

## THE THEOLOGY AND TIMES OF WILLIAM OF TRIPOLI, O.P.: A DIFFERENT VIEW OF ISLAM

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*The 13th century, the age of universities and cathedrals, was a time when Europeans journeyed to unknown realms and encountered different religions. It was also the age of Crusades. William of Tripoli spent his life and ministry in the world around Acre in the Latin Kingdom, a crossroads for art, trade, and contacts between Christians and Muslims. His writings offer not only a positive presentation of Muslim life and faith but also traces of a Christian theology of that religion.*

TODAY IN A NUMBER OF FIELDS and with new approaches Christians are seeking to go beyond the prejudices with which in the past they had covered Islam. A phenomenological understanding of Islam in the approach of religious studies can describe figures and beliefs common to two faiths. In the last half of the 20th century some Catholic theologians went further and developed a theological perspective that might locate Islam and Christianity in one salvation-history. Advocates of a further approach from comparative theology seek to understand another faith on its own terms, allowing one's faith to be confronted by the truth of the other without making overarching claims about the relationship between Christianity and the beliefs of another tradition. William of Tripoli's name appears briefly in surveys of the few medieval Christians whose attitudes toward Islam were moderately positive. His writings from the 1270s are unusual in offering a favorable presentation of Muslim life and faith and, even more, a Christian theology of that religion.

### THE FRIARS AND ISLAM

Dominic sent his first co-workers, the first preaching friars, to cities with universities, and so the Dominicans from their foundation placed study at

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the center of their postmonastic form of religious life and at the heart of their ministries. Study remained important when the friars went outside of Europe. "During this period [the 13th century] a movement had developed among the mendicant orders seeking a rapprochement with Islam, and study played a role in it. Dominican priories began to study oriental languages after 1236. Raymond of Peñafort in Barcelona sought to prepare apostles for Islamic countries, and the general chapter of Toledo in 1250 authorized 20 religious to specialize in Arabic and to found a studium in Tunis."<sup>1</sup> Already in 1226, Pope Honorius III had written a letter to the Dominicans authorizing missionaries working in the East to dress in local clothes, to wear a beard, and to have their hair cut according to the local custom, and in 1256 Pope Alexander IV asked the Dominicans to educate specialists in languages and apologetics for work in Spain and Tunisia.<sup>2</sup> For some, the study of Islam took a new direction, ending not in contempt but appreciation. A few missionaries in the areas conquered by the Crusaders wrote books to help their fellow friars: some were apologetic manuals giving points for informal discussions and public debates with schismatics, Jews, and Muslims, but other writings described the beliefs and practices of Muslims in different regions. "With the inception of missionary activity among Muslims by the Dominicans and Franciscans in Europe and in the East in the early 13th century a new phase in the encounter between Muslims and Christians began . . . , one of debate based not on mutual ignorance but on information and argumentation."<sup>3</sup>

The Dominican approach contrasted with the Franciscan style of direct public preaching. "Despite their apostolic motivation and humility, Franciscan missionaries had less flexibility than their Dominican cousins and often, drawing on rigid academic arguments, annoyed those questioning them by a lack of psychological engagement. If a number of Franciscans courageously accepted martyrdom, they did not adapt evangelization to a deeper knowledge of the people being evangelized."<sup>4</sup> Peter Engels sums up that history of encounters: "The Crusades led to a variety of contacts with the world of the Muslims. While the first Crusaders appeared full of preju-

<sup>1</sup> Berthold Altaner, *Die Dominikanermissionen des 13. Jahrhunderts* (Habelschwerdt: Franke, 1924) 26.

<sup>2</sup> See Gaston Zananiri, *L'Église et l'Islam* (Paris: Spes, 1969) 195; see Robert I. Burns, S.J., "Christian-Islamic Confrontation in the West: The 13th-Century Dream of Conversion," *American Historical Review* 76 (1971) 1386-1405.

<sup>3</sup> Ludwig Hagemann, *Christentum und Islam: Zwischen Konfrontation und Begegnung* (Altenberg: Verlag für Christlich-Islamisches Schrifttum, 1983) 73-74.

<sup>4</sup> Zananiri, *L'Église et l'Islam* 196. Scholars see the Dominican approach reaching a highpoint around 1270 (Altaner, *Die Dominikanermission* chap. 5; Burns, "Christian-Islamic Confrontation 1401).

dices about an idolatrous religion, the next generation more and more changed their viewpoint, noting that the way their opponents thought and lived was quite different from what they had previously believed. In the later time of the Crusades information came from diplomatic contacts between Muslim rulers and Christian kings and the pope. Also the new mendicant orders of Franciscans and Dominicans, whose missionaries were in daily contact with non-Christians and who traveled far into Islamic areas contributed to an improvement of European knowledge of Islam.”<sup>5</sup> Among those Christians living among Muslims who wrote positively about their beliefs was William of Tripoli.

### A DOMINICAN OF TRIPOLI AND ACRE

William was born most likely in Tripoli in Lebanon, the modern Tarabulus, in the first third of the 13th century, and died after 1273 (his life span may have been approximately the same as that of Thomas Aquinas, 1225–1274). One suspects that William was of a family that had settled in Palestine in the wake of the Crusades, most likely of Italian or French origin.<sup>6</sup> Tripoli was a prosperous Crusader city situated at the foot of Mount Lebanon; it was also a center of Eastern Christian churches. Dominicans had been in the Latin Kingdom since 1226, and a central organizational meeting, the general chapter held in Paris in 1228, added four more provinces to the eight instituted by Dominic: Greece, Poland, Dacia, and the Holy Land. The Holy Land remained a small province with six or seven priories.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Wilhelm von Tripolis, *Notitia de Machomet; De statu Sarracenorum*, ed. Peter Engels (Würzburg: Echter, 1992) 43 (hereafter this combined work will be cited as Engels, while the second of the two works will be cited to as *DSS*).

<sup>6</sup> See F. M. Abel, “Le Couvent des Frères Prêcheurs à Saint-Jean d’Acre,” *Revue Biblique* 43 (1934) 265–84, at 266. “The friars preferred some mission fields over others. French and Italian Dominicans sought the Near East and Asia; French friars were in the majority in 13th century Palestine” (William Hinnebusch, *The Dominicans: A Short History* [Staten Island, N.Y.: Alba House, 1975] 51); see Berthold-Altaner, “Sprachkenntnisse und Dolmetscherwesen im missionarischen und diplomatischen Verkehr zwischen Abendland und Orient im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert,” *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 55 (1936) 83–126; Martin Grabmann, “Die Missionsidee bei den Dominikanertheologen des 13. Jahrhunderts,” *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft* 1 (1911) 137–48.

