

## **Impact of Crusades on Islam and Christianity**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The phenomena of violence justified by religious faith has ebbed and flowed and it has reached to the margins of historical and contemporary human consciousness. Some historical events are forgotten easily as conquest of Mecca (630 AD) which has the vibrant message of peace process in the present day world. But unfortunately such events are admitted and admired which has a negative message on the human relations for time eternal. Human thought towards a better and safer world has developed technology but morally it has degraded to the extent that dangerous Crusades are still remembered as a mark of glory. John Esposito says that five centuries of peaceful coexistence elapsed before political events and an imperial-papal power play led to centuries-long series of so-called holy wars that pitted Christendom against Islam and left an enduring legacy of misunderstanding and distrust. This work will strive to highlight the implications of Crusades on the two monotheistic religions, which before that were living in harmony.*

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

History of past few centuries is full of examples where the man has bewildered in different directions without any proper purpose and the man aimlessly created confusion and chaos. Thus a state of anarchy was created at times which lead to much more disastrous consequences. However, Prophets and saints took this challenge of anarchy with multidimensional efforts and were triumphant in reforming the society back to the state of peace and just social order. One cannot even deny the efforts and struggle of people in the form of French Revolution and American Revolution for the maintenance of justice on earth. But these all efforts ceased somewhere and their continuity felt a great set back. This is interesting that war, conflict or clash has dominated the global politic always! Why? It needs intense research of human behavior to study whether it is instinctive in human beings to conflict or we have accepted it as a way of life? When mankind can evolve technologically to new heights and form what Marshal McLuhan says *global village*. Why is it not possible for us to evolve mentally as well to establish a peaceful world?

The word Crusade a non-medieval Franco-Spanish hybrid only popularised in English since 18<sup>th</sup> century has entered the Anglo-American language as a synonym for a good cause vigorously pursued.<sup>1</sup> When viewed in their rightful setting the crusades appear as the medieval chapter in the long story of interactions between East and West of which Trojan Wars and Persian wars form the prelude and imperialistic expansion of modern day Europe the latest chapter. PK. Hitti sees the Crusades as the reaction of Christian Europe against the Muslim Asia, which had been on the offensive since 632 AD not only in Syria and Asia Minor but in Spain and Sicily as well<sup>2</sup>. However, most of the scholars are of the opinion that Crusades were ‘religious wars’ fought primarily on the motive of the Pope Urban II to gain control against the Christian Kings. Pope motivated people emotively by raising the voice that “Jerusalem was groaning under the Saracen yoke” without realising that Jerusalem was as important to Christians as it was to Muslims because of Prophet Muhammad’s (saw) nocturnal Journey. E.L Skip Knox gives a summary of the speech of Pope Urban II(1088-1099 AD), delivered in the Council of Clermont (1095 AD) which has been recorded in different sources as:

The noble race of Franks must come to aid their fellow Christens in east. The infidel Turks are advancing into the heart of eastern Christendom; Christians are being oppressed and attacked; churches and holy places are being defied. Jerusalem is groaning under the Saracen yoke. The Holy Sepulchre is in the Muslim hands and has been turned into a mosque.... The west must march to the defence of the east. All should go, rich and poor alike. The Franks must stop their internal wars and squabbles. Let them go instead against the infidel and fight a righteous war<sup>3</sup>.

### **II. IMPACT OF CRUSADES ON MUSLIM- CHRISTIAN RELATIONS**

Crusades had a very negative impact on the relations between Islam and Christianity. Crusades sabotaged the interfaith dialogue between these two communities who were initially living peacefully during the time of Prophet Muhammad (saw)<sup>4</sup>. The death of Malik Shah in 1092 AD, the Turkish Sultan of Baghdad, led to the disintegration of empire in Syria, Palestine and Iraq. This offered Alexius I, the Byzantine Emperor, a chance to restore the Byzantine control in Syria and Asia Minor lost to Turks since their encounter in the Battle of Manzikert in 1071 AD. For this political cum economic purpose he approached to Pope Urban II. The pope

himself led the recruitment drive while preaching in his homeland, France that reached to its defining moment in the Council of Clermont in 1095 AD. He emphasised the religious motive behind an aggression and raised the call of religious revivalism<sup>5</sup>.

