The Race for Paradise Review

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**Introduction**

According to Paul Cobb (2014), the process of writing this book was not easy because it deals with the issues about the crusaders and the Muslims. The crusaders were military brought forward by the Roman Catholic Church during the High Middle Ages and the Late Middle Ages. The movement was initiated by Pope Urban II, and the aim of the crusaders was to restore access of Christian to holy places in and near Jerusalem. Before the first crusade, there had been around 200 years of struggle to control the Holy Land. Seven more crusades were organized, followed by other several minor ones, after that. In 1219 the conflict ended in failure with the fall of the last Christian stronghold in the Holy Land. The book by Cobb aimed at expounding more details of how the crusaders were defeated.

**Supremacy of Eurocentric History**

The writer of this book says that in the western countries there are some materials providing information about the crusaders as victims. He thinks his book will be the best way to correct this wrong notion presented to readers from the western countries. The supremacy of Eurocentric history about the crusades is wrong, and the explanation of crusades given to most European nations is wrong, which, according to Cobb, aim at tainting the good religion. He argues that the western countries have tried by all means to propagate the idea that most of terrorist attackers are victims of the war between Muslims and the crusaders. As stated by the writer, the book aimed at clarifying things to both interested readers and professionals. Cobb argues that the majority of Muslims in the current world lacks some crucial concepts about Islam and this is the reason why so many theories have been developed concerning Islam and Islamic culture.
The author brings out the idea that during the times of military actions most of the Middle Eastern nations were divided, and the Middle East existed as a fragmented region. This division made it hard for Muslims to stay together and share the crucial information about their religion to one another. Such union would close the loophole used by the critics of Muslims and the crusaders. These critics have even made some people think that all Muslims are terrorist, hence suffering from segregation and deportation in different parts of the world. This wrong view of the Muslims has affected a lot of people who believe in Allah. According to Cobb (2014), in the Middle East things at some point became tough until it was not possible for the weak to survive, but only the strong with might were able to put up with the severe situations of war.

A lot of people during these hard times in the Middle East opted to just do away with the Franks, which, according to Cobb, was not the best option to cool down things in the Middle East (Lloyd, 2007). Most of the invaded societies were indeed affected, and this was done because of the wrong notion that exists about Muslims and the crusades. The book argues that when studying Islamic history, it might be very confusing. According to Cobb (2014), Medieval Muslims, especially those with noble lineage, can be identified by a number of names, titles or even their combinations. For instance, a perfectly ordinary medieval Muslim’s name given in its glory was: Majd al-Muhammad ibn Khalid ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Tamimi. The writer states that such title is a highly esteemed formal name in Islamic culture. He states that Islamic titles are developed to promote the glory of the religion. They did not necessarily mean a glorious nature of people bearing them; but they were definitely the names associated with the religion’s glory.

In his book, the writer puts an emphasis on what happened in Damascus and writes about Salah al-Din, who was one the best known Muslim leaders ever. According to Cobb (2014), the city of Damascus has a lot to offer to anyone who is interested in learning and understanding more about
the Islamic culture. Damascus is known to be the city where many crusades raised from; hence, the city is crucial to Muslims and Islamic culture (Cobb, 2014).

**Crusades in Damascus**

Cobb explains why the crusaders are said to be people who defended the Holy Land of Jerusalem. The crusaders could not withstand the force of one Saladin, who was known as a Sultan of the Ayyubid dynasty of Egypt and Syria. Saladin started as a regular Kurdish soldier in the strong army of a local Potentate in Syria. Saladin grew up and became one of the most influential military leaders of his times. His fame was highly known to all Muslims when he won the battle of Hattin in 1187 (Bartlett, 2011), a war that allowed him to take back Jerusalem and a larger part of Palestine. According to Cobb (2014), Saladin is so much adored in the Middle East and treated as a symbol of statesmanship and chivalry.

