

## Aid and Comfort to the Enemy, Part II

In last month's *American Proscenium*, I focused on the news that Washington is reaching out to various Islamist activists opposed to the secularist regime of Bashar Assad, and notably to the supposedly "moderate" elements of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria. The editorial, entitled "Aid and Comfort to the Enemy," concluded that such policies reflect either the inanity of those pursuing them or else their disdain for the values and legacy of our own society.

Within weeks, two events provided the domestic mirror image of aid and comfort to the enemy abroad. The first was an attempt by a prominent "conservative" institution in the United States to censor me under Muslim pressure. The second was a major new Hollywood movie dealing with the Crusades.

Stalin's purged comrades were routinely airbrushed from photographs and replaced with vases, chairs, or shrubs. Last April, I had an inkling of how that feels, when a flattering review of my book *The Sword of the Prophet* was abruptly removed from the *National Review Online* bookstore, under pressure from the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR). This was the result of a campaign against *National Review* by CAIR, seeking the removal of my book and *The Life and Religion of Mohammed* by the late Fr. J.L. Menezes, a Roman Catholic priest, from sale by the NR Book Service. CAIR's Communications Director Ibrahim Hooper accompanied the demand with the warning that "The National Review must clarify its position on Islamophobic hate speech and offer a public apology" and warned that "anti-Muslim rhetoric" could lead to violence.

The plot thickened when it was revealed that CAIR's success in imposing its will on NR may have been the result of pressure the Muslims exerted on one of NR's advertisers, Boeing. CAIR was delighted with its campaign. "We would like to thank all those who took the time to contact both National Review and Boeing to defend Islam and the Prophet Muhammad from defamation," said CAIR Executive Director Nihad Awad. The fact that Boeing announced delivery of the first two Boeing 777-300ER

airplanes to the Emirates on March 28—with more sales in the pipeline—provided what looked like a revealing context to the story.

Boeing's vice president for communications, Larry McCracken, told me that Boeing was not in any kind of communication with NR over this issue, however, and he gave me specific assurances that his company had not made any attempt to influence NR's decision one way or another and had no intention of doing so in the future. My call to Jay Nordlinger, NR's managing editor, was far less satisfactory. When I expressed dismay at a statement on the affair by his colleague Rich Lowry—who called it a "brouhaha"—Nordlinger merely said that his silence should not be construed as approval of, or agreement with, my view of the matter.

As I mused gloomily on how easy it was for some "conservatives" to submit to the culture of *dhimmitude*, some comfort came with the news that *The Sword* had jumped to a three-digit position on *Amazon.com*. The pleasing thought that the Muslims were doing for me what Abe Foxman had done for Mel Gibson was soon offset by e-mails informing me of Islamic gloating around the world. From Moscow, a friend sent me a link to a Muslim site in Russia that celebrated CAIR's feat.

By April 3, however, my book was back on NR's site—no statement, no explanation, no apology. This personal half-victory did not resolve the problem, of course: CAIR, an utterly nasty piece of work, tainted with terrorist links and steeped in the ideology of *jihad*, has succeeded in forcing a prominent American institution to practice self-censorship. Once the precedent is established, and the model is accepted as legitimate, it will only whet the appetites of activist Muslims and encourage their hope that the end result will be a crescent on the Capitol a generation or two from now.

The only proper way to react to CAIR's veiled threat of violence if its demands are not met is to call the Department of Homeland Security. That reaction does not require too much courage, but NR apparently had none in this case.



The best that can be said for NR is that it does not go so far as to accept the point of view of the enemy as legitimate and even admirable. They may be wimps, but they are not self-loathers.

Ridley Scott is. His *Kingdom of Heaven* is spectacular, silly, historically inaccurate, unwittingly funny, badly scripted, and pretentious. So far, so conventional, one might say: just another Hollywood big-budget yarn à la DeMille and *Troy*. What makes Scott's epic about the Crusades different is a political message more insidious than the standard leftist-revisionist pap we have been fed by Tinseltown for decades. That message is that, in a conflict between Christians and Muslims, the former attack, while the latter react. The true hero of the movie is Saladin, a wise warrior-king *sans peur et sans reproche*; its villains, the coarse and blood-thirsty Knights Templar.

