

BOOK REVIEWS

Christopher Tyerman. *God's War: A New History of the Crusades*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. Pp. 1024. Paper, \$22.95; ISBN 978-0-674-03070-1.

"Deus lo Vult!" or "God wills it!" was the call from Pope Urban II to all Christians to crusade to free the Holy Land from the clutches of Islam. *God's War* by Christopher Tyerman, a Lecturer of Medieval History at Hertford College and New College, University of Oxford, is an in-depth look into the events of the Crusades. His writing is thorough when it comes to covering the Crusades which span nearly two hundred years from beginning to end. The book is perhaps too thorough when referencing Crusade leaders and soldiers; this is trivia that the reader neither needs to know about nor should really care about. Introducing dozens and dozens of obscure soldiers slows down the book and does not encourage the reader to continue to learn and experience an important era of Western history. The Crusades covered every experience of the human condition, yet somehow Tyerman turns it into an insurance lecture full of charts, graphs, and political analyses sure to put even the most interested reader to sleep.

Yet, not all is lost on this book. Tyerman provides a detailed history of the Crusades that many might not know about or even realize could be considered part of the Crusades. The reader observes that the goal of the Crusades evolves from the goal of liberating the Holy Land from Islam to broadly going after all of the enemies of Christianity, the heretics. The typically ignored Albigensian Crusades are addressed, where French nobles in southern France offered protection to the Cathars, Pure Ones, or Albigensians, a heretical movement. The nobles wanted to keep the Pope and the King of France out of their affairs. These nobles saw the Albigensians being more Christian than the Catholic Church. Albigensian missionaries were pious men living moral lives compared to the underhanded Catholic bishops of southern France. The Albigensians accused the Catholic Church of being in league with the devil and much of the population of southern France agreed. The Pope ordered the crusade in 1209 with support coming from the King of France who wanted to regain control of his country and crush those nobles challenging his power. By 1229, the Albigensians and their supporters were defeated. This challenge to the Church helped lead to the establishment of the Dominican Order and the Medieval Inquisition.

If the reader can work through all of the minutiae that Tyerman included, the importance of the book can be found and used in the classroom. The Crusades continued running battles between East and West that started with the Greeks and the Persians. It evolved into a battle between Christianity and Islam that is still affecting the world today. Shortly after the attacks on September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush said, "This crusade, this war on terrorism is going to take a while." Those words awakened old memories in the Islamic world, forgotten for nearly a thousand years. Tyerman's book allows the student to see where that anger comes from.

Georgia Highlands College

Todd Elsen