

St. Anthony of Padua R.C. Church

160 Court Street, Buffalo, New York 14202

Traditionally Speaking *by S. Casarotto* 11/8/09

Card. Gaspar Contarini

He was a cardinal, a theologian and a... layman. Gaspar Contarini (1483-1542) was born into a wealthy and politically prominent family in Venice. Appointed ambassador for the Republic to the Emperor Charles V, and then to the Vatican, he learned the art of compromise, and developed much admired diplomatic skills.

Contarini was appalled by abuses within the Church and wrote about the need for reform. He also wrote in defense of the papacy as needed ministry in the Church.

In 1535, while remaining a layman, he was appointed by the pope to the College of Cardinals. One of his hopes was to use his theological and diplomatic skills to heal the split with Luther. He had written sympathetically about some of Luther's views and, although the split had grown wider over the years, he felt that a re-unification was still possible.

It was through his good offices that in 1538 an Ecumenical Council opened in Vicenza under the protection of the Republic of Venice. The Council ran a snag at very start: only a few Italian bishops showed up. The French and Spanish bishops boycotted it (their countries were at war). The German bishops wanted to appease the Protestants and considered Vicenza to be too close to Rome!

Contarini tried to bridge the divide in 1541 at a conference in Regensburg, Germany, convened by the emperor. Lutheran representatives were there, and Contarini was the papal emissary. He skillfully crafted compromises that were acceptable to both sides, but when word of this leaked out, there were angry reactions. The conference ended in failure.

Contarini died a year later, still hoping and praying for reform in the Church, and re-union with the Lutherans. The Ecumenical Council eventually restarted in Trent in 1543 and closed, after several interruptions, in 1563.

Could you imagine, today, a layman like Contarini heading a Pontifical commission? Yet, "the age of the laity" is not a novelty in the history of the Church.

ATHEISM has many contradictions. Voltaire said, "*God and I are friends, but I say Hello to Him from far away!*" He also said, "*If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him.*" Later, Russian philosopher Mikhail A. Bakunin stated, "*If God really existed, it would be necessary to abolish him.*" According to some sociologists like Zygmunt Bauman, "*the days of religions are numbered*". In fact, a century ago, Nietzsche proclaimed to the world, "*God is dead!*" It turned out that Nietzsche is dead and God is still very much alive! That's why Blaise Pascal had this wise thought: "*Let us weigh the gain and the loss that God is. Consider the alternatives: if you win, you win all; if you lose, you lose nothing. Do not hesitate, then, to wager that God is.*"