<sup>7</sup> See François Balme (“La Province Dominicaine de Terre-Sainte de Janvier, 1277 à Octobre, 1280,” *Revue de l’Orient Latin* 1 [1893] 526–36) analyzes a letter from the provincial chapter of Tripoli in 1277 and a letter confirming the election of a prior in Acre in 1279. The Dominican priory in Tripoli was taken in 1289 and most of the friars killed (J.-M. Mérioux, “Un précurseur du dialogue Islamo-Chrétien, Frère Ricoldo,” *Revue Thomiste* 73 [1973] 609–21).

Dominicans from Jerusalem, Tripoli, and Antioch sought to convert Muslims and to evangelize Jews and members of schismatic Eastern Christian churches. It is not known if William entered the order in the priory of Tripoli or in that of Acre.<sup>8</sup> William called himself “*Guillelmus Tripolitanus Acconensis conventus Ordinis Praedicatorum*” (William of Tripoli, of the priory in Acre of the Order of Preachers). A list of members of that priory for 1280 does not hold his name, so he is presumed dead by then.<sup>9</sup>

The priory of Acre (an Arabic dialect’s form of Acco or Acca), founded around 1228, was the largest Dominican priory in that region. William lived there during much of his ministry. It was the only house of a religious order located inside the city walls. Experts are divided on William’s knowledge of Arabic. Berthold Altaner says he preached in Arabic, while Engels, admitting that William knew the Qur’an and could translate its texts clearly into Latin, notes that William cited no other Arabic source and concludes that he did not know Arabic well.<sup>10</sup> Did the future Dominican grow up and live in an Arabic-speaking society without being fluent from childhood on in the language around him? This seems unlikely in a medieval city with a cosmopolitan society and in light of the Dominican project reaching from Spain to Antioch to master Arabic.<sup>11</sup> Regardless of his fluency, William reports that his studies of Islamic culture and language made his ministry to Muslims possible.<sup>12</sup>

Acre was a crossroads of Muslim and Christian commerce, a meeting place of all kinds of contacts between East and West. After the reconquest of Jerusalem by Saladin’s army in 1188, Acre, a diocesan see, was the capital of the Crusaders’ realms. Jaroslav Folda observes: “Besides the commercial activity of Italian and other European maritime cities, there were also other travelers and envoys, both Christian and Muslim, passing through Acre at this time, and that added to the cosmopolitan ambience of

<sup>8</sup> See Abel, “Le Couvent des Frères Prêcheurs” 265.

<sup>9</sup> See Balme, “La Province Dominicaine de Terre-Sainte” 532–33. In a chronology of famous Dominicans composed in the 17th century, William appears under January 19: Etienne Thomas Souèges, O.P., and Jacques Lafont, *L’Année dominicaine: Ou vies des saints, des bienheureux, des martyrs . . . de l’Ordre des Frères Prêcheurs*, vol. 1 (Amiens: LeBel, 1678) 629.

<sup>10</sup> See Altaner, *Die Dominikanermission* 236; Engels 88.

<sup>11</sup> See Norman Daniel (*Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* [Oxford: Oneworld, 1993] 264) observes: “William of Tripoli’s work stands apart from that of other writers in many respects, and his presentation of facts was individual, even peculiar.”

<sup>12</sup> See *DSS* 24; 51–55. Citations are translated from the Latin text in Engels.

the city.”<sup>13</sup> Folda goes on to describe the evidence for an expanding production of works of art and illuminated manuscripts in the workshops of Acre in the decades after 1260. Anne Derbes and Amy Neff, in a study written for an exhibit of medieval art from the Eastern Mediterranean area, concluded: “The Frankish court and the local population shared this rich city with a cosmopolitan array of soldiers, pilgrims, and merchants from Europe and the entire Mediterranean basin. 13th-century painters resident at Acre have been credited with illuminated manuscripts, including the spectacular Arsenal Bible probably made for King Louis IX of France during his four-year stay there . . . , [and] the Perugia Missal with its calendar that cites the dedication of a church at ‘Akko.’”<sup>14</sup> Sultan az-Zahir Baybars, a Turk aided by the military forces of the Mamluks, was, after 1263, reconquering the lands of the Latin Kingdom. By his death in 1277 the European settlers were confined to a strip of coastline. Baybars did not attempt to take Acre, perhaps because he recognized its cultural and economic contribution to the Muslims. Sultan Malek-Ashraf did take the city in 1291, thereby bringing to a conclusion what had been the Latin Kingdom. The end came to the priory in Acre on May 18, 1291, its 63rd year of existence. The friars and faithful attended the Eucharist in the morning and, as the defense of the Templars collapsed, were massacred. A Dominican friar from Florence, Riccoldo de Monte Croce, living on the Tigris, heard of the fall from the victors and saw the procession of captives and spoils en route to Baghdad including church vessels and a white habit of a Friar Preacher stained with blood, but he met no Dominicans.<sup>15</sup> “The

<sup>13</sup> Jaroslav Folda, “Acre and the Art of Crusaders: The Final Years, 1268–1289,” *Crusader Art in the Holy Land: From the Third Crusade to the Fall of Acre, 1187–1291* (New York: Cambridge University, 2005) 369–479, at 374, 435; see S. Vaillhé, “Acre (Saint-Jean D’),” *Dictionnaire d’histoire et géographie ecclésiastiques*, 27 vols. (Paris: Letouzey, 1912) 1:369–75. For maps (some from medieval manuscripts) and a detailed study of the city, see Erwin Stickel, *Der Fall von Akkon: Untersuchungen zum Abklingen des Kreuzzugsgedankens am Ende des 13. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1975). The Sicilian Thomas Agni was named Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem and arrived at Acre in October 1272; decades earlier, as prior of the Dominicans in Naples, he presided at the entry of Thomas Aquinas into the novitiate in 1243. Agni’s successor as patriarch after 1288 was also a Dominican, Nicolas de Hanapes of Rheims, who drowned trying to escape the fall of the city in May 1291 (Mas Latrie, “Les patriarches latins de Jérusalem,” *Revue de l’Orient Latin* 1 [1893] 23–32).

