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Between Augustine and Pelagius: Leonard Lessius in the Leuven controversies, from 1587 to the 20th century

Introduction

In the second half of the 1580s, Leuven – a stronghold of Catholicism in the Spanish Netherlands during the wars of religion¹ – was the scene of a thorny dispute over Grace, free will, predestination and Holy Writ, which was part of the series of theological controversies which developed in the 16th and 17th centuries.² The Leuven controversies represent the essential connection between Michael Bay and Cornelius Jansen’s theologies and the necessary background to understand the later *controversia de auxiliis*.

On 9 September 1587, the professors of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Leuven censored thirty-one assertions gathered from the theology classes taught by the Jesuit theologian

¹ Judith Pollmann, *Catholic Identity and the Revolt of the Netherlands, 1520–1635*. (Oxford: OUP, 2011); Geoffrey Parker, *The Dutch Revolt*. (London: Allen Lane, 1977).

² The documentation on Leuven controversies is available in several copies, in the Archive of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (ACDF), Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARSI), Vatican Library (BAV), Historical Archives of the Pontifical Gregorian University (APUG). The correspondence between Lessius and Bellarmine on the controversies was published by Xavier-Marie Le Bachelet, *Bellarmin avant son Cardinalat. 1542-1598. Correspondance et documents*. (Paris: Gabriel Beauchesne, 1911). The main documents of the dispute were published by Gerard Schneemann, *Controversiarum de divinae gratiae liberique arbitrii concordia. Initia et progressus*. (Fribourg: Sumptibus Herder, 1881); some of them were also printed, with other important documents on the matter *de auxiliis* in Jaques H. Serry, *Historiae congregationum de auxiliis divinae gratiae sub summis pontificibus Clemente VIII. Et Paulo V.* (Anvers: Sumptibus Societati, 1709); De Meyer L., *Historiae controversiarum de divinae gratiae auxiliis sub summis pontificibus Sixto V. Clemente VIII. Paulo V. Ab objectionibus R.P. Hyacinthi Serry Vindicatae*. (Bruxelles: Antonii Claudinot, 1715). *Annales de la Société des soi-disans Jésuites; ou recueil historique-cronologique*, I, (Paris: 1764). At first, Hamelius, professor of the Jesuit College, was censored together with Lessius by the University. However, he did not respond to the censorship.

Leonard Lessius,³ characterising his doctrine as ‘[...] *peregrina, offensiva, & periculosa*’.⁴ Basically, Lessius’ theology of Grace was charged with Semi-Pelagianism. At the time, Lessius was Professor of Theology at the Jesuit College in Leuven (1585–1600).⁵ Quoted widely by historians, especially for his treatise *De iustitia et iure*, and for his theory on lending at interest, Lessius contributed to many other fields: he composed theological, ascetic, and religious-political works, which were often censured, even within the Society of Jesus. The strong probabilism which he endorsed, clearly shown in his treatises, was opposed by many theologians in the Early Modern Age.

Lessius’ humanistic open-mindedness towards man’s ability, even in the soteriological field, made him one of the most significant Jesuits of the Old Society; the originality of his contribution to moral theology and theology of Grace is remarkable, and needs to be considered in the precise context of early modern Flanders, in the years affected by the religious wars. The threat of Protestantism marked Lessius’ theology; similarly, his proximity to Antwerp, a European economic

³ *Lessius, Leys, Léonard*. In Augustin and Aloys De Becker, Carlos Sommervogel, ‘*Bibliothèque de la Compagnie de Jésus*’. (Leuven, Editions de la Bibliothèque S.J, 1960), IV, 1726-1751; S. De Smet, *Lessius (Leys), Leonardus (Lenaert)*. In Charles E. O’Neill and Joaquín M. Domínguez, ‘*Diccionario Histórico de la Compañía de Jesús biográfico-temático*’. (Madrid: Ortega Ediciones Graficas, 2001), III, 2336-2337. Leonard Schoofs, *De vita et moribus R.P. Leonardi Lessii e Societate Iesu theologi liber. Una cum divinarum perfectionum opuscula*. (Paris: Henault, 1644); Charles Van Sull, *Leonard Lessius de la Compagnie de Jésus*. (Leuven: Museum Lessianum, 1930); on Lessius’ moral theology, Toon Van Houdt, *Tradition and Renewal in Late Scholastic Economic Thought. The case of Leonardus Lessius (1554-1623)*. In ‘*Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*’ 28, no. 1 (1998), 51-73; Schneemann, *Controversiarum*, 359-362.

⁴ The censorship was delivered to the Jesuits on 12 September 1587. *Censura Facultatis Theologiae Lovaniensis in assertiones quasdam Rev Patrum Societatis Jesu, exhibita ipsi Societati die XII Septembris 1587 per Bedellum eiusdem Facultatis* in ACDF, St.St. E 7-c, *Controversia inter doctores Lovanienses et Patres Societatis Jesu tempore Xyxti V*, ff. 15r-29v. Lessius answered with his *Responsio ad censuram*: ACDF, *Controversia*, ff. 38r-52v. See also Eduard Eijl, *La controverse louvaniste autour de la grâce et du libre arbitre à la fin du XVI^e siècle*. In Mathijs Lamberigts, eds., *L’augustinisme à l’ancienne Faculté de théologie de Louvain*, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium, 111 (Louvain: Peeters, 1994), 207–282.

⁵ Born Lenaert Leys in Brecht, 1554; died in Leuven, 1623.

and financial capital, deeply influenced his theory on lending at interest.⁶ The Society of Jesus played an important role in the Counter-Reformation and Catholic revival in the Netherlands. The increasing power of the Reformation alerted Lessius to its possible influence on Catholic doctrines. After being appointed to the Chair of Theology at the Jesuit College, Lessius engaged in an internal Counter-Reformation against the Catholicism represented by the professors of the University of Leuven, whose theology Lessius considered to be very close to Calvinism.⁷ The subsequent censorship of Lessius represented the Faculty's first counter-attack.

The dispute was the expression of two different Catholic positions. On one side, the academics⁸ defended their doctrine of Grace as the authentic teaching of Saint Augustine, considered the *primus* among the Fathers of the Church. These theologians supported an extreme Augustinism based on a literal interpretation of Augustine's writings on Grace, in particular the anti-Pelagian works, and promulgated a partial vision of Augustine's doctrine, as the Jansenists did later.⁹ The Leuven theologians did not consider the 'other' Augustine, author of the *Confessiones*, who accepted mankind's ability to answer God's call positively through free will. The academics rejected entirely the contribution of human freedom to the process of salvation and relied completely on God's predestination and Grace. Furthermore, they suspected theologians who ascribed importance to freedom — combined with Christ's redemption — of Pelagianism or Semi-Pelagianism.

⁶ Leonard Lessius, *De iustitia et iure caeterisque virtutibus cardinalibus libri IV*. (Leuven: ex officina Ioannis Masii, 1605).

⁷ Bellarmine stated that Protestants were glad that Lessius' doctrine was censored. *Quid a Sancta Sede Apostolica desideretur* in ARSI, Fl. Belg. 72, I, ff. 120r–122v.

⁸ Hereafter, 'the academics' refers to the group of theologians of Leuven University who opposed Lessius in the controversies.

⁹ On Augustine's doctrine on Grace see Gaetano Lettieri, *L'altro Agostino. Ermeneutica e retorica della grazia dalla crisi alla metamorfosi del De doctrina christiana*. (Brescia: edizioni dehoniane, 2001).