Christianity and Islam were already in conflict in 1095 AD in Spain and Sicily and in Byzantine East. So it would be an exaggeration to say that Crusades were altogether responsible for their hostile relations. The soft corner of relationship shown by the Alp Arsalan is one of the episodes of crusades in which Muslims displayed a good relation with Christians, which is when Emperor Romanos was taken captive and conducted into the presence of Alp Arsalan, who treated him with generosity and following conversation is said to have taken place in the battle of Manzikert in 1071 A.D:

Alp Arsalan: What would you do if I was brought before you as a prisoner?

Romanos: Perhaps I would kill you, or exhibit in the streets of Constantinople!

Alp Arsalan: My punishment is far heavier; I forgive you and set you free<sup>6</sup>.

Also the more soft approach shown by the Pope George VII'S letter to the an- Nasir, the Muslim emir of Mauretania, in 1076 AD, as a document of peace and were things could have gone differently<sup>7</sup>. But exceptions don't make rules

However, such initiatives could not help the peace process between Christianity and Islam. The Popes were never ready to think out of box and it's because of their vested interests that relationship between Islam and Christianity spoiled in the entire Middle East. Even the agreements between Saladin and Richard I in 1191 AD held no compromise regarding the guardianship of Holy places. Ibn Shaddad quotes Saladin's remark to the king of England "Jerusalem is to us as it is to you. It is more important to us, since it is the site of our Prophet's nocturnal journey and the place where people will assemble on the Day of Judgment"<sup>8</sup>.

The first crusade and to some extent all the expeditions up to 1291AD were Euro-centric ventures. These were characterised least by the opposition to Islam rather by their socio-political settings which were deep within catholic society. In the eleventh Century AD West experienced extraordinary concern about their chances of salvation, penance and remission from the sin and for all this was responsible the Pope Urban II's call for a Crusade. The religious feelings in Western Europe had become focussed on the superfluous concepts, like the "ability of the holy to be polluted" and the role of saints on the behalf of living one. This was a feature of eleventh century religion in Europe. It is under these trends that Pope was able to promote the feelings of thousands of Children even in sixth Crusade<sup>9</sup>. The violence for the sake of salvation and the horror for the sake of lives of innocent children were prompted mainly through the deceptive religious training under the disguise of Saints. This is why religion and religious people are questioned in Twenty first century for the role in promoting intolerance throughout the globe. This is the reason why religion has become one of the most important factors in governing global politics in twenty first century. Religion being innocent in its teachings has the ability to transform the inner Character and is the most respected system on earth by millions. Hence, it is vulnerable and can easily be used and misused by the saints for economy and by the politicians for vote banks. And for this vested interest there is no scarcity of leaders to indulge common masses in romantic notions of heavens and fairy tales. During Crusades romantic notions and emotive descriptions were portend by Popes as:

The romantic images of knights bearing crosses on surcoats and banners, fighting for their faith under an alien sun, occupies a familiar niche in the facade of modern western perceptions of the past. Despite, or perhaps because of, its lack of context, it remains the indelible image of crusading in popular culture, shared even by the sculptors of the late President Assad of Syria. Iconography is never innocent. Assad's Damascus Saladin is defeating the Christians at their own imperialist game as surely as the Ladybird's Saladin and Richard I are playing out some 19th-century cultural minuet. Polemicists and politicians know – or should know – that to invoke the Crusades is to stir deep cultural myths, assumptions, and prejudices, a fact recognized by Pope John Paul II's apology to Jews, Muslims, and Eastern orthodox Christians for their intolerance and violence inflicted by the Catholic warriors of cross.<sup>10</sup>

## **II (A). MUSLIMS OF LUCERA**

This Muslim settlement of Lucera was about 24 kilometres south east of Rome, in what is know the Republic of Italy. This settlement was moved by the decision of Fredrick II from Sicily and lived for about seventy or seventy five years. Muslims in Lucera were authorized to work in the fields as they had in Sicily. They were authorized to buy and own farmlands and houses, both within the city and in its immediate outskirts. On the whole the taxes due from the Muslims of Lucera were fixed around 10% of their incomes. They did the activities like commerce, medicine etc. Farmers grew wheat barley, grapes and other fruits. Muslims also kept bees for honey. The Muslim community of Lucera had full freedom to practice its own religion and rites. It had

a mosque of its own, Quranic schools and a “Qadi” able to judge litigation between Muslims, using Islamic law<sup>11</sup>.

