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Gasparo Contarini

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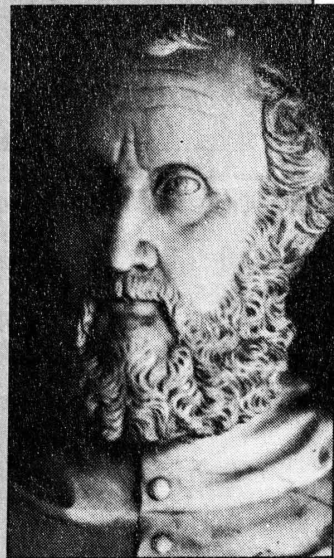
Cardinal Contarini (1483–1542) was a leader of reform in the Roman Catholic church. He belonged to a leading family in Venice and studied at the University of Padua. He became well known both for his scientific studies and for defending the doctrine of the immortality of the soul against Pietro Pomponazzi. He served Venice as ambassador to the Emperor Charles V and in other important posts. His study of the constitution of Venice long remained a classic.

But Contarini was also deeply concerned with religious reform.

In 1511 he underwent a religious conversion similar to Luther's. He wrote tracts on the ideal bishop, the papacy, the sacraments and Lutheranism. In 1535 Pope Paul III made Contarini a cardinal and a year later named him chairman of a reform commission. Contarini helped win approval for the Jesuits and urged reconciliation with the Protestants.

He tried to achieve this as papal legate to the Regensburg Colloquy of 1541. But he could reach no agreement with the Protestants on the sacraments. When Contarini returned to Italy, Rome refused to approve his views on justification and Luther attacked them too.

Contarini died shortly after this. His life reflects, better than that of any other contemporary, the political, intellectual and religious crisis of Italy during the early sixteenth century.



Cardinal Contarini, the great Catholic reformer. He experienced conversion in 1511 and strove to achieve understanding with the Reformers in 1530s.