On the other side, during the 16th century an optimistic Thomistic theology was being propagated in Europe. It was strictly linked to Christian Humanism: the religious, anthropological and philosophical trend that elevated mankind from its irremediably ‘corrupted-by-sin’ condition to a positive state, in which every man could potentially be a good Christian. Francis of Sales, who fully expressed these values in his *Filotea*, supported Lessius’ views and defended his controversial work *De gratia efficaci*, published after many polemics and severe criticism in 1610.¹⁰ This theological tendency was associated with the probabilistic moral orientation, of which Lessius was an eminent representative, and was often depicted as coinciding with the doctrine of the entire Society of Jesus, as the eighteenth-century Dominican Daniele Concina, among others, claimed.¹¹ A general inclination towards that orientation is undeniable; however, this phenomenon never involved all Jesuits. For instance, Tirso Gonzàles (1624–1705) strove to instil the probabilistic view within the Society, although he did so in a period in which the rigorist tendency was prevalent.¹² While since Ignatius’ time the Superiors General had wished for doctrinal unity, a large variety of opinions circulated within the Society,¹³ a fact that is proven by the abundance of censorships issued by the Jesuit editors.¹⁴ For instance, the Jesuit John Lorinus, who critically analysed Lessius’ *De iustitia et iure*, wrote disapprovingly to the General that the author had gained the plaudits of merchants by demonstrating extremely broad-minded ideas about lending at interest.

¹⁰ Leonard Lessius, *De gratia efficaci Decretis Divinis libertate Arbitrii et Praescientia conditionata Disputatio Apologetica*. (Anvers: Ioannem Moretum, 1610).

¹¹ Daniele Concina, *Della storia del probabilismo e del rigorismo. Dissertazioni teologiche, morali, e critiche, nelle quali si spiegano, e dalle sottigliezze de’ moderni probabilisti si difendono i principj fondamentali della teologia cristiana*. (Lucca: Simone Occhi, 1743). On the Christian rigorism see Jean-Louis Quantin, *Le rigorisme chretien*. (Paris: Les editions du Cerf, 2001).

¹² On Gonzales Gay J.–P., *Jesuit Civil Wars. Theology, Politics and Government under Tirso Gonzales (1687–1705)*. (Surrey: Ashgate, 2012); Colombo E., *Convertire i musulmani. L’esperienza di un gesuita spagnolo nel Seicento*. (Milano: B. Mondadori, 2007).

¹³ *Monumenta ignatiana ex autographi vel ex antiquioribus exemplis collecta. Serie tertia. Sancti Ignatii de Loyola Constitutiones Societatis Iesu*. (Roma: Monumenta Historica Soc. Iesu, 1936), II, 356.

¹⁴ Ugo Baldini, *Una fonte poco utilizzata per la storia intellettuale: le «censurae librorum» e «opinionum» nell’antica Compagnia di Gesù*. In ‘Annali dell’Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento’ XI, (1985), 19-50.

Lorinus suggested that Lessius harmed not only himself, but the entire Society¹⁵ – an accusation that was proposed again with respect to his doctrine of predestination.

Censorship

In the Leuven censorship, Lessius was charged with diverging from Augustine's theology. The academics connected Lessius' theory to Pelagian theology, which took its name from the British monk Pelagius (ca. 354 – ca. 427) who proposed a salvation theology in which good deeds assumed primary importance, to the detriment of Grace.¹⁶ Augustine railed against this doctrine, later condemned as heretic, stating that every good deed is the result of God's will, which held absolute supremacy over human will. Augustine held that Grace is mysteriously granted by God independent of meritorious acts; through Christ's Redemption, God offers his Grace to men destined to be free from sin.

In response, Lessius highlighted the difficulty of understanding Augustine, who often wrote in an obscure way, but argued for the goodness of his own doctrine and its agreement with that of Augustine: *'Et quamvis D. Augustinus interdum aliter loqui videatur, quam in quibusdam ex istis conclusionibus expressum sit, mihi tamen probabile est ipsum in re non dissentire'*.¹⁷

The academics accused Lessius of Semi-Pelagianism – a doctrine that spread from monasteries in Provence in the 5th century and which held that, even if man needed God's Grace, he could start the conversion process himself. In the 16th century this doctrine began to be called Semi-Pelagianism. The idea that the theologians subsequently classified as Semi-Pelagians, such as

¹⁵ ARSI, Censurae 654, III (1603-1631), I. Lorinus to C. Aquaviva, 22 December 1603 (uncertain date), ff. 3r-4v.

¹⁶ On Pelagianism, for example, Salvatore Pricoco, *Da Costantino a Gregorio Magno*. In Giovanni Filoramo, Daniele Menozzi, eds., *Storia del Cristianesimo. L'antichità* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2001), I, 335-343; on Pelagius, Brinley R. Rees, *Pelagius. Life and letters*. (Woodbridge: The Boydell press, 1998).

¹⁷ Leonard Lessius, *Conclusiones de praedestinatione et reprobatione* (known as the 34 Propositions), n. 34 in Le Bachelet, Bellarmin, 153-156.

Cassiano and Salviano of Marsiglia, derived their doctrines from Pelagius was completely foreign to their contemporary detractors. On the contrary, Semi-Pelagians harshly condemned Pelagius, but advocated a doctrine about Grace much less radical than that of Augustine.¹⁸

The accusation of Semi-Pelagianism directed at Lessius rested on the idea that he overturned Augustine's teaching on Grace. Despite Lessius' repeated requests to discuss the issue face to face, the academics never agreed to meet, and always rejected Lessius' proposal of submitting the question to Rome, preferring to rely on the support of local bishops.¹⁹ The academics' refusal is easily explained by the fact that their doctrine was inspired by the previously condemned theories of Michael Bay.²⁰ From the 1550s, when he became professor of Holy Writ at the Leuven University, Bay laid the foundation of a theological doctrine which was developed and defended by later theologians in the Faculty, despite two Papal condemnations,²¹ and became the most valuable precursor of Jansenism.

Ruard Tapper, Chancellor of the University and general inquisitor in Brabant, was greatly affronted by Bay's theology, as was Jean de Lens, to whom the preface of the censorship of Lessius' doctrine, nevertheless, would later be attributed.²² The resulting internal dispute foreshadowed the controversy with Lessius. Moreover, Tapper's identification of predestination

¹⁸ Rebecca Harden Weaver, *Divine grace and human agency, A study of the semi-pelagian controversy*. (Macon: Mercer university press, 1998). Jean-Louis Quantin, *Histoire de la grâce. 'Semi-pélagiens' et 'prédestinatiens' dans l'érudition ecclésiastique du XVII^e siècle*, 333. In Thomas Wallnig, Thomas Stockinger, Ines Peper, Patrick Fiska, eds., *Europäische Geschichtskulturen um 1700 zwischen Gelehrsamkeit, Politik und Konfession*, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 327–359.

¹⁹ Le Bachelet, Bellarmin, 147-148.

²⁰ ACDF, *Controversia*, ff. 687r-733r. On Bay see Xavier-Marie Le Bachelet, *Baius Michel*. In Alfred Vacant and Eugène Mangenot, *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*. (Pargi: Letouzey et Ané, 1910), II, 38-111.

²¹ Pius V, *Ex omnibus afflictionibus*, 1567; Gregory XIII, *Provisionis nostrae*, 1580. In 1560, Bay had been condemned by the Sorbonne.

