only for clerics and religious. The theological concept of the holy, necessary war in the name of God and the crucified savior reaped amazing response. Both the required financing and the personnel were abundantly supplied.

One final note regarding the potency of the argument relates to the Papal rationale stating that killing Muslims fell under the category of “malicide” (the killing of evil) rather than “homicide.” Justification for this was rooted in the teaching of Bernard of Clairvaux who wrote:

“The knight of Christ ... may kill with great confidence and die with greater confidence, for he serves himself when he dies, and serves Christ when he kills the enemy. If he kills an evildoer, he is not the killer of a human being, but... a killer of evil.”⁸

There was tremendous pressure on preachers, including the lesser brothers, to participate in the Pope’s “call to arms.” Francis and the brothers were surrounded by this

⁷ The Encyclical, *Quia Maior*, was written in 1213. Prior crusades were considered the activity of the Emperor, with support from the Pope. The Encyclical presents the cry of Jesus who is suffering, Jesus the King who has been expelled from his royal city. Therefore, take up the cross, follow him into battle and regain his kingdom.

⁸ The Pope’s call to Crusade was discussed at the Fourth Lateran Council (which Francis may have attended) and was certainly at the top of the Papal priorities.

conversation and activity. They must have discussed the encyclical and their position in relation to it. Not until after the death of Francis do we find evidence of friars participating in the army of “crusade preachers.” There is a deafening silence in the writings of Francis regarding this papal priority.⁹ This is significant, especially when we note that Francis wrote significantly about the other top priority of the Papacy: reverence for the Eucharist. There is no evidence to indicate that Francis was in support of the crusades. In fact, his actions and his writings strongly suggest that he was not in favor of this ongoing brutal destruction of the human family.

2. The Location

What was the strategic importance of Damietta¹⁰, especially if reclaiming the Holy Land was the primary purpose of the Crusades? (A little Muslim geography.)¹¹

For the Muslims, Cairo was the key to success against the Crusaders because of its wealth from trade, agriculture, population. Crusaders understood the tactical importance of the Nile Delta for the Muslims. Thus, the key to conquering Jerusalem was to control the port city of Damietta, the gateway to the Levant. The Fifth and Sixth crusades fought for control of this strategic city.¹²

When Francis arrived in Damietta the Crusaders had been on the banks of the Nile already for over a year, unable to capture the city or route the Muslims. Francis was in the Crusader camp after their staggering defeat on August 29, 1219. Malek al-Kamil, nephew of the famous Muslim Saladin and leader of the Muslim forces, offered a peace treaty including an offer to give the Crusaders Jerusalem along with money to reconstruct

⁹ Nowhere in the early sources (Writings or Biographies) do we find evidence of Francis supporting the Crusade.

¹⁰ About 150 miles north of Cairo by car, 62 miles as the crow flies.

¹¹ In 1171 Saladin overthrew the Fatimid Dynasty and ultimately established the Ayyubid Dynasty 1171-1250, retaining Cairo as the capital city. Followed the Shia Fatimid rule, marked a return to dominance for Sunni Islam. It was named after Saladin’s father, Ayyub. It was comparatively short-lived, but spread an age of economic prosperity and intellectual development (*softschools.com*). When Saladin dies in 1193 his two sons (controlling Aleppo and Damascus) fight for control but it eventually falls to Saladin’s brother, Al-Adil, father of Malek al-Kamil (“The Perfect). Saladin [1171-1193] – Al-Adil [1200-1218] – Al-Kamil [1218-1238].

¹² They did not succeed; both crusades fell to the Nile flood and the superior numbers of the local defenders fighting in familiar territory.

it. In exchange, the Crusaders would leave Egypt. The offer caused great division among Crusader leaders, with the King of Jerusalem, John of Briene (military leader), the Germans & others wanting to accept the treaty and Cardinal Pelagius (spiritual leader), most of the clergy & the Italians opposing it.¹³ Of course the King of Jerusalem would want to get his city back and spoke in favor of the treaty! On the other hand, the Italians didn't want to lose their lucrative trade opportunities with Egypt and agreed with the Papal position. Since Cardinal Pelagius had the final word, the peace treaty was not accepted.

3. The Encounter

The fighting stopped while the Muslims waited for a response to the peace offer. A truce of up to 25 days ensued.¹⁴ During this time, Francis and Br. Illuminato crossed the enemy line into the Muslim camp. Francis was 37 years old, the Sultan was 39. It takes two to dialogue. Michael will fill you in on the Muslim leader with whom Francis dialogued.

No written reports about the encounter exist. However, we can conclude that the encounter was one of respect, openness, curiosity, non-judgement and a willingness to enter into dialogue. We know this way of interacting with others was the way of life for the friars. Recall the numerous passages from the *Earlier Rule* identifying how the brothers are to conduct themselves: "Let the brothers not slander or engage in disputes...let them revile no one...not judge nor condemn."¹⁵ "Whatever house they enter, first say: "Peace to this house."¹⁶ We know the trademark greeting of the friars was: "May God give you peace."

