



# History of the Devil

*By Gerald Messadie*

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Exploring the personification of evil, through the ages and across cultures, a French historian and critic shows that our image of Satan - the antithesis of God and good - was a concept unknown to the Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, Hindus and Chinese. The Devil as we know him was probably invented in Persia six centuries before Christ, by Zoroastrian high priests eager to demonize their adversaries and aid their own political machinations. The image of evil has been a useful tool of political power ever since, from the proponents of the Spanish Inquisition to the Cold Warriors, fundamentalists and proponents of "ethnic cleansing" of our own time. Gerald Messadie's historical references and broad cultural analysis aim to show that it is precisely a belief in the Devil that lies at the root of contemporary religious fanaticism.

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## History of the Devil By Gerald Messadie Bibliography

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## **Editorial Review**

From Publishers Weekly

Now that God's biography has been written, by Jack Miles, it's time to give the Devil his due. Messadie's book is the finest of the legion of recent books released about the archfiend and his cohorts. Using a comparative and phenomenological approach, the author traces the idea of the Devil from ancient Greece and India to contemporary Western culture. What emerges from Messadie's explorations is that the Devil is a very recent concept, arising primarily out of Zoroastrianism in Persia in the sixth century B.C. In that religion, a personified evil being is coexistent and coeval with a personification of the good, and Messadie examines how that dualism has slipped into Christianity, in particular. Thus the author concludes, on the basis of careful historical study, that the Devil does not exist in societies where the need for a force opposing the good is absent. Finally, Messadie aptly demonstrates how people in contemporary culture, in the absence of the personification of evil, use the Devil to vilify their enemies and to promote hatred.

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From Library Journal

Given the great success of books about angels, is it any surprise that the Fallen Angel himself, the devil, wants to horn in on the territory? Actually, Messadie's book is a comparative historical study of the development of the concept of the devil in different cultures, from ancient Oceania to 20th-century Europe and America. While the idea of the devil as evil personified is often absent from Eastern cultures, such an idea is common to many Western cultures. Yet Messadie's conclusions call into question the existence in the late 20th century of a personified evil figure whose presence often becomes the pretext for human abdication of moral responsibility. Massadie's highly engaging and provocative cultural history is essential for most libraries.

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