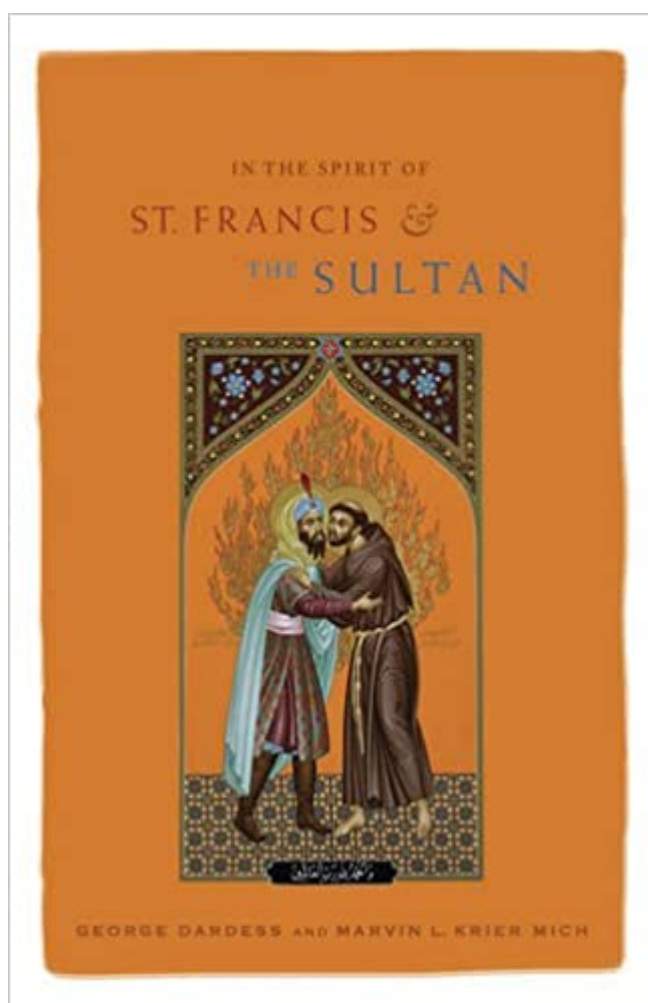


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In The Spirit Of St. Francis And The Sultan: Catholics And Muslims Working Together For The Common Good



Synopsis

A guide for Catholics and Muslims on how to reach greater understanding of the other's tradition in order to work together to end social injustice. This book takes on a specific challenge: We all, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, have a choice. Either we allow our fears to bear us along towards what could eventually become a war of apocalyptic dimensions. Or we can rouse ourselves from our fearful obsessions and search for ways not only to reverse this negative trend but also, and most importantly, to focus the world's energies on achieving peace and human flourishing (from the Preface). Taking up the story of the peaceful encounter between St. Francis of Assisi and Sultan Malek al-Kamil, the authors attempt to increase understanding between Christians and Muslims and to demonstrate how Christians and Muslims can work together for social justice. Basic tenets of both Christians and Muslims are described using clear, accessible language intended for general readers. After demonstrating how both the Bible and Qur'an call for actions that promote the common good and love of neighbor, Dardess and Mich suggest practical ways for Muslims and Christians to come together to implement specific programs of social justice.

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Customer Reviews

George Dardess lives in Rochester, NY. He is a member of the Muslim Catholic Alliance of Rochester and the author of two recent books on Muslim-Christian dialogue: *Meeting Islam: A Guide for Christians* (Paraclete, 2005) and *Do We Worship the Same God: Comparing the Bible and the Qur'an* (St. Anthony Messenger, 2006). George is an ordained deacon. He has a master's in theology but his doctorate is in literature. Marvin L. Krier Mich is the director of Social Policy at the

Catholic Family Center, a regional office of Catholic Charities in Rochester. He is also president of the Greater Rochester Community of Churches. His books include *Catholic Social Teaching and Movements* (Twenty-Third, 1998) and *The Challenge and Spirituality of Catholic Social Teaching* (Sower Books, 2005). He earned a Ph.D. and licentiate in theology at the Alphonsian Academy in Rome.

IN THE SPIRIT OF ST. FRANCIS AND THE SULTAN IS A WORK OF FICTION. St Francis accompanied the Fifth Crusade and managed to slip through Muslim lines during a lull in fighting, reach Sultan Malik al-Kamil, the nephew of the great Sultan Saladin, and return to the crusader's camp unharmed. Other than that, all that is known is that the two men met in the sultan's tent near Damietta, Egypt in 1219. Malik, like his uncle Saladin, had a good reputation as a fair man who sought peace. No record of St. Francis and the sultan's conversations was made, as the authors freely admit in several places in the book (e.g., p 23). Thus, the book is based upon conjecture, hope, optimism and fantasy. The authors are proposing a method of bringing Muslims and Christians (and Jews, though this is never clearly stated) together--a noble goal indeed. In the preface the authors quote from Professor Tolan's *Saint Francis and the Sultan: The Curious History of a Christian-Muslim Encounter*, "Each interpreter reads into [the] encounter his or her own preoccupations." An even more interesting passage is found in Tolan's epilogue (page 325), "Once we strip away the prejudice and the polemical or apologetical agendas of each writer, from crusading bishop Jacques de Vitry to Pope Benedict XVI, via Bossuet and Voltaire, what is left of the event itself, the dialogue in al-Kamil's tent? Not much, one is tempted to say." Thus, *IN THE SPIRIT OF ST. FRANCIS AND THE SULTAN* is based upon pure conjecture and fantasy. Words like "imagine," "guess," and "we can't know for sure" are peppered throughout the text. As a lay student of Islam, I found the authors' lack of knowledge of Islam and the Qur'an to be shocking. The dedication page begins "--strive together as in a race to do works of justice...." --Qur'an 5:48. I have checked several translations and none of them contain the quoted phrase. When the entire verse is read in context the correct message emerges. Muhammad's recitations of Allah's messages correct the Bible and the Torah. The verse ends, "To Allah you will return. So he will inform you about your differing." Verse 5:51 clarifies the fifth surah's intentions, "O you who have believed, do not take the Jew and the Christian as your friends. They are friends to one another. And whoever among you takes them as friends, so surely he is one of them. Surely Allah does not guide unjust people." On page 25 the authors continue to selectively quote the fifth surah (5:82-83), and once again they do not understand the meaning of the verses, "For they perceive at once its truth, and they pray, `O