When I visited Damietta on our scouting trip for the Franciscan Media film, we visited a 7th century mosque that was being reconstructed. Did Francis visit that very mosque? Pray there? I think it could have been likely. (Recall the images we have seen of Popes

¹³ Because of its location and economy, Damietta was much more economically attractive to the Italian traders than was Jerusalem. Jerusalem was in the hands of al-Kamil's brother, al-Mu'azzam, who was obviously a party of this proposal. Vigorous trade supported a healthy economy and was mutually beneficial to both the Muslim and Christian worlds. Italian merchants were not in favor of ending the lucrative trade when Crusade leaders wanted to stop this.

¹⁴ The truce was likely most of the month of September.

¹⁵ ER XI:1-8.

¹⁶ ER XIV:2.

John Paul II, Benedict and Francis praying in mosques in the midst of their Muslim brothers and sisters.) Remember, Francis and Illuminato could have been with the Muslims for as long as 25 days. We know the great reverence Francis had for churches. Would not the Muslim house of prayer have caught his attention? Was he not impressed with their five times of prayer each day? He certainly alludes to their prayer practices in his writings after he returns to Assisi.¹⁷ We have the horn for calling people to prayer that Francis may have brought back to Assisi. Would that not have been a great symbol of their encounter?! We do know that Francis would have been fed while he was in Damietta. Middle Eastern hospitality is big on providing guests with good and plentiful food. The chroniclers who wrote about being prisoners of the Muslims mentioned the ample food they received from their captors. Not what is usually written about by prisoners of war!

I have experienced the wonderful hospitality and fabulous meals of Muslims, both in the Middle East and here in the U.S. Fast food is not in their cuisine. I savor the image of Francis and Illuminato, the Sultan and his court enjoying meal/s and conversation together. I agree with Paul Moses who writes: “[The] scene of Francis peacefully breaking bread at a banquet with Sultan Malik al-Kamil, his supposed enemy, could not differ more from the fictitious image that has come down through the ages to capture their encounter: two tense antagonists separated by a threatening bonfire [*the dominant image of their encounter for over 400 years*]¹⁸. Their meal ought to have been the enduring image of the encounter between [Francis] and the sultan.” Thankfully, the 20th/21st centuries do offer new images of the encounter. What impact might a meal image have had during the past eight centuries? Is there an artist among us who might put a shared meal image on canvas? As we consider what action this story invites us to, might a first step be as simple as sharing a meal with our Muslim brothers and sisters? What wondrous tastes and other delights might await?!

Part 3: The Motivation that took Francis to the Muslim Camp and What this says about our Franciscan Charism for Today’s Challenges

¹⁷ Numerous images of this encounter have come emerged over the centuries, dominated for 400 years by the trial by fire story inserted by Bonaventure.

¹⁸ Italic text added.

So, what was it that took Francis to the Muslim camp? We know that over the course of many years, Francis and his brothers gradually developed a critical theological vision of church and world in continuous interaction with their situations in light of the gospel. Rooted in that vision they made choices and determined their position regarding what was happening in the world and church.¹⁹ I will conclude by proposing three core elements of their evolving Way of Life which I believe offer the most plausible explanation of how Francis' extraordinary conversion story resulted in his presence in the Muslim camp at Damietta. These elements will not be new to you. There are certainly other core elements of their Life that could be named (for instance "peace"). But, we do have a time limit!

The core elements are:

- 1) The Call to Do Penance
- 2) The Vision of Universal Kinship
- 3) Being Servant and Subject to All

1) The Call to Do Penance

Thomas of Celano tells us clearly why Francis chose to go to the Muslims: "[he] went to Syria to preach the Christian faith and penance." Preaching penance and proclaiming peace was what Francis and the brothers had been doing around Assisi for some years. What did "preaching penance" mean? To understand that, we need to review Francis' seminal conversion experience among the lepers. Francis writes in his Testament:

"This is how God led me, brother Francis, to begin to do penance": (*poenitentiam*): when I was in sin, it seemed too bitter for me to see lepers. And God led me among them and I showed mercy to them. And when I left them, what had seemed bitter to me was turned into sweetness of soul and body. And afterwards I delayed a little and left the world.²⁰

For Francis, penance is not something initiated by the person. It is very different than our Western notion of giving up something, offering to help someone or wearing a hairshirt.

¹⁹ See Jan Hoerberichts, *Francis and Islam*, particularly Chapter 2. Eventually this vision was written in their Rule.

²⁰ Test 1-3.

For Francis, penance is something God does. God led Francis to the lepers. God initiates so I can respond. Francis' response: he showed mercy.²¹ Afterwards there was a complete reversal Francis' life: what had been bitter became sweet.

