

Encyclopedia of Religious and Spiritual Development

Elizabeth Dowling and W. George Scarlett, eds. *Encyclopedia of Religious and Spiritual Development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006. 528 pp. \$155.00. Cloth. ISBN 0761928839

Interest in the field of spiritual and religious development has burgeoned in the last ten years, resulting in the publication of an abundance of books on such subjects as moral and spiritual intelligence, the medical/spiritual connection, meditation, and spiritual happiness. The field has even reached the cultural gold standard for popularity with the publication of a *Spirituality for Dummies* book. In addition, the connection between psychology and spirituality has been discussed in journals named for the subject and in books, newspapers, and the popular press. The publication of *The Encyclopedia of Religious and Spiritual Development* raises the expectation that this book would be a much-needed and very-welcomed reference in an untamed field.

This work is arranged in alphabetical order by entry, and begins with a much abbreviated table of contents containing just nine items aimed at alerting the reader to extra information as well as the actual entries. The editors present an alphabetical list of entries without including their accompanying page numbers. A much more helpful listing comes under "Reader's Guide" that records the same entries but arranges them by topic. "Scholars," "Organizations," "Texts," and "Theory" are some of these themes. This subject arrangement will provide a starting point for a student who is writing a paper on a particular aspect of religion or spirituality. Each entry under a topic can be explored, and the "Further Reading" listed at the end of a topic will also be helpful. Again, page numbers for the entries are absent. This oversight is corrected in the index, where a very detailed, twenty-nine page listing with page numbers completes the work.

The title of the work indicates an emphasis on spiritual and religious development, and the reader would expect that Robert Coles, James Fowler, Lawrence Kohlberg, and Ignatius of Loyola would be significant enough to deserve individual articles. These giants in the fields of psychological, spiritual, and moral development are, in fact, included by the contributors. Other noteworthy personalities are also found within these pages, such as the Dalai Lama, George Fox, Mahatma Gandhi, C.S. Lewis, and Abraham J. Heschel. Missing from the text, however, are individual entries for such notables as Abraham Maslow, father of humanistic psychology, Teresa of Avila, whose *Interior Castle* is a classic on the development of prayer, and Alfred Adler, the founder of individual psychology.

Although entries are not limited to individual persons, this same unevenness in coverage occurs throughout the volume. Topics such as "Sin and Forgiveness," "The Five Pillars of Islam," and the "Eucharist," are subjects that the editors include in the text. But under the absent column are such subjects as "Spiritual Direction," "Centering Prayer," and "Pastoral Counseling." There is a major article on "God" followed by an article on "God, Hindu Views Of" but no articles on the Christian, Jewish or Muslim views of God. In the introduction, the editor-in-chief acknowledges the impossibility of capturing every aspect of the field into one encyclopedia, but notes that her criteria for inclusion is to "present a sample of contexts and experiences that are central for at least some people, in some parts of the world, some of the time" (xxiii). This criterion for inclusion of entries creates such an immensity of scale as to be unworkable in the present volume.

Each topic entry is signed, and some have three or four books or articles listed after the entry to consult for further research under the heading “Further Reading.” A few of the articles, like “Meher Baba” and “Positive Youth Development,” have rather extensive bibliographies (15-17 items), but others, such as “Aquinas, Thomas,” “Muhammad,” and “Prophets of the Hebrew Bible,” have no follow-up resources. This is a serious flaw in the book and highlights the disparity from one entry to the next.

Although the book’s title would indicate an emphasis on spiritual and religious development, there is another emphasis in this reference book that becomes very clear through a perusal of the introduction and text. “This encyclopedia ... [aims] at better understanding the similarities and differences between world religions and spiritualities” (xxiii). The editors desire to actively expose the reader to a variety of ways (“contexts”) in which one may develop a relationship with the divine or transcendent. This diversity is visible in that all the major religions have entries, and many common but foundational beliefs, such as “sacrifice” and “soul” are covered in a non-denominational manner. Culturally diverse topics are also included, such as “Voodun,” “Thich Nhat Hanh,” and “Suicide and Native American Spirituality.”

The very inclusiveness inherent in the term “diversity,” however, may confuse major trends with minute gestures, and the tendency to do so is evident in this book. “Crop Circles” are given more column space than “Catholicism,” “John Muir” more ink than “Myth.” The editors presented their book as the *Encyclopedia of Religious and Spiritual Development*; readers have the right to expect that all major subjects would be treated in some depth. Minor trends, religions, people, and movements should be treated, but treated with much less weight than more significant ones.

The title of the work indicates an emphasis on religious and spiritual development, and the editor defines this development as how “one sees oneself in relation to that which is considered divine or transcendent” (xxiii). At times, the entries do an excellent job of focusing on the individual’s growth. The articles on “Positive Youth Development,” “Stage-Structural Approach to Religious Development,” and “Peer and Friend Influences on Adolescent Faith Development” are examples of articles that concentrate on how the human person matures in spirituality and religiosity, and the various external influences on that progress. At other times, the individual’s development gives way to the development and history of particular religious traditions. Further, some entries are misleading. A significant article titled “Health” is actually an article on adolescent psychology and spiritual expression. The article on “Happiness” is actually a description of the *Oxford Happiness Inventory*, while “Faith Maturity” is about another test, the *Faith Maturity Scale*.

19% of the contributors come from Tufts University; a check of that institution’s website indicated that five of the twenty-five contributors are on the faculty. Perhaps the remaining twenty left the institution between the time the articles were written and published. Or perhaps they are students given the opportunity to publish under their own name. In any event, caveat emptor.

Although the need for an encyclopedia on spiritual and religious development is great, this volume does not rise to the challenge. Despite its intended audiences, students in high school or above, and for academic or public library collections, this work cannot be recommended for purchase.

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