the 'scientific' stream of Humanism, leaving Vico as the culmination of its 'rhetorical' counterpart. But surely Vico, the author of the *New Science* and devotee of Francis Bacon, has a legitimate claim to membership in the 'scientific' stream.

Troublesome as they are, these problems should not distract us from the main significance of Grassi's synthesis from the standpoint of Renaissance studies, viz. his clear understanding that Renaissance Humanism has had descendants in modern thought that deserve as much attention as its antecedents in classical and medieval thought. Most studies of Renaissance humanism – and among these the best – are devoted either to its origins or to a close study of its most important texts from the end of the fourteenth through to the middle of the sixteenth centuries. By that time, according to the conventional wisdom of scholars, Humanism had run its course. Not so, according to Grassi. In this book and elsewhere he demonstrates that only in the eighteenth century, with Vico, do we reach "the end of the humanistic tradition" (67). This connexion between Vico and the Renaissance has already attracted the attention of an impressive list of scholars, including, besides Grassi himself, Eugenio Garin, Isaiah Berlin, D.P. Verene and Donald Kelley. But much of this work of recovering the modern descendants of Renaissance Humanism is still left undone, even in the field of Vico studies. It is Grassi, more than anyone else, who has devoted himself to the task of making Renaissance history, in a meaningful way, the history of the present.

LEONARD PENNACHETTI, *York University*

Steven Ozment. *The Age of Reform, 1250–1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1980. Pp. xii, 458. \$28.50.

The Age of Reform, 1250–1550 is the culmination of a decade of research by Steven Ozment into the intellectual continuity of religious reform movements in the medieval and early modern periods. Ozment's previous books (*The Reformation in Medieval Perspective*, *Mysticism and Dissent* and *The Reformation in the Cities*) and essays have pointed the way in this regard, each treating an element or elements of the thesis that the ideas and ideals of the Lutheran Reformation were not wholly children of the sixteenth century but arose through a maturation process, the origin of which was distinctively medieval. Ozment does not deny, of course, that much of the Lutheran religious programme was novel. His point, rather, is that the sentiments, as well as many of the solutions, endemic to the Reformation had a long history that can be traced far back into the Middle Ages. While Ozment's claim is hardly controversial, at least to those familiar with intellectual history between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries, it has seldom been investigated thoroughly and in detail.

The great virtue of *The Age of Reform* is its clarity in the face of a labyrinth of religious traditions and movements. *The Age of Reform* weaves together the important primary sources and the outstanding secondary literature into a solid and readable introduction to the major figures, events and ideas of later medieval and Reformation Europe. The sheer scope of this enterprise poses certain dangers, however, which Ozment has not completely avoided. The most obvious of these is the manner in

which one defines and analyzes "intellectual continuity." The intellectual historian seems to have two possible courses he may follow. Either he provides the broadest possible introduction to the varieties of thought in the epoch under consideration or he is highly selective, treating his subject-matter in terms of an evolutionary pattern and funneling earlier thought through later developments. Both methods may properly establish "continuity," but the end products will differ widely depending upon which direction is followed.

Ozment seems to have chosen the first of these two routes in *The Age of Reform*. His presentation of the medieval tradition of religious dissent, which occupies the initial 180 pages of the text, is far less concerned with pinpointing the intellectual sources of the Reformation than with sketching out the full range of opposition to Church theology and institutions in the later Middle Ages. This is not to suggest that Ozment ignores the intellectual heritage of the Lutheran Reformation; he does address, for instance, the significance of Ockhamist scholasticism for Lutheran principles. But *The Age of Reform* also introduces numerous later medieval quests for religious change which were inimical to or had no direct bearing on the sixteenth-century reformers: mysticism (and especially Meister Eckhart) and Spiritual Franciscanism, as well as major portions of the so-called "ecclesiopolitical tradition," receive attention out of proportion to their importance for Luther and his followers. Ozment's point in surveying the broad contours of religious dissent is to show that the Reformation must be seen against the background of several on-going traditions of protest against the spiritual, intellectual and institutional corruption of the Church, real or perceived. This is the lesson of *The Age of Reform*, and it is one that cannot be stated too often.

