



For immediate release

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### ***The Sultan and the Saint: a message of mercy, compassion and peace***

About 500 people were in the audience for the Australian premiere of *The Sultan and the Saint* on 29 July 2017 at Western Sydney University's Parramatta South Campus.

*The Sultan and the Saint* tells one of the great, lost stories from history, the meeting between St Francis of Assisi and the Sultan of Egypt, Malik Al-Kamil, in the midst of the conflict of the Fifth Crusade nearly 800 years ago.

At Damietta in Egypt, at the height of the war, St Francis and his companion crossed no man's land between the two opposing armies from the Christian camp to the Sultan's camp and spent some days there meeting and discussing with the Sultan and his court.

A simple Christian friar and a mighty Muslim leader changed world history by going deeper into their faiths – beyond war and the angry rhetoric that some of their co-religionists were advocating – to find the central message of their religions: mercy, compassion and peace.

The retelling of the story of their encounter comes at a similar moment of division, fear, and disunity in the world today.

Journalist Hugh Riminton was the MC for the premiere. With his extensive experience as a news reporter covering violent conflicts in various parts of the world, Hugh provided a personal insight into the importance of community relations and harmony.

This new docudrama from Unity Productions Foundation in the USA was more than two years in production. The Franciscan Action Network (FAN) was a partner with UPF in the making of the film.

The film combines the scholarship of over two dozen sources in English and Arabic and includes voices representing Christian and Muslim traditions but guided by academic scholars who have spent years researching this history.

Featuring dramatic re-enactments, the film includes interviews with Michael Cusato (St Bonaventure University), Sr Kathy Warren (Sisters of St Francis), Suleiman Mourad (Smith College), Homayra Ziad, Institute for Christian & Jewish Studies, Paul Moses (author of *The Saint and the Sultan*), and others.

A response to the film was offered by Assoc Professor Mehmet Ozalp and Br Matthew Beckmann OFM.

Assoc Prof Ozalp is an Associate Professor of Islamic studies and the Director of the Centre for Islamic Studies and Civilisation at Charles Sturt University, and Executive Director of ISRA (Islamic Sciences and Research Academy of Australia).

He said in the dialogue encounter between Francis and Al-Malik, it is the human touch that makes all the difference. “The experience of dialogue reminds us of one’s humanity and deep commitment to God, especially those of us who are committed to peace. It is a transforming and enriching experience,” Prof Ozalp said. “In the end, if we stand for religion, whether Christians or Muslims, we must see our religion as a way of transforming ourselves for the better.”

Br Matthew Beckmann OFM is a Franciscan friar who teaches in the areas of Systematic Theology and Church History.

He said the film shows two people who go out to meet each other. “I don’t think that story works nearly as well unless you deal with two people who go out to meet each other, to actually look each other in the eye, to actually hear each other’s story, to listen with respect and to respond.

“This is something we are very bad at doing in our modern society, we are fearful of doing it. But the possibilities that spring from that encounter between the two is really worthwhile. The way in which they stood out was beautifully achieved in this film.”

Audience responses to the film included:

*“The film showed there can be a strong relationship provided there is a great belief in faith and a love of God and respect for all religions.”*

*“People of love move beyond labels Christian and Muslim to know each other as children of God.”*

*“Differences between people/communities should be celebrated, not dividing. Interfaith dialogue is important for the enrichment of society and self.”*

A vote of thanks was given by Rev Dr Patrick McInerney SSC, Director of the Columban Mission Institute and Coordinator of its Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations.

“I thank everyone present, leaders and members of religious, civic and interfaith organisations, who attended this Australian premiere. You came here perhaps out of curiosity, out of interest, perhaps skeptical about Christian-Muslim relations, seeking inspiration, seeking hope for a better, more peaceful world. Whatever your motivation for coming, I hope you leave charged with responsibility to promote peace among the members of our respective religions.”

The screening was co-hosted by Affinity Intercultural Foundation, Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay, Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations, Diocese of Parramatta, Franciscan Provincial Office Australia, Islamic Sciences and Research Academy (ISRA), Uniting Church in Australia, and Western Sydney University.

A gallery of images can be downloaded at: <https://1drv.ms/f/s!AnsTWVfkaB7ChKYTakq1Jy83atjuQ>

A photo credit would be appreciated: **Images: #SultanSaintSydney**

For more information about the film, visit: [SultanandTheSaintFilm.com](http://SultanandTheSaintFilm.com)

### Media inquiries

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