An example: For the first time in his life, Francis saw the leper not as a repulsive problem but as a genuine human being, a suffering human being. What a drastic change from what Francis had been taught about lepers – that they were people to be ignored and despised, devoid of worth.²² But, among the lepers God opened Francis' eyes and heart to the reality that, all persons, without exception are endowed with dignity and value, all have been redeemed by the love of Christ, all are sons and daughters of God. Each person, without exception, is a brother or sister of Jesus, and thus to one other. Each person is a member of the one human family whose origins and destiny is God. We are one. There are no exceptions to this truth. This is radical insight, teaching!

2) The Vision of Universal Kinship

That insight into the universal kinship of all creatures revealed to Francis among the lepers profoundly changed his worldview, spirituality and behavior. Francis realized, through the grace of God, that *anything that threatens to rupture the bonds of the one human family – by placing one human over or against another is “sin.”*²³ Sin for Francis is the degradation, the destruction of the human person.²⁴ To do penance, for Francis, was to choose to abstain from every action, behavior and attitude that would divide and destroy the bonds of the human community and violate the sacred character of human life. To do penance was to engage in actions of compassion and goodness that would serve to build up the person and the human community. This vision of universal kinship was not something to *talk* about, it was something to *do*, to incarnate. Devastated by the ongoing violent bloodshed and senseless horror on the battlefields that only served to further alienate and destroy the bonds of the human family redeemed by the love of Christ,

²¹ A divine response!

²² Michael Cusato, “Healing the Violence in the Contemporary World,” *Daring to Embrace the Other: Franciscans and Muslims in Dialogue*, ed. Daria Mitchell, Spirit and Life, vol. 12 (St. Bonaventure: Franciscan Institute, 2008), 11-17.

²³ This manifests itself through greed, violence, oppression, aggression, indifference and neglect.

²⁴ Later his vision grew to encompass the entire cosmos.

Francis was impelled to preach penance in the Levant:²⁵ to the Crusaders and to the Muslims.

Francis goes to the Muslims to show by his actions that those who are called “enemy” and “beast” are in fact, brothers and sisters and part of the human family.²⁶ He goes to show that no one, not even the most despised by the Church exists outside of the human fraternity.²⁷ He goes to do penance by living in a manner that sustains and respects the bonds that indissolubly bind us all together.

This core piece of the Franciscan way of life was not something Francis would be dissuaded from. When the Chapter of 1217 sent friars to places outside of Italy,²⁸ Francis set off for France. Cardinal Hugolino met him on the way and demanded that he stay in Italy. Francis’ response is Spirit directed and prophetic: “Do you think and believe that God has sent the brothers for these provinces only? God has chosen and sent the brothers for the good and salvation of all the people in the entire world; they will be received not only among the believers but also among the unbelievers. Let them observe what they have promised God and God will give them among the unbelievers as well as among the believers *all that they will need.*”²⁹

Francis’ fixed resolve to reach the Muslims becomes clear when we recall his two failed attempts to reach the Muslims in 1212 and 1213. Finally, in 1219 he achieved his goal of taking his message of penance and peace to the Muslims, in hopes of achieving its conclusion: his radical vision of universal [kinship].³⁰

The clarity of Francis to rebuild the house of God by healing and reconciling broken relationships and eradicating from the world the evils of greed, violence, oppression, aggression, indifference and neglect appear obvious to us today. It seems they were not that obvious in Francis’ day. Nor were many willing to embrace these ways.³¹

²⁵ The power center of the Islamic world.

²⁶ This concept is extended to all creatures/creation by the story of Francis and “Brother Wolf” and the prayer, the Canticle of Creation.

²⁷ Other groups officially excluded from the Church included Jews, heretics and Muslims.

²⁸ Such as Spain & Germany. Elias went to the Holy Land.

²⁹ AC 108. LP 82.

³⁰ M. Cusato, 18.

³¹ Recall the five martyrs of Morocco.

The vision of Francis is not a theory but a way to relate to each other. It is a vision of God's own original intention – that all be one.³²

3) Servant and Subject to all

Letter to the Faithful

The third essential element of the new form of life Francis was inaugurating has to do with being “servants and subject to all.”³³ As you might imagine that was as rare/uncommon a stance in Francis' day as it is in ours. To the sisters and brothers who were attracted to how Francis was living, Francis wrote in *The Letter to the Faithful* – the foundational text of our Third Order: “We must never desire to be above others, but instead, we must be servants and subject to every human creature for God's sake.”³⁴

Indeed, the word servant (*servus*) appears sixty-four times in Francis' writings.³⁵ “Being servant” was an indispensable element of this new vocation; it was the way of the brotherhood.³⁶ Both at work and on the road the brothers present themselves as servants. “I am the servant of all,” proclaimed Francis in his *Letter to the Faithful* and in his *Letter to the Entire Order* he identified himself as “your very little servant.” Being servant to the other is the way of Jesus, a way of being in relationship with people.

