

Current Books

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

defend lying, or at least to explain it sympathetically. While stipulating that lying cannot succeed unless truth is the norm, he maintains that “humanity would never have stayed the grueling course to its present high place on the evolutionary ladder on a diet as thin and meager as the truth.”

Nature, Campbell points out, routinely lies. The perched female firefly *photuris* imitates the mating signals of another firefly species, lures a male over, and eats him. A household dog—man’s best friend—will go to the door as if it wants out, and then race to claim the master’s vacated chair.

In a crisp and remarkably readable discussion of how philosophers have addressed the topic, Campbell demonstrates that truth has become less absolute and less compelling over the centuries. The “logos,” where reason exists in nature such that humans can tune it in, allowed a harmony with the Almighty until Ockham’s razor sliced God away (as being incomprehensible) in the 14th century. Niccolò Machiavelli’s prince had to be a fraud to maintain power over the stupid citizenry. We move from René Descartes, who believed that falsehood arises because the will is free, to David Hume, who elevated the search for truth even as he acknowledged that the lie might be useful, to Immanuel Kant, who subordinated the search for truth to the search for

meaning. Friedrich Nietzsche considered lying more natural than telling the truth, and Sigmund Freud deemed self-deception the key to human behavior.

Taking the next step, some modern-day philosophers conclude that there is no truth with a capital “T,” and that any truth we happen to find is conditional and transitory. As a result, the many faces of falsehood today outshine the dull, singular, and prissy quest for an absolute. Because thought is a captive of language, and language is promiscuous, unreliable, and downright mischievous, truth telling in modern society is battered and abused.

Early on, Campbell suggests that polygraphs work because lying is so contrary to the human psyche that it can be detected electrically—in essence, that we are hard-wired to tell the truth. He never returns to this provocative notion, one that seems at odds with his later contentions.

In the last few pages, he argues that social morality is more important in a democracy than individual morality, citing as an example Bill Clinton’s survival of the Lewinsky scandal. Where did this distinction between individual morality and social morality come from? Perhaps Campbell’s next book will explain, or perhaps I should re-read this one. In any event, the final destination may be surprising, but it’s very much worth the ride.

—JOHN FROHNMAYER

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SCIENCE: As Seen through the Development of Scientific Instruments.

By Thomas Crump. Carroll & Graf.
425 pp. \$28

This one-volume history of science begins with a preface explaining that it’s no longer feasible to write a history of science in one volume. The subject has grown too vast and varied. Scientists can barely stay abreast of their own disciplines, and academic historians prefer to dig narrow and deep.

As a retired professor of anthropology at the University of Amsterdam, Crump can afford to indulge his fondness for breadth and compendiousness, but by his own admission this book

can’t live up to its title. He discusses only what he calls the hard, exact sciences (is the reader to infer a smidgen of disdain for the soft, squishy ones?), and restricts the subject further by putting experimental discoveries and practical inventions at center stage, with the role of theory reduced to an occasional voice from the wings.

The author’s ambition, however, is laudable. He begins with some harsh words against Aristotle, whom he calls a “reason-freak” for coupling ineluctable logic with self-evident (to him) principles, such as the notion that heavy objects fall faster than light ones. The dogmatization of such erroneous ideas made true science impossible. Only when Francis Bacon