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"To make a diligent Inquisition": Gian Pietro Carafa and the origins of regular Theatines clerics

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Andrea Vanni. *"Fare diligente inquisitione": Gian Pietro Carafa e le origini dei chierici regolari teatini*
"Fare diligente inquisitione": Gian Pietro Carafa e le origini dei chierici regolari teatini by Andrea Vanni

Review by: Stephen D . Bowd

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Andrea Vanni. *“Fare diligente inquisitione”*: Gian Pietro Carafa e le origini dei chierici regolari teatini.

Università degli studi Roma tre Dipartimento di Studi storici geografici antropologici. Studi e ricerche 23. Rome: Viella S.r.l., 2010. 264 pp. index. €26. ISBN: 978-88-8334-443-5.

Gian Pietro Carafa, who was elected Pope Paul IV in 1555, was completely opposed to any form of toleration of heresy; helped to create the modern Roman Inquisition; published the first and most severe Index; established the Roman ghetto

for Jews; and waged war on Spain. In contrast to the grief provoked by Pope John Paul II's death, Carafa's passing in 1559 was marked by rejoicing and riots in Rome, including an attack on the Holy Office. The immediate posthumous assessments of Carafa's character were decidedly negative. For example, the King of Spain's envoy to Paul's successor Pius IV reported to the king that Pius, who had just arrested Paul's nephews for treason, corruption, and abuse of power, had claimed that the old pope had been a mad eccentric and refused to say anything good about him. Historians have also been uniformly unsympathetic: Geoffrey Elton described Carafa as effectively insane throughout his pontificate.

In his study of Carafa and the origins of the Theatine order of regular clerics Andrea Vanni suggests that the Theatine order tried to distance itself from Carafa after 1559 and that its seventeenth-century historians attempted to rewrite Theatine history in a way which emphasized the role of Gaetano Thiene (and thereby promoted the case for his canonization) and glossed over some of the more unsavory aspects of Carafa's career. Vanni makes a carefully documented case for a clash between the two ways of spiritual life promoted by Thiene and Carafa. Thiene combined charitable and monastic models of behavior which Vanni attributes to St Jerome with an intense Christocentric love, partly inspired by the mystic Laura Mignani and Battista da Crema. The mixture of spirituality and practical assistance for laypeople which animated the Roman Oratory of Divine Love from its foundation in 1497 was very attractive to Thiene, who joined it around 1515, but seems to have disturbed Carafa deeply and led him in 1524 to found the company of regular clerics known, after his diocese of Chieti, as the Theatines. Vanni argues that the company was founded by Carafa principally as a means to promote his vision of the reform of the Church. He shows how the Theatines undertook some acts of charity in syphilitic hospitals in Rome and Venice, but under Carafa's autocratic guidance placed increasing emphasis on eremitic seclusion, reading the gospels and reciting the divine offices in austere Theatine style — without singing. Carafa and the Theatines were also charged by the pope with a role in monitoring the quality of candidates for priestly ordination in Rome. The company therefore foreshadowed the Roman Holy Office by maintaining close and direct ties to the papacy which lay outside episcopal control, and by aiding Carafa's efforts to root out lax clerics and squash heresy without compromise. Vanni shows how Carafa's rigor was harnessed by pope and doge in Venice after 1527 as he moved to settle religious disputes in the city and encourage lay piety. Theatine efforts were also extended to the Neapolitan convent run by Carafa's energetic sister Maria: as well as enforcing a more complete enclosure of the convent the Theatines in Naples moved against Valdesians in the city by using spies in suspect places and even by betraying confessions made to them by suspected heretics.

Vanni's account of Carafa's involvement with the Theatines is a valuable one since it is based on much archival material as well as the documents previously published by Pio Paschini and Gennaro Maria Monti. Vanni manages to navigate through a mass of personalities, institutions, and settings without losing the thread of his argument too often, and he demonstrates a good grasp of the studies of

Church history which have appeared in Italian during the last few decades. It is a pity that he has not made much use of studies in English which have thrown light on Roman religious politics or matters of reform and piety, and the broader context of reform might have been outlined with greater clarity than is apparent here. While it has many virtues this book is not the full and rounded study of Carafa that is badly needed, but it does offer some important insights into the world of this key figure of the early modern Church.

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