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Ex Meritis Praevisis: Predestination, Grace, and Free Will in intra-Jesuit Controversies (1587-1613)

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Abstract: This article retraces the intra-Jesuit theological debates on the theology of salvation, including the relationship between the elements of predestination, God's foreknowledge, Grace, and free will, in the delicate passage between the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, and within the debates on Augustine's theological legacy. Specifically, it explores the Flemish Jesuit Leonard Lessius' theology and the discussions raised by it within the Society of Jesus, in order to show how soteriology has been central in the process of self-definition of the Jesuit identity in the Early Modern Age. This is particularly clear from the internal debates developed between Lessius, on the one hand, and General Claudio Acquaviva and curial theologian Roberto Bellarmino, on the other hand. Not only does the article investigate little known aspects of intra-Catholic theological debate in the post Tridentine period, but it also shows how deep pastoral and moral concerns strongly contributed to the rise of Lessius' open-minded theology of salvation, which seemed to deprive God's sovereign authority in favour of humankind's free will, and human agency in the process of salvation.

Keywords: Lessius, Bellarmino, theology of salvation, predestination, theological controversies, free will, human agency

Non parum indolui cum intellexi Ill.mam D.V. sententiae illi, quam de praedestinatione tradidi, adversari.

(Leonard Lessius to Roberto Bellarmino, February 18, 1611)¹

¹ *Lessius to Bellarmino*, February 18, 1611, in Xavier-Marie Le Bachelet, *Auctarium Bellarminianum, Supplément aux oeuvres du Cardinal Bellarmin* (Paris: Gabriel Beauchesne, 1913), 148–150. See also Historical Archive of the Pontifical Gregorian University (APUG) 540, 73r–74v, and Xavier-Marie Le Bachelet, *Prédestination et Grâce Efficace. Controverses dans la Compagnie de Jésus au temps d'Acquaviva (1610–1613)*, vol. 1 (Leuven: Museum Lessianum, 1931), 156–158.

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1 Introduction to the intra-Catholic controversies over Grace (late 16th-early seventeenth centuries)

On December 31, 1610, Jesuit cardinal and theologian Roberto Bellarmino (Montepulciano 1542-Rome 1621) addressed a concerned letter to his former disciple Lenaert Leys (Brecht 1554-Leuven 1623), or in Latin Leonard Lessius, who was a professor of theology at the Jesuit College in Leuven.² Whilst teaching at the Jesuit College twenty-three years earlier (1587–88), Lessius had engaged in a dispute over Predestination, Grace and free will, as well as over the inspiration of Scripture, with members of the Faculty of Theology at Leuven University; a dispute which had built on a long-standing disagreement, in terms of authority,

² Bellarmino to Lessius, December 31, 1610, in Le Bachelet, *Prédestination*, vol. 1, 156–158. My PhD dissertation (Eleonora Rai, “Le Petit Prophète. Leonardo Lessio SJ Tra Controverbie Teologiche e Santità (1554–1623),” University of Milan – École pratique des hautes études, 2014) retraces Lessius’ biography, and discusses his role in the early modern controversies on Grace, inspiration of the Holy Writ, moral economy, and Catholic spirituality. Particular attention is also paid to his cause for beatification (a good example of the Society of Jesus’ strategies of sainthood, strictly related to Bellarmino’s canonization cause), and the devotion developed in Flanders after his death. On this see Eleonora Rai, “The ‘Odor of Sanctity.’ Veneration and Politics in Leonard Lessius’s Cause for Beatification (Seventeenth-Twentieth Centuries),” *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 3, no. 2 (2016): 238–258. For a preliminary approach to Lessius see *Imago primi saeculi societatis Jesu a provincia Flandro–Belgica ejusdem societatis representata* (Antwerp: Balthasar Moretus, 1640), 877; Jean-François Foppens, *Bibliotheca belgica sive Virorum in Belgio vita, scriptisque illustrium catalogus, librorumque nomenclatura*, vol. 2 (Brussels: Petrum Foppens, 1739), 815–817; Lessius, *Leys, Léonard*, in Carlos Sommervogel, *Bibliothèque de la Compagnie de Jésus*, vol. 4 (Paris: Alphonse Picard, 1890–1932), 1726–51; *Diccionario histórico de la Compañía de Jesús biográfico-temático*, ed. Charles E. O’Neill and Joaquín M. Domínguez (Madrid: Universidad Pontificia Comillas, 2001), 3:2336–37. Information on Lessius is mainly stored in Rome, at the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARSI) and Belgium, at the Documentation and Research Center on Religion Culture and Society (KADOC). A hagiography was composed by Leonard Schoofs, *De vita et moribus R.P. Leonardi Lessii e Societate Iesu theologi liber. Una cum Divinarum perfectionum opusculo* (Brussels: Thomas Courtois, 1640); Jesuit postulator of Lessius’ cause for beatification. Charles van Sull published a biography to promote the cause: *Léonard Lessius de la Compagnie de Jésus, 1554–1623* (Leuven: Éditions du Museum Lessianum, 1930; original edition: Wetteren 1923). On Lessius, especially his moral economy, see works by Toon Van Houdt (e.g. “Tradition and Renewal in Late Scholastic Economic Thought. The case of Leonardus Lessius (1554–1623),” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 28, no. 1 (1998): 51–73) and Wim Decock (e.g. *Le marché du mérite: penser le droit et l’économie avec Léonard Lessius* (Brussels: Zones sensibles, 2019) and “Lessius and the Breakdown of the Scholastic Paradigm,” *Journal of the History of Economic Thought*, 31, no. 1 (2009): 57–78).

between the Jesuits and academics, due to the Jesuit aspiration to establish a competing philosophical and theological centre of education in the city; a threat to the University's monopoly on education.³ At the time, Bellarmino had defended the orthodoxy of his Jesuit brother's doctrine, only to condemn it as heterodox many years later, after the publication of Lessius' *De Gratia Efficaci* in 1609; a treatise focusing on the role of divine Grace in the salvation process, aimed at contrasting an anti-Jesuit work disseminated at the beginning of the 1600s in the Low Countries, as the author states in the introduction, without mentioning any other detail concerning the *opusculum*.⁴

This essay will address the dispute between the two Jesuits, in light of the evolution of the "politics of Grace" within the Society of Jesus – namely the strategies for addressing extreme theological positions within the Order – between 1587 and 1613 (respectively the first year of the Leuven controversies and the year of publication of Jesuit General Claudio Acquaviva's decree on Grace), and considering the development of sixteenth-seventeenth century intra-Catholic controversies on the subject of Grace and free will.

Two closely connected moments in the history of the disputes over Grace within early modern Catholicism will be included in this study: the Leuven controversies (1587–88)⁵ and the Congregation *De Auxiliis Divinae Gratiae*

3 On this specific aspect, see Jan Roegiers, "Awkward Neighbours: The Leuven Faculty of Theology and the Jesuit College (1542–1773)," in *The Jesuits of the Low Countries*, ed. R. Faesen and L. Kenis (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), 153–175. Records concerning the Leuven controversies are conserved at the Archivum Societatis Iesu (ARSI), Fl. Belg. 72, I–II and the Archive of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (ACDF), St.St. e 7–c. Some of these records have been published in Jacques-Hyacinthe Serry, *Historiae congregationum de auxiliis divinae gratiae sub summis pontificibus Clemente VIII. et Paulo V. in quatuor libros distribuita* (Antwerp: Sumptibus societatis, 1709) and Lievin de Meyer, *Historiae controversiarum de divinae gratiae auxiliis sub summis pontificibus Sixto V. Clemente VIII. Paulo V. Ab objectionibus R.P. Hyacinthi Serry vindicatae libri tres* (Brussels: A. Claudinot, 1715). On the Faculty of Theology at the University of Leuven, see Bruno Boute, *Academic Interests and Catholic Confessionalisation: The Leuven Privileges of Nomination to Ecclesiastical Benefices* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

4 Leonard Lessius, *De gratia efficaci decretis Divinis libertate arbitrii et praescientia Dei conditionata disputatio apologetica Leonardi Lessii e Societate Iesu S. Theol. in Academia Lovaniensi Professoris. Duae aliae eiusdem auctoris disputationes: altera de praedestinatione et reprobatione angelorum et hominum, altera de praedestinatione Christi* (Antwerp: Moretus, 1610), unnumbered page.

5 On early modern theological controversies over Grace, see, for example, Edmond J.M. van Eijl, "La controverse louvaniste autor de la grâce et du libre arbitre à la fin du XVI^e siècle," in *L'augustinisme à l'ancienne Faculté de théologie de Leuven*, ed. M. Lamberigts and L. Kenis (Leuven: Peeters-Leuven University Press, 1994), 207–282; Jean-Louis Quantin, "Histoire de la grâce. 'Semi-pélagiens' et 'prédestinatiens' dans l'érudition ecclésiastique du XVII^e siècle," in Thomas Wallnig et al., *Europäische Geschichtskulturen um 1700 zwischen Gelehrsamkeit, Politik und Konfession* (Berlin: De Gruyter 2012), 327–359; Eleonora Rai, "Between Augustine and Pelagius: Leonard Lessius in the

(January 1598–August 28, 1607),⁶ which, respectively, pitted the Jesuits of the Leuven College (especially Lessius) against the theologians of Leuven University; and the Jesuits against the Dominicans, in particular Luis de Molina (1535–1600) and Domingo Bañez OP (1528–1604). Bellarmino's role in the *De Auxiliis* and the subsequent “politics of Grace” established by the Society constitute the key to understanding the Cardinal's change of perspective, as we will see.

