reader is likely to get exasperated. First the irresistible title, promising a comedy of manners at college, turns out to be a ruse, and now the book abandons all pretense even of being a memoir.

Readers new to Kathleen Norris aren't likely to give the book what it deserves: a second chance, in which they abandon all expectations and trail, lamblike, behind the author onto strange terrain.

Those who follow will be rewarded with something more interesting than a memoir. In considering the role Kray played in her life and in the lives of others, Norris comes to see her old friend and mentor as something akin to a spiritual leader. She may even wish us to see Kray as a latter-day saint, though she has the good taste and sense never to say so.

Norris's two previous "memoirs," *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography* (1993) and *The Cloister Walk* (1996), were much admired for their nonstick spirituality. Here, too, Norris invites religious contemplation without a trace of ickiness. Her meditation on the life of Betty Kray—a "nobody"—illuminates the miraculous influence that one ostensibly ordinary person can have on another, even long past the grave. And such is Norris's unassuming but persuasive style of thought that the reader, too, may feel something akin to an awakening.

—A. J. Hewat

Religion & Philosophy

BERTRAND RUSSELL: The Ghost of Madness, 1921–1970.
By Ray Monk. Free Press. 574 pp. $40

The second thick volume of Monk's biography of influential Welsh logician, philosopher, and social critic Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) traces the latter half of a long, eventful life. Monk, a British writer and broadcaster, argues tenaciously that Russell, despite his many professional and intellectual achievements, was a tragic figure of misdeeds, anxieties, and betrayals, a man whose life "seems to have been drawn inexorably towards disaster."

The story is indeed depressing in some respects. In 1921, Russell was 49 years old, an established presence in London literary circles, with half of his life still ahead—but his best philosophical work, including the groundbreaking arguments of *The Principles of Mathematics* (1903) and the three volumes of *Principia Mathematica* (1910–13), written with Alfred North Whitehead, was behind him. Because of his active pacifism, he had lost his fellowship at Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1916 and had been jailed for six months in 1918. He had dropped his first wife, Alys, with a coldness bordering on brutality, and his relationship with his second wife, Dora, was difficult, partly because both were given to frequent infidelities.

To pay the family's bills, he wrote newspaper articles and popular works on science and politics and gave numerous public lectures in England and America. Though often slapdash and rather vain, many of these efforts became Russell's best-known works (his logical theories are matters for specialists, and in any case were soon overtaken by the speculations of others). Though Russell returned to scholarship, publishing in the 1940s works on epistemology and an acclaimed history of Western philosophy, his concerns and writings were increasingly political, moral, and autobiographical. He regretted his inability to contribute to debates in logic, but he knew it was a young man's game. He received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1950 "in recognition for his varied and significant writings in which he champions humanitarian ideals and freedom of thought."

His views were not wholly humanitarian. He harbored some unpleasant opinions, especially about blacks and Jews, and some exaggerated ones, especially about the evils of the United States. Politically he was of the Left, but he was high-minded, arrogant, and naive about the business of politics as only an aristocrat and a philosopher can be. (He succeeded his brother as the third Earl Russell in 1931.) He ran unsuccessfully as a Labor candidate for Parliament in 1922, but later abandoned the party and advocated more radical positions, including the justifiability of guerrilla war in Vietnam and Cuba. In his eighties he lent his reputation to the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament,

and his activism led to another stay in prison, this time with his fourth wife, Edith, for a week in 1961. Retired to North Wales, he continued writing and arguing while trying without success to patch up the many rends in his life's fabric, including estrangements from his ex-wives, children, and grandchildren.

Monk is severely critical. His condemnation rests substantially on a judgment of Russell's journalism, which, he believes, exemplifies the philosopher's squandered promise. He seems incapable of seeing the value in polemic, or of accepting that humor and a brisk turn of phrase are assets in newspaper writing. Monk's philosophical hero is the logician who was the subject of his 1990 biography, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (the subtitle seems significant). Compared with the clay-footed Russell, Wittgenstein was indeed the genuine article, a solitary and eccentric man of transcendent mind.

The lack of charity Monk brings to Russell's more complicated, more human story weakens the book. He cannot justly portray the texture of this difficult yet brilliant man. He will not let us decide for ourselves. Luckily, we have the three volumes of Russell's own autobiography to even the balance. Sometimes special pleading in the first person is better, and more accurate, than narrow-minded, thin-lipped appraisals delivered in the third.

—Mark Kingwell

MYTHS IN STONE: Religious Dimensions of Washington, D.C.
By Jeffrey F. Meyer. Univ. of California Press. 343 pp. $35

If you follow the tourists around Washington, D.C., it's hard to miss the element of pilgrimage. Visitors come to see vistas that reaffirm the meaning of American history. The stone temples of the city's monumental core hold out visions of the nation's purpose; the Republic's founding documents rest under glass in the sacred space of the National Archives. The experience of viewing these sites, Meyer argues, is fundamentally religious. He quotes historian Daniel Boorstin: "Architecture can and does play the role of ritual."

Meyer, a professor of religion at the University of North Carolina, never quite explains what makes something a religious experience rather than a ritual or symbolic one, and the failure leaves conceptual gaps in this otherwise intriguing book. But his definition of religion is evidently capacious. He traces some of Washington's "religious" aspects back to Babylon and other ancient capitals: radiating avenues, orientation of the city's main axes to the four points of the compass, "central monumental architecture like temples, palaces, pyramids, ziggurats, and raised altars," and "processional boulevards connecting these places of power." Such architecture, Meyer says, symbolizes the larger cosmic order and proclaims a connection between the city and its heavenly sponsors.

That ancient religious impulse, in Meyer's view, emanates from the wordless, enigmatic Washington Monument and echoes the early settlers' belief that they were creating a new Jerusalem firmly under the protection of Providence. It resonates in the Framers' "missionary" certainty that their great experiment would bring a new birth of freedom to mankind, a conviction expressed through what Meyer calls the "axis of Enlightenment" running from the White House to the Jefferson Memorial. Where the Jefferson edifice is light, open, and hopeful, the more somber Lincoln Memorial completes the task of "baptizing the Founders' terms into the religious discourse of American Christians, with Lincoln assuming the aura of a Christlike figure who saved the Union by taking its sufferings on himself."

The argument breaks down somewhat when Meyer turns to the Smithsonian Institution and the tree-lined National Mall. A quick tour of recent controversies, such as the fiasco over an Enola Gay exhibit at the Smithsonian, is meant to show how these venues have become a locus for communal reevaluation of the American experience. But such squabbles hardly seem to fall under the rubric of religion, even American civic religion. Nor does Meyer's closing survey—fascinating though it is—of the allegorical artworks that decorate the Capitol itself, including now-objectionable depictions of the white man's conquest of the Native Americans.

The tussle over changing cultural mean-