²² Claeys Bouuaert denied Bay's influence on the theology of the Faculty during the controversy also because Lens - supposed author of the preface of the censorship of Lessius - initially opposed Bay. Ferd Claeys Bouuaert, *L'ancienne Université de Louvain. Études et documents*, (Louvain: Bureaux de la Revue 1956), 131.

with the prescience of the good use of Grace prefigured Lessius' and Luis de Molina's doctrine,²³ which added the concept of *scientia media*, that is, the prescience with which God foresees men's actions, without depriving them of their freedom.²⁴

During the second half of the 20th century, Henri de Lubac stated that Bay had distorted Augustine's theology, and had misunderstood the spirit of his works.²⁵ On the contrary, Bay had claimed that there were no different interpretations of Augustine's doctrine, representing himself as a truthful exponent of Augustinism, a path that would be followed by his supporters, such as James Janson and James Bay, Michael's nephew, during the dispute with Lessius. After the death of Ruard Tapper, Bay enjoyed the backing of the Faculty.²⁶ Bay's doctrine, like the theology of Lessius' detractors, proposed a pessimistic anthropologic vision, based on the idea that human nature was irremediably corrupted by original sin. After the Fall man did not have any choice, because freedom would always lead him to evil. According to Bay, only a Pelagian could hold that free will could be used for good. The idea of the necessity of sin after the loss of innocence, together with the importance granted to the faith in the process of justification, seemed to align Bay's doctrine with Lutheranism, although the theologian himself strongly censored Luther's doctrine. Bay shared the radicalised Augustinism embraced by Luther, as well as Calvin, though the three theologians came to different conclusions.

In an apologetic letter addressed to Pius V, Bay justified the Leuven theology as a Counter-Reformation instrument.²⁷ His letter suggests that in the Netherlands, a borderland where Catholics were living in close proximity to Protestants, people were more receptive to the teachings of Holy

²³ Luis de Molina, Jesuit theologian (Cuenca 1536–Madrid in 1600).

²⁴ Jean Orcibal, *Jansénius d'Ypres (1585–1638)*. (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1989), 26–27.

²⁵ Henri de Lubac, *Augustinisme et théologie moderne*. (Paris: Aubier, 1965).

²⁶ Tapper wondered: «*Quel est donc le diable qui a introduit ces sentiments dans notre école?*». Le Bachelet, Baius, 39.

²⁷ Michael Bay, *Apologia Summo Pontifici Pio V*. In Gabriel Gerberon *Michaelis Baii, celeberrimi in Lovaniensi Academia Theologi Opera [...]*, 'Baiana', II. (Cologne: Sumptibus Balthasar Ab Egmont & Sociorum, 1696), 79.

Writ and the Fathers than those of the Scholastics.²⁸ Focusing on Augustine, also respected by the Protestants, would be a useful tool for converting heretics and perhaps help to achieve confessional reunification. In this regard, Pierre Chaunu, in a classic article on the history of Jansenism, wrote about the ‘Catholicism of the border’.²⁹

During the 1950s, Lucien Ceysens wrote in relation to Jansenism, a theological movement born in the University of Leuven some years after the theological controversies:

*Je considère le jansénisme comme un mouvement de réforme, théorique et pratique, issu de la Contre-Réforme septentrionale (dont par ailleurs il fait partie), réactionnaire vis-à-vis de l’antijansénisme, lequel m’apparaît comme un mouvement semblable, mais progressif, né plutôt de l’humanisme méridional.*³⁰

And:

*En parlant de Contre-Réforme septentrionale et d’humanisme méridional, je n’entends qu’insinuer l’opposition entre un certain pessimisme augustinien, d’un côté, et l’optimisme né de la renaissance en Italie.*³¹

Ceyssens’ definition also could be applied, broadly speaking, to the Baianist theology promoted by the University. Ceysens himself stated that the censorship issued against Lessius was the first manifestation of Jansenism.³² Archival documentation suggests that the censorship has to be more appropriately considered as a ‘missing link’ between the original Baianism and the late Jansenist doctrine, that is, as an intermediate passage that would guarantee the continuity of Bay’s and Jansen’s reflections, in a theological path defined by a stable element: the inability of man to accomplish good by means of free will. The academics had an elitist opinion of Grace, even if they did not openly declare it. They believed, as was later written in the *Augustinus*, that God did not

²⁸ Jean Orcibal, *De Baius à Jansénius: le «comma pianum»*, 561. In Jean Orcibal, Jacques Le Brun, Jean Lesaulnier, eds., *Études d’histoire et de littérature religieuses. XVI^e–XVIII^e siècles* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1997), 561–583.

²⁹ Pierre Chaunu, *Jansénisme et frontière de catholicité (XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles). À propos du Jansénisme lorrain*. In ‘*Revue Historique*’, 227, (1962), 115–138. In this paper, the author presents his idea of ‘une forme particulièrement pure d’augustinisme que nous appellerons un augustinisme de frontière de Catholicité’.

³⁰ Lucien Ceysens, *Le jansénisme. Considérations historiques préliminaires à sa notion*. In ‘*Analecta Gregoriana*’ LXXI (1954), 28.

³¹ Ceysens, *Le jansénisme*, 28.

³² Ceysens, *Le jansénisme*, 19.

grant Grace to all men. The academics' censorship of Lessius recalled Bay's words in suggesting to the Jesuits that they would have encountered many difficulties in approaching the Protestants without employing Augustine's dogma, and in defending a different and erroneous doctrine of Grace and predestination.³³ It was an accusation of denying the maximum authority in the matter of Grace and of embracing a Semi-Pelagian doctrine.

Although the academics' concern that Lessius' ideas might increase the distance between Catholics and Protestants was probably authentic, it contained the implicit acknowledgment that the Augustinism taught at the University and the theology on which the Protestants shaped their Reformation had common points. Nevertheless, that does not mean that the doctrine of the Faculty amounted to Calvinism, as Lessius claimed. Bay and the theologians of the Faculty struggled against Late Scholasticism, of which Lessius was an eminent representative; in their eyes, it was guilty of corrupting Augustine's doctrine. Although Bay stayed in the background during the Leuven controversies, his influence was clear. Lessius himself, in a letter to the future cardinal Bellarmine,³⁴ wrote that his doctrine presumably annoyed Bay and Janson. The academics' preoccupation with Lessius grew, as more students undertook Lessius' classes and were exposed to Thomistic theology that diverged substantially from the strict Augustinism taught at the Faculty.³⁵ Some sources have even asserted that Bay himself collected all thirty-one of Lessius' condemned propositions directly from the students' handbooks.³⁶ The attack launched against Lessius was very serious. From the academics' point of view, Lessius' doctrine implicitly assumed that Augustine erred in the matter of Grace and free will; consequently, Lessius was implying that the Roman

³³ Stephan Duffy, *The Dynamics of Grace. Perspectives in Theological Anthropology*. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press 1993); Bernard Quilliet, *L'acharnement théologique. Histoire de la grâce en Occident. III^e-XXI^e siècle*. (Millau: Fayard, 2007).

³⁴ Franco Motta, *Bellarmino. Una teologia politica della Controriforma*, (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2005).

³⁵ In his theology lectures, Lessius used Saint Thomas' *Summa* instead of Peter Lombard's *Sentences*.

³⁶ Le Bachelet, *Baius*, 147. See *Acta quaedam Baianismum respicientia historice narrata* in Bibliothèque Royale de Bruxelles, Ms 17581, n. 1.

Church was mistaken too, as it had followed Augustine's theology since the first centuries of Christianity.³⁷ Ultimately, the academics suggested that Lessius implicitly charged Augustine's theology with Lutheranism and Calvinism *ante litteram*.

Following the attack, Lessius composed thirty-four propositions that summarised his doctrine and sent them to Bellarmine, who basically approved his friend's statements. An eminent Jesuit theologian, at the time professor of Controversies at the Roman College, and later a theologian and cardinal within the Curia of Rome, Bellarmine had been Lessius' teacher during his two years of study in Rome; in the first half of the 1570s he was a professor in Leuven, distinguishing himself in preaching against Bay's doctrine. He was a friend and confidant of Lessius, who wrote him the first letter about the Leuven dispute on 29 May 1587. From this date an intense correspondence about the controversy began. The letters show Lessius' certainty that his doctrine laid within the borders of Catholic orthodoxy, and his opinion that the theology of the Faculty did not.

