

Christopher M. Bellitto and David Zachariah Flanagin, eds. *Reassessing Reform: A Historical Investigation into Church Renewal*.

Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2012. xii + 290 pp. \$69.95. ISBN: 978-0-8132-1999-8.

This volume originated as a commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of Gerhart Ladner's *The Idea of Reform: Its Impact on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers* (1959). Ladner had a profound knowledge of both texts and images, and he emphasized the idea that humanity was made in God's image. Ladner never finished his larger study of ideas of reform to the end of the Middle Ages. Nonetheless, he made studying reform an aspect of intellectual history. These essays illustrate the continuing impact of Ladner's work. The resulting collection is divided into two parts: "Gerhart Ladner's *The Idea of Reform* after Fifty Years" and "Models and Case Studies of Medieval and Reformation Reform."

Some contributors were Ladner's students, including the three in the first part of the book. Lester Field provides background to Ladner's effort to understand the past "in its own language and ideological complexity" (22). Methodology, philological and iconographic, was crucial in this effort. Louis Pascoe discusses Ladner's attempted to define *reformatio* clearly, showing how later writers have realized that the language of the sources was not always so precise. Philip Stump adds an overview of how scholars influenced by Ladner's work have addressed issues of reform down to the Renaissance and Reformation. A crucial issue for these writers is the relationship of "personal reform" to "top-down," structural reform.

The studies in the second part respond to Ladner's ideas in a variety of ways, mostly for the later Middle Ages. Ken Grant's sketches out the transition in Gregory VII's letters from personal to institutional reform. Gregory thought humility allowed the authority Christ conferred on Peter to be manifest in the world through him. This approach to reform, which included an attack on simony, did not die with the Gregorian Reform. It had, as C. Colt Anderson argues, a living echo in Jan Hus's writings. This was not some revived form of Donatism, denying the Catholicity of the Church, but an echo of older attacks on abuse of clerical authority. Hus erred on the side of reforming zeal, but he was no Donatist. Gerald Christianson takes up the Hussite envoys' discussions with the fathers of the Council of Basel (1431–47) on issues dividing them from Christendom. They represented not a coherent movement but splintered groups with differing opinions. Basel's leaders found themselves resisting papal pressure to dissolve the council while attempting to win the Bohemians to a Church order that included affirmation of the Holy See.

David Albertson examines the mathematical language Heymeric de Campo used to the Council of Basel. He sought to put Christ, not the pope, at the center, giving proofs that unity was reflected in the council. Heymeric was for a time a colleague of Nicholas of Cusa. Inigo Bocken focuses on lay piety in Cusanus's thought, exploring his ideas on inner reform and taking on the form of Christ. Human practice could make the divine manifest in the world. Anne Astell compares

the approaches of Hildegard of Bingen and Cusanus to Eucharist and reform in their different theological contexts. Hildegard's focus was visionary, looking to the "celestial church" as a model for the "earthly communicant" (213). Nicholas focused on the transforming power of the transubstantiated sacrament.

William Hyland examines Premonstratensian preaching to the councils of Constance and Basel, which called love the way to unity and reform. Dennis Martin looks at a different monastic role, the Carthusians as "public intellectuals," offering solace and advice to local leaders and men of business on practical matters.

These studies look respectfully toward Ladner's ideas. Only Michael Vargas takes issue with Ladner's method as divorced from reality. Vargas treats reform efforts in the Dominican order's province of Aragon, which were not tidy. A historiography of inspired founding, declining purity, and reform does not suffice to explain these messy realities. This is true, but the belief in a lost period of perfection was before the eyes of the leaders of religious communities when they embarked on attempted reforms. The volume closes with William Hudon's very historiographical article looking at how complexity has been added to the simple picture once presented by a heavily Protestant school of thought. In fact, both Catholic and Protestant leaders sought to bring about reform. That Ladner's work has led to discoveries of such complexities, undermining simplifications, is a tribute to him as a scholar.

THOMAS M. IZBICKI
Rutgers University