

Encyclopedia of Love in World Religions I–II. Edited by Yudit Kornberg Greenberg. Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 2008. 665 pages. \$265.00.

The *Encyclopedia of Love in World Religions* is the first reference work to offer a multidisciplinary investigation of love in the past and present texts and practices of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism. It includes as well studies of love in various cultures, philosophies, and other religions.

Not only is this two-volume encyclopedia the first; in my judgment, it also is an excellent resource. Its contributors include 190 leading scholars from major universities all over the world. It contains 300 entries and draws on the disciplines of religious studies, theology, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, gender studies, and literary studies. In my view, more attention to law and economics should have been given, although some articles touch on these subjects. No encyclopedia can do everything, and this one is impressive in the range of disciplines it uses and the scope of topics that it addresses.

Although in recent years the subject of sexuality has been a hot topic in religious studies, love as such has been neglected. It also has been overlooked, as editor Greenberg correctly observes, as “an independent category of analysis” (p. xxvii). These two volumes hope to “serve as an atlas to the global terrain of ideas, beliefs, and practices linked to love and religion” (p. xxvii). It treats religion as a distinct system of beliefs and practices that is also integral to culture. The work’s many articles function to question a rigid dichotomy between sexuality and spirituality as well as an overly facile separation of earthly and divine love. On this last point, the encyclopedia investigates both human and divine love and their interrelationships. The preface claims that “love cannot be extracted from its worldly embodiments.” Even divine love is embedded in categories such as body, sexuality, and gender (p. xxviii). Yet, Greenberg claims, love in the world religions is also culturally constructed.

A list of questions guides the authors of the many articles that constitute this reference work. Is love a decision? Can it be unselfish? Are there differences between human and divine love and between love and desire? Why do some religions emphasize sexual abstinence and celibacy? Can love be mutual, and is it gender-dependent? How do metaphors and allegories construct the meaning of love?

The encyclopedia investigates altruistic love, erotic love, filial love, romantic love, self-love, and friendship. Greenberg claims that the collection suggests a “perennial phenomenology—the existence of certain recurring patterns of human experience and thought” (p. xxix). As an example, Greenberg finds motifs of “deep yearning for—and intimacy with—the divine” (p. xxix). But the investigation of common themes, as important as it is, does not completely dominate this work. The volumes have articles about important historical figures who contribute to ideas about love in these five religions. There are articles on topics unique to particular religious traditions. Most important, from my perspective, is the abundance of composite articles written by scholars from each of the five religions that examine relevant subjects such as beauty, community, marriage, and many other topics.

The articles are relatively brief as encyclopedias go, but very comprehensive. They are perfect for use by advanced high school and college students. Mature scholars can learn much as well, especially on subjects beyond their specialization.

Cross references are effectively used, and each article has a list of references for further reading.

The encyclopedia begins with articles by contemporary leading figures such as the Dalai Lama, Pope Benedict XVI, and Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson. These serve to invite the reader into a lively worldwide interreligious discussion.

The composite articles on common topics found in each of the five religions attracted my attention the most. They help the work to make a genuine contribution to comparative religion and ethics. There are articles on charity, compassion, divine love, divorce, fatherhood, forgiveness, grace, and suffering, to mention only a few. Take, for instance, the composite articles on divine love. One learns that in Buddhism, because there is no tradition of an existent absolute being, sacred love is human, born of enlightenment, and takes the form of compassion for all sentient creatures. Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism all contain images of a God of love, with Judaism and Christianity presenting portraits of an active God dedicated to searching out even the sinful and lost.

I am enthusiastic about this encyclopedia. I have been studying the subjects covered in its two volumes for years. I am learning something new on every page. I strongly recommend it.

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