Lessius' doctrine of Grace and predestination

Lessius' doctrine can be divided into a soteriological part, pertinent to the relationship between Grace and free will, original sin and predestination, and a part relating to the inspiration of the Holy Writ. Regarding the soteriological part, first of all Lessius taught that men were not predestined or reprobated before the prevision of the original sin, even if they were preordained with a certain predisposition toward eternal life,³⁸ and that the original sin was not established as an effect of the reprobation of all men.³⁹ Furthermore, God would have granted to all men enough help (*auxilium sufficiens*) and, if they agreed to it, they could rise again from sin and be saved. One of the most delicate points of the controversy was represented by the attribution to God of the decision

³⁷ Censorship in *Annales de la Société*, 165.

³⁸ *34 Propositions*, n. 13.

³⁹ *34 Propositions*, n. 14.

not to provide to all men the relief of salvation. On the contrary, Lessius affirmed that God granted Grace to all men.⁴⁰

Lessius considered the example of a child who dies without baptism. The Leuven academics taught that when a child accidentally dies before baptism, that event would have not only been simply allowed by God, but determined by Him, ‘And this is extremely cruel’.⁴¹ Instead, Lessius taught that God could never command that the relief of salvation – first and foremost the baptism – would not be applied because of original sin, but that He could simply allow it, in conformity to what He had foreseen. On the other hand, it was legitimate to suppose that God *sua sponte* would prevent the occurrence of natural or accidental events in order to permit a child to receive baptism.⁴² Lessius proposed an image of a merciful and typically neo-testamentary God, who would not deny necessary help to anybody. A man adequately encouraged through *Gratiam excitantem* or *praevenientem* could accept God’s call without any new Grace that would prevent his consent. This man, being gifted with the *Gratia habitualis*,⁴³ and sufficiently encouraged *per Gratiam excitantem*,⁴⁴ could ask for concomitant help. Stronger support and protection from God are, however, necessary in order to make him persist in good deeds over a long time.⁴⁵

The Jesuit definitely rejected the principle of sin as a necessity, and therefore the idea that some men would inevitably sin due to the original sin.⁴⁶ That was the substratum of Bay’s doctrine;

⁴⁰ *34 Propositions*, n. 17.

⁴¹ *Lessius to Bellarmine, 29 May 1587* in Le Bachelet, Bellarmin, 149. The adjective *durus-a-um* can also mean ‘difficult’, so ‘unlikely’. However, I translated it with ‘cruel’, since Lessius often alluded to the idea that the theologians of Leuven showed the image of an arbitrary and harsh God.

⁴² *34 Propositions*, n. 16.

⁴³ *34 Propositions*, n. 20. The adjective *habitualem* concerned the usual presence of Grace in people.

⁴⁴ *Excitans* refers to the stimulating action of Grace; men are free to agree or reject it.

⁴⁵ *34 Propositions*, n. 21.

⁴⁶ *34 Propositions*, n. 22.

in fact, he taught that men naturally tend towards evil.⁴⁷ In contrast, Lessius' confidence in man's abilities also emerged strongly in the soteriological field. The typically humanistic, anthropological, optimistic value of the *homo faber suae fortunae* found room also in the Catholic reflection. Lessius, like other early modern Christian thinkers, re-read that humanistic concept in a Christian way and based it on fundamental prerequisites, common to all men: the *auxilium sufficiens* and the *Dei Gratia*. Through free will every man can knowingly ratify his own damnation or salvation. God does not refuse his help to anybody, nevertheless many men refuse to affirmatively answer God's call. It is clear that Lessius' theory cannot be considered Semi-Pelagian or Pelagian, as the Leuven academics asserted; Lessius conceded benevolence and confidence to man's capacity to fulfil good actions, but by virtue of the fact that every man had previously received God's Grace.

Concerning predestination and reprobation, the Jesuit taught that everyone who had been saved was elected *ab aeterno* to the Grace (not to the Glory), through which God already knew who would be saved (foreknowledge). According to Lessius, that happened before the prevision of the merits of men and derived only from God's will.⁴⁸ However, Lessius believed that it was highly probable that men were not immediately and effectively elected to the Glory, with an absolute will, before the prevision of merits.⁴⁹ At that stage, in fact, man's response to God's Grace became substantial. Eventually, he also admitted that it could be affirmed that a man would be elected to Glory before the prevision of his merits, but only due to God's prescience.

The *ante merita praevisa* concept was vital for the supporters of a rigid Augustinism, both for the professors of Leuven and later for Jansen; it represented the '*centre logique de la doctrine approuvée, sans lequel tout l'augustinisme s'écroulerait*'.⁵⁰ The idea of human freedom shaped

⁴⁷ Lessius did not name Michael Bay in the 34 Propositions. Instead, he mentioned the theologian explicitly in the personal letters to Bellarmine.

⁴⁸ *34 Propositions*, n. 23.

⁴⁹ *34 Propositions*, n. 25.

⁵⁰ Orcibal, Jansénius d'Ypres, 19.

Lessius' doctrine. The foreknowledge, through which God knows in advance whether a man was elected to Glory, did not depend on God's will, but on what man, with free will – urged by divine help – decided.⁵¹ Similarly, Lessius believed that the reprobation with which God immediately and effectively destines some men to eternal suffering, preparing them for the eternal death, is not inflicted before the prevision of the faults.⁵² Lessius described reprobation as the God-given chance to reject eternal life, created after the prevision of the original sin:⁵³ before that, there would be no need to introduce the concept of reprobation.

This sentence about predestination and reprobation, which I briefly explained in these conclusions and I have frequently taught during my lessons, mainly conforms to Divine generosity, to the authority of the Writs, to the statements of the Fathers, to the equity of natural reason. It absolutely does not support Pelagius, and distances itself strongly from the heresy of Calvin and Luther.⁵⁴

With these words Lessius concluded the thirty-four propositions, defending himself against the accusations of the academics. Bellarmine subsequently defended Lessius' theology in front of the Holy See, as his doctrine was taught by many orthodox authors; a statement which, as a Cardinal over twenty years later, he retracted.⁵⁵

Lessius' doctrine was based on three keystones: first, God supplied everybody with sufficient help to accomplish good (through Grace) and be saved; secondly, man's response to God's invitation was crucial for Grace to be efficient; finally, the predestined men were chosen as a result of God's prescience of their positive response. However, the predestination did not simply depend on prescience of good deeds; nobody could earn his own predestination, as the ability to accomplish good derived from the merit of Grace, and the sufficient assistance granted to all men. The idea that election to Glory occurred after the prevision of man's merits did not reduce the role of divine Grace, which was necessary to achieve good.

⁵¹ *34 Propositions*, n. 27.

⁵² *34 Propositions*, n. 29.

⁵³ *34 Propositions*, n. 31.

⁵⁴ *34 Propositions*, n. 34. Translation is mine.

⁵⁵ ARSI, Fl. Belg. 72, I, ff. 120r–122v.

