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A Strange Case of Co-Authorship. *Humana industria*, the Holy Spirit, and the Inspiration of the Scriptures according to Leonard Lessius (1500s-1800s)¹

I. APPROACHING LEONARD LESSIUS (1554-1623)

Leonardum Lessium non magis ingenii monumentis quam virtutum fama aeternum, ex orbe toto consultum pro oraculo, de Religiosa vita iubilantem Lovanienses Socii faustis acclamationibus sunt prosecute.²

In the early modern Low Countries, Leonard Lessius, a well-known Flemish Jesuit theologian and moral economist born Lenaert Leys (1554-1623), was known as the *lumière de la théologie*, as twentieth-century Jesuit Charles van Sull reminds us in his biography-hagiography.³ For his vast scholarly knowledge of theology, the law, contracts, and economics Lessius was widely consulted as an oracle. Although this flattering title, already included in the seventeenth-century *Imago primi saeculi societatis Jesu a provincia Flandro-Belgica ejusdem societatis representata*, may smack of partisan exaggeration, Lessius was indeed famous in early modern Flanders. The theologian was a mentor for many Flemish businessmen and merchants, and even a reference point for Archduke Albert of Habsburg and his wife Isabella, who ruled the Low Countries at the time.

Lessius' moral treatise *De Iustitia et Iure*⁴ includes a rich dissertation on contractual law and, specifically, on buying and selling (along with an innovative market analysis), and was even recommended to

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² Bolland 1640, 17.

³ Van Sull 1930, 3. A rich corpus of records on Lessius are stored in the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARSI). See, for example, a biography of him, stored in ARSI, *Vitae* 134.

⁴ Lessius 1605.

merchants to acquaint themselves with the Antwerp market.⁵ As a confessor, Lessius was also involved in counseling and directing the troubled consciences of Catholics. The aforementioned *De Iustitia et Iure* also served as a manual for confessors to resolve moral dilemmas. In a trading hub such as the early modern Low Countries, these quandaries often involved economic matters, and it is worth mentioning that, in this respect, Lessius fostered a—the oxymoron is intended—“strict” Probabilism, extraordinarily open to human beings’ freedom of action. This is a recurring topic and will resurface frequently in the course of this article. As a theologian, Lessius also dealt with the theology of grace, free will, and eternal predestination—a hot topic in Counter-Reformation Europe—as well as with the doctrine of the inspiration of the Scriptures, which will be the focus of this article.

In the early twentieth century, Charles van Sull began to promote devotion for Lessius. Although a cult had emerged soon after his death in 1623, it had declined by the 1800s. Van Sull aimed to re-open Lessius’ cause for beatification, riding the wave of the actions undertaken in Rome by the general postulator for the Causes of Canonizations of the Society of Jesus, Torquato Armellini (1823-1901).⁶ In the Flemish Jesuit tradition, Lessius was indeed depicted as a champion of orthodoxy and holiness. Reports on his life and death, describing him as a paragon of Christian perfection, began to circulate soon after his passing, and relics were collected from his body.⁷

The first printed hagiography of Lessius, Leonard Schoofs’ *De vita et moribus R.P. Leonardi Lessii*, describes him as an ascetic and mystic, characterized by a deep Christological piety, humility, and desire to encounter God.⁸ We will return to the importance of this hagiography, which the Roman Inquisition later condemned, and the Congregation of the Index placed on the list of forbidden books. News of Lessius’ alleged holiness spread through the Spanish Low Countries after his death, to such an extent that records report the legion of devotees who visited his tomb begging for graces, including healings and exorcisms. In the seventeenth century, the doorkeeper of the Jesuit College of Leuven even distributed holy water to devotees, in which Lessius’ relics had been immersed. He thus contributed to a series of imprudent devotional actions involving Lessius, which were not welcomed in Rome (not even

⁵ Decock 2012b, 28.

⁶ On the attempts to re-open Lessius’ cause, see Rai 2019 and 2016a.

⁷ See Schoofs 1640, 179; ARSI, Fl. Belg. 70, I, 256.

⁸ Schoofs 1640, 69–75. Schoofs (75) tells us that his mystical contemplation was so profound that he almost died in a fire in his cell, without even realizing it: *Evenerat aliquando, ut scintilla aliqua in chartas delapsa, fumum & ignem cieret. Fumus e cubiculo per rimas eluctatus, incendii signa domesticis faciebat: accurrunt illi Lessium oratione occupatum, fumi ac incendii prorsus ignarum deprehendunt.*

by Jesuit General Muzio Vitelleschi). Pope Urban VIII was in the middle of strictly re-organizing and centralizing canonization procedures, as well as normalizing the veneration of the dead, precisely to eradicate such heresies. Lessius' fame for sanctity grew regardless—miracles were said to take place around his tomb—and an informative process (today lost) was opened in the Archdiocese of Mechelen.

But not all that glitters is gold. Records produced in the 1580s and 1590s by academics at the theology faculty of the University of Leuven, and later by consultants at the Congregation of the Index between the mid-1600s and the 1890s, depict a different figure. In contrast to images of sanctity, these testimonies tell the story of a heterodox figure in the early modern Catholic landscape, who had embraced the ancient Pelagian heresy. In the early 1600s, concerned critiques even came from the top leaders of the Society of Jesus in Rome, namely General Claudio Acquaviva (1543-1615) and Roberto Bellarmino (1542-1621). Bellarmino is one of the most important Counter-Reformation theologians in Jesuit history, and, indeed, in all Catholic history. What did these criticisms involve? Let us take a step back in order to understand the kind of hornet's nest Lessius had stumbled into to be charged with heterodoxy—even by his Jesuit brothers—especially for his views on the inspiration of the Scriptures.

II. THEOLOGY OF SALVATION AND RELIGIOUS ANTHROPOLOGY: EARLY MODERN CRITICISMS

Our story begins in 1587, when Lessius was a professor of theology at the Jesuit College of Leuven, an educational institute that had entered into competition with the university's much older Faculty of Theology. The faculty, founded in 1432, was a stronghold of strictly Augustinian Catholic theology in the Low Countries and also hosted theologian Michael Baius (1513-1589). The academics of Leuven began to question Lessius' orthodoxy precisely when the Jesuit, during his lectures, expressed theological positions that were extremely open to the individual's free will with respect to God's grace and eternal predestination, and—as we read in the Jesuit sources—in total contrast with “Baianist doctrines.”⁹ Pius V had already condemned Baius' assertions

⁹ It is paramount to understand that the Leuven theologians considered themselves Augustinians (and that Baius had many opponents in the faculty), and that the reference to Baianism in Jesuit sources was meant to be polemical. Lessius, in fact, sought to blame Michael Baius for the censure issued against his own doctrine and, at the same time, implied that all Leuven theologians followed Baius' teachings, which was not true. The theological disputes of Leuven (1580s) are widely documented: ARSI, Fl. Belg. 72, I-II; Archive of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (ACDF), St. St. e 7-c. Also see printed records in De Meyer 1715 and Serry 1709. As

in 1567 and Baius also had opponents in the faculty itself. Nonetheless, Lessius considered the Leuven theologians' reaction to his anti-Baianist teachings as proof that Baius' doctrine was still influential within the faculty.¹⁰ The dispute between Lessius and the Leuven theologians ignited when the latter censured several assertions on matters of grace, free will, eternal predestination and inspiration of the Scriptures, which had been extrapolated from Lessius' classes. The theologians aimed to prove that these ideas contradicted the *doctor Gratiae* himself, Augustine, and were linked to the teachings of Pelagius (360-420) and with the fifth-century thinkers unfairly labeled Semi-Pelagians.¹¹

The crux of the matter remained the relationship between God and humankind, from a soteriological perspective. After the Pelagian controversy, Augustine heavily stressed the fundamental role of divine grace, at the expense of human free will, in order to counter Pelagius' idea that human beings can start their justification process without God's grace and by means of their free will.¹² Although Lessius' doctrine was far more complex than that, and always postulated the necessity of receiving God's grace first, it was evidently extraordinarily open to the potential of free will and meritorious deeds in the process of salvation.

