Drobner, Hubertus R.

The Fathers of the Church: A Comprehensive Introduction

Translated by Siegfried S. Schatzmann.

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Nick Norelli
Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth
New Jersey

Hubertus R. Drobner is Professor for Church History and Patrology of the Theological Faculty at the University of Paderborn, Germany. This volume is an updated and expanded translation of his 1994 work in German, *Lehrbuch der Patrologie* and was translated into English by Siegfried S. Schatzmann. The bibliographies have been updated and expanded by both the author and William Harmless, Sj of Creighton University.

Time and space won't permit me to make mention of everything that Drobner covers in this introduction, so I commend to your attention the table of contents available on the publisher's website. One Amazon reviewer opined that the subtitle was misleading because Drobner's descriptions were too brief and he failed to mention Didymus the Blind. But if there's one thing I'm convinced of it's that the subtitle accurately reflects the content of this work! The book isn't comprehensive in its treatment of each individual Father, nor is it meant to be (I mean c'mon, it's an *introduction*!), but its comprehensiveness lies in its treatment of such a wide range of people and subjects. Failing to give the attention to Didymus the Blind that that particular reviewer feels he deserves hardly negates this fact and completely ignores Drobners stated purpose:

> It is not a "manual" that intends to cover the entire field in all its details. It is a textbook that presents an overview of the most important authors, works, and themes, imbedded in their historical, political, and ecclesiastical background. For

everything beyond this basic aim, the numerous bibliographical data given serve to point the way to further and more specialized studies. (xvi)

For the most part Drobner follows a chronological timeline of literature beginning with the Septuagint (second-third centuries B.C.), protocanonical, deuterocanonical, and apocryphal writings of the first and second centuries, and then moves on to the Apostolic Fathers, the Ante-Nicene Fathers, with a brief stop at Philo before moving onto Origen; so on and so forth all the way up through John of Damascus. One thing that I appreciated as a lay-heresiologist was the attention given to Arianism, Apollinarianism, Nestorianism, Donatism, Pelagianism, etc.

Depending on how one reads this work they can finish it in a week or get lost in it for years. Each subject receives half-a-page to three pages of introductory commentary before presenting the reader with wonderfully detailed bibliographies of primary and secondary literature in Greek, Latin, German, Italian, English, and French. If you just read the introductory material then the reading is quite quick, but once you take the time to comb through the bibliographies you can easily get sidetracked for hours at a time looking up books on the internet, seeing which are worth your money and time.

The bibliographies are divided according to the various types of material that exists for each given subject (e.g., encyclopedia articles, dictionaries, monograph series, grammars, studies, translations, biographies, etc.). The format is very similar to that used by Johannes Quasten in his *Patrology* (4 vols.) but Drobner points the reader to a broader range of material. Depending on the subject covered the bibliographies are also divided into thematic categories. For example in chapter nine "Augustine of Hippo" under section C. "Priest and Bishop of Hippo," the bibliography (399-401) is divided into the following thematic categories:

1. Anthropology
2. History of Theology
3. Ethics of Moral Theology
4. Prayer
5. Liturgy
6. Preaching and Catechesis
7. Theology of Creation

One can certainly see the great benefit that this presents to the seminarian looking to write a thesis on Augustine's ethics of moral theology. The student in Patristics can consider this volume their research assistant when it comes time to write an essay.

At its heart this is a textbook and reference work. It's not something that you'll want to cozy up with next to a nice fire and read while enjoying a glass of (insert your favorite beverage here), but this is an indispensable reference for studying Patristics. Not only are the brief introductions to the people and various other topics covered informative, but the bibliographies open the door to an entire world of scholarly literature that would otherwise probably be unknown to the reader. While I wouldn't say that this should replace a set like Quasten's (which is equally invaluable), I think this is the perfect work to complement it, and Drobner's bibliographies are certainly more up-to-date and extensive. If one absolutely had to choose between the two then I'd suggest Drobner's work (but thank God we don't have to choose!). Every student of Patristics needs this volume in their library, layman and scholar alike. Drobner has labored for years to dig up the relevant material to the subjects covered, and we'd be fools not to take advantage of his leg work.

For its astounding comprehensiveness in collating primary and secondary material as well as its easy to read (and understand) introductions to various Church Fathers, Ecumenical Councils/Creeds, Christian and non-Christian literature, Theology, and so many other subjects, I give this book a very strong rating and recommendation, seeing room for improvement in two areas:

1. Include the additions and changes made to the second German edition (2004) that were not able to be included in this volume due to its advanced stage in the editorial process.
2. Beef up some of the shorter introductory commentary. While I don't share the Amazon reviewer's belief that "comprehensive" must mean super-detailed treatments of each subject, those that only take up half of one page do seem a bit short.

I hope to see these changes made to subsequent editions of this volume, but as it stands this is a fantastic work!