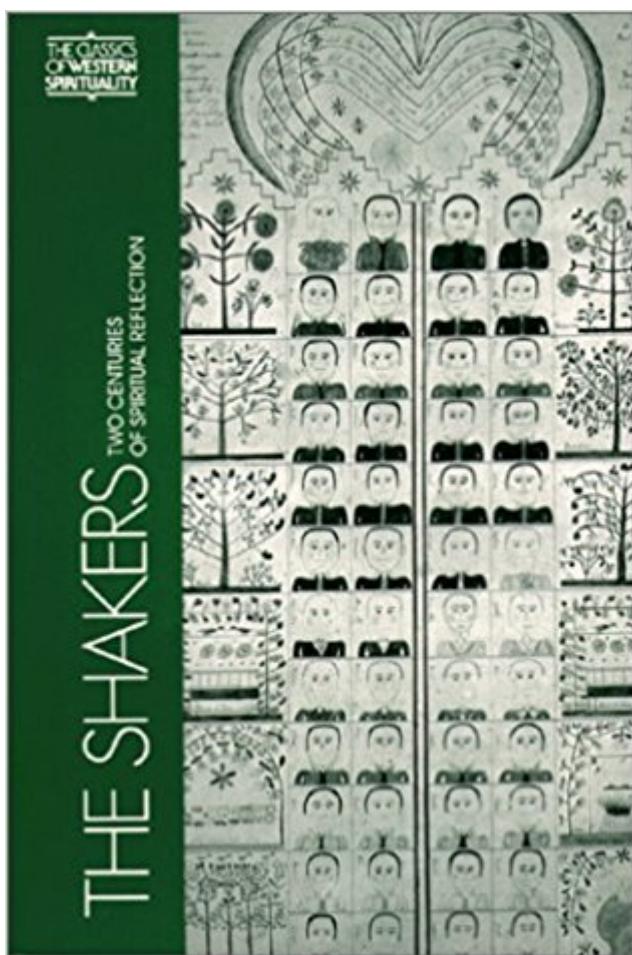


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The Shakers: Two Centuries Of Spiritual Reflection (Classics Of Western Spirituality (Paperback))



Synopsis

Discusses the theology of the Shaker religion and examines the attitudes of the Shakers toward celibacy and community.

Book Information

Series: Classics of Western Spirituality (Paperback)

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Customer Reviews

This anthology of Shaker spiritual writings and songs is probably the best edition available exploring the Shaker spiritual legacy. -- Word Trade

Text: English, Persian (translation)

"The Shakers: Two Centuries of Spiritual Reflection" is an excellent effort at understanding Shaker beliefs. The book, from its introduction by Gertrude M. Soule, flows very well and gives good detail of the key aspects of Shaker life throughout the nineteenth century. The first writings are a testimony to how Shaker community served to give experience of the Divine to each Believer and direction to his/her life. There is an excellent description of Joseph Meacham's viewpoint of how Shakerism relates to the life of Christ, and there are several other simple but effective sources later in the book. The next section deals with the way in which Shakers lived out their lives within the context of the Gospel and how Shaker theology was related to the ideal of Christ and Wisdom of earlier sects. Indeed, the whole chapter shows Shaker theology possessed a mystical spirit based on the idea of

the Light of God and the discernment of spirits. This areas shows how Shakers taught "to make the way of God their occupation" and how Shaker writers believed themselves illuminated by the divine Spirit. The third chapter "Sharing The Christlife" turns the focus away from theological matters to practical Shakerism and the observation of a religious life. Here we see the character of celibate communalism that was a fundamental Shaker doctrine and how the interests of each Believer must be the interest of all. Shakers felt the Spirit led them into this order, and in the fourth chapter we see a return to theological reflection. Because Shakerism believed God to have both male and female attributes (Ann Lee was seen as the Second Coming by believers), this part focuses on the role of Christ, and simple description of the birth and life of Christ are most effective to see Shakerism's connection to the Peace Churches of the Reformation. This part is more difficult to read than the relatively unchallenging earlier parts, but illustrates the manner by which Shakerism was effective in developing the humanity of Christ in a way rarely seen since the first millennium. There is a lengthy treatise on historical redemption that illustrates Mother Ann's historical role, and on the dual nature of the Godhead and Trinity. The last two chapters focus on the role of spiritual gifts in Shakerism that served to enhance their lives beyond rigid routine. The gift of peace, unity, and simplicity so evident in Shakerism during the nineteenth century are put out impressively throughout these parts. Written in touching mystical language, they show Shakers as people possessed of a truly joyful spirit. Focusing on as many Shaker writers as possible, the book gives a very good understanding of who these people were and how they evolved during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Rather than becoming incongruent, the use of many authors illustrates the communal spirit of the Shakers. An impressive historical resource.

Purchased this to add to my Classics of Western Spirituality collection. When I get around to reading it, probably years from now, I'll probably review it then.

This volume is an excellent introduction to the breadth of Shaker experience, the diversity of writings, and the depth of thought. Shakers are often unfairly associated with an idealized view of a lifestyle or fine furniture rather than their groundbreaking theology, vital interaction with society at large, and unprecedented ability to take themselves both lightly and seriously. This volume respects "the Believers" and kindly reveals them to ecumenically minded folks. Students who can appreciate a tradition with a fluid nature will enjoy this book.

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