

# **RIDLEY SCOTT DOES THE CRUSADES: FINDS CHRISTIANITY DEMENTED – ISLAM DE-LOVELY**

**By Don Feder**

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Conservative critics of Ridley Scott's "Kingdom of Heaven" are calling it a mash note to Muslims (Love Letters in the Sand), that wildly distorts the Crusades while applying generous coats of whitewash to the religion of peace.

True, but this misses the larger point: "Kingdom" is the latest in a long line of films that smear Christianity. At the heart of "Kingdom of Heaven" lies a sneering contempt for those whose lives are ordered by faith.

Still, these critics have a point: "Kingdom of Heaven" is the Crusades a la Al Qaeda.

- The Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee's Laila Al-Qatami gushed that Scott is "presenting something unprecedented: a complex and human representation of Muslim characters." Al-Qatami also called "Kingdom," "one of the better representations of Muslims we've seen out of Hollywood."
- Entertainment Weekly notes "the film's prominent villains are militant Christians behind centuries of bloodshed in the medieval Middle East."
- French actress Eva Green, one of the film's stars, predicts, "I think Muslims will be extremely proud and happy, because they're seen as noble, chivalrous characters." (Like their modern counterparts – Saddam Hussein, Hafez Assad, Yasser Arafat, the Ayatollah Khomeini, Moammar Khadafy, Sheikh Omar Abdul Rahman, Mullah Omar and Osama bin Laden?)
- Green continues: "Especially in this crusade, the 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." (Where did Green study history – Oliver Stone U?) Any resemblance between "Kingdom" and history is purely coincidental. They should have called it "Dances With Camels."
- And director Scott admits that in his epic, the Crusaders are "bad guys."

Synopsis of the film: Good crusader nobleman (Liam Neeson) returns to Europe to acknowledge his illegitimate son (Orlando Bloom), who inherits dad's fiefdom in Palestine when Neeson dies. Bloom is a 12<sup>th</sup>. century character who's had a Hollywood mind-meld with 21<sup>st</sup>. century liberalism. Orlando arrives the Holy Land just in time to develop a deep appreciation for practitioners of the religion of peace, understand the depravity of the Knights Templar and Catholic hierarchy, and lead the last defense of the Christian Kingdom of Jerusalem (for purely secular reasons).

In the course of his fantasy history, Scott chose to ignore a few details:

- Palestine wasn't Muslim territory invaded by wicked European colonialists. Sweeping out of the Arabian peninsula in the 7<sup>th</sup>. century, Muslims conquered Jerusalem and set about doing what Muslims do best – slaying and oppressing non-Muslims.
- The impetus for the First Crusade was Muslim attacks on Christian pilgrims and the destruction of Christian shrines.
- In this era, Islam was an aggressive, expansionist force. (Sorta like Islam today.) Muslims conquered and occupied the Iberian peninsula and the Balkans, ruling what were indisputably Christian lands for hundreds of years. In 732, Muslim crusaders were stopped at the Battle of Tours in Southern France. As late as the 1683, Muslim crusaders were at the gates of Vienna, which – when last I checked – was in Europe and not the Middle East.
- Saladin was not the noble soul portrayed in the movie, but a tyrant who presided over savage slaughters and personally beheaded captives – sorta like the founder of his religion. In the movie, when he conquers Jerusalem, the gracious Saladin gives Europeans safe conduct to Christian lands. The historical Saladin allowed Jerusalem's defenders to ransom themselves. Those who couldn't were enslaved.

But “Kingdom of Heaven” is more than revisionist history seeking to sanitize Islam. It's also yet another heavy-handed indictment of religion per se, and Christianity in particular.

In “Kingdom” there’s an inverse relationship between decency and a commitment to Christianity. The more overtly Christian a character is, the more he’s sadistic, bloodthirsty, callous, cowardly or hypocritical. On the other hand, the casual Christians (those who aren’t really into this crusader stuff) are uniformly wise, generous and courageous – like movieland Muslims.

In “Kingdom,” gung-ho Christian knights go about shouting “It’s God’s will” as they cut down unarmed Arabs and try to provoke a war with the long-suffering Saladin.