Bellarmino, who was Pope Marcel II's nephew, a theologian of the Roman Curia, Archbishop of Capua, a consultant of the Roman Inquisition and author of several renowned counter-Reformation theological treatises, spent the first part of his career in Leuven, teaching theology.⁷ Here, he strongly opposed Michael Baius' (1513–1589) doctrine, and also professed a strict Augustinism.⁸ In 1576, he was called back to Rome, where he taught theology at the *Collegio Romano*. Here, Lessius studied for a short period, and became Bellarmino's student, also attending Francisco Suarez's (1548–1617) classes. After learning grammar and philosophy, Lessius studied theology, eventually becoming philosophy professor in Douai, a consultant of the Jesuit provincial, and a professor of theology in the Jesuit college of Leuven.⁹ Lessius considered Bellarmino as a mentor, and most probably the best ally he could hope for within the Society. For this reason, he immediately appealed for his help after being charged with accusations of heterodoxy by the Faculty theologians in 1587.

This work looks at the intra-Jesuit controversies over Grace and, as we will see, the inspiration of the Scripture (especially Lessius' quarrel with Bellarmino and the General Claudio Acquaviva), as a valuable lens for observing the construction of the Catholic, and more specifically Jesuit, theological identity in the post-Tridentine Era; in a period when theology, and the Bible as its core, were commonly used as instruments for affirming confessional identity.

Leuven Controversies, from 1587 to the twentieth century,” *The Journal of Baroque Studies* 4, no. 1 (2016): 79–106; Wim François and Antonio Gerace, “The Doctrine of Justification and the Rise of Pluralism in the Post-Tridentine Catholic Church,” in *More than Luther: The Reformation and the Rise of Pluralism in Europe* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019), 9–40.

⁶ On the *De Auxiliis* see, for example, Paolo Broggio, *La teologia e la politica* (Firenze: Olschki, 2009), 83–129.

⁷ On Bellarmino, see Franco Motta, *Bellarmino. Una teologia politica della Controriforma* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2005). For an overview of available literature on Bellarmino, see Anita Mancina, “Bibliografia sistematica e commentata degli studi sull'opera bellarminiana dal 1900 al 1990,” in *Roberto Bellarmino Arcivescovo di Capua teologo e pastore della Riforma cattolica*, ed. G. Galeota (Capua: Archidiocesi di Capua-Istituto superiore di scienze religiose, 1990), 805–872.

⁸ See Manfred Biersack, *Initia Bellarminiana. Die Prädestinationstheorie bei Robert Bellarmin SJ bis zu seinen Löwener Vorlesungen 1570–1576* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1989).

⁹ ARSI, *Cataloghi triennali (1584–1603)*, I, 202r, 135r, 248r. See also ARSI, *Schede Lamalle*, Sch. 05; 07, 1–2.

After the Protestant break, a common concern within the Catholic Church was how to address those who converted to Protestantism to re-convert them to Catholicism. The Leuven controversies can also be read through this prism. In fact, the dispute concerned two different approaches to the theology of salvation (especially the relationship between Grace and free will from a soteriological perspective), which were justified by their supporters as genuine orthodox methods. Such a quarrel had also constituted the basis for the Protestant schism, and therefore Rome was wary of this dispute possibly causing further divisions within Catholicism.

The dispute, based on diverse interpretations of the doctrine of Grace, as expressed by Augustine¹⁰ and other Church Fathers as well as Scholastics (the latter especially taken into consideration by the Jesuits), was the expression of two different theological positions within Catholicism. Both positions fostered opposite counter-Reformation approaches. On one side, the Leuven theologians defended their doctrine of Grace as the authentic teaching of Augustine, which they considered the *primus* among the Fathers of the Church, the celebrated adversary of Pelagius, and the *Doctor Gratiae*.¹¹ Raising the prominent role of Grace had after all become necessary since Augustine's anti-Pelagian works, for contrasting the primary role of free will taught by Pelagius and contrasted by Augustine. A pessimistic anthropology emerged, which focused almost exclusively on the depravity of man's nature after the Fall and the overwhelming need for God's Grace (and predestination); thus not taking into account man's free will as an acting force in the process of salvation. Such a position was based on the idea that the Protestants could be re-admitted to Catholicism by employing the same sources they had themselves used: the Bible and Augustine.

On the other hand, during the 1500s, an optimistic theology, connected to Christian Humanism and Late Scholasticism spread across Europe. This positive attitude depended on the idea that man, considered by strict Augustinians as irremediably corrupted by sin, could actually raise himself to a positive condition: every man had the potential to live a good Christian life. In this respect, scholars should pay greater attention to the value of education, a stance particularly fostered by the Jesuits and their network of colleges, due to the belief that rational, educated people could also improve their moral values.¹² Lessius,

10 On Augustine's doctrine of predestination see, for example, Mathijs Lamberigts, "Augustine on Predestination: Some Quaestiones Disputatae Revisited," *Augustiniana* 54, no. 1–4 (2004): 279–305.

11 On Augustine's doctrine on Grace see, for example, Volker H. Decroll, *Die Entstehung der Gnadenlehre Augustins* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999).

12 For a preliminary look at the history of the Christian theology of justification, see Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) and Bernard Quilliet, *L'acharnement théologique: Histoire de la grâce en Occident – III^e–XXI^e siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 2007).

highlighting the role of man's response to God's invitation and Grace, gave renewed attention to the value of free will and human agency in the process of salvation; a partial reading of Augustine emerges, mediated by Aquinas' work. In particular, it is necessary to make a distinction between the first Augustine who, before the Pelagian dispute, was far more willing to accept the cooperation of man's free will in the economy of salvation; and the second Augustine who, after the beginning of the Pelagian controversy, highlighted the overwhelming need for God's Grace. Lessius' position stressed the necessity of directly counteracting the Protestants, by highlighting the indispensable role of free will in the economy of salvation. It is worth mentioning here, in addition, that during the sixteenth century, works by Greek Fathers, dealing with the element of free will differently from Augustine, spread across Europe, and were often used by the Jesuits.

Both theological standpoints, in a "border land" such as the early modern Spanish Low Countries, justified their doctrine as being a powerful counter-Reformation instrument. Years before, the Leuven Faculty theologian Michael Baius, whose doctrine had been condemned by Rome, addressed a letter to Pope Pius V, in which he justified his doctrine and, more generally, the Faculty's teaching, by highlighting the value of employing Augustine, rather than the Scholastics, in a borderland like the Netherlands, where Catholics and Protestants lived very close to one another. Here, Christians were more receptive to the Fathers of the Church and the Bible, than they were to Scholastics.¹³ The Faculty theologians' attention to Augustine thus had a confessional value, and was useful for trying to reconvert the Protestants, who were also receptive to Augustine's teachings.¹⁴

In the same way, although with opposite results in terms of theological theories, Lessius and his Jesuit colleagues propagated a doctrine focusing on the role of man's agency in the acceptance of divine Grace, for contrasting the

¹³ Jean Orcibal, "De Baius à Jansénius: le 'comma pianum'," in *Études d'histoire et de littérature religieuses. XVI^e–XVIII^e siècles*, ed. J. Orcibal et al. (Paris: Klincksieck, 1997), 561–583. On Baius and the condemnation by the Pope see, for example, van Edmond J.M. van Eijl, "Les censures des universités d'Alcala et de Salamanque et la censure du Pape Pie V contre Michel Baius (1565–1567)," *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* 48 (1953): 719–776 and "L'interprétation de la bulle de Pie V portant condamnation de Baius," *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* 50 (1955): 499–542. For a proper understanding of Baianism and Jansenism see also Lucien Ceyskens' studies, e. g. "Que faut-il penser du jansénisme et de l'antijansénisme?" *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* 88 (1993): 108–130.

¹⁴ Michael Baius, *Apologia Summo Pontifici Pio V*, in Gabriel Gerberon, *Michaelis Baii, celeberrimi in Lovaniensi Academia Theologi Opera [...]*, Baiana 2 (Cologne: Balthasar Ab Egmont & Soc., 1696), 79.

Calvinist doctrine of predestination; rehabilitating man's potentiality was meant to be a tool for counteracting the idea of an irreversibly corrupted human nature, and the absolute impotence of man from a soteriological perspective.

Taking into account all the elements featured in the Leuven controversies, we can conclude that the quarrel between the Faculty's theologians and the Jesuits was rooted in two major issues: firstly, the doctrinal differences between the parties, inflated by the fact that, whereas the Jesuits employed a series of sources highlighting the cooperation of free will, the Faculty's theologians professed a strict Augustinism, based especially on the "second" Augustine's insistence on Grace. In this respect, it is worth highlighting that Lessius hid behind Augustine's ambiguity (*obscurius loquitur*) for justifying his doctrine, besides stating that most probably Augustine himself would not dissent from his vision.¹⁵

Secondly, it is necessary to consider the contextual (and thus confessional) problems of the land where such a dispute developed, namely the proximity of Catholics and Protestants. In a border land such as the Low Countries, the Jesuits, as a counter-Reformation order, were very suspicious of any doctrine nourishing the idea of a hopelessly sinful human nature, and of the uselessness of free will. That was precisely Lessius' defence after his doctrine was censored; the Jesuits declared that the Faculty theologians fostered a doctrine dangerously close to Calvinism. On the opposite side, and with the same confessional attempt at preserving orthodoxy and to avoid Protestants' attacks, the Leuven academics accused Lessius' doctrine of being Pelagian and Semi-Pelagian.¹⁶

However, the fact that in Spain a very similar controversy had also emerged between the Jesuits and Dominicans and was brought to the pope's attention (*Controversia de Auxiliis*), suggests that the matter did not exclusively stem from

¹⁵ See Leonard Lessius, *Conclusiones de praedestinatione et reprobatione* (known as the *Thirty-four Propositions*), no. 34, in Xavier-Marie Le Bachelet, *Bellarmin avant son Cardinalat. 1542–1598. Correspondance et documents* (Paris: Gabriel Beauchesne, 1911), 153–156.

