

Christian Apologetics Past and Present: A Primary Source Reader (Volume 1, To 1500)

William Edgar and K. Scott Oliphint, Wheaton, Ill. Crossway Books, 2009

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William Edgar and Scott Oliphint (both Professors of Apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary) have assembled a collection of writings from sixteen different sources in Church history. In Part I “The Early Church: The Struggle for Vindication” the selections chosen represent primary source texts from the Bible, Aristides, Justin Martyr, Athenagoras, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, Athanasius, John Chrysostom, and Augustine. In Part II “The Middle Ages: The Church Becomes Established” the selections include Boethius, Peter Abelard, Anselm, Thomas Aquinas, Raymond Lull, and Girolamo Savonarola.

As the book of Ecclesiastes reminds us “there is nothing new under the sun.” Therefore, knowing the challenges to faith that arose in the past as well as the arguments and methods of argumentation used to countermand them is a vital part of the apologetic project. Volumes of this sort are of great value not only because they develop an appreciation for the opposition to the Christian faith that has taken place since its inception, but also because in and through the writings of those who have gone before us we can find the foundations for most if not all of the answers to objections given in the modern context.

For this reason one can easily see that a great strength of this volume is the fact that the editors allow the texts to speak for themselves. They provide a short introduction to each major historical era and an even briefer introduction to each particular author included. When necessary there is adequate clarification of ideas through footnoting and only minor adjustments in the original texts to allow for readability. For the most part, however, the reader is allowed to engage the texts at face value and begin the process of developing a baseline understanding of the given historical apologist’s position on apologetics. Indeed, this point is particularly helpful

for the average reader who otherwise would have no idea where to begin while sorting through the massive amounts of material written by figures such as Augustine or Chrysostom.

This great strength, however, also serves as one of the major weaknesses of this book. While the introductions to the era and each particular figure chosen are adequate to provide context for the readings, one might have hoped for and expected a bit more interaction and discussion from the editors as to the value and application of each particular reading to the modern context.

This critique notwithstanding, *Christian Apologetics* is a very helpful volume and one that is highly recommended for the library of anyone interested in the field. Being aware of our history in this regard will time and again prove invaluable as one seeks to engage the culture and defend the faith.

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