

# Dictionary of the Middle Ages

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**REFORM, IDEA OF.** The terms *reformare* and *reformatio* are key words in medieval Christian parlance. Their force is essentially retrospective; though customarily translated “reform,” they could more accurately be rendered as “restore” and “restoration.” In classical pagan literature they could refer to a miraculous return to a previous state, for example through restoration of lost youth (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*). This notion of reform as turning back to an earlier condition is suggested also in later and purely secular usage: Rudolf I of Habsburg, on becoming emperor in the late thirteenth century, announced his intention to “restore the peace” with the formula *pacem reformare*. Usually implicit or explicit in such usage was the understanding that reform harked back to an ideal state of affairs in the past, a “golden age” of the church, the monasteries, the state, or society in general. It is only in the modern era that these terms, linked with Enlightenment notions of progress, came to be used with reference to a forward-looking transformation, or a process of building toward an ideal goal not already realized in the past. Because conceptions of the ideal era might differ, there was no consensus regarding the nature of the reform to be undertaken in medieval Christendom; concepts of reform varied widely.

The notion of reform in a specifically Christian sense was first articulated in the patristic era with reference to the individual soul. Having fallen into sin, each individual stood in need of reform. In such contexts the term “reform” came to be closely linked with “conversion.” Entry into the monastic

life was one way of effecting and securing a transformation of this sort; Augustine, for example, did not feel that his own spiritual recovery was assured until he was able to assume the full rigor of the ascetic life. Partly because it was the monasteries that developed the theory of individual reform, it was natural that the term should become extended within a monastic milieu to institutional transformation as well. Thus, when monks in the ninth and following centuries sought to restore monasticism to what they saw as its original vigor, they evolved a theory of institutional reform that owed much to earlier theology of personal religious life.

When the project of reform spread from the monasteries to the church at large in the eleventh century, the ideology of reform was further translated into ecclesiological language. This article, then, will focus on (1) theological notions of individual reform, particularly as they were developed in the patristic era; and (2) the ideas of reform embodied in the monastic and church reforms of the Middle Ages.

#### INDIVIDUAL REFORM IN THE PATRISTIC ERA

The patristic concept of reform has been unfolded by Gerhard B. Ladner, who distinguishes the idea of reform in terms of four related but distinct groups of notions. First, cosmological ideas of renewal, elaborated by Plato, the Stoics, the Neopythagoreans, and others, envisaged a general cyclical pattern of recurrence in which a set succession of eras would be perpetually reenacted. In extreme forms this theory maintained that not just the general eras would be repeated, but the details of individual lives as well. Frequently the assumption was that each cycle began with a golden age, from which history declined. Such ideas were incompatible with the linear conception of history found in the Bible, and in particular with Christian conceptions of freedom.

Second, vitalistic notions of renewal or renaissance posited a restoration of life or of growth following a period of dormancy. The metaphor used could be vegetative, but the myth of the phoenix arising from its ashes also came into play in such contexts. The pagan renaissance under Theodosius in the late fourth century, which sought to defend, revise, and revive the literature of pagan antiquity, employed such ideas. Whereas the vitalistic notion of renewal suggests a spontaneous urge, the idea of reform involves a conscious pursuit of goals.

Third, millenarian concepts of renewal, which anticipate a 1,000-year period of bliss at the end of history, derive mainly from Jewish messianic expectations (tempered by Hellenistic cosmology), and were transmitted to Christendom through the book of Revelation, especially chapter 20. Christian millenarianism has arisen in various forms: Augustine reinterpreted the millennium as the last era in ordinary Christian history, while Joachim of Fiore conceived it as the imminent and ultimate age of the Holy Spirit, which would succeed the age of the Son just as the latter had already superseded the age of the Father. Later theories of renewal (utopian, revolutionary, and progressive) have owed much to millenarian precedent. The distinguishing feature of millenarianism is its insistence that when the millennium or 1,000-year kingdom comes, there will be absolute, total perfection on earth. The idea of reform, on the other hand, maintains that imperfection will remain in earthly affairs; perfectibility is always relative, and will be realized to an extent that cannot be foreseen.