Intra-Catholic quarrels on matters of soteriology were frequent and common in the post-Tridentine period, for the Council of Trent had not specified all the subtleties of the official, orthodox theology of salvation.¹³ To offset Protestant claims, Counter-Reformation statements had been made emphasizing the importance of free will, alongside God's grace and predestination. However, a lack of clarity about the relationship between the various elements playing a role in the economy of salvation, such as grace, free will, and eternal predestination, had allowed different theological positions to be taught and spread across Europe. Some of these, adhering to strict Augustinism, highlighted the absolute predominance of God's grace and propounded a pessimistic anthropological view, according to which humankind was irremediably corrupted by original sin. Free will could thus not lead to any merits. Others, however, stressed the role of free will in man's answer to God's calls and grace, thus fostering a more positive anthropological view and the idea that human beings are effectively able to do good in a soteri-

for literature, see, for example, Eijl 1994; Rai 2016b. On Baius' condemnation by the pope and Baianism, see, for example, Eijl 1953 and 1955. See also Ceyssens' studies, for instance 1993.

¹⁰ See, for instance, *Lessius to Bellarmino*, 29 May 1587, in Le Bachelet 1911, 147–53.

¹¹ On Pelagians, see Lamberigts 2008 and 2002.

¹² See, for instance, Lamberigts 2004; Decroll 1999.

¹³ For a comprehensive approach to post-Tridentine doctrines of Grace, free will, and eternal predestination, as well as intra-Catholic debates, see François and Gerace 2019; Sesboüé 2009; Quilliet 2007; Duffy 1993; Armogathe 1988; Lettieri 1999; Rai 2020.

ological sense. Such a theological landscape was typical of Christian humanism, of which Lessius was a prominent representative.

1. Free will and the Scriptures

But there is more. These disputes were entangled with another debated aspect of early modern Catholic doctrines: the inspiration of the Scriptures, the process by which the books forming the Bible were composed. The Bible per se became an object of debate on a number of counts, which, at the very least, had been touched upon by the conciliar fathers at the Council of Trent: the composition of the biblical canon, the printing and translation of the Bible into the vernacular, and the scriptural inspiration behind it.¹⁴ Lessius' attention to human liberty and free will, and the potential of human agency in both the world (the moral sphere, including the financial) and the salvation process, allows us to properly understand his doctrine of inspiration and its connection to the theology of salvation. As mentioned, a major point of contention was precisely free will, the power of the individual's decision-making and his resulting ability to act. In the debates on the inspiration of the Scriptures, a central problem revolved around the role of the authors of the books constituting the biblical canon and the extent of their contribution to the genesis of the Scriptures, which were by definition inspired by God.

A major underlying question lay, therefore, at the basis of this controversy, which had spread within Catholicism: Who is the real author of the Scriptures? Whereas most Catholic authors attributed the composition of the entire Bible to a verbal inspiration by the Holy Spirit, and thus identified the Spirit himself as the true author, Lessius took a different view, as we will see below. We will now briefly consider Lessius' religious anthropology and theology of salvation, which form the basis of his doctrine of the inspiration of the Scriptures.

1.1. Religious Anthropology and Theology of Grace, Free Will, and Eternal Predestination

Lessius promoted an optimistic view of humankind, very far removed from the idea that free will remains irremediably corrupted after the original sin. According to Lessius, human beings have the duty to answer the divine call by means of a good use of their free will. Lessius' teaching (as found in his *De Gratia Efficaci*, *De Gratia Congrua*, and *De Iustitia et Iure*, and propounded in sacramental confession) was welcomed with relief by penitents, who felt it put some power in their hands. Such positions underlined the value of human will and actions,

¹⁴ On problems related to the translation of the Bible, see Agten and François 2015.

and several of Lessius' peers, such as Cornelius a Lapide or Francis of Sales, argued that this idea consoled Catholics, who were often in anguish over their own salvation.¹⁵

Lessius' doctrine of salvation is quite complex, especially given some of the sophisticated scholastic distinctions the Jesuit made between God's predestination (or election) to grace (i.e. to receive his grace) and predestination to glory (i.e. to gain eternal life and salvation). In any case, one specific point is of interest here to fully grasp Lessius' general attitude to the relationship between humankind and the Creator, namely God's foreknowledge of human merits (meritorious, good deeds) and the crucial role it plays in the process of salvation. Lessius promoted a doctrine according to which, immediately after freely preordaining human beings to receive his grace, God foresaw their merits and, on that basis (*ex meritis praevisis*), predestined them to glory—eternal life and salvation. This theory grants enormous power to human beings in the economy of salvation, because merits, obtained by means of free will and agency, or actions, would seem to be the very reason God decides to predestine human beings.

Yet Lessius always maintained that God's grace (granted to all human beings) was the necessary prerequisite to obtain merits but also that grace had to be activated by the individual's positive answer to God's invitation. We can, thus, argue that, if God grants every individual enough grace, in equal measure and independently of the eternal destination of the individual, the only variable that makes a difference in the history of salvation is free will. Lessius' opponents based their criticism on these claims, leading to two explosive controversies: First, the aforementioned Leuven disputes and, second, an intra-Jesuit quarrel between Lessius, on the one hand, and Bellarmino and Acquaviva, on the other.

The major point of dispute appears to have been the role of free will and human agency in the economy of salvation, and, by extension, in every aspect of daily life. This is particularly apparent in the attacks on Lessius' moral theology, including his moral economy and ideas on banking and finance. His moral treatise and manual for confessors, *De Iustitia et Iure*, received harsh criticism from Jesuit peers and was accused of being lax—of lacking any strictness or even control to discipline Catholic morality, especially in economics and business.¹⁶ Although the matter is far more complex, as numerous studies by Toon van Houdt and Wim Decock have proved,¹⁷ it is here sufficient to men-

¹⁵ *Cornelius Cornelii (A Lapide) to Lessius*, 3 December 1610, in Le Bachelet 1931, I, 146. On A Lapide's theology, see François 2017.

¹⁶ ARSI, *Censurae*, 654, III (1603-1631), 1r-49v. See also Tutino 2014, 179–89.

¹⁷ See, for example, van Houdt 1995; Decock 2009b.

tion that free will and human agency vis-à-vis God's initiative and law represent the bones of contention, for Lessius allowed a great deal of freedom in economic and moral activities. He even argued that extreme, strict prohibitions would drive human beings to sin and practice truly illicit activities in order to bypass the ban. More freedom of action, on the contrary, would allow individuals to pave their way to Heaven.¹⁸ In other words, the freedom of human agency has a soteriological dimension and value in Lessius' theology, including moral doctrines.

How are Lessius' religious anthropology and theology of salvation connected to his doctrine of the inspiration of the Scriptures? The latter is built on the idea that the *humana industria* of the authors, their human agency, is a sufficient force to write at least some of the books composing the biblical canon, without any need for literal dictation or inspiration from the Holy Spirit. A major contribution to the study of Lessius' theory of the inspiration of the Scriptures is the 1970s work by Antonio Maria Artola.¹⁹ The present essay is indebted to his work but also attempts to go a step further; that is to say, to properly place and understand in detail Lessius' theory within his broader theological oeuvre and religious anthropology. It demonstrates that Lessius' doctrine of inspiration is simply one of many demonstrations of the underlying principles of his global theological system and his view of humankind and its relationship with the Creator.

III. INSPIRATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

It was late 1587 when Lessius received an undoubtedly much-anticipated letter from Roberto Bellarmino, a renowned Jesuit theologian who was later nominated cardinal of the Roman Curia and was one of the most significant collaborators of General Claudio Acquaviva. Moreover, in the early 1600s, he played a key role in the works of the *Congregatio de Auxiliis Divinae Gratiae* (1597-1606), which had been called to solve the theological disputes on the matter of grace and predestination raging between Jesuits and Dominicans.²⁰ Bellarmino's cause for canonization opened soon after his death and was only successfully concluded in 1930. It is one of the most effective examples of a canonization of a member of a Catholic religious order that aimed to theologially legitimize the order itself.²¹ When Bellarmino sent his let-

¹⁸ On the significance of Jesuit ideas of freedom in contractual law, see Decock 2009c.

¹⁹ See, for example, Artola 1974; 1973; 1972; 1970. See also De Raedemaeker et alii 1954.

²⁰ On *De Auxiliis*, see Broggio 2009, 83–129.

²¹ On Bellarmino and the role of theology in the Society of Jesus in the Early Modern Era, see Motta 2005 and 2017.

ter to Lessius, his fame as a theologian had already spread far and wide, and the Italian Jesuit was considered an authority. He was, furthermore, Lessius' former mentor (during his studies at the *Collegio Romano*), as well as a friend and his predecessor holding the chair of theology at the Jesuit College in Leuven.²²

A much-anticipated letter, as I said. It was Bellarmino's answer to a previous missive from Lessius, who wrote to and confided in Bellarmino immediately after being charged with Pelagianism and Semi-Pelagianism by the theologians of the University of Leuven. Lessius sought Bellarmino's opinion on the matter and certainly hoped for his approval.

From 1587 to 1588, Bellarmino supported the liceity of Lessius' statements in matters of grace, free will, and eternal predestination (although he did not fully agree with them). He did so at the expense of the strict Augustinism propounded by the Leuven theologians, especially focusing on the "second" Augustine, who was much inclined to stress the role of grace, rather than free will, after the Pelagian dispute. Moreover, Lessius managed to instill in Bellarmino a suspicion that his opponents still adhered to Michael Baius' doctrine, which Bellarmino himself had strongly criticized, even fought, in the past. Yet, twenty-three years later, Bellarmino dramatically reversed his position, claiming that it was only due to a misunderstanding that he had approved Lessius' soteriology in the late 1580s, before recognizing its heterodox nature. But that is another story.²³ What is of interest here is that, at the time of the Leuven controversies, Bellarmino defended Lessius' soteriological doctrine for a number of reasons: First of all, because he considered it a powerful weapon to resist a potential revival of Baianism.²⁴ Second, because of a certain *esprit de corps* he felt for his Jesuit brothers, which he showed on several occasions during his career (e.g. during the quarrel *De Auxiliis*), despite his personal beliefs. But when it came to Lessius' theory of the inspiration of the Scriptures, Bellarmino's attitude was already negative in 1587. He categorically and explicitly disapproved of at least part of the doctrine (as we will see, the third proposition). We will come back to this, after a detailed explanation of Lessius' doctrine in the context of the Leuven disputes.

The controversies between Lessius and the theologians of the University of Leuven did not only focus on grace, free will, and eternal predestination, although these points have attracted most scholarly interest. When the Leuven theologians censured Lessius' doctrines, they reserved an interesting place for the Jesuit's theory of the inspiration of

²² Biersack 1989.

²³ On this matter, see Rai 2020.

²⁴ We can read about Bellarmino's concerns in ACDF, *Bellarmini Censurae*, 34v–35r.

the Scriptures, which would have paved the way for a novel conception of biblical inspiration, of how the books of the Bible came into being.²⁵

From thirty-one propositions extrapolated from Lessius' teaching, the theologians censured three propositions on the issue of inspiration.²⁶ These are as follows:

Ut aliquid sit Scriptura sacra, non est necessarium singula eius verba inspirata esse a Spiritu Sancto; non est necessarium, ut singulae veritates et sententiae sint immediate a Spiritu Sancto ipsi scriptori inspiratae; liber aliquis (qualis forte est secundus Machabaeorum) humana industria sine assistentia Spiritus Sancti scriptus, si Spiritus Sanctus postea testetur ibi nihil esse falsum, efficitur Scriptura sacra.²⁷

These assertions argue, in other words, that, first, it is not necessary that every single word be inspired by the Holy Spirit in order for a text to be considered Scripture. Second, it is not necessary for the Holy Spirit to directly grant the authors individual truths and sentences. Third, some books (for instance the second book of Maccabees), which were created through *humana industria*, by means of human agency, without any assistance of the Holy Spirit, are themselves Holy Writ if the Holy Spirit later confirms that they do not include any falsities. The creation of the Scriptures could thus be understood, from a scholarly perspective, as a strange case of co-authorship, in which God and man struggled to

²⁵ On Lessius and his theory of inspiration, see works mentioned above by Artola. Whereas the present study is based on official documents related to the Leuven controversies and Lessius' correspondence with Bellarmino, from which Lessius' theory emerges clearly, Artola refers to notes taken by Lessius' students, which were dictated by the teacher in class (1585-86). These records provide another angle of observation, for they were dictated by Lessius with a mere educational purpose, and not as official documents composed during theological controversies. In any case, the documents I use here represent how Lessius, after many reflections and considerations, officially summarized his doctrine. As for the students' notes, as cited in the literature, see: *In primam partem Summae S. Thomae Commentarium* (Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique, MS 3631); *Commentarius in Secudam Secudae divi Thomae perlectus per R. Patrem Leonardum Lessium, brechtanum, Societatis Jesu theologum Lovanii, 21 februarii, anno 1592* (Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique, MS 3515); *Dictata Patris Leonardi Lessii Societatis Jesu in primam partem divi Thomae in qua de Deo secundum se disputatur, anno 1599* (Archives of the Bollandists, Bruxelles). Artola also published an article listing references to the sources useful to study Lessius' theory of inspiration. Artola proposed some passages from these records (*In II-IIae*), which are useful to fully understand Lessius' position; see Artola 1974a, 14-15. For a list of useful sources on Lessius' theory, see Artola 1973.

²⁶ Schneemann 1881, 374-75.

²⁷ *Assertiones a Facultate Loaniensi censura notatae, De Sacra Scriptura*, n. 1, 2, in Schneemann 1881, 359; see also *Assertiones quaedam ex publicis praelectionibus Reverendorum PP. Societatis nominis Jesu, anno 1586, in Universitate Lovaniensi habitis, verbatim excerptae, et ab ipsis Ibidem Professoribus pro suis agnitae, scholisque illustratae, quae sacrae Theologiae Ibidem facultati offensivae, et ex subjectis rationibus improbandae videntur*, in Le Bachelet 1911, 164-69. The criticized assertions *De Sacra Scriptura, De praedestinatione, De reprobatione* are also included in ARSI, Fl. Belg. 72, I, *Status causae inter Facultatem theologicam Lovaniensem et professores theologiae in Collegio Societatis Iesu Lovaniensis excerptus ex censura Facultatis, et Apologia professorum Societatis*, 2r-6v.

find their own place and role, which are seen as distinct and different by theologians.

Lessius elucidated his doctrine on various occasions, both in personal correspondence with Bellarmino and in official documents in response to the censure of the Leuven Theology Faculty.²⁸ The third proposition, uncommonly open to human contribution to the creation of the Scriptures, without the necessity of divine intervention, was the main apple of discord. As for the first two propositions, Lessius stated that he had never claimed that the hagiographers (i.e. the biblical authors) composed the books without any inspiration, assistance, or direction of the Holy Spirit. He did claim, however, that it was not necessary for the authors to receive *new* inspiration from the Holy Spirit to know the truths they wrote about—which reminds of his idea that human beings do not need a new divine *auxilium* or help in order to perform every single good deed. Neither did they need to be granted visions of the words they were required to use.

