

Consensus

Volume 14

Issue 1 *Essays: Historical and Theological*

Article 20

5-1-1988

Fragmented Gods: The Poverty and Potential of Religion in Canada

Oscar Cole-Arnal

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus>

Recommended Citation

Cole-Arnal, Oscar (1988) "Fragmented Gods: The Poverty and Potential of Religion in Canada," *Consensus*: Vol. 14 : Iss. 1 , Article 20.
Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol14/iss1/20>

This Book Reviews is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in Consensus by an authorized editor of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact scholarscommons@wlu.ca.

that powerfully reflect that Sobrino writes from the heart as eloquently as from the head.

A word must be said about the translation. The essays appeared previously in several journals and the translators/translations differ markedly in quality. Unfortunately the precision of Sobrino's thought in the first essay was made even more difficult to grasp by a translator given to coining new and awkward words such as "acceptation" and "essentialities". Other essays, particularly "The Epiphany of the God of Life", were more easily read.

"Who do you say that I am?" Jesus asked his disciples. That old, old question has been answered in many ways. *Jesus in Latin America* reveals how a significant Salvadoran theologian can answer that question today with eloquence, relevance and power.

Jon M. Temme
Ascension Lutheran Church
Edmonton, Alberta

Fragmented Gods: The Poverty and Potential of Religion in Canada

Reginald W. Bibby
Toronto: Irwin Publishing, 1987
xiii + 319 pp.

In my research on the French worker-priests I encountered a decisive historical book entitled *France, pays de mission?* in which two working-class chaplains concluded that France, the reputed "eldest daughter of the church", was instead a "territory for mission". The book scandalized many among the ecclesiastically comfortable, but its sociological data were unassailable. These two priests cared so much for their church that they dared to proclaim a painful truth, and it was that shock which helped the French church move out of its lethargy and embark on profound and creative missionary ventures in its own nation.

Reginald Bibby's classic *Fragmented Gods* is the Canadian equivalent of *France, pays de mission?* It is sociology with a purpose, a sociological analysis of religion in Canada prompted by the care and conviction of its author. To be sure, the book is not perfect, and this or that criticism may be warranted. After a while some of the rhetoric becomes repetitive and tedious. The use of commodity and marketing language is somewhat excessive and not always necessary. In his all too brief analysis of religion's potential, his description of historical religion's commitment to self-fulfillment is not spelled out in all its distinctiveness. However, all of these criticisms are

minor when contrasted with the worth of the book itself. Indeed, none of the book's faults undermine or weaken its profound and timely challenges.

Bibby and his research colleagues have given to Canada's religiously committed (mostly Christians) a priceless gift. His *Fragmented Gods* is an x-ray into the profundity of our collective disease and a challenge to look honestly and courageously at ourselves and our churches. Church attendance and influence have been and are declining precipitously, and his hard data are blatant proof of that. However, his research and his analytical skills probe deeper. "In meeting a specialized age with a specialized religion," he asserts, "religious organizations are offering little more than a commodity, manufactured according to cultural guidelines." In short, Bibby insists that the churches are marketing religion like food on a menu by trying to serve up different dishes in ways palatable to people within our consumer-oriented culture. We have lost our unique message, he charges, and we are rushing pell-mell to grab our piece of a dwindling market. In short, we let the culture define us and no longer offer an alternative to the common values shared by all Canadians. He offers little comfort to either liberal or conservative church people; instead he portrays ably how both ends of the ecclesiastical spectrum have failed. And the hard data back him up.

However, there is hope. Historic religious faith has much to offer. It can challenge its own fragmentation and menu mentality by offering a gospel that addresses life around its three fundamentals—God, the self, society. The faith still has a vast potential audience, because Canadians, like most human beings, still struggle for meaning, still ask the basic life and death questions, still are struck by the mysteries of life and still are immersed in social networks. He calls on our churches to perform the risky and courageous mission of reintegrating these fundamentals. Thank you, Reginald Bibby, for placing before our eyes a reality and a task that we dare no longer avoid.

Oscar L. Arnal
Waterloo Lutheran Seminary

Education For Peace: Testimonies From World Religions

Edited by Gordon Haim and Leonard Grob
Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1987
240 pp.

Educators of whatever nature need to help people to entertain, to develop and to become committed to peace-fulfilling perspectives, peace-loving attitudes and peace-generating education which results in positive