

THE PAPAL PRINCE. ONE BODY AND TWO SOULS: THE PAPAL MONARCHY IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE by Paolo Prodi. Cambridge University Press, 1987, x + 287pp. £36.

Professor Prodi starts with the generally accepted view that the medieval papacy served as a prototype for the modern state: 'it introduced the first hierarchy of courts with positive written laws and uniform procedure into the West; it rationalised for the first time the system of imposing and collecting taxes, and anticipated the practice of anticipating revenue by the sale of its offices; it had the first foreign minister, the first diplomatic corps and the first standing mercenary army'. Yet the early modern papacy appears, by contrast, as a historical left-over, marginal to the political and social developments of the West. Thus it was Protestantism, especially Calvinism, that seemed to be the midwife of change, liberal politics, for example, or *laissez-faire* capitalism, while Catholicism became identified with a feudal and increasingly irrelevant residue.

What Professor Prodi has most refreshingly done is to analyse the papacy in this period as if it was just another secular state. This seems very shocking, but as Peter Partner has shown in his study of the papal state in this period, contemporaries were not always shocked. Thus Machiavelli, in *The Prince*, took many of his examples from the rascally exploits of Cesare Borgia, and his father, Pope Alexander VI, in their successful recovery of temporal power in the papal states. Whether or not contemporaries expressed disapproval, however, the evidence, if fully investigated, speaks for itself, and Prodi has devoted major sections to this 'new monarchy', as he calls it: the basis of its authority, the legal system, central and local government and the conduct of foreign policy. His conclusion is unequivocal: the papacy was largely instrumental in bringing a sense of awareness to the state-builders in European politics during the early modern period. These States came into being among the ruins of Christendom, but the Papacy, far from being just part of the debris, actively contributed to the new European system. It is an exciting prospect for the historians, their task made easier by virtue of living with the consequences of Vatican II, which, by bringing the Counter-Reformation to an end, has given us a better perspective on an earlier age, when the Church became secularised, and the state clericalised.

It is a perspective that helps us to understand how the Papacy did not just survive the crises of exile at Avignon, the Great Schism, the Conciliar Movement and the Renaissance 'decadence', but did so triumphantly. Above all, we shall no longer feel obliged to watch a repeat of 'The Borgias' on T.V. Watching the series petering to an end, one wearied reviewer suggested that viewers might like to test themselves by questions such as: How would you describe 'the bosom of the Pope' without waving your arms about? Thanks, now, to Professor Prodi, we can begin to take the Renaissance papacy a little bit more seriously.

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