



**Benedetto, Robert, ed.**

***The New Westminster Dictionary of Church History, Volume One: The Early, Medieval, and Reformation Eras***

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Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

New Jersey

In 1971 Westminster John Knox published *The Westminster Dictionary of Church History* (hereafter *WDCH*) under the editorship of the University of Chicago's Jerald Brauer. A team of 140 scholars from all walks of the Christian world contributed articles about the church from the first century to the twentieth, but over the nearly 40 years since its publication there have been advances in scholarship and the folks at WJK recognized some deficiencies in the project that made an 'update' such as *The New Westminster Dictionary of Church History* (hereafter *NWDCH*) necessary. I place the word 'update' in inverted commas because the *NWDCH* is really an entirely new project under the general editorship of Robert Benedetto. It "continues the tradition [of the *WDCH*] by providing 'an immediate, accurate, introductory definition and explanation' concerning major personalities, events, facts, and movements in the history of Christianity [and] [l]ike its predecessor, it 'does not intend to be definitive, nor do the entries pretend to be exhaustive.'" (ix)

Some of the areas of improvement of the *NWDCH* over the *WDCH* are to be found in its more extensive list of contributors (203 compared to 140), drawing articles from an international team of scholars to include women and people of color, something noticeably lacking in the first volume. There's also much more attention given to Eastern Orthodoxy and global Christianity. The former volume had a much more narrow focus on American/European Christianity. The addition of the author's name at the end of each entry as well as short (albeit in most cases much too short) bibliographies are other added bonuses. And according to the preface it's much

broader in scope, especially for the post-1700 period. I can't confirm or deny this since the volume under review only covers up until 1700.

With 203 contributors and over 1400 entries, nearly everyone has contributed multiple articles. I was very pleased to see entries by some of my favorite patristics scholars like John Behr, Brian E. Daley, Lewis Ayres, Michel René Barnes, and Tarmo Toom. But many recognizable names from a variety of disciplines line the pages of this volume, e.g., Judith Kovacs, Carl Trueman, and Harold Attridge to name a few. There were also dozens of names that were new to me but that I'll be keeping in mind as I continue to build my library.

A broad range of topics is covered in this volume and seemingly no stone has been left unturned; I'm at a loss to pick out any notable omissions. The articles themselves are concise yet informative. This is the type of resource that will suffice if you need to provide a student, friend, or group study with a quick and competent description of a particular person, group, movement, or event. It's also the type of resource that will inevitably lead you into further study as the articles are enough to whet the appetite but not to satisfy completely. As I noted above, the end-of-article bibliographies are generally too short. Obviously in a volume with over 1400 articles there's a need to be brief because limited space is a factor, but listing a book or two in some cases seems unsatisfactory, especially given the extensive bibliographies that appear in comparable resources.

Other than my gripe about the bibliographies I can't complain about the *NWDCH*, well, I could complain that my copy was bound upside down, but a simple flip of the dust jacket solved that problem. It sits proudly in my bookcase among a variety of other helpful top-shelf dictionaries. I'd recommend it without hesitation to anyone interested in church history.