

## Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



### Bellitto, Christopher and David Zachariah Flanagin (eds.). Reassessing Reform: A Historical Investigation into Church Renewal

Jennifer Mara Desilva

Volume 36, numéro 2, printemps 2013

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1091143ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v36i2.20173>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (imprimé)

2293-7374 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Desilva, J. (2013). Compte rendu de [Bellitto, Christopher and David Zachariah Flanagin (eds.). Reassessing Reform: A Historical Investigation into Church Renewal]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 36(2), 171–174. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v36i2.20173>

© Canadian Society for Renaissance Studies / Société canadienne d'études de la Renaissance; Pacific Northwest Renaissance Society; Toronto Renaissance and Reformation Colloquium; Victoria University Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies, 2013

Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

é  
rudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

<https://www.erudit.org/fr/>

ersatz university collection, since Pavia had none of its own—proved a perfect channel for sharing celestial scholarship with the ruling caste.

Ludovico il Moro was the most avid Sforza consumer of astrological knowledge. By the mid-1490s, his queries to Ambrogio da Rosate became obsessive, and Ambrogio eagerly obliged his patron: the pair were, in Azzolini's words, symbiotic. When the catastrophes of the French invasion brought Ludovico down in 1499, his favoured astrologer fell too. Although this is where Azzolini's book ends, I can offer a brief coda to the story since her characters have recently jumped off the pages in my own research in Milan after 1500. For instance, when Ludovico recaptured Milan for a short period in 1500, he wrote to Isabella d'Este (the letter is in Mantua's Gonzaga archive) that he had re-entered his city at daybreak specifically on his astrologer's advice. And as for Ambrogio, he may have fallen into disgrace, but he appears to have remained active in Milan as a physician, though perhaps not as an astrologer. He resurfaces in documents in 1508 treating a Sforza noblewoman, and—if it is the same Ambrogio da Rosate—as late as 1517 he was labelled one of Milan's "primi phisici" on a mission to Monferrato to treat the marquis. Regardless, Azzolini chose the proper ending point, and readers will find in this volume not just a compelling account of the rise and fall of the house of Sforza, but new and important reflections on astrology's role in fifteenth-century politics.

JOHN GAGNÉ, *University of Sydney*

**Bellitto, Christopher and David Zachariah Flanagin (eds.).**

***Reassessing Reform: A Historical Investigation into Church Renewal.***

Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2012. Pp. xii, 289. ISBN 978-0-8132-1999-8 (hardcover) \$69.95.

Christopher Bellitto and David Flanagin's newest collection is self-described as having two purposes. First, the volume acts as a Festschrift for the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of Gerhart Ladner's *The Idea of Reform* (1959), striving to celebrate, critique, and reapply Ladner's methodology of reform in new scholarly ways. Second, the volume commemorates in a more quiet fashion the opening of the Second Vatican Council (1962–65). Readers might be

forgiven for believing that the first purpose stood alone, as overwhelmingly the volume investigates the work and vision of the Austrian-born historian Ladner (1905–93), who taught at the Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies (Toronto), Fordham University, and the University of California, Los Angeles, among other institutions. Aside from writing on topics as diverse as papal iconography and systems of religious reform, Ladner encouraged many other scholars through his teaching, research, and friendship.

The collection is divided into two sections. Part 1, entitled “Gerhard Ladner’s *The Idea of Reform* After 50 Years,” memorializes Ladner’s career and methods in three chapters, each written by one of his former doctoral students: Lester L. Field Jr., Louis B. Pascoe, and Phillip H. Stump. Although these chapters provide an interesting academic genealogy, they also articulate the fundamental characteristics of studies that have benefitted from Ladner’s influence. Typically these studies appreciate the influence of biblical and patristic reform ideas on later reform ideologies, pay close attention to reform terminology and imagery, and seek the transformation of reforming words into actions implementing reform.

Part 2, entitled “Models and Case Studies of Medieval and Reformation Reform,” moves from celebrating Ladner as a historian to exploring the continued influence of *The Idea of Reform*’s central premise. Ladner argued that reform in Christianity appeared in a series 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” (85). The ten chapters comprising part 2 investigate this idea and show how Ladnerian characteristics can illuminate past perspectives in important ways. Across the board these essays are excellent, written by enthusiastic historians who explore the pursuit of reform in a variety of environments, building exclusively on manuscript and archival work.