Fourth, the ideas of conversion, baptismal regeneration, and penance are closely linked with the idea of reform but not precisely identical. The effects of baptism are instantaneous and nonrepeatable; postbaptismal conversion and penance, seen as nonrepeatable during the earliest Christian centuries but later made repeatable, were turning points rather than gradual processes. Reform, on the other hand, involves a prolonged process of spiritual recovery, which may be initiated by baptism or by penance but requires multiple and repeated means (such as the Eucharist) toward its fulfillment.

Ladner therefore defines the concept of reform as "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" (p. 35).

New Testament language of renewal sometimes (for instance, in John and Titus) refers to baptismal regeneration. When Paul speaks of *anakainosis* and related concepts, however, he is referring to a sustained process of renewal that begins with conversion and baptism, and extends beyond this initial stage throughout life. The typical Latin term for this process is *reformatio*. Thus, for example, Romans 12:2 enjoins readers not to be conformed to this world but to be reformed (*reformamini*, in the Vulgate) according to the transformation that has

occurred in their minds. II Corinthians 3:18 speaks of the inner person as renewed daily, reformed from glory to glory in accordance with the Creator's image. This notion of restoration according to God's image, which echoes the language of Genesis 1:26, takes on christological implications: whereas Christ is the image of God, human beings are made and later reformed *according to* or *in* God's image.

The Greek fathers developed these biblical conceptions in various ways, of which the notion of recovering one's likeness to God is one of the most important. Genesis referred to human beings as made in God's "image and likeness"; some of the earliest Fathers saw the body as marked by the image of God, and the soul as characterized by his likeness, the latter being more valuable than the former. Because this likeness has been obscured by an accumulation of impurities—or has, so to speak, been painted over by sin—it needs to be purified through the process of being-made-like. The Septuagint gives *homoiosis* rather than *homoioma* for "likeness," thus emphasizing process rather than state. Gregory of Nyssa in particular, taking advantage of this translation, equated the soul's likeness to God with the process of seeking him or of assimilation to him: ". . . to progress forever in seeking, and never to pause on the road up, this is truly to enjoy the desired. . . ." Thus the Greek fathers developed Paul's notion of ongoing reform within the soul as a process that extends through one's life. They convey similar perceptions in their discussion of other motifs, such as the return to paradise and the establishment of the kingdom of God.

The other central category in the Greek understanding of reform is that of deification: what God is by nature, human beings are called upon to become through grace or adoption. Irenaeus, for instance, stressed that Christ had become human so that human beings could become divine. In all such contexts the fundamental idea is one of gradual progress toward that ideal state from which Adam had fallen.

In the West the notion of reform was taken over and in some ways transformed. Tertullian frequently used the term *reformare* in the broad sense of a restoration or a return to some previous state of affairs. He held that the constant *reformatio* in nature, where all things recur and are preserved, is a sound argument for the resurrection of bodies, and that the prime exemplar of such restoration is the phoenix. His most significant contribution, though, was the notion of reform to something

better than the original state (*in melius reformare*—a phrase taken over by Cyprian and by later Latin fathers). While he used *reformare* with reference to baptism, he also recognized a process of asceticism or discipline (*exercitatio*) after baptism by which the individual is purified and assimilated to God. Ambrose, building on such earlier references to reform, emphasized that reform entails more than a mere recovery: "The Lord came to reform the grace of nature, and even to increase it, so that where there was a superabundance of sin, there would be a superabundance of grace." Ambrose's distinction between a grace of nature (*gratia naturae*) and a grace of renewal (*gratia renovationis*) is expressed with special poignancy in the *Exultet* of the Easter liturgy, which refers to the happy or fortunate guilt (*felix culpa*) of Adam: The sin of Adam made it possible, through Christ's incarnation, for humankind to enjoy a higher state than Adam himself could ever have achieved without sinning.

