

## 50 ideas you really need to know about religion by Peter Stanford.

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This title is one of a series published by Quercus that includes subjects such as Economics, Psychology, Genetics and Philosophy. With this volume on Religion, the author Peter Stanford, a former editor of the Catholic Herald, has set out to make a balanced and non-denominational presentation of 50 different ideas connected with religion, grouped under 7 sections: Common Ground, Christianity, The Reformed Tradition, Judaism, Islam, Eastern Traditions, Modern Dilemmas.

Each of the 50 ideas is clearly set out over four pages, with one or two select quotes and two little 'mini-subject inset boxes'. There is also a timeline pertinent to each subject at the bottom of the first two pages of each section. The text is highly readable and informative and clearly fulfils Peter Stanford's intention of helping readers to be informed in the debate that rages between aggressive secularism and various types of religion.

I have, unfortunately, a few cavils: in idea 2, (about sacred texts), the description of the Oral Law as being constituted by parts of the Torah is incorrect; traditional Judaism believes that the entirety of the five books of Moses was revealed by God on Sinai and written down by Moses, and IN ADDITION the lawgiver received a large amount of Oral Law passed down by generations of leaders until it was collated and edited under the leadership of the then Patriarch of the Jews of Palestine, Rabbi Judah the Prince, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE; in idea 22, I would have referred to the Hebrew Bible rather than the Jewish (sic) Bible.

The references in idea 24 (on Kabbalah) to Madonna and her involvement with the Bergian version will not impress serious Jewish readers, and idea 25 contains a bizarre, highlighted quote from Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice, appearing to show the Bard's own anti-Semitism, unless one knows that the quote is a deliberate malapropism/pun put in the mouth of the clown, Launcelot Gobbo, and likely indicative of a far more critical attitude to anti-semitism by the Bard. This was a poor choice of text.

There is a brief glossary, which does not contain all the unusual terms referred to in the book, and a bibliography would have been most welcome.

Apart from the above 50 ideas about religion is a good, basic introduction, commendably balanced, to the subject for those who have little idea about it but desire to make themselves better informed.

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