

REVIEWS

The Idea of Reform¹

THE word 'reform' has for most of us the connotation of changes, of greater or lesser degree, in the morals of churchmen, in ecclesiastical organizations, in religious worship, even in preaching or the teaching of theology. It is a venerable notion: long before the Reformation of the sixteenth century it was, so to say, the theme of the Councils and of many treatises in the Middle Ages, above all after the beginning of the fourteenth century. We speak, too, in the same way of monastic reforms, canonical reforms, the Gregorian reform, and so on.

But anyone who expects to find in Dr G. B. Ladner's recent book at least the beginnings of that particular history would run the risk of being disappointed. The author, who is professor of history at Fordham University, has indeed the intention of writing such a history, but he has begun at the true beginning. Now, while this is the beginning of that other history, it does represent a very different chapter from that which we have grown used to reading in later chapters, namely those which concern the eleventh, the fourteenth and fifteenth, and above all the sixteenth, centuries. This difference, moreover, has a considerable interest from the standpoint of the history of theological and particularly of ecclesiological doctrines.

For the Fathers in effect, whether Latin or Greek, what was in question was essentially the reform of *man*. Their ideology of reform is not ecclesiological, at least in the technical and narrow sense of the word: it is anthropological. Later, in the West—in practice from Leo X and Gregory VII onwards—what is in question is the reform of 'the Church'. And what is meant by 'the Church' is the clerical body of men charged with sacred functions or at least drawing their living from the sacred institution. As we have often had occasion to remark, for the Fathers—and again for the great Scholastics²—ecclesiology embraces anthropology: the Church is seen as being first of all not so much the machinery of the means of grace as the reality of men living in communion with God: the people of God, a sanctified people. We often hear of the *Ecclesia electorum*, and St Augustine will speak of 'The City of God' without absolutely distinguishing or identifying *Ecclesia* and *Civitas Dei societisque sanctorum*. This is then already the first chapter of the history of the idea of reform which Professor Ladner has written, but the content of this chapter is entirely anthropological. What is

¹ *The Idea of Reform: Its Impact on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers*. By Gerhart B. Ladner. (Harvard University Press; Oxford University Press, 100s.) Ladner understands 'reform' in the widest sense, and defines it as follows: 'the idea of free, intentional and ever perfectible, multiple, prolonged and ever repeated efforts by man to reassert and augment values pre-existent in the spiritual-material compound of the world'.

² See my article, 'The idea of the Church in St Thomas Aquinas', in *The Thomist*, October 1939, pp. 31-58.

in question is the reform of the Christian man, that is to say his re-conformation to the pattern which God has willed for him.

When ecclesiology, in the technical sense of the word, is in question, this re-conformation is looked for in relation to a pure and authentic state of the ecclesiastical institution itself: that to which the canons and the councils have provided the formula, but above all to that of the *Ecclesia primitiva*, the Church in its beginnings, the Church of the Apostles. When anthropology is in question, the re-configuration is seen in relation to that primitive state in which God had created man and in which he willed him to be. The anthropology of the Fathers, above all that of the orientals, is linked to the interpretation of man's paradisaical state at the beginning. Professor Ladner has an excellent chapter on the idea of the reform of man among the Greeks.³ For them it was a matter of the restoration of the original integrity, both of the universe and of man. This restoration is expressed in two principal ways in the East: in monastic life and in the function of the sovereign (the political theology of Eusebius). Each of these persons is, in his measure, a realization and an image of the royal government of the world, in that divine ideal in which the Fathers unite the biblical and Christian themes with the Platonic and Stoic heritage. Thus St John Chrysostom composed a small work called *De comparatione regis et monachi*.⁴

The later evolution of the West is dominated by the thought of St Augustine. The more one reads him the more one admires the way in which the Bishop of Hippo was able to construct out of the speculations of Platonic thought a synthesis at once sufficiently broad and rigorous, so strongly carved and so swept by the breath of life! Dr Ladner devotes a long chapter to him, and shows—which as far as we know has never been done before—the double connection which the anthropology of the restoration of the image of God in man has with the theme of the City of God—which theme he traces back to its pre-Augustinian origins. On the one hand, the City of God is made up precisely of men who are re-conformed to the image: on the other, its ideal is made concrete in activities and institutions—that of a quasi-monastic statute of clerical life surrounding the bishop, and the richness of that idea appears later not only in canonical life (though its golden age is outside the chronological limits of the present book) but in monastic life properly so called, whether Benedictine or not. Moreover—

³ He does not however penetrate to the depth of this theological anthropology, which involves the Eastern conception of what we call nature and grace, divinization, cosmism, etc.

⁴ Would this be pushing too far a comparison of texts, each of which relates to its own historical context? One would be inclined to remark that in the West the theme '*duo sunt . . . personae*' (Gelasius) envisages kings and *priests* (bishops). On the other hand, Anselm has drawn a parallel between the Monk and the King (cf. *Spicilegium Beccense*, vol. 1, Le Bec et Paris, 1959, p. 376). The monarchy he knew, that of the Conqueror's sons, led him above all to oppose the two personalities: the one did his *own* will, the other, through obedience, did the will of Another. The short treatise of St John Chrysostom (P.G. 47, 388 ff.) discusses in particular the different use of the world made by the monk and the monarch; that of the monk is evidently superior.

and Dr Ladner makes this plain—in the fifth and sixth centuries the distinction between clerics and monks was not as sharp as it was to become in the Middle Ages.

