

Book Reviews

Philip Sheldrake (Ed)

The New SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality

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SCM, London, 2005, £50 (hardback)

This is a major work in the field of spirituality, edited by one of the leading experts in the study of spirituality in Britain today. After a few brief essays on Spirituality and Culture, Spirituality and Science, etc, there are nearly 600 pages of A-Z entries on the various aspects of Christian spirituality. The articles are short, of only one or two pages each, but end with helpful selections of books suggested for further reading. The authors of the articles have often published works on the themes themselves: such as Richard Woods writing on Dominican Spirituality, or Gordon Mursell on English Spirituality.

The emphasis is clearly on gaining an overview of trends in spirituality rather than providing many historical details, though this is in part necessitated by the brevity of each article. The article on Benedictine Spirituality, for example, gives a synopsis of the Rule, but nothing on Benedict himself or later Benedictine tradition. The article on Ignatian Spirituality is, naturally enough, mostly on Ignatius himself and the Spiritual Exercises, but then there are further links to separate articles on Ignatian themes such as Consolation, Desolation, Examination of Conscience and the Society of Jesus itself. The article on Franciscan Spirituality (by William Short OFM), gives a helpful summary of Franciscan themes such as Incarnation, Creation, Poverty, and Example and Mirror with reference to Clare, but does also include some reflections on later developments - even the SSF gets a brief mention.

Many of the concerns of more recent spiritual writing are well covered here, with entries on Black and Womanist Spiritualities, Body and Spirituality, Postmodernity, relations with other faiths, and even Cyberspace and Spirituality. All in all this is a rich resource of ideas to spark other ideas, and trails to follow up at one's leisure. Not a book for continuous reading, but an ideal companion for idle moments.

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