<sup>14</sup> Anne Derbes and Amy Neff, “Italy, the Mendicant Orders, and the Byzantine Sphere,” in *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557)*, ed. Helen C. Evans (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2004) 449–89, at 466.

<sup>15</sup> See Riccoldo de Monte Croce, *Lettres sur la chute de Saint-Jean d’Acre* (Paris: Champion, 1997) 228, 243; see also Mérigoux, “Un précurseur du dialogue” 609–21; and Pierre Mandonnet, “Fra Riccoldo de Monte-Croce, pèlerin en Terre

attacks of the sultans of Egypt on the Christian state in the East had inevitable repercussions on the Dominican province of the Holy Land. When Antioch was taken in 1268 a number of Dominicans were killed. Eleven years later the city of Acre fell into the power of the Muslims who massacred the friars and destroyed their priory. . . . In 1292, a General Chapter meeting at Rome after the fall of Acre asked the Master General to reorganize in a suitable way the Province of the Holy Land."<sup>16</sup> The province formally continued on in Cyprus until 1571.<sup>17</sup> In Erwin Stickel's analysis, Acre and the Latin Kingdom fell despite their long history and rich situation because the church and the nobility in Europe were not motivated to help them. With the fall of Acre the era of the Crusades ended. Some scholars understand this event as both a symptom and cause of the subsequent unraveling of a unified medieval worldview.<sup>18</sup>

While in the past century some encyclopedia articles and surveys of positive attitudes by Christians toward Muslims have mentioned William of Tripoli, knowledge about him increased in 1992 when Peter Engels published a critical text and analysis of William's two treatises and a meticulously researched and critical report on the personages and events touching

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Sainte et missionnaire en Orient," *Revue Biblique* 2 (1893) 44–57. "The mendicant settlements that proliferated in the East played a role in the production and dispersal of images. Friars in new houses would have required at least minimal liturgical implements and manuscripts for the performance of offices and services; the larger houses may have established scriptoria to produce their own books. A Dominican missionary from Florence, Ricoldo of Monte Croce, was traveling in the region of modern Iraq when Acre fell to the Saracens in 1291. In Baghdad and Nineveh (Mosul), he saw convoys of Christian captives and booty from the defeated Christian city, including church utensils and manuscripts. From the breviaries, missals and other books he saw, he purchased a missal and a manuscript of Gregory's *Moralia in Job*" (Derbes and Neff, "Italy, the Mendicant Orders, and the Byzantine Sphere" 450). Clearly by 1243 the Dominicans had their own rite, universal and unified, for in that year a military order petitioned Rome to give up the rite of the Holy Sepulcher and to take on that of the Dominicans (William Bonniwell, *A History of the Dominican Liturgy* [New York: Wagner, 1944] 62).

<sup>16</sup> F. M. Abel, "Écrits des Dominicains sur la Terre Sainte," *Miscellanea Dominicana in memoriam VII anni saecularis ab obitu Sancti Patris Dominici (1221–1921)* (Rome: Fererari, 1923) 224. For years the conquered Christian cities remained empty ruins (see R. W. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1962] 71).

<sup>17</sup> See Hinnebusch, *The Dominicans* 54.

<sup>18</sup> See Stickel, *Der Fall von Akkon* 243–47, 252. Southern (*Western Views of Islam* 68) writes of a momentous and negative change in the attitude of European Christians toward Islam after the fall of Acre: "Very soon after 1290 there are signs of a revulsion of feeling against the extravagant hopes of the previous thirty years. The turning point may conveniently be placed at the fall of Acre in May 1291."

his life. Engels concluded that many of the incidents long attached to the Dominican's career, events transposed from source to source, are not historically accurate:<sup>19</sup> William did not meet Louis IX in 1250 or 1270; he was not a cleric from Tripoli named William who was the emissary from the Emir of Hamah to the crusaders in Tripoli in 1239, nor was he the companion of the Dominican André de Longjumeau sent by Louis IX after 1249 to the Great Khan of the Mongols. Some of the writings attributed to him in a text by Matthew Paris in 1236 are not by him.<sup>20</sup>

### WILLIAM, POPE URBAN IV, AND THOMAS AQUINAS

Certain information about William of Tripoli comes from three bulls issued by Pope Urban IV from Orvieto in 1264. Urban had been Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem when, attending the papal court in Italy on business, he was elected pope in August 1261. A first bull issued on January 7, 1264, to Louis IX, says that William has informed the pope concerning the attacks of Sultan Baybars and urges the King to send the money collected for strengthening the fortification of Haifa. The bull also says that William would travel to France and report directly to the King on the situation of the Holy Land. "Moreover, this William works ceaselessly for the Holy

<sup>19</sup> Already in the 1920s Altaner (*Die Dominikanermissionen* 87–88) was critical of some of the legends. On the history of inexact biographical information on William by Dominicans and others, see Engels 32–35. Engels refers to Antoine Touron, *Histoire des hommes illustres de l'ordre de Saint Dominique*, vol. 1 (Paris: Babuty, Quillan, 1743–49) as a source of imaginative but unsupported biographical stories retained later in expansive studies like that of Marco Voerzio, *Fr. Guglielmo da Tripoli* (Florence: Il Rosario, 1955). In 1269 Nicolo and Maffeo Polo were returning from their first journey to Asia when they stopped at Acre. They went on to Venice. In 1271, however, they were back in Acre on their way east again with Nicolo's son, Marco. Twenty-five years later, Marco Polo, held captive in a Genoan prison, dictated his memoirs, in which he claimed that two Dominicans, one of whom was William of Tripoli, accompanied them as far as Armenia. Engels concludes: "The historicity of this piece of Marco Polo's *Milione* is dubious and it should not be part of William's biography" (Engels, introduction to *Notitia de Machometo* 31–32).

<sup>20</sup> See Palmer A. Throop, *Criticism of the Crusade: A Study of Public Opinion and Crusade Propaganda* (Amsterdam: Swets & Zeitlinger, 1940) 120 n. 24 where there is some discussion of William and Matthew with references to Altaner. William mentioned information he had gained from Egyptian Christians. He may have visited there, but he was not active as a missionary in Egypt during or after the visit of Louis IX in 1270. Contact with Egypt may have meant contacts with Coptic Christians living in Gaza. "I could compose a small book on the faith, piety, and kindness of the Christians living in Egypt and the stories about them that have reached my ears" (*DSS* 6).

