

Book of the Month

February 2010

MON

TUE

WED

THU

FRI

SAT

SUN

**God's Battalions: The Case for the Crusades.
Rodney Stark. Harper One. New York. 2009.**

Here's a novel idea. The next time someone uses the Crusades as yet another reason why Christians are all hypocrites and Christianity should be jettisoned, try defending them! That is precisely what Rodney Stark (Professor of Social Sciences at Baylor University) does in this fascinating new book. Stark challenges the long-held conventional wisdom that pretends the Crusades (seven major military campaigns taking place from 1095-1291) were simply the first installment of European colonialism, conducted by barbarians from the west who were hungry for land, plunder and converts. This stereotypical view normally sees the Muslims as highly cultivated, innocent victims of European aggression. To be sure, as a good historian, Stark does not gloss over the wrongs and abuses that were often committed by the European armies, but he boldly reminds us of some of the hard historical realities, namely that the Crusades were first of all a military response to unprovoked acts of Muslim terrorist aggression.

Stark's fresh look at the troublesome times of the Crusades provides a thought-provoking contribution to the conversation taking place in our day. The reader will no doubt want to challenge and debate many of Stark's conclusions but, hopefully, his analysis will restore some reality to the contemporary discussion and perhaps deliver us from the trite slogans that so often characterize contemporary dialogue.

Pastor Stan Key