

The Crusading Spirit and the Twenty-First Century

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INTRODUCTION

There exists in modern-day Vienna an office for the Teutonic Knights and one in Rome for the Knights of Malta, formerly called the Knight's Hospitaller. Their military prowess and goals are extinguished, but both perform acts of charity for the poor and sick. These are the last vestiges of the great crusades.¹ Or, are they? Some say that the crusading fire still exists in the West to confront Islamic radicalism.

In this paper, I will answer a two-part question: Is the crusading spirit a needed legacy of the last 1,000 years, and what are the chances for peace between Islam and the West in the twenty-first century? Prior to answering, I will consider elements of causation, character change, convivencia, and modern problems.

CAUSES OF THE ORIGINAL CRUSADING SPIRIT

The military expansion of Islam sparked the crusading spirit in Christian feudal states that had been created by war and for war.² Islam's progressive conquest over the centuries and internal rivalries invaded the physical security of Europe, fashioned spiritual alarm about the holy land, and drew armed retaliation. Crusading spirit arose against the spirit of militant jihad!

Within two decades after Muhammad's death in 632 AD, the Muslims conquered land from northern Africa to the Caucasus, and in the east beyond modern Iran to the Oxus River in Afghanistan. Arab Islamic armies caught cities off guard and unprepared, which had experienced a measure of peace after the wars between the Christian Byzantine and Zoroastrian Persian empires.

The death toll of Christian Palestine sounded in February of 638 when the Patriarch Sophronius was forced to surrender Jerusalem. It was reported that shortly afterwards, he died "of a broken heart."³ The early Islamic formula for Jerusalem, as elsewhere, was to the point: Islam, tribute, or sword - the sword being reserved for those refusing to cooperate or pay taxes. Converts

¹ Thomas F. Madden, *A Concise History of the Crusades* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999), 211-212. Madden claims that the orders have come full circle since they began as charitable institutions.

² Christopher Dawson, *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*-Image Books edition (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 140.

³ Steven Runciman, *The First Crusade* – Canto Edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 2.

lived tax-free.⁴ The worldview of Islam gave outsiders a poignant caution: For everything within Islam was House of Islam or House of Peace (*dar-al Islam*) but everything outside was House of War (*dar-al Harb*).

The political and religious unity of Islam did not survive the first four warring Caliphs. A concentric-Arab-dominated Islam dissolved as conquered communities converted, adding their character and culture to the spread and leadership of Islam. The power base shifted under the Umayyad Dynasty (661-750) to Damascus and then in the Abbasid Dynasty (750-935) to Baghdad and Samaria.⁵ Within Islam, doctrinal schism about Muhammad's lineage and how Islam was to be ruled split radical Shiite from orthodox Sunni. Eventually, Sufi mysticism created more schism. By 925, during the Abbasid Dynasty, there were also power bases in the Iranian Sunni capital of Bukhara, the Egyptian Shiite capital of Cairo, and an emerging Caliphate in Cordoba, Spain. When the Seljûk Turks rose to power, defeated the Eastern Byzantines at Manzikert, and then captured Jerusalem in 1071, it brought a special alarm to the Christian West.⁶

There was also a spiritual concern. Before the Turkish invasion, Christian pilgrims had been allowed access to the holy sites in Palestine, but now it was intermittent or often denied, and pilgrims were randomly robbed and/or murdered.

Before the middle ages, Christendom had no well-defined concept of holy war like Islam did.⁷ It had preached a peace not achieved.⁸ Christian Rome's central control waffled as it dealt with paganism and invasions by barbarians. These wars obliterated hope of pacific development and produced feudal Christian states with a warrior ethos.⁹ By the tenth century, there was an emergence of French chivalry and the belief that the Christian knight who died in battle for the faith was both hero and martyr.¹⁰

The warring efforts of Emperor Charlemagne and his son, Pepin, in the ninth century, possibly foreshadowed the Crusades, as did the rising resistance in Spain. After conquering the Berbers (barbarians) in the area of northwest Africa called the Maghrib, Arab Islam strategically employed converted Berbers in 711 to attack the Visigoths in Al Andalus (ancient Spain). By 715, they had taken the entire Iberian Peninsula. Conquest continued on to Gaul, Toulouse, and Burgundy, but the Muslims were checked and driven back at Poitiers in 732 by Charles Martel.