¹⁶ On Pelagianism see Mathijs Lamberigts, "Pelagius and Pelagians," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 258–279; "Recent research into Pelagianism with particular emphasis on the role of Julian of Aeclanum," *Augustiniana* 52, no. 2 (2002): 175–198. Recent historiography has shown that Pelagianism, as a doctrine, has to be considered as a construction built by its adversaries, and that it never existed as an organized group. As for semi-Pelagianism, this term was born in the sixteenth century to refer to a doctrine diffused in fifth century Provence by monastic authors, such as Cassian and Faustus of Riez, who in reality countered Pelagius, despite propounding the role of free will. It is additionally important to highlight that, at the time, Augustine did not consider these authors as his opponents, but rather as colleagues; thus the term semi-Pelagianism fails to do justice to these theological reflections (which could be simply called "Provençal," rather than semi-Pelagian).

contextual elements or an anti-Protestant approach, but was instead an issue deeply rooted within the Catholic Church; in the Early Modern Age, the doctrine of Grace was still an unresolved element of the identity of Catholicism, as is evident when considering the explosion of various theological quarrels and the development of different orientations, notably including Jansenism. Such theological vagueness can be also explained by the fact that the Tridentine Decree *de iustificatione*, concerning the doctrine of Grace and justification, could not foresee all elements that would be objects of contention.¹⁷

This study is based on a rich corpus of documentation produced between the late 1580s and early 1590s, as well as during the 1610s; and includes private correspondence between the Jesuits (e. g. Lessius and Bellarmino; Lessius and Acquaviva); censures compiled by Jesuit authors and Leuven theologians; Lessius' *apologiae*; and early modern Jesuit theological treatises on the matter of Grace, especially Lessius' *De Gratia Efficaci*. This rich record allows us to retrace a fundamental moment in the history of the early modern Catholic (including Jesuit) construction of theological, soteriological identity.

2 Private correspondence for official matters: Lessius' theology of Grace and Bellarmino's position (1587-88)

After being accused of heresy by the professors of the Faculty of Theology of the University of Leuven in 1587, Lessius immediately involved his former master, commencing a steady epistolary exchange in which he provided his insight into the events, asking for Bellarmino's opinion on his and the Faculty theologians' doctrines.¹⁸ In his justification, Lessius composed *Thirty-four Propositions* explaining his doctrine of Grace and inspiration of the Scriptures; he then summarised it in *Six Propositions*, at the request of the Archbishop of Malines after the even more severe censorship of Douai, which followed the censorship of Leuven.

¹⁷ On the concept of merit in the Tridentine decree *de iustificatione* see Christian D. Washburn, "The Transformative Power of Grace and Condign Merit at the Council of Trent," *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 79, no. 2 (2015): 173–212.

¹⁸ Lessius' and Bellarmino's correspondence has been published by Xavier-Marie Le Bachelet in the early twentieth century, in a volume gathering documents before Bellarmino's cardinalate (Le Bachelet, *Bellarmin avant son Cardinalat*).

As a professor of theology, holding the very same position that Bellarmino had held about twenty years earlier, Lessius strongly distanced himself from the strict Augustinism taught by his predecessor. In the conclusions to his volume *Initia Bellarminiana*, Biersack brilliantly explains how Bellarmino attempted to be a good mediator among Augustinism and Thomism, finding a compromise in Congruism; viz. the doctrine stating that God provides human beings with His Grace in the circumstances of place and time when He knows it would be efficacious.¹⁹ In fact, the doctrine of predestination presents some points that are clearly missing: if we go for a strict Augustinism, viz. highlighting the sovereign authority of only divine Grace and predestination, the role of the Church as a mediator falls apart. Namely, if everything has already been established by God, there is in fact no need for the hierarchical Church; instead, we read in the Gospel that Christ himself established his Church on earth. Bellarmino aimed at saving the original Augustinism, but also taking the middle way of the Church. Congruism allowed him to do that, preventing him from falling into Molinism (a theological system open to man's contribution to salvation, which presents similarities to Lessius' doctrine).

It is not by chance that the Faculty theologians highlighted the inconsistency of Lessius and Bellarmino's teachings from the beginning of their censorship, as Lucien Ceyskens has already remarked.²⁰ However, it is not completely clear whether Lessius was fully aware of the substance of Bellarmino's teaching in Leuven. In fact, in a letter addressed to Bellarmino at the end of 1588, Lessius claimed that the criticism he received in the matter of sufficient and efficacious Grace concerned a topic that Bellarmino himself had dealt with extensively (more than Lessius did) during his years in Leuven.²¹ On the one hand, as we will see, Lessius declared that he was aware that Bellarmino adhered to Augustinism in Leuven, but, on the other hand, he seemed to consider his own doctrine equal to Bellarmino's teaching. We can therefore understand Ceyskens' astonished comment, when he wonders whether Lessius could not see any difference between the two theological systems.²²

¹⁹ Biersack, *Initia Bellarminiana*, 383–384.

²⁰ Lucien Ceyskens, "Bellarmin et Louvain (1569–1576)," in *L'augustinisme*, 179–205, here 202. Ceyskens' essay explores Bellarmino's activity in Leuven.

²¹ *Lessius to Bellarmino*, December 10, 1588, in Le Bachelet, *Bellarmin avant son Cardinalat*, 227–231.

²² Ceyskens, "Bellarmin et Louvain," 203. Ceyskens identified Lessius' doctrine as Molinism, as most historians have done, also owing to Lessius' self-identification with Molina's theology. However, it is my conviction that Lessius' theology went further, due to his doctrine *ex meritis praevisis*, and cannot be considered as strictly Molinist. Additionally, Lessius' doctrine was expressed during the Leuven controversies, in 1587–88, thus before the publication of Molina's

Since the late 1580s, as for the theology of Grace and salvation, Lessius had maintained three major assumptions: firstly, God provides each man with an *auxilium sufficiens* (sufficient aid) which is necessary to perform meritorious deeds, as well as to be saved through God's Grace; secondly, man's positive answer to God's invitation is essential for making His Grace efficacious, but there is no need for a second Grace preceding the consent and allowing man to answer positively (in this sense, the Jesuit strongly disagrees with the idea that man, who does not consent to God's invitation, has not received the efficacious Grace); thirdly, predestined men are chosen *ex meritis praevisis*, as a result of, and owing to, God's prescience of their acceptance of the divine invitation and Grace, which remains the indispensable element for their salvation, as stated by Lessius on several occasions.

To understand the matter properly, and specifically Lessius' position, a terminological premise is essential. This article presents the theological discussions over two moments or stages of God's predestination of man: firstly, the predestination to Grace (*electio ad Gratiam*); and secondly, the predestination to the Glory (*electio ad Gloriam*); which respectively constitute God's accordance of Grace to human beings, and the predestination to final salvation and eternal life.

These two aspects of predestination were explained by most of the early modern Catholic theologians in two different ways: *ante merita praevisa*, meaning that predestination happened because of God's sovereign will, before His foreknowledge of man's merits (this was, for instance, Bellarmino's position); or *post merita praevisa*, namely after God's prevision of man's merits, with a chronological meaning (*post*). The question that arises is how can we now consider Lessius' "*ex meritis praevisis*" doctrine?

At this stage, it is not entirely clear if the doctrine of predestination *post merita praevisa* (i. e. after the prevision of merits) and the doctrine of predestination *ex meritis praevisis* (i. e. post and due to – with causal meaning – man's merits foreseen by God) coincided for Lessius. It was certainly from this particular issue that the dispute arose within the Society of Jesus, because the doctrine *ex meritis praevisis*, fostered by Lessius, was charged with depriving God of His own sovereign will by orthodox authors such as Bellarmino; thus it was considered, in other words, a Pelagian drift.

We have already introduced the theological concepts of election to Grace and to Glory. For clarity, this essay employs the English term "predestination" as a

Concordia. At most, we can argue that Molina was influenced by Lessius' teaching, if he was aware of it; or, most probably, that the two theologians independently proposed similar theologies. This point will be addressed properly in another article which I am currently working on.

synonym of “election” for denoting God’s predestination act; although Lessius’ writings contain both the Latin words *praedestinatio* and *electio*. The word *electio* specifically refers to the election to Grace or to the Glory, which constitute two complementary moments or aspects of the divine predestination act. However, at the very beginning of his *Thirty-four Propositions* (1–3), Lessius states that *praedestinatio*, and the efficacious and immediate *electio ad gloriam*, differ. In fact, he defines *praedestinatio* as the preparation of the divine Grace and of all the benefits it entails, through which God foreknows who shall be saved (Proposition 2: *Praedestinatio est preparatio gratiae et omnium beneficiorum, quibus Deus praescit hominem salvandum*). *Praedestinatio* overlaps for Lessius, in other words, with the election to Grace – but there is more to the equation. Lessius consciously uses the expression *praeparatio gratiae*, which refers to future things, precisely for saving the role of free will. In fact, an actualized predestination would exclude the contribution of man’s will; on the contrary, the simple preparation of something that still needs to happen would allow man to intervene in the process of salvation.

We now need to pay particular attention to Lessius’ doctrine of *electio ad gloriam*; being the “second” stage in God’s predestination act, following the predestination of man to Grace. Lessius defines, in fact, the election or predestination to the Glory (namely final salvation and eternal life) as the *immediata* – this is the key word – preparation to the Glory, viz. God’s absolute will to grant the Glory, without presupposing any condition (Proposition 3: *Electio efficax ad gloriam est immediata praeparatio gloriae, seu voluntas absoluta dandi gloriam, nullam amplius praesupponens conditionem*). This element coexists, however, with Lessius’ doctrine of predestination *ex meritis praevisis*, as it would have been clearly expressed in the *Six Propositions*, and is even inconsistent with the Proposition 25 (within the *Thirty-four Propositions*), which states: *Probabilius est homines non eligi immediate, et efficaciter seu absoluta voluntate ad gloriam; nec gloriam alicui absoluta voluntate esse praeparatam, ante praevisionem meritum*; viz. it is more probable that men are *not immediately* or efficaciously elected, or with an absolute will to the Glory; and that Glory is not prepared for someone with an absolute will, before the foreknowledge of merits.

