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Preface

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Preface

The idea of this book emerged more than a dozen years ago. Conversation with Benjamin Nelson teemed with intellectual projects and schemes of exploration, but he feared that time would run out before he made his work available to the world. One of the editors, moved by his eloquence, promised him a *festschrift*. Later, in meetings at his summer place in Montauk, a small community of friends and students pursued the idea of making a collection of essays bringing together his work and their work. But he died in 1977, and the *festschrift* seasoned into a *Denkschrift*.

The German word *Denkschrift* means a written memorial, but it also suggests a record of thought. The stir wherever Nelson went is the excitement caused by a remarkable man of thought. The editors want to keep alive the ideas of Benjamin Nelson himself and thoughts about his life and work as well.

Four of us who were close to him spontaneously formed an editorial group. Many writers responded to our call for papers with very interesting essays, but financial limitations these days demand a lean book, and with great regret we were forced to turn away some excellent contributions.

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"Systems of Spiritual Direction" is reprinted with permission from *Criterion* 11, No. 3 (Spring 1972), pp. 13–17. "Games of Life and Dances of Death" is reprinted with permission from *The Phenomenon of Death*, ed. by Edith Wyschogrod (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), pp. 113–31. Marie Coleman Nelson's essay, "Ben Nelson: A Personal Memoir," originally included in this volume, was published instead as the lead article in a special memorial issue of *Social Research*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (Autumn 1982), pp. 578–88.