Lord, we believe -- write us down among the witnesses.' " Witnesses to what? That there is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is His messenger? Did, the priests and monks convert to Islam? Note that the authors skipped over the worrisome verse 5:72, "Infidels indeed are those who said, `Surely Allah is the Christ, son of Mary.' And the Christ said, `O children of Israel, serve Allah, my lord and your lord.'" On page 42 the authors write about Muhammad's emigration from Mecca to Medina (the correct name at that time was Yatrib) in 622. Muhammad did not emigrate; his tribe ejected him. After one failed attempt to conquer Mecca, and he returned with 10,000 warriors in 630 with plans to subdue Mecca. His tribe realized they could not win the battle and converted to Islam. The authors do a better job on page 100, but never mention that between 623 and 630, Muhammad robbed his tribes' caravans and then became a warlord. But what really boggles this reviewer's mind is Muhammad's "defense" mentioned at the top of page 101. Muhammad was defending against his tribe when they sent an army to stop him from raiding their caravans. Finally, further down on the same page, under the subheading, Jihad as the basis of peacemaking, is an inverse interpretation of the 9th Surah, the most hostile chapter of the Qur'an. It is widely accepted that 9:5, known as the verse of the sword, abrogates all peaceful verses recited by Muhammad. Before taking anything in this book seriously, do your own research, and don't limit to apologists, as the author appears to have done. As a starting point I recommend *The Truth About Muhammad: Founder of the World's Most Intolerant Religion*, and for a clear translation of the Qur'an, *The Generous Qur'an, An Accurate, Modern English Translation of the Qur'an, Islam's Holiest Book*, translated by Usama Dakdok.

In the spirit of *St. Francis & the Sultan: Catholics and Muslims working together for the common good*. By George Dardess and Marvin L. Krier Mich, Maryknoll, NY, USA, Orbis Books, 2011, 205 pages, \$20.00. The authors of this book have the credibility to write about Muslim Christian dialogue because they have organized and participated in interfaith dialogue groups already (pp xiv-xv). The authors envision organizing eight gatherings which would incorporate JustFaith's key elements: prayer, community-building, study of each religion's scriptures and social justice traditions, and the planning of actions to promote the common good (p. xiv). The authors chose to base these Muslim Christian encounters on the model of a meeting that took place in 1219 near Damietta, Egypt between St. Francis of Assisi and Sultan Malik al-Kamil. This meeting took place as the colleagues of these two individuals were at war with each other. Both the Bible and the Qur'an encourage such encounters: Mat. 5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. James 3:18 Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness. Sura 5:48 Strive together as a

race to do works of justice....Sura 2:62 To those who believe, Muslims, Christians... and do works of justice -they shall receive their reward from their Cherisher and Sustainer.Sura 29:46 Listen and respond to the People of the Message (Jews and Christians) only in the fairest way - unless they are behaving maliciously.The authors suggest that the initial meeting of today's Muslim-Christian groups include tracing some of the commonalities between the two religions - commonalities of creed, symbol, and practice because without an appreciation of the commonalities, dialogue can not begin (p.27). Dealing with differences can be left for later.The authors help Christian readers understand how Muslims usually misinterpret (and reject) Christian scriptures based on a misreading of the word `beget'. In the Qur'an, the word beget refers only to the physical act of fathering a child. But based on this interpretation, Christians can point out that they are as adamantly opposed to the literal meaning of `beget' as Muslims are (p.58).I was sad to learn about some of the dark aspects of Christian history such as: (1) After the Crusaders of the Second Crusade of 1187 surrendered Jerusalem to Saladin's armies, Saladin ordered that Jerusalem's conquered Christian population be treated humanely, in contrast to the slaughter visited on the then-Muslim inhabitants in 1099 by the Christian knights of the first Crusade, (2) In 1218, Cardinal Pelagius Galvani, an Italian Bishop to whom Pope Honorius had given the duty of crushing Muslims, insisted that the Crusaders attack Damietta immediately. We learn of his attitude toward Muslims from an eye witness who overheard his prayer, "...that we may be able to convert the perfidious and worthless people...(p.91), (3) Opposition to the Crusades was considered a sign of heresy (p.133), (4) The Church seemed to foment the idea of the Crusades and to suppress the efforts of people like Francis, who embodied a completely different (peace making) response to Muslims (p.136).One practical way for Muslims and Christians to work together is in the area of alternative models of food production and distribution to address the food needs of our communities. The authors discuss community gardens in vacant city lots, and church or mosque properties as well as Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) that establish direct links between farmers and consumers. Other possible joint projects include defending the right to life and the family and promoting justice for the poor.Scott Hedley,Research associate, Dallas, TX, USA

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