Proposition 26 complicates things. Lessius states, in fact: *Mediate tamen aliquis potest dici electus ad gloriam ante praevisionem meritum, quia electus ad gratiam cum qua Deus praescit illum venturum ad gloriam*; however, it is possible to state that a person was elected to the Glory before the prevision of merits in a conditioned way (*mediate*), for he had been elected to Grace by means of which God foreknows who is going to reach the Glory, and thus eternal life. These two almost simultaneous moments in the predestination act are key to understanding Lessius’ thought.

Let us shed some light on these apparently irreconcilable elements. Two major considerations emerge here: firstly, in the *Thirty-four Propositions*, sent by Lessius to Bellarmino, Lessius did not use any of the expressions *post merita praevisa* or *ex meritis praevisis*; the use of the prepositions *post* or *ex* could, in effect, change the meaning of the sentence and lead to problematic consequences. Both expressions refer to an election that happens after the prevision of merits: *ex* could be included in *post*, but it can also be considered as the bearer of a causal sense. The text is instead limited to the defence that the election to Grace happened before the prevision of man's merits, and that those who would be saved were predestined to receive God's Grace *ab aeterno* (before the Creation), and *ex sola Dei voluntate* (due to God's mere will); but also that it is more probable that man was not immediately (*immediate*, thus only due to God's will) and efficaciously predestined to the Glory and final salvation, before the divine foreknowledge of man's merits; thus implying that election to the celestial Glory is given *after* the prevision of merits. However, as we have seen, in the very same *Thirty-four Propositions*, Lessius also defined the efficacious election to the Glory as the "immediate" preparation to the Glory, which seems in stark contrast with his other statement.

Secondly, the main question here is how we can explain the apparent inconsistency in Lessius' doctrine. Aforementioned proposition 26 allows us to shed some light on the matter. As already mentioned, Lessius, quite surprisingly, and apparently in contrast to his own doctrine, writes in this proposition that it is even possible to state that some men are elected to the Glory and final salvation *before* the prevision of merits, due to the fact that they had been previously elected to Grace (which happens *ante merita praevisa*, due to God's absolute will). Nonetheless, at the same time, such an election to the Glory is subject to some conditions, namely God's prevision of man's meritorious acts. In fact God, through His Grace, foreknows the persons who will reach the Glory, and thus final salvation and eternal life, immediately after predestining them to Grace through his sovereign, thus not conditioned, will. In other words – this is the keystone of Lessius' logic – Grace functions as a sort of lens through which God foreknows who will be saved on the basis of merits (*ex meritis praevisis*).

The key to understanding Lessius' doctrine is, therefore, the role of the divine foreknowledge of man's meritorious acts and of their relationship with God's Grace. It is my impression that Lessius tries to safeguard God's sovereign will, by explaining in depth the coexistence and consistency of God's absolute will (in providing His Grace to man before the prevision of merits) and the fact that He took into account his foreknowledge of man's actions in the process of salvation. In these two almost simultaneous moments of the divine predestination act (an issue to which we will return again), God's Grace is the channel

through which God immediately foresees the persons who will reach final salvation; and due to this foreknowledge, He grants them Glory and eternal life.

Lessius' doctrine becomes clearer in the *Six Propositions*, summarising his *Thirty-four Propositions*, where he explicitly uses the expression *ex meritis praevisis*:

Nos docemus homines non esse immediate et absoluta voluntate destinatos ad gloriam ante omnem praevisionem meritorum, quia hoc aperte docent omnes fere patres praeter Augustinum qui obscurius loquitur [Lessius often highlighted this point as a sort of justification], quem tamen puto non dissentire: omnes tamen praedestinos dicimus immediate esse electos ad gratiam per quam Deus sciebat illos perventuros ad gloriam, et consequenter seu mediate esse electos ad gloriam. Unde praedestinatio quidem non est ex praevisis meritis, quia est electio ad gratiam ad quam nemo eligitur ob sua merita, sed electio ad gloriam est ex praevisis meritis, quia Deus ab aeterno praeparavit gloriam iis quos praevidebat sua gratia cum auxilio ipsius bene usuros.²³

With a view to achieving a deeper understanding of the issue, it is important to see how Lessius clearly distinguished, in the *Six Propositions*, between the two aspects of the divine predestination act; a distinction that was not entirely clear from the *Thirty-four Propositions*, but emerged with more detail in the *Six Propositions*: firstly, God's predestination of man to Grace (*electio ad Gratiam*) and secondly, the predestination to eternal Glory (*electio ad Gloriam*). Lessius postulates here very clearly that on the one hand men are "immediately," viz. on the basis of God's sovereign will, and not due to any divine foreknowledge of their merits, predestined to receive Grace (*immediate esse electos ad gratiam*). Moreover, in the act of predestinating or electing some men, God also immediately foresees whether these men will cooperate with His Grace (accepting that man's cooperation is necessary for making Grace efficacious), and thus whether they will be able to contribute to their eternal salvation. In this case, these people are predestined to receive heavenly Glory, and they are granted so on the basis of their foreseen merits. In other words, they are not predestined "immediately" to the Glory, but "by means" of their own merits which God foresees (*mediate esse electos ad gloriam [...] ex praevisis meritis*). We might wonder whether Lessius used the expression *ex praevisis meritis* as a synonym of *post merita praevisa*. Lessius even takes distance from the view that men are predestined to the Glory, *ante praevisa merita*, before God's foreknowledge of their merits. It should not be a surprise that Lessius' views in this regard would eventually create problems, since they suggest that God is deprived of His sovereign decision-making power, but is instead dependent on man's actions. This is the core of the problem: the role of the prevision of merits *per se*. However, Lessius argued that his views are in complete accordance with the

²³ Proposition no. 5, *Six Propositions*, in Le Bachelet, *Bellarmin avant son Cardinalat*, 194–198.

patristic tradition, including Augustine, who nevertheless on these matters – Lessius writes – *obscurius loquitur*.

We can conclude that it is only in the *Six Propositions* that Lessius explicitly added the *ex meritis praevisis* doctrine. If we accept that this expression implies causality, the crucial question is whether Lessius always intended to express this causality or not, since in the *Thirty-four Propositions* he was more interested in simply contrasting the idea of predestination before the prevision of merits. We were not able to find, in the *Thirty-four Propositions*, the expression *ex praevisis meritis*, nor *post praevisa merita*, but only the idea that God's predestination of man to the Glory could not be *ante merita praevisa*, for preserving the value of human free will (with the important addition of the Scholastic distinctions of the two almost simultaneous moments in God's predestination act, when the election to Grace *ante merita praevisa* almost blends with the election to the Glory, subsequent to the divine foreknowledge of human deeds). Hence, it seems that it is in the *Six Propositions* that Lessius first used the expression *ex praevisis meritis* (and he will continue to do so in later writings, as we will see). The fact that the Jesuit – a theologian well-versed in Latin – did not notice the possible implications of his choice of words leads us to think that, probably, *post* and *ex* were interchangeable for him; or, even more likely, that the expression *ex meritis praevisis* was employed to make the absolute value of the prevision of merits, which had to be considered the reason for God's election to the Glory, even more clear to the reader. The debate around this still continues.

I came to the conclusion that thinking and re-thinking on predestination, and especially passing from the *Thirty-four* to the *Six Propositions*, Lessius decided to specifically prioritize the role of God's foreknowledge of meritorious acts in the salvation process, and tried to preserve God's sovereignty through the fine Scholastic distinction between the two moments of the divine predestination act, as has already been discussed.

Lessius' doctrine of predestination *ex meritis praevisis* strongly contrasts with the ideas of predetermined Grace and physical predetermination, which were widely propounded at that time. In other words, the Jesuit maintained that God predestined man to the Glory after foreseeing their merits or good deeds with the aim of preserving human freedom. In fact, man's choice of performing meritorious acts is representative of his consent to the Grace received in the temporal order, and to which God had predestined him on the basis of his sovereign will. Though, at the same time as this free predestination, God immediately foresees man's merits.

In his judgement of the *Six Propositions*, Bellarmino stated that Lessius' doctrine was not erroneous or liable to be judged heretic. He nevertheless believed that Lessius' proposition concerning the predestination to the Glory was "false," as well as being novel. Bellarmino had indeed himself always

taught that God predestined man to the Glory before His foreknowledge of human deeds, due to His absolute sovereign will.

Propositio de electione ad gloriam ex praevisione meritorum, mihi videtur falsa, et satis nova [...]; hoc enim compositum duarum propositionum conflatum ex sententia S. Augustini, et ex sententia Pighii, non est nullius auctoris, quod sciam.²⁴

Nonetheless, Bellarmino defined the matter as irrelevant because it did not pertain to Faith. Commenting on Lessius' propositions in matters of Grace and Glory, he noted:

Placent propositiones: signatae transversa lineola indicant praedestinationem prius ferri in media, quam in finem. Contrarium puto verius, sed non est quaestio fidei.²⁵

In any case, Lessius' doctrine of the election to the Glory seems to be greatly overlooked by Bellarmino in the 1580s, as we have seen. In fact, discussing the root of the quarrel, Lessius and Bellarmino focused on another aspect instead. Lessius claimed that the issue was all about the question of whether God did or did not provide everyone with sufficient aid:

Ex autem quaestione fere tota pendet ex quaestione de auxilio sufficienti, quod negant omnibus dari ex parte Dei, et de gratia efficaci, quam longe aliam ponunt atque nos ponimus.²⁶

And most importantly here, in his first letter to Bellarmino regarding the dispute, Lessius recalled that Bellarmino once followed the Faculty theologians' doctrine, at the time of his residency in Leuven:

Memini enim R. V. mihi aliquando Romae dixisse se in materia de praedestinatione [including doctrines of election to both Grace and Glory, *auxilium sufficiens*, and efficacious Grace] olim secutam esse Lovaniensium sententiam, quam modo ut haereticam improbaret.²⁷

24 Bellarmino's judgement on Lessius' Six Propositions, in Le Bachelet, *Auctarium*, 199. Albertus Pighius (1490–1542), mentioned by Bellarmino in this passage, was a Dutch theologian and astronomer, educated in Leuven under the guidance of Adrian of Utrecht, among others. His doctrine of justification, which was considered to be excessively open to Protestants, was rejected during the Council of Trent.