Instead, it was sufficient that the Holy Spirit spurred them on to write the words or facts they had seen, heard, or known in other ways, limiting the Spirit's role to guiding them and safeguarding them from errors. To prove his point, Lessius offered the example of the evangelists. Matthew and John, he wrote, testified to the events they witnessed. Mark recorded what he heard from Peter, while Luke documented what others had seen and reported. No new revelation was required; there was no need for the Holy Spirit to repeat what was already known.²⁹ A sharp distinction thus emerges between the prophets and the authors of the Gospels or Acts. Prophets received immediate and direct divine revelations in order to understand what was beyond experience, thus on matters they could not know through natural means, while the evangelists narrated facts or testimonies that had become known to them precisely through experience.³⁰

Lessius defended the third proposition even more strenuously, using a compelling logic typical of his way of thinking as a jurist and moral economist. In order to prove that it was completely licit to state that a book could be confirmed as Scripture by the Holy Spirit at a later date, he provided the example of the natural truths, which were already correct in and of themselves, and were only later confirmed by the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures. He also likened this to the authority of the popes and councils of the Church, capable of officially recognizing a text as Holy Scripture, when properly assisted by the Holy

²⁸ See, for example, ARSI, Fl. Belg. 72, I, 63r–66v.

²⁹ ARSI, Fl. Belg. 72, I, 63r.

³⁰ Schneemann 1881, 374–75.

Spirit.³¹ The idea of a subsequent confirmation by the Holy Spirit arose in Lessius' mind due to the presence of a particular historical book in the biblical canon, namely the second book of Maccabees, traditionally attributed to either Flavius Josephus or Philo of Alexandria, both first-century authors.³² Lessius attempted to find a feasible explanation for the presence of such a book in the Bible, which could hardly be defined as the product of divine revelation.

Lessius' doctrine ran counter to one of the major theologies of inspiration common in the sixteenth century, namely the doctrine of verbal inspiration.³³ This theory was primarily propounded by Dominican Domingo Báñez (1528-1604), who was the major opponent of Jesuit Luis de Molina (1535-1600) in the aforementioned controversy *De Auxiliis*. A Thomistic theologian, Báñez highlighted the sovereign authority of God, and maintained that divine action predetermines (free) human action, grace precedes human merits, and predestination does not depend on the divine prescience of merits. In matters of inspiration, Báñez had radicalized the opinions of his teacher, Melchor Cano (1509-1560), who considered the Scriptures the main *locus theologicus* (i.e. theological place) from which theology grew as a science. The Holy Spirit's inspiration was believed to guarantee the absolute truthfulness of theological principles.³⁴ Above all, he applied the concept of the enlightenment of Revelation to all the Scriptures, without distinguishing between the enlightenment of prophetic revelations and the assistance and encouragement provided by the Holy Spirit to the non-prophet authors of the books of the Bible. Well-known theologian Thomas Cajetan (1469-1534), however, maintained that, when hagiographers wrote about facts known through natural reason, simple assistance by the Holy Spirit was sufficient—a concept that is particularly close to Lessius' propositions one and two. Followers of the verbal inspiration theory, on the other hand, argued that every single word or sentence was directly inspired by the Holy Spirit, thus reinforcing the idea of the Scriptures as a source of theological knowledge guaranteed by divine Revelation.

It was against this doctrine, depicting all biblical authors as amanuenses, merely taking down what the Holy Spirit dictated, that Lessius revolted. Revisiting his religious anthropology and soteriology, it is not hard to see why. It is self-evident that such a doctrine left no space for

³¹ Moreover, one possible explanation of Lessius' opinions concerning the approval of the Scriptures by the Church councils is that Lessius took inspiration from Sisto of Siena's *Bibliotheca Sancta* (1566), in which Sisto stated that 2 Maccabees was accepted as a canonical book by appealing to the authority of the Church, which had the effect of adding a book composed by a "secular" author.

³² See Artola 1975.

³³ On the verbal inspiration, see, for example, Artola 1970.

³⁴ Artola 1972, 121.

the actions, agency, or contribution of human beings in an activity—the writing of the Scriptures—that had undeniably been carried out by men.

It must also be noted that Lessius—a nonconformist on many occasions—did not follow the Jesuit mainstream on the subject of inspiration. At the time, the doctrine of the Scriptures as rule of faith dominated not only the Ignatian Order but the whole Catholic Church, after being declared an article of faith at the Council of Trent (along with the non-written Tradition).³⁵ A notable representative of this trend, which was linked to the theory of verbal inspiration, was Gregory of Valencia (ca. 1550-1603), who taught that the biblical authors remained passive under the influence of divine action. The latter was binding to such an extent that the authors were not even free to choose the words they used.

Nonetheless, the Society of Jesus had distinguished itself by tolerating (up to a certain point) a broad range of opinions on various matters. As for inspiration, different perspectives had coexisted since the very beginning of the order.³⁶ One of Ignatius' first companions, Alfonso Salmerón (1515-1585), for instance, adhered to Cajetan's doctrine, which argued that the evangelists had not needed any new revelation different from that conveyed by Christ. By contrast, Francis Coster (1532-1516), who served as father provincial of Flanders in Lessius' time, supported a "mixed" doctrine, according to which God had written the Ten Commandments with his own hand, and had directly dictating the rest of the Old and New Testaments, while leaving the hagiographers the freedom to edit the structure of the text, which he later approved through the Church's authentication.

The first part of Lessius' doctrine was inspired by Bellarmino's work. Bellarmino, who dealt with the topic of inspiration in his masterpiece, the *Controversiae*, fostered the concept of the Scriptures as a rule of faith but also maintained that the evangelists wrote down facts they had gained through experience.

At the core of Lessius' theory we find a profound preoccupation with preserving the role of human beings' free will and agency vis-à-vis God's initiative. The doctrine of verbal inspiration did not leave any room for human contribution or free initiative—the authors were not even able to choose the words in which they expressed the revealed content.³⁷ But one can hardly avoid considering the experience, previous knowledge, and natural reason of the authors. Furthermore, Lessius also had a philological concern. He stressed the different styles of the numerous books of the Bible. Such a consideration was typically hu-

³⁵ Artola 1971, 244–49.

³⁶ Artola 1972, 123–32.

³⁷ See selected passages of Lessius' *In II-IIae*, in Artola 1974a, 14–15.

manistic and also sheds light on Lessius' attention to details, which were extremely important in the legal world to which he belonged. According to Lessius, these stylistic variations should be considered the result of the different effects of divine inspiration on different human beings, who were not passive.

This final idea seems to be strongly connected to Lessius' highly criticized opinion that divine grace needs to be activated and made efficacious by human beings' answer to God through their own free will. Similarly, Lessius suggested that one cannot argue that the biblical authors passively received God's revelations without putting in any personal effort, precisely because their responses to the divine call differed, whether in matters of soteriology, morality, or the inspiration of the Scriptures. A thorough overview of Lessius' theories leaves the historian feeling that the Jesuit's main goal consisted of proving that the history of humankind (including the economy of salvation) would be nonsensical if humans were deprived of any real capacity to contribute to their relationship with God and the world.

Let us now return to that day in November 1587, when Lessius received Bellarmino's letter, in which the Italian theologian expressed his disagreement with Lessius' doctrine of inspiration, especially the third proposition. Bellarmino also produced an official *votum* on Lessius' whole doctrine—which had already been censured by the Leuven theologians—allowing the reader to properly retrace the Italian Jesuit's thoughts. The first two assertions had to be proposed *de possibili*, Bellarmino wrote, not *de facto*—which Lessius would have done, even in class, when he returned to the issue during his course of 1591–1592.³⁸

Lessius shared Bellarmino's idea that the Scriptures, including the historical books such as the second book of Maccabees, had to be considered the word of God, and always needed to be confirmed as such by the Holy Spirit.³⁹ To summarize Lessius' position on this particular topic: Such a confirmation could happen *per expressam revelationem*, via a supernatural revelation—either through the direct intervention of God, in order to avoid any errors by the hagiographer, or at a subsequent time, after the books were composed entirely by means of the *humana industria*, without any divine assistance.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, God's authority had to be considered the true origin of the Scriptures: *Ratio Scripturae Sacrae generatim consistit in auctoritate primae veritatis alicui sententiae Scripturae immediate applicatae*.⁴¹

³⁸ See Lessius to Bellarmino, 26 January 1588, in Le Bachelet 1911, 179–81.