Land, exposing himself to the dangers of travel on land and sea.”<sup>21</sup> On the same day Urban wrote to Archbishop Giles of Tyre and John of Valenciennes, Lord of Haifa, about the needed funds. Six months later the pope wrote again to the archbishop of Tyre (who was still in France) about William, his “*nuntius*” for the faithful in the Holy Land, concerning the fortifications of Acre and the need for money; the pope implied that the three would meet in Europe. Unfortunately we do not know how William’s role as “ambassador” unfolded. Did he come to Europe? Did he meet with Louis or the pope? “Regardless, the observations of the Pope . . . imply contact over time with William of Tripoli in terms of the crusader states.”<sup>22</sup>

Thomas Aquinas was residing in Orvieto at the time when the pope dispatched letters about William’s efforts. He was the “lector of the priory,” the director of that Dominican community’s intellectual life. During his first months in Orvieto he completed his *Summa contra Gentiles*. This work was once thought to have had a missionary purpose: to serve as a handbook for Dominicans and others at work in Muslim countries. It does critically survey dozens of philosophical and religious positions, some of which are Jewish or Muslim. Scholars in the 1960s, however, noting the lack of a presentation of Islam or of any contemporary thinkers and movements, came to see the “Gentiles,” the non-Christians to which it is addressed, as important but long-dead Muslim, Greek, and Jewish intellectuals like Averroes, Avicenna, and Maimonides.<sup>23</sup> Its field of interest is not Islam but Aristotelian thought; it offers a consideration of systematic wisdom, not apologetics. Aquinas treated Muhammad at the beginning of that *summa* where he contrasted the “wonder” of the conversion of all kinds of peoples to the Christian faith without many miracles with a religion based on false miracles, sensual pleasure, and a mediocre philosophy and ethics.

<sup>21</sup> Jean Guiraud, ed., *Les registres d’Urban IV* (1261– 1264): Recueil des bulles de ce pape publiées ou analysées d’après les manuscrits originaux du Vatican, 4 vols. (Paris: Albert Fontemoing, 1901) nos. 473, 474, 869 (2:234–236, 421). “The first letter carries on the back the notation ‘*Frater Guillelmus Ultramarinus*,’ and the second ‘*Frater G. pro Terra Sancta*’” (Engels 26). See James Powell, “Church and Crusade: Frederick II and Louis IX,” *Catholic Historical Review* 93 (2007) 251–64.

<sup>22</sup> Engels 27.

<sup>23</sup> See René Antoine Gauthier “Introduction historique à S. Thomas d’Aquin,” *Contra Gentiles*, vol. 1, trans. R. Bernier and M. Corvez (Besançon: Lethielleux, 1961) 7–123; and Gauthier, “Introduction” Saint Thomas d’Aquin, *Somme contre les gentils* (Paris: Éditions universitaires, 1993); Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1 of 2, *The Person and His Work* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1996) 104–7; Yves Congar, “‘Gentilis’ et ‘Judaeus’ au moyen âge,” *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 36 (1969) 222–40. Aquinas’s writings cited Avicenna and Averroes over 400 times, indicating an appreciation of Islamic philosophers (Pierre Torrell, “Saint Thomas et l’histoire,” *Revue Thomiste* 105 [2005] 355–409, at 390).



This rare description of Islam by Aquinas treated not concrete teachings of the Qur'an but merely summarized prejudices about Islam, probably based on the writings of Peter the Venerable from a century earlier.<sup>24</sup> Jean-Pierre Torrell concludes: “[Aquinas] hardly concerns himself with Muslims, and what he says of them shows that he knew their teaching quite poorly.”<sup>25</sup>

At that time in Orvieto, Aquinas was quite productive, writing a commentary on the Book of Job, and in the month of January 1264, at the request of Urban IV, composing “an irenic and well-intentioned examination of a collection of texts from the Greek Fathers.”<sup>26</sup> The *Contra errores Graecorum* treats passages from early theologians seemingly supportive of Greek theological opinions on issues dividing the Eastern and Western churches: the procession *a Filio*, unleavened bread in the Eucharist, the primacy of the pope, and purgatory. At the same time he was assembling another work: a biblical commentary in the literary form of a “*catena*,” a chain, that is, a collection of succinct patristic interpretations of each verse of the four Gospels. More to our topic is Aquinas’s composition of *De rationibus fidei contra Saracenos, Graecos, et Armenos ad Cantorem Antiochenum*. Scholars date this small work to around 1265, a little after the *Summa contra gentiles* to which it refers three times.<sup>27</sup> A cantor of a church in Antioch asked for some answers to popular objections to Christian dogmas coming from Muslims and from diverse Christian groups. Thomas responded that one should not try to prove what are truths of faith but show that central Christian truths are not irrational or clearly false but are reasonable and attractive. Torrell contrasts this work with the *summa* just finished. “The exposition is rather precise, the language simple. . . . Thomas develops an apologetic of a high quality, far removed from the inferior arguments which are repeated in the *Contra Gentiles*.”<sup>28</sup>

<sup>24</sup> See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* 1, chap. 6. For Louis Gardet, Thomas repeats the traditional criticism of Islam and is not much interested in that religion because it will not illumine the central teachings of Christianity (“La connaissance que Thomas d’Aquin put avoir du monde islamique,” in *Aquinas and the Problems of His Time*, ed. G. Verbeke and D. Verhelst [The Hague: Martinus Nijhof, 1976] 139–48).

<sup>25</sup> Torrell, *The Person and His Work* 105.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 123; and chapter 7, “The Stay in Orvieto.” See Ulrich Horst, “Thomas von Aquin—Professor und Consultor,” *Münchener Theologische Zeitschrift* 48 (1997) 205–18.

<sup>27</sup> See *ibid.* 124–25, 351–52; and Martin Grabmann, “Die Schrift: De rationibus fidei contra Saracenos Graecos et Armenos ad Cantorem Antiochenum des heiligen Thomas von Aquin,” *Scholastik* 17 (1942) 187–216.

