

Book Reviews

It described one of four possible responses to widespread Jewish persecution. Many Jews responded to persecution by becoming “true” converts to Christianity; others became “partial converts” vacillating between Judaism and Christianity; while still others rejected both Christianity and Judaism. The fourth response—that of the Crypto-Jew—was to continue practicing their Jewish religion in secret. The fourth response was the most feared by Church authorities who developed a systematic approach for identifying secret Jewish practices that became known as the “Edicts of Grace.” An irony is that the “Edicts of Grace” contained extremely detailed descriptions of Jewish ritual. These same descriptions were of great value to Crypto-Jews whose direct knowledge of Judaism had been limited by a general lack of texts and the dissolution of major Jewish institutions.

The exact number of Crypto-Jews in the New World is unknown. They are believed to number between 25,000 and 50,000. A vexing problem for historians and social scientists is that Jews assimilated very rapidly—blending with New World populations. Today, descendants of Crypto-Jews can be found primarily in Cuba, Venezuela, and Uruguay as well as in Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas.

When Jacobs began her research in 1993, her goal was to investigate women’s roles in the preservation of Jewish culture. Gradually, she shifted her focus to the effects of “hidden ancestry” on the construction and reconstruction of ethnic identity. Among Jacobs’s central concerns are: 1) the roles of women as bearers of culture, 2) the effects of marginalization on ethnicity, and 3) the ways in which the construction of ethnic and religious identity transcends both time and space.

Hidden Heritage is based on fifty life histories (25 males/25 females). The majority of Jacobs’s subjects were raised Catholic, but over forty percent now identify themselves as Jews. Among Jacobs’s main findings is that members of her sample who remained Catholic were raised in strongly Catholic homes, while those who eventually converted to Judaism were raised in homes where Crypto-Jewish practices were present. She interprets these findings in terms of “Self-in-Relation Theory” which focuses on the pivotal roles of female caregivers in early socialization.

Chapter one, “Secrecy, Anti-Semitism, and the Dangers of Jewishness,” begins with an apt quotation from Georg Simmel: “The secret offers, so to speak, the possibility of a second world alongside the manifest world.” Chapter one makes a strong case that secrecy surrounding Jewish ancestry is not merely a vestige of the past. It reflects a real and persistent fear that—in Simmel’s words—engenders a “second world” alongside the manifest.

Chapter two provides an outline of the processes of ritual preservation. The author emphasizes that continuance of Crypto-Jewish practices is highly selective. In

many households, for example, Jewish practices were limited to observance of the Sabbath, lighting of oil lamps, and certain dietary prohibitions. Jacobs suggests that these particular practices were continued because they could be hidden and/or “masked” as Christian observances. Chapters four and five focus on spiritual transformations among contemporary descendants of Crypto-Jews, with special attention to the construction of religious syncretisms. Jacobs’s concluding chapter examines the effects of cultural loss on changing gender dynamics and religious persistence.

Hidden Heritage is accessible to both scholars and general readers. Its author is to be commended for bringing much of the research on Crypto-Jews to the attention of a wider audience. Jacobs’s quotes are well chosen, and her research is thorough. She cites a broad array of appropriate authors ranging from Georg Simmel, to Franz Fanon, to Karen McCarthy Brown, and makes excellent use of interview material. The author’s arguments are well organized and well documented. This is an excellent study, and highly recommended.

Jeff Spinner-Halev. 2000. *Surviving Diversity: Religion and Democratic Citizenship*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, x + 246 pp. Cloth ISBN: 0-8018-6346-5.

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Surviving Diversity is a work of normative political philosophy that will be of interest to some scholars who study religion empirically. Jeff Spinner-Halev, a political theorist and professor of social justice at the University of Nebraska, argues that religion is an important but neglected factor that liberal political theories must take account of in grappling with the place of diversity in modern (secular, liberal, democratic) societies. Spinner-Halev recognizes that the question of multiculturalism has been increasingly on the agenda of political theorists, mostly in terms of race and ethnicity, but often also including questions of gender, sexuality, and other lifestyle issues. Rarely, however, has religion been seriously considered in these discussions. This is unfortunate because a plausible argument can be made that religious pluralism is the most significant pluralism in American society today. The failure to take religion seriously weakens liberal and multicultural accounts of democratic citizenship alike.