The theology of personal reform is further developed by Augustine, whose *Confessions* is a classic account of his own reform, worked by divine effort through the mediation of friends and circumstances. From Augustine's perspective both the final resurrection of the body and the reform of the soul in this life entail an improvement on the original state (*renovatio in melius*). When the body is resurrected, it will be a spiritual body, superior to the present one; whereas Adam's body had the possibility of not dying (*posse non mori*), the resurrection body will be characterized by the impossibility of dying (*non posse mori*). So, likewise, the regenerated Christian on earth, who is in fact a predestined saint, stands higher than Adam; such an individual is distinguished by resistance to far greater temptation than Adam's, and is characterized not only by the possibility of not sinning (*posse non peccare*) but also by the impossibility of sinning (*non posse peccare*), thanks to Christ's redemptive work.

Augustine saw the reform of the soul as prefigured in the very act of God's creation. When God began to create, on the first day he fashioned spiritual matter and physical matter that were as yet unformed, and then he called them to himself (*revocante ad se creatore*) by bestowing form upon them. This process of *revocatio*, then, is the archetype of human *reformatio*, according to Augustine. The calling of both spirit and matter to God is in this respect significant: the reform of human beings is ultimately a process that includes body as well as soul, though the latter remains superior.

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Like Paul and the Greeks, Augustine develops the notion of reform by referring to the Genesis language of creation in God's image and likeness. Yet he maintains that the likeness to God (traces of God, *vestigia Dei*) can be found throughout nature, while it is only in human beings that God's image is present. Unlike the Greeks, then, Augustine ranks the image above the likeness; whereas they see the likeness as pertaining to the higher element in humanity, he sees the image as that which is distinctive to humanity. An image is something begotten by that which it reproduces—as an object produces its image in a mirror, a model serves as the basis for a painting, a parent begets a child, or God the Father begets Christ. There are degrees of likeness between prototype and image; having been created according to God's image, human beings have become dissimilar to God through sin, and need to be restored to similarity through reform. Ultimately, though, the process of reform is something that God alone can accomplish: "We could deform the image of God in us, but we cannot reform it."

Augustine agrees with the Greeks in seeing the assimilation of human beings to God as a process of deification, in which we become divine by adoption and grace rather than by nature.

Augustine's theory of the City of God likewise serves to develop the notion of reform. The City of God is not equated with the institutional church, and its development through the present era until the end of time (the *procursus*) is not intended for "church reform" as that concept later evolved. What Augustine does mean to say is that the City of God consists of individuals who are themselves undergoing reform, and who will in the end restore the numbers of souls in heaven lost through the fall of the rebellious angels.

Augustine's influence on later generations ensured that his conception of reform would be perpetuated throughout the Middle Ages and beyond, even if revised. It is not surprising, for example, to find Caesarius of Arles insisting that reform involves not only recovery of pristine health (*ad sanitatem pristinam revocare*) but also conversion to better things (*converti ad meliora*). Echoes of Augustine similar to this can be found liberally dispersed through medieval theology and spiritual literature.

### THE MEDIEVAL THEOLOGY OF REFORM

Ideas of reform in medieval theology and philosophy built upon this patristic foundation, but were

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not wholly derivative. In the early Middle Ages, the most striking variation on the notion of reform was perhaps John Scottus Eriugena's Platonic conception of the return of all things to God, who as the final recapitulation of his own creation renews all things by absorbing them back into himself. Bernard Silvester, in the twelfth century, spoke of *reformatio* (and *reformatio in melius*) both in a moral sense (for man the microcosm) and in a cosmological sense analogous to Eriugena's (for the matter of the macrocosm). Anselm of Canterbury was more traditional in his notion of the *imago Dei* obscured by sin and in need of reform or renewal. The same theme occurs in Bernard of Clairvaux, with a sharper sense of the difficulty in reform. It is a process that grace will bring to fulfillment only in heaven, even though progress toward this reform can take place on earth.

