

the center of prophetic fulfillment" [p. 27]) with the correct understanding that must be based on "a Christ-centered interpretation of Old Testament promises" (p. 27).

Using the theme of "Holy Wars," the writer traces and interprets the holy wars of scripture and lays a solid base for his interpretation of the last "Holy War"—Armageddon. The interpretation is adequately founded and well done. The reviewer has a problem, however, with the "kings of the east," as presented by LaRondelle. While C. M. Maxwell problematically suggests that "Christ and God the Father" are the "kings from the east" (*God Cares*, vol. 2: *The Message of Revelation for You and Your Family* [Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1985], p. 443), as LaRondelle observes (p. 119), it is equally problematic to suggest that the angels of heaven are kings. As far as I know, angels have never been called "kings" but are rather "ministering spirits." It would therefore be out of place to interpret the "kings from the east" as angels from heaven.

A preferable way to handle the question would surely be to ask, "Who in heaven are called 'kings'?" While the author makes some reference to this concept (p. 121), he, unfortunately, does not develop it sufficiently. It could be pointed out that Christ is called "King of kings" (Rev 19:16). The kings of this earth have given their allegiance to Satan. Then who are the kings who are still loyal to Christ and are with Him in heaven? The clue is possibly given in Rev 4-5, where the twenty-four elders, who were redeemed from this earth (possibly those Jesus took with Him when He ascended—Eph 4:8), are referred to as "kings and priests" (Rev 5:10). Here we have "kings" with Christ in heaven, and they will come with Him when all heaven returns for the final victory over Satan and his evil forces, and to welcome the redeemed.

With the term "the east," as used in prophecy, established by LaRondelle as "heaven," it can be understood, therefore, that (with the above suggestion) the "kings from the east" might refer to Christ leading the twenty-four elders at the second advent, all surrounded by the holy angels—the ministering spirits, God's army—as they return as a mighty legion for the Battle of Armageddon.

*Chariots of Salvation* has been long overdue. It is well written and should be read by every student of Bible prophecy.

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McGrath, Alister E. *The Mystery of the Cross*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988. 192 pp. \$11.95.

Every so often I pick up a book that not only has an impact on my scholarly discipline, but has a profound influence on my life as a whole.

*The Mystery of the Cross*, by Alister McGrath, is such a book. A lecturer in Christian Doctrine and Ethics at Oxford University, McGrath sees the cross as a powerful critique of the way in which modern scholars approach the study of Christian faith.

The book is divided into two main parts. In the first part McGrath argues that the cross is the central reality of Christian faith. Christianity's uniqueness is not found in its teachings, such as the Sermon on the Mount, but in a symbol of death and despair. The second part of the book contains an attempt to explicate the meaning of the cross, with particular emphasis on its meaning for today.

McGrath argues for the centrality of the cross on a number of grounds: (1) The NT writers not only asserted that the cross is the central reality of the gospel (1 Cor 15:3, 4); they placed it at the climax of each of the four Gospels. (2) The cross is the one aspect of the Christian religion that is truly unique, thus providing Christianity with both its basic identity and its relevance to a questioning world. (3) The cross has always confronted those who seek to approach Christianity. Not only is the cross at the heart of the kerygma, but in baptism and the celebration of the Lord's Supper, the cross is continually brought home to the worshipping community. Therefore, according to McGrath, to be a Christian is to find the cross inescapable.

In the process of identifying the cross as the central reality of Christian faith, McGrath offers a scathing rebuke to biblical scholarship for its neglect of the cross. He mocks scholarship's supposed "objectivity" by invoking the searching criticisms of Gadamer and Polanyi, and by noting how scholarly pictures of Jesus end up looking like self-portraits of those drawing the pictures. He needles the hidden agendas of scholars who, from a desire for advancement, often present bizarre distortions of Christian faith in order to gain notoriety, the most dependable route to publication.

What is the meaning of the cross? Above all, suggests McGrath, it provides a unique picture of God, a God willing to submit to humiliation, powerlessness, abandonment, and death. But, McGrath maintains, it is just such a God who can provide the answers to the two critical questions of modern secular experience: How can I find God when all I experience is his absence? And how can I believe in God in a world of pain and suffering? To these questions the cross provides the only meaningful answers. The crisis of maintaining faith while experiencing the absence of God is not a modern invention; it was tasted by God at the cross. And the same God who produced an Easter out of an instrument of torture, can do the same in everyday experience. The cross also indicates that God Himself is willing to share in the pain and suffering of every individual, thus providing dignity and significance to what otherwise would be void of meaning. In the light of the cross, it is an illusion to assume that God intervenes to avert suffering in every crisis. Obedience does not lead to a primrose path where all thorns have been removed. Because of such

insights, McGrath believes that the cross is the chief point of contact between the Christian faith and the secular world.

For McGrath, the cross challenges the believer to reject the sugar-coated gospel of success for one that makes sense of life, death, and suffering as they really are. The cross challenges the church to reject secular models of exercising power so that it can conquer in weakness, as Christ did. The cross challenges the theologian to reject the discipline's increasing distance from the life and concerns of the church in favor of a theology that is oriented to the pastoral and missiological needs of practical, everyday Christian living.

As with any other book, it is possible to criticize *The Mystery of the Cross*. The book's format leads to considerable repetition of some of the main points. McGrath's writing style is at times opaque, and it is often difficult to follow the flow of thought. But even here the opacity is more due to the depth and richness of the thought than to any confusion or muddy thinking on the part of the author.

Many scholars will probably find McGrath's chiding of their discipline offensive, but much of what he says is right to the point. We can all stand a little honest criticism. And for the general reader, who struggles to find an absent god and to regain again a sense of belonging to eternal realities, this book is a gold mine of insight and an infusion of faith.

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Neusner, Jacob. *The Enchantments of Judaism: Rites of Transformation From Birth Through Death*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1987. xv + 224 pp. \$15.95.

Jacob Neusner dons many hats in this work: as a liturgist, he reviews and comments upon the basic religious practices of contemporary Judaism; as a scholar of religion, he describes and analyzes the foundational myths that impel Judaic belief and action; as an interpreter of Judaism to the Gentile world, he shows how holiness and sanctification lie at the heart of the ordinary life of the Jewish people; and as a committed Jewish theologian, Neusner presents his life's work from a new perspective—a vision of the imaginative and creative power of Torah.

The bulk of Neusner's book falls logically into halves, parts one and three deal with ceremonies and rites for the individual, while part two covers the same topics for the group. The work reviews major events in the cycle of Jewish life, from birth (circumcision and naming), to adolescence (*Bar or Bat Mitzvah*), to adulthood (marriage), and finally to death (burial). At the same time, the author leads his readers through a separate, more public cycle of festival and holiday observances, including Sabbath, Pass-