



A History of the Devil

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AN UNORTHODOX COMPARATIVE HISTORY OF RELIGION-FROM THE DARK SIDE-BY A
BESTSELLING THEOLOGIAN

"The biggest ruse of the devil is making us believe that he doesn't exist," claimed Baudelaire. On the contrary, argues bestselling historian and critic Gerald Messadie, the true evil lies in the fact that we believe in him at all.

A History of the Devil is a provocative exploration of the personification of evil through the ages and across cultures. Messadie reveals that the Satan of Judeo-Christian mythology-the antithesis of God and good-was a concept unknown to the Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, Hindus, and Chinese. In fact, the devil was probably invented six centuries before the common era by Persian clergy eager to demonize their political adversaries. Ever since, the image of evil has been a useful tool of the powerful, both religious and secular, from the prosecutors of the Spanish Inquisition to the Cold Warriors of our own time. In seventeen absorbing chapters, Messadie researches the genealogy of the devil in the world's major civilizations, from Asia and Europe to Africa and North America. He examines the devil's role in each culture and the evolution of his various incarnations throughout history.

Abundant in historical references and cultural analyses, *A History of the Devil* shows that it is precisely the belief in the devil that lies at the root of religious fanaticism around the world today.

A History of the Devil Details

Date : Published November 17th 1997 by Kodansha (first published 1993)

ISBN : 9781568361987

Author : Gerald Messadié

Format : Paperback 384 pages

Genre : History, Religion, Nonfiction, Spirituality

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Natalia says

It started great...great idea. But then the mistakes arise.. (translation mistakes, I hope). It states that Snorri Sturluson was Irish (someone please inform the Icelanders of this) and he refers to the Vikings and Norse as Celts which even though maybe right in terms of DNA traces is not normal to call them so, as the Celts are a completely different ethnolinguistic group of people who shared the same Celtic languages. At no point in time did they migrate north to Scandinavia. It is not my subject so of course ..what do I know... but I continued to read the rest of the book slightly suspiciously. I did however enjoy the main premise of the book that the devil is a political creation for manipulation of the masses..that's what I interpreted the premise to be and of course is spot on.

Brett Chapman says

I think I didn't like this book because I was expecting something occult-based or something of that nature. Instead it was a pretty clear cut historical recollection of the history of the devil. From Zoroastrianism, to Judaism, to the concept of the devil in other culture throughout the world. It was good on what information was presented, I was disappointed in nothing mystical or occult was presented.

Meg says

The devil made me read it.

Nikos Kernel says

Fun read but judging from the inconsistencies and inaccuracies on topics i know about makes me wonder about the exactitude of the information therein. The writing resembles popular articles rather than serious historical research and the tone at many points is sarcastic towards historians and researchers (not to mention writers whose work the author seems not to comprehend - [last chapter]).

Mark says

This book was a real challenge for me, so my rating may not be entirely fair. The author seemed to take for granted the background knowledge of the reader, so I felt like a lot of material was glanced over, and that conclusions he made were not well supported. I felt like he was saying, "This is the conclusion, and I don't need to back it up because it's so obvious."

The chapter on the Persians, and the later chapters on Judaism, Christianity and Islam were the strongest.

The other chapters were intended to show that there is not a universal idea of a single, evil adversary. I think the author should have spent more time on those strong areas and peppered the rest throughout as a means of contrast.

In spite of that, I think the author (in those stronger chapters) does make a very good argument that the idea of an evil adversary was created and exploited out of political need.

Finally, I felt the last chapter was extremely dated material. If a later edition is ever published, the final word needs to be re-written.

Sara says

Not as good as I was hoping.

Christine Van Heertum says

Un sujet très intéressant, mais très inégal dans l'écriture. Certains chapitres se perdent dans les digressions et autres virgules ou parenthèses.