The soap-opera story line itself had the potential for great moviemaking. What we get instead is Orlando Bloom rallying the defenders of Jerusalem with an oration in which he asserts that the holy city belongs to all three faiths equally. Saladin's captured sister is killed by Christians (an historical falsehood), but, upon entering Jerusalem, he nevertheless respectfully picks up a fallen cross (another fantasy). On such form, it is not surprising that the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee praised the film as a "balanced" portrayal of the Crusades. Even the terrorists' friends at CAIR liked the movie. A spokesman for CAIR who (unlike several of his colleagues) remains undicted as of this writing has said that "Muslims are shown as dignified and proud people whose lives are based on ethics and morality." A French actress, whose contribution to the epic consists of flashing her sensual eyes in a dozen ways, boasted that the film will

make all Muslims

extremely proud and happy, because they are seen as noble, chivalrous characters . . . [T]he Arab people behaved in a more noble way than the Christian people. Saladin was such a great character. He was the hero of his time.

*Kingdom of Heaven* does not tell you that the Crusades were defensive in nature—a reaction to the Muslim conquest, pillage, and enslavement of two thirds of Christendom. The Crusades were but a temporary setback to Islamic expansion, but they have provided the source of endless arguments within Western academia that sought, at first, to establish some moral equivalence between Muslims and Christians and, eventually, to use the Crusades as a tool to elevate the former to victimhood and condemn the latter as aggressors.

This is a spectacular reversal of history to which *Kingdom of Heaven* makes an enthusiastic contribution. Far from being wars of aggression, the Crusades were a belated military response of Christian Europe to over three centuries of Muslim aggression against Christian lands, the systematic mistreatment of the indigenous Christian population of those lands, and the harassment of Christian pilgrims. The modern myth, so comprehensively propagated by Ridley Scott, has been promoted by Islamic propagandists and supported by their Western allies and apologists for decades.

The Crusades were initially successful because Islam was by no means a monolithic body politic. The caliphate's authority was purely notional: Egypt was under the rule of the Fatimids, a Shiite sect, while the Sunni Turks from central Asia were gaining the upper hand in Shiite Persia, as well as in Iraq, Syria, and Palestine. By the beginning of the "Glorious Twelfth," the Christian states—the Kingdom of Jerusalem, the Countship of Tripoli, the Principality of Antioch, and the Countship of Edessa—controlled an unbroken but tenuously held belt of territory roughly corresponding to the Fertile Crescent between the Euphrates and the Sinai. It was long and thin: The preoccupation with the holy places and ports precluded any serious attempt to develop strategic depth or to create a viable local economic and demographic base for the new Christian states.

The necessity of defending these frag-

ile Outremer domains, coupled with the lack of reliable local recruits, resulted in the creation of the religious orders of knighthood: the Hospitallers and the Templars. They attracted the younger sons of feudal houses and acquired considerable property both in Palestine and in Europe. Their bravery and discipline (in stark contrast to Scott's caricature) could not compensate for the crusader states' lack of cohesion, however. The help they received from the West was too scattered and intermittent. The Principality of Edessa was the first to succumb to the Muslim counteroffensive on Christmas Day 1144, and Damascus fell in 1154.

In 1169, an energetic and able prince of Kurdish blood, Salah-ed-Din (Saladin), succeeded his uncle as the grand vizier of Egypt and, in 1171, helped to overthrow the Shiite Fatimid dynasty. Appealing to the religious fervor of Egyptian and Syrian Muslims, Saladin was able to take possession of Damascus and to conquer all of Mesopotamia except Mosul, threatening the Kingdom of Jerusalem from all sides. On July 4, 1187, his army defeated the Christians on the shores of Lake Tiberias, and he entered Jerusalem on September 17. The fortified ports of Tyre, Antioch, and Tripoli were the only remaining Christian strongholds.