25 The note was written by Bellarmino on the *verso* of a letter sent by Lessius on May 15, 1587. On Bellarmino's judgement of the Leuven theologians' censure and Lessius' response see *Bellarmini Censurae in sententias Lovanio missas* in ACDF, SO, St.St. e 7–c, *Controversia inter doctores Lovanienses et Patres Societatis Jesu tempore Xyxti V*, 34r–35r, and ARSI, Fl. Belg. 72, I, *De controversia Lovaniensi nuper exorta inter facultatem theologicam, et quendam professorem Societatis Jesu. Summa totius controversiae*, 119r–120r.

26 Lessius to Bellarmino, May 29, 1587, in Le Bachelet, *Bellarmin avant son Cardinalat*, 148.

27 *Ibid.*

In November 1587, Bellarmino responded to such a statement, by explaining that at the beginning of his teaching in Leuven, he followed that doctrine only in one respect (“solum in una questione cum Lovaniensibus convenisse cum doceret de praedestinatione, videlicet an sufficiens auxilium omnibus daretur”), namely the doctrine of *auxilium sufficiens*:

sed in illa etiam quaestione ab eis [the Leuven theologians] recessisse, cum adhuc esset Lovanii [...] et postea de gratia, aperte docuit [Bellarmino referred to himself in the third person, for he suggested to Lessius what to write about him in his *Apologia*] longissima quaestione, auxilium sufficiens omnibus dari pro loco, et tempore; et gratiam efficacem non esse determinationem aliquam voluntatis a Deo immissam, sed vocationem prout apti praevidebantur ad sequendum, qui vocabantur; et breviter articulos omnes Michaelis a Pio V, damnatos, sine nomine auctoris, in eadem schola publice refutavit.²⁸

Bellarmino, we learn, later took his distance from the Faculty theologians' doctrine over *auxilium sufficiens*, even before he moved from Leuven to Rome, and from then on always taught that such divine aid was offered to every man. The final statement is particularly interesting, as it reveals an important aspect of the controversy, and a potential reason for Bellarmino's support: the role of Michael Baius, whom Bellarmino had strongly opposed.

The question should now be whether Bellarmino believed that the Faculty theologians' doctrine was the same as Baius'. It must be highlighted that even within the Faculty, there was disagreement between Baius and other theologians. At the beginning of his teaching in Leuven, Bellarmino was close to the theological sensibility of the theologians of the Faculty; while at the same time, he criticized Baius, precisely because the official position of the Faculty did not coincide with Baius'.

It was rather Lessius who attracted Bellarmino's interest on Baius in 1587–88, claiming that he was behind the attack on him.²⁹ Since 1585, Nuncio Giovanni Bonomi had conferred to the Holy See that it was commonly believed that Baius kept professing the condemned propositions, and that the actions taken against Baianism until then had been fruitless.³⁰ The suspicion that Baius kept promoting his doctrine was further boosted by Lessius, Bellarmino, and the

²⁸ Bellarmino to Lessius, end of November 1587, in Le Bachelet, *Bellarmin avant son Cardinalat*, 172–175, here 174–175.

²⁹ See, for example, Lessius to Bellarmine, May 29, 1587, in Le Bachelet, *Bellarmin avant son cardinalat*, 147–153.

³⁰ Giovanni Bonomi to Girolamo Rusticucci (Sixtus V's Secretary of State) in Ludwig Von Pastor, *Storia dei Papi dalla fine del Medio Evo*, vol. 10, *Storia dei Papi nel periodo della Riforma e Restaurazione cattolica, Sisto V, Urbano VII, Gregorio XIV e Innocenzo IX, 1585–1591* (Rome: Desclée & Cie, 1955), 140.

Bishop of Middelburg Jan van Strijen (1576–1594), who has been described as the strongest supporter of the Jesuits during the dispute.³¹

Most probably, Bellarmino's support must also be read as anti-Baianist, if it is true that he believed that the Faculty theologians' teaching was influenced by Baius' doctrine. To explore the matter more deeply, it is worth understanding Bellarmino's support for Lessius during the Leuven controversies. Lessius sent Bellarmino propositions extrapolated from Jacobus Jansonius' doctrine (1547–1625; Baius' spiritual son), as allegedly representative of the Faculty's.³² Firstly, Bellarmino sent the Holy See a document titled *Quid a Sancta Sede Apostolica desideretur*, in which he asked for some judgement over the dispute, because since the Faculty theologians' censorship, Lessius' doctrine (Bellarmino prudently referred to an anonymous Jesuit professor) had been branded erroneous, increasing the sense of scandal among Catholics and satisfaction among Protestants. However, Lessius' doctrine was taught in many schools and defended by orthodox authors.³³

In his comment on Jansonius' doctrine, Bellarmino focused especially on the propositions that, in his view, seemed somehow to nullify free will, and especially the idea that man, left without divine help, does sin necessarily, but nonetheless freely, because willingly: “[...] quae sententia videtur omnino haeretica.”³⁴ Such an assertion seemed heretical to him.

Furthermore, Bellarmino also explained another substantial and controversial element at the basis of the quarrel; namely the question as to whether God provided every person with the necessary aid (*auxilium sufficiens*), or not. The Faculty theologians maintained that human beings needed divine help to determine their own will, and consequently to be able to act properly in the moral sphere; the aid of Grace being necessary to each good action. However, to be sufficient, such help also had to be efficacious, to the extent that no aid could be considered sufficient if it was not efficacious. As a consequence, Bellarmino explained, paraphrasing the Faculty's teaching, not every man could aspire to salvation because some of them had not received the efficacious (and therefore

³¹ Alfred Poncelet, *Histoire de la Compagnie de Jésus dans les anciens Pays-Bas. Établissement de la Compagnie de Jésus en Belgique et ses développements jusqu'à la fin du règne d'Albert et d'Isabelle*, vol. 2 (Brussels: Marcel Hayez, 1927), 134.

³² *Propositions extraites de l'enseignement oral de Jacques Janson et envoyées à Rome par Lessius*, in Le Bachelet, *Bellarmin avant son Cardinalat*, 158–160. On Jansonius see Lucien Ceysens, “Jacques Jansonius (1547–1625) et l'Augustinisme à Leuven,” in *L'augustinisme*, 283–298.

³³ ARSI, Fl. Belg. 72, I, 120r–122v.

³⁴ ACDF, *Bellarmini Censurae*, 34 v.

not sufficient) *auxilium* to be saved. Only the efficacious *auxilium* could actively determine human will and thus allow men to perform meritorious acts.

On the contrary, Lessius maintained that divine Grace, which was necessary to do good works, did not actively predetermine man's will, but only prepared it through internal enlightenment and inspiration, safeguarding and leading it in a collaborative process. The *auxilium sufficiens*, clearly distinct from the efficacious Grace propounded by Lessius, needed in fact to be "activated" by man's positive answer to God. The major distinction also noted by Bellarmino was that according to Lessius, each person received the *auxilium sufficiens*, and after that could freely intervene according to his or her will, by accepting or refusing it, and consequently making it efficacious or not.

This passage is particularly relevant not only in the context of the Leuven controversies, but also for the evolution of the doctrine of the *auxilium sufficiens*. In fact, teaching that only some persons had received sufficient (and thus efficacious) aid, as was the case for the Faculty's theologians, could lead to important consequences, especially the idea that Christ did not die for everybody; an assertion that would later be condemned with the bull *Cum Occasione*, in 1653, and would have been identified with a proposition included in Jansenius' *Augustinus*.

Bellarmino, to go back to his comment on Jansonius' teaching, did not clearly flag Jansonius' doctrine as being derivative of Baius'. However, he highlighted that Jansonius was close to him, and once supported his doctrine. He concluded: "Utinam etiam modo non sit",³⁵ in other words, God forbid that Jansonius still adhered to Baius' doctrine.

Whether Jansonius' doctrine was influenced by Baius or otherwise is not of primary concern here; but it is extremely interesting for this study that Bellarmino produced a censure that implicitly raised suspicions over Baius' doctrine being influential for the Faculty's theologians. This notion helps us to understand why Bellarmino overlooked Lessius' predestination theory, although personally finding it to be false. If Bellarmino, a strong opponent of Baius, saw the shadow of the condemned doctrine in the Faculty's teaching, then he needed to be an advocate of Lessius' doctrine as a means of contending it. Besides, Bellarmino proved himself capable of prioritizing the protection of the Order over his personal views. He would later have the same approach defending Molina, during the *De Auxiliis* controversy.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 35r.

