



The Devil: A New Biography

By Philip C. Almond

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"Although the Devil still 'lives' in modern popular culture, for the past 250 years he has become marginal to the dominant concerns of Western intellectual thought. That life could not be thought or imagined without him, that he was a part of the everyday, continually present in nature and history, and active at the depths of our selves, has been all but forgotten. It is the aim of this work to bring modern readers to a deeper appreciation of how, from the early centuries of the Christian period through to the recent beginnings of the modern world, the human story could not be told and human life could not be lived apart from the 'life' of the Devil. With that comes the deeper recognition that, for the better part of the last two thousand years, the battle between good and evil in the hearts and minds of men and women was but the reflection of a cosmic battle between God and Satan, the divine and the diabolic, that was at the heart of history itself."?from *The Devil*

Lucifer, Mephistopheles, Beelzebub; Ha-Satan or the Adversary; Iblis or Shaitan: no matter what name he travels under, the Devil has throughout the ages and across civilizations been a compelling and charismatic presence. In Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, the supposed reign of God has long been challenged by the fiery malice of his opponent, as contending forces of good and evil have between them weighed human souls in the balance.

In *The Devil*, Philip C. Almond explores the figure of evil incarnate from the first centuries of the Christian era. Along the way, he describes the rise of demonology as an intellectual and theological pursuit, the persecution as witches of women believed to consort with the Devil and his minions, and the decline in the belief in Hell and in angels and demons as corporeal beings as a result of the Enlightenment. Almond shows that the Prince of Darkness remains an irresistible subject in history, religion, art, literature, and culture.

Almond brilliantly locates the "life" of the Devil within the broader Christian story of which it is inextricably a part; the "demonic paradox" of the Devil as both God's enforcer and his enemy is at the heart of Christianity. Woven throughout the account of the Christian history of the Devil is another complex and complicated history: that of the idea of the Devil in Western thought. Sorcery, witchcraft, possession, even melancholy, have all been laid at the Devil's doorstep. Until the Enlightenment enforced a "disenchantment" with the old archetypes, even rational figures such as Thomas Aquinas were obsessed with the nature of the Devil and the specific characteristics of the orders of

demons and angels. It was a significant moment both in the history of demonology and in theology when Benedict de Spinoza (1632–1677) denied the Devil's existence; almost four hundred years later, popular fascination with the idea of the Devil has not yet dimmed.

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Editorial Review

Review

"What we can find here is a serious look through the ages at our choices to not just personify evil, but make it a central, even necessary, part of the culture. Almond creates a readable, if not comfortable, journey to that regard.... Clearly, the devil is not dead, even if modern thought has him in assisted living." – Thomas Whitaker, *U.S. Catholic Magazine* (June 2016)

"The book's greatest strength is Almond's ability to present complicated theological and philosophical debates with clarity and in an engaging style. The sweeping scope of the work is admirable.... It will be of great interest to a broad readership, both within and beyond academia." – Jason Coy, *Speculum* (July 2016)

"By the time the reader has reached the final page of Philip Almond's (presumably unauthorised) bio-graphy, one is possessed by a curious and wholly unexpected sensation – that of sympathy for 'the Devil.'" ?Jonathan Gornall, *The National* (May 2014)

"Almond's contribution to the Devil's bibliography is welcome in particular because he makes it clear just how tenuous the Christian theory of evil is, and how much it potentially undermines the power and goodness of God; the commander of all things evil is a dangerous concept for monotheistic religion, complicating the already difficult problem of the existence of evil in a world created by an overwhelmingly good deity." ?Noel Rooney, *Fortean Times* (October 2014)

"Almond has accomplished an impressive feat in compressing the long and complicated life, or lives, of the Prince of Darkness into a clear, coherent, and engaging narrative. For students and general readers, this is an excellent introduction to the Devil's story, and scholars will find it a valuable synthesis as well." ?*The Medieval Review*

"Almond's biography carves out of the mass of works related to the diabolical a carefully delineated history that is both scholarly and accessible and that contributes to the intertwined fields of Christian theology, magic, witchcraft, and demonology. . . . Almond's careful overview of the Western perspective of the devil provides a valuable and highly readable explanation for one of the most bizarre and devastating ideas in Western history." ?Gary K. Waite, *H-Albion* (January 2015)

"With its understanding that the devil is best understood through his history, with its many stimulating and illuminating *obiter dicta*. . . with its up-to-date bibliography, and with its understanding of the moral importance of the devil as at least a metaphor of real evil as opposed to treating the subject as merely a literary topos, Almond's book is a welcome addition to the subject."?Jeffrey Burton Russel, *The Catholic Historical Review* (Summer 2015)

"Philip C. Almond's new book is a triumph. With humor and charm, it proceeds accessibly from the earliest Jewish writings on demons to eighteenth-century attempts to challenge the belief that Satan was active in human affairs. Angels, giants, demoniacs, witches, and divines fill its pages, and the breadth of research informing the book is impressively broad. Yet the text is informal and readable. Almond has made theology and demonology approachable and his account rips along. This is an entertaining and informative read."?Marion Gibson, University of Exeter

"Philip C. Almond's new book spans the whole range of time, amounting to two and a half millennia, in which Satan has been a figure in the Western imagination. It is lucid, explaining often quite complex theology in a manner that can be understood by, and makes the material genuinely interesting and exciting to, any readers. This is probably the best scholarly book on the subject currently available to a general audience."?Ronald Hutton, University of Bristol

"This fascinating?and tragic?account of his influence through history will be a real eye-opener to anyone who supposes that the inconvenience of his not existing would limit the damage the Devil could do. Fundamentally, the Devil owes his powers to the problem of reconciling God's goodness with God's omnipotence. Following with deep learning a trail of confusion, dogmatism, and persecution, Philip C. Almond in his vivid biography convincingly demonstrates that the Devil was, and is, a very bad idea."?Jill Paton Walsh, author of *Knowledge of Angels*

About the Author

Philip C. Almond is Associate Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences (Research) and Professorial Research Fellow at the Centre for the History of European Discourses at The University of Queensland. He is the author of many books, including *The Devil: A New Biography* and *Afterlife: A History of Life after Death*, both from Cornell; *The Lancashire Witches: A Chronicle of Sorcery and Death on Pendle Hill*; *Adam and Eve in Seventeenth-Century Thought*; and *Heaven and Hell in Enlightenment England*.

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