

what it wants. Akenson's observation and statement that covenantal cultures of South Africa, Northern Ireland and Israel have been "painting their rocks green when someone wants to be shown a nice pasture" (356), is his most controversial statement. In support of this he notes that while all three adopted the trappings of liberal parliamentary democracy, with public election campaigns, secret ballots, and open parliamentary debates, the system has been "skewed so as to preclude democratic rights for, respectively, blacks, Roman Catholics, and Palestinians" (356).

Akenson's final recommendation points out that compromise within covenantal cultures is considered a sign of weakness. Time and distance must be granted in order for leaders to talk to themselves, and to their constituents, to become accustomed to the potential for change, and to convince themselves that the idea was theirs from the first. Akenson affirms that, as South Africa and Ulster have shown, societies can slowly redefine themselves and accept quite a radical change. In dealing with covenantal cultures, Akenson encourages people to think in terms of societies that conform to a covenantal "blueprint," a covenantal cosmology, based on the ancient Hebrew template. He warns, however, that this pattern may well become one the "most effective ways for small nations to fortify themselves" (357) in a world that is fast becoming more confusing.

Akenson's theoretical model of a covenantal grid assists the reader's understanding of the presuppositions, the root paradigms and the worldviews of the cultures of South Africa, Israel, and Ulster in their struggle to come to terms with the world around them. *God's Peoples* is an important book assessing the self-perceptions of three cultures, the basing of their identities on a narrowly focused understanding of the biblical texts, and the important role played by the Bible in the fundamental foundation upon which they have written their history and understood their world.

Moreover, Akenson's theories and models provide the reader with valuable insights into religious war in general and its consequent atrocities such as those inflicted upon and by the Serbs, Croats and Muslims in Bosnia. Akenson helps put into perspective the reasons the critical nature of the current negotiations between Britain and the Irish Republican Army, between Israel and the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and Jericho, and the first free elections in South Africa. Based on sound scholarship, *God's Peoples* is written with vigour, supplying valuable critical apparatus and supplemental maps, charts and an index.

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Postmodernism, Reason and Religion. By Ernest Gellner. London: Routledge, 1992. ISBN 0-415-08024-X. Pp. ix+96.

Judging by its title, one might expect in this volume a broad discussion of the relationship between reason and religion in light of the phenomenon of postmodernism, suitable, perhaps, to use for teaching undergraduates in the philosophy of

religion. One discovers quickly, however, that this is not the case. In this work, Gellner treats the reader to the development of a very specific argument which deals with each of these three areas: absolutism, as manifested in Islamic fundamentalism; relativism, typified by postmodernism, particularly in its anthropological mode; and a third, middle way, his so-called "rationalist fundamentalism." Again contrary to expectations, he does not really discuss the relationship, if any, among these three areas, nor is there a symmetry in his emphases.

Gellner's book addresses the phenomena of postmodernism in three major sections. In the first, he argues that absolutism is alive and well, despite the consensus that secularism prevails throughout the globe. Islam, unlike the other major civilizations of the world, has provided a medium in which fundamentalism can and has developed, defying the trend toward secularization. Gellner provides an historical argument for why this is the case.

In the second section, one encounters what can only be described as a diatribe against postmodernism. This section comprises roughly half the book, and he summons considerable vitriol in his attempt to discredit the entire enterprise known as postmodernism. He makes plentiful references to its "mist," "metatwaddle," and pretentious obscurity: "[i]t is only the abstract, unhistorical formulation of the hermeneutic doctrine," he says, "which obscures its utter silliness." He even intimates that a major impetus for postmodernism is that it provides projects which tend to garner tenure at universities. Still, among his use of *ad hominem* and caricature, there reside three main objections. First, the familiar argument that postmodernism is internally inconsistent, and hence untenable. The postmodernist, he claims, if consistent, should lapse into silence, "rather like the *avant-garde* painter who secures admiration for a canvas which he simply covers with uniform black paint." But, of course, they do not. Secondly, postmodernism is neither practical nor practicable. It is so abstract and arcane that it is out of touch with the "real world." Its path to perception of social reality is neither possible, necessary, nor desirable. Gellner argues that "the real and greatest objection to relativism is not that it proposes a false solution (though it does), but that it prevents us from even seeing and formulating our problem." Thirdly, it is utterly plain, he argues, that cognitive relativism is false: "The existence of trans-cultural and amoral knowledge is *the* fact of our lives." For the postmodernist to avoid this truth is to avoid reality.

In his third major section, Gellner argues with some self-deprecation for the acceptance of rationalist fundamentalism. Neither fundamentalism nor postmodernism provides a tenable intellectual position. What remains, of course, is a compromise of sorts, sharing characteristics with the two discredited accounts (*viz.* the disavowal of utter relativism on the part of the fundamentalists and the rejection by the relativists of any substantive and world-transcending revelation) yet not given to the extremes of either. Decrying the intellectual paralysis of each of these two positions, Gellner argues that the trans-cultural nature of our cognition is "*the* central fact about our shared social conditions." Rationalist fundamentalism accepts the existence of a unique truth, itself perhaps unattainable, as opposed to an endless plurality of meaning-systems, each of which is supposed to be equal in value.

Gellner's book will undoubtedly elicit two responses. On the one hand, some will be refreshed to read this frank, broad-side attack on postmodernism, agreeing with Gellner that this trendy fad has enjoyed far more notoriety than its substance merits. On the other, some will object, not without justification, that Gellner has cavalierly employing caricatures and the occasional *ad hominem* instead of an honest representation of an intellectual position. Regardless of which position is taken, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion* is a provocative, interesting, and, dare I say it, entertaining book, well worth an evening's read.

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***Fackenheim: German Philosophy and Jewish Thought.* Ed. Louis Greenspan and Graeme Nicholson. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992. ISBN 0-8020-2763-6. Pp. x+318.**

Now retired and living in Jerusalem, Emil L. Fackenheim was for many years a professor in the University of Toronto. During that time, he produced substantial writings in two areas: German philosophy and Jewish thought. Fackenheim commented on their relationship in 1968 upon the publication of two books: *The Religious Dimension of Hegel's Thought* and *Quest for Past and Future: Essays in Jewish Theology* (QPF):

These two works...are related in their very difference. In the philosophical work all religious commitment is suspended by reflection; in the theological work all philosophical thinking is geared to commitment (QPF, ix).

One of the most creative Canadian thinkers in this century, he earned a reputation as both a teacher and a public figure. Given his importance to Canadian scholarship, and the growing recognition he has achieved since 1967 as one of the foremost Jewish thinkers of the post-*Shoa* era, such a volume was as necessary as it was overdue.

Fackenheim begins with a fine introduction to the subject as: a student of German philosophy (Hegel, Kant, Schelling and Heidegger) and Jewish thought (Baeck, Rosenzweig, Buber); a refugee from Nazi Germany finding his way to Canada in 1939; and a thinker able to change his mind. The remainder of the book is divided into two parts. In the first, "German Philosophy" is used as the lens through which his *opus* is examined in five essays by scholars from McGill (L. McRobert), Toronto (G. Nicholson and W.H. Dray), Bishop's (W.A. Shearson), and Trent (J. Burbidge). All are significant contributions to the study of Fackenheim. Written from a wide variety of perspectives, together they probe the connection between the thought of those at the limits of the German Enlightenment and recent Jewish faith/experience.

The second part uses "Jewish Thought" as the focal consideration. It is Fackenheim's conviction that contemporary Jewish experience and thought must be permitted to have an impact upon philosophical discourse. It is in these that the