Reassuring even the most tormented consciences was one of Lessius' main concerns, and his doctrine reached this goal. Lessius was broadly open-minded towards the necessities of men, and exhibited a complex spirituality. On one hand he fully embodied the Salesian spirituality; even his openness towards the use of money – that in *De iustitia et iure* subverted, from a practical point of view, the Aristotelian principle of the sterility of money – was connected to the idea that a good Christian could also be a good merchant, that salvation can be reached through daily activities. Tolerance of others was necessary; imposition of overly strict rules would cause the Catholics to distance themselves from religious practice. That conclusion was absolutely not shared by rigorists and Jansenists, who asked for the contrition of the heart in the confessional. The Jesuit's theology of salvation, which granted hope and confidence to mankind, perfectly fits with his unusual open-mindedness. Despite his attitude towards others, Lessius was very severe with himself: he self-inflicted frequent corporal punishments, spending hours in a meditative state that – according to some 16th century sources – led him to a sort of mystic ecstasy. Lessius embodied *ante litteram* Alfonso de Liguori's attitude, which involved tolerance of others but strictness towards oneself.⁵⁶

De Sacra Scriptura

As previously explained, the censorship included Lessius' teaching *de Sacra Scriptura*. We can learn about Lessius' inspiration doctrine not only from the documents on the controversy, but from his commentaries on Saint Thomas' *Summa*, used by the Jesuit as the basis for his theological course.⁵⁷ As the historians have certified, Lessius assumed a very important role in the history of

⁵⁶ Saint Alphonsus de Liguori defined Lessius 'prince of the moralists'. Van Sull, Léonard Lessius, 186.

⁵⁷ Antonio M. Artola, *Fuentes para el estudio de la doctrina lessiana sobre la inspiración*. In 'Scriptorium Victoriense' XX, (1973), 5-31. Artola wrote essays on this matter, for example *El sistema inspiracionista de Leonardo Lessio, S.I.* In 'Archivo Teologico Granadino' 37, (1974), 5-44.



Leonard Lessius S.J. Print by Nicolas de Larmessin

inspiration dogma.⁵⁸ Lessius' inspiration theory has been generally considered an alternative to the ruling doctrine of his time – that is to say, the verbal inspiration doctrine.

The Dominican Domingo Bañez was a strong adherent to and promoter of the verbal inspiration doctrine.⁵⁹ He was a Thomistic theologian, but spread a doctrine similar to that of the Leuven academics. He endorsed physical predetermination and radically extended the theories of Cano and Caetano. Cano, Bañez's master, considered the Holy Writ as the main *locus theologicus*

⁵⁸ See Eugène Mangenot, *Inspiration de l'Écriture*. In 'Dictionnaire de théologie catholique', VII (2), 2068-2266.

⁵⁹ Antonio M. Artola, *Las aportaciones de la escuela salmantina a la Teología de la Inspiración*. In 'Scriptorium Visctoriense' XVII, (1970), 220-236.

from which theology could be organised as a science,⁶⁰ while Caetano taught that prophetic revelations and the divine assistance provided to the New Testament's authors had to be differentiated. According to Cano and Caetano, the enlightenment of the revelation would not have been necessary if the authors wrote about facts known '*por luz natural*',⁶¹ needing only the assistance of the Holy Spirit. Bañez extended the concept of the enlightenment of the revelation to all Holy Writ.

Lessius' inspiration doctrine was nonconformist (as were many of his theological works), including ideas that were not widely followed even within the Society of Jesus. A very important scholar of Lessius' inspiration doctrine, Antonio Maria Artola, emphasised that the Leuven controversies represented one of the most influential moments in the history of the inspiration dogma.⁶² Lessius' doctrine was a milestone in that history. The censors questioned three of Lessius' statements.⁶³ In the first, the Jesuit claimed that it was not necessary that every word was inspired and shaped by the Holy Spirit in the minds of Biblical authors' in order to generate Holy Writ. In the second proposition, Lessius maintained that it was not necessary that whole sentences were immediately revealed by the Holy Spirit to the author, as totally new knowledge, if they were already known by him through experience or natural reason (but not excluding the support of the Holy Spirit in the process). Thirdly, with explicit reference to 2 *Maccabees*, Lessius affirmed that it was possible that a book written with mere human *industria* could become Holy Writ with the subsequent approval of the Holy Spirit. Thus, Lessius' doctrine postulated a dual source of knowledge: human reason and experience, in the Galilean meaning, which valued man and his

⁶⁰ Antonio M. Artola, *La razón formal de la Sagrada Escritura en el sistema inspiracionista de Leonardo Lessio, S.J.*, 'Scriptorium Victoriense' XIX, (1972), 121–157.

⁶¹ Antonio M. Artola, *El sistema inspiracionista de Leonardo Lessio, S.J.*, 9, 'Archivo Teológico Granadino', 37 (1974), 5–44.

⁶² Antonio M. Artola, *La razón formal de la Sagrada Escritura en el sistema inspiracionista de Leonardo Lessio, S.J.*, 'Scriptorium Victoriense' XIX (1972), 122.

⁶³ Schneemann, *Controversiarum*, 374–375.

operative and intellectual skills; and a new supernatural revelation that enlightened the authors. Lessius argued that divine dictation – the basis for the prophetic books – was distinct from New Testament writings, and primarily the Gospels, in which the authors’ free will could play a role. In his view, the doctrine of verbal inspiration did not take into account a multiplicity of factors, such as the variety in the books that comprise the Biblical canon, and their many authors and styles.⁶⁴

Bellarmino suggested to Lessius that he should remove the third proposition, which troubled the Leuven academics and many other theologians.⁶⁵ Lessius’ theory was initially largely rejected even in the Society of Jesus, where, however, it later received some acceptance. Lessius gave life to ‘real inspiration’ of Holy Writ, an idea opposed to the verbal theory.⁶⁶ In essence, the Jesuit’s doctrine took into account man’s role in the revelation process, thereby attracting many Jesuits of Thomistic education, who were very close to Christian Humanism. Moreover, Lessius’ doctrine did not call into question God’s supremacy in the writing of Holy Writ, but it highlighted its necessity and derived the veracity of the contents of the biblical books from His authority.

Bellarmino’s intervention and papal edict

After the academics’ censorship of Lessius’ assertions, a sequence of polemic writings was presented by both sides.⁶⁷ Lessius involved Robert Bellarmine, his former tutor, in the dispute by

⁶⁴ The attention to the philological aspect of Holy Writ was typically humanistic.

⁶⁵ *Bellarmino to Lessius, end of November 1587* in Le Bachelet, Bellarmino, 172-175.

⁶⁶ Antonio M. Artola, *La expansión de las ideas inspiracionistas de Lessio en la Compañía de Jesús, desde la controversia lovaniense hasta la extinción de la misma (1587-1773)*. In ‘Scriptorium Victoriense’ XXIII (1976), 6. See also Johannes Beumer, *La inspiración de la Sagrada Escritura*. In ‘*Historia de los dogmas*’ (Madrid: B.A.C., 1973), I, 55.

⁶⁷ Lessius wrote the *Antitheses*, in which he summarised his doctrine in six propositions (in *Historia Ms. Collegii Lovaniensis S.J.*, Archives du Royaume, Bruxelles); after the censorship of the University of Douai, he wrote the *Apologia* and the academics answered with the *Antapologia or Iustificatio seu defensio censurae Facultatis S. Theologiae Academiae Lovaniensis contra assertiones quasdam Professorum ibidem Societ. Nominis Iesu* (Schneemann, *Controversiarum*, 363-364); then, Lessius wrote the *Responsio ad Antapologiam Ven. Facultatis S.*

sending him a document that contained Janson's doctrine; Bellarmine provided an interesting censure to demonstrate the wrongness of the academics' position.⁶⁸

First of all, Bellarmine focused on one of the most controversial points of the academics' theology. In some aspects of their doctrine, God appeared as the author of sins – an idea decisively refuted by Lessius. Bellarmine diplomatically stated that even if the Faculty of Theology could give a better explanation of the sentences in question, in that 'difficult time' – the century of Protestant schisms – they seemed far too similar to Calvin's and Melanchthon's assertions, which had been condemned by the Council of Trent. Furthermore, Bellarmine labelled as heretic the opinion that men *necessario peccant* (i.e., that men necessarily commit sin), but do it freely as a voluntary act; in the same manner, men who benefit from God's help act necessarily, but, at the same time, freely. This assertion seemed to nullify free will, and not distinguish it from necessity. Moreover, it was totally contrary to the regulation established by the Council of Trent, and therefore heretic. Significantly, at the end of the censure Bellarmine noted with concern that Janson, who taught this doctrine in Leuven, was Michael Bay's close friend and had accurately followed his mistaken doctrine in the past. '*Utinam etiam modo non sit*':⁶⁹ a final comment that alluded in an almost explicit way to the derivation of Janson's doctrine from Bay's, and expressed the fear that Bay's heresy had been proposed again, as Lessius suggested.

