

Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion

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Our post-modern era has seen a growing interest in a meeting of the “science of the mind with the science of the spirit” (xiii). The *Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion (EPR)* is a first-of-its-kind reference work with the stated goal of providing “a crucial new resource for the collaboration and mutual illumination... [for] researchers, academics, teachers, clergy, counselors” (v), libraries, and other professionals within the fields of both religion and psychology because “the need to address religious and spiritual problems is...clinically and ethically imperative” (vii). The *EPR* strives to accomplish this by illustrating how the deep symbology of religion coupled with psychology’s multi-faceted layers of meaning is of vital importance to “the intersection and growing synthesis of psychology and religion” (viii).

Co-editors David A. Leeming, Ph.D. (interim President of the Blanton-Peale Institute), Kathryn Madden, Ph.D. (licensed AAPC psychoanalyst), and Stanton Marlan, Ph.D. (adjunct Clinical Professor of Psychology at Duquesne University) bring many years of experience to this collaborative work containing articles written by 182 contributors from fifteen different countries.

This set, fashioned in two volumes, is just under 1000 pages and follows standard encyclopedic structure. A list of contributors follows the introduction, but lacks a table of contents or an index. The simplicity of an alphabetic structure for a work of this size makes the index a logical exclusion. However, with the number of articles unique to each respective discipline, readers with a background in only one of the fields would find benefit in an index for browsing unfamiliar entries. This also would have been helpful for some entries that are combined, as in “Biblical Narratives versus Greek Myths,” since there is often no separate entry when two subjects are combined in one article.

Every page is clearly marked with an alphabetic header that includes the first entry and last entry titles on the left and right pages respectively. Additionally, an index tab on every right-hand page is clearly visible from the unbound open edge on the books. With a quick glance, this demarcation allows one to easily place oneself within the broad structure of the work. Primary and secondary headings for the articles are clean and well defined, with appropriate spacing for in-depth reading as well as quick skimming. Concise bibliographies are part of most entries, and some also include internal cross-references linking to related information within the set. An illustration or picture is found among the occasional subject, but it is an exception to the general content.

Articles within the set are generally brief. Most fall between a half-page to two pages in length. The shortest are about one quarter of a page (roughly one or two paragraphs). The longest topic is a series of articles that cover seventeen pages following the primary entry of “Jung, Carl Gustav,” with secondary entries including “Jung, Carl Gustav and Alchemy,” “... and Eastern Religious Traditions,” “... and Gnosticism,” “... and Phenomenology,” concluding with “... and Religion.”

Some prime examples of the kind of dialogue and interchange that can take place between these two distinct fields is seen in the structure of entries like “Anxiety,” “Poverty,” and “Meditation.” Each gives a brief general overview of the topic, differences, views, or perspectives from and between major religions; highlights psychological views and interpretations; and concludes with a short synthesis on current contemporary debate. This structure provides a good format that lends itself to appropriately deal the breadth of inquiry across both spectrums. Unfortunately, this pattern was not applied consistently. Articles such as “Ethics and Ethical Behavior” and “Meaning of Human Existence” could have more closely aligned to the stated goal of the *EPR* if they had followed a similar structure. Instead these entries, along with several others, cover the religious perspective in a fairly superficial manner. At times the “religion” perspective was reduced to a psychological interpretation of religious thought rather than an actual belief or view from within a faith community or tradition. The psychological aspects of most entries are the strong points in this set, as nearly every entry has a significant amount of the content dedicated to those types of considerations.

Most major world religions (and some sub-groups) are included as individual entries: Bahai, Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hasidism, Hinduism, Islam, Jesuits, Mormonism, Protestantism, Shinto, Taoism, Wicca, and Zoroastrianism. Notably absent, however, are entries for Catholicism, Judaism, Jainism, and Sikhism. These entries on religions are weaker elements within the work since the articles are not necessarily written by adherents to each respective faith tradition.

The book covers the main psychological players of Freud and Jung, and their theories are mentioned or referenced in most entries on some level. The *EPR* can be commended in limiting most entries of individuals to those persons who had a significant role in some sort of interworking between religion and psychology like “Heidegger, Martin,” “Kristeva, Julia,” and “Levinas, Emmanuel.” This strongly supports its focus on the interaction between the two fields of study.

Many of the entries would make good starting points for initial research. Their brevity, coupled with the cross-referencing and bibliographies, can help point one in the right direction for the next step of research. The strength of this resource lies in the entries that do actually interact with both realms. When this occurs, the energy of this kind of mutual dialogue is displayed. However, because the individual articles do not uniformly follow the same content structure, a good number of the entries are much weaker in relation to the stated goal of the work and fall short of creating a fully interactive dialogue. As a whole, the high aspiration of bringing together these two massive discipline areas into one condensed form is often lacking in actual intersection. To accomplish that kind of interaction, the reader needs to be able to connect with the voice of strong belief from both sides. If a professor of psychology and a professor of religion had been placed together to work jointly on the subjects included in the *EPR*, it most likely would have created a dialogue closer to what the set was intended to produce.

Placing this work within the current literature is both clear and unclear at the same time. Since the work attempts to bridge the gap between the two fields, it creates its own space in the middle. However, it is evident that the scholarly interaction within the *EPR* was primarily psychological, with a significant majority (a three-to-one ratio) of the contributors hailing from the psychological field. While the voices of Freud and Jung are always distinctly present, the individual voices of the world religions, although occasionally present, are largely silent in comparison. The religious perspective is often generalized to speak as a whole or specified to such an extent that the unique perspectives from the various faith traditions are overlooked, as only one is heard distinctly. In light of this, the attempt to create a discussion between the two fields is slightly one sided. When compared with stand-alone works

in the realms of religion (*Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2005) and psychology (*Encyclopedia of Psychology*, 2000), the *EPR* is found to be lacking depth in both areas due to the simple fact that these fields cover such a broad range of issues.

There are indeed some benefits for the religious community as it relates to the interaction of psychology with the spiritual dimensions of humanity. Many of the articles are informative in that regard. It will be of more benefit to those with little or no religious background in the psychological profession as the content is geared to provide a religious/spiritual flavor to the study of the mind. As a whole, the set should basically be viewed as another encyclopedia of psychology with a special emphasis on the religious and spiritual dimensions of life. With that in mind, this work could be a handy reference for those individuals or institutions lacking the extra funds or the shelf space for the larger, more comprehensive works from within each discipline. While this resource may be the most fiscally conservative option in comparison, it does seem overpriced for its contribution to the fields of religion and psychology.

Mark Hanson
Maranatha Baptist Bible College & Seminary