3 Inspiration of the Scriptures: The disputes on single words' inspiration and the role of *industria humana* (1587-88)

Further disagreements emerged during the Leuven Controversies between the two Jesuits, namely a dispute concerning the Inspiration of the Scripture. This quarrel is particularly important for understanding Lessius' theories on the role of human agency in the whole history of salvation and divine Revelation.³⁶ In this case, in 1587 Bellarmino already saw in Lessius' doctrine an insuperable problem, and urged him to correct the related assertions. Lessius' theological reflection over the Scripture has to be considered within the context of early modern controversies over the Bible, which had a seminal role in the confessionalisation process, especially in counter-Reformation attacks, but also in the Catholic process of self-definition, as demonstrated by quarrels within different schools, such as Thomist-Bañezian or Augustinian. Once again, within the Society of Jesus, different conflicting schools were present. In this sense, Jesuit disputes over the Scriptures represent an important element in the process of Jesuit self-definition. For preserving human agency in divine Revelation, Lessius strongly opposed the doctrine of verbal inspiration, of which Bañez (Molina's opponent in the dispute *De Auxiliis*) was an important propagator.³⁷

Lessius' inspiration theory is composed of three major assumptions, which are as follows:³⁸ firstly, for generating Scriptures, it is not indispensable for every single word to be inspired in the authors by the Holy Spirit; secondly, it is unnecessary that entire assertions be considered as having been revealed by the Holy Spirit as new knowledge, if the authors knew them through natural reason or experience (possibly, but not indispensably, with the aid of the Spirit); finally, a text composed by an author employing merely his *industria* (work, agency) can become Scripture, through the Holy Spirit's subsequent confirmation. Lessius was thinking of the historical book of 2 *Maccabees*.

³⁶ I will not go into detail on this but will provide a general overview, as this topic will be the subject of a further study which is currently in its preparatory phase.

³⁷ Antonio-Maria Artola, "Fuentes para el estudio de la doctrina lessiana sobre la inspiración," *Scriptorium Victorienense* 20 (1973): 5–31. Artola wrote essays on this matter; for example "El sistema inspiracionista de Leonardo Lessio S. I.," *Archivo Teológico Granadino* 37 (1974): 5–44.

³⁸ Gerhard Schneemann, *Controversiarum de divinae gratiae liberique arbitrii concordia. Initia et progressus* (Freiburg: Herder, 1881), 374–375. The major documents related to the dispute *de auxiliis* and on the inspiration of the Scripture were published in volumes composed by Dominican and Jesuit authors. See Serry, *Historiae congregationum de auxiliis* and Meyer, *Historiae controversiarum de divinae gratiae auxiliis*.

Natural lumen and experience become, thus, valuable sources of knowledge, even in the Revelation; this attitude raises the authors of Biblical books from the condition of simple receptacles of revealed divine knowledge, to a positive state, where they could employ their intellectual abilities and natural gifts for composing the books, and at the same time be enlightened by God's supernatural help or revelations. A clear distinction between prophetic books, composed through divine dictation, and the books of the new Testament, is thus made. According to Lessius, verbal inspiration simply did not take into account the multiplicity of styles and the variety of the biblical canon, especially in the New Testament.³⁹

Bellarmino totally disagreed that single words were not required to be inspired, contending that simple assistance by the Holy Spirit was sufficient.⁴⁰ That was the very point distinguishing the Scripture from conciliar decrees. However, Bellarmino agreed that the first two assertions could be defended on the basis of a distinction between two typologies of God's inspiration (which was also Lessius' explanation): on the one hand, the inspiration which reveals knowledge by means of a new revelation, as in the case of prophets; and on the other hand, the Holy Ghost's inspiration which spurred on other authors, such as the evangelists, to write down what they saw or knew in other ways. Lessius was quite astonished by Bellarmino's comment, and in a letter dated 1588, he reminded his former teacher that this was exactly the doctrine he explained in his *Apologia*, during the Leuven controversies.⁴¹

In any case, Bellarmino was especially concerned by the third proposition, and specifically the role of human *industria*. For him, such an assertion needed to be indicated at the least *de possibili*, and not *de facto*.⁴² Once more, Lessius' positive anthropology influenced his theological and intellectual reflections, as was the case with his view on human contribution in the process of salvation, and would also be the case with his view on moral economy, especially his radical innovations in terms of contracts.⁴³

³⁹ Attention to the philological aspect of Holy Writ was typical of humanism.

⁴⁰ *Bellarmino to Lessius*, end of November 1587, in Le Bachelet, *Bellarmino avant son Cardinalat*, 172–175.

⁴¹ *Lessius to Bellarmino*, January 26, 1588, in *ibid.*, 179–181; *Lessius to Bellarmino*, April 26, 1588, in *ibid.*, 186–191.

⁴² Lessius did correct his proposition. See *Lessius to Bellarmino*, January 26, 1588, in *ibid.*, 179–181.

⁴³ On Lessius' moral economy, see Wim Decock's studies, e. g. "In Defense of Commercial Capitalism: Lessius, Partnerships and the Contractus Trinus," *Max-Planck – Institute for Legal History Research Paper Series* 1, no. 4 (2012): 1–36; "Leonardus Lessius (1554–1623) y el valor normativo de usus y consuetudo mercatorum para la resolución de algunos casos de conciencia

Compelled by Bellarmino, the Flemish Jesuit modified his propositions *de Scriptura* several times, until reluctantly producing a censored version of his doctrine.⁴⁴

4 After the congregation *De Auxiliis Divinae Gratiae*: The publication of Lessius' *De Gratia Efficaci* (1609) and Bellarmino's recantation (1610-13)

As we have seen, during the 1580s Bellarmino had two concerns: compelling Lessius to correct the third assertion concerning the inspiration of the Scripture, which was far more open to human agency at the expense of God's action, and supporting Lessius' doctrine of Grace (although not completely agreeing with it) as a means of opposing the Faculty theologians' teaching. We can hypothesise that Bellarmino, anxious (rightly or wrongly) for a possible return of Baius' doctrine, chose what he considered to be the lesser sin: Lessius' doctrine. In the context of the aforementioned latent tensions between the Jesuit college and the Faculty theologians, defending Lessius' doctrine also appeared to be a reasonable choice in terms of *esprit de corps*.

en torno de la compra de papeles de comercio," in *Entre hecho y derecho: tener, poseer, usar en perspectiva histórica*, ed. E. Conte and M. Madero (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Manantial, 2010), 75–94; "At the Crossroads of Law and Morality: Lessius on Precontractual Duties to Inform about Future Market Conditions," in *Crossing Legal Cultures*, ed. L. Beck Varela et al. (München: Meidenbauer, 2009), 243–258. For moral economy and Jesuit anthropology, see Wim Decock, "Jesuit freedom of contract," *Tijdschrift voor Rechtsgeschiedenis* 77 (2009): 423–458.

44 In 1870, on the occasion of the Vatican Council I, Lessius' inspiration doctrine was involved in the condemnation of Daniel Haneberg's (Bishop of Speyer) theories. It was believed that such a condemnation included Lessius' doctrine, as Haneberg was largely influenced by Lessius. In a report, Vincent Gasser showed however how Lessius' and Haneberg's doctrines were actually very different. But this was a misleading conclusion, as it relied on the final edition of Lessius' third proposition, which had been corrected to satisfy Bellarmino's requests. This version did not mention the contested role of human agency (*humana industria*), whilst leaving room for the act of the Holy Ghost. However, from his private correspondence with Bellarmino, it is clear that Lessius did not agree with the imposed corrections. On Lessius' alleged recantation see Henri Holstein, "Lessius a-t-il été condamné au Concile du Vatican?," *Recherches de science religieuse* 40, no. 2 (1961): 219–226. Vincent Gasser (1809–1879) was Archbishop of Brixen. See his "Relatio de emendationibus cap. II schematis const. de fide catholica," in *Acta et decreta sacrosancti oecumenici Concilii Vaticani: cum perulitis aliis documentis ad concilium ejusque historiam spectantibus*, ed. G. Schneeman and Th. Ganderath, *Collectio Lacensis* 7 (Freiburg: Herder, 1892), 139–141.

Understanding why in the 1610s Bellarmino withdrew his support for Lessius is of the utmost interest (but nonetheless has not been properly investigated yet) for understanding disputes within the Society of Jesus, which are particularly relevant in order to comprehend a significant part of early modern Catholic theological self-definition. In fact, as is made evident by the case-study explored in this article, intra-Jesuit controversies show the Jesuit General and Bellarmino's (working closely with the General) double aim: firstly, an attempt to defend the Order from external attacks (as in the Leuven disputes and the *De Auxiliis* controversy); and secondly, their efforts to instil in the Order's theologians a sense of doctrinal unity (with a tendency towards Thomism, but with a certain elasticity of views), during a period when theological quarrels were at the basis of confessional divisions and self-definition. In this respect, the role of the Jesuit system of internal censures and official decrees needs to be explored as a remarkable instrument for shaping the intellectual production of Jesuit theologians, regulating Jesuit orthodoxy, and understanding voices of dissent not only within Catholicism, but even within the same religious order.⁴⁵

The Jesuits' central, internal censure system (which did not always function as desired, especially with regards to difficulties in controlling the Provinces) is just the right starting point for understanding Bellarmino's initial reaction after the publication of Lessius' *De Gratia Efficaci* (plus *De praedestinatione et reprobatione angelorum et hominum* and *de praedestinatione Christi*), which was published by Lessius to systematically present his theology of Grace; and, crucially, was printed without General Acquaviva's permission, and therefore without passing through the central censure system. The latter was established by the *Constitutiones* as a central structure of consultants with advisory capacity, who analysed all manner of texts (not only theological treatises) and responded directly to the General. Furthermore, the system also evaluated opinions expressed orally during preaching, in *disputationes*, and during teaching at the Jesuit colleges.⁴⁶ In 1608, Lessius' treatise received the approval of the Jesuit Belgian Provincial François Fléron,⁴⁷ who discussed the possibility of publishing it with the General; however, Acquaviva replied that the time was not ripe.⁴⁸ Why indeed was it published, then?

⁴⁵ On the Jesuit censure system, see Ugo Baldini, "Una fonte poco utilizzata per la storia intellettuale: le 'censurae librorum' e 'opinionum' nell'antica Compagnia di Gesù," *Annali dell'Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento* 11 (1985): 19–50.

