

Consensus

Volume 33
Issue 2 *Theology and Context(s)*

Article 11

11-25-2011

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Oscar Cole-Arnal

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Recommended Citation

Cole-Arnal, Oscar (2011) "A People's History of Christianity, vol. 4," *Consensus*: Vol. 33 : Iss. 2 , Article 11.
Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol33/iss2/11>

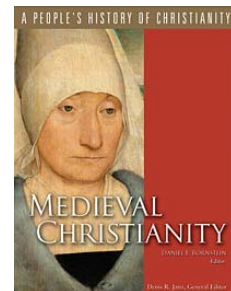
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Book Review

A People's History of Christianity, vol. 4

Daniel E. Bornstein, ed. Medieval Christianity.
Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2009

This last work to appear in the monumental series A People's History of Christianity brings to a close a trail-blazing effort to gather up the entire two millennia of "Christian" history from the Jewish Jesus Movement to the global Christianity of today. Once again, much credit belongs to Denis R. Janz for his overall work as general editor for the series. As far as this reviewer is concerned, if Dr. Janz did nothing more than edit this seven-volume set and his Reformation anthology, his academic reputation would remain assured.



True to the encompassing purpose of the series, Dr. Bornstein oversees and contributes to a work that brings to life various elements of the "grass-roots" during the long series of epochs known as medieval society. One finds glimpses of parish life, patterns surrounding death and burial issues, saints and relic piety and the role of religion in family life. An especially fine and compelling piece by Teofilo F. Ruiz portrays the complicated interface of the three Abrahamic faiths (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) throughout the period.

Not surprisingly Medieval Christianity reflects both the strengths and weaknesses of the other six volumes. Although I have found no articles that I would criticize in any depth, some outrank others in quality and scholarship. At the same time, judgments on that score are difficult to assess, often reflecting more the readers' interests or expertise rather than clear and useful critiques. On the bright side, all the volumes (including this one) contain a rich tapestry of topics that plunge us into the daily lives of the ordinary people struggling to get by and make sense of their lives. Such historical "paintings" give hands, feet and body to the abstractions and ideas found in the typical church histories dedicated habitually to the history of theological ideas and "Great MAN" individualism. Medieval Christianity rescues us from this trap as does the entire series. In this volume, Dr. Bornstein and his colleagues have fulfilled their mandate. Now that the series is completed, we need cheaper paperback editions. Sadly, even then cost and size will prohibit the series being used as a whole in "History of Christianity" courses. At the same time, for scholars in the field these volumes are a must. The next step should be a one-volume People's History of Christianity by one or several authors, preferably in paperback, well-illustrated and with charts.

Oscar Cole-Arnal
Waterloo Lutheran Seminary
Waterloo, Ontario