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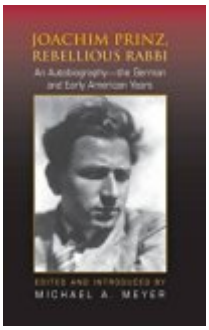

Joachim Prinz. *Joachim Prinz, Rebellious Rabbi: An Autobiography--The German and Early American Years.* Edited and Introduced by Michael A. Meyer. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007. xliii + 270 pp. $34.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-253-34939-2.

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Commissioned by Jason Kalman (Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion)

Although one might not expect to find either rich historical data nor literary excellence in a memoir written by a modern pulpit rabbi, the recently published *Joachim Prinz, Rebellious Rabbi*, edited and superbly introduced by noted historian Michael A. Meyer, is a remarkable historical document with literary merit. This insightful, colorful autobiographical account of much of the life and career of Rabbi Prinz (1902-88) offers the reader poignant glimpses into the life of a young Jew growing up in the then eastern German province of Upper Silesia; his unlikely decision to become a rabbi; life in Berlin as a Jewish and Zionist leader under the Nazi regime; his painful relocation to America; and his successful rebuilding of a life and career in Newark, New Jersey, with the help of a local Jewish gangster, Abner "Longy" Zwillman. While a significant number of retired pulpit rabbis publish collections of their sermons, only a few, like Isaac Mayer Wise and David Philipson, have written comprehensive or near comprehensive autobiographies. *Joachim Prinz, Rebellious Rabbi* is a particularly worthy example of this genre of Jewish literature.

Prinz, Meyer reports in the book's introduction, probably wrote his autobiography in 1977 shortly after his retirement from the pulpit. The report ends with his reaction to the death of Rabbi Stephen Wise in April 1949. His subsequent work both as president of the American Jewish Congress and president of the Conference of the Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations is, regrettably, not covered in this account, indicating a clear need for a full, critical biography of this gifted orator, scholar, writer, and international Jewish leader. It should also be pointed out in this regard that the editor wisely included in the book's appendices a text of the rabbi's masterful August 28, 1963, oration at the great civil rights rally in Washington DC at which Martin Luther King Jr. gave his historic "I Have A Dream" speech. Prinz's speech, which is also preserved in video, is an oratorical gem. Meyer also includes a helpful chronology of Prinz's life, a list of the rabbi's major book-length publications, and a detailed Index.

Meyer's own reflections on the historical value of memoir literature provide a gentle but reassuring caution to scholars planning to mine this book or any other memoir for historical purposes.

Prinz's memoir begins with an endearing account of his childhood in Upper Silesia along the Polish border with a special emphasis on his secularity and slow entry into Jewish life. His opening words are memorable: "The village in which I was born," he reports, "cannot be found on any map" (p. 1). His uninhibited reports of his sexual coming of age purposefully gives this book a European, that is, non-American, non-Puritanical "feel," reflecting the author's overt belief in the cultural superiority of the Old World over the New. Prinz also clearly lets his readers know that he never became "religious" in any traditional, if even spiritual, way, and that his journey into the rabbinate was fueled mostly by his irrepressible intellectual interests. Prinz studied for the rabbinate at Breslau's Jewish Theological Seminary and was awarded a PhD by the University of Giessen.

Prinz's account of his work as a rabbi under Nazi rule is highly nuanced. Not only does he report on the persecution of the Jews and his own encounters with Adolph Eichmann and the Gestapo, but he also discusses the highly variegated Jewish response to persecution. Prinz himself occupied an unusual position in the Berlin Jewish community. A popular speaker, he regularly attracted large crowds as the options for cultural activities for Berlin's Jews rapidly diminished. At the same time, however, his pro-Zionist beliefs put him at odds with the established lay leadership of the Berlin Jewish community. The conflict ultimately cost him his job. Even more disturbing is his report of his continuing conflict with Dr. Max Naumann, the leader of the pro-Nazi "National Socialist Jews" association. Surprisingly, the memoir includes only a few references to Rabbi Leo Baeck, the religious leader of Berlin's Jewish community and a leading neo-Kantian Jewish theologian of distinction.

The final period covered in ***Joachim Prinz, Rebellious Rabbi*** offers a portrait of his arrival in the United States, his first encounter with personal poverty, and his rapid rise in the American rabbinate. Prinz served an unaffiliated Conservative synagogue, B'nai Abraham in Newark, New Jersey, but joined the Central Conference of American Rabbis, a Reform organization. Further, in 1959, he was awarded an honorary doctorate by the Hebrew Union College--Jewish Institute of Religion. His friendship with Newark mobster Zwillman, a founder of Murder, Inc., is reminiscent of more familiar scenarios in which high officials of the Catholic Church interacted with the American branch of the Italian Mafia. In the end, Zwillman remained a personal friend of the rabbi who adroitly did not offer a eulogy at the Boss's funeral. Prinz's rabbinic work in New Jersey earned him the unique rabbinic distinction of winning the "approval" of a deeply secular, Jewish American writer and son of Newark, Philip Roth. Had the young Roth been privy to the rabbi's report of his sexual coming of age, perhaps the approval would have been even stronger.

Joachim Prinz, Rebellious Rabbi ends with a touching account of the death of Rabbi Stephen Wise, which may supply the original reason Prinz wrote his memoir. Although better known than Prinz, Wise's life and career parallels that of Prinz who may have used Wise as a kind of yardstick by which to measure (and perhaps model) his own success as a rabbi. Like Wise, Prinz was a leading Zionist voice in the American Jewish community. However, Prinz broke with the official Zionist movement following the attainment of Israeli statehood. Appropriately, Prinz's description of Wise's funeral gently contrasts the public and private aspects of the event, an apposition that is the hallmark of this very fine memoir. Prinz's subsequent work as president of the American Jewish Congress and chair of the Conference of Presi-

dents of Major Jewish Organizations is beyond the scope of this memoir.

Students of the German Jewish experience, the Holocaust, and American Jewish history, as well as rabbis and rabbinic students will all find *Joachim Prinz, Rebellious Rabbi* engaging and worthy of their consideration for many different reasons. Although, as the editor cautions, all memoirs have both conscious and unconscious omissions and editorialized narratives, this autobiography has an unusual frankness about it. Written by a successful, confident senior rabbi in his "anecdotage," it illuminates the public life and private world of a leading Jewish figure of the twentieth century with refreshing clarity and honesty.

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