

Encyclopedia of Religion in America

Charles H. Lippy and Peter W. Williams, eds. *Encyclopedia of Religion in America*. Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2010. 4 vols.: 2792 pp. \$600.00. Hardcover. ISBN: 9780872895805 (set).

The *Encyclopedia of Religion in America* is a new comprehensive collection of essays on the American religious experience. Published by CQ Press, a division of Sage, this four-volume set has an impressive group of editors and contributors. The general editors, Charles Lippy of the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga and Peter Williams of Miami University in Ohio, are distinguished church historians who have a history of successful collaboration. The associate editors are a group of influential American church historians and theologians from across a wide spectrum of religious experience, including Protestant, Jewish, African American, Latino/a, and Catholic scholars. They are Randall Balmer (evangelicalism, religion and politics), Kathleen Flake (religion and law), Philip Goff (religion and law), Paula Kane (Catholic history), Timothy Matovina (Catholic and Latino/a theologies), Anthony Pinn (African-American religion, humanism), and Jonathan Sarna (Jewish history).

As mentioned above, this is not the first time Lippy and Williams have collaborated. Indeed, they edited a similar work published in 1988 as the *Encyclopedia of the American Religious Experience*. Though not explicitly stated, this new reference project from Lippy and Williams seems to be an attempt not only to update the content of *EARE* but also to correct some of the perceived organizational flaws that were present in *EARE*.

EARE was criticized in reviews at the time for only having a topical table of contents and no alphabetical one. *ERA* has both types of content lists, but its topical list is also alphabetical. *EARE* articles are not arranged alphabetically. Lippy and Williams were also criticized by reviewers for not explaining why they chose to employ this layout. *EARE* was lauded at the time for including “non-traditional” church history categories. *ERA* states as its purpose the inclusion of emergent themes in recent American church history, especially since more have come to the fore and made great strides in the time since *EARE*.

ERA, which is intended for students at all levels and general readers, is structurally well planned. The four volumes have continuous pagination, and each volume contains a comprehensive index of the complete work at the end of the volume. An alphabetical table of contents and a thematic table of contents appear in each volume, with the thematic list grouping the entries under some forty-eight headings such as Cultural Issues and Movements; Family, Gender, and Sexuality; Race, Ethnicity, and Prejudice; and War and Peace. The entries are featured alphabetically for easy scanning and browsing. Every article is signed by the contributor and has “see also” references and a short bibliography at the end. A list of contributors, arranged alphabetically by article, appears in each volume and is helpful, but an alphabetical list of contributors might make searching for entries by contributor easier.

A mild criticism of *ERA* is that each of the four volumes is a different color. While this is visually interesting, it detracts from the cohesion of the set when viewed on the shelf. Though the text and font on the spines are the same, it looks at first as though they are four distinct books rather than a set. Sets tend to look like sets so that they can be identified easily when scanning the reference shelf. This may seem to be a quibble and was likely not the choice of the editors, but it is also an uncommon design choice and could make browsing and locating more difficult for the user.

A larger concern is that the editors are not as zealous as they suggest in their effort to offer a more even-handed treatment of North America outside the United States. According to the preface, the focus of the set is religion in all of North America, but the overwhelming majority of the material is about the United States. The title even refers to the focus as “America” rather than the more inclusive and yet more specific “North America.” This is less problematic, though, than publications that include North America in their titles but merely pay lip service to inclusivity and multiculturalism. Lippy and Williams at least acknowledge that *ERA* has an inherent, if unintended, bias toward the United States.

Of the 374 entries in *ERA*, only six focus exclusively on Canada. These articles delve into specific issues like aboriginal traditions, church and state, and pluralism. Three further entries explore “Canadian Anglicanism,” “Catholicism,” and “Protestantism.” The pluralism entry, while referring largely to the three Christian groups covered by their own respective articles, mentions in brief detail the increasing numbers over the decades of Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs in Canada, as well as newer movements like Mormonism. As good as these articles are and as much as other articles refer to Canada and the six entries about Canada, there is a marked lack of parity for Canada in light of the editors’ mission as stated in the preface. This is further evident in the relatively small number of Canadian institutions represented by *ERA*’s contributors.

Representation for the remainder of North America in *ERA* is equally low. There are five articles dedicated to Mexico, and only one Mexican university is represented. This, of course, does not account for immigration or language ability; this is an English-language publication. These articles are supplemented by a small number of treatments of immigration and Latino/a religion. There are only three articles covering religion in the Caribbean, a general treatment and one each on Santería and Voodoo. Despite all of this, *ERA* is much more inclusive than *EARE* and other similar works. Lippy and Williams state in their preface that it was their goal to include more than their previous work, and while they still overstate the inclusive nature of the work as a whole, *ERA* still presents a more complete picture of North American religion than most encyclopedias of its kind.

ERA is a more ambitious work than *EARE* and is a vast improvement in many ways. *ERA* is nearly twice the length of *EARE* and has a significant advantage in articles and contributors. While *EARE* focuses more on denominations, traditions, and movements, including non-Judeo-Christian traditions, *ERA* includes these but also more theology, literature, liturgy, and social and cultural issues. *ERA* features more articles that are more specific than the broader articles in *EARE*. For example, in the section on social issues, *EARE* had an article on “Women and Religion.” *ERA* has a thematic section of articles concerning women and religion, articles about various types of theology formulated by and about women (feminist, womanist, lesbian, mujerista), and articles about controversial issues like abortion and ordination. Some of these issues appear in the *EARE* article about women, but one would have to skim the article or consult the index, which is only in the final volume, in order to discover this.

ERA does an exceptionally complete job of including the pressing issues of recent American religion. This is a stated goal of the editors, and they go much further than they did in *EARE*. Issues that other works shy away from and that may not have been included in a reference work from thirty or forty years ago, issues that still get scant treatment today, and truly new religious and cultural phenomena are unapologetically tackled by leading scholars in the respective fields. Ada Maria Isasi-Díaz, a mujerista theologian, examines the religious implications of immigration on the Mexico-U.S. border. Anthony Pinn addresses the varied forms of African-American religion. Marvin Ellison discusses issues of gender and sexuality inside and outside the church. John Corrigan writes about religion and violence up to and including the attacks of September 11th, 2001, and the aftermath. Randall Balmer

explores the evangelical movement and its growing stature in the religious and political spheres. As charged with emotion and opinion as many of these issues are, the contributors present the issues fully and are remarkably objective.

The *Encyclopedia of Religion in America* is effectively organized and appropriately written for its target audience. The contributors provided content that accomplished the task set forth by the editors to address American religion in a way that includes recent study, emergent trends, and social issues. It does lack equal treatment of issues in North America outside the United States, but the non-U.S. entries are of high quality and are in greater abundance than in other works. *ERA* would be an appropriate addition to any library serving undergraduate or graduate students.

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