



Encyclopedia of Monasticism

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Encyclopedia of Monasticism From Routledge Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #3214826 in eBooks
- Published on: 2013-12-04
- Released on: 2013-12-04
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Editorial Review

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Throughout history, human beings have struggled to discover what gives life its ultimate meaning and purpose. Many have explored these questions in the world's religious traditions, and some of these have found answers in a profoundly personal and interior pursuit. That pursuit, the monastic life, is the subject of a wonderful new reference work. For the purposes of this encyclopedia, "monasticism is defined as a single-minded commitment to religious life conducted apart from the surrounding society (almost always in celibacy and relative poverty) and following a rule that usually involves emulating or obeying a founder." The strength of this treatment is its descriptions of and comparisons among three great monastic traditions: Buddhist, Eastern Christian, and Western Christian. More than 600 entries are alphabetically arranged and cover important persons, such as the founders of particular orders or great reformers; concepts; doctrines; practices; and the monastic history of places, whether country, city, or individual monastery. Aspects of monastic life such as celibacy and fasting are described in both their Buddhist and Christian contexts. One would expect entries for the various monastic rules that have guided Buddhist and Christian communities, but this work includes entries one might not expect, such as monastic attitudes toward animals (*Animals, Attitude toward: Buddhist Perspectives; Animals, Attitude toward: Christian Perspectives*) and the contributions of Western Christian monasteries to the development of pharmacology. The encyclopedia is historical in scope but includes specific concerns of the twentieth century as well, including intermonastic dialogue between Buddhists and Christians, the growth of Buddhism in the U.S., and the use of the Internet by Buddhist and Christian monasteries. The entry *Internet, Buddhist and Christian* even includes Web and e-mail addresses, demonstrating just how contemporary ancient lifestyles can be. Entries conclude with supplemental bibliographies and are signed by the scholars who wrote them. Cross-references lead readers to appropriate headings or related text. The work is illustrated throughout, including 48 pages of well-chosen color plates, and concludes with a thorough index. An alphabetical list of entries and an outline of entries by theme precede the main text. As the introduction states, "except in one or two comparative entries, the *Encyclopedia of Monasticism* does not encompass Hindu, Jain, Daoist, or Islamic monastics or confraternities." This is really too bad, given the paucity of encyclopedic reference sources in English for these traditions, with the exception of Islam. Interested readers will have to rely upon the *Encyclopedia of Religion* (Macmillan, 1987) and the *Encyclopedia of Islam* (Brill, 1960-). Withdrawal from society and its cares is a hallmark of monastic life, but this is not to say that monastic seclusion has had no influence on the broader society. The contributions of monastics to art, architecture, agriculture, philosophy, theology, and even the brewing of beer (covered in *Brewing, Western Christian*) are immense. The *Encyclopedia of Monasticism* presents these contributions as well, making it a reference tool of use to interests other than religion. Highly recommended for all academic and large public libraries. *RBB*

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Review

"Stands alone in offering broad and deep coverage of Buddhist and Christian monastic places, concerns and controversies, ideas, spirituality, social dynamics, and practices. A superb resource for historical, cross-cultural, sociological, and phenomenological studies."

- "Choice, March 2001

"This magnificent work on monasticism is the first of its kind... the first time under one cover that an extensive encyclopedic work is dedicated to monasticism in both the Christian (Eastern and Western) traditions, with Buddhist traditions treated on a par.... It is recommended for all library collections: academic, college, convent, monastery, public, seminary, and theological."

- "Catholic Library World

"Johnston and his editorial team have produced an excellent central resource for the world history of monasticism. This work is highly recommended for junior college and college and university libraries, in addition to any reference collection pertaining to religious history."

- "American Reference Books Annual

"Withdrawal from society and its cares is a hallmark of monastic life, but this is not to say that monastic seclusion has had no influence on the broader society. The contributions of monastics to art, architecture, agriculture, philosophy, theology, and even the brewing of beer are immense. The "Encyclopedia of Monasticism presents these contributions as well, making it a reference tool of use to interests other than religion. Highly recommended for all academic and large public libraries."

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