

**'The Essential Guide to Religious Traditions
for Spirituality and Health Care Professionals'**



Jeffers SL, Nelson ME, Barnet V, Brannigan MC [Editors]
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Book Review by Rob Waller

This hefty tome [694 pages] is actually one of those books you are NOT meant to read cover to cover. A bit like a dictionary. But there is a theme that runs through it. How do you relate to a person from religion X or Y when they are in a time of personal distress? To be sure, you do not want to seem an expert – for they are the best placed to be an expert in their own spirituality – but a little bit of knowledge can go a long way to making it clear that you care.

I, for one, know very little about most of the religious groups covered by this book. Some are largely unique to North America where this book comes from. However, most will be encountered from time to time – and you can bet that there will not be a local faith leader to whom you can talk!

I also found it very instructive to read the sections on my own faith and those I know a bit more about. Most of my spiritual input comes from the church I attend, and it is good to be reminded of what are seen as the 'pillars' of my faith by those on the outside. It's also a pleasure to be nudged about how wide is the grace of God. Perhaps we are the narrow ones.

Each section is divided into an overview of the faith group including beliefs and history. Then follows a section on how they understand pastoral theology, thereafter a section on medical beliefs and then a glossary of terms. To be sure, there is the bit we all know or think we know (much beloved by medical ethics classes at medical school) on a certain faith and blood transfusion. But it is so helpful to be able to read, in one place, what faith A or B believes about doctors, be they dualists or syncretists (those terms are explained!), and those areas of medicine and life with which they may struggle more than others.

It is a hefty tome, and not one for every bookshelf. Yet this is not a book for a bookshelf. It is a resource for the desktop of the chaplain, the health visitor, the psychiatrist; for the person who wants to be well equipped in this diverse age.