Yet *The Age of Reform* is ultimately unsatisfying as a scholarly statement, beyond its obvious value as a sort of primer. For Ozment leaves untouched a series of vexing questions. Why did reform movements of various shapes and sizes persist over the 300 years with which *The Age of Reform* deals? Why did the Lutheran Reformation succeed in producing widespread religious change where its predecessors failed? Why did demands for reform not arise uniformly but in different geographic and social configurations at different times? These legitimate problems of continuity and discontinuity are hardly to be considered incompatible with the most basic aims of *The Age of Reform*. Ozment, however, never expressly acknowledges the existence of such questions, even if he provides scattered clues to what he supposes the solutions might be. Part of this reticence, I suspect, is due to a methodological injunction that seems to inform *The Age of Reform*: "theology and religion also had lives of their own independent of larger historical circumstances; people could act apart from and even against their best material self-interest for the sake of theological abstraction" (p. 374). Ozment forms a rigid dichotomy between "ideas" and "history" which grants to intellectual production a sort of objective status beyond its context. Ironically, Ozment's own evidence renders this dualism self-contradictory. An important goal of *The Age of Reform* is to belie the claim that the Lutheran Reformation was intellectually superior to its medieval counterparts in terms of the conceptual apparatus brought to bear on the critique of the Church's institutional and theological principles. The quest for religious reform continuing into the sixteenth century was not based on the intellectual inadequacy of the ideas posed by earlier reformers; nor did the Lutheran movement succeed purely as a result of some unique theological and philosophical under-pinnings. Luther and other Reformation thinkers represented

only the latest in a series of learned and sophisticated attacks mounted against the Catholic Church. If ideas alone were the key to the emergence, persistence and ultimate victory of reforming movements, then there is no possible rationale for the failures of later medieval religious dissent or for the success of the Reformation. It is necessary, then, that we turn to history to provide an explanation for the course of on-going demands for reform. Answers to the questions of continuity and discontinuity must be sought in the larger historical setting of Europe and the transformations which European society was undergoing in the period under consideration, as well as in the practical programme entailed by the pursuit of reform.

Ozment's sole attempt to provide an historical basis for intellectual continuity and discontinuity in reforming thought during the later medieval and early modern epochs is to be found in his dissection of the transitional state of European culture on the eve of the Reformation, where he lays heavy emphasis on the growth of urban centres and related developments. Ozment sees in the cities the basic elements of a catalyst for religious dissent and change in the guise of the intellectual vitality often associated with increases in town population, literacy and particularly the availability of money (pp. 190–204). Earlier in *the Age of Reform*, Ozment had suggested that the flowering of medieval culture resulted from the intensification of secular and city life produced by the opening of "new routes of Western commerce" (pp. 4–5). His analysis of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries merely confirms the premium he places on the town as the source of intellectual energy: "Urban centres ... were then, as they have always been in Western history, the sites of creative change. In the cities lived the merchants, bankers, skilled craftsmen, and scholars who possessed the power and ingenuity for innovation, and there one also found the social conflicts on which change thrives" (p. 192). Ozment has inherited and reproduced the common historical supposition that the intellectual, social and economic environment of the town acts as a dissolvant of traditional bonds and serves to foment new values and ideas. Thus, *The Age of Reform* reflects an *a priori* division of urban and rural in terms of a separation of progressive and regressive, dynamic and static, elements in society. As such, Ozment conceives of Protestantism as a distinctively "urban theology," in the sense that it constituted "both a reflection and a defense of the social and political values of townsmen in free cities, especially their egalitarianism and strong sense of communal solidarity" (p. 192). Ozment's view would seem to be that religious reform movements commencing in the thirteenth century can generally be traced to urban origins: where the country side was resistant to change and held to customary forms of worship and superstition, the towns were a hotbed of the social, economic and intellectual activism necessary for widescale religious protest and dissent. From the economic and demographic data Ozment has amassed emerges the implicit thesis that the historical precondition for the success of religious reform was the entrenchment of a new set of social values and conflicts issuing from an urbanized setting.