<sup>28</sup> Pierre Torrell, “S. Thomas et les non-chrétiens,” *Revue Thomiste* 66 (2006) 17–49, at 41. See Thomas Aquinas, *On Reasons for our Faith against the Muslims, Greeks, and Armenians*, trans. Peter Damian Fehlner (New Bedford, Mass.: Franciscans of the Immaculate, 2002). Joseph Kenny in the foreword to his translation

Had something altered Aquinas's understanding of Islam? We should note that sections of the *Summa theologiae* with their openings to wider salvation—the generosity of God's grace, the different ways of Jesus Christ's relationship to people throughout history, implicit faith, the desire for what baptism sacramentalizes, and the universality of each individual's psychological response to God's call—would be written in the following five or more years leading up to the beginning of 1272.<sup>29</sup> A few researchers on what Aquinas thought of the salvation of peoples who were not Christian mention William. In his early writings Aquinas treated the salvation of non-Christians in terms of the unusual case of a child separated from his parents and raised by animals, a version of Tarzan.<sup>30</sup> However, in mature works—the *Summa theologiae* is begun in 1265—he never mentioned the forest-child (*nutritus in silva*). Instead, he spoke of generic groups of people who do not believe in Jesus Christ or who are not baptized but whose implicit faith in the Incarnation and the Trinity and whose orientation of the will toward a saving God receives and bears God's supernatural grace. It is possible that the shift in Aquinas's theology on this point was caused by reports and writings about Islam and peoples to the East composed by Dominicans living there or sent as part of embassies to unusual countries.

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of this text writes: "Perhaps [the Cantor of Antioch's] bishop, the Dominican Christian Elias, referred him to Thomas Aquinas" (*Islamochristiana* 21 [1996] 31). See too Saint Thomas d'Aquin, *Traité: Les raisons de la foi: Les articles de la foi et les sacrements de l'Église*, trans. and annot. Giles Emery (Paris: Cerf, 1999); Ludwig Hagemann, "Missionstheoretische Ansätze bei Thomas von Aquin in seiner Schrift De rationibus fidei," *Miscellanea Medievalia* 19 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1988) 459–83.

<sup>29</sup> The gift of supernatural life is given to those who, rejecting or ignorant of the gospel, have an "implicit faith" in God caring for each person or to those with a fundamental orientation toward what the faith and its sacraments proclaim (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1, q. 89, a. 6; 1–2, q. 110, a. 2; 2–2, q. 7, a. 3; 3, q. 68, a. 2).

<sup>30</sup> The child "growing up alone in the woods" is mentioned by Aquinas in *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate* q. 14, a. 11, ad 1; see Max Seckler, "Das Heil der Nichtevangelierten in thomistischer Sicht," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 140 (1960) 40–55; Otto Hermann Pesch, "Der Waldmensch oder die Welt des Thomas von Aquin," *Thomas von Aquin* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald, 1988) 52–55; Thomas F. O'Meara, "The Presence of Grace Outside of Evangelization, Baptism, and Church in Thomas Aquinas' Theology," in *That Others May Know and Love: Essays in Honor of Zachary Hayes O.F.M., Franciscan, Educator, Scholar*, ed. Michael F. Cusato and F. Edward Coughlin (St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: Franciscan Institute, 1997) 91–132; Anselm Min, "The Implicit Salvation of Non-Christians: The Moral Way to God," *Paths to the Triune God* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 2005) 51–75.

### WILLIAM'S WRITINGS ON ISLAM FOR EUROPEANS

Composed 50 years after the arrival of the first Dominicans in the Latin Kingdom, William's writings present him as an evangelist, a missionary. If he also sought to convert Jews and Eastern Christians, he spent his life and ministry among Muslims. His openness to Islam, derived from his personal experience, sought to fashion a positive relationship between the two faiths. He wanted to show Christians that some beliefs of Islam were close to (or even the same as) those of Christians and to suggest that the Bible was a source of the Qur'an. He researched the history and expansion of Islam, using written materials in Latin or Arabic available to him in the Acre priory that held passages from the Qur'an and from stories authentically Islamic in origin. He rejected the previous method of describing Muhammad's religious life as the product of immorality and illness and of picturing the origins and triumph of Islam in terms of violence, immorality, and religious fantasy. He offered an alternative to the earlier view that Islam was the gospel deformed and that its ethics were contrary to both the natural law and the teaching of Jesus. The pervasive approach had been to treat Islam as a false religion, as a parody of bad Christianity, rather than as a religion enjoying an independent existence of its own. To compare Islam and Christianity in a positive way was unusual, and in William's presentation of ideas and facts there is a personal tone.<sup>31</sup>

William wrote two treatises in a simple and direct Latin: *De Notitia de Machometo* and *De statu Sarracenorum*: one might translate "notitia" in the first work as "data" and "statu" in the second work as "realm" or "reality." Both works were prepared for Teobaldo Visconti, an important ecclesiastical ambassador and future pope. He was first a canon of the cathedral of Piacenza, his birthplace, and then a canon in Lyons. During the summer of 1245 he attended the First Council of Lyons whose issues included the financial and military support of the Latin Kingdom. After the council, he studied at the University of Paris during the years from circa 1248 to 1252 when Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure were beginning their careers there as professors.<sup>32</sup> After this time of study Teobaldo transferred his cathedral membership so as to become archdeacon of the cathedral chapter of St. Lambert in Liège. Undertaking voyages in the service of the Roman

<sup>31</sup> Norman Daniel writes: "He was extraordinarily sensitive in some aspects to shades of Islamic opinion, but he was blind to its aggressive and triumphant aspects. . . . Tripoli's attitude contrasts with those that we have so far considered and it is mysterious. . . . Tripoli was almost unique in encouraging Muslims to think that Islam and Christianity had much in common" (*Islam and the West* 40, 145, 294).

<sup>32</sup> See Ludovico Gatto, *Il pontificato di Gregorio X (1271-1276)* (Rome: Nella sede dell'Istituto, 1959) 41; Thomas Aquinas began his teaching career in Paris as an instructor in September 1252 (Torrell, *The Person and His Work* 37).

curia, he became a confidant of the King of England and Louis IX. In early summer 1271, he arrived in Acre. Meanwhile, in Viterbo Clement IV had died (he had followed Urban IV as pope from 1265 to 1268), and after 18 months the cardinals had not yet elected a successor. Then a committee of six cardinals was delegated to find a way out of the stalemate: they chose a pope on September 1, 1271, and in October their documents reached Acre and the elected Teobaldo Visconti who selected the name, Gregory X.<sup>33</sup> Returning to Italy, he chose Rome as the place of his consecration as a bishop and coronation as pope on March 27, 1272, the first pope to enter the city in years.

