

John Bowden (Ed.)
Christianity: The Complete Guide
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Yes, this could be called 'a mighty tome'. It fulfils that description in terms of material bulk, but 'tome' also implies a weightiness of content - scholarship, theory or information. One hundred and seventy six contributors associated with prestigious centres of learning or highly reputable Christian institutions provide one thousand two hundred and fifty nine articles. This goes a long way to reassure us of the high standard of the contents.

The volume is published as a guide, which can lead the reader to a fairly comprehensive review of the matter in which he is interested. For example, looking up 'Desert Fathers' in the Index leads to a short half-paragraph under 'Buildings' which includes a reference to Anthony of Egypt, and to a box on 'Desert and Wilderness' in the entry on 'Spirituality' which gives a useful factual overview and a reference to H.A.Williams' 'The True Wilderness' from the same publisher. This also indicates the very anglican (small a) focus of the Guide. There is no entry for 'Scete' or 'Cassian' in the index but looking up 'Macarius' takes us to a box under 'The Hesychasts' in the article on 'Mysticism' but the references at the end of this section would have only incidental mention of the Desert Fathers.

This book, we may perhaps conclude, would have a useful place in the library of a Secondary School or of a college whose students are preparing for lay Christian service who will want to inform themselves with a useful and beneficial measure of background knowledge for their work. This approach to applied knowledge rather than abstract is shown in the list of 'Gateway' articles highlighted in the List of Articles at the beginning.

This listing of key subjects and other devices, including line drawings, black and white reproductions and plates, together with its clear typography, makes this volume one that will be looked at by the casual user of any library where it is readily on view and could stimulate interest and lead many young people to more in-depth study of some subject that excites their interest.

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