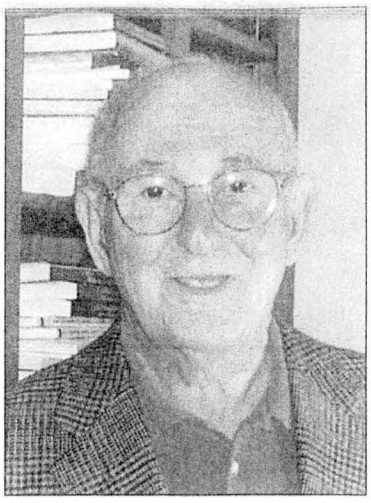
NEUSNER, Jacob
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Jacob Neusner, influential scholar of rabbinic Judaism, dies



Jacob Neusner

JTA – Jacob Neusner, one of the most influential voices in American Jewish intellectual life in the past half-century, has died.

Neusner, one of the most published authors in history, wrote or edited more than 950 books, died Oct. 8 at his home in New York. He was 84.

His funeral was Oct. 10 on the campus of Bard College in upstate New York, where he has taught theology since 1994. He also taught at Brown University and at Columbia University, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Brandeis University, Dartmouth College and the University of South Florida.

Earlier this summer, the NYU Press released an extensive biography of Neusner titled "Jacob Neusner: An American Jewish Iconoclast" by Aaron W. Hughes.

"[I]in the '50s, there took place an explosion of Jewish studies on campus, and Neusner had a very significant role in training a new generation of scholars to occupy these new positions," wrote Jack Riemer, a rabbi and author, in a review of Hughes'

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book in the Connecticut Jewish Ledger, which Neusner's father co-founded in 1929. "Toward that end, Neusner produced a gigantic library of classic Jewish sources in translation. The entire Babylonian Talmud, the entire Palestinian Talmud, most of the Midrash, and many other indispensable books were made available to the general reader by Neusner."

Neusner's influence also extended to the study of other religions in books he wrote and conferences he held exploring how Judaism influenced and was influenced by Islam and Christianity.

A fierce defender of his own work, Neusner often tussled publicly with rivals and critics. But even those who disagreed with him acknowledged the depth and breadth of his scholarship.

Prior to entering Harvard University as an undergraduate, Neusner, who was raised by American Jewish parents in West Hartford, Connecticut, had no formal Jewish education.

Neusner graduated from Harvard and spent a year at Oxford University before enrolling in the Jewish Theological Seminary's rabbinical school.

His area of expertise was rabbinic Judaism and rabbinical Jewish writings. Two of his best-known textbooks for general audiences are "The Way of Torah: An Introduction to Judaism" and "Judaism: An Introduction."

"In his final days, he was able to say goodbye to his dearest friends. And his family was with him right to the end, just as he wished," wrote his son, Noam Neusner, a former speechwriter for President George W. Bush, in announcing his father's death.