As argued in the book, the bronze statue of Saladin in Damascus proves that he was a person who could stand for many things and achieve them. The statue was erected back in 1992, when they were marking the 800th anniversary of his death (Edde & Todd, 2011). Behind him in the statute there are two crusader prisoners, with an expression showing that they were defeated. This statute conveys an idea that Saladin depicted a leader who cared about both spiritual and worldly concerns. He was able to influence different cities in the Middle East. The fact that the statute stands in the capital city of Syria proves it, and this is because is known to be a secular Arab nation that is highly influenced by the western cultures.

**Saladin**

In any case, Saladin was the primary focus for people who wanted to know more about the Arabic countries view the Crusades, and it has been less emphasized in the regions where these events took place. According to Cobb (2014), Saladin is a true hero among the Arabs. He
argues that Syria is not the only nation honoring him, but even streets named after him appear in
different parts of most of the Middle East countries, among them Jerusalem and the former
crusade bastion of Acre. In Iraq, for example, there is an entire province named Salah al-Din.
This shows why Saladin is so important and is used to make everyone learn more about the
 crusaders. According to the book, many people in the Middle East see Saladin as a symbol of
unification and a liberator (Edde & Todd. 2011).

Cobb produces an idea that some Middle East leaders have tried to reach Saladin’s
glamor. He gives an example of Saddam Hussein, who has almost made himself a name during
his era. If this was to happen accordingly, it would be very symbolic because Saddam Hussein
was born in Saladin’s hometown called Tikrit. Cobb highlights that Saddam Hussein took the
name of Saladin. Such things prove how important Saladin was in the Middle-East. Moreover, he
has become a role model for almost every leader who reigns in the Middle-East (Edde & Todd,
2011).

According to Cobb (2014), sometimes there was some propaganda about Saddam Hussein
as the next Saladin, and this was evident because a book was given the title Saladin II Saddam
Hussein (Anderson, 2004). Saladin highly shapes the politics of the Middle East. But according
to Cobb (2014), it is disappearing with time, and other things like terrorism and war against the
western countries is taking a central place in the Middle East. Thus, Saladin is no longer a symbol
of strength and unity in the modern Middle East, but more of a household name.

There are several biography materials on Saladin, which have been brought forward by
different writers. The first one was published and later edited and printed by Namik Kemal in
Turkey in 1872. It portrayed Saladin as a hero and warrior. Other works were written by Sir
Walter Scoot, who under the influence of foreigners portrayed Saladin as noble and chivalric
man. According to Cobb (2014), Saladin was a leader who differs from the modern politicians. He was committed to his duty and obligations, unlike political leaders in the current Middle East, who pursue things to satisfy personal greed. By contrast, Saladin only wanted to keep his people secure (Cobb, 2014). The crusaders were viewed as faithful, noble and brave individuals. In the modern world, the use of the word crusaders is seen as a way of simply adapting the term from the Jewish culture.

According to Cobb (2014), crusaders can be considered as the last group of people who commit barbarian invasions. Towards the end Cobb tries to explain the origin of the crusaders and says that the group was founded in 1095 at Clermont in France, where Pope Urban II began a preaching journey, urging his gathered congregation to embark on the use of war and be ready to defend their fellow Christians from the East, and at the same time liberate the Holy City of Jerusalem that had been taken by Muslims. According to Cobb (2014), these are some people like Osama bin Laden who were using war between Muslims and Christians in different parts of the world, especially the western countries. Through this appeal of the Pope, the Crusaders formed four Crusader Kingdoms that they used in conquering some Muslim Kingdoms (Cobb, 2014).

Conclusion

This book brings some light to the difference between the true Islamic leaders who existed before and the current leaders in the Middle East, who are entirely different. The use of Saladin is symbolic because if most of the Middle East leaders could borrow a leaf from his way of leadership, this region would be experiencing peace. At the same time, the book tells very well the origin of the crusaders and how some terrorists used them to make sure they topple the Western countries in the name of being against the crusaders.
References


