



The Devil: A Biography

By Peter Stanford

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Drawing on literature, the arts, folklore, psychology, world history, and church history, the author explores why humans have needed the Devil to explain evil and human suffering and why modern Americans are once again turning to the explanation of a Devil. 20,000 first printing.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

"Though this biography is definitely unauthorized," Peter Stanford writes in his preface, "and the subject has not cooperated -- as far as I am aware -- I did at least manage to track down not one but three exorcists." We're used to seeing entertaining biographies of the famous, but here's something new: a very readable biography of the most infamous of all, the Devil himself. Peter Stanford presents a great amount of historical and scholarly material, yet manages to do so in a witty and highly intelligent style that keeps the reader turning the pages. From early Mesopotamia through the long history of Christianity, from medieval witch hunts to today's heavy metal rockers and Satanic cults, Stanford manages to, as he puts it, present a "very personal exploration of the highs and lows of the Devil's influence."

From Publishers Weekly

Now that Jack Miles has written God's biography (*God: A Biography*, 1995), Peter Stanford must give the Devil his due and tell the life story of Old Scratch. The personification of evil in a figure who co-exists with the goodness of God entered Western religious thinking through the demonology of Zoroastrianism. Thus, late Judaism and early Christianity divided up the world into good powers and evil powers. As Stanford narrates the story, the living character of an Evil One persisted through Puritan America but began to lose its grip amid the cultural and scientific optimism of the 19th century. Yet, he argues, since evil has persisted in our century, as evidenced by the Holocaust and other horrors, perhaps we shouldn't do away with the idea of Satan just yet. In spite of the fact that contemporary culture seems to have left behind a personified figure who wreaks havoc and evil in the world, Stanford points to a number of cultural currents like film and Satanic cults to show that Satan is alive and well in our society, even if the contours of his figure are visible only in the shadows, which, as Stanford argues, may be just the way Satan wants it. Stanford offers a workmanlike treatment of ideas and themes that have already been explored in fuller and more interesting ways by Gerald Messadieu (*The History of the Devil*, 1996) and Andrew Delbanco (*The Death of Satan*, 1995).

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From Library Journal

British journalist Stanford provides a brief overview of the concept of the Devil in Western thought. In an effort to give readers a concise and colorful look at a fascinating subject, he traces the Devil from ancient sources, through the Middle Ages and the Reformation, down to the current newly awakened interest in exorcisms and Satanism. What makes this book stand out is the author's admitted ambivalence toward the subject. "For ninety-nine percent of the time, I am coldly rational about the whole subject...[but]...there is a single thread that remains caught on a nail on the other side." Like many educated believers, Stanford sees clearly the dangers in literal belief in the Devil, but he also realizes the need for some explanation of radical evil. He knows that mainline churches are reluctant to mention the Devil, but he sees him as crucial to the New Testament story of salvation. A readable and informative popular work; for public libraries. ?C. Robert Nixon, Lafayette, Ind.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Earl Goodman:

This The Devil: A Biography book is not really ordinary book, you have it then the world is in your hands. The benefit you get by reading this book is definitely information inside this reserve incredible fresh, you will get info which is getting deeper you actually read a lot of information you will get. That The Devil: A Biography without we comprehend teach the one who examining it become critical in thinking and analyzing. Don't end up being worry The Devil: A Biography can bring whenever you are and not make your case space or bookshelves' turn out to be full because you can have it in your lovely laptop even mobile phone. This The Devil: A Biography having fine arrangement in word along with layout, so you will not really feel uninterested in reading.

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