

## *The Sultan and the Saint*

**Release date:** February 1, 2013 (USA)

**Genre:** Docudrama

**Director:** Alex Kronemer

**Producer:** Alex Kronemer, Daniel Tutt, and Jawaad Abdul Rahman

**Narrator:** Jeremy Irons

**Cast:** Zach Beyer and Alexander McPherson,

**Length:** 1 hour and 48 minutes

**Awards:** Bronze Winner at the 38th Annual Telly Awards (2017); Award of Excellence Special Mention at the IndieFEST Film Awards (2017); and an Official Selection at the International Christian Film Festival (2017).

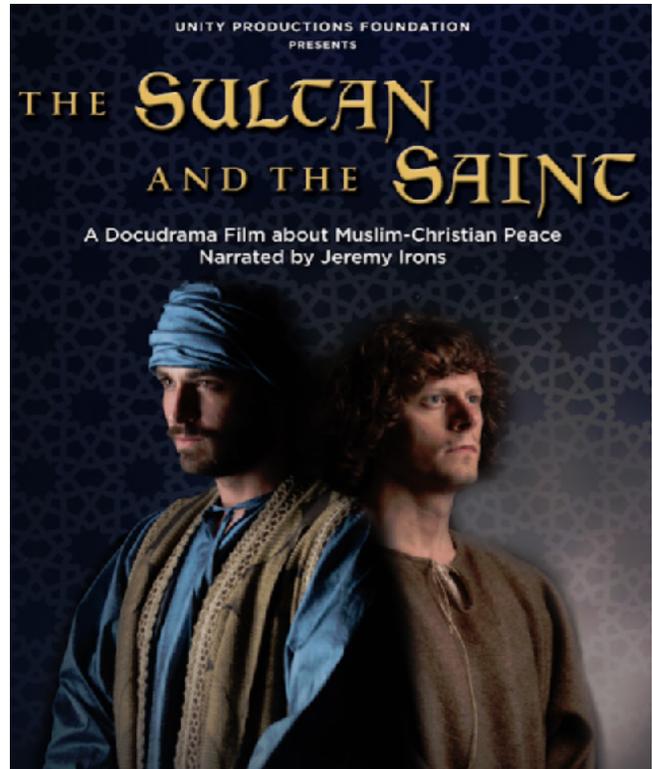
**Rating:** NR

### SYNOPSIS

*The Sultan and the Saint* tells one of the great, forgotten stories of history between two men of faith: St. Francis of Assisi, a traveling Christian preacher, and Sultan Malek al-Kamil, ruler of a Muslim Empire. Through their interaction, we see that interfaith dialogue can work to achieve understanding among peoples of different faith traditions, cultures, and ethnicities.

As a soldier involved in bloody conflicts during his young years, St. Francis has known the cruelty of war. In the year 1220, during the height of the Muslim-Christian conflict that raged for 120 years, and with death and misery mounting, Francis attempts to convince Cardinal Pelagius Galvani to make peace with the Sultan. Francis is a believer that all are brothers and sisters in humanity and that a universal kinship connects all peoples regardless of one's faith tradition. He reminds us, "We are more than our daily struggles. . . . The Lord has made us for a greater purpose, to be instruments of his peace."

Efforts to convince the Cardinal are futile, and Francis sets out across the battle lines, unarmed, to help resolve the conflicts between Christians and Muslim by visiting the Sultan of Egypt. He is captured by the Sultan's army, imprisoned, and subjected to severe beatings. His life is spared, and he is taken to Sultan Malek al-Kamil who receives him with courtesy. The two men share the beliefs they hold and each man's immense desire for peace. Francis and the Sultan are transformed by the person each once believed to be his enemy.



### CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT THEMES IN THE FILM

- Interfaith Dialogue
- Common Good
- Peace and Diplomacy
- Peace and Nonviolence
- Respect for Religious Minorities
- Conflict Transformation
- Community and Participation

### OFFICIAL FILM TRAILER

<http://bit.ly/2yFw5DP>

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

Their actions defy those who believe that peace is not possible. They are able to recognize how hatred, fear, and misunderstanding can serve as fuel for conflict. Saint Francis and the Sultan recognize that in the most difficult of times, dialogue—a revolutionary idea of peacemaking—can resolve conflict among people of different faith traditions, ethnicities, and understandings. The encounter between the Sultan and Francis turns into a mutual embrace driven by their spiritual belief of peace, compassion, and the common good.