While medieval theology took over the patristic conceptions of reform, the term *reformare* (along with related words such as *renovare* and *restaurare*) accumulated further uses and nuances as well. The variety of its meanings becomes clear from a survey of usage in the works of Thomas Aquinas. Most commonly, *reformatio* for Thomas is a moral process. In various contexts he speaks of the "reformation of the soul" or "of the mind" that is achieved by grace. Repeatedly he speaks of the *reformatio imaginis*, the restoration to the soul of the image of God that has been lost by sin; following a tradition that comes from Augustine, he sees this image as consisting in the psychological trinity of memory, understanding, and will, and the process of reform affects all of these faculties. Elsewhere he uses *reformatio* in an eschatological sense. The bodies of the saints will be reformed (or restored); but because they will be glorified like Christ's body (according to Phil. 3:21), they will be reformed *in melius*. (Thomas uses the notion of *reformatio in melius* in loose as well as in traditional ways; when a man is made into a bishop, this transformation counts as a "reformation for the better.") In extension of this eschatological usage, Thomas refers also to the final *reformatio* of the whole world. The verb *renovare*, "to renew," is also important for Thomas, and has a similar range of meanings, plus a further sacramental significance: those who undergo baptism are thereby "renewed."

### THE IDEOLOGY OF INSTITUTIONAL REFORM

The most important innovation in medieval ideas of reform is their extension to societies and

institutions. Even Augustine, while he envisaged spiritual progress within the City of God, did not conceive of it as a process evident in historical institutions such as monasteries or the church. In the Middle Ages, particularly from the eleventh century onward, *reformatio* became a rallying cry for action. While never totally removed from its theological context, in the midst of institutional reform the term becomes an expression of ideology more than of theology. The primary documents vital for the cause of reform were *consuetudines* and other elaborations upon the monastic rule. These texts showed in minute detail how a truly reformed monastery was to be run; they did not attend to the theology of the religious life, except perhaps in passing and by implication. When reformers carried the zeal for reform out of the monasteries and into the church at large, the texts that most directly served their purposes were canons directed against specific abuses, such as simony and clerical marriage. Here, too, there was little urge to pursue theological issues per se. From themes that recur in these and similar documents, however, one can piece together a conception (if not a full-fledged theology) of reform.

Like the theologians, the reformers spoke at times about *reformatio in melius*. St. Norbert of Xanten, founder of the Premonstratensians and archbishop of Magdeburg, announced his intention to reform *in melius* the clergy of his archiepiscopal see. Jacques de Vitry, in a survey of reform movements, spoke of the Western church as daily being "reformed for the better." The reformers' endeavor was not a purgation that occurred once and for all; it was a task that required constant attention. Anticipating in this respect Luther's insistence that "the church must always be reformed," the Fourth Lateran Council required monasteries to attend constantly to "the reform of the order and of regular observance."

It is clear from many sources that both monastic and ecclesiastical reformers thought they were restoring their institutions to a state of pristine purity. Monks could hark back to either of two possible golden ages: the flourishing of eremitic monasticism among the desert Fathers, or the codification of cenobitic monasticism under St. Benedict of Nursia. The life of Bernard of Tiron speaks of the wilderness in northwestern France as becoming "like another Egypt" because of the hermits who gathered there. Early Cistercian documents, too, often speak of a return to the rigor of early

desert monasticism. When reformers set out detailed norms for proper monastic observance, however, they typically saw themselves as reviving the regimen of St. Benedict. The *Regularis concordia* of tenth-century England tells how King Edgar restored (*restauravit*) monasteries that had fallen into neglect. Having driven out their wayward monks, he substituted devout ones, and at a synodal council he urged the new monks "to be of one mind as regards monastic usage, to imitate the holy and approved Fathers," and to preserve their unanimity by faithful adherence to the Rule of St. Benedict.

#### MONASTIC REFORM

The reform movements of medieval monasticism arose in response to various symptoms of corruption. These fall essentially into three categories: (1) negligence of monastic responsibilities, such as extending hospitality, performing requisite liturgical services, and maintaining the monastery through manual labor; (2) distraction or alienation from the monastic community, either in secular employment (such as counselor or chaplain to a secular lord) or in wanton desertion; (3) violation of common Christian morality, typically by indulgence in drunkenness, licentiousness, and other vices of the flesh.