Gregory's career had given him an extensive knowledge of contemporary European affairs and direct experience of the Kingdom of Jerusalem. Concern for the Holy Land was one of the new pope's priorities. On March 31, 1272, his bull, *Salvator noster*, announced an ecumenical council to be held at Lyons,<sup>34</sup> and a later bull, *Dudum super generalis*, asked that reports on non-Christians be sent to his administration so that a picture could be composed of challenges facing the church in the world. The Second Council of Lyons—it was to treat the situation in the Holy Land, reunion with the Greek Church, and the reform of the clergy—opened on May 7, 1274, with Gregory addressing, among other topics, the situation in the Holy Land. The great Khan of the Mongols sent legates to ask for help against Egypt.<sup>35</sup> The assembly in Lyons lasted six weeks, until July 17. At the end of June representatives of the Greek empire and church arrived to discuss reunion, and at the fourth session in July reunion between the Eastern and Western churches was formally concluded. Thomas Aquinas died en route to the council, while the Franciscan theologian Bonaventure, made a cardinal at the assembly, died there a few days before its conclusion. Not long after the council, on January 10, 1276, Gregory X died in Italy, at Arezzo. His successor, the Dominican Peter of Tarantaise, an earlier colleague of Aquinas at the University of Paris, became Innocent V. He had served as archbishop of Lyons, had been vocal at the recent council there, and had preached at Bonaventure's funeral.

Teobaldo, William wrote at the opening of both works, desired to know

<sup>33</sup> On the conclave and for the text of the letters (brought by Dominicans and Franciscans) to the "perennial pilgrim" in Acre, see Antonino Franchi, *Il Conclave di Viterbo (1268–1271) e le sue origini: Saggio con documenti inediti* (Assisi: Edizioni Porziuncola, 1993) 110–14.

<sup>34</sup> See Gatto, *Il Pontificato di Gregorio X* 54–56; Hans Wolter, Henri Holstein, *Lyon I/Lyon II* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald, 1972) 178.

<sup>35</sup> See Jean Richard, "Chrétien et Mongols au Concile: La papauté et les Mongols de Perse dans la seconde moitié du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle," in *1274, année charnière: Mutations et continuités* (Paris: Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1977) 31–44.

what the Saracen people and their book hold concerning the Christian faith. The *Notitia* might have been finished for Theobaldo before he left Acre. In 1271, William began a second treatise on the Qur'an and Muslim history and life, *Tractatus de statu Sarracenorum*, largely composed and dedicated to Teobaldo before his election to the papacy.<sup>36</sup> Nonetheless, William revised the *Tractatus* in July 1273, perhaps while he was in Europe. Possibly he (and others) came to see his book not only as a source of information on Islam but as a service to the approaching council.<sup>37</sup>

The master of the Dominican Order from 1254 to 1263 had been Humbert of Romans. He completed in 1273 a lengthy and influential response to the declining support for Crusades: he argued that bloodshed was legitimate, God favored the Christians, and a military presence in the Holy Land (ultimately to be directed by the papacy) was necessary. He described Islam as the most serious threat to Christianity in its entire history and found only negative aspects in its faith and society. What factors, he asked, hinder military recruitment and success? Incredulity toward the indulgences granted Crusaders, fears of unknown journeys and places, and the atmosphere of sin and violence surrounding the armies' camps play a role.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, efforts to stimulate support in Europe for the Latin Kingdom and for a continuing movement of Crusades faced the indifference of the nobility, the avarice of the clergy, and the popular disillusionment with Crusades. At the council in 1274, Humbert asked for a different kind of army, one composed not of mercenary soldiers and criminals but of intelligent and high-minded permanent soldiers. What would cover the costs of this distinguished militia? He suggested to the cardinals and bishops that funds should be raised by the sale of "superfluous ornaments" (chalices and vessels) kept in the sacristies of cathedrals, taxes on the rents of church properties, the sale of the property of abbeys fallen into ruins, and financial penalties for prelates leading dissolute lives. Moreover, Humbert was not sympathetic to critics of the use of force, the position of his Dominican confrere William, and argued for the legitimacy of violence against the Saracens. William's rejection of military force as inevitable was

<sup>36</sup> For an overview of manuscripts and printed editions see Engels 32–35.

<sup>37</sup> See Throop. "Anti-Crusade Sentiment" 114–18.

<sup>38</sup> See Humbert of Romans, *Opusculum Tripartitum* in *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, 31 vols., ed. Giovanni Mansi (Venice: Antonio Zatta, 1780) 24:109–32. In a short manual on how to arouse enthusiasm for a Crusade Humbert mentioned the foolishness and immorality of the world of Islam (see Edward Tracy Brett, *Humbert of Romans: His Life and Views of Thirteenth-Century Society* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984). A Franciscan, Fidenzius of Padua, in a position paper for the council, *De recuperatione Terrae Sanctae*, treated military approaches and mystical motivation (Wolter and Holstein, *Lyon I/Lyon II* 168).

implicitly critical of the project of a new Crusade, although he does not anywhere rule out military action.<sup>39</sup> The council's document *Zelus fidei* did not follow William's approach but sought new military initiatives and the financial means to support them.<sup>40</sup>

Engels considers William to be the author of the *Notitia de Machometo* but thinks that either William or an editor produced the *De statu Sarracenorum* by drawing on materials from the *Notitia* and from a second smaller work of similar content.<sup>41</sup> Engels's doubt about the second work is new and not convincing. The history of the manuscripts finds both works being kept together at the papal curia, most likely their first destination, and both writings have the same opening paragraph mentioning William and Teobaldo. The first and shorter treatise on Muhammad treats the prophet's life, his basic doctrine, and the teaching of the Qur'an on things touching Christianity. The text unfolds according to several dozen summary propositions. One states the important Muslim view—of interest to Christians—that Jesus did not die on the cross but was taken up to God and will come again, at which point in time all religions will fade away. The final sections consider the secular and religious leaders of Muslims, and then the mosque and the prayers held within it. William concludes with a summary of how Christians should respond theologically to Muslim views.

