

Hill portrayed the English Civil War as a class struggle. The German-born Geoffrey Elton (a Jewish refugee who spent his career trying to comprehend the enigma of the hospitable English) asserted that what we thought was the birth of the English nation under the Tudors in the 16th century was in fact mere bureaucratic reorganization. J. H. Plumb found the Whig Revolution and Ascendancy equally the work (and profit) of Tories. A. J. P. Taylor deflated the heroic legend of 1940 by pointing out that “all that was best and most enlightened in English life” had been only too willing to appease Hitler.

In America, the Arkansas-born C. Vann Woodward, who recalled as a boy watching a lynch mob form and seeing the Ku Klux Klan march into church in full regalia, revealed a South rather less segregated, far more divided, and much more complex than the conventional view had it. William McNeill, a Canadian Presbyterian transplanted to a riotous 1920s Chicago, leapfrogged the Great Man school of history to give pride of place to microbes and plagues rather than human weapons. The brilliant young Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., who challenged the deeply held American myth of the classless society by identifying the class politics in the Age of Jackson, went on to revive the Great Man delusion with a moving if near-hagiographic account of John F. Kennedy’s *Thousand Days*.

Palmer is on to something when he suggests that the World War II historians had much in common beyond the way they potted back and forth across the Atlantic to form an almost single culture. The American historians were grappling with the origins of a great power that had suddenly reached its prime, while the British were dealing with the causes of their decline as well as with the causes of their earlier ascendance to global power. And both were living in societies gripped by the Cold War, which made Marxist analysis, whether of the English Civil War or the American one, acutely political.

The author clearly relishes the grand tussles, such as the debate between Lawrence Stone and Hugh Trevor-Roper over the decline—or rise—of the English gentry in the century before the Civil War, or between Trevor-Roper and A. J. P. Taylor over the roots of World War II. Indeed, the book would be far less enjoyable without Trevor-Roper, an intellectual bully with a killer instinct. No wonder half of Oxford cheered when Taylor rebutted his attacks in a celebrated *Encounter* article called “How to Quote—Exercises for Beginners,” which showed Trevor-Roper misquoting or unfairly summarizing what Taylor had written. Taylor concluded: “The Regius Professor’s methods might do harm to his reputation as a serious historian, if he had one.”

—MARTIN WALKER

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

CHURCHES.

By Judith Dupré. HarperCollins. 168 pp. \$40

In 1996, Dupré published *Skyscrapers*—a fine collection of minibiographies of the world’s most famous very tall buildings, presented chronologically in a distinctively proportioned volume, 18 inches tall and eight inches wide. The left-hand page was given over to a black-and-white photograph of a particular building, while on the facing page was stacked all the accompanying information. It was both an inventive design

decision and a clever marketing device.

In 1997 came her equally informative book *Bridges*. Since these structures also tend to be unidirectional, the format of *Skyscraper* was repeated, only this time turned on its side. While justifiable, this approach had its drawbacks. *Bridges* spans three feet when open. This not only makes it awkward to handle; it also imposes potentially threatening structural demands on the book’s comparatively modest spine.

After three years, Dupré is back with another large volume, *Churches*. As she states in her

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foreword, this is a highly subjective collection of approximately 60 examples of Christian architecture built around the world at various times over the past 1,800 years. Some, like the great cathedrals of northern Europe or the Basilica of St. Peter's in Rome, are very familiar. Others, such as the modest Ethiopian churches of the 13th century, cut from the top down into volcanic rock, or San Francisco Acatepec in Mexico, with its exuberant ceramic-and-stucco decoration, are wonderful surprises. The stops on Dupré's tour are all rewarding.

Like its two predecessors, *Churches* cleverly and appropriately begins with a conversation between the author and a contemporary architect—in this case, Mario Botta, a man widely recognized for creating distinctive and highly personal churches in his native Switzerland. Botta's words remind us that even the most awe-inspiring church represents at its core a solution to a number of very practical problems. Dupré further underscores the relevance of her subject by including several contemporary churches and the stories behind them. In so doing, she helps us appreciate and ultimately share in her commemoration of some of mankind's most meaningful architectural achievements.

My only complaints stem from the book's design. As in *Skyscrapers* and *Bridges*, each structure is given its own spread, and once again half of that spread is devoted to a single photograph. Some of the smaller images seem lost on the oversized pages (a foot wide by 16 inches high), while others are of insufficient quality to hold up at the necessary level of magnification.

The page opposite each photograph features an extended piece of text, several smaller photos with captions, a horizontal band with a fragment of prayer or Scripture, a second band with the "who, what, when, and where" information, sometimes a quotation, and, last and absolutely least, a floor plan the size of a large postage stamp—generally too small to be read, and lacking any scale that would permit readers to compare one edifice with another. Dupré justifies this fragmented design as reflecting and celebrating (celebrating!) the "kaleidoscopic information deluge of our times." But don't people enter churches, at least in part, for relief from the information deluge of our times? These pages aren't awful, but they are a missed opportunity to reflect, through a careful placement of infor-



Celebrating mass at Paris's Sainte-Chapelle.

mation, the sense of order maintained in even the most elaborately decorated church interiors by the reassuring hints of structure.

And last, the book's unusual binding. The front cover has been split down the middle and bound at both sides, so that it opens like a pair of cathedral doors. But there is no follow-through on this idea: We immediately confront the large pages, bound at the left in the customary fashion. "The book's unusual format calls attention to itself as an object to be held and read," Dupré writes. To be read, yes, but held? Any book that stretches 31 inches when open is going to be a bit of a challenge, and, with the split binding, the pages on the left side are only partly supported, while the other half of the front cover flaps uselessly to the right.

To get at the content, which I reiterate is worth the effort, you'll first have to overcome the package. In short, you'll need a table.

—DAVID MACAULAY

THE LIAR'S TALE: *A History of Falsehood.*

By Jeremy Campbell. Norton. 363 pp.
\$26.95

In this beautifully written book, Campbell, a Washington correspondent for London's *Evening Standard*, sets out to