Presuming that I have pieced together Ozment's clues correctly, his account of the sources, persistence and final victory of reforming sentiment in terms of the regeneration and expansion of urban-centered values and struggles is not without serious flaws. The assumption of an unequivocal split between town and countryside has been challenged and largely repudiated in recent years by scholarship that has established the fundamental interrelatedness of urban and rural sectors, and the continued dominance of agrarian life, throughout the period covered by *The Age of Reform*. To suppose that cities were oasis-like islands in the midst of a desolate feudal sea,

harbouring all that was progressive in society, economy and the intellect, is not only the small conceit of the modern urbanized Western mind, but also reveals a certain ignorance of the essential nature of feudalism. It was precisely the fragmentation characteristic of the feudal world that made towns possible; far from eroding feudal relations, town life was an integral part of feudalism as a whole. The analogous presumption that conflict enveloped the medieval towns while rural regions remained peaceful and harmonious is untenable, as well. Neither were medieval cities as riven with civil strife as has often been supposed, nor were rural regions as tranquil as might be thought. Indeed, the struggles of the countryside, between competing feudal lords and particularly between lords and the peasantry, were a driving force of change in feudal social, political and economic relations. For example, the emergence of the secular nation-state, on which Ozment places so much emphasis (cf. pp. 4, 182–90, 193–5, 204–5), was largely reliant on the course of these sorts of rural conflicts.

Similarly, it is curious that Ozment makes no effort to acknowledge that, from the thirteenth century onwards, the regions where sentiment favouring Church reform was most intense and widespread tended to be those where traditional feudal relations and institutions were the strongest and most successful. Perhaps the best example of this connection is the relation of the Lutheran Reformation to the German Peasants' Revolt of 1525. Ozment minimizes the purely intellectual impact that Luther and other reformers had on the Revolt, quoting Luther's memorable repudiation of peasant discontent: "I am and always will be on the side of those against whom insurrection is directed, no matter how unjust their cause; I am opposed to those who rise in insurrection, no matter how just their cause" (p. 282). Yet we should not forget that the peasantry did employ spiritual principles of Protestant reform to justify basic demands (summarized by Ozment on pp. 275–7) revolving around long-standing conflicts with the feudal nobility over agrarian production and the surplus fruits of that production. As with the English Peasants' Revolt of 1381, which has been documented so well by Rodney Hilton in *Bond Men Made Free*, religious reform became a rallying-point and cloak for attempts to remedy specific rural economic and social ills in the sixteenth century. The theology of dissent, even in those cases where it clearly emerged from towns, had direct and immediate application to the lives of poor, untutored and agrarian peasants; and this can hardly be considered an accident if one dismisses a rigid division between urban and rural society. Much of the popular appeal of Protestantism and its predecessors can be located in the legitimacy that reforming thought and feeling conferred on those seeking to relieve peasant grievances endemic to traditional feudal relation. The theory and practice of religious dissent must not be separated from the other needs of those who took up the cause.

It is at the nexus of "history" and "ideas," then, that *The Age of Reform* is least convincing. For in treating as derivative questions about the social origins and influence of ideas – particularly where *traditions* of thought are concerned – *The Age of Reform* reveals Ozment's lack of a coherent vision of evolving historical processes to match his portrait of ideas of religious dissent in medieval and early modern Europe. In the absence of such a vision, *The Age of Reform* fails to address important historical questions about the transformation of the intellectual world of Europe the solutions to which are crucial to our understanding of the continuity and discontinuity of thought between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries.