

RBL 07/02/2001



Migne, Jacques-Paul, ed.

Patrologia Latina Database

Alexandria, VA: Chadwyck-Healy, 1995. 5-volume CD-Rom, Other, No Price Available, ISBN 0898871344.

<http://pld.chadwyck.com/>

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The *Patrologia Latina Database* (PLD) comprises an electronic edition of the *Patrologia Latina*, that massive, 221-volume collection of the writings of the Latin church fathers up to Innocent III that was published by Jacques-Paul Migne from 1844 through 1865. As is well known, Migne's industry churned out a colossal amount of text in an unparalleled frenzy of publication, but with predictable flaws that range from typographical errors to misattributed authorship. Beginning in 1949, many of the works and authors in Migne have been critically edited to modern standards by the *Corpus Christianorum*—a series that is itself available on cd-rom as the Cetedoc Library of Christian Latin Texts (fourth edition, Brepols, 2000). Nonetheless, the *Patrologia Latina* (like its cousin, the 162-volume *Patrologia Graeca*) remains an acceptable source for most of its contents and the only accessible source for some works, as well as the common standard for reference and citation.

To be sure, it is a doubly odd experience to review a text that, on the one hand, has not changed materially for a century and a half and is as liable as ever to error or obsolescence, yet, on the other hand, is priced beyond the reach of mortal scholars and even many mortal libraries. However, the sticker price on the PLD actually represents only one purchasing plan, and it is more common for libraries to subscribe to internet-based PLD access, priced on a sliding scale (based on an institution's book budget) that ranges from \$1000 to \$4000 annually. In addition, while the electronic text is scrupulously unchanged from Migne's first edition, including all prefatory material and notes, editors have added codes for individual documents that are correlated with the standard reference works on Migne (including Glorieux's *tables rectificatives* and Dekkers's *Clavis patrum latinorum*) and thus signal possible corrections or queries.

The search interface on the cd-rom edition is functionally equivalent, though not identical, to that on the internet website. Both allow complex combinations of fields (keyword, title, author, volume) and support truncation, boolean operators, and proximity searching, though the proximity operators in the two versions are completely different. The cd-rom edition also allows searching by Greek keyword. On even a moderately powerful computer, searching this huge database is unbelievably fast. Searches using a dial-up connection logged in to pld.chadwyck.com typically returned results in ten to fifteen seconds, depending on the number of hits. Searching the cd-rom is slightly slower, though the main complication is the changing of disks. One should also note that both the website and the cd-rom allow unrestricted access to the database and provide for viewing (and, on the website, saving for later use) as large a selection of text as the reader desires.</ P>

Technical support for the cd-rom product was eventually fine, and a problem I had running the PLD on Windows 98 was quickly resolved, once I was finally able to explain who I was and why I had a copy of the software. Some support delays seemed due to Chadwyck-Healey's recent acquisition by Bell and Howell, but my latest contacts have been prompt and helpful. As for the future of the PLD, there is no plan to reissue the database on a single dvd, since this is far from a mass-marketed product. There is also no plan to produce a similar resource for the *Patrologia Graeca*, owing to difficulties with Greek fonts on the website.

Why should the PLD be of interest to the readers of the *Review of Biblical Literature*? In a word, because it allows nearly instant access to the biblical scholarship and theological traditions of the first thousand years or so of the common era in the Latin West. Despite the drawbacks noted, the PLD is an amazing tool particularly for researching the history of biblical interpretation. In my own research on selected biblical figures in the book of Judges, a search of the PLD instantly uncovered twice as many references as I had been able to find using conventional indexes and searching by hand. The database also offers a superior means of access to a classic series that is often compromised on library shelves today by cracked bindings and crumbling paper. No theological research library should be without this tool.