⁴⁶ ARSI, *Censurae opinionum*.

⁴⁷ Le Bachelet, *Prédestination*, vol. 1, 99. See also Acquaviva to Fléron, August 21, 1610, in *ibid.*, 105. After the end of the *De Auxiliis*, the General forbade publication of new books on the matter (following the pope's imposition of silence) without sending the texts to Rome first for an accurate censure.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 127.

Lessius fell into the censure system several times. The censure of his moral theology treatise *De Iustitia et Iure* was particularly harsh; it was published after revision in 1605, and included Lessius' innovative moral economy theories, and was believed to propose laxist opinions.⁴⁹ General Acquaviva himself addressed a letter to Lessius, encouraging him to amend the treatise before publishing it, and urged him to follow stricter regulations, for the times in which they lived required prudence:⁵⁰ a clear reference to the accusations of laxism addressed to the Society, in a period when rigorist opinions were gaining ground. Lessius was aware of the papal prohibition of publishing new works dealing with the theology of Grace after the *De Auxiliis* controversy, when the pope had imposed silence on the parties. However, besides the fact that memories of the “uncomfortable” past experiences with the Jesuit censure system were probably still fresh in Lessius' mind, he also most likely felt safe to publish his treatise due to the fact that Luis de Molina's theology (which Lessius considered to be very close to his own) had not been condemned in the *De Auxiliis* dispute.⁵¹

The “silent” role of Molina's doctrine in the quarrel with Lessius, which actually developed after his death, is of the utmost relevance for understanding Bellarmino and Acquaviva's preoccupation. *In tempore non suspecto* (in 1590, thus after receiving Bellarmino's approval of his doctrine), Lessius already expressed his satisfaction of the publication of Molina's masterpiece *Concordia* in a letter to Bellarmino, considering it as proof of the orthodoxy of his own doctrine; meaning that Lessius considered his theology to be the same as Molina's, notwithstanding the fact that Molina explicitly denied causality in God's prevision of merits.⁵² Again, it is not entirely clear whether Lessius used the preposition *ex* as a simple synonym for *post*.

49 ARSI, *Censurae*, 654, III (1603–1631), 1r–49v. The censure is dated December 22, 1603, *Collegio Romano*; it is signed by Jean Lorin, Cristóvão Gil, Juan de Salas, and Antonio Maria Menuzio. The documentation also included positive reviews, coming from the Flemish world, where Lessius' theories were far more appreciated.

50 Acquaviva to Lessius, January 15, 1604, ARSI, Fl. Belg. 1, II, 909 v.

51 On censures of Lessius' moral theology see, for example, Stefania Tutino, *Shadows of Doubt. Language and Truth in Post-Reformation Catholic Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 179–189. On Lessius' moral theology, and especially moral economy, see works by Toon Van Houdt and Wim Decock, for example Toon Van Houdt, “Tradition and renewal in late scholastic economic thought: the case of Leonardus Lessius (1554–1623),” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 28, no. 1 (1998): 51–73 and Wim Decock, “L'usure face au marché: Lessius (1554–1623) et l'escompte des lettres obligataires,” in *Le droit, les affaires et l'argent. Célébration du bicentenaire du code de commerce* (Dijon: Université de Bourgogne, 2008), 221–238.

52 Lessius to Bellarmino, July 12, 1590, in Le Bachelet, *Bellarmino avant son Cardinalat*, 271. See also Molina, *Concordia*, 350.

Molina emphasized that God, taking into consideration His prescience of man's response to His invitation, predestined human beings *per propria merita* (through one's merits). This did not coincide properly with *ex* or *post* prevision of merits, which I mentioned earlier, but properly expressed the idea of *scientia media* (middle knowledge). These expressions, and especially the possible causality included in the theory *ex meritis praevisis*, were considered unacceptable by Molina, who postulated the infallibility of Grace through the infallible divine prevision of human consent to God, depending on the divine ordination and his middle knowledge, through which He knew the right circumstances for human beings to consent to His Grace. Lessius, although not mentioning the "middle knowledge" in the *Propositions* he had composed during the Leuven Controversies, employed the expression *scientia media* in his *De Gratia Efficaci*, which was published after Molina's *Concordia*. This treatise written by Molina caused quite the reaction among the Dominicans, and the subsequent summoning of the Congregation *De Auxiliis* by the pope in 1598. During the dispute, which finally ended in 1607, Bellarmino defended Molina and the Society of Jesus.

After the publication of Lessius' *De Gratia Efficaci* in 1609 (thus, only two years after the end of the *de Auxiliis*), Acquaviva's anxiety was understandable, as Lessius' doctrine could appear as a renewed Jesuit attack on the Dominicans' doctrine, contained in the *De Auxiliis*, notwithstanding the papal imposition of silence on the matter; and a provocation for the Leuven theologians, after the end of the Leuven controversies in 1580s-1590s. Lessius tried to minimize this, explaining that his treatise did not properly address the problem of *auxilia*, but rather predestination and the order of divine decrees in matters of salvation; for that reason, according to Lessius, it did not fall under the pope's prohibition, and Lessius therefore did not believe that the pamphlet needed to be revised in Rome.⁵³

Lessius' self-defense focused on another important point: twenty-three years earlier, the same doctrine described in the *De Gratia Efficaci* was defended by Bellarmino himself. The pope declared his teaching as safe and stated that it was not possible to change it without any damage for him and the Society, due to the fact that such a doctrine had been supported by the Order during the Leuven disputes in the 1580s:

Ut omittam non potuisse nos mutare sententiam sine damno famae propter disputationes quas habuerimus cum DD. Lovaniensibus.⁵⁴

⁵³ Lessius to Acquaviva, September 1610, in Le Bachelet, *Prédestination*, vol. 1, 131.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Lessius claimed that he considered it so safe that he did not even believe it was necessary to send the pamphlet on predestination to Rome, for Acquaviva's censure; he finally asserted that his doctrine coincided with Molina's, and was taught in Jesuit schools; a statement Bellarmino had also shared in the 1580s.⁵⁵ Lessius also asked for reviews by Spanish Jesuits, who commended on his book,⁵⁶ as expected. Spanish Jesuits, close to Early Modern Scholasticism and Christian Humanism, were in fact more aligned with Lessius' doctrine, which expressed an optimistic approach to man's potential in both Grace and moral theologies.

The events of the *De Auxiliis* certainly had a strong influence on Bellarmino's recantation. As anticipated above, the Congregation was summoned by the pope for resolving a dispute surrounding the theology of Grace born among the Jesuits and Dominicans; respectively between Luis de Molina and Domingo Bañez. Molina fostered a doctrine grounded in the idea of *scientia media* and the election to the Glory *per merita*, as we have seen. Bañez, on the other hand, promoted the physical predetermination doctrine.

Beyond the details of the *De Auxiliis* (which was also characterized by Spanish political pressure: the monarchy and the Spanish Inquisition interpreted the summoning of the Congregation to Rome for resolving a "Spanish" dispute as an abuse of power),⁵⁷ three major points are of interest for this study: firstly, the controversy was not really solved, besides there being an imposition of silence. This lack of resolution allowed both parties to maintain that none of their doctrines were in fact heterodox, and therefore they could be taught. Secondly, it was Bellarmino who defended Molina and the Society of Jesus during the dispute, and it was he who suggested that the pope impose silence on the parties, in order to avoid any further damage to the Church.⁵⁸ Bellarmino's diplomacy emerges as strategically safeguarding both the unity of the Catholic Church and his own Order. Looking at the Leuven controversies, the *De Auxiliis*, and the consequences of such disputes on the Jesuit "politics" of Grace, the element of self-protection often emerges, and allows for a better understanding both of Bellarmino's and the Faculty theologians' defensive attitudes. Thirdly, the *De Auxiliis* made the vertices of the Society face an internal problem: the variety of doctrines taught by the Jesuits. Some of these were most probably considered out of line; Lessius' was certainly.

55 ARSI, Fl. Belg. 72, I, 120r–122v.

56 *Lessius to Acquaviva*, September 1610, in Le Bachelet, *Prédestination*, vol. 1, 131.

57 See, for example, Broggio, *La teologia*, 83–129.

58 APUG, *Tromp*, Bellarmino, 1, 204.

After the publication of the *De Gratia Efficaci*, a new dispute within the Society unavoidably emerged, involving Lessius, Bellarmino, Acquaviva, and other Jesuit theologians.⁵⁹ It eventually ended with the promulgation of Acquaviva's *Decree on the Efficacious Grace* (1613), which was composed with Bellarmino's support and established a model for Jesuit orthodox doctrines over Grace. Acquaviva's aversion to Lessius' *De Gratia Efficaci*, and the re-definition of the Jesuit official, orthodox doctrine through the *Decree*, certainly caused Bellarmino's recantation with regard to Lessius' theology.

The first step to consider is Bellarmino's recantation, which made clear that times had changed. It is possible that Bellarmino realised that Lessius' subtle distinction between the two previously discussed aspects of God's predestination was dangerous only after the long and intense debates of the *De Auxiliis*. General Acquaviva, who ordered Bellarmino to closely investigate the matter, sent several concerned letters to Lessius, accusing him of perpetuating an incorrect doctrine, which was distant from Augustine's, Aquinas', and also from many of his Jesuit peers' theologies, such as Bellarmino and Suarez. Acquaviva sought the objective of doctrinal unity, yearned for since Ignatius' time.⁶⁰ A major concern was that Lessius taught that God provided men with only one Grace, sufficient and common to mankind, and did not distinguish between Grace and *auxilium* granted by God to those men intended to be saved and those who would not be saved.⁶¹ Lessius, in effect, fostered the idea that God provided all men with the same divine help, and that only man's response made a difference. Moreover, we could add that Lessius did not take into any account Augustine's principle, which was already present in Matthew's Gospel (22, 14), that *multi* are *vocati*, but *pauci electi*.