³⁹ *Responsio ad antapologiam*, in Schneemann 1981, 387.

⁴⁰ Artola 1972, 139, note 53.

⁴¹ Artola 1972, 139–40.

On one occasion, Lessius also mentioned the idea of the Scriptures as a rule of faith, stating: *Scriptura enim divina est regula quam in credendo sequi debemus*.⁴² My hypothesis is that Lessius believed that the Scriptures had to be considered an object of faith, rather than a *locus theologicus*.⁴³

What then bothered Roberto Bellarmino? The Jesuit theologian strongly disagreed with the idea that simple assistance of the Holy Spirit was enough.⁴⁴ Such assistance was sufficient for conciliar decrees but certainly not for the Bible. In his correspondence with Lessius, Bellarmino seems to have been slightly confused when he declared that the only way the first two propositions could be defended was by categorizing God's inspiration into two different modalities. The first modality involved a new revelation of knowledge (for example the wisdom received by the prophets). The second involved the way the Holy Spirit guided authors, such as the evangelists, who employed their previous knowledge when composing the Gospels. Lessius, who had proposed exactly this interpretation, reminded Bellarmino that this was the doctrine he had explained in his *Apologia*, which he had composed in 1588 to reply to the censures of the universities of Leuven and Douai.⁴⁵

However, this should not be our first concern. Bellarmino's comments on the first two assertions of Lessius' doctrine are not the fulcrum of his discourse. What is of the utmost interest, instead, is Bellarmino's astonished reaction to the third proposition. If Lessius hoped to find an advocate in Bellarmino, he was disappointed. Bellarmino even refused to allow the use of the expression *humana industria*, or at least required that such a concept be indicated to be *de possibili*.⁴⁶ Bellarmino's real concern emerges in his official judgment of the *Six Propositions*, which Lessius had composed at the request of the archbishop of Mechelen, to clarify his positions after the censure of Douai (1588).⁴⁷ In his judgment, Bellarmino shared his concern that Lessius' assertions were exposed to the calumny of the opponents of the Society of Jesus.⁴⁸

⁴² See *In II-IIae*, Bruxelles, 41r. Artola 1972, 144.

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴ *Bellarmino to Lessius*, end of November 1587, in Le Bachelet 1911, 172–75.

⁴⁵ *Lessius to Bellarmino*, 26 January 1588, in Le Bachelet 1911, 179–81; *Lessius to Bellarmino*, 26 April 1588, in Le Bachelet 1911, 186–91.

⁴⁶ Lessius did correct his proposition. See *Lessius to Bellarmino*, 26 January 1588, in Le Bachelet 1911, 179–81.

⁴⁷ *Assertiones quaedam ex publicis praelectionibus Reverendorum PP. Societatis nominis Jesu, anno 1586, in Universitate Lovaniensi habitis, verbatim excerptae, et ab ipsis Ibidem Professoribus pro suis agnitae, scholisque illustratae, quae sacrae Theologiae Ibidem facultati offensivae, et ex subjectis rationibus improbandae videntur De doctrina P. Leonardi Lessii a Lovaniensibus notata*, in Le Bachelet 1911, 199–200. See the *Six Propositions*, in Le Bachelet 1911, 194–98.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*.

Being a theologian was not Bellarmino's only occupation; on the contrary, it can be argued that he was also one of the most attentive strategists of the early modern Ignatian order. He dealt effectively with critics and attacks. For example, during the Leuven controversies, it seems that Bellarmino defended Lessius' doctrine of grace as a powerful anti-Baianist tool, especially in Leuven and Flanders.⁴⁹ He opted, in other words, for the lesser evil, given the fact that, although he did not fully agree with Lessius' theology, he had certainly condemned that of Baius. Moreover, during the controversy *De Auxiliis*, he took Molina's side, not because he entirely shared his doctrine of salvation but rather to defend the order from Dominican attacks.

It can be argued that, regarding Lessius' doctrine of inspiration, he saw more trouble in defending it rather than in imposing a revision, especially concerning the third proposition, which could be interpreted as excluding God from the written Revelation of the truth, attributing it to humans alone. A very similar critique had been raised by Lessius' theology of salvation. Lessius' doctrine of predestination to eternal life and salvation after (and due to) divine foreknowledge of human merits could potentially be charged with depriving God of his sovereign will and his act of predestination *ab aeterno*, predating even Creation.⁵⁰

In 1588, the Jesuit sent the aforementioned *Apologia* to be reviewed by the Jesuit Curia in Rome, including his three propositions *de Scriptura* (as they can be found in the thirty-one propositions condemned by the Leuven theologians). He received two evaluations. One came from the prefect of studies at the Collegio Romano, Juan Azor (ca. 1536-1603), the other from Bellarmino, who confirmed the critiques that he had already, privately, forwarded to Lessius in his letters. Azor's review was extremely negative:⁵¹ He did not like the first proposition, liked the second even less, and declared the third completely intolerable. The only solution was presenting such a doctrine *de possibili*.

To Bellarmino, Lessius wrote that he could provide additional arguments to substantiate his views.⁵² On May 26, 1588, he sent his former mentor a more detailed explanation and expressed his surprise at Bellarmino's astonished reaction to the third proposition.⁵³ Lessius confided in Bellarmino to such an extent that he even asked him to modify the

⁴⁹ This idea emerges from records in which Bellarmino both defended Lessius' doctrine from the Leuven theologians' attacks and expressed his concern that Baius' theology might revive. See, for example, ACDF, *Bellarmini Censurae*, 35r. The apprehension that Baius' doctrine might spread anew had already been expressed in 1585 by papal nuncio Giovanni Bonomi. See von Pastor 1951, X, 140–41.

⁵⁰ See proposition five, *Six Propositions*, in Le Bachelet 1911, 194–98. For a comprehensive view on the matter, see Rai 2020.

⁵¹ Le Bachelet 1911, 173.

⁵² Le Bachelet 1911, 179–81.

⁵³ Le Bachelet 1911, 208.

Apologia before Lessius submitted it to the Holy Office. In a letter to Baudouin Delange (1535-1601, rector of the Jesuit College in Leuven and Jesuit superior of the Province of Flanders), even General Acquaviva suggested prudence, and a declaration that, after re-evaluation, the third proposition had to be modified.⁵⁴ The correspondence with Bellarmino proves that Lessius believed his doctrine to be safe, and only allowed Bellarmino to modify it out of obedience. Even Francis Coster intervened in the quarrel, claiming that it would not be hard to convince the author to change his proposition.⁵⁵

Compelled by Bellarmino and other Jesuit censors to modify his propositions, Lessius bowed to their requests. *Efficitur scriptura sacra* was initially changed into *non video cur talis liber non sit habiturus auctoritatem sacrae scripturae, [...] nempe auctoritatem divinam*; in a new version, Lessius changed it again into *fore sacram scripturam, scilicet quad infallibilem auctoritatem*.⁵⁶

A later version of the *Apologia*, also containing the revised third proposition—*humana industria sine assistentia Spiritus Sancti scriptus* became *ex instinctu spiritus sancti scriptam*⁵⁷—was sent to Rome by Lessius between March and April 1588. Research conducted in other records pertaining to the Leuven controversies has proved fruitful. Useful documents include the *Responsio ad Antapologiam*, Lessius' response to the *Antapologia* or *Justificatio*, which had in turn been composed by the Leuven theologians as an answer to Lessius' *Apologia*.⁵⁸ In the *Responsio*, Lessius expressed regret that his three propositions *de Scriptura* had to be unified into one, as requested by Jesuit censors. This was a clear disadvantage, for if a part of it, namely the third proposition, was considered unlikely, the other two would also be rejected.

