

## Reviews

Gleason, Elisabeth G. *Gasparo Contarini. Venice, Rome, and Reform*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1993. xvii, 335 pp.

Elisabeth Gleason's study of Gasparo Contarini revises substantially the traditional view of Contarini as one of the original supporters of Catholic reform in the early sixteenth century. Gleason examines how Contarini's activities reflected the fortunes of pre-Tridentine reform in the Italian church and she argues that he must be seen primarily as an orthodox churchman whose values were shaped by his Venetian heritage. In the first chapter of the study Gleason examines the theme of the coexistence of secular and spiritual pursuits which recurred throughout Contarini's life. Gleason argues that there was a significant link between the themes such as the search for peace and harmony in society which Contarini addressed in his activities as a Venetian statesman in the early part of his career and those found in his later duties as a cardinal in Rome. She suggests that evidence found in Contarini's texts and letters reveals that Contarini was not the "major theoretician of Catholic reform" whom historians had portrayed in the past, but rather his thought reflected the orthodox views of clerics of the period. Further, Gleason maintains that Contarini's thought was formed by his experiences as a Venetian statesman he served as a member of the Council of Ten for several years and as a pious layman and later a cleric. She notes that "a remarkable continuity ran through Contarini's life. As churchman he regularly drew on the experience he had acquired in Venetian politics, and in his theoretical considerations he united the secular and ecclesiastical spheres" (62). Further, Gleason suggests that Contarini's secular and spiritual activities reveal his conservative nature, as he sought to support the status quo in both sacred and secular undertakings in order to achieve the peaceful, ordered society he desired.

Gleason's revisionist view of Contarini's significance with regard to church reform extends to embrace a new perspective of pre-Tridentine reform in general. Gleason argues that the appointment of Contarini along with several other "reforming" cardinals in 1535 did not necessarily mark the "beginning of serious reform in Rome" as historians have traditionally believed (130). Instead, by examining the *Consilium de emendanda ecclesia* prepared by Contarini and his colleagues in 1536/37, Gleason demonstrates that while the cardinals advocated relatively stern reform measures, their calls for reform of church abuses were less significant than their vision of changes to papal government. Between 1536 and 1540 reform measures failed to take hold in Rome. Gleason argues that this situation was partly due to the need of all churchmen (including Contarini) for the revenues from church offices during a time of economic difficulty. She notes that "Contarini and his supporters should be seen against the actual circumstances of the Roman ecclesiastical society to which they belonged, rather than set apart in a category labelled 'reformers'" (185).

Gleason not only reevaluates the significance of Contarini in the introduction of reforms to the Roman church, but she also employs the figure of the cardinal to reassess the importance of pre-Tridentine assemblies such as the colloquy at Regensburg in 1541 at which Contarini was present as legate. Gleason argues that historians have exaggerated the significance of the failure of Regensburg for the future of Catholic reform, and that Contarini was neither "bitter" nor "isolated" by the papacy after he failed as papal legate to achieve compromise with Protestant theologians at Regensburg. She writes that his letters at this time were "written by a man who knew that he had lost a battle yet had not despaired" (256).

Gleason has based her work on critical readings of texts written by Contarini as well as on substantial archival work, including studies of documents largely ignored by past historians of Contarini's life. Her study offers a useful perspective on the pre-Tridentine period in Italy, and will be invaluable to political and church historians alike.

Roisin Cossar  
University of Toronto

*Lorenzo de' Medici: New Perspectives*. Ed. Bernard Toscani. Studies in Italian Culture/Literature in History, 13. New York: Peter Lang, 1993. xvii, 355 pp., 5 illustrations.

The majority of this volume, which contains the proceedings of an international conference held to commemorate the quincentenary of the death of Lorenzo il Magnifico, contains little mention of confraternities, though in his article "Lorenzo il Magnifico, Savonarola, and Medicean Dynasticism," Lorenzo Polizzotto refers to the three confraternities at the monastery of San Marco which had Cosimo il Vecchio as patron. Polizzotto argues in a paragraph that these confraternities were used by the Medici as "instruments of informal political supervision and control" (337). This idea is taken up by Ronald F.E. Weissman in his article "Lorenzo de' Medici and the Confraternity of San Paolo" (315-29).

Weissman, the author of *Ritual Brotherhood in Renaissance Florence* (1982), explores Lorenzo's participation in the Confraternity of San Paolo, to prove that Lorenzo did not cease active membership in confraternities upon his rise to power, and to discern the possible role of the confraternity in that rise, which he detects as having taken place in 1471, at which point Lorenzo managed to effect constitutional changes which put him in control of the city government. All Florentine ritual brotherhoods were viewed with suspicion during periods of political strife, as potential meeting-grounds for conspiracy; for instance, confraternal activity was suspended for two years following the Pazzi conspiracy in 1478. The period of constitutional struggle in Florence which brought Lorenzo to power was also the period when the confraternity was reconsidering its own government, and in the end, the confraternity appointed Tommaso Soderini as governor with wide-ranging, indeed almost dictatorial powers, on 9 April 1471, finding a solution to its governmental problems that (as Weissman suggests) was already a commonplace among Florentine political thinkers in the larger communal arena.

Lorenzo was elected to the confraternity on 1 June 1471, under Soderini's governorship, despite being two years below the required age of members. This special dispensation revealed his evident importance in the politics of the city. One month later, Lorenzo convinced the government of the city to accept critical electoral reforms which gave him a central position in choosing the electoral officials. Lorenzo became governor of the confraternity in November of 1472, again with special dispensation, and under his leadership the confraternity accepted new statutes, in which the minimum age of entry was lowered to eighteen, most clergy were excluded from membership, and the processes of both the election of officers and of expulsion of members were reformed. The continuing importance of the confraternity in Florentine political life is suggested by the admission of Lorenzo's notary and his friend Poliziano in 1474.

Weissman concludes that the Confraternity of San Paolo was a political hotbed which required Medici supervision and intervention, and that Lorenzo's membership in the