ForeWord Reviews

RELIGION

The Future of the Jewish People in Five Photographs
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Judaism has a future, but of enigmatic form. Using his own Jewish experience and five evocative historical images as a starting point, Dr. Peter Temes (former Harvard professor and author of *The Power of Purpose*, among other titles) explores some of the paths that Jews, and Judaism, may next opt to take. Temes begins by examining how Jewish identity is adapting to meet the challenge of dwindling communal practice.

Will intermarriage and cultural assimilation cause the numbers of coming Jewish generations to atrophy, as traditionalists have long feared? Should such a possibility even be considered a threat? Temes draws a connection to Zoroastrianism, whose once substantial population could not be sustained by patrilineal succession alone, and parallels this to the nearly vanished Chinese Jewish community. A tradition that does not actively recruit converts, he suggests, must be conscious of related implications. Temes also troubles Judaism's active role in the world, putting doctrinal exclusivity and tikkun olam—world healing—into conversation with one another.

Both postures offer prospective answers to the question of what Judaism will survive as: either a community focused on preserving its ancient culture despite challenges, or one which expands itself to answer the needs of an outside world. Or might it manage to do both? Jewish philosopher Abraham Joshua Heschel's involvement in the civil rights movement becomes an example of Judaism's call, and power, to encourage positive social change, whereas an iconic photograph of Adolph Eichmann, one of the architects of the Holocaust, introduces a discussion of the shortcomings of insularity, particularly in relation to ethics. A reverential posture toward a Torah scroll—held by a female rabbi—is the last image we're left with, and so final questions orbit around the ways that contemporary Jews relate to, and incorporate, Judaism's most ancient beliefs.

Five Photographs contributes to extant discussions in Jewish thought with both verve and acuity. Temes deftly synthesizes his own religious ambivalence—a family and, to some extent, community inheritance that he wonders about bequeathing to his own children—with

stories of the faithful adaptations assumed by luminaries of Jewish theology, from Martin Buber to Abraham Heschel. Connected examinations of tradition and change have a nearly rabbinical quality. The result is a book that feels at once like a scriptural commentary, a spiritual memoir, and a multifaceted inquiry into a community's future. An important read for those outside of Judaism who wish to understand the tradition's complexity; an essential read for those within the community, for whom such questions are of particular exigency.

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