

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-

over, and Days of Awe ("High Holidays"). He documents not only the rituals of communal observance, but also the nearly abysmal lack of attention to many of these rites.

By intertwining these separate cycles—the one entirely individual and gripping, the other wholly communal and jejune—Neusner weaves together the fabric of Judaism. What do Jews say and do on a day-to-day basis? How does Judaic practice orient their lives in sacred time and space? These basic questions receive ample attention in Neusner's discussion of the capability of the intellect to surmount reality and lead an entire community to an enchanted world.

The tone of these discussions is engaging, ranging from presentations of the details of a given rite to autobiographical anecdotes aimed at illustrating the power and impact of Judaism through an insightful and personal treatment of many of his topics (such as his feelings about his own wedding and its significance). Neusner moves far beyond discussions of the liturgy found in his *Way of Torah: An Introduction to Judaism* (4th ed., [Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1987]). After following Neusner through these entirely new discussions, the reader nonetheless wants more.

Neusner supplies that further discussion in the final portion of the book, which turns from the liturgy itself to the theology that underlies it. In the most challenging segment of his monograph, Neusner seeks to explain why "Judaism [is] intensely affective in the private life and remarkably irrelevant to the public" (p. 195).

The answer lies in two separate Judaic thought systems, one essentially religious and one ultimately political. The *religious* aspect of Judaism—"with its Adam and Eve, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, slaves in Egypt, Moses in Sinai, sanctification in the here and now and salvation at the end of time" (p. 196)—underlies the private and individual expressions of contemporary Judaism. But, according to Neusner, it is Judaism's *political* vision—"the destruction of the Jews in Europe, the creation of the State of Israel" (p. 197)—that seems to guide public life in Judaism. Is it any wonder, then, that synagogues usually sit empty on Sabbath, while Israeli Independence Day celebrations are always crowded? Neusner here reflects upon the basic insight of more than twenty years of essays on Zionism and the Holocaust, brought together in *Stranger at Home: "The Holocaust," Zionism, and American Judaism* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1985). In *Enchantments*, Neusner succeeds in explaining the *outcome* of the irreconcilable tension between the "Judaism of Torah" and the "Judaism of Holocaust and Israel": contemporary Jewry lies fractured between two realms, a shattered competition between individual and collective consciousness.

Precisely because of the self-evidence of Neusner's claim (once he so clearly states it), the basic thesis challenges his readers: How can Judaism

be integrated? How can the best of a religious world view be used to cope with the destruction and triumphs of political reality?

In the end, Neusner urges contemporary Judaism to adopt (or better, to re-adopt) a new mode of expression. Jews should move beyond production of holy words to the use of various artistic media, Neusner claims, so as to best confront the difficult situation facing American Jewry. "*We are Jews through the power of our imaginations,*" writes the author. This book—a work of art in itself—shows just how powerful that imagination can be.

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