All these forms of abuse were known, and some of them were widespread, in the early Middle Ages. The reasons for the corruption were various. Among the factors commonly cited are the Viking and other raids, which disrupted normal monastic life and made the usual discipline and regular liturgy difficult if not impossible. Poor financial conditions were sometimes blamed. Perhaps more important, many monasteries (like churches) came under lay control during the early Middle Ages, and lay proprietors could not be assumed to have the spiritual welfare of the monks at heart. The custom of entering young children in monasteries as oblates meant that there would be many in the monastery who had no particular religious calling and could not be expected to pretend that they did. From the viewpoint of the moralists, however, the central difficulty was simply tepidity, or lack of fervor, in the spiritual life. For all these reasons, monks who compared their experience of monasticism with the depictions of the early desert hermits or with the standard monastic rules (especially the Rule of St. Benedict) would find much that needed reform.

Among the earliest reform movements was that of Benedict of Aniane. Born in Aquitaine in the mid

eight century, he fought under Pepin and Charlemagne before withdrawing to a monastery. Inclining more toward the rigors of the desert fathers than toward the moderation of Benedictine monasticism, he imposed extreme mortifications upon himself, constantly striving, as his biographer Ardo says, "after impossible things." When he founded his own monastery at Aniane around 779, he at first strove for the same kind of rigor among his monks. He fed them only bread and water, and in their simplified liturgy they at first used only wooden chalices. Within a few years, however, he changed his views, concluding that the moderation of Benedict of Nursia was preferable to the rigors of desert monasticism, at least for the monks he had in Gaul. He then applied himself with great diligence to mastering the details of the Rule of St. Benedict, and to writing the *Concordia regularum* to aid in following the Rule. Reversing his policy on liturgy, he advocated scrupulously precise observance in decorated chapels.

Placed in charge of reforming other monasteries in Aquitaine by Emperor Louis the Pious, Benedict established a reputation as one of the spiritual leaders of his time. In 817 he was the dominant figure at a conference of abbots held at Aachen, where he inspired a series of rules (*capitulum monasticum*). The first canon in this compilation specified that each abbot should ponder the Rule of St. Benedict word by word, and along with all his monks should endeavor to observe it fully. The second canon advised that every monk who could learn the rule by heart should do so. The remaining canons dealt with the peaceful solitude of the cloister, restoration of discipline and observances, and moral conversion of the individual monk. The canons insist on faithful observance of the Rule—though in fact there are several accommodations to time and place (for instance, the monks are allowed more clothes than would have been the case in Benedict of Nursia's Mediterranean climate).

In Benedict of Aniane, then, two quite different models of reform are apparent: that of scrupulous adherence to the rigorous rule of the desert, and that of flexible accommodation to the already moderate Rule of St. Benedict. While Benedict of Aniane insists on careful mastery of the Rule, he is willing to adapt it to circumstances as required.

The Cluniac reform, begun in the tenth century by Odo of Cluny and continued by a succession of distinguished abbots through the eleventh century and beyond, fits the general pattern of Benedict of

Aniane's later reform. The ritual practiced at Cluny was significantly more elaborate than that of the Rule of St. Benedict: the number of psalms added to the schedule was considerable. It has been proposed that what the monks at Cluny were doing was adjusting to the needs of lay patrons, who endowed the monastery with the intention of having prayers said for their souls; the more elaborate the regimen of prayer, the more efficacious it was assumed to be. Another keynote in the Cluniac system is the freedom of the monasteries, each of which was to be independent of both lay and episcopal control, and subject only to the abbatial system within the Cluniac order. Other monasteries in the tenth century were commonly founded with such autonomy, but what distinguished the Cluniac houses was that they fought vigorously and successfully to maintain their freedom.