The controversy did not subside. The theologians of the University of Douai, who produced a censorship (20 January 1588), and various bishops lent their support to the Faculty of Theology of

Theologiae Universitatis Lovaniensis (manuscript copies are available in BAV, Barb. Lat. 1058, 195-303 and Barb. Lat. 1034, 42-128; ACDF, *Controversia*, ff. 361r.-394v). See also ARSI, Fl. Belg. 72, I, ff. 230r-263r.

⁶⁸ ACDF, *Bellarmini Censurae in sententias Lovanio missas*, ff. 34r-35r in ACDF, *Controversia*. See also *Propositions extraites de l'enseignement oral de Jacques Janson et envoyées à Rome par Lessius* in Le Bachelet, *Bellarmin*, 158-160.

⁶⁹ *Bellarmini Censurae*, f. 35r.

Leuven. In 1591, Lessius composed six assertions to defend his doctrine once again.⁷⁰ These mutual continuous accusations were seen as so dangerous for the unity of Catholicism that the Nuncio of Cologne, Ottavio Frangipani, imposed silence on the two factions through the publication of a papal edict on 10 July 1588.⁷¹ Sixtus V's decision declared Lessius' censored sentences to be '*sanae doctrinae articuli*' (orthodox doctrine). The choice to impose silence – and deliver victory to Lessius – was strategic: in a century of schisms, the Holy See wanted to avoid further fractures. The academics demonstrated the derivation of their doctrine from Bay's theology: this was evidence that the previous condemnations had not prevented the diffusion of Bay's doctrine, even if with certain adjustments. Condemnations were frequently insufficient to arrest heterodox doctrines, as the later Jansenist case proved.

The evolution of the controversy: 16th and 17th centuries

Despite the papal edict on the orthodoxy of Lessius' doctrine, the issue remained latent for years. It arose again in a dispute between the Jesuit Luis de Molina, accused of Pelagianism and Semi-Pelagianism, and the Dominican Domingo Bañez: the deep connection between the two controversies is confirmed by Holy Office documentation.⁷² The report containing the censorship of Molina's doctrine starts with a concise dissertation on the Leuven dispute, and demonstrates the link between the two events. Furthermore, the editor pointed out that Sixtus V's imposition of silence should have closed the issue, a hint that presaged the conclusion of the *Congregatio de auxiliis divinae gratiae* (2 January 1598 – 28 August 1607), organised to solve the new dispute.

After many sessions under Clement VIII and Paul V, the controversy ended with no definitive result, and the two sides were authorised to freely teach their own doctrines, but were

⁷⁰ Leonard Lessius, *Antitheses in quibus consistit tota Controversia inter Doctores Lovanienses et Societatis Jesu Professore, mota per eorundem Doctorum Censuram, anni 1587*.

⁷¹ ACDF, *Controversia, Papal edict*, Leuven 10 July 1588. A second Papal edict was published after the censorship of Douai. ARSI, Fl. Belg. 72, I, f. 270r.

⁷² ACDF, St.St., S.O. 0 5 h 1, *Scritto sulla dottrina del p. Molina, 1605*, ff. 6-7.

advised to avoid new controversies. The discussion focused on the effectiveness of Grace: according to the Dominican's thesis, its efficacy was due to the divine predetermination of the human will; in contrast, the Jesuit stated that it depended on the conformity of the divine decree with God's prescience about human choices. On 5 September 1607, Paul V reminded the Superiors General of the two Orders of the postulate of Trent, which stated that divine help for the exercise of the free will was necessary for salvation, however, the Pontiff did not detail its nature. Paolo Broggio spoke about a '[...] *disposizione di Paolo V nel senso di una chiusura della disputa che ha tutto il sapore di una scelta di opportunità politica*':⁷³ the matter was very serious, and the risk of further theological divisions was evident. Then, the Pope was unable to make a resolution contrary to the Society of Jesus, at that time a faithful ally of the Holy See. In essence the Society was the winner of the *Congregatio de auxiliis*. The dispute played an important role in the evolution of the politics of Grace in the Order, as Lessius realised with bitterness some twenty years after the Leuven controversies.

In 1610, Lessius published his treatise *De gratia efficaci*, a response to the work of a Dominican, Francis de Avila, who promoted the concept of predetermining Grace, and declared that the Jesuit's doctrine was contrary to Holy Writ. In his work, Lessius restated his predestination doctrine; however, unlike Lessius, many theologians of the Society of Jesus – among them Bellarmine and Francisco Suarez – attributed the election to effective Grace to the absolute and independent divine will, and did not agree with Lessius' theory *de praedestinatione post merita praevisa*, which preserved human freedom. This was nothing new. Lessius and Bellarmine had debated this question in their correspondence in 1580s, but not as an object of faith. The General Aquaviva complained about the publication of Lessius' work on such a delicate matter; he asserted that the treatise, published without authorisation, contained positions even more difficult to defend

⁷³ Paolo Broggio, *La teologia e la politica. Controversie dottrinali, Curia romana e Monarchia spagnola tra Cinque e Seicento*. (Firenze: Olschki, 2009), 128.

than Molina's.⁷⁴ Aquaviva was greatly influenced by some documents opposing Lessius' doctrine which were circulating among Catholic theologians, which described it as contrary to Augustine's and even to Thomas' doctrines, as well as being close to the heretical opinions of Catarinus. Aquaviva ordered Lessius to correct his treatise, to avoid the entire Society being attacked.⁷⁵ The General expressed his displeasure in many letters, pointing out the necessity of admitting the difference between the Grace provided by God to the men who would be saved and to the men who would not.⁷⁶

According to many theologians, Lessius' doctrine called into question the omnipotent and absolutely free divine decision. Moreover, other pressures, connected to the *Congregatio de auxiliis*, unnerved the Jesuit General. First of all, on 28 August 1607 the Pope strongly recommended that the protagonists should completely abstain from the debate, in order to maintain peace. Furthermore, Philip III of Spain pressured Rome to confirm the Dominican theory. To prevent problems arising from Lessius' work, Aquaviva obtained permission from the Pope to delegate the issue to Bellarmine. Concerned about doctrinal unity in his Order, he communicated to Lessius that Bellarmine was worried about his doctrine of predestination.

After the *Congregatio de auxiliis*, Bellarmine realised that the doctrines of Lessius and Molina posed dangerous risks to Catholic theology and to the reputation of the Society. During the *De auxiliis*, the anti-Protestant function of Molina's doctrine was eulogised, however at the end of

⁷⁴ Xavier-Marie Le Bachelet, *Le décret d'Aquaviva sur la grace efficace*, 48. In *Recherches de science religieuse* 14, no. 1 (1924), 46-60.

⁷⁵ *Aquaviva to Florentinus*, 21 August 1610 in ARSI, Fl. Belg., 1, f. 1169. Le Bachelet told that an anonymous censorship was sent to Paul V. See Xavier-Marie Le Bachelet, *Auctarium Bellarminianum, Supplément aux oeuvres du Cardinal Bellarmine*. (Paris: Beauchesne, 1913), 27.