In Lessius' defense of the liceity of his opinions *de Scriptura*, which he considered at least probable, we can arguably see his probabilistic mindset at work (namely the idea that more or less probable opinions, supported at least by one *auctoritate*, can be followed),⁵⁹ a defense Lessius also relied on in other controversies. As it is evident, Lessius' theological work was a frequent target of criticism, both from within the Society of Jesus and from without (including the Leuven University).

⁵⁴ Le Bachelet 1911, 173. Baudouin Delange wrote to Acquaviva immediately after the censure of Lessius' doctrine by the Leuven theologians. See *Baudouin to Acquaviva*, 2 June 1587, in Le Bachelet 1911, 157–58.

⁵⁵ Le Bachelet 1911, 179.

⁵⁶ See ARSI, Fl. Belg. 72, I, ff. 63r–66v.

⁵⁷ Lessius made various attempts to edit the third proposition. See Pagano 1952.

⁵⁸ Most of these documents have been published (originals and copies are stored in the ACDF and ARSI). See Schneemann 1881.

⁵⁹ On probabilism, see works by Stefania Tutino, such as Tutino 2017.

IV. NEW DEVELOPMENTS ON LESSIUS' DOCTRINE DE SCRIPTURA. THE FIRST VATICAN COUNCIL (1870)

More than three hundred years later, during the First Vatican Council in 1870, new suspicions of heterodoxy struck Lessius' doctrine of the inspiration of the Scriptures.⁶⁰ Echoes of Lessius' doctrine had reached Daniel Haneberg (1816-1876), bishop of Speyer. Haneberg's doctrine of subsequent inspiration, which was based on the theories of Lessius and Jesuit Jacques Bonfrère, was specifically condemned by the First Vatican Council.⁶¹

At the beginning of April 1870, the Council discussed the constitution *Dei filius*, approved later that month, which ratified the doctrine of the inspiration of the Scriptures. The document is reminiscent of the teachings of Johann Baptist Franzelin (1816-1886), who had been professor of *Sacra Scriptura* at the Pontifical Gregorian University.⁶² It declares:

Eos vero [books] Ecclesia pro sacris et canonicis habet, non ideo quod sola humana industria concinnati, sua deinde auctoritate sint approbati; nec ideo dumtaxat, quod revelationem sine errore contineant; sed propterea, quod Spiritu Sancto inspirante conscripti Deum habent auctorem, atque ut tales ipsi Ecclesiae traditi sunt.⁶³

The cited passage is an explicit condemnation of Lessius' third proposition and particularly of the role of human agency in the creation of the Scriptures. Franzelin, who relied on the teachings of the Councils of Florence (1438-1445) and Trent (1545-1563), taught that God himself was the real author of the Scriptures, and distinguished inspiration from assistance. Franzelin openly condemned two doctrines as erroneous. First was Haneberg's doctrine. Second, the theory of Johannes Jahn (1750-1816) that linked the idea of inspiration to a particular divine protection, which saved the authors from committing errors. This was not inspiration, though, but assistance.

When debates on the *Dei filius* began, some participants regretted that condemning Haneberg's theory would also mean condemning the preceding authors on whom he had based his teachings, first of all Lessius. At this complicated impasse, archbishop of Brixen (Bressanone), Vinzenz Gasser (1809-1879), intervened to calm the conciliar fathers, even though he personally disagreed with Lessius' third assertion. In his report, *De emendationibus capituli secundi constitutiones dogmaticae de fide catholica*,⁶⁴ he wrote:

⁶⁰ For an overview of the sources on the First Vatican Council, see Vanyacker 2015.

⁶¹ *Bonfrère, Jacques*, in Sommervogel 1890-1932, I, 1713-15.

⁶² Courtade 1952.

⁶³ *Constitutio Dei Filius*. <https://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-ix/la/documents/constitutio-dogmatica-dei-filius-24-aprilis-1870.html> (accessed on November 1st, 2019).

⁶⁴ Grandera 1892, from 49.

Ad inanes vero timores abigendos, quasi doctrina hac nostra damnetur illa sententia Lessii et Lovaniensium, pauca mihi hac de re dicenda sunt. Doctrina, quae primo in nostro capite damnatur [namely, Haneberg's doctrine], nullatenus debet confundi cum doctrina Lessii et Lovaniensium [these *Lovanienses* refer to the Jesuit Fathers of the College of Leuven, who supported Lessius, rather than the theologians of the University]; cum doctrina ipsa, utut sit erronea, tamen non sit eadem quam nos inschemate nostro proscribimus.⁶⁵

In other words, although Lessius' doctrine was erroneous, it did not have to be equated or confused with the doctrine condemned by the Council. The condemned doctrine, in fact, affirmed that the Church had the power to declare a book Scripture that had been written by means of simple, pure human agency. The Church's approval could not transform such a book into something that it was not: Scripture inspired by the Holy Spirit.

A certain difference exists between this doctrine and that of Lessius. The Jesuit theologian did not focus on ecclesiastical confirmation but on divine approval. At first glance, Gasser was thus right to claim that Lessius' doctrine had not been implicitly condemned along with Haneberg's theory. Looking closer, however, one may notice some ambiguities. Lessius had also taught that a Church council, under the direction of the pope, had the authority to declare a book, composed through human agency, as inspired by the necessary, infallible guiding presence of the Holy Spirit. In other words, the simple presence of the Holy Spirit, which acted through the Church, guaranteed the infallibility of the declaration of the council on matters of inspiration. It is not entirely clear whether Lessius also meant to include the original formulation of the biblical canon by the first councils of the Church, such as the Council of Nicea (325 A.D.).

These nuances in Lessius' doctrine were certainly not clear or even known to Gasser and the other conciliar fathers, because they were only fully expressed in Lessius' private correspondence with Bellarmino and in his *Apologiae*, rather than in the simple propositions, which only summarized his positions and lacked details.

Moreover, as others have noted,⁶⁶ Gasser only considered the final version of the third proposition, which—I strongly believe—did not reflect Lessius' real thought but only several compulsory modifications. Lessius himself, as previously mentioned, confessed to Bellarmino that he did not understand why this sentence displeased Bellarmino and other theologians so much—an admission that was unknown to the conciliar fathers. The modified proposition reads as follows:

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁶ Pagano 1952, 148–50.

Liber ex instinctu quidem spiritus sancti, sed sine eius assistentia speciali conscriptus, si Spiritus sanctus postea publice testetur omnia in eo contenta salutaria et vera esse, efficitur, etsi non simpliciter, tamen quod auctoritatem infallibilem pertinet, Scriptura sacra.⁶⁷

Compared to previous versions, there is the noticeable absence of the expression *humana industria* and the addition of the formula *ex instinctu Spiritus Sancti*. To be declared as Holy Scripture, a book should be inspired by the Holy Spirit and, when not written with his special assistance, it required the Spirit's subsequent public testimony to the truthfulness of its contents.

Benevolently, Gasser stated that the verbal inspiration against which Lessius rebelled was a Protestant doctrine. But this is a baseless argument, considering that such a doctrine was widespread in early modern Catholicism and was propounded by the Dominican Order, particularly by Domingo Báñez.