Third, Cluny was distinctive in that it served as the center for an elaborate network of monasteries: there were five by the mid tenth century, and by the later eleventh century there supposedly were more than 1,500, though some were tied less closely to the mother house than were others. The order extended through most of Western Europe. Like Benedict of Aniane, the reformers at Cluny endeavored to restore proper monastic discipline—not only at Cluny but elsewhere as well. Indeed, Odo's biographer tells us that he conceived of monasteries as floods of grace to the entire vicinity, aiding in the reform of secular clergy, knights, and others. Not surprisingly, Cluniacs were leaders in the peace movement of the tenth and eleventh centuries. Odo's spirituality was clearly marked by traditional motifs of reform, particularly that of return to a paradisiacal state of innocence.

Monastic life was a way of overcoming original sin and its effects through renunciation and austerity, and thereby recovering that original order of obedience from which Adam fell. At this juncture the link between individual and institutional reform becomes clearer than usual. As Benedict of Nursia surely perceived (but did not explicitly articulate), obedience is a quality of the individual that of its very nature subordinates the individual to a community (or to the head thereof), so that individual and institution are simultaneously reformed.

The Cistercian order, founded in 1098 by Robert of Molesme, corresponds in some crucial ways more to the earlier phase of Benedict of Aniane's reform. Like Cluny, the monastery of Citeaux be-

came the motherhouse for an extended order, with nearly 350 abbeys established by the mid twelfth century. Unlike Cluny it placed primary emphasis on rigor: the ideal of upholding the Rule of St. Benedict "more strictly" (*actius*) recurs throughout the early Cistercian literature. Whereas the Cluniacs evolved an elaborate liturgy with rich settings, the Cistercians stressed simplicity of worship and of ecclesiastical architecture. While the Cluniacs were tightly organized within their system, each Cistercian house was autonomous (though subject to visitation).

The foundation of the Cistercian order is recounted in a series of documents which again shed light on the connection between individual and institutional reform. The *Exordium Cistercii* and the *Exordium parvum* are narratives telling how Cîteaux and the order came into existence as offshoots of an earlier, unreformed monastery. Both these documents emphasize the early monks' sense of urgent moral responsibility to live according to the letter of their monastic vows. They had sworn fidelity to the Rule of St. Benedict, and when they recognized that their cloister was lax in observance of this Rule they took counsel among themselves as to how they might heed the psalmist's words (Ps. 65:13 [66:14]), "I will fulfill my vows to you, vows which I made with my own lips." Until they undertook a more strenuous life in a strict monastery, they found themselves guilty of "perjury." In their "New Monastery," as they called it, they dispensed with those luxuries that were contrary to the Rule: mantles, furs, fine linen shirts, mattresses, cupboards full of dishes, and so forth. Conforming themselves thus to the Rule, "having put off the old man, they rejoiced in putting on the new" (Col. 3:9f.). For these reformers, the relationship between moral and institutional reform was clear. Foundation of a new monastery was a necessary step in the personal reform to which they felt committed. Bernard of Clairvaux, in the next generation of Cistercians, maintained that he could not have attained salvation outside the rigorous bonds of this order; the same conviction seems to have animated the founders, who saw their "perjury" as an offense that they needed urgently to redress.

Monastic reform continued beyond the twelfth century; the proliferation of new forms of religious life in the twelfth and following centuries, in particular the rise of the "apostolic life" and specifically the mendicant orders, can be seen as an extension of earlier monastic reform. Even within

the monastic orders there were reforms throughout the High and late Middle Ages—except in the Carthusian order, which boasts that it has never had to be reformed because it has never been deformed. For the ideology of reform, however, the period up through the twelfth century holds special importance.

#### THE GREGORIAN REFORM OF THE CHURCH

When the reform papacy of the eleventh century set out to purge the church of corruption, it followed closely the example of the monasteries. Reforming popes of the mid eleventh century were in some cases monks themselves, and in other cases they had monks among their associates. Peter Damian and Humbert of Silva Candida, cardinals who aided in the campaign against simony and clerical concubinage in mid century, were both monks; Peter had been a leader in the ascetic revival of north Italy. Gregory VII, the firebrand who in his reformist zeal alienated many even within his circle of associates, had evidently been a monk; though he had not been a Cluniac, he acknowledged a spiritual kinship with Cluny, particularly in the quest for independence from secular control.

