

# Horizons

<http://journals.cambridge.org/HOR>

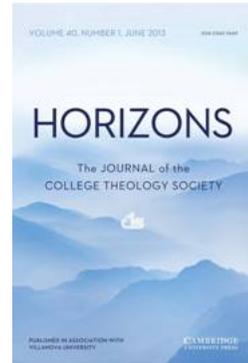
Additional services for **Horizons**:

Email alerts: [Click here](#)

Subscriptions: [Click here](#)

Commercial reprints: [Click here](#)

Terms of use : [Click here](#)



---

***The Quest for the Historical Satan.* By Miguel A. De La Torre and Albert Hernandez. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011. xii + 248 pages. \ \$20.00 (paper).**

Neil Forsyth

Horizons / Volume 40 / Issue 01 / June 2013, pp 133 - 134  
DOI: 10.1017/hor.2013.23, Published online: 31 July 2013

**Link to this article:** [http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract\\_S0360966913000236](http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0360966913000236)

**How to cite this article:**

Neil Forsyth (2013). Horizons, 40, pp 133-134 doi:10.1017/hor.2013.23

**Request Permissions :** [Click here](#)

The final division represents the Third Order of the Brothers and Sisters of Penance, opening with the *Exhortation of St. Francis to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance*. The authors present Angela of Foligno as representative of the early Franciscan penitents, giving excerpts from her *Memorial* that describe her mystical experiences. The Third Order Regular is represented by Mary of the Passion and Marianne Cope of Molokai. The Secular Franciscan Order is then presented with the Martyrs of Nagasaki, Jean-Marie Vianney, and Matt Talbot. The final section of the book presents the Secular Franciscan Order Rule approved in 1978, and the Third Order Regular Rule approved in 1982.

The authors admit that it was difficult to make choices. One figure passed over is Elizabeth of Hungary, the earliest recognized Franciscan penitent. The approach of spiritual theology tends to overlook the social dimension of early Franciscan spirituality. The focus on inner life also tends to leave history largely confined to chronology rather than as integral to the development of practices that describe Franciscan life.

This text could be used in an undergraduate course in spiritual traditions, but the instructor will need to supply information about the historical context of some of the early Franciscan texts. But, even given some shortcomings, the authors have produced a valuable anthology for an undergraduate course, as well as for Franciscans who seek to know their own tradition better.

MICHAEL W. BLASTIC  
*Siena College*

*The Quest for the Historical Satan*. By Miguel A. De La Torre and Albert Hernandez. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011. xii + 248 pages. \$20.00 (paper). doi: 10.1017/hor.2013.23

I am sympathetic to the themes and approach of this occasionally fascinating but usually frustrating book and only wish it were better so that my review would not have to be quite so critical. The title of the book recalls Albert Schweitzer's *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*. The book advocates that we get away from the adversarial model of the relation of Satan and Christ (though the word *satan* means "adversary") in favor of a notion that in one of his earliest historical-biblical forms Satan was a trickster. This is not a new idea: see, for example, chapter 11 of my book *The Satanic Epic*. Unfortunately the authors of this book never manage to lay to rest the adversary idea other than by wishing it away, though they are honest enough to recognize it dominates the history they trawl through.

The book begins from the stark opposition of good and evil as represented in the thrillers of Frank E. Peretti, such as *This Present Darkness*, and by US Presidents Reagan and Bush in their phrases “the evil empire” and “the Axis of Evil.” The authors hope that their study will help move readers beyond this simplistic dichotomy toward a better understanding of “the ambiguities of right and wrong,” and eventually to “a more balanced moral life” (11). This praiseworthy goal is to be attained by showing readers how the history of Satan, in all its multiplicity and variety, is incompatible either with the figure in red tights with a forked tail and cloven hoofs or with the fantasies generated by the “War on Terror.” Yet the authors do not include in their bibliography the major American books on the devil, indeed specifically Jeffrey Burton Russell’s works about the history of the concept. This is all the more surprising in that one scholar they do cite is Henry Ansgar Kelly, whose own work on the subject frequently acknowledges Russell, even in disagreement.

Much is confused. The authors seem to say that the modern nation-state emerged “from the violence and scattered debris of colonial empires of the early modern period” (136), which would have surprised Mazzini and Garibaldi, who thought they still had to fight for a unified Italy in the nineteenth century. Two dates are given within a few pages for Theodosius finally making the Roman Empire Christian: was it 394 or 395? On successive pages the Dark Ages (a contested concept in itself) are said to last from the late sixth to the tenth century, and then from 476/525 to about 800 CE (140–41). We are even told that Barbara Tuchman’s fine history of the fourteenth century, *A Distant Mirror*, is a best-selling novel (153).

When the authors move toward their conclusion they ask whether the death of Satan will lead to the death of God. This is a very bold question, and their reflection on it is the best part of the book. It leads them into a reiteration of their notion of Satan as trickster. After a brief and undocumented review of global tricksters, we come to the vital evidence in the Judeo-Christian tradition: YHWH’s demand of Abraham to sacrifice Isaac (in Genesis 22), the demands made of Moses (the passage in Exodus 4:24 where God tries to kill him), though Satan is not present in either passage, as the authors admit, only in the rewriting in *Jubilees*; Job, where Satan clearly acts on God’s instructions; the desert temptation of Jesus; Peter’s testing; and finally that of Judas. Running the dark side of YHWH together with explicitly satanic passages is problematic, and indeed it leads these honest men to ask whether God himself is not the real trickster. They conclude by reviewing the terrible history of what the Church has done in the name of extirpating Satan.

NEIL FORSYTH

*Université de Lausanne, Switzerland*