Chapter 16 of the Earlier Rule: Being Subject to

After his experience among the Muslims Francis adds to the Earlier Rule his new insights about *how* the brothers must conduct themselves among the Muslims. They are to live among the Muslims³⁷ in two ways. One is “not to engage in argument or disputes but to be subject to every human creature for God's sake, acknowledging that they are Christians.” The other is to “announce the Word of God when they see it pleases God.”³⁸

³² Is. 11; 62.

³³ See 2LtF 47, SaV 16, Test 19, ER 16:6.

³⁴ 2LtF 47.

³⁵ It appears often in his early writings.

³⁶ David Flood suggests that the word “servant” is code for describing the lesser brothers and sisters. David Flood, *Francis of Assisi and the Franciscan Movement* (Quezon City: Franciscan Institute of Asia, 1989) 139.

³⁷ “and non-believers.”

³⁸ ER 16:6-7.

Francis insists that they not argue the truth or falsity of Muhammad³⁹ or of Jesus Christ. For Francis, truth is not a matter of words or formulas, not a possession. Truth is expressed in action. To be sure, Francis believed that Jesus was the “way, the truth, and the life,” the wisdom of God. But, his faith in the truth of Jesus did not serve as a limitation or boundary for excluding the faith of others. Rather, the truth of Jesus was realized in action, action that pointed beyond himself toward God, the One who sent him into the world. As Michael Blastic says, “When Francis turns toward the other, the non-believer, in attention, receptivity and openness, he is actualizing the truth of Jesus.”⁴⁰ Jesus came to *be among* us humans; to enter our life; not to lord it over but to serve. The ultimate image of service is the Suffering Servant, who gives up his life for his people. Jesus alone is the motivation for the brothers to “be subject to every human creature for God’s sake.”

Towards the end of his life, wanting one last time to highlight its importance, Francis writes in his Testament, “We were simple and subject to all.”⁴¹ Being subject is the WAY of the brotherhood. It is a way of dealing with others. This is not a passive acceptance but rather an active choosing of a particular way of being and acting.⁴²

It is interesting to note that canon law of the day dictated that no Christian could be subject to a Muslim. Francis has his brothers do the opposite. Obviously, what Francis and the brothers were proposing was something that disregarded the Church’s program at that time. Radical!⁴³ When he sends brothers among the Muslims in this way it becomes a declaration of their identities as “lesser” brothers. Evidently this was not something understood or valued by the brothers. The 21 verses in Chapter 16 of the *Earlier Rule* get reduced to only two verses in the *Later (approved) Rule* of 1223. Regardless, the essence of Franciscan identity as being sent toward others, subject and submissive, remains at

³⁹ This is exactly what the Martyrs of Morocco did.

⁴⁰ Michael Blastic, *On Not Being a “Deaf Hearer of the Gospel,”* Address on the Occasion of Granting an Honorary Doctorate to Most Rev. Giacomo Bini, St. Bonaventure University. September 23, 1999. For this reflection I am indebted to M. Blastic.

⁴¹ *Testament* 19.

⁴² An example might be helpful. In the Rule after the times and manner of fasting are identified, Francis adds: “... it may be lawful ... to eat of all the food that is placed before them.” That is, the brothers are not to make demands on their hosts by requiring special foods which fulfill their laws of fasting. Rather, the brothers should take what is offered: be simple and subject to all.

⁴³ This is in response to the way of Jesus, who came not to be served but to serve all. In a later writing, the Cantic of Creation, Francis takes this concept even further. Humans are subject even to Mother Earth who “governs” us!

the heart of Franciscan life and reveals our unique way of being present in all circumstance.

Conclusion

The call to do penance, the vision of universal kinship, being servant and subject to all were three foundational elements of the developing brotherhood. As architects of peace and reconciliation, Francis embraced them as essential behaviors for rebuilding the house of God. Francis' encounter with the sultan is one of the most important and instructive events of his life. His radical and novel approach speaks loudly today to any who see a need for a new approach to the "other" in our world. I believe this story contains critical *Lessons from the Past and Prospects for the Future* in its inspiring message. I end with a question: what do I hear?

For Discussion: How do I experience these three elements of our Franciscan vocation and what are they asking of me now?

- The Call to Do Penance
 - Abstaining from any actions that divide or destroy the human community and engage in actions that serve to build up that community
- The Vision of Universal Kinship
 - Reverences the unique dignity of each person, no exceptions, recognizing each "other" as my brother or sister
- Being Servant and Subject to all
 - Claiming the "lesser" position, a stance of humble service, in all cases to foster unity in the manner of Jesus who came not to be served but to serve and give his life out of love..