### THE SOCIAL REALITY OF THE SARACENS

The goal of the longer work *De statu Sarracenorum* is to offer information to Christians who, toward the end of the 13th century, want to learn more about Islam, the dominant religion of the conquered Holy Land. The genre is positive, not controversial; it stresses similar beliefs and yet presumes the superiority of Christianity. This longer and more systematic work has three parts with 55 paragraphs. The first section gives a portrait of Muhammed, his career and his death; the second (and longest) presents the history of the expansion of Islam from its birth into the 13th century; the third studies the Qur'an's authority and its content with particular attention to "what of the Christian faith is contained in it."<sup>42</sup>

A long history of the Muslim conquest extending to Spain, Provence, and North Africa (this makes up almost a third of the *De statu Sarracenorum*)

<sup>39</sup> See *DSS* 22; see Engels 41.

<sup>40</sup> See Wolter and Holstein, *Lyon I/Lyon II* 212–14. Stickel (*Der Fall von Akkon* 152–56) documents the widespread criticism in 13th-century Europe toward the idea and the reality of Crusades, hostility he sees rooted in the scandal and avarice of the bishops, the commerce of indulgences for Crusaders, and the byproduct of violence toward other groups, including Christians, to get money and property.

<sup>41</sup> See Engels 73.

<sup>42</sup> Introduction to *DSS*.

leads to a section on the political structure of the caliphs and sultans, ending with pages listing good deeds of sultans past and present.<sup>43</sup> The current Sultan Baybers I—a personage of great interest to Europeans—had been militarily and politically successful. He is presented as a gifted opponent but also as a humane figure who lives a virtuous life and labors that his subjects might live in peace and prosperity. “If he wanted, he could do much worse toward the Christians than he has done . . . , taking many Christian cities and fortresses without opposition. . . . But he says that, for the sake of goodness and kindness, he does not want to ruin the Christians. . . . Still, some of us assert that he is a benefactor to the Christians so that Akko has a good opinion of him and sees him as a good friend, and then possibly he could easily take the city. A Saracen betrayed this plan to the Christians.”<sup>44</sup> This historical and political section of the work ends with observations on a pessimistic mentality then existing among some Muslims. They think, writes William, that the future of Islam is uncertain: it will pass away after an approaching time of dominance by the Turks or Christians. Regardless, the end of history may be near. Some Muslims, William thinks, see the Christian faith lasting beyond Judaism and Islam.<sup>45</sup>

In William’s view of God’s one saving plan, Christianity stands at the beginning of Islam. The story of Bahîrâ, the Christian teacher of Muhammad, shows how Bahîrâ inspired Muhammad and led him to moderation. For Muslims “four books descended from heaven—the law of Moses, the Gospels, the Psalms and the Prophets, and the fifth is the Qur’an.”<sup>46</sup> The Qur’an is a third covenant, not rejecting the previous two but excelling it.<sup>47</sup> “A noisy crow bedecked in the feathers of others birds claiming a unique descent from heaven,”<sup>48</sup> the holy book of Islam contains much drawn from inspired biblical material and is in part a version of Jewish and Christian Scriptures.

Eleven paragraphs offer the Qur’an’s picture of Mary, and several pages treat Jesus. “Even if this faith is obscured in poetry and hidden in some falsehoods, still it indicates the Saracens’ fear of God and shows clearly that they are neighbors to the Christian faith and are near to Christians on the

<sup>43</sup> See *DSS* 5–22. “In contrast to the Latin literature with its plethora of ugly and demeaning characteristics, the good spirit of Islam emerges here. . . . Kalif Umar and Sultan Baybars, the great and relentless opponents of the crusader states at the time of William, receive a positive presentation” (Engels 44–45).

<sup>44</sup> *DSS* 21.

<sup>45</sup> See *DSS* 49. Engels (432) surveys a number of prophecies by Muslims holding that the end of Islam will come at the end of the 13th century.

<sup>46</sup> *DSS* 25.

<sup>47</sup> See *DSS* 24, 26.

<sup>48</sup> *DSS* 24.

way of salvation.”<sup>49</sup> Muslims not only tell about Jesus and Mary; they venerate them. Christians are praised in the Qur’an—praised in their faith and even in their celebration of the Eucharist. While the Jews failed to recognize the Messiah, here Jesus is superior to the prophets. God’s removal of Jesus from the earth so that he would not die on Calvary shows God’s justice toward the innocent Jesus. For William the faith of Islam can have a positive influence on its followers; his analysis of Islamic morality looks accurately and sympathetically at some practices, noting their cultural context and their relationship to natural law. Illustrating the Dominican’s pastoral experience is a succinct presentation of how uneducated Muslims will respond if they are questioned about their faith and about what they hold on paradise and on observances like having several wives.<sup>50</sup>

The *De statu Sarracenorum* is not a handbook on how to evangelize. William’s mode (and indirectly his theory) of evangelization builds upon a presentation of Islam as related to Christianity. He thought that shallowness in some Muslim beliefs and practices might arouse interest in the firm and full Christian faith, and his conclusion expounds how the truths of the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the teaching of Jesus might attract Muslims to a deeper theology. The directness of his point of view implies a confidence in his approach as well as long experience in explaining Christianity to Muslims. “They should hear that in Christ’s teaching a full and unstained faith is present, a knowledge of the way of God, an exclusive prescription for believers that is, nonetheless, a prescription of the love and true friendship with God and neighbor.” Basic Christian views on salvation, William argued, should be preached in an attractive way, pointing out similarities and differences. Ultimately Muslims seek salvation and truth. William’s viewpoint—and probably his personal expectations—looked toward a radical shift in Christian and European policies. A different sort of occupation of the Holy Land could take place if it were entrusted not to soldiers but to missionaries. “In this way, on the basis of a simple preaching about God without philosophical arguments or the power of weapons, they move like simple sheep to the baptism of Christ and enter into God’s flock. The one who says and writes this has baptized more than a thousand in the name of God.”<sup>51</sup>

Some experts criticize William for being optimistic when the Latin Kingdom was undergoing diminishment decade by decade; the view of Engels and others is that Christian missionaries in Muslim countries were discouraged and that William’s claims of success could not be true. This, however, does not take account of the varied society in which the Dominican lived

<sup>49</sup> DSS 48: “quod ipsi sint fidei christianae vicini et ad viam salutis propinqui.”

<sup>50</sup> See DSS 49–52.