⁷⁶ *Aquaviva to Lessius*, 7 January 1612 in ARSI, Fl. Belg., 3, ff. 70-71; *Aquaviva to Lessius*, 23 October 1610 in ARSI, Fl. Belg., 1, II, f. 1176.

the Congregation, Bellarmine chose caution, adopting the General's view.⁷⁷ In 1610, the difference in opinion between Bellarmine and Lessius – but also between Bellarmine and Molina – was extremely clear, unlike twenty-five years earlier: these theologians were in agreement about rejecting physical predetermination, but not about the relationship between Grace and good deeds, predestination and election to Glory. Suddenly the cardinal began to believe that Lessius could be charged with Semi-Pelagianism, as the Leuven academics had claimed in the 1580s. Even if Lessius had some defenders in the Roman College, the council established by Aquaviva to analyse Lessius' opinions (Mutius Vitelleschi, the future General, took part in the censorship) was unfavourable to him. Some assertions taken from the *De gratia efficaci* were censored, and the author was ordered to make the necessary corrections.⁷⁸ Xavier-Marie Le Bachelet speculated that Aquaviva glimpsed in Lessius' doctrine the risk of showing a God who would not give the predestined men anything more than other men, as if a common Grace sufficient for all men existed.

Bellarmino's change of attitude greatly disappointed Lessius, as is easily realised by reading his letters.⁷⁹ The cardinal had apparently completely changed his opinion. In a letter dated 31 December 1610, Bellarmine explained to Lessius that he had defended him during the Leuven controversies due to a misunderstanding. At that time, he interpreted Lessius' doctrine as meaning that the predestination to the Glory depended on forecast merits, but predestination to the effective Grace only originated from God's will. However, reading the *De gratia efficaci*, Bellarmine comprehended, with great astonishment, that Lessius derived predestination simply and absolutely

⁷⁷ See ACDF, S.O. I 5 e, n. 146: *De novis controversiis inter Patres quosdam ex Ordine Praedicatorum et Patrem Molinam Jesuitam (a) Opusculum Auctore Roberto Cardinale Bellarmino*. The author states he copied a manuscript stored in the Corsini Library.

⁷⁸ On the censorship in the Society of Jesus, Ugo Baldini, *Una fonte poco utilizzata per la storia intellettuale: le «censurae librorum» e «opinionum» nell'antica Compagnia di Gesù*. In *Annali dell'Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento* XI, (1985), 19–50.

⁷⁹ *Lessius to Bellarmine*, 18 February 1611 in Le Bachelet X–M., *Auctarium Bellarminianum, Supplément*, 148–150. See APUG 540, ff. 73r–74v. Lessius answers Bellarmine's letter dated 31 December 1610 (Le Bachelet, *Auctarium Bellarminianum, Supplément*, 145–147).

from the prevision of merits; therefore, that was prescience, not predestination. That doctrine was opposed to those of Augustine and Thomas, as well as to the precepts of Francisco Borgia and of the *Ratio Studiorum*, besides being very similar to Catarinus'.⁸⁰

Lessius defended himself from these attacks. On 18 February 1611, he resolutely communicated to Bellarmine that he hoped his doctrine would be better understood by the means of additional explanations: his main concern was to demonstrate his complete conformity with Augustine and Thomas. He pointed out that the antecedent and absolute election to Glory clashed with Ignatius' teachings and with the Constitutions, which also profess the active participation of man in salvation.

Bellarmino's previous evaluation cannot be explained as a misunderstanding: the documentation Lessius sent in the 1580s was too accurate to confuse the future cardinal. The hypothesis that Bellarmine completely embraced the change of politics of the Order about the doctrine of the Grace endures. This change depended, essentially, on two factors: firstly, Aquaviva's theological sensitivity; secondly, the conditions imposed by the Pontiff at the end of the *Congregatio de auxiliis*. From the General's point of view, Lessius' work risked to lure new accusations against the Society of Jesus, which were very hard to shake off: in fact, Lessius supported opinions which were more radical than Molina's assertions. It is important to highlight that Lessius was not inspired by Molina: in effect, the *Concordia*⁸¹ (Molina's masterpiece) circulated in Belgium only after Lessius' dispute with the academics. The two theologians developed a similar doctrine, to the point that Lessius greeted the *Concordia* as a confirmation of his own theology.

⁸⁰ Le Bachelet, Le décret d'Aquaviva, 52.

⁸¹ Luis de Molina, *Concordia Liberi arbitrii cum gratiae donis, diuina praescientia, prouidentia, praedestinatione et reprobatione*. (Olyssipone: Antonium Riberium, 1588).

Pérez Goyena, in a celebratory paper written for the third centenary of Lessius' death, dramatically wrote that the Leuven academics, faced with the Jesuit's doctrine, imagined that Pelagius had risen again from the tomb to defend the dangerous doctrine previously crushed by Saint Augustine.⁸² The *Doctor Gratiae*, as Jean Dagens wrote in 1951, ruled 17th century theology;⁸³ the doctrine of Grace, which received new formulations in the 1500s and 1600s, effectively orbited around Augustine: on one hand, a radical and sometimes altered Augustinism grew in Europe, among Christian theologians; on the other hand, several scholars and theologians were accused of subversion of traditional Augustinism. Lessius put Augustine at the level of the other Fathers of the Church, and freely expressed his own opinions, as long as they were supported by at least one Father; he learnt this probabilistic lesson from Francisco Suarez during his Roman sojourn.

The controversies arising in Leuven during the 1580s represented an essential moment in the history of early modern theology: they showed that Bay's doctrine was alive and appreciated, despite the papal condemnation, and displayed how, over the years, the politics of the Society of Jesus on the subject of Grace changed. In 1613, Aquaviva issued a decree on effective Grace (*De gratia efficace*): the theologians of the Order had to comply with the instruction in order to achieve the desired doctrinal unity. The actions undertaken by the Leuven academics demonstrate that fear of the resurrection of Pelagianism, as a complete subversion of Augustine's doctrine, was still strong in the 16th century. Some historiographers have defined the Augustinism of the academics as pure, others as distorted (*obscurius loquit*, as Lessius wrote about Augustine). Even if some Jesuit historians supported the hypothesis that the academics attacked the entire Society, it is more plausible to assert that this attack was directed, first of all, against the doctrine of a man who

⁸² Antonio Pérez Goyena, *El tercer centenario de la muerte de un gran teologo*, 63. In 'Razon y Fe' II, (1923), 50-69.

⁸³ Jean Dagens, *Le XVII siècle, siècle de Saint Augustin. Communication de M. Jean Dagens au IIIe congrès de l'Association, à Paris, le 28 août 1951*. In 'Cahiers de l'Association internationale des études francaises', 3-5 (1953), 31-38.

contradicted the controversy's instigator, Michael Bay. Additionally, the academics criticised the Thomism generally proposed by the Society, worried that it was corrupting the true Augustinian doctrine of Grace.⁸⁴

During the 16th and 17th centuries, the Holy See repeatedly faced similar controversies, through the intervention of the Holy Office or the Pontiff himself.⁸⁵ This is proof that the holders of different perceptions on the matter of Grace and free will that coexisted within Catholicism barely tolerated each other, and that the Church feared internal divisions. That intolerance was the result of the desire to safeguard the orthodoxy on the part of the most rigid Augustinian theologians. They did not consider the remaining tradition of the Church, particularly Scholastic theology, and distrusted salvation doctrines based on Church Fathers and authors other than Augustine as manifestations of condemned theologies (Pelagianism or Semi-Pelagianism). Caesar Baronius highlighted this in his *Annales*: he '[...] mit solennellement en garde "certains modernes" – entendons les molinistes – contre la tentation d'abandonner la doctrine d'Augustin pour adopter celle de Fauste'.⁸⁶ Simultaneously, Lessius and his followers were intolerant of the rigid Augustinism embodied by the academics, associating it with Calvinism.

