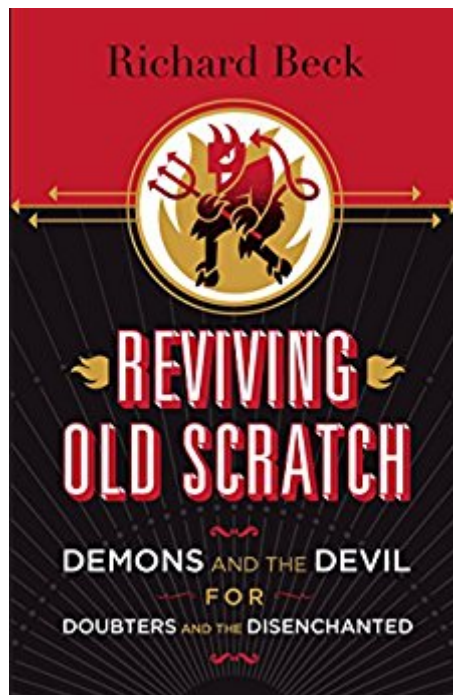




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Reviving Old Scratch: Demons And The Devil For Doubters And The Disenchanted



Synopsis

The devil has fallen on hard times. Surveys say that even the majority of Christians doubt Satan's existence. Burdened by doubts, skeptical believers find themselves divorced from Jesus dramatic confrontation with Satan in the Gospels and from the struggle that galvanized the early church. In *Reviving Old Scratch*, popular blogger and theologian Richard Beck reintroduces the devil to the modern world with a biblical, bold, and urgent vision of spiritual warfare: we must resist the devil by joining the kingdom of God's subversive campaign to interrupt the world with love. Beck shows how conservative Christians too often overspiritualize the devil and demons, and progressive Christians reduce these forces to social justice issues. By understanding evil as a very real force in the world, we are better able to name it for what it is and thus to combat it as Jesus did. Beck's own work in a prison Bible study and at a church for recovering addicts convinced him to take Satan more seriously, and they provide compelling illustrations as he challenges the contemporary versions of evil forces. Because if Jesus took Satan seriously, then so should we.

Book Information

File Size: 812 KB

Print Length: 200 pages

Publisher: Fortress Press (June 3, 2016)

Publication Date: June 3, 2016

Sold by:Â Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B01GOZRQ42

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #25,188 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #5 inÂ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Religion & Spirituality > Christian Books & Bibles > Theology > Angelology & Demonology #6 inÂ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Religion & Spirituality > Christian Books & Bibles > Bible Study & Reference > New Testament Study > Jesus, the Gospels & Acts #14 inÂ Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Theology > Angelology & Demonology

Customer Reviews

When it comes to Christian beliefs about Satan and demons, there are typically two basic approaches. So-called "conservative" Christians tend to view the issue solely as a spiritual matter. Satan and demons are spiritual beings, and they affect the spiritual well-being of people. On the other hand, so-called "progressive" Christians, if they even have a belief in such things, reduce demons to matters of injustice, often systemic or political in nature. Richard Beck challenges both approaches, which is perhaps the greatest strength of this book. Those looking for stories resembling scenes from "The Exorcist" will be sorely disappointed, for Beck is convinced that the effects of Satan and his minions are much worse than simply inducing vomiting in those who have fallen prey to their onslaught. Likewise, those who equate spiritual warfare with political activism will be pressed to acknowledge that perhaps there really is a "spirit" within the structures that needs to be exorcised or fought in order for real transformation to take place. This book is written for Christians, and it will be helpful for those from a wide range of backgrounds. Those who've become embarrassed by Christian claims about the Devil as a pitch-fork carrying, red creature with pointy ears, might come to see the reality of Satan after reading this book. Likewise, those obsessed with exorcisms and demonic possession, as understood in some (charismatic) circles emphasizing spiritual warfare, might find that Satan's power is much greater than even they had imagined. Beck is a gifted communicator who draws from a range of source material to illustrate his points, including such diverse things as Scooby-Doo, Pat Benatar, and Twitter. Most relevant are the stories that he shares from his time leading a weekly Bible study at a maximum-security prison. I highly recommend this book to all who have an interest in this topic.