Professor Ladner emphasizes a more specific way in which, for St Augustine, the ideal of a *reformatio in melius* is actualized, namely the development of a complete scheme and practice of *doctrina christiana*. Augustine, who loved and sought out the *intellectus* of the Revelation of the divine wisdom ('*intellectum valde ama!*'), opened the way for that great movement for the sanctification of the understanding and of the kingdom of God in the souls of men, which is an important chapter in the re-modelling of man, and through him the whole world, to the image of God. This movement, taken up by Cassiodorus and Boethius, was to become that of the western Middle Ages. The value of restoration or reform through the arts and sciences, placed at the service of theological contemplation, is exactly expressed in the twelfth century, by the Victorines for example, or in the *Hortus deliciarum*.

Of the famous medieval trilogy, *Sacerdotium, Regnum, Studium*, St Augustine gave value to the two terms Priesthood (or Clerisy) and Sacred Study: he scarcely considered the notion of *Regnum*. He did not write a *De Regno Dei*: he did not place the notion of the City of God in a historical or political context, as Eusebius did with his political theology of a Christian Empire imitating the divine Monarchy, or as the typical medieval treatise in the West was to do, over and over again, whether in the Carolingian epoch or in the theocratic writers of the twelfth century or in the curialists at the beginning of the fourteenth (as in James of Viterbo's *De Regimine christiano*). For my part, I have no great liking for the label of 'political augustinianism', created by the late H. X. Arquillière, for it would seem to attribute to St Augustine himself a political translation of the City of God which Arquillière admits he never made. The paternity of that 'political augustinianism' should, it seems to me, be attributed to St Gregory the Great and to St Isidore rather than to St Augustine.

In the third part of his book Professor Ladner studies the handing on of the idea of anthropological reform in the fifth and sixth centuries by clerico-monastic institutions. The work of self-reformation, corresponding to the movement of sanctification, was considered as the essential complement of pre-baptismal conversion and baptismal regeneration: that aspect of things was systematically developed in the post-constantinian Church. Dr Ladner retraces that history; he puts into operation, here as everywhere, a knowledge of the sources and an erudition which overwhelms us. In reading him one is constantly enriching one's own impressions and knowledge of history. But, apart from the detail of so many documented statements, it is a general point of view that Dr Ladner has better enabled us to understand and which should be recognized here.

Nowadays we distinguish sharply between personal and collective, private and public, moral or spiritual and cosmic or material. Modern philosophy starts out from the initial isolated consciousness of the external world (*Cogito*). Such a separation would have seemed strange to the Fathers and to the Middle Ages. They distinguished indeed: they knew better than we

do how to discern spiritual values and to make them dominate the material world. But they did not isolate the spiritual from the cosmic, nor the personal from the collective. Their great systems of interpretation embraced all these territories together.

G. Tellenbach had already shown that the idea of *libertas*, which in the theme of the *Libertas Ecclesiae* animates the whole of eleventh-century reform, was both of cosmic and spiritual value.⁵ The most mystical idea of liberty dissolved at once into a metaphysical and cosmic view of the universe such as God wills for it. One might make the same enquiry about the notion of order, which in any case is so closely related to the other. One could do the same too for the notion of *reformatio* or *renovatio*, of which Dr Ladner has considered the development up to the sixth century. In all three cases what creates unity is God's design, which has a single source and encloses at the same time the world we call material and the most spiritual and intimate operations of the Christian life.

It is very important that a foundation of such breadth should be available for the subsequent history of the idea of reform which Dr Ladner promises to provide and which we shall await with an appetite that has been stimulated by this excellent beginning. Even when we are concerned with the reform of *the Church*, understood in the sense of a juridical machinery or a clerical body, the large themes of spiritual anthropology which Dr Ladner has detached will not be wanting, just as the mystical idea of a liberty assured by the unconditional service of God is present in the reform of Leo IX and Gregory VII. One cannot understand the 'idea' of the men of the Middle Ages in all its fulness and truth unless one inserts those juridical and political aspects, on which historians have insisted to an almost exclusive degree, within a context, at once spiritual and cosmic, in which illumination comes from God's unique and universal design.

For my part, during the last six or seven years, I have come to see that unity as proceeding from the Bible, in what we may call its consistent monotheism. And I believe in effect that the secret of that unity belongs to a truly *theo*-logical concern with things. More and more the secret of the many urgent and concrete problems which are postulated by the existence of the Christian in the contemporary world seems to reside in the answer given in the Bible to the simple question—so simple that it is often assumed to be answered, but which is indeed never asked—What is my God? What is the concrete goal of my Faith and my Prayer?

For the idea that one has of the world and of man, of life and its meaning, springs at once from the idea one has of God.

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THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN SOUTH AFRICA. By William Eric Brown. Edited by Michael Derrick. (Burns and Oates; 35s.)

The way to an understanding of the complex situation created by the

⁵ G. Tellenbach, *Libertas. Kirche und Weltordnung im Zeitalter des Investiturstreites*. Stuttgart, 1935.