This is a scholarly book. Each of the 12 chapters is concerned with one of the early Christian writers who helped to form the theology which the Church has taken on board. It covers the important formative period from the mid-second century to the year 330, i.e. 5 years after the Council of Nicaea.

Every chapter has a different author, but there is a remarkable unity about the whole book. In each case we are given a biographical introduction to the early Christian teacher under consideration; this is followed by a summary of the writings themselves, together with a commentary on the main issues.

In the course of the book, many widely accepted views are challenged. For example, we are told that the historian Eusebius of Caesarea scarcely knew the Emperor Constantine even though he wrote his biography. Doubts are raised as to whether Hippolytus actually had more than a minimal connection with the celebrated liturgy ascribed to him. Presumably theologians will continue the debate on such matters for many years to come. It is noted that Tertullian had a great influence on the later development of systematic theology, and that Cyprian of Carthage paved the way for the understanding of the place of the Church in the sphere of our salvation.

It may surprise many readers that one chapter is devoted to Perpetua, for she is remembered as a martyr but not usually as an author. However we are told of her 'prison diaries', written before her heroic death in the arena.

The book makes a valuable contribution to the understanding of early Christian doctrine. It needs careful and leisurely study if its riches are to be fully appreciated.

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