The Gregorian program can be seen as comprising two essential elements. First there was the project of moral reform, which Gregory fostered in his correspondence with individual churchmen. This component of the program was entirely traditional: popes from the late tenth century on had endeavored, vigorously if not consistently, to uproot the immorality of simony and clerical concubinage. This aspect of reform had been accentuated in legislation and judicial action by Gregory's immediate predecessors, especially Leo IX. Against simony the reform popes used the weapons of synodal legislation and trial. Against clerical concubinage there was the further expedient of encouraging clerics to live together in quasi-monastic houses (as "canons regular"), where they would be less likely to sin. For the ideology of reform this measure is highly important, because it represented a major step toward the assimilation of diocesan clergy to the monks, and thus a merger of general church reform with monastic reform. There was the further possibility of enjoining the laity (as Gregory VII did) to shun the Masses of priests who kept concubines, a measure that could easily lead toward radicalization of the laity and may have contributed to the spread of popular heresy in the later twelfth century.

More in the forefront of Gregory's reform, however, was the political component: he was determined to release the church from its bondage to lay rulers, which he perceived as a major cause of immorality. He insisted that all ecclesiastical elections must be canonical, meaning (most importantly) under clerical rather than lay control. He furthermore repudiated the practice of lay investiture, a symbolic act in which a lay ruler bestowed the insignia of office on a bishop or abbot; while this issue was less vital than that of appointment to ecclesiastical office, it nonetheless took on profound significance because investiture marked out theoretical lines of authority, and it was difficult to keep the theory from infringing on reality. A king who was allowed to bestow the insignia of office on a bishop was not likely to appreciate that bishop's autonomy as a servant of the church. Meeting resistance from Emperor Henry IV, Gregory turned radical, claiming power to depose emperors and to absolve the subjects of tyrannical monarchs (such as Henry IV) from their fealty—in addition to his absolute authority within the church. Those who argue that Gregory was essentially a radical or a revolutionary appeal to this side of his reform program; indeed, while the moral reform was essentially conventional, Gregory's conception of his relationship to the emperor was innovative, and startlingly so. Nonetheless, it was possible for him to represent himself as a conservative (a reformer in the medieval sense) by virtue of the ultimate goals of morality and autonomy that he was seeking.

Throughout the High and late Middle Ages, reform of the church remained a demand and an ongoing project. Bishops and cardinals were called on to reform themselves on account of their luxurious style of living and their inattention to their dioceses. Lower clerics were cited for simony, concubinage, pluralism (holding more than one appointment), absenteeism (absence from place of appointment), and other offenses. Monks were criticized for essentially the same offenses as in earlier centuries. The popes, who had been largely responsible for cultivating the notion of reform, and who rose to power in Christian society largely because they were recognized as effective advocates of reform, were targets of criticism. The difficulty that arose was in part a result of inadequate financing: because the popes could not pay sufficient or regular salaries to the members of their bureaucracy, graft became widespread.

By the late Middle Ages the standard call was for

reform of the church "in head and members." Both within the orthodox church and among heretics, reform was a major goal throughout the later Middle Ages and into the Reformation. In most calls for reform, though, the philosophical and theological content was meager or nonexistent; reformist literature tended to be practical, and at times satirical, rather than theoretical. While reform remained a major concern of late medieval society, the theology of reform did not develop in proportion to the energy expended in movements for reform. The patristic motifs remained decisive until the end of the Middle Ages.

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[See also Ambrose, St.; Augustine of Hippo, St.; Baptism; Benedict of Aniane; Benedictine Rule; Benedictines; Carthusians; Christology; Cistercian Order; Cluny, Order of; Councils, Western; Gregory VII, Pope; Gregory of Nyssa, St.; Henry IV of Germany; Humbert of Silva Candida; Investiture and Investiture Conflict; Joachim of Fiore; Monasticism, Origins; Odo of Cluny, St.; Peter Damian, St.; Simony.]