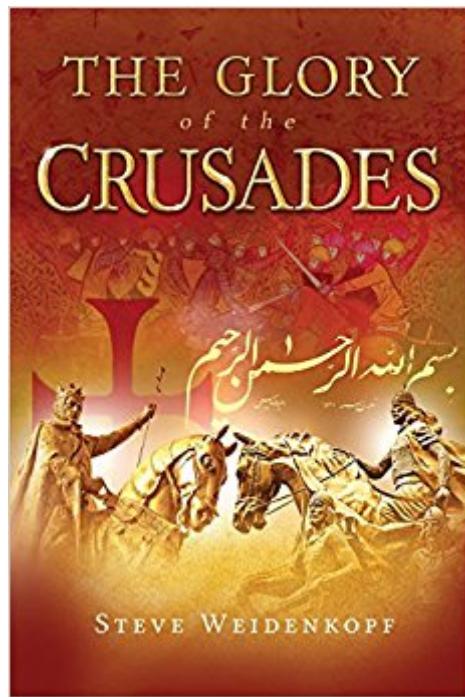


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The Glory Of The Crusades



Synopsis

How can the Crusades be called glorious ? Our modern mindset says they were ugly wars of greed and religious intolerance a big reason why Christians and Muslims today can't coexist peacefully. Historian Steve Weidenkopf challenges this received narrative with *The Glory of the Crusades*. Drawing on the latest and most authentic medieval scholarship, he presents a compelling case for understanding the Crusades as they were when they happened: armed pilgrimages driven by a holy zeal to recover conquered Christian lands. Without whitewashing their failures and even crimes, he debunks the numerous myths about the Crusades that our secular culture uses as clubs to attack the Church. In place of these myths he offers men and women of faith and valor who pledged their lives for the honor of Christ's holy places. With a storyteller's gift, Weidenkopf relates the Crusades many dramas their heroes and villains, battles and sieges, intrigues and coincidences offering a vivid and engrossing account of events that, though centuries old, have profoundly affected the course of our world to the present day.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Hillaire Belloc's *The Crusades* had been on my shelf for over a decade, but something in the style kept me from going past the first few pages. I'm happy to say that I had the opposite experience with Steve Weidenkopf's *The Glory of the Crusades* (Catholic Answers Press, 2014). I sailed through it in the course of a weekend. You are probably wondering about the use of the word "Glory" in the title. Weidenkopf certainly doesn't glorify violence. He is using the word in its original Hebrew sense, meaning "heavy in weight." In the preface he explains, "To recognize the glory of the

Crusades means not to whitewash what was ignoble about them, but to call attention to the import in the life of the Church" (p.14). Weidenkopf is a fantastic story teller, and he used that talent to rather effortlessly lead the reader, in just over 240 pages, through six centuries of crusading history. In this sweeping narrative we are introduced to characters such as Godfrey de Bouillon and Richard the Lionhearted, as well as saints like Francis of Assisi, Bernard of Clairvaux, and St. King Louis IX of France. What I value most about this book is the way it unmasks the many myths about the Crusades - that they were wars of aggression, motivated by greed, the first movement in European colonialism. Weidenkopf shows how these false characterizations arose in the Reformation and Enlightenment. He provides a good review of the early Church's view of military service and the requirements of a "just war," contrasting these with Islamic jihad. When you finish this book, however, I doubt that you will have a triumphant feeling regarding the Crusades.

Trying to tell the truth about the Crusades isn't easy in today's politically correct environment. That's why this book is so needed. Weidenkopf's book is a bracing corrective to the centuries of exaggerations and lies told about anything Catholic by the likes of Voltaire and Gibbons. As he shows, the Crusades were not wars of aggression. Quite the contrary. Mohammed, who carried a sword known as the 'Cleaver of Vertebraes', began a religion that sent Muslim armies swarming across the once wholly Catholic areas of North Africa, Egypt, and Middle East. All these areas, all the monasteries, the churches, the Catholic populations, fell to Islam. And even worse, Muslim armies occupied much of Spain and were threatening Constantinople at the time of the first Crusade. The common impression today is that the Crusaders were greedy men out for plunder. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, "the vast majority of those who took the cross suffered financial hardship...many knights...sold...their land and possessions" (p 43) in order to fight. Many would never return, many would return crippled or penniless. They joined knowing it might mean they would give up their lives for God. The majority of those who joined in the Crusades appear to have joined out of piety. Further, an indulgence was promised that would remove temporal punishment due to sins. Those who returned from the Crusades, tended to petition Rome to name their fallen comrades as martyrs. That was their perspective of the Crusades. Fast paced and sure to appeal to anyone with an interest in war and history, Weidenkopf gives a balanced presentation of the facts. He never shies away from reporting the wrong done by the Crusades.

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