A symbolic battle occurred some time prior between 718 and 725 at Covadonga in northern Spain. The small Christian army of Visigothic king Pelayo imposed the first defeat on the Muslims. Supposedly, this marked the beginning

⁴ Ruqaiyyah Maqsood, *Islam-Teach Yourself Series* (Lincolnwood, IL: Contemporary Publishing, 1994), 22.

⁵ Karen Armstrong, *Islam: A Short History* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2000), 63.

⁶ Runciman, 27-29.

⁷ Madden, 1.

⁸ Runciman, 7.

⁹ Dawson suggests that the Christian wars with barbarians almost destroyed Christianity and thus were more of a crusade than the formal Crusades themselves, 87-88.

¹⁰ Dawson, 142, 146.

of the *Reconquista*, the re-conquering of Spain by the Christians.¹¹ But the Reconquest would take hundreds of years to achieve, during which Moorish Spain supposedly enjoyed its Golden Age, taking leadership of Western culture in the tenth century.¹²

However, tenth century Spain was also known colloquially as the *Dar-Djihad*, the land of jihad.¹³ For instance, there was a great slaughter of Christians at Valdejunquera in 920 by Córdoba armies. In the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, the ruler Almoravid and his son, Abd al-Malik, launched continual battles northward into the Christian principalities, sacking cities, persecuting Christians, and destroying communities.

In Europe, by the end of the eleventh century, East and West Christendom had diverged politically and ecclesiastically. Constantinople ruled the East and Rome the West. Within the West, there were warring feudal states, heretical issues, and criminal activities. Also, there was encroachment by Islam at its borders. The conquests of the Córdoba armies in Spain and the Seljûk Turks in the Christian Byzantine East created insecurity and birthed resentment of Islam's hold over the ancient holy sites. The spirit for Crusade was ignited in the West!

CHARACTER CHANGES OF THE CRUSADING SPIRIT

The word crusade is modern. It is derived from the medieval word *crucesignati* meaning "those signed by the cross." Modern crusade has varied meanings and does not necessarily convey the religious inference of *crucesignati*, yet the spirit of passion is still ignited by worthy causes.

When Pope Urban II made his speech at the Council of Clermont in 1095, it incited the first Crusade. The exact wording was lost. However, chronicler Robert the Monk reports of specific atrocities done to Christians in the East by the Turks.¹⁴ Fulcher of Chartres tells of the Pope's two driving points being inner cleansing and the need of a military response to help the Christians of the East.¹⁵ Jerusalem should be rescued from Muslim infidel. This could happen only if Christians in the West would quit squabbling and unite against Islam. For those who died along the way or in battle, the Pope offered absolution and the remission of sins. The speech by Pope Urban II birthed a vision of crusade that would change future relationship of Western Christendom with that of Eastern Byzantine Christendom, as well as the Islamic world.

Life in the middle ages was not easy, and there was enough of an *other-worldly* sense in a typical Christian's thinking, as well as an illiteracy of New Testament doctrine prohibiting violence, that people rose to the call. Within months, no less than 150,000 men, women, and children were taking pilgrim

¹¹ *Columbia Encyclopedia*, Sixth Edition, "Pelayo," (Columbia University Press, 2001).

¹² Dawson, 84-85.

¹³ Richard Fletcher, *Moorish Spain* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1992), 61.

¹⁴ Madden, 8-9.

