

Horton who?

by [Martin E. Marty](#) in the [April 7, 1999](#) issue

It was a major event in American Protestantism when, in 1933, Douglas Horton translated Karl Barth's *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, just as it was when Walter Marshall Horton, formerly a liberal, wrote his own *Realistic Theology*." Hang on to that sentence from my *Righteous Empire* (Dial, 1970). I have to prove that I can tell the Hortons apart.

Fast-forward to last month in Tuscaloosa, where Theodore L. "Ted" Trost, new to the University of Alabama faculty, graced me with a copy of his dissertation, subtitled "A Study of Douglas Horton's Illustrative Career." That gift inspired talk about Horton and his spouse, Mildred McAfee Horton. I told some anecdotes about her as president of Wellesley. "But in your book," interrupted Ted, "you have her as president of Mount Holyoke." Uh-oh.

Trost winked and suggested I read footnote 23 on page 19 of his paper. "A recent discussion . . . refers to the 'theologian Walter Douglas Horton.' . . . The author confused Douglas Horton with Walter Horton, Congregationalist, theology professor at Oberlin College and contemporary (though not relative) of Douglas Horton. This happened often during Douglas Horton's lifetime, too. Indeed, Horton informed a graduate student that he once received Walter Marshall Horton's salary check by mistake." Trost adds that other scholars confused his subject with English Congregationalist R. F. Horton (calling him Douglas R. F. Horton), liturgy scholar Horton Davies or early United Church of Christ leader Truman Douglass. (Gotcha back, Trost: on page 185 you misspell his name Truman Douglas.)

The "recent discussion" Trost alludes to occurs in my *Modern American Religion: Under God: Indivisible*. Yep, there on pages 270-71 and 233 I give you two errors for the price of one, Walter Douglas Horton and Mount Holyoke. I have Douglas Horton right twice in my own footnotes, and I have Walter Marshall Horton right on 14 pages in *The Noise of Conflict*. But a lot of good that did me as I grinned with chagrin at Tuscaloosa.

I have a theory that no book is inerrant, including the Bible. I've heard that there's at least one typographical error in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*. Still, it is disquieting to see that the Horton confusion slipped in.

Compounding my guilt: I knew both Hortons. Walter Marshall was a slight acquaintance and Douglas I got to know at the third session of the Second Vatican Council. And Douglas's daughter, Peggy Horton Grant, is the spouse of my colleague Robert M. Grant, with whom I've swapped Horton anecdotes for decades. And Douglas's nephew Jamie Horton was best man at the wedding of our daughter. With all those connections, you'd think I could have gotten this right. (By the way, theologian Robert McAfee Brown is also a nephew.)

Fame is fleeting. Trost credits Douglas Horton with good years as dean of Harvard Divinity School and raiser of funds for remodeling its library, including the basement, to which his own portrait had been relegated. My hunch is that Trost's mention of Douglas in his book will help get Douglas's portrait moved upstairs, if it hasn't been moved there already.

And you can be sure that when the paperback of my book comes out, Wellesley will replace Mount Holyoke and there will be no more reference to "Walter Douglas Horton." Meanwhile, those who read it may spend a good deal of time in the afterlife trying to find all the Hortons in their rightful paradisiacal places, properly identified at last.