The Leuven controversies and the quarrel between Molina and Bañez had several differences. As Paolo Broggio highlighted, the *Congregatio de auxiliis* occurred in a complicated political situation as regards the relationship between the Pope, the Holy Office, the Spanish monarchy, and the Spanish Inquisition.⁸⁷ In contrast, the Leuven dispute is generally regarded as a

⁸⁴ See Gaetano Lettieri, *Il metodo della grazia. Pascal e l'ermeneutica giansenista di Agostino*. (Roma: Edizioni dehoniane, 1999), 49; Jean-Louis Quantin, *Ces autres qui nous font ce que nous sommes: les jansénistes face à leurs adversaires*, 409. In *'Revue de l'histoire des religions'* 212, no. 4 (1995), 397–417.

⁸⁵ For instance, see the case of Sirmond's homilies, in the 1620s. Jean-Louis Quantin, *Philologie et querelle de la grâce au XVII^e siècle: Sirmond, Valérien de Cimiez et le Saint-Office*, 720. In Jacques Elfassi, Cécil Lanéry, Anne-Marie Turcan-Verkerk, eds., *'Amicorum Societatis. Mélanges offerts à François Dolbeau pour son 65^e anniversaire'*. (Firenze: Sismel Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2013), 699–739.

⁸⁶ Quantin, *Philologie*, 720.

⁸⁷ Broggio, *La teologia e la politica*, 61.

theological quarrel, without political implications. However, the connection between the two disputes is clear: the theologies of the Leuven academics and Bañez were very close, as Lessius had already pointed out,⁸⁸ and deeply opposed to the similar doctrines of Lessius and Molina.

The final echoes of the controversy: 19th and 20th centuries

The Leuven dispute was a troubling event in Lessius' life and, more broadly, in early modern Catholicism. The censors of the *Index librorum prohibitorum* and Holy Office preferred to avoid this subject, as we can see from the censorships on the first biography/hagiography of the Jesuit.⁸⁹ In the middle of the 17th century, Leonard Schoofs' *De vita et moribus R.P. Leonardi Lessii* was included in the *Index*, and condemned by the Holy Office *donec corrigatur* (until corrected). The Holy Office's and the Index's concerns focused on two spheres: the attribution of sanctity and the theological controversies.⁹⁰ Indeed, they were the years of the reorganisation of the causes for canonisation, and of the explosion of Jansenism. Furthermore, some inquisitors were averse to the idea of validating the 'sanctity' which emerged from the biography of such an open-minded and probabilistic Jesuit,⁹¹ which would mean implicitly approving a theological and moral system branded as too indulgent by many rigorists. From the inquisitors' point of view, accepting Lessius' hagiography would have meant approving the doctrine of the entire Society of Jesus, which they completely and wrongly identified with probabilism. In the 1890s, when the Society asked to remove the book from the *Index* in order to re-open Lessius' cause for beatification, the hagiography was discussed again in the Congregation of the Index, and a Dominican commissioner raised the same doubts as the commissioners in the 17th century concerning the attribution of

⁸⁸ E.g. *Lessius to Bellarmine*, 29 December 1587 in Le Bachelet, Bellarmin, 175–177.

⁸⁹ Schoofs, *De vita*. Decree of the Index: 18 December 1646. Jesús M. De Bujanda, *Index librorum prohibitorum 1600-1966*. (Montréal: Médiaspaul, 2002), 817; ACDF, *Index, Diari IV (1628-1650)*, ff. 152, 245, 276.

⁹⁰ As it happened in the case of Sirmond's homilies. See Quantin, *Philologie*, 719.

⁹¹ For the 19th century, ACDF, *Index*, *Protocolli 1894-96*, f. 93.

sanctity and the theological controversies. Furthermore, he spoke of a Jesuit plot to promote Lessius' cause for beatification and defend what he saw as the Jesuit doctrine.⁹²

Bellarmino's and Lessius' fates intersected again three hundred years after their deaths, to the Flemish theologian's disadvantage. At the beginning of the 1900s, Charles van Sull, postulator of Lessius' cause for beatification, wrote to the General Postulation for the Causes of Saints of the Society of Jesus in Rome that the General of the Society of Jesus had recommended that Lessius' process be renounced in case discrepancies between Lessius and Bellarmine emerged.⁹³ An archival investigation brought to light records of the theological controversy between the two Jesuits, and Bellarmine's concern that Lessius could be accused of Semi-Pelagianism. After three centuries, the Society was close to achieving the beatification of the cardinal (as occurred in 1923, and his canonisation in 1930): thus, the Order chose Bellarmine. In any case, from the General's point of view the cardinal had fulfilled a more significant role in the Society than the Belgian theologian, who had, moreover, been censored. Bellarmine's beatification and canonisation therefore represented a superior outcome. In contrast, Lessius' cause for beatification, which had been supported especially by Flemish Jesuits in the Early Modern Age, was interrupted; after new attempts in the middle of the 20th century, the Society definitively dropped it. The Leuven controversies dogged Lessius even after his death.

Furthermore, in 1870, during the First Vatican Council, Lessius' inspiration theory was raised in connection with the condemnation of Daniel Haneberg's doctrine, which was inspired by the Flemish theologian.⁹⁴ Some members of the Council feared that Haneberg's condemnation extended to the Jesuit, but the archbishop of Brixen, Vincent Gasser, defined the differences between the two doctrines in his report *De emendationibus capituli secundi constitutionis*

⁹² ACDF, *Index*, Protocolli 1894–96, ff. 65r–66v

⁹³ ARSI, Archive of the General Postulation for the Causes of Saints of the Society of Jesus, *Corrispondenza* 6 (1904–1905), Letter of Charles Van Sull, Bruxelles 21 January 1905.

⁹⁴ Haneberg was Bishop of Spiers.

dogmaticae de fide catholica.⁹⁵ However, Gasser's considerations were based on the final – and compulsorily corrected – version of Lessius' third assertion on Holy Writ; a version which did not speak of *humana industria*, and contemplated the action of the Holy Spirit. The Council Fathers were not aware of Lessius' true intentions, which clearly emerged from his private correspondence with Bellarmine, and in the explanations he composed. If they had been, the results could have been different, since Lessius' inspiration theory was extremely close to Haneberg's.

Conclusion

Two main points need to be reiterated. First, as emerges from Lessius' writings, despite the controversies he never abandoned the main idea that underpinned his moral theology and doctrine of Grace: the active and fundamental partnership of man in his salvation, in a soteriological process known by God *ab aeterno*. Second, as 19th- and 20th-century documentation shows, Lessius' theology of Grace and predestination and his inspiration theory continued to be strongly criticised and censured as they had been in Leuven in the 1580s. Lessius' open-mindedness has represented a powerful challenge for many theologians over the past 400 years.

⁹⁵ Vincent Gasser (1809–1879; Archbishop of Brixen), *Relatio De Emendationibus Capitis Secundi Constitutionis Dogmaticae de Fide Catholica, Acta et Decreta Sacrosancti Oecumenici Concilii Vaticani, Acta ante Sessionem III*, (Freiburg: Sumptibus Herder, 1890), 7, 139–41. In 1961 Holstein stated that, according to Gasser, Lessius had retracted his theory on 2 Maccabees (a book written with *humana industria* and later approved by the Holy Spirit). That was incorrect; in fact, Lessius never changed his mind, but was compelled to modify his third sentence on the Holy Writ. Henri Holstein, *Lessius a-t-il été condamné au Concile du Vatican?*. In 'Recherches de science religieuse' XLIX, no. 2 (1961), 219–226.