Muslims would not be able to pay the debt to Fredrick II because of his tolerance with “other” communities. But this whole peace process was sabotaged by the Charles II of Anjou, who wiped out this community of Muslims, about twenty thousand strong, mainly to please the Pope Boniface VIII. Muslims were slaughtered and thousands of them were sold for slavery. As rightly put by N Housley that at each end of Mediterranean, a large number of Muslims and Christians experienced death, dispossession, and break up of their families and a life of slavery mainly because of their religious faith<sup>12</sup>

During ‘Crusades’, the situation changed rapidly when Muslim world came under subsequent Western imperialist control. The Crusades against Muslims, the Crusaders’ capture of Jerusalem twice between 1099 AD and 1229 AD, and final recapture of the city by Muslims by the mid-thirteenth century left lasting imprints of distrust and residual enmity between many of the orthodox followers of these religions. The Crusaders were spectacularly severe in capturing Jerusalem in 1100 AD. They not only brutalized and humiliated the Arab Muslim citizens of Jerusalem, but also made the Jewish inhabitants of the city suffer to the extent that many of them felt they had more to fear from the Christians than from traditional Muslim rulers. Although the Muslims eventually dislodged the crusaders, the whole incident changed the favourable view that Muslims had held so far of Christians, and many Muslims remained wary of them for a long time to come<sup>13</sup>.

Islamic scholar John Esposito blames the Crusades for destroying the peaceful coexistence of Islam with its neighbors "Five centuries of peaceful coexistence elapsed before political events and an imperial-papal power play led to centuries-long series of so-called holy wars that pitted Christendom against Islam and left an enduring legacy of misunderstanding and distrust"<sup>14</sup>. Another Islamic Scholar and Orientalist Karen Armstrong says that Crusades deteriorated the relation between the three Abrahamic faiths which have been until now living peacefully and under harmony for nearly five hundred years under Islamic rulers<sup>15</sup>. Even the president Bill Clinton blamed Crusades for the current bad relation between Islam and Christianity. He said that the story of violence and the massacre done by the Christians to Muslims is still narrated in the houses of Middle East and we are still paying for it<sup>16</sup>. Though Crusaders disturbed Muslims, Muslims did not engage with any organized violence on Christianity, which existed strongly before Islam spread in the Arabian Peninsula. This attitude remained prevailed long after the decline of Abbasids into the periods of their successors. Being the supreme head of millions of Christians, he tactfully inspired people to crusade in the name of religion. ‘God wills it’ became the battle cry of crusades

If viewed in the light of original purpose, the crusades were failures. They made no permanent conquests of the Holy Land. They did not retard the growth and expansion of Islam. They unfortunately fostered a harsh intolerance between the Muslims and Christians, where before, they were living with mutual respect.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

Keeping in view the turmoil which crusading in the name of religion has created, it is the time to devise some ways of dialogue. It is necessary for the scholars to bridge the gaps between Muslims, Christians and Jews by creating a platform of Trialogue between these monotheistic religions. Middle East is already experiencing a serious brunt of crusades. A genuine interaction should take place between these communities by highlighting the metaphysical commonalities of their religions. Developed countries should play an upper hand role. If the rich nations put half of their efforts into justice and bridging the understanding of people that they currently put into defending vested interests, the process of peace will begin to show its colour. They must begin to behave democratically in world forums rather than trying to force other countries to line up with them through bribing and bullying, relationships would be transformed and world would rapidly become more secure. We must know the religion and make others understand that religion has the potential to create peace in the world.

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