After Saladin's death, his possessions were divided among his lesser successors, who lost Jerusalem again to the crusaders in 1229; but the Christians' strength and unity was waning. By 1244, the city fell again to the Muslims, who maintained control until 1918. Mamlukes destroyed the venerated Church of the Nativity in Nazareth. Caesarea capitulated under the condition that its 2,000 knights would be spared, but, once inside the city, the Muslims murdered them all. When Antioch fell to the Muslims, 16,000 Christians were put to the sword, and 100,000 are recorded to have been sold as slaves.

It is possible to make a great movie out of this bloody history and to give it depth. Indeed, while the Crusades lasted, the warriors on both sides developed a degree of grudging respect for each other. They believed, and by the tenets of their religions they were justified in believing, that they were doing God's work. They fought each other, but there were long periods of truce when they traded, met, talked, and learned from each other. The crusaders discarded their heavy armor and adopted the flowing robes better suited to the local

climate, while Saladin's warriors grasped and willingly accepted something of the knightly code and mystique that had been quite alien to the early followers of Muhammad. And yes, Saladin was a brave and capable soldier. He repeatedly expressed admiration for the piety of Christian pilgrims, and, a generation or so later, Joinville refers approvingly to Saladin's interesting observation that a bad Muslim could never make a good Christian. The lords of Outremer were often far lesser men. Some had found it convenient to strike all kinds of unseemly bargains with their foes and allied themselves with Muslim rulers against both Constantinople and new groups of crusaders who were threatening to upset the balance of power.

One can be critical of the Crusades, but primarily because of the great damage the Fourth Crusade inflicted on the Christian East. As for the slaughters, what the crusaders did to the Muslim inhabitants of Jerusalem in 1099 was as bad as what the Muslims had done to countless Christian cities before and after that time. By the end of the 13th century, the last crusader remnants in Palestine and Syria were wiped out. That was the end of the real Crusades, but it was by no means the end of *jihad*. That same *jihad* that conquered and reconquered the Holy Land continues in earnest today. With his *Kingdom of Heaven*, Ridley Scott has joined the ranks of its abettors. He, too, is aiding and comforting the enemy.

The quest for "moderate Islamists" abroad, the appeasement of CAIR at home, and the propagation of a self-hating view of history everywhere are jointly indicative of a malaise that makes the outcome of the "War on Terror" uncertain at best. The American interest mandates first and foremost the rediscovery of the self, the refirming of the moral fiber that makes everything else possible. When Pat Buchanan takes over *National Review*, CAIR is outlawed, and Mel Gibson makes a *real* movie about the Crusades, we will know that there is light at the end of the tunnel. c

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## THE OLD REPUBLIC

## Why Taft Matters

by Mark Royden Winchell

Even in that prehistoric time before television, Robert Alphonso Taft seemed an unlikely leader of men. Looking like a small-town grocer, he spoke in what one admirer conceded was a “whiney Midwestern voice.” When trying to pose as a deep-sea fisherman, Taft once allowed himself to be photographed in a boat that was visibly tethered to the shore, even as he was shown landing an already dead sailfish. (A reporter for *Time* dubbed him the “Dagwood Bumstead of American Politics.”) Despite an aloof and sometimes awkward manner, Taft sought the presidency three times. The son of former president William Howard Taft (who once had to summon aides to extricate his more than 300-pound girth from a White House bathtub), young Bob wistfully referred to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue as “the old homestead.” Even though he never occupied that address in his own right, Taft was so widely respected as a legislator that, a mere four years after his death, a bipartisan committee of the Senate named him (along with John C. Calhoun, Daniel Webster, Henry Clay, and Robert La Follette) as one of five members of that body who “left a permanent mark on our nation’s history.”

