



Edgar, William and K. Scott Oliphint, eds.

Christian Apologetics Past & Present: A Primary Source Reader, Vol. 1: To 1500

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Nick Norelli

Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

New Jersey

Christian Apologetics Past & Present (hereafter *CAPP*) is not so much a book *about* apologetics as it is a book *of* apologetics. In other words, the editors William Edgar and K. Scott Oliphint, both professors of apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary, don't seek to provide an introduction to the field of apologetics. There is no discussion of differing apologetic methodologies such as evidentialism or presuppositionalism. There isn't any extended presentation of the history and development of apologetics as a discipline. And there's no step-by-step guide on how to do apologetics. So what, you may be asking, is the value of this book? Well, in short *CAPP* provides us with primary source material (in English translation of course) of Christian apologetics in action from some of the greatest minds that the Church has produced throughout history.

The book is divided into two main sections:

1. The Early Church: The Struggle for Vindication
2. The Middle Ages: The Church Becomes Established

Part 1 begins with the NT itself and concludes with Augustine, covering nearly 400 years. Part 2 begins with Boethius and concludes with Girolamo Savonarola and spans roughly 900 years. One thing is readily apparent however, there is much more emphasis on the early church in this volume than there is on the medieval church. St. Augustine alone receives 100 pages while Part 2

in total receives 176 pages including introductions! This of course can be explained by the early church's need to establish itself in the world and defend the true faith against all manners of emerging heresy. Men like Irenaeus, Origen, and Augustine were voluminous writers who produced enough material to keep anyone busy for a lifetime, so it's no great surprise that the first part of this project would be greater in size than the second, although one could argue that Thomas Aquinas was as voluminous as anyone in the early church and produced enough apologetic material that it warranted more than a scant 13 pages, with 6 of those pages being introduction!

But the seeming unevenness aside, *CAPP* has a nice format. Each section begins with a general introduction providing some background information on the period being covered before moving onto the work of each apologist. Introductions are provided for each apologist in which we're told a bit about their life, social situation, position in the church, and their reasons for writing. In general the introductions are quite good even if at times they contain the occasional tidbit of irrelevant information, e.g., "Augustine was ethnically from the Berber people and thus likely of darker skin." (205) The texts themselves are pretty straightforward and simply reproduce what's already available in the public domain with minor alterations here and there (e.g., *æ* and *œ* being rendered as *ae* and *oe* and the occasional omission of material for the sake of brevity). There are footnotes but these are sparse and many times they contain little more than Scripture references although sometimes they're explanatory and quite useful (see e.g., the notes to Origen's *Contra Celsus* Book VI on pp. 167-72). Each chapter is concluded with a set of diagnostic questions "to prompt reflection or discussion." (7)

One thing that worries me is something that hasn't actually surfaced in this volume (the first of a proposed two volume set) but promises to appear in the next. In the introduction the editors discuss their choice of source material and say:

Regarding the major divisions in the Christian church, we have chosen to feature a generous representation from Protestantism and somewhat less from the Roman Catholic Church as it emerged after the sixteenth century. We feature considerably less from Orthodoxy, mostly because far less material exists. one reason for this is that Orthodoxy either conquered the countries it was in, or it was under persecution, with little opportunity for free expression. (7)

My fear is that the second volume will look like a volume on Protestant Christian apologetics rather than Christian apologetics. By the editors' admission I can't see how anything else could be the case, and if this is so then it will represent a serious deficiency, but we'll have to wait until that volume is published to pass our final judgment. Having said that, I can recommend this volume of *CAPP* to students of all stripes; it's all material that's available elsewhere but it saves the

reader the trouble of having to run all of it down. Sometimes it's nice to just have an anthology with material relevant to your present interests, so if your interest is a defense of the Christian faith then *CAPP* is a volume that should serve you well.