

Dictionary of Theologians to 1308

Jonathan Hill. *Dictionary of Theologians to 1308*. Cambridge, UK: James Clarke & Co. Ltd., 2010. 588 pp. \$122.50. Paperback. ISBN: 9780227679708.

This volume, as the title indicates, is a biographical dictionary of Christian theologians beginning with the early church fathers to 1308, the author's admittedly arbitrary ending point because it represents his estimation of the apex of medieval scholasticism, the death of John Duns Scotus. The reference work from Jonathan Hill demonstrates his continued productivity as a church historian. He has also written the highly acclaimed *The History of Christian Thought* (2003), *Faith in the Age of Reason* (2004), *What Has Christianity Ever Done for Us?* (2005), the *Zondervan Handbook to the History of Christianity* (2007), and *Christianity: How a Despised Sect from a Minority Religion Came to Dominate the Roman Empire* (2011).

The purpose of this work is two-fold. First, it is to provide bibliographic information about the life and theology of theologians in the early and medieval period. What warrants inclusion into such a work? Hill clarifies that this is no exhaustive work; some theologians were necessarily excluded. Rather, Hill limits his selections to those theologians who made a "contribution to the development of Christian theology" (7). More specifically, theologians' contributions are determined by their "originality and influence on later figures" (7). (He has excluded non-Christian figures as well.) While the concept of influence in history is a subjective criterion, every historian is necessarily selective with his or her choice of content (persons, events, movements, and ideas).

The second purpose of *Dictionary of Theologians to 1308* is to offer comprehensive bibliographies which include a list of the figures' original works and the best and most recent secondary literature. Again the author has chosen to be selective with each list, favoring major original works translated in English and secondary works in English (heavy emphasis on books) dating back to the middle of the twentieth century. His bibliographies themselves are valuable to all students and make this a superb work worth the price.

As one might expect, all the major theologians of the early and (early) medieval periods are accorded an entry. Figures receiving entries include such notables as Athanasius, Augustine, Boethius, Isidore of Seville, Alcuin of York, Gottschalk, Anselm, Rupert of Deutz, Peter Lombard, Abelard, Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, Siger of Brabant, Bonaventure, and naturally John Duns Scotus who represents the pinnacle of medieval scholasticism. Each author who produces an historical work like this necessarily makes judgments as to who should receive an entry who should not. Some figures who (surprisingly) did not receive an entry include Cassiodorus, Hugh of St. Cher, and Nicholas of Gorran. Nevertheless, the work is remarkably comprehensive, encompassing theologians from Eastern and Western Christian traditions.

If I have an issue with the author, it would not be for his scholarship, but rather for the arbitrary ending point of 1308, which is the scope of the work. Was this the author's decision or the publisher's? By not extending the dictionary to include late medieval figures, one misses the flowering and "harvest" of late medieval theology. Left out of the theological terrain is the highly influential work of later scholastics like William of Ockham. Neglected are mystics like the German, Meister Eckhart, who represents an abbreviated form of theology with its own piety. Or how can one grasp the full picture of the medieval period without the later criticism of medieval theology

from the likes of John Wyclif and John Hus? A more robust account would also include such notable exegetes and theologians as Nicholas of Lyra, Paul of Burgos, Jean Gerson, James Perez of Valencia, and Faber Stapulensis. Such entries would have demonstrated the mature thought of the medieval period, revealing to readers the extended trajectory of thought from earlier medieval theologians. In addition, all of these essential figures helped shape and lay the groundwork for the Reformation and beyond. Hill would certainly have been capable of providing such important entries. Alas, “for the sake of space” one is left wishing for more! A second volume that continues from 1308 forward should fill this void.

One additional asset worth noting is the series of indexes at the end of the work. There are indexes for people, subjects, councils, and synods, as well as biblical references. Such indexes are quite useful tools for the size and scope of this volume and always welcome for cross-referencing. The additional indexes, especially the subject index, are also helpful since the volume, as a bibliographical dictionary, does not include doctrinal loci nor events as entries. Furthermore, Hill also helpfully references common variants of names and ideas.

I am really not aware of any works comparable to this volume. There are two works that are close: *The Biographical Dictionary of Christian Theologians*, edited by Patrick W. Carey and Joseph T. Lienhard (Hendrickson, 2002), and *The Westminster Dictionary of Theologians*, edited by Justo L. Gonzalez (Westminster John Knox, 2006). Both of these works also focus on theologians, and not events or doctrines. Although they are broader in scope, their entries and bibliographies are briefer and certainly do not provide the breadth of early and medieval theologians that Hill does. Hill’s book is therefore unique in its scope and scholarship. By focusing on a particular period of history, he is able to offer lengthier entries and more extensive bibliographies. However, it will need to be supplemented by standard reference works like the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, and *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*.

One disappointment is directed toward the publishers. A reference tool of this size and scope should have been produced in hardback. It is an outstanding and valuable resource which will surely become a standard for its particular purpose and therefore will be referenced often. I can almost guarantee that it will need re-binding after a few years of heavy use.

All in all, this is a well-conceived and well-designed volume for its stated purpose. It provides a significant early and medieval bibliographical work, surveying the major theologians along with their corresponding ideas, and includes accessible bibliographies of recent scholarship for each entry. Hill is to be highly commended for an outstanding resource. Because of its unique purpose, it will become a standard reference for its intended scope.

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