

Encyclopedia of New Religious Movements

Peter B. Clarke, ed. *Encyclopedia of New Religious Movements*. New York: Routledge, 2006. 686 pp. \$290.00. Hardcover. ISBN: 0415267072.

New Religious Movements (NRMs) don't always get a lot of good press, and this may be because they are so often associated with religious fanatics, cults, sects, or other splinter groups. This volume edited by Peter B. Clarke sets out to provide a more balanced perspective, in part by illustrating NRMs as a growing, worldwide phenomenon.

The book is arranged alphabetically by subject. To add clarity to this sometimes confusing subject, Clarke provides an introduction and a brief essay on how to use the encyclopedia. Each entry is signed and cross-referenced, and has a brief bibliography for further reading. Its index is very thorough.

The editor's aim is for the encyclopedia to provide basic data on numerous NRMs and to offer insights as to the directions NRMs are taking. Acknowledging that the common perception is that NRMs flow from west to east, Clarke instead argues that NRMs are more of a "global labyrinth than a straight highway" (p.vii). Clarke believes that a primary common feature of NRMs is their "inward-directed" spirituality.

Clarke's working definition of NRMs is quite broad, and he draws many interesting subjects into the mix for consideration. These include Black Theology and Black Muslims, as well as Forest Monks and Matthew Fox. Clarke uses this eclectic definition throughout this book to provide examples of the many kinds of NRMs that have arisen in various parts of the world, with the aim of illustrating how widespread they have become.

Clarke draws on a wide variety of authors. Unlike some previous reference works on NRMs, Clarke selected scholars in the fields of religion, sociology, psychology and history to contribute articles. He has not limited himself to contributors from academe; scholars working with foundations and groups have contributed articles as well. In that same spirit, the authors also represent an international spectrum. Drawing on African scholars to write about African NRMs and Pacific Rim scholars for Asian NRMs, Clarke has sought out the best.

Three characteristics of this book are especially worth noting. First, given Clarke's emphasis on the global nature of NRMs, every corner of the globe seems well represented. Secondly, the book deals both with groups and with individuals of significant influence within various movements. Clarke interweaves entries the reader might expect to see (James Cone, Carl Jung, etc.) with the more esoteric parts of the NRM world such as the People's Temple. This may be the first work of its kind to have entries both on Liberation Theology and Opus Dei. Thirdly, this book includes an extensive section on the literature of NRMs in French, German, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese.

Mention has already been made of the book's interest in NRMs as a global phenomenon. The book does an especially good job at drawing attention to Africa, no small feat considering the size and religious diversity of the continent. One of the few quibbles with this work is the inclusion of certain churches that at first glance seem very much in the mainstream, such as the United Church of Christ in Japan or Thich Nhat Hanh's Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam. Many readers might not consider these to be NRMs at all, and will be surprised to

find them treated in a work like this. In the case of the UCC in Japan, the writer argues that this union church of several mainline Protestant denominations is really an NRM. Yet it's never made clear what puts this group on approximately the same footing as the Moonies and Scientology. Likewise, although it is interesting to read about Thich Nhat Hanh and Vietnamese Buddhism, there isn't a solid rationale why Clarke considers this an NRM. Does Thich Nhat Hanh's place as a leading proponent of Engaged Buddhism confer on his movement the status of an NRM? One wonders if including more mainstream examples represents an effort to normalize NRMs, or reflects an overzealous attempt to identify NRMs in all corners of the globe.

For those interested in biographical information on prominent figures in NRMs this work also has much to offer. Clarke has gone to great lengths to include individuals who have had a formative influence in the beginning of a movement, or have had otherwise great impact. There are entries on Matthew Fox, Emanuel Swedenborg, and the Dalai Lama, to name a few. It is not always clear what criteria were used in deciding which individuals to include.

This encyclopedia will provide an important starting point for those interested in further studies of NRMs. With the recent publication of other related works (James R. Lewis, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements*, 2004; Christopher Partridge, ed. *New Religions: A Guide*, 2004, to cite two examples from OUP alone) it is encouraging to see a marked improvement in the reference literature for this field. This encyclopedia breaks new ground by helping to clarify and redefine what constitutes an NRM. Because of its global perspective and its interaction with literature from various parts of the globe, this compact volume will be a worthy addition to any religion/theology reference collection.

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