Henri Holstein (1961) has argued that two elements saved Lessius from being condemned during the First Vatican Council and distinguished his doctrine from Haneberg's.⁶⁸ First, the hypothetical formulation (i.e. *de possibili*), which Bellarmino had required. Second, the omission of the example of 2 Maccabees. According to Holstein, Gasser maintained that Lessius had withdrawn his theory on 2 Maccabees. However, this is not entirely true. The omission of the reference to the book cannot be explained by Lessius' change of heart, but rather by the fact that Lessius was obliged to eliminate the reference, because it represented the perfect case for the original third proposition—and his entire doctrine of inspiration along with it. This is an excellent example of Lessius' way of thinking, which emerges strongly in his moral theology and economics. Lessius' developed his theological thought by starting with experiences and concrete cases, from which he then derived principles, rather than reasoning in the opposite direction. The language used by Lessius in his updated proposition undeniably changed, but only to respect Bellarmino's requests. Nonetheless, as mentioned earlier, Lessius' private correspondence proves that he never really changed his mind.

This superficial shift is betrayed, first, in Bellarmino's dissatisfaction with Lessius' changes, although they at least made his assertion tolerable,⁶⁹ and, second, in an enlightening line in the last version of the third proposition. Lessius wrote *Liber ex instinctu quidem spiritus sancti, sed sine eius assistentia speciali conscriptus*. The Jesuit theo-

⁶⁷ The modifications to the assertions *de Scriptura* (highlighted in this article) can be found in the series of *apologiae* composed by Lessius during the Leuven controversies, as already mentioned. Discussions on the changes can be found in the already cited correspondence between Lessius and Bellarmino.

⁶⁸ Holstein 1961.

⁶⁹ *De doctrina P. Leonardi Lessii a Lovaniensibus notata*, in Le Bachelet 1911, 199–200.

gian referred to a book whose composition started with the Holy Spirit's inspiration but without his specific assistance or aid. The use of the formula *ex instinctu [...] spiritus sancti* did not deceive Bellarmino, while the second part of the sentence, referring to the Holy Spirit's assistance, clarified Lessius' real position.

The (false) idea that Lessius' doctrine (or at least the final, official version of his theory of inspiration) had been condemned by the First Vatican Council was also propagated at the turn of the nineteenth century by a Dominican consultant for the Sacred Congregation of the Index, Enrico Buonpensiere (1853-1929). Buonpensiere was an intriguing figure: a keen opponent of the theory of evolution, a friend of Italian priest and politician Luigi Sturzo and his Popular Party, and collaborator of the Index for several years. In 1899, Jesuit Postulator Torquato Armellini requested Buonpensiere draft a *votum* on the removal of Jacob Wyns' hagiography of Lessius, *De Vita et Moribus R.P. Leonardi Lessii*, from the index of forbidden books.⁷⁰ Buonpensiere, acting in a climate of anti-Jesuit conspiracy, produced one official *votum* on the matter, as well as a personal note to be addressed to the secretary of the Index, Marcolino Cicognani (secretary from 1894 to 1899). Besides his disapproval of Lessius' inspiration theory (which he stated had already been condemned), Buonpensiere proposed substantial modifications to the hagiography in his *votum*, in line with his predecessors who had dealt with it in the seventeenth century. He suggested to eliminate any reference to the supposed miracles that happened through Lessius' intercession and to omit the theological controversies of Leuven. Only then could the hagiography be republished. The idea of revisiting such a delicate moment in the history of intra-Catholic tensions, which had risked provoking further schisms, was unwelcome.

In a secret, confidential *pro memoria* to Cicognani, Buonpensiere wrote that, although the rehabilitation of the *De vita et Moribus* might seem a simple affair, it was actually complicated and "for us, the Dominicans, could be compromising."⁷¹ Buonpensiere explained that the request by Armellini had to be understood in a broader context, which dated back to the Leuven controversies. According to the *pro memoria*, the *De Vita et Moribus* needed to remain on the Index, precisely because Wyns claimed that Lessius' doctrine of salvation and inspiration had

⁷⁰ Schoofs 1640. The attribution of the *De Vita* to Schoofs has been widely discussed; the hagiography was most probably based on a manuscript *Vita* authored by Lessius' nephew Wijns or Wyns (the manuscript is today stored at the Koninklijke Bibliotheek van België [KBR], Jacob Wyns, *De Vita et moribus Patris Leonardi Lessii Societatis Iesu theologi clarissimi duo*, MS 4070 [4021]). On Wyns and this problem, see van Houdt 2009. Wyns was one of the main propagators of the cult of Lessius in the seventeenth century. See "Wyns, Jacques," in Sommervogel 1890-1932, VIII, 1306; Stanciu 2013. On Lessius' biography, see also Stanciu 2012.

⁷¹ *Index*, Protocolli 1894-96, 93r.

been approved by Pope Sixtus V, which seventeenth-century Dominican historian Jacques-Hyacinthe Serry contested. Here, Buonpensiere followed anti-Jesuit historiography, which argued that Sixtus V had never defined Lessius' assertions as *sana doctrina articuli*, through issuing a papal brief.⁷²

The Dominican's concern indicates a precarious knowledge of the history of the Ignatian order, filtered through anti-Jesuit literature. Buonpensiere even claimed that the rehabilitation of the hagiography was nothing less than the Jesuits' attempt to achieve Lessius' canonization, which would represent the definitive approval of his theology and, with it, the approval of the theology of the entire Society of Jesus. According to Buonpensiere, Lessius' doctrine coincided completely with that of the Society. Moreover, such approval could potentially damage the Dominican order, which had opposed the Jesuits during the controversy *De Auxiliis* (especially Molina's doctrine, which was considered to be similar to that of Lessius). It must be remembered that it had been a Dominican—Domingo Báñez—who confronted Molina during the dispute, and that Báñez was also a distinguished representative of the doctrine of verbal inspiration. Thus the idea arose that the entire affair could be compromising for the Dominicans. Buonpensiere seems to have completely neglected the fact that Lessius' doctrine was harshly criticized within Lessius' own religious order and that Lessius' theology certainly did not represent that of the entire Jesuit order.

Even though the hagiography was eventually removed from the Index, Lessius' cause for canonization failed to make any real progress for at least seventy years. Yet, in the early 1900s, Lessius' theology, including his theory of the inspiration of the Scriptures, still stirred serious concerns. The false idea that his doctrine of inspiration had been condemned continued to circulate. The major point to focus on, the *leitmotiv* of these disputes, including those involving Lessius, is the role of free will and human agency vis-à-vis God's initiative, whether relating to soteriology, morality, or the inspiration of the Scriptures.

V. INSPIRATION OF THE SCRIPTURES AND JUSTIFICATION. CONCLUDING NOTES

The connection between the Scriptures and the process of justification, i.e. the salvation of the soul, was a major point of discussion between Catholic and Protestant reformers in the Early Modern Era.

⁷² ACDF, *Controversia*, 129. See also ARSI, Fl. Belg. 70 I, 245r. Sixtus V was obviously concerned that these intra-Catholic quarrels would cause further schisms. See ACDF, *Controversia*, 112v.

Whereas Protestants, Martin Luther above of all, fostered the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura*, the Catholic Church, in matters of Revelation, stressed the importance of the traditions of the Church. During the Council of Trent, on April 8, 1546, during the fourth session of the day, the conciliar fathers stated that “the source of the whole truth of salvation and rule of conduct” had been offered to Christendom through two channels: the Scriptures and the “unwritten traditions.”⁷³ The study of the Bible was encouraged to an extraordinary degree during the fourth and fifth sessions of the council, to such an extent that several scholars have talked of a “golden age of Catholic biblical scholarship.”⁷⁴ The University of Leuven represented a stronghold of this scholarly tradition, along with various Jesuit houses, especially in Spain. It is no surprise, then, that Lessius—a Jesuit theologian in early modern Leuven—grappled with the concept of inspiration.

Going even further, Lessius’ doctrine of inspiration was deeply connected to his theology of grace, free will, and eternal predestination. Moreover, given the aforementioned direct connection between the Scriptures and justification, Lessius’ position on the matter should not be surprising. However, as has been stressed, after the Council of Trent most Catholic authors supported conservative views of the Scriptures, abandoning theories such as Cajetan’s and suspecting any innovative theory of heresy or at least heterodoxy.⁷⁵ This is precisely what happened to Lessius’ teachings, which were considered too far removed from traditional doctrines, especially from the **verbal dictation** of Scripture.