¹⁵ Paul Halsall, "Medieval Sourcebook: Urban II: Speech at Council of Clermont, 1095, according to Fulcher of Chartres," (March 1996).

vows, signing the cross by having its symbol sewn on their clothing, and starting on a 2,000-mile journey to find favor with Christ. Noblemen and knights joined the Crusade from a simple and sincere love for God. The mixture of Christian virtue and barbarous warring made them pious, idealistic, and faithful, but also crude, arrogant, and savage at times.

Unfortunately, the first Crusade was marked by disorganization, outbreaks against the Jews, shuffling for power among the nobles, and a terrible slaughter when they finally conquered Jerusalem. All in all, it was a bloody war in which terrible things happened; yet the crusaders were victorious. Also, characteristics of this crusade were personal sacrifice, acts of kindness, chivalry, vision, faith, miracles, and a tenacity for accomplishing God's will. Crusade in its purest form was an act of selfless piety for the salvation of one's soul.¹⁶ Of course, not all the crusaders necessarily had what modern evangelicals would call a personal salvation relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet, in the theology of that day, the crusaders embraced self-sacrifice in the holy cause of rescuing Jerusalem from the Muslim by which one earned eternal reward.

Later, cultural trends altered the character and purpose of crusading, but the crusading spirit was now part of western Christian worldview. The spirit of passion and commitment of the First Crusade would be carried on for generations by individuals, such as St. Louis IX, King of France,¹⁷ or groups, like misguided children in the Children's Crusades. However, contemporary movements would determine purpose in the crusade itself. For example, the Wendish Crusade's goal was not to drive out the infidel but to convert them by sword.¹⁸ By the time of the Second Crusade, which was a failure, the Reconquesta in Spain was emerging. This expanded the definition of crusade to include fighting home-wars in defense of the faith.¹⁹

The disastrous Fourth Crusade permanently split West and East Christendom when crusaders sacked Christian Constantinople in 1204. Crusades now justified attacking Christians in opposition. *Political* crusades at home in Europe were emerging, and the Fourth Crusade's change in crusading concept now justified fighting heretics, thus, ignited the Albigensian Crusade of the thirteenth century in France and eventually the Hussite Crusade of the fifteenth century in Bohemia. Eventually, one motif of crusade simply meant any war against the adversaries of the Papal policy.²⁰ This could have eventually included the Protestants if the respect for the papacy and the institution of Christian knighthood had not crumbled in the fifteenth century.²¹

¹⁶ Madden discusses this in relationship to the betrayal of Frederick II who appeared successful in the Crusade of 1229, but it was done through secular means and without spiritual passion, 164.

¹⁷ Steven Runciman, *A History of the Crusades: Volume III, The Kingdom of Acre and the Later Crusades* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 258.

¹⁸ Madden, 58.

¹⁹ Ibid, 123.

²⁰ Runciman, 472.

²¹ Madden, 201, 209.

Although Pope Gregory X decided the crusading spirit was moribund²² in the late thirteenth century, international crusades continued until the Crusade of Nicropolis in 1397.²³ The fall of Constantinople in 1453 to the Muslims marked the end of Byzantine history.²⁴ Yet, the completion of the Reconquista in 1492 and the immediate expansion of Spanish conquest into the New World mimicked the concept of crusade. The crusading spirit helped spawn manifest destiny and European westward movement, but then it diffused into numerous ideological meanings.

Today, there are evangelism crusades or those for charities and politics. Any type of reform with zeal can be called a crusade. One professor lists four characteristics of modern movements we call crusades: (1) moral cause based on Christian principles; (2) long-term commitment to a cause by a minority; (3) victory achieved by suffering and struggle against enemies who have a powerful belief system; and (4) responding to unexpected results.²⁵ So, the concept has survived yet in altered form consistent with contemporary need. Crusade mentality helps individuals or groups respond to causes.

CONVIVENCIA AND THE CRUSADING SPIRIT

Some believe that during the Golden Age of Moorish Spain, Muslim, Christian and Jew lived in harmony within a tolerant, enlightened, and upward mobile Islamic culture. Conversely, however, it was the fragmentation of that society and jihadic spirit that spurred on the crusading Reconquista.

