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People Profile: Matt Hancox

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The Encyclopedia of Religion in America (2010, 978-0872895805, $600) is further evidence that CQ Press is expanding its horizons since its purchase by Sage. Best known for its reference works on U.S. government and politics, this recent encyclopedia is a departure. While religion and politics as well as Church-state issues are discussed, this set is far more ambitious. These four volumes are concerned with the “origins, development, influences, and interrelations of the many faiths practiced in North America.” In short, the influence of religion on the social, cultural, economic, and historical development of the United States, Canada, Mexico, and the Caribbean are explored in approximately 340 scholarly articles.

Edited by Charles H. Lippy and Peter W. Williams, the present set is, in some ways, an updated and expanded version of their well-received collaboration, the Encyclopedia of the American Religious Experience, published in 1988 by Scribner. However, while this prior reference was a collection of in-depth essays treating major themes, this time Lippy and Williams have opted for the more traditional alphabetical arrangement of topic-specific articles. Of course, the world has changed, often dramatically, since 1988. While articles on the Emerging Church Movement, Faith-Based Initiatives, Megachurches, and Same-Gender Marriage speak to this change directly, the Encyclopedia is informed by contemporary scholarship throughout. Each entry has bibliography of quality sources, and recent publications are well-represented. Examining the thematic table of contents reprinted in each volume also testifies to the religious diversity found in the Americas. Entries cover topics as diverse as Appalachian Mountain Religion, Buddhism, the Holiness Movement, Wicca and Witchcraft, City Missions, Santería, Ecumenism, Jainism, and Neo-Paganism. Although a lot of the coverage relates to the United States, there are specific articles that discuss Canada, Mexico, and the Caribbean from aboriginal and indigenous traditions to the twentieth century mainstream. In addition, articles discussing cultural issues, theological movements, and social forces, as well as those delving into the role of mass media, popular culture, worship, music, and architecture are included.

Regardless of the changes made by editors Lippy and Williams in the Encyclopedia of Religion in America, an insistence on scholarly rigor and integrity remains key to their efforts. The quality readers have come to expect from CQ Press is evident throughout. The articles provide well-researched and accessible discussions of complex issues, as well as specific religions and traditions. They offer information and insights that students, scholars, and lay readers will all find of value. While it may continue on page 48.