Some years ago, biblical scholar Prosper Grech posed an intriguing question: Is the Holy Spirit’s inspiration relevant only for the very moment of the books’ writing or does it apply to a continuum of moments?⁷⁶ For example, several books of the Old Testament were assembled by copyists who united older traditions. The question is: Did the Holy Spirit assist and inspire the oral composition of such traditions from the very beginning? Or did he intervene only at the stage of writing?

Such questions provide food for thought when applied to Lessius’ case. Lessius’ original third proposition, mentioning the *humana industria* and the subsequent approval by the Holy Spirit, could be interpreted as a demonstration that the intervention of the Holy Spirit can happen when it pleases the Spirit himself. Reasoning purely theoretically, while putting ourselves in the shoes of early modern theologians, we may suppose, for instance, that Old Testament authors recorded material

⁷³ François 2017, 176.

⁷⁴ François 2017, 177. On the matter, see also François 2012 and 2007.

⁷⁵ Bray 1996, 209. See also Murray 2015, 61–62.

⁷⁶ Grech 2012, 81–89.

that had originally circulated orally. The Holy Spirit only supported and guided the authors as they put their pens to paper but had no hand in the creation of earlier traditions. We could also hypothesize, therefore, that stories such as 2 Maccabees were written simply through human agency, without the Spirit's inspiration (as was the case for the creation of the oral traditions). The Spirit would approve such books only later, potentially after the death of the author.⁷⁷ However, despite the fact that Bellarmino attacked the third proposition in particular, it is evident that another element bothered Lessius' opponents, namely, his underlying conviction that verbal inspiration was not plausible—not even logical—given that Catholicism had the duty to preserve human free will. Once again, Lessius' positive anthropology influenced his theological and intellectual reflections, such as his understanding of the human contribution in the process of salvation, his views on moral economics, and his radical innovations in contract law.⁷⁸

From another perspective, it can be argued that Lessius did not necessarily equate sacred books with inspired books. In other words, departing from then mainstream thought, he had no difficulties accepting that the Church had inserted a book such as 2 Maccabees into the biblical canon and that it had thus become a sacred book, without having been directly inspired (but rather only confirmed) by the Holy Spirit. Using a typically humanist scientific method, Lessius simply began his reflection by considering a few very practical aspects of the composition of the Scriptures, starting with the presence of rather peculiar books, especially 2 Maccabees.

On the opposite side, Lessius' critics were certainly concerned that to accept that the biblical canon could include non-inspired books would jeopardize the Bible's divine authority. They could also argue that Lessius neglected the relationship between the Incarnation and the Scriptures, and focused only on the legal authentication of the books.⁷⁹ However, this is not true. Lessius was instead interested in two elements: first, the contribution of the authors to the creation of the Scriptures, second, the divine, rather than juridical, confirmation of the veracity of the books of the Bible. A very rational, humanist, and also philological approach permeated Lessius' entire oeuvre.

One question remains unanswered: Why did Bellarmino so harshly condemn Lessius' theory *de Scriptura*, especially the third proposition, even though he defended the remaining part of the doctrine? This time

⁷⁷ For doctrines relating to Scriptures and Revelation in contemporary times, after Vatican Council II, see Boeve 2011. For inspiration doctrine in the same period, see Schelkens 2010, 111–56.

⁷⁸ On Lessius' moral economics, see important studies by Wim Decock (some already cited) e.g. Decock 2019; 2012a; 2010; 2009a.

⁷⁹ De Fraine 1954.

around, Bellarmino did not show any of the brotherly solidarity he had displayed for Lessius' theology of salvation, with which he did not agree either. Can we believe Bellarmino's claim that he realized only many years later that he had misunderstood Lessius' doctrine of grace and free will? It seems at least curious that such a skillful theologian could be confused by Lessius' doctrine, which Lessius summarized in very specific, unmistakable assertions. Moreover, when, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, Bellarmino suddenly condemned Lessius' doctrine, which he had previously defended, he did so for strategic reasons. In the early 1600s, Lessius published in fact his treatise *De Gratia Efficaci*, a book concerning the theology of grace, free will, and eternal predestination. The publication contravened the papal prohibition on printing books on that subject, issued in the aftermath of the congregation *De Auxiliis*. During the *De Auxiliis*, which was concluded only a few years before the publication of *De Gratia Efficaci*, Bellarmino managed to prevent condemnation of Jesuit Luis de Molina's doctrine of grace, which resembled that of Lessius in some respects. The publication of Lessius' treatise, thus, threatened to reignite the dispute.

During the Leuven controversies, Bellarmino chose the smaller sin by defending Lessius' doctrine, fearing the return of Baius' doctrine, as already mentioned. However, by the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Baianist threat seemed to have waned and, after the risks taken by the Society of Jesus during the dispute *De Auxiliis*, Bellarmino no longer had a reason to defend Lessius' doctrine, with which he did not agree.

But why did Bellarmino already condemn Lessius' doctrine of inspiration in the 1580s? It is my opinion that Bellarmino saw in Lessius' theory, and particularly in the third proposition, a major risk that he, and with him the entire order, might be charged with spreading an undoubtedly Pelagian doctrine. The idea that the mere *humana industria*—human work and efforts, moved by free will—was enough to create the Scriptures, left no room for doubt: Lessius clearly stated that there were circumstances in which God's inspiration and help were not necessary to obtain a good result, or to perform a meritorious deed, such as the composition of some of the books of the Bible. We could even argue that this idea represents the apotheosis of Lessius' theory of free will and human agency, and that Lessius' often overlooked theory of inspiration represents the best opportunity to understand his views and religious anthropology.

It must be stressed, furthermore, that accusations of Pelagianism leveled at Lessius' doctrine, especially by the Leuven theologians, should be read in the context of Counter-Reformation disputes. In the 1580s, Lessius had called the strict Augustinism propounded by the Leuven theologians crypto-Calvinism, due to its overwhelming focus on divine

predestination and grace in the economy of salvation, at the expense of the role of human free will. Lessius' doctrine was equally the target of denunciations, labeled Pelagian for its openness to free will and human contribution in the justification process. However, both theological systems claimed to provide ammunition against Protestantism. Strict Augustinian theologians relied on Augustine and the Bible because Protestants valued these sources much more than scholastic sources, and this common ground could be a powerful instrument for reconciliation.⁸⁰ On the opposite side, theologies open to the role of free will, which had been neglected in Protestantism (it is sufficient to mention Martin Luther's *De servo arbitrio*), directly confronted reformers with this vital topic.

It is the very word *industria* that leads the reader to reflect upon the idea of a human contribution to the economy of salvation, of which the divine Revelation is certainly a part. *Industria* is a word that belongs to the world of craftsmen and artisans, and can easily be recognized by art historians as typically used to describe the activities of artists' workshops. Did Lessius choose this word by chance? Certainly not. It is undeniable that this word is of particular interest when we connect it to the work of an artisan who, relying on his own abilities, skills, and labor, creates a piece of art or simply a useful object. In his original third proposition on the biblical authors, Lessius seemed to refer precisely to the efforts of a fine craftsman or artist, who, by means of his industry and abilities—and by extension his free will—has created a work of literature called the Bible.⁸¹

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⁸⁰ In a letter to Pius V, even Baius tried to justify his teachings (and the faculty's theological positions) in this way. See Orcibal 1997.

⁸¹ I am indebted to art historian and professor Walter Mellion for his insights in Lessius' use of the expression *industria*, typical of the handicraft world, which we discussed during a fruitful conversation on the occasion of the 2019 Sixteenth Century Society Conference in St. Louis, Missouri.

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