Convivencia was a Spanish term for *living together*. Applied to religion, it would include the concept of Christian, Jew, and Muslim living together in mutual respect for benefit. The term *Mozarabs* referred to Christians under Moorish rule and *Mudejar* vice-versa. Spanish historians suggest that in the Golden Age of Moorish Spain, there were experiments in convivencia, producing harmonious and intellectual relationships.²⁶

There was intellectual sharing. Spain and other countries influenced by the Golden Age produced Muslim philosophers such as Averroes and Avicenna, Maslama, the astronomer, Jewish poets like Yehuda HaLevi, and Jewish scholars like Maimonides, etc. Eleventh century Cordoba boasted a library of 400,000 books. At the university in Toledo, Jews, Arabs, and Greeks cooperated with Spaniards, Italians, and Englishmen to translate philosophy, science, medicine, and other great scholastic works.²⁷ Translations of works by Aristotle and other great thinkers would stimulate future intellectualism in Europe. Also, Christians and Jews were given limited self-government.

²² Runciman, 401.

²³ Ibid, 461.

²⁴ Steven Runciman, *The Fall of Constantinople 1453* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 189.

²⁵ For full definition, see William Urban, "Rethinking the Crusades" *Perspectives Online* (October 1998).

²⁶ Fletcher, 134.

²⁷ Dawson suggests that Toledo for a time became equal to the universities flourishing in Paris and Bologna, 191-192.

Yet, Moorish Spain was not always so golden, nor were other cultures so uncivilized. The process of translating important books actually began in southern Italy, not Spain.²⁸ Peaceful relationship between Christian, Muslim, and Jew were promoted in Norman Sicily as well as in the Christian principalities in the crusader states of Syria and Palestine.²⁹ In fact, an Islamic traveler, Ibn Jubayr, visited Tibnin, near Tyre, and expressed frustration because Muslim inhabitants lived in comfort with Franks and were treated with equity, whereas Muslims suffered injustice from one another.³⁰

Convivencia was not always harmonious! Some rightly suggest that the Golden Age, in regard to equal rights, was a myth.³¹ The Mozarabs of Al Andalus, just like the Copts of Egypt, were treated as second-class citizens and often lived in demoralized conditions.³² Insurrections and wars were not uncommon.

The goldenness of tolerance was a suspect. Numerous Christian martyrs were reported in ninth century Cordoba; persecutions of Almazor and Abd al-Malik blazed against Christians in the tenth; Jews of Granada were massacred in the eleventh (1066); and numerous Christians were deported to Morocco in the twelfth (1126).

The goldenness of learning was stifled. Scholarship was limited to a small percentage in circles of princely courts.³³ Jews and Mozarabs were prohibited to flourish and the latter lost intellectual initiative.³⁴ Yehuda was a Zionist reacting to restrictions in Moorish society such as clothing identification for Jews. His poems yearned for Jerusalem.³⁵ Also, Maimonides' family fled from Cordoba to Morocco, Palestine, and Cairo because of religious persecution.

The image of convivencia is appealing but not compelling. Source evidence does not illustrate a convivencia that was harmonious, long lasting, tolerant, and equitable. Probably, like any other forced coexistence, there were ups and downs. The Reconquest began in 718 by Pelayo and emerged through the centuries. In the tenth century, during the Moorish *Dar-Djihad* - the land of jihad, Christian Leon, Castile, and other kingdoms started numerous battles with a crusading spirit, to take back Al Andalus. In 1236, Cordoba fell to Christians, but the city had declined earlier at the Muslim's own hands through

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Fletcher, 135.

³⁰ Amin Maalouf, *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes* (New York: Schocken Books Inc., 1984), 263.

³¹ Bernard Lewis, *Peace Encyclopedia*, Mitchell Bard, referencing Bernard Lewis, "The Pro-Islam Jews," *Judaism* (Fall, 1968), 401.