Given limited space, I will focus this review more on the implications of this book for religious researchers than on the subtleties of the argument itself (and there are many). Although not subdivided as such, *Surviving Diversity* is a two-part book. The first part (consisting of chapters 2-4) covers liberalism and its limitations as

it excludes consideration of religion. Here Spinner-Halev best summarizes the driving force behind the book when he declares: "The religious conservative haunts liberalism today" (p. 24). In a liberal culture in which individual autonomy is the highest virtue, religious conservatives belong to communities in which their autonomy and individuality are restricted (in terms of dress, patterns of association, and time usage, not to mention beliefs and values). What are liberals to make of Hutterites, the Amish, Hasidic and Orthodox Jews, Protestant fundamentalists, and conservative Catholics?

Rather than recoiling from the specter of religious conservatives, Spinner-Halev wants to challenge liberals to make space in liberal political theory for them. Although some liberals—like Joseph Raz and Will Kymlicka—want to defend a liberal view of pluralism, Spinner-Halev reveals them to be not pluralistic enough, as demonstrated by their failure to take account of authentic religious differences. He therefore reconstructs liberalism by arguing that the restrictions a religious life entails do not necessarily contradict the liberal imperative for individual autonomy, particularly because it is often the autonomous choice of an individual to voluntarily submit to the constraints of conservative religion.

The fact that Spinner-Halev has to make a case against his liberal peers for the propriety of an individual's choosing a conservative religious tradition suggests how illiberal many liberals are when it comes to religion. Enlightenment Fundamentalist heirs of the tradition of John Stuart Mill, they apparently cannot fathom why a restrictive (conservative religious) life would be compelling to a "modern." To his credit, Spinner-Halev seems to be genuinely sympathetic to "the depth of commitment and character" of those who choose this path, recognizing that in an increasingly secular culture, the choice is truly counter-cultural (p. 25). At the same time, he clearly wishes religious conservatives were more liberal. He claims, for example, that making religious conservatives feel welcome in public schools will help expose them to liberal values and allowing them into the public square "will often have the salutary effect of making them more liberal" (p. 20).

The second part of the book explores the implications of his argument for questions of education (ch. 5), public debate, (ch. 6), and discrimination (ch. 7). My own interests led me to focus in particular on the chapter on "the public squares." Here, Spinner-Halev seems genuinely torn. He believes that a liberal polity has no business excluding religious arguments from public debate, recognizing that excluding people is more divisive than including them, even if some might not like what they have to say. He also wisely notes that arguments based on secular reasons are not necessarily more publicly accessible than religious reasons. "Would an argument based on my understanding of Kant's cate-

gorical imperative, or Hegelian dialectics, or Rousseau's general will really be an argument that many could understand?" (p. 144). (Indeed, Richard John Neuhaus's *Naked Public Square* (1984) and Stephen Carter's *Culture of Disbelief* (1993) both suggest that it is precisely those languages grounded in the Judeo-Christian tradition that have the most resonance among the public in the United States.)

At the same time, Spinner-Halev argues that religious groups should be welcome in public because "many purportedly religious views actually have very little to do with religion" (p. 146) and there is a possibility that "over time . . . some conversions [to liberalism] may take place" (p. 156). This seems more a grudging acceptance than a principled embrace of religion in the public square. Consider the following striking passage: "There are many issues that do not map onto religious beliefs. Should certain cities in New Jersey slow down their development? Should Congress pass campaign finance reform? . . . Should interest rates be raised? One's belief that Christ died for our sins says little about these matters" (p. 149). I do not have space to rebut this unenlightened comment point-by-point, so would simply invite Spinner-Halev and others who might hold this view to read the publications or visit the web sites of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (www.usccb.org) and its state-level analogs (www.nascad.org) to see the way one religious tradition grounds a vision of the good society—including positions on development, campaign finance reform, and the economy—in a Christian theological anthropology.

The biggest liability of this work from the perspective of a religious researcher is precisely that which makes it a work of political philosophy: its ethereality. Spinner-Halev writes as a political theorist, not as a student of religion. His understanding of religion is neither broad nor deep. Religious historians will find his history thin, sociologists of religion will find his engagement with society and social trends shallow, and students or practitioners of particular religious traditions will find his depictions of their cults, codes, and creeds curious.

Political theorists and empirical researchers interested in politics need to engage each other more. This book amply demonstrates this in its strengths and weaknesses. Those pressed for time who are interested in a more adequate engagement of empirical reality and normative considerations on this issue would be better served by Christopher Eberle's *Religious Conviction in Liberal Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

One final note: I received a free review copy for myself, but anyone who pays the list price of \$36.50 deserves better copy-editing than this book received.