

11-1-1991

Liberation Theology and Its Critics: Toward an Assessment

Oscar Cole-Arnal

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

Recommended Citation

Cole-Arnal, Oscar (1991) "Liberation Theology and Its Critics: Toward an Assessment," *Consensus*: Vol. 17 : Iss. 2 , Article 18.
Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol17/iss2/18>

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.

of dialogue in India and Canada, the ISKON-Christian encounter, Hindu views of Christ, Christian views of Hindu devotion, and Hindu and Christian influences on each others' spiritual practices. Part III concludes with reflections on dialogue and the academic study of religion, the place of scripture, and two perspectives on the future of Hindu-Christian dialogue.

Nearly all the essays take up the meaning of dialogue and its place in religious enterprise and cross-cultural encounters. Not all the understandings of dialogue agree, but many echo the sentiment expressed by Raimundo Panikkar (xv) that dialogue can contribute positively to new self-understanding. Others suggest dialogue is an end in itself (Eric J. Sharpe:111), while still others speak of dialogue as a search for community (S. Wesley Ariarajah:253). For these reflections alone, the volume is worth consulting. But the work offers much more than a series of definitions of dialogue; its essays provide us with a much-needed review of Hindu-Christian encounters. Recommended for anyone interested in interreligious and cross-cultural communication.

K.I. Koppedrayar
Wilfrid Laurier University

Liberation Theology and Its Critics: Toward an Assessment

Arthur F. McGovern
Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1989
xxii + 281 pp.

Arthur McGovern has done it again. As in his earlier work, *Marxism: An American Christian Perspective*, the United States Jesuit scholar has brought to bear his fine descriptive and analytical skills to his most recent study. This time he offers a balanced and convincing defense of Latin American liberation theology. True to his title, he allows significant space for descriptions of the positions taken by liberation theology's more celebrated and vociferous critics, from John Paul II to Catholicism's more recent, somewhat notorious convert, Richard Neuhaus. Although the author shares some of these assessments and although he stands on the main street of catholic orthodoxy, his position is not that of an uncommitted moderate. McGovern is clearly an open supporter of the liberation theologians, and even his own critiques are designed to enhance the liberationists' claims and influence.

The author guides his reader in a careful step-by-step approach, designed to appeal to someone who is both thoughtful and open. After an overview of the book, he supplies a brief history of Latin America followed by a definitional treatment of liberation theology. The critics of this new

and radical perspective are then analyzed. McGovern spends the remainder of the book describing various themes from a liberationist angle: biblical motifs, the role of women, spirituality, socio-political perspectives, capitalism, socialism and ecclesiology. Much time is given to "dependency theory" versus notions of modernization as developed by Western imperialism, to the impact of Marxist analysis on liberation theology and to the competing value systems of capitalism and socialism. McGovern cuts through the excessive rhetoric on the subject by his calm and nuanced analysis. His highlighting of the Nicaraguan Sandanista government in light of liberation theology is especially useful. Small biographical sketches at the end of his book are a decided plus.

McGovern's book is far from perfect. It is sometimes tedious and repetitive. His excessive caution can be maddening at times. Yet even these negative characteristics translate frequently into strengths, as they add weight to the balanced and thoughtful quality of the work. At a time in our world's history when progressive forces are being heckled or hounded everywhere, McGovern's focus is timely and relevant. His hope both to have liberation theology remain in and be heard by the church is most appropriate. His own words underscore the permanent value of the theology he has analyzed so thoroughly: "The message of liberation theology and the development of base communities... have already made it possible for many poor to experience a new sense of dignity, a new awareness of God's special love for them, and an ability to work in solidarity to achieve significant social goals at community levels."

Oscar Cole Arnal
Waterloo Lutheran Seminary

Adult Children of Alcoholics: Ministers and the Ministries

Rachel Callahan and Rea McDonnell
New York: Paulist Press, 1990

In the early 1980s, a new phenomenon in alcohol-related difficulties was being discussed: adult children of alcoholic parents (or ACoA) seemed to share a number of similar emotional and social difficulties as a direct result of the conditions of their upbringing. For many people such news was liberating and, as more and more people were discovering that perhaps there was hope towards feeling better, support and self-help groups sprang up and more and more books were published on understanding and helping the ACoA.

As with any new, exciting trend, there will be both good, careful work, and on the other hand, much that is well-intentioned but not very helpful.