

The Westminster Dictionary of Theologians

Justo L. Gonzalez, ed. *The Westminster Dictionary of Theologians*. (Translated by Suzanne E. Hoferkamp Segovia). Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006. 362 pp. \$ 44.95. Cloth. ISBN: 0664229891, ISBN13: 9780664229894

First published in Spanish in 2004 and translated by Suzanne E. Hoferkamp Segovia, *The Westminster Dictionary of Theologians* was conceived as a project of the Hispanic Association for Theological Education (AETH), an organization founded in 1991 to foster theological education of Hispanics in the United States, Canada, and Puerto Rico. Although AETH was established as an ecumenical organization, its membership is primarily Protestant and it functions as a complementary counterpart to the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States (ACHTHUS). The work includes almost 1300 entries by sixty contributors. The publication information for the original work in Spanish is given as *Diccionario de teólogos y teólogas* (Terrassa: CLIE, 2004). However, this title is not listed with the publisher, and a search for libraries holding this title has been unsuccessful. Instead, CLIE offers what appears to be a slightly larger version of the same work (almost 2000 entries by sixty contributors, issued by the same editorial team in 2004) under the title *Diccionario ilustrado de intérpretes de la fe*.

The aim of the *Dictionary* was to provide both a reference work of theologians from a variety of traditions throughout the history of Christianity, as well as a bibliographical resource that “paid particular attention to Latino and Latina theologians working within the United States, as well as to other minorities in the same context” ([v]). For obvious reasons, a one-volume work such as this cannot strive to be comprehensive in its scope. Thus, the combination of general breadth and specific depth poses a serious challenge for this project, as it would for any reference tool. Furthermore, the goal of inclusivity and the expressed aim to focus especially on demographic minorities makes the task of producing such a dictionary more complex. The success of this work must therefore be measured by how effectively these two guidelines of breadth and inclusivity on the one hand and depth and specialization on the other are balanced. Assuming that the intended audience of the *Dictionary* appears to be Hispanic students of theology seeking a concise reference that is both general and culturally specific, the *WDT* is largely successful in meeting this challenge. There is a fairly good balance and proportional representation of Catholic and Protestant theologians. It includes the major theological thinkers, such as Augustine, Barth, Calvin, and other theologians who have made a contribution to the history of the church, and whom one can expect to find in most theological reference works. Philosophers and other thinkers outside the field of theology, who have had an impact on the development of Christian thought are also covered, for example Marx, Darwin or Freud, as are church councils and organizations like the World Council of Churches or the Iglesia y Sociedad en America Latina. Not included are theological movements (e.g. Pietism, liberation theology, etc.) or Christian denominations, keeping the focus of the *Dictionary* biographical rather than thematic. The greatest contribution of the *Dictionary* is its representation of Spanish-speaking theologians. Despite its declared focus on “Latino and Latina theologians working within the United States” this representation goes beyond the geographic context of North America to include Latin American theologians. This expansion of the discourse of theology beyond the traditional European and anglo-

American scope is most welcome, if not overdue, in a time in which the demographic center of Christianity is increasingly shifting away from Europe and North America. Regarding the inclusion of other non-Western thinkers in the North American context or elsewhere, the *WDT* falls short of providing adequate coverage of Asian theologians. It is surprising, for example, that minjung theology and its proponents are not represented in this work. The welcome attention to Spanish speaking theologians is also somewhat tempered by the unequal length of entries. Naturally, an entry on “Luther, Martin (1483-1546)” (almost three and a half pages) should be longer than an entry on “Mesters, Carlos (1931-)” (seven lines), but it is the latter rather than the former in regard to whom users of the *Dictionary* are in greater need of information. The major theological thinkers and philosophers receive more attention because their contributions are proportionally more significant (otherwise they would hardly be major theological thinkers), but the *WDT* contributes too little coverage of these lesser known figures that cannot already be found elsewhere. Perhaps a somewhat more expansive description about lesser known, socio-culturally marginalized theologians might have been appropriate as this a focus of the *WDT* that sets it apart not only from other reference works, but also from an increasing number of readily accessible online sources, such as the *Catholic Encyclopedia* (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/>) or even *Wikipedia* (<http://www.wikipedia.org/>). Generally speaking, the *WDT* achieves a fairly good balance of proportional representation and deliberate diversity, but it could have done more to develop its most notable contribution to the field of theology

The entries in the *Dictionary* are predominantly biographical. The inclusion of some organizations and meetings distracts from this focus, but is nevertheless justifiable, especially since these discussions provide good cross references to and from biographical entries. However, given the declared focus of the *WDT*, one may wonder why neither AETH nor ACHTHUS received an entry. Even more surprising is the inclusion of some literary collections, such as “Sibylline Oracles” or “Gospels, Apocryphal.” It is not clear what purpose the inclusion of texts should serve in this particular reference work, especially if the authors of these texts are anonymous. In biographical entries, major theories and contributions are identified or summarized, but it is information about the theologian’s life that forms the central focus of the work. The *Dictionary* does not include bibliographic information, either about writings by a theologian, although major works are sometimes named in an entry, or about secondary sources about the person in question. This lack limits the usability of the *WDT* as a resource for scholarly research.

A more comprehensive treatment of twentieth century theologians from a Spanish perspective can be found in Juan Bosch, *Diccionario de teologos/as contemporaneos* (Burgos: Monte Carmello, 2004), published the same year as the original Spanish version of this work. Those seeking biographical essays on modern theologians and theologies may want to consider Donald W. Musser & Joseph L. Price (eds.) *A New Handbook of Christian Theologians* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996) or David Ford & Rachel Muers (eds.) *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918* (3rd ed.; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005). Instead, the *WDT* is best suited as a quick reference work for concise biographical information. As such the *WDT* is successful in providing a very readable and informative resource that is remarkably broad and diverse for a single-volume publication. *The Westminster Dictionary of Theologians* is to be recommended as a reference work for theological libraries.

Armin Siedlecki
Pitts Theology Library, Emory University