*National Catholic Reporter* movie reviewer Sr. Rose Pacatte writes that *The Sultan and the Saint* seeks “to articulate and demonstrate the essence of interreligious dialogue and encourage viewers to actively participate in dialogic action with people who believe differently because without dialogue, the alternative is hostility and worse.

The way to do this is modeled on how Francis and the Sultan were with one another, by starting with the respect they most certainly had for those things that we today hold in common, such as belief in the one true God, the centrality of God’s will in our lives, charity for the poor, and the desire for peace.”<sup>1</sup>



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How does the peaceful dialogue between St. Francis and Sultan Malik al-Kamil speak to international relations with Muslim nations today?
- What do you think really happened at that meeting between St. Francis and Sultan al-Kamil in 1220, and what meaning does this encounter have for Catholics and Muslims today? Do you believe that Islam can deepen our Christian understanding of the Almighty? Explain.
- Historically, it is not known whether Francis spoke Arabic or if Sultan al-Kamil spoke the French-Italian dialect spoken by Francis. Yet, these two men were able to communicate with one another. What common interests brought these two men together to engage in respectful dialogue? How did their relationship give primacy to the common good? How would you define respectful dialogue in today’s world?
- Are you comfortable in the presence of Muslim people? Why or why not?
- While it is true that the complex history of Christian-Muslim relations has known much rivalry and war, it is often forgotten that there have been rich and fertile encounters in the realms of life and ideas alike. Conflicts, fear, and false accusations of Muslims made by U.S. officials have drowned the voices of understanding and have displaced common or shared principles. How can you engage in efforts to “de-globalise Christian-Muslim tensions?” How can you engage in efforts to promote a culture of peace among those who have a false understanding of Muslims, those of different ethnicities, and those of different faith traditions?
- Can you think of two people who, like Francis and Sultan Malik al-Kamil, have undertaken brave risks to promote peacemaking by crossing enemy lines to meet with someone who is considered an enemy?
- What was the emotional high point of the film? Why is this film important today? How can it inspire others to engage in further interfaith or intercultural dialogue?

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

- Today, Christians and Muslims live as neighbors and co-citizens. Dialogue is not only an activity of meetings and conferences. It is also a way of living out our faith commitment in relation to each other; sharing our common concerns, our immense desires for peace, and our aspirations; and striving together in response to the problems and challenges of our time. How do St. Francis and Sultan Malik al-Kamil inspire you to live out your faith commitment in relation to those of different ethnicities and faith traditions?

## PRAYER

Holy Spirit of God, you who inspire  
All human beings in our quest for unity,  
Fill our hearts with reverence for Muslim people  
As true daughters and sons of Abba God  
And true brothers and sisters of us.

Soften the hearts of those who fear and reject Muslim nations  
And guide us to unity in our diversity  
As humanity continues its journey home to you, Divine Lover.

We make this prayer to you who are God's Love  
Poured out on our entire human family. Amen.



## FAITH IN ACTION

- Organize a screening of the film in your school, community, or parish. Invite people from different backgrounds, particularly Muslims and Christians, to watch the film together in a spirit of dialogue, just as St. Francis and Sultan al-Kamil engaged and shared peacefully and respectfully. For information on holding a screening contact: <http://bit.ly/2wWghiZ>.
- Ask your parish youth leader or your religious education teacher to organize a trip to a local mosque. Talk with Muslims to better understand their faith and pray with them.
- Interfaith Campaign: You Can Make a Difference: <http://bit.ly/2wRQ9ps>.
- Submit your story of peace to the Peace Wall: <http://bit.ly/2fx9q8f>.
- Listen to interviews with faith leaders on interfaith dialogue:
  - Cardinal McCarrick & Imam Magid on the Sultan and the Saint Film: <http://bit.ly/2xuYuyS>.
  - Shaykh Abdullah Bin Bayyah and Shaykh Hamza Yusuf: <http://bit.ly/2xDy119>.
  - Franciscan Action Network: <http://bit.ly/2xJ3fVc>.
  - Role of Religion in Conflict Transformation: <http://bit.ly/2wiMIZY>.

<sup>1</sup> Sr. Rose Pacatte, "Recent release of 'Francis and the Sultan' documentary is perfect timing," *National Catholic Reporter*, March 20, 2013, <http://bit.ly/2k03ypq>.