Woowott says

I wish I could give it a half star more. It's not quite four stars. But it was incredibly interesting. Coming from my background, there are plenty of things I know precious little about as far as religion goes, so I thoroughly enjoyed learning even a tidbit about some of the more obscure bits of religious history. And I'm always unutterably fascinated by something taking a stance opposite of the one with which I grew up (a stance with which I disagree now). And I found M. Messadie to be enjoyable and erudite; he reminded me a bit of Hitchens in the translation. But I also found him a bit biased, which made me question his assumptions of texts about which I know something. So I'm dubious about his accuracy at times. Still, this is well worth the read, despite any flaws, and it is incredibly informative and enjoyable.

Aw, heck. I'll give it four stars.

Demian says

Thorough, insightful, brilliant. A history of our religious roots.

Sam Thurman says

What makes this work stand out from other literature on the devil is that it isn't limited by a focus on Israel or devil figures alone, but rather branches out to other civilizations and the evolution of evil, sin, and demonic

figures in general. Messadie's expertise is matched by his ability to keep the reader's interest piqued, and, though it is scholarly in its approach, it is not what I would call dry. Recommended to all interested in the conception and evolution of ancient civilizations' perceptions of evil.

Veleda says

Overall, I say that this book is worth reading. The first few chapters are dry and tedious and imperialist prejudices keep popping up. Non-Western cultures are continually referred to as "primitive." Even when the author is describing the jungles of an area that can only be trekked through using a "primitive" tool made by the natives. So, it's the best tool for the job; hell, it's the only tool for the job, but because it wasn't made by white people, let's call it primitive. However, after about five or so chapters it becomes much more readable, and in the chapters about Africa and the Americas, the author takes Western scholars and religious figures to task for their racism. It makes me wonder if the book wasn't actually translated by two different people.

Sometimes the book feels too simplistic, and I don't always agree with his interpretation of the mythology he's discussing. He states that when we think of Greek gods, we think of heroes lounging on Mt. Olympus. I guess I can't speak for anyone else, but when I think of Greek gods, I think of spiteful, jealous, petty, rapists... lounging on Mt. Olympus. Then again, maybe I'm the unusual one. (But also the right one.)

Despite the book's flaws, I wouldn't dissuade anyone from picking it up. Once it got going, it was really interesting.

Elis says

N?scocit de preo?ii iranieni acum 2600 de ani, Diavolul înc? nu ?i-a g?sit nici scopul, nici sensul, de-a lungul timpului. Satana din Vechiul Testament este un aliat ?i un slujitor al voin?ei divine, a?a cum ne arat? Cartea lui Iov. Abia în Noul Testament el devine Lucifer, Belzebut sau Baal, surs? a r?ului în lume, de?i nici pâ? azi Biserica nu a putut preciza dac? Prin?ul acestei lumi s-a n?scut înaintea de apari?ia R?ului sau de ce ?i în ce împrejur?ri acest înger c?zut a devenit "vr?jma? al lui Dumnezeu", egal ca putere ?i influen???

Olethros says

-Enorme ejercicio de erudición e investigación a partes iguales.-

Género. Ensayo.

Lo que nos cuenta. Con el título original de Histoire générale du Diable (más útil para que el lector potencial valore su lectura, en mi humilde opinión), viaje por nuestra historia y por nuestro globo terráqueo para que tratemos de descubrir el origen del concepto del diablo desde diferentes orígenes y la evolución del mismo a través del tiempo, las culturas y los territorios.

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Emir says

Sadly, it did not meet my expectations. From the start through Zarathustra, it was, again sadly, quite boring. After that, it became much more readable and quite informative. As a whole I found it a little hard to understand since Messadie's sentences were sometimes overwhelmingly loaded. Messadie's own views about the Devil part was also mostly great. However, the book as a whole, especially in the aforementioned part as boring, felt a little off-track when it's title taken into consideration. I can understand all that historical info might be relevant, alas remotely, to the concept of the Devil in respective civilizations, but it was too much information, which in my opinion impeded the books flow.

Malaga says

I love this book so much I checked it out 3 times, paid a ton of fines, and finally bought a copy.
