

HERESY IN THE LATER MIDDLE AGES. *The Relation of Heterodoxy to Dissent, c. 1250-1450.* 2 Vols., by Gordon Leff. *Manchester University Press, 1967.* 90s.

In this world of dissolving integrities, and a new barbarian invasion, Dr Leff remains a civilized portent. As historical research is menaced by pressures from science and pseudo-sciences, and the image of the man of learning forgotten in the welter of hordes of eager beavers lusting after slightly higher degrees, Dr Leff pursues with Erasmian concentration and single-mindedness, in the grand manner of the great German and British medievalists, the cause of sound learning. This he has done in a series of learned studies of which the present work is a climactic, but not a viaticum. It is the combination of technical competence, of European wide learning and profound intellectual dexterity which gives this work signal importance among recent historical studies.

The key to it lies in the opening disclaimer. This is not intended as a survey of the whole field of medieval heresy. Still less is it concerned for the machinery of ecclesiastical ways of handling heretical pravity: for this we may still turn to older works, to Bernard Gui or Henry Lea. Dr Leff singles out some things for study in detail and in depth, while others he leaves alone. This is not only because we sense that Joachim da Fiore, Eckhart and, above all, Ockham and Wycliffe appeal to him as problems of ideas, but because they interest him and grip his imagination—a pardonable way, indeed, of going about the historian's business, and one to which we owe classical essays by great masters.

For him heresy must be seen in relation to orthodoxy on the one hand, and dissent on the other—dissent which is in the main the moralistic protest, an awareness of the tension between Christian precept and practice—which exists 'divina permissione' throughout all Christian history. On the one side ecclesiastical organization, all too thoroughly earthed in culture, and a formidable body of orthodox doctrine, undergirded by scholastic theology: on the other the Poor Man of Nazareth and Golgotha, with his Brocken-like shadow of Anti-Christ. A study of heresy in this context has very important material for Christians to ponder, and value beyond that which it evidently possesses for students and teachers of history. Indeed, Christian scholars ought to be chastened and abashed to see how historical imagination, depth of learning and a prodigious capacity for lucid and abstract thought can take one who stands outside the Church into

perceptive understanding of fundamental Christian mysteries. We think perhaps the definition is not entirely satisfactory: one reason for not treating the Cathari in great detail is that it is to a great extent extra-Christian, but then one has to ask whether, in fact, Gnostic and Manichean ideas do not continue to penetrate all the Middle Ages, to re-appear even among the more respectable Biblicists like the English Lollards who read at a wedding the 'Gospel according to Nicodemus'—and other elements in the Free Spirit which link them with Jerome Bosch and even with William Blake.

The prologue of the work is as much epilogue as preface and distills the lessons of these massive volumes, so that the student who runs may read it with profit, leaving his teacher to sit and pore over the whole. Dr Leff deals effectively with those who would interpret the whole business in terms of class conflict, and by anticipation with the rigidities of the sociologists. Each of the main studies in the rest of his work gives us the latest 'state of the parties' in European research, and treads with discrimination among the numerous authorities (e.g. the singling out of Lossky among discussions of Eckhart). There is a fine analysis of the whole debate about apostolic poverty, as it arises from the drastic recapture by St Francis of authentic and overlaid simplicities—adroitly side-stepping John XXII's 'Slough of Despond' and lucidly analysing the addled complexities of the Spiritual Franciscans and Fraticelli who put what Francis had found as gospel, under the sign of the law. There are valuable pages on Joachim da Fiore and his influence in the later Middle Ages which will one day be extended into the sixteenth century. There are splendid essays on Eckhart and on Ockham. Of course, Eckhart is treated in full because his alleged teaching was condemned, and Dr Legg's thesis has the defects of its virtues at this point. For the consideration of Eckhart's significance demands a wider treatment still: a reference to the teaching of Dionysius the Areopagite—himself a continuing ferment throughout the later Middle Ages. And we wonder if Dr Leff has really got Augustine quite right—theology and grace, as well as illumination and prayer—whether this Mount Everest is the one lofty peak he has not yet mastered. And one would have welcomed some treatment of Christology at this point—