³² Richard Fletcher, *Moorish Spain* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1992), 173.

³³ Fletcher, 172.

³⁴ *Library of Congress Country Studies*, "Spain, Al Andalus," (December 1998).

³⁵ Lindsay Faber, "A Zionist in Andalusia's golden age", *U.S. News & World Report* 127 (August 16-23 1999), No. 750.

conspiracy, assassination, slave revolts, and insurrection.³⁶ Century by century, the battles continued until the Reconquest was complete in 1492.³⁷

MODERN PROBLEMS AND THE CRUSADING SPIRIT

Today, Islamic-dominated nations struggle with embracing advanced democratic citizenship and modernity. Militant jihadist spirit divides Muslims, disrupts nations, births intolerance, appears irrational, and poses a global threat to peace, commerce, and religious pilgrimage. Reaction to this by non-Muslim nations reflects similarities of a modern crusading spirit minus the Christian component.

It is interesting to see the alliance forming against Islamic terrorism. International peacekeeping forces, arms inspectors, relief agencies, and real warriors have organized to respond.³⁸ The United Nations currently focuses on numerous militant jihadist problems.

Of course, modern secularism makes it politically incorrect for democratic leaders to fight religion, i.e. Islam. Crusading character has changed. Yet, the hitch is that Islamic militant jihad still exists, forcing a response. *Jihad* can mean inner purification or combating societal evils. Like this, it is similar to a modern crusade characteristic. But, in militant germ form, jihad is an aberrant, cancerous doctrine festering in a myriad of Muslims. For instance, in the training camps of Pakistan and Afghanistan alone, in the 1980's and 1990's, 100,000 Muslim radicals were trained in terrorist tactics.³⁹

Since Israel became a nation again in 1948, the world has experienced a backlash from Islam that in some small way must mirror the experience of the ancient crusader states, except this time the real estate is Jewish. Modern Arab nationalists view Israel as the new crusader state representing a military/religious personification of European colonialism.⁴⁰ A rash of Muslim terrorism worldwide has exploded in the last two decades. No one will forget 9/11 and the WTC collapse in New York. Terrorists justify their actions because of western allied support for Israel. Since 9/11, Islamic suicide bombings in Palestine have intensified. Ironically, eleventh century Islam had its own suicide commando sect called the *fida'iyun*. They were hashish-eaters from which our word *assassin* was derived.⁴¹ Hamas, Hezbollah, Taliban, P.L.O., al-Qaeda, and scores of other terrorist groups mimic the ancient cult and justify aberrant militant jihad as modern Koranic ethos to be embraced by all Muslims.

³⁶ Joel L. Swerdlow, "Alexandria, Cordoba, and New York: A Tale of Three Cities," *National Geographic* (August 1999), 196 No. 2.

³⁷ *Si, Spain*, "The Reconquest," (May 1994)

³⁸ William Urban expands on this and how the crusading states compared.

³⁹ Ahmed Rashid, *Militant Islam, Oil, & Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 130.

⁴⁰ William Urban mentions this view while critiquing Robert Lerner, Standish Meacham, and Edward Burns, *Western Civilizations: Their History and Their Culture* -13th edition (New York: Norton, 1998).

⁴¹ Maalouf, 98. Muslims and others feared the sect. Thousands joined it and occupied numerous fortresses throughout the Middle East.

In October of 2002, I was teaching at a new Bible school in Jakarta, Indonesia. Less than two weeks prior, a bomb exploded in a Bali tourist area causing 180 fatalities. Islamic militants were blamed. Of Indonesia's huge Muslim population, many appeared peaceful, but others were not, violently resisting the secular government and democratic laws not compliant with strict Muslim (Shariah) standards for all citizens. Christianity is growing and its followers are being persecuted. A pastor told me that in the last few years, almost 300 churches have been burnt down, and Christians martyred in the name of Allah.

