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Reiss's "The 16 strivings for God: The new psychology of religious experiences" (Book Review)

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Book Reviews



Reiss, S. (2015). *The 16 strivings for God: The new psychology of religious experiences*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press. 174 pp. \$25.00. ISBN 9780881465570

Beginning with the early days of the study of mental health, psychologists have tried to explain (or at times, explain away) religious experiences and the human desire to connect with spiritual truth. In *16 Strivings for God*, Harvard-educated Professor of Psychology Steven Reiss applies his theory of personal development to the religious experience. It is important to note that although the majority of Reiss's writing focuses on a Judeo-Christian experience of God and faith, his work seeks to explain the global human need for religion and is not limited to those within the Christian faith. Basic tenets of Buddhism and Islam are also included, as are references to those who seek spiritual experiences but are not connected with a particular religion.

According to Reiss, humans have sixteen basic desires which motivate actions and define personalities. Each individual has varying levels of need in each of the following categories:

- Acceptance** - the desire for positive regard
- Curiosity** - the desire for understanding
- Eating** - the desire for food
- Family** - the desire to raise children and spend time with siblings
- Honor** - the desire for upright character
- Idealism** - the desire for social justice
- Independence** - the desire for self- reliance
- Order** - the desire for structure
- Physical Activity** - the desire for muscle exercise
- Power** - the desire for influence or leadership
- Romance** - the desire for beauty and sex
- Saving** - the desire to collect
- Social Contact** - the desire to have fun with peers
- Status** - the desire for respect based on social standing
- Tranquility** - the desire for safety
- Vengeance** - the desire to confront provocations

Throughout the book, Reiss contrasts his theories with those of Freud, Jung, and other well-known theorists, giving credence to his knowledge of the field of psychology. His familiarity with world religions is made known through his ability to cite the teachings and practices of multiple faith systems. After laying his foundation, Reiss uses individual chapters to explore God as an expression of basic human desires, motivation for more extreme religious behaviors such as asceticism and mysticism, and he also investigates the areas of religion which seem to contradict human nature.

The study of psychology is often viewed as being at odds with faith. Leading theorists are quick to show that religious practices such as those mentioned in the chapters on asceticism and mysticism seem to mirror the actions and thoughts of psychosis. Reiss, however, denies this and shows that individuals who pursue those areas are often acting out of their levels of need within one or more of the sixteen areas.

Reiss' writing is conversational and clear. A more complete exploration of his theory of motivation and personality is available in his previous publication *Who Am I? The 16 Basic Desires that Motivate Our Actions and Define Our Personalities*. Both books are recommended for those interested in the interaction of human behavior and religious faith.

Reviewer

Lisa Fuller, Harding University

Vicario, J. (2015). *100 illustrated Bible verses: Inspiring words. Beautiful art*. New York: Workman Publishing. 206 pp. ISBN 9780761185666

For those who see the Word of God as a colorful illustration of prose, this is the book for you. *100 Illustrated Bible verses* is a creative depiction of what we could envision in our minds when we think of certain scripture verses. Throughout the 206 page treasure are illustrations on every page with Bible verses from both the Old and New Testaments. On pages 48-49 the scripture in Proverbs 3:5 “*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not to your own understanding*” (NIV) is given the visual of an acrobatic duo displaying the death defying feat of soaring through the air relying on the other to catch them. There is also the beautiful image of a heart shown as a tree with the verse from Ecclesiastes 3:11 that “*He [God] has planted eternity in the human heart*” (NLT). Janet Vicario is a well-known art director in New York and has provided input and art contributions to her colleagues in several other printed works. Illustrators Cahan and Keegan are best known for their custom design patterns and illustrative lettering. The creators of this work combined those elements with a hint