Dictionary of Christian spirituality

Glen G. Scorgie, Simon Chan, Gordon T. Smith, James D. Smith, Eds. (2011). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

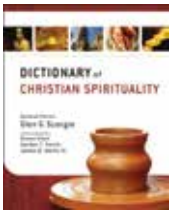
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The *Dictionary of Christian spirituality* is an important resource for those who are engaged in the spiritual formation of children, youth and adults.[1] While this is not the only dictionary of Christian spirituality on the market,[2] the book is significant in that the contributors are broadly representative of the evangelical tradition. Indeed, it is remarkable that a group of evangelicals would write a book like this since up until latter part of the 20th century evangelical spirituality was largely confined to the practices of prayer, reading scripture, and hymn singing; with the practice of fasting restricted to a select few.

In organising this book, the editors have chosen to divide it into two parts: "Integrative Perspectives" and "Dictionary Entries". The first section consists of 34 essays that serve to introduce and contextualise spiritual practice within the Christian tradition. Included with each article is a brief reference list to guide those who wish to know more. Within this section, the reader will find articles which outline the OT and NT Foundations of Christian spirituality; articles that address particular theological themes (i.e., "Jesus"; "The Holy Spirit"; "Human Personhood"; "Eschatology and Hope"; "Spirituality in Community"); a series of articles reflecting on the global history of Christian spirituality (Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, Global Christianity, Evangelicalism, etc.); articles on specific spiritual practices ("Liturgical Spirituality"; "Prayer"; "Mysticism"; and "Music and the Arts"). Given the evangelical character of this book, some of the more intriguing chapters discuss "Spirituality in Relationship to Psychology and Theology"; "Spirituality in Relation to Creation"; "Contextual Spirituality" (i.e., an indigenisation of spiritual expression that is grounded in Christ's incarnation); and, "Christian Spirituality in Interfaith Encounter" (i.e., the role accorded to and played by spirituality when engaging individuals from traditions that are outside the Christian tradition). While these articles are generally well done, the reader is likely to find that some articles are lacking either in depth or breadth. For example, the article on Global Christianity focuses on trends in spirituality within regions and peoples impacted by Catholic and Protestant missionary activity but makes no mention of either the South Pacific Islands, Australia or New Zealand. Notwithstanding possible limitations in scope, the value of these essays is that they serve to ground the practice of Christian spirituality within the broader context of the Christian story.

The second section (600 pp.) contains almost seven hundred entries, each of which includes a brief list of resources for further reading. The scope of these entries extends far beyond the understandable list of historically significant theologians and spiritual practitioners (i.e., Aquinas, Augustine, Barth, Basel, Benedict, Bonhoeffer, Calvin, Chrysostom, Evagrius, Francis, Gregory, Gutiérrez, Hildegard of Bingen, Ignatius, Irenaeus, Jerome, Joachim of Fiore, Luther, Origen, the Wesleys and George Whitefield). Indeed, the editors have included entries for culturally prominent individuals (i.e., Bach, Chesterton, Dante, Emily Dickinson, Donne, Hammarskjöld, Handel, Herbert, William James, Martin Luther King, Jr., C.S. Lewis; Milton, Flannery O'Connor, Scott Peck, Pascal, Tolkien, and Desmond Tutu). Also included are significant recent voices to the conversation about spirituality (i.e., Anthony Bloom, Dom Hélder Câmara, Maxie Dunnam, Shusako Endo, Gutiérrez, Francis MacNutt, Henri Nouwen, Mother Teresa, Howard Thurman, and Dallas Willard). Finally, the biographical entries include a host of lesser-



known figures (i.e., Gertrude the Great, Pastor Hsi, Mechthild of Magdeburg, Raimon Panikkar, Pandita Ramabai, Henry Suso, Watchman Nee, and Ming Dao Wang).

In addition to featuring key individuals, this dictionary highlights significant spiritual movements within the Christian tradition (i.e., "African-American Spirituality"; "Asian Christian Spirituality"; "Benedictine Spirituality"; "Catharism"; "Celtic Spirituality"; "Feminist Spirituality"; "Franciscan Spirituality"; "Ignatian Spirituality"; "Korean-Christian Spirituality"; "Liberation Spirituality"; "Moravian Spirituality"; "Pentecostal Spirituality"; "Puritan Spirituality"; "Russian Spirituality"; and, "Syrian Spirituality"). Curiously, however, one wonders how it is that "Baptist Spirituality" and "Quaker Spirituality" are included within this dictionary but "Adventist Spirituality" is not.

Of significance for those who work with families, children and youth is the place given to describing spirituality within the perspectives of human development and family life (i.e., "Adolescent Spirituality"; "Children and Spirituality"; "Family Spirituality"; "Marriage"; and, "Parenting") as these entries speak to the intersection between spirituality, family, and faith development.

Given the practical character of Christian spirituality, the editors have included entries on many significant practices and disciplines. Indeed, the list of practices moves far beyond pietistic practices known to evangelicals and is inclusive of all Christian traditions (i.e., "Breath Prayer"; "Celibacy"; "Centering Prayer"; "Chastity"; "Dance"; "Examen"; "Fasting"; "Glossolalia"; "Icons"; "Imagery"; "Inner Healing"; "Lectio Divina"; "Meditation"; "Penitence"; "Pilgrimage"; "Relics"; "Retreats"; "Rosary"; "Sacrament"; "Sacred Heart"; "Silence"; "Solitude"; "Spiritual Direction"; "Spiritual Journaling"; "Spiritual Marriage"; "Sanctification of Time").

In contrast to what may be expected of a book reflecting the evangelical tradition this dictionary contains a number of surprises. To begin, relatively few entries highlight the spirituality of specific biblical writers and genres: i.e., James; "Johannine Spirituality"; "Lukan Spirituality"; "Pauline Spirituality"; "Psalms"; and, "Song of Songs". Next, the dictionary includes descriptive rather than evaluative entries on "Christian Science"; "Daoist Spirituality"; "Mohandas Gandhi"; "Hindu Spirituality"; "Jewish Spirituality"; "Muslim Spirituality"; "Mormon Spirituality"; "Native American Spirituality"; "Neo-Pagan Spirituality"; "New Age Spirituality"; "Scientology"; "Sufism"; "Transcendental Meditation (TM)"; "Yoga"; and, "Zen". Other surprises include entries on "Creation-Centered Spirituality"; "Ecological Spirituality"; "Exercise"; "Internet"; "Spiritual Geography"; "Sports and Spirituality"; and, "Technology and Spirituality".

As with any book of this type there are always topics which one wishes were included. Indeed, readers in the South Pacific and ANZAC regions are likely to wish for topics reflective of their current and historical setting (i.e., Aboriginal spirituality and Maori spirituality as well as spiritual leaders who have played a significant role within these regions). For this reason, it is important to remember that the editors' intent is to introduce the readers to the subject (as opposed to providing a comprehensive discussion) and point the way for further study and reflection. To this end the editors have provided an important reference work that roots our understanding of Christian spirituality within the broader Christian story and thus expands the intellectual and experiential horizons of students, teachers, and academics alike. TEACH

Notes

[1] It is available as an ebook.

[2] Compare: Michael Downey (Ed.), (1993). *The new dictionary of Catholic spirituality.* Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press/Michael Glazier, and Philip Sheldrake (Ed.), (2005). *The new Westminster dictionary of Christian spirituality.* Westminster: John Knox Press.