Naturally, the group which comes off worst is the Christian clergy, again in keeping with the Hollywood ethos. In the movie’s opening scene, a priest in Orlando’s village orders that the corpse of the knight-to-be’s wife be decapitated, because she’s a suicide. (Just before this act, he steals the cross she’s wearing.) Later, he taunts Bloom, telling him that his spouse is headless in Hell. (At least she has something in common with Hillary Clinton.)

The other straw man is the bishop of Jerusalem – a smug, pompous hypocrite who sires bastards, condones the murder of Muslims and (when the city is besieged by a seemingly invincible army) advises: “Convert to Islam. Repent later.”

As he leaves the battlements to parlay with Saladin, Bloom’s character sarcastically tells the bishop, “I’ve learned much about religion from you.” The 12<sup>th</sup>. century knight has indeed absorbed Hollywood’s secularist lesson: That religion is a sham – that it engenders fanaticism and serves as an excuse to grab other people’s land. This, of course, is Hollywood’s second favorite theme – the first being sex without content or commitment is OK.

Toward the end of the film, kindly Saladin is walking through the ruins of the city he’s just conquered when he comes upon a cross on a pedestal, lying on the floor. The Saracen lifts it, almost reverently, and places it on a table. I’m only surprised Scott didn’t have Saladin kiss it, while lecturing his warriors on the importance of diversity. (“It makes us stronger, O’ sons of the desert.”)

In terms of Christian-bashing, “Kingdom of Heaven” bears a striking resemblance to the 2004 film “King Arthur.” Here too, the Christians come off badly – either as murderous fanatics or bloodless bureaucrats.

In this re-telling of the Arthur legend, the future king is a Roman centurion, in the dying days of the empire, leading a rag-tag band of barbarian knights. Rome is about to depart Britannia for good. The cynical Bishop Germanius wrongly withholds the discharge papers of Arthur and his knights until they complete one last mission -- rescuing an important Roman family whose estate lies across the path of Saxon invaders.

Not only is the bishop a callous, sinister figure, but when Arthur and company reach the estate, they find the Roman patrician in charge is a monster who aids a gang of lunatic monks in torturing and killing innocent, loveable pagans to “save their souls.” Torquemada meets Auschwitz.

In contrast, Arthur’s pagan knights are nobility personified. Arthur himself is the token good Christian, who abandons the faith when he learns that his hero, a saintly philosopher, has been condemned and executed as a heretic.

In the end, after a fight to the finish against the usual overwhelming odds, Arthur marries Guinevere in a pagan ceremony presided over by none other than Merlin, here a Druid. Presumably, they all go off to found the Humanist Society of Britain and work for the ordination of gay priests in the Anglican Church.

“No one has claim (*to Jerusalem*),” the valiant Bloom tells the city’s defenders before the epic siege, “all have claim.” Scott, a scholar of comparative religion, somehow forgot that while Jerusalem plays a pivotal role in both Jewish and Christian Scriptures, the Koran does not mention the city even once.

The film fades out with the observation that, “Nearly a thousand years later, peace in the Kingdom of Heaven remains elusive.” Might that have something to do with the inability of Muslims, anywhere, to live in peace with infidel neighbors – or the savagery of those who, a

millennium after the First Crusade, still passionately embrace holy war? Naw, it must be those land-grabbing, colonial European Zionists.

“Kingdom of Heaven” tells us that Western religion breeds fanaticism, which in turn leads to intolerance, corruption and an endless cycle of violence. Most adolescent moviegoers are blissfully unaware of the fact that the bloodiest era in human history was dominated by Godless isms – political creeds which not only rejected, but made war on God.

Neither do they understand that true faith leads to lives of decency and acts of charity and compassion – everything that makes civilization possible.

To see how well Hollywood has done without God, consider what passes for entertainment in the movies today: sickening violence, nihilism, and barnyard sexuality (where characters behave like animals in heat).

Real religion is the polar opposite of that which Hollywood cherishes, hence its suspicion of and loathing for the Catholic Church, evangelical Christians and increasingly Orthodox Jews.

Scott’s Kingdom of Heaven is a multicultural, secular utopia, where what Hollywood sees as the superstitions that divide us are exchanged for enlightened values – leading to the dawning of the Age of Aquarius.

In reality, Hollywood’s Kingdom looks less like a shining city on a hill than a Michael Jackson slumber party.

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