Although the vast majority of Americans under the age of 70 would be hard-pressed to identify Taft, much less explain his importance, he has recently become a hero to conservatives displeased with the way their movement has been hijacked by ex-Trotskyites, Cold War liberals, and Israeli fifth-columnists. In the September 13, 2004, issue of the *American Conservative*, Rep. John Duncan (R-TN; one of only six Republicans in Congress to vote against the invasion of Iraq) labeled Taft’s views on foreign policy the “traditional conservative position.” What Duncan neglected to mention was the fact that Taft’s personal political ambitions were consistently thwarted by the crusading internationalists of his own day.

At the time he was elected to the Sen-

ate in 1938, Bob Taft was known as an articulate opponent of the New Deal with minimal credentials in foreign policy. Had he been willing to go along with the Wall Street financiers who were eager to involve the United States in the war in Europe, he might well have gotten the Republican presidential nomination two years later. His fate was probably sealed when he attended a dinner party thrown by Ogden Reid, publisher of the *New York Herald Tribune*, on June 2, 1940. The rest of the guest list consisted of the British ambassador and several prominent American Anglophiles. Before the evening was over, Taft got into a shouting match with a utilities executive named Wendell Willkie, who said he would vote for Roosevelt before backing any Republican who did not favor aiding the Allies. Although Willkie was a registered Democrat who had never held any position in government, the East Coast internationalists were soon backing him for the GOP nomination. They flooded the delegates to the convention with fake telegrams supporting Willkie and packed the stands with demonstrators paid to chant, “We want Willkie.” The Wall Street crowd got what it wanted—a stooge who would parrot the interventionist line while handing Roosevelt a predictable, if unprecedented, third term.

Although revisionist historians have tried to tar all the nonimperialists of the late 30’s and early 40’s as protofascist, Taft’s reluctance to plunge America into another world war was a sentiment shared by principled leftists such as Norman Thomas (whose pacifism Taft and his wife, Martha, admired) and Dwight Macdonald. In his book *Prophets on the Right* (1975), the left-wing historian Ronald Radosh writes of Taft’s stand against intervention:

Almost alone among political leaders, he had called attention to the negative effects of concentrated executive power, and had condemned the usurpation of an independent congressional role by the executive. . . . He had [also] warned his fellow citizens against creating a Pax Americana at the war’s end, and he spoke of the possibility of a new imperialism breeding what would later be called the

military-industrial complex.

Like all loyal Americans, Taft supported the war after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Unlike Arthur Vandenberg and so many other former “isolationists,” however, he did not become a born-again internationalist. Even if war was forced upon us, he had no illusions about its creating a New World Order. On June 25, 1941, Taft noted the irony of Roosevelt talking about the Four Freedoms while shipping arms to the Soviet Union. “If through our aid Stalin is continued in power,” he asked, “do you suppose he will spread the four freedoms through Finland and Estonia and Latvia and Lithuania? Do you suppose that anybody in Russia itself will hear of the four freedoms after the war?”

Taft was willing to stand alone against war-crazed jingoists. In October 1946, for example, he gave a speech at Kenyon College in which he criticized the war-crimes tribunal at Nuremberg because the defendants were being tried for violating an *ex post facto* statute. Taft’s own wife, who agreed with his reasoning, had warned him not to give the speech for fear of being considered sympathetic to Nazism. (He had already gone against the tide by opposing both the internment of Japanese-Americans and the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.) For a man who was still hoping to secure his party’s presidential nomination, the speech was a public-relations disaster. Prominent Republicans repudiated Taft’s position, Democrats denounced him, and the *CIO News* ran his picture next to that of two Germans acquitted at Nuremberg. The caption read: “SENATOR ROBERT ALPHONSO TAFT AND FRIENDS.” By 1956, however, Taft’s lonely position had won him a chapter in Ted Sorenson’s *Profiles in Courage*.

Today, Taft’s vision seems so timely because, in the late 40’s and early 50’s, he was among only a handful of prominent American conservatives to express *any skepticism* concerning the holy struggle against communism. In his own time, that skepticism made him appear a throwback to the 1920’s and 30’s. In our time, he seems more like a premature foe of neoconservative triumphalism. As late as 1951, Taft wrote to Norman Thomas:

I see no reason for the President