***Main (and only) Criticism** - The editing work is quite poor. Typos are so numerous in places that I wondered if I had received an advance copy that hadn't been proofread by an editor.

tl;dr: I would recommend buying this book, as long as you understand that Dr. Beck is beginning the conversation, not ending it. I doubt that, for anyone, this book will resolve any tension they feel or offer closure/certainty of any sort. However, it may provide for you a framing that helps you dive deeper.--In *Reviving Old Scratch*, Dr. Beck argues that-- regardless of whether Satan is a sentient being with a personal will and physical/spiritual presence-- there is a certain understanding of evil and of the Devil that is both robust and thoroughly Christian. Per my understanding of the text, he argues that the pathway to understanding the Devil lies through re-enchanting our worldview, regardless of whether we are theologically conservative or liberal. Both sides of the theological fence have become disenchanted with the world, and both need to re-engage with what it means for

the immanent God to be incarnate through acts of love. The content of book hearkens back to C.S. Lewis' "That Hideous Strength". If you enjoyed this book and are looking to see its themes fleshed out in a work of fiction, I would highly recommend Lewis' Space Trilogy. The final book in the series addresses many of these themes, and I would wonder if the author was similarly affected in some capacity. This book very effectively outlines the fundamentals of his position, and of why we should care about it. I'm not sure that a hostile reader would be persuaded, but a reader open to the ideas it presents would likely find them engaging. Unfortunately, the limitations of the book are in its simplicity. I struggled with whether to rate this "3" or "4" stars, but ultimately, I feel that it was too shallow to accomplish what it set out to do. If the book was able to engage in a mental conversation with me by answering the questions I had, I would have bumped it up to "4" stars. If it was able to do so in a way that I found profound and masterful, I would have bumped it up to "5" stars. Below are some specific points where I felt the book, had it been written differently, could have been elevated from "3" to "4" stars:-

Dr. Beck pulls out some tensions we have with scripture, but fails to resolve (or even address) the tensions in ways that leave the reader satisfied. For example, in the "Jesus the Exorcist" chapter, he addresses the Jeffersonian approach to "cutting up your Bible" and removing the passages we find troubling. He claims that this is problematic. However, elsewhere (such as in the chapter, "Angels & Demons"), he notes discrepancies in how modern people understand scripture and the world versus how ancient people do. This is disconcerting and, even if the author does not wish to sidetrack the reader, the tension-- which is quite central to the book-- should at least be addressed, so as not to leave a reader in a more confused state than when they began.

While I'm sympathetic to Dr. Beck's arguments in the chapter, "The White Witch", for rejecting penal substitutionary atonement theories-- in fact, I am inclined to agree with him-- he has stirred up an anthill without being able to deal with the resulting bug bites. In most of today's theological institutions, including churches and seminaries, rejecting penal substitution is akin to rejecting a fundamental of Christianity. For Dr. Beck to throw that out as a fragment of a chapter without addressing or dealing with the profound implications is like putting a hungry person in the middle of the Pacific without a boat and expecting them to fish. You just completely upended someone's world in order to get them access to what they need, but didn't give them any of the tools or resources they need to deal with the complete change of circumstances.

I found myself unsure of how to apply much of what he advocated for. In the "Holy Ghost Congo Lines" chapter, he argues for rejecting a disenchanted worldview and embracing enchantment, but he doesn't tell us how to get there. At the end of the chapter, he spends maybe two paragraphs trying to elucidate how we can do this. Those two (or so) paragraphs should have and could have, frankly, merited several

chapters on their own. In "Angels & Demons", he argues that Christians should reject the Zeitgeist of the world and embrace Christ's vision of love, but I don't understand how we're supposed to apply that or what that looks like. He rejects the actions of those such as Westboro Baptist, but fails to explain how our application must lead in a different direction. In conclusion, my core problem with the book is an inconsistency between its content and its method. The book argues that we should reject disenchantment, find depth and meaning in the world, and really live out a bold and revolutionary love. Unfortunately, the book is very shallow-- this is a very short book and is not, itself, enchanting. It fails to carry out the bold and revolutionary work that it tasked itself with. Its content is great, but it's coffee-table level. Would I buy it again? Yes, but knowing that I would be dissatisfied at the end. If Dr. Beck were to put out a follow-up, in which he dove into the issues he raises in-depth and brings the reader to enchanted, strange new places in bold and revolutionary ways, I would be thrilled to join him. As it is, unfortunately, this book isn't sufficient to complete the work it sets out for itself. This book was paid for by me. I did not receive any compensation or free copies. I have no affiliation with Dr. Beck/etc. I have no conflicts of interest that I believe I need to disclose.

Reviving Old Scratch delivers on its promise of teaching modern Christians about the devil, demons, and spiritual warfare, but is not a book about the Devil. It is a clear guide to the way of Jesus, the kingdom of God, and how to be a faithful Christian. Richard Beck shares how he came to take the Prince of Darkness as seriously as Jesus did while working in a psychiatric hospital and a maximum security prison and worshiping in a charismatic, mission church on the poor side of town. He shows how spiritual warfare is social justice and something more direct and personal than social justice. There are at least a dozen stories from this book that would show up in sermons that I preached if I were preaching regularly. You should read the book yourself just in case your preacher does not use every one of them. They are that good.

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