Ken A. Grant begins the section with a study of Pope Gregory VII’s reform ideology and the way that he framed and supported his arguments for papal authority. This study reflects Ladner’s own research interest in the Gregorian reform movement as well as the medieval papacy’s method of self-presentation. Michael Vargas follows with an exploration of reform rhetoric transformed into action. Using records from the fourteenth-century Dominican Order, Vargas evaluates the difficulty of achieving widespread success in this transformative process, and, upon reflection, the difficulty of using reform as an analytical

tool. C. Colt Anderson returns to the benchmark of Gregorian reform in his essay on Jan Hus's *The Six Errors*, in which he argues for the Czech reformer's traditionalism on the issue of simony and the consequent disjuncture with the Council of Constance's over-arching and more pragmatic concern for maintaining clerical authority. Gerald Christianson continues to explore Hus's legacy by examining the debates at the Council of Basel and the diverse ways in which the conciliar fathers and the Hussite representatives authenticated their reforms using Scripture and Late Antique authors. David Albertson offers an unusual and intriguing perspective on Catholic unity as achieved through the use of mathematical metaphors. His contribution continues Ladner's own interest in the "reformative function of number" as seen in Augustine of Hippo and developed further in the fifteenth century by Heymeric de Campo. William P. Hyland maintains the theme of Catholic unity in his exploration of sermons presented by members of the Premonstratensian Order at the Council of Constance, which presented the order's practice of consultative leadership and mutual love as a plan for healing ecclesiastical leadership. Ann W. Astel follows this sympathetic path with a comparison of the visions of eucharistic reform described by Hildegard of Bingen and Nicholas of Cusa. Inigo Bocken's essay on Nicholas of Cusa's belief in the performative side of personal reform complements Astel's work nicely. Together they continue Ladner's elaboration of personal reform as an integral part of communal or institutional reform. Dennis D. Martin returns the focus to the clergy in his discussion of German Carthusian monks who served as "public intellectuals," bridging the theological knowledge gap between clergy and interested lay petitioners.

While part 2 banishes any doubt that Ladner's work has had a profound influence, the volume's second focus, as a commemoration of the Second Vatican Council, is much less apparent. Although elsewhere several contributors (Bellitto, Anderson, and Vargas) have discussed the connection between Ladner's work and the conciliar theme of *aggiornamento*, in this volume the Council lurks in the shadows. Bellitto and Flanagan note "a hermeneutic of continuity and-or discontinuity" (9) present in the Council that subsequently emerges in several chapters in part 2 as a side argument. Only William V. Hudon's essay brings Ladner's vision of evolving reform in the European past into confrontation with the methodology and scholarship of the present. Hudon's call for a better synthesis of early modern religiosity and reform attempts highlights the continued challenges that historians find inherent in

expressing the effects of reform rhetoric and programs in a balanced and nuanced fashion.

Nevertheless, as this volume amply and convincingly shows, Ladner's work continues to inspire historians to explore the extent of European reform efforts in a variety of venues and media, in order to test the boundaries of human achievement in pursuit of church unity and salvation.

JENNIFER MARA DESILVA, *Ball State University*

**Bénévent, Christine, Annie Charon, Isabelle Diu, and Magli Vène (eds.).**  
*Passeurs de textes. Imprimeurs et libraires à l'âge de l'Humanisme.*

Études et rencontres de l'École des Chartes, no. 37. Paris: Librairie Droz, 2012. Pp. 306. ISBN 978-2-35723-029-3 (paperback) € 34.

All of the essays in this volume deal, in some way, with the connections between the producers and distributors of printed books—printers and booksellers—and the spread of humanism in France during the sixteenth century. The editors contend that the relationship between printing and humanism, long taken for granted by scholars, deserves much more attention than it has received. The fourteen essays presented here, the fruits of a conference hosted by the École Nationale des Chartes and the Bibliothèque Ste. Genviève in 2009, present abundant evidence that the editors' contention was well-founded, and that there is much still to be learned about the mark and influence that producers and sellers of books had on the diffusion and reception of humanist ideals.

The volume reflects the shift of *l'histoire du livre*, pioneered by French book historians like Henri-Jean Martin and Roger Chartier, from an emerging to an established discipline. Take the title, *passeurs de textes*: on the one hand it evokes the image of a ferryman, a benign conduit between author and reader; on the other, it has the more nuanced (and perhaps more sinister) connotation of a dealer in questionable or illicit goods. The ambiguity is intentional; not all *passeurs de textes* were cast from the same mould, and the editors have opted, wisely, to allow that diversity to shine through rather than forcing a coherence where none exists. Likewise, the essays reflect the interdisciplinary approach