<sup>51</sup> DSS 55.



and worked during his decades of ministry. Research into the Islamic population in Tripoli or Acre is helpful. Who were the Muslims to which he was preaching? Some have suggested that it was not the indigenous people fixed in their religion who became Christians, but slaves, prisoners of wars, and refugees from hostile Islamic rulers, all living in a somewhat European and Christian realm. For Altaner, William was describing an Islam in occupied areas where it lacked social and religious stability.<sup>52</sup> Benjamin Kedar discusses at length the problems of local churches in cities where refugees (some Muslims) from oppressive religious occupational forces sought membership in the church. Indeed, the pastoral and social problems introduced by caring for converts were burdensome. Pope Urban IV ordered that poor Saracens in Acre and needy converts in Bethlehem be given sustenance. "Saracen conversion continued to occur at the lower levels of crusader society."<sup>53</sup> For not a few, conversion could have meant social and economic improvement. In light of that variety of social strata among Muslims, what William wrote at the end of the *De statu Sarracenorum* is not fantastic: "The one who says and writes this has baptized more than a thousand."<sup>54</sup> This claim exists not to emphasize an evangelical program but to support the practical and theoretical view of the relationship of Christianity to Islam which he had developed.

### EVANGELIST AS THEOLOGIAN

Any presentation of William is hampered by a lack of information about him. Was he a world-traveler? Was he a naïve enthusiast with little cultural and linguistic sophistication? Was he an ordinary Dominican preacher whose experience of his own life and society led him to new ideas, pastoral and theological? He grew up not in Europe but in a multicultural, polyglot society in which he, in faith and language, belonged to a ruling minority, whose future was precarious. He spent his life in forms of evangelical outreach to Muslims and others. With a growing openness he developed new approaches to a people who in his eyes have a history, a religion, and a faith. The Dominican's serene directness is the result of experience and insight. He was a person of a milieu, a personality of comparison and dialogue, a man of a particular faith but with a temperament inclined to respect others.

William was more or less consciously fashioning a perspective that was new in his own region and largely unknown or unimagined in Europe.

<sup>52</sup> See Altaner, *Die Dominikanermissionen* 86.

<sup>53</sup> Benjamin Z. Kedar, *Crusade and Mission: European Approaches toward the Muslims* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, 1984) 152.

<sup>54</sup> *DSS* 55.

Already in 1883, Heinrich Prutz wrote: "One sees that the enterprise of William of Tripoli, as incomplete and confused as it might be in some aspects, takes place in a completely different intellectual milieu than the great mass of Christian reports from the time. The author gives Islam more or less its due, and he seeks to understand it."<sup>55</sup> In William's unusual employment of Islamic sources and in its sympathy with the peoples of Islam, comparison becomes theology. "He emphasized the historical and theological connection between Mohammedanism and Christianity, insisting that this connection forms an admirable basis for the successful conversion of the Saracens."<sup>56</sup> Although William was aware that many points in Islam are not reconcilable with Christianity, his tone is optimistic, buoyed up by a conviction that Islam, far from being some alien pagan religion, is a relative to Christianity. "Muslims hold the previously listed views on Christ in their hearts and confess them publicly. If these statements are sometimes hidden in what is false or adorned by poetry, still they show a fear of God."<sup>57</sup> The friar was part of a creative and optimistic time of exchange between religions that faded away for centuries after the fall of Acre in 1291.

William's pages hold not only descriptions and apologetics but theology. It is one thing to compare views about a supreme being; it is something else to accept and understand a little how God's saving power and love are present outside one's own religion. William was not only a comparative phenomenologist of religions but a theologian of what he named the "*via salutis*,"<sup>58</sup> the way of salvation. He located Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in one salvation history. God is the origin and destiny of the one way of saving knowledge.<sup>59</sup> Christianity and Islam exist within a single plan of God in the human spirit and mind. "What attracts [Muslims] to the true faith is a depth of belief and a kind of common conception situated in the

<sup>55</sup> Heinrich Prutz, *Kulturgeschichte der Kreuzzüge* (1883; repr., Hildesheim: Olms, 1964) 85. Students of the Dominican Ricoldo da Montecroce may see similarities between this later figure and William. It would seem that Ricoldo's more volatile personality and the events during his time in the Middle East that brought an end to the Latin Kingdom contributed to a view of Islam that is more critical and less irenic, one in which the Qur'an is not much of a religious text, and the Prophet has few redeeming qualities (Mérigoux, "Un précurseur du dialogue" 617). "A great difference between William and Ricoldo Croce, who also has an unusually positive view of Muslims, is that William, in contrast to his confrere, worked to do justice to the '*Lex Sarracenorum*' which Ricoldo dismissed" (Altaner, *Die Dominikanermissionen* 85).

<sup>56</sup> Throop, "Anti-Crusade Sentiment" 120.

<sup>57</sup> *DSS* 48.

<sup>58</sup> *DSS* 48.

<sup>59</sup> See *DSS* 25, 26

hearts of all as a pre-knowledge.”<sup>60</sup> William presented at length the Qur’an’s portrayal of Mary and Jesus to illustrate some sharing of religious ideas and figures. More important than religious similarities is the theological model and reality. There is the one dynamic of covenants, one group of inspired books coming down from heaven. Muslims believe that God is directing the human race on a path of divine knowledge in various ways: through Abraham, the Mosaic law and the prophets, and Jesus. “[God] gives knowledge of himself through the holy Gospel, the life and teaching of Jesus who has been given as a professor and teacher of the entire world.”<sup>61</sup> There is one road along which the human race journeys to salvation. Islam’s origins lie somewhat within the earlier Christian reality. Although for Christians this way has been revealed clearly in Jesus, Muslims with their faith and life are on the same journey to a supernatural destiny. “The Saracens are neighbors [*vicini*] of the Christian faith and are near [*propinqui*] to them on the way of salvation.”<sup>62</sup>

In the midst of economic exchange and social contacts, challenged by political upheavals, military skirmishes, and threats of wider war, William of Tripoli fashioned a positive approach to Islam. Seeing similarity and potential harmony, he sought further, pondering the source and destiny of God’s plan in the religions of ordinary people. At a time when from afar Muslims were vilified and wars against them were urged in emotional rhetoric, William discovered in the markets and streets of Acre faith in a history of salvation. His ministry then turned to writing, and his experience and theology reached distant Orvieto and Lyons in Europe.

<sup>60</sup> *DSS* 49.

<sup>61</sup> *DSS* 26.

<sup>62</sup> *DSS* 48.