Islam is divided. Some Islamic-dominated nations are trying to eradicate militant jihad, as well as embrace democracy and modernity. Turkey and Iran are among these. Outwardly, Turkey supports the West in fighting terrorism but often restricts Christian expansion within. Iran has repositioned itself since its radically anti-West stance in the 1980s. Intellectuals, such as Mohsen Kadivar, Ayatollah Mojtaba Shabestari, and Abdolkarim Soroush, are advocating democratic principles and freethinking. Kadivar argues for republicanism that places citizens on the same par with their leaders. Shabestari teaches the need for popular opinion and religious choice. And, Soroush embraces scientific modernity and rejects the mullahs' (Islamic teachers) role of interpreting the Koran for everyone else.⁴²

Other Islamic countries are oppressive and resist modernity. In Sudan and Mauritania, slavery is active.⁴³ Algeria's civil war cost 60,000 lives by 1998.⁴⁴ The Armed Islamic Group (GIA) targeted journalists, intellectuals, religious, and secular leaders.⁴⁵ In Iraq, Saddam Hussein taunts the West. Other forms of oppression and resistance are: prohibitions of political dissent, harassment of opposition, arrests without warrants, abuses to women and children, forced female circumcision, and discrimination against non-Muslim minorities in Muslim-dominated regions.⁴⁶ The West and first world nations react to this and to militant jihad with alarm as insecurity arises within.

THE NEEDED LEGACY AND THE FUTURE

The crusading spirit arose as a necessary reaction to the spirit of militant jihad. For a time, it secured Western Christendom and counteracted the spread of Islam. Without it, Seljûk Turks, Mamluks, Moors, Ottomans, or even Mongols would have stormed through Europe, and the world we know today would not exist. Christianity might have been extinguished by Islam, as was

⁴² Dr. Robert Vanderplank, "The Evolution of Religious Thought in Iran: Are We Witnessing an Islamic Reformation?" – A report given at The Kellogg College Seminar, Hilary Term (February 16 2001), citing sources from "Abdolkarim Soroush and the Secularization of Islamic Thought in Iran," *Iranian Studies*, volume 30, no. 1-2, Winter/Spring 1997, 103; *Kiyan*, No. 45, (February-March 1999) 6-19; and Mohsen Kadivar, "Zendan dar Qur'an," *Kiyan*, No. 53, (August-September 2000) 2-10.

⁴³ Ronald Segal, *Islam's Black Slaves* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2001), 202-203.

⁴⁴ David Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations* (London: Abacus, 1999), 509.

⁴⁵ Armstrong, 180, 182.

⁴⁶ Muhammad As Hikam, "Islam and Human Rights: Tensions and Possible Cooperation: The Case of Indonesia," (February 1997), Report No. 24.

Zoroastrianism.⁴⁷ The crusading spirit changed with the needs of Western culture and was used for defense, vision and conquest. Although its character and mission was at times abused and misused, it eventually emerged as a non-violent passion to rally people against unjust causes. Its legacy was indeed necessary!

Within Islam exists the doctrine of militant jihad that reacts violently to all things in opposition to Koranic doctrine and tradition. It must be extinguished if peace is to have any chance. Its arrogant, irrational, and threatening manner is like a Goliath in the earth. A shepherd boy, named David, said, “Is there not a cause” to fight,⁴⁸ and slung a stone to slay Goliath.

Aberrant jihad caused the first crusade and is causing militant response today. Christendom is not now crusading, but rather the first nations of the modern world are arising. The spark of crusade is once again kindled and being formed to meet the needs of contemporary culture. Peace will come only if Islam itself can lay down the sword and fight its battles in non-violent ways. Perhaps, in modern Islamic scholars, like Soroush, we see a glimmer of hope for a change within Islam that will eventually create a modern Golden Age of international convivencia.

⁴⁷Thomas F. Madden, “The Real History of the Crusades,” *Crisis Magazine* (April 1 2002).

⁴⁸ 1 Samuel 17:29.

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