for here German mysticism, St Hildegard and the Gertrudes, with their concentration on the sacred humanity, and on the 'Wounds of Jesus'—supply even more important influences on Tauler, Suso and perhaps the modern devotion. And here and at one or two other points I am not sure whether the medieval hermeneutic, with its ambivalent exegesis did not permit thinkers to treat 'unity in Christ' as at once a matter for the individual soul while at the same time being ecclesiological? About the Free Spirits, Dr Leff gathers together the fragments of this intriguing underworld more carefully than most—and confirms me in thinking that this is one of the clues towards the imagery of Bosch and that spiritual jungle in which another important element is alchemy. The chapter on Wycliffe is fine and enthralling, and what Dr Leff has to show in a documented analysis of his later eucharistic teaching shows a spiritualism too subtle for Wycliffe's followers but which will have to be considered and noted by those concerned with late medieval and Reformation eucharistic controversy. But about this, and about Wycliffe's doctrine of the Bible, while marvelling at Dr Leff's easy movement among the Latin imponderables, I found myself wondering like Doubting Luther on the 'Scala Sancta'—'who knows whether it is true?' Only in heaven—and perhaps in Tübingen—is there knowledge enough to answer this question. And then the question—Wycliffe's influence on Lollardy—the remote and ineffectual don and a church struggle—Karl Barth and the Confessing Church. I do not think we have got this right yet, either. I know that at the end of H. B. Workman's life, his daughter came upon him weeping and sadly tearing to pieces the manuscript he could never finish of a further volume on

Wycliffe and later Lollardy, and I suspect he might have come up with some clues which have yet to be brought out. What is fascinating is to turn from Wycliffe's influence on his disciples in England to those in Bohemia and to see what different things they found in him, and how those differences were rooted in a different historical and theological context—much as the Americans and the Germans have found two different Bonnhoeffers.

Finally, Dr Leff leaves ideology for historical events in a lucid, factual survey of the Hussite movement which show his competence in the field of historical narrative. We feel perhaps that it is among ideas that he is most at home, that it is here that his work is most rich and thought-provoking. Amid the papal bulls and the theological treatises, the articles and the meditations, the gifted and often lop-sided leaders, we only catch occasional glances of the little people. Perhaps one who has an in-built sympathy with dissenters and non-conformists may suspect that there were among them not only the perverts, the arrogant, the awkward squads; but, as Dr Leff implies, he cannot narrate this, for the records are in the main silent about them—holy and humble men and women of heart. One whose interest lies in the sixteenth century must be deeply grateful for this work, and still more exasperated that we await another Leff to explore for us the jungle of the fifteenth century where his main streams begin to run underground and the conventicles of Lollards, Hussites, Waldensians, Free Spirits, Friends of God almost disappear, to come up again one day among the Anabaptists and the disciples of Thomas Müntzer. But this is a great, memorable study for which we should be very thankful.

E. GORDON RUPP

DEFENSORIUM OBEDIENTIAE APOSTOLICAE ET ALIA DOCUMENTA, ed. and trans. H. A. Oberman, D. E. Zerfoss, and W. J. Courtney. *The Belknap Press of Harvard University*. vii + 387 Pp. £5 14s.

This sumptuously produced and very expensive volume was probably meant primarily as a contribution to the pre-history of the Reformation. It contains a number of documents relating to the ex-communication of Archbishop Diether of Mainz by Pius II, chief amongst them a tract, celebrated in its day, by one Gabriel Biel, called *Defensorium Obedientiae Apostolicae*. The dispute had more than local importance because it occurred very soon after Pius II thought he had given the *coup de grace*

to the Conciliar Movement with his bull, *Execrabilis*; in spite of which Archbishop Diether had the temerity to appeal to a council. The editors provide annotated texts, a valuable introduction, and a free translation which seems accurate where I have tested it. Although one of them is a professor in a German university, we get that horrid solecism, *Hapsburg*. They have conscientiously sought to identify their authors' sources, although this cannot have been their main interest, but they have, I