

**Paul Moses, *The Saint and the Sultan: the Crusades, Islam, and Francis of Assisi's Mission of Peace*. New York: Doubleday Religion: 2009, xiv + 302 pp.**

Christian teachers of preaching and interreligious dialogue commonly take comfort in attributing to Francis of Assisi, "Preach by all means; when necessary, use words." Did Francis in fact endorse humble service and sincere listening, to the exclusion of testimony and persuasion, when encountering people who do not know God in Christ? This study roots Francis's pacifism in his experience as a prisoner of war in Perugia, documents his "plan for fearlessly approaching Muslim enemies to live among them as friends" (p. 217), and yet attests that Francis late in life continued to approve deploying friars as evangelists among hostile populations, both Germanic and Muslim.

Francis, the leader of a rapidly proliferating lay movement challenging the Western church to return to Gospel simplicity of life, chose to insert himself into one of the major military campaigns authorized by the Bishop of Rome to restore Christian rule over Jerusalem. In late summer 1219 A.D., the most active theater of war was Egypt, where Western armies were besieging the Nile Delta city of Damietta and aiming for Cairo. Francis first offended the Pope's legate by warning, prophet-like, that to switch from siege to an assault on the fortified city would be disastrous for the Christians – and it was. Next Francis set out on foot, accompanied only by Brother Illuminato, for the encampment of the Sultan of Egypt, Malik al-Kamil Muhammad, where remarkably he was allowed to speak of Christ -- but converted no one.

This well researched and delightfully accessible study has two aims. It explores why the hagiography approved by his Order and by papal authority after his death in 1226 chose to ignore Francis's characteristic practice of non-violence and submission to fellow human beings, in favor of his function as a conduit of God's power and a model for martyrs. In addition this book makes a persuasive fresh case for the historical Francis as a model, not for warriors, but for Christians whose watchwords are the words of Jesus, "Love your enemies" and "Blessed are the peacemakers". The argument relies chiefly on the early biographies (prior to the official biography by Bonaventura), crusader chronicles, Francis's *Rules* for his order and his *Canticle of Brother Sun*, and recent psychological and historical scholarship – mostly Christian, very little Islamic.

The argument also draws on an intriguing artifact. Paul Moses took the trouble to look closely, among the relics preserved on the lower level of the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi, at a sketch drawn by Francis on parchment "about the size of the cover of a small paperback book" (p. 185). The parchment was entrusted to his friend Brother Leo just after Francis underwent the mystical experience on La Verna mountain which left him marked in his own body with the wounds of the crucified Christ. After writing a blessing from the Book of Numbers invoking God's peace, Francis drew "the head of a man ... as if the figure were lying flat on the ground and looking straight up. And then he drew a large T rising from the figure's mouth . Finally he wrote words that appeared on both sides of the vertical line [in the T]." The phrase may be read as *fleo*, "I weep", or *fleo te*, "I weep for you". For whom did the dying Francis weep, and for whose peace did he pray? For the descendants of Adam? For Brother Leo? Moses observes, "The head 2 Francis drew clearly wears a turban, a three-tiered headpiece." Following Michael F. Cusato, Moses understands that the head belongs to the Sultan of Egypt. Francis would then have been praying for God to protect "a man he had come to view as an *amicus* and, even more importantly, as his *frater*; someone he had come to know and apparently respect during that famous encounter with him under the tent in Damietta" (pp. 181-184). Moses suggests the inscription "may well be a call for the sultan to receive God's



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protection, possibly by converting to Christianity to avoid a new Crusade.” An illustration included in the book reminds me, however, of one other possible identification for the head. Another wearer of a three-tiered headpiece, known to Francis for having approved a tamed version of his *Rule* and for prosecuting the Fifth Crusade despite an offer of peace from the Sultan, was Pope Honorius III.  
-- Richard J. Jones



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