Under attack, Lessius claimed self-defence. He claimed to believe in, and teach, Augustine's doctrine of the gratuitousness of Grace. However, he did not consider it credible that those predestined to be saved were predestined *ad Gloriam* by God's absolute will, before any prevision of the deeds. This is a major issue in Lessius' self-defence against accusations of Pelagianism, since Lessius argued that he only took into consideration the merits derived by the

⁵⁹ The documents retracing the dispute (mostly letters) have been published in Le Bachelet, *Prédestination*, 2 vols.

⁶⁰ See *Monumenta ignatiana ex autographi vel ex antiquioribus exemplis collecta. Serie tertia. Sancti Ignatii de Loyola Constitutiones Societatis Iesu*, vol. 2 (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societas Jesu, 1936), 356; see also *Acquaviva to Lessius*, January 7, 1612, in ARSI, Fl. Belg., 3, 70–71.

⁶¹ *Acquaviva to Lessius*, January 7, 1612, in *ibid.*; *Acquaviva to Lessius*, October 23, 1610 in ARSI, Fl. Belg., 1, II, 1176.

action of God's Grace (considering good deeds as God's gifts), rather than free will's natural merits, which were acknowledged by Pelagius.⁶²

Lessius, when criticised by Bellarmino, denied ever having maintained that predestination only depended on the prevision of good deeds; he stated that he had always taught that no man could earn his own salvation; man was only able to do good deeds thanks to the gift of God's Grace. These works were, in turn, meritorious in the economy of salvation.⁶³ Lessius denied the idea that only the doctrine of predestination before the prevision of merits (*ante merita praevisa*), fostered by Bellarmino, could preserve the gratuitousness of Grace. In fact, according to Lessius, predestination to the Glory *ex meritis praevisis* did not affect the role of Grace or its gratuitousness: God's Grace was, indeed, the necessary precondition for doing good deeds, and for being saved.

Lessius' explanations did not convince the Cardinal, who, on the contrary, maintained that it was not possible to comply with Augustine's or Aquinas' doctrines on efficacious Grace or predestination without assuming God's antecedent choice of the elected man. In fact, according to Bellarmino, Lessius' doctrine failed to consider the prominence of God's Grace and predestination *ab aeterno*.

In 1611, Acquaviva admonished Lessius, stating that the pope himself worried about the consequences of the publication of his work on the heels of Molina's *Concordia*.⁶⁴ Lessius, confident that his theological work was free from errors (as his teaching had been defined *sana doctrina* by a papal brief in 1588), continued with his self-defence undaunted, to such an extent that he wrote a private letter to the pope, asking for the replacement of a number of theologians at the *Collegio Romano*⁶⁵ who had suggested his doctrine ought to be censured.

In Lessius' works (an excellent example of probabilistic moral orientation), a pastoral concern consistently emerges, which takes into consideration devotees' practical issues, moral preoccupations, and the necessity of living in the world, resulting in an extremely positive outlook on man's ability to do good works. Almost as a natural consequence of this optimistic view on humanity, man's role

⁶² On the topic see also Xavier-Marie Le Bachelet, "Le décret d'Acquaviva sur la Grace efficace," *Recherches de science religieuse* 14, no. 1 (1924): 46–60.

⁶³ Le Bachelet, *Auctarium Bellarminianum*, 28.

⁶⁴ *Acquaviva to Lessius*, August 11, 1611 in ARSI, Fl. Belg., 3, 48.

⁶⁵ The information is provided by General Acquaviva. See *Acquaviva to Lessius* and *Franciscus Flerontinus*, October 8, 1611 in ARSI, Fl. Belg., 3, 58. Acquaviva complained about Lessius' lack of obedience in a letter addressed to him in 1612: *Acquaviva to Lessius*, January 7, 1612 in ARSI, Fl. Belg., 70–71. Six years after the publication of the *De Gratia Efficaci*, once again Lessius ignored the General, addressing a letter to the pope requiring permission to re-print his work, and highlighting its counter-Reformation stance. See APUG 540, 135r–136r. The letter (a copy) is undated but provides a time reference (i. e. six years after the publication of Lessius' treatise).

in Lessius' theology of salvation becomes essential. According to Lessius, who claimed the orthodox, anti-Protestant value of his theology, man's cooperation in the process of salvation is fundamental (i. e. his acceptance of God's invitation). However, he clearly highlighted the crucial action of God inciting men to consent as a preliminary step,⁶⁶ without the need for Grace to precede each agreement. Lessius' vision ultimately implies that God prepares the conditions necessary for his creatures to perform meritorious acts.

5 The evolution of the quarrel: Human agency to the detriment of God's Grace?

In 1610, after the publication of Lessius' *De Gratia Efficaci*, General Acquaviva stated in a letter to the Flemish provincial Fléron that Lessius' doctrine was more difficult to defend than Molina's.⁶⁷ He reiterated this point in a letter to Lessius himself, claiming that his doctrine would cause more trouble to the Society than Molina's during the *De Auxiliis* (which was a very serious charge *per se*): "Interea opto ut applicet animum serio R.V. et videat quid fieri possit, ne in hisce tricis versemur."⁶⁸ A reference to Bellarmino's preoccupation with the predestination doctrine expressed in the book came at the end of the letter. A series of censures followed.⁶⁹

The most surprising aspect of the quarrel is that four theologians at the *Collegio Romano*, tasked with commenting on Lessius' doctrine, expressed positive comments about it.⁷⁰ Censor Alessandro de Angelis even stated that rejecting Lessius' doctrine would mean falling into physical predetermination. In

⁶⁶ It is interesting to note that Lessius, as well as other theologians dealing with Grace and predestination in the same period, employed a terminology borrowed from the sensual or emotional sphere, to describe the action of God's Grace in human beings (e. g. inspire, excite, allure). Lessius often used the past participle *excitatus*, as we can read in his *Thirty-four Propositions*, in the section titled *De praedestinatione et reprobatione hominum*. The word *excitatus*, furthermore, was employed by Augustine himself to describe the action of God's Grace; such an expression has been considered as proof of the existence of free will. If there were only blind predestination, Augustine would not in fact have used this vocabulary.

⁶⁷ Acquaviva to Fléron, August 21, 1610, in Le Bachelet, *Prédestination*, vol. 1, 105.

⁶⁸ Acquaviva to Lessius, August 21, 1610, *ibid.*, 106.

⁶⁹ Some censures have been included in Le Bachelet's work. *Ibid.*, 108–125.

⁷⁰ Antonius Marsilius (1567–1663), Jean Lorin (1559–1634), Alessandro de Angelis (1542–1620: for de Angelis censure, 143), and Nicolas Godigno (?-1616). *Ibid.*, 139–143. The most conservative Jesuits were chosen for censorship activity. It is pertinent to note that Jean Lorin provided very negative comments on Lessius' *De Iustitia et Iure*, claiming that his moral theology would damage the entire Order. See ARSI, *Censurae*, 654, III (1603–1631), 3r-4v.

other words, from this study it emerges that Lessius' doctrine particularly annoyed Acquaviva and Bellarmino. The General was concerned about protecting his Order from external attacks and establishing internal doctrinal unity, and the theological authority of Bellarmino, who was one of Acquaviva's principal advisers, was not questioned. The impression is that the matter was strategically addressed by Acquaviva and Bellarmino with a political intent, rather than with a real doctrinal concern. Even Acquaviva's decree on efficacious Grace, published three years later, was a manifesto of the Society's internal "politics of Grace," rather than a doctrinal work, as we will see.

In particular, Acquaviva's critics referred to Lessius' doctrine on predestination to the Glory and efficacious Grace. In this respect, Lessius was accused of proposing a doctrine contrasting with those of Augustine, Bellarmino, Suarez, and Molina; in fact, he even seemed to reject the doctrine of *Gratia Congrua*, for not admitting that God gives more aid to the predestined ones than to the others. It appeared, in other words, that Lessius taught that God provided every human being with a common sufficient Grace, without offering anything more to those he predestined than to reprobates.⁷¹ In this sense, in the instance of a common Grace, the only remaining variable was human consent. It was thus man's free decision to welcome God's inspiration to "activate" the divine Grace, which would save him or her. Those who did not consent, on the other hand, would be condemned.⁷²

It is not surprising at all that Bellarmino disagreed with such a doctrine. In his *De Gratia et libero arbitrio* he taught that divine Grace did not only provide a general internal sollicitation within the soul, but also chose the circumstances of its action (i. e. time, place, and the person). As a consequence, those who converted to God congruently received the Grace with their intellect and talent, but those who did not believe did not receive it in the same way; that is to say, the first category of man was granted with a more superior Grace than the other. God would therefore invite each person accordingly under the specific circumstances in which he knows they would respond to his call. Human will is thus touched by God morally, not physically; in fact, if the divine predetermination of will were physical, Grace would always be irresistibly efficacious. On the contrary, according to Bellarmino, salvation is reached only when divine Grace is provided befitting to man's nature.⁷³

⁷¹ Acquaviva to Lessius, October 23, 1610, in *Ibid.*, 150–151.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 147.

⁷³ On this subject, see Marta Moiso, "La libertà e la Grazia. Campanella critico di Bellarmino," *Bruniana & Campanelliana* 14, no. 1 (2008): 127–135, here 132–133.

After reading Lessius' treatise in 1609–10, Bellarmino expressed his fears of having misunderstood Lessius' teaching during the Leuven controversies in 1587–88, twenty-three years earlier. This is very hard to believe, given Bellarmino's expertise in the subject, and the fact that Lessius' doctrine in matters of Grace did not change from the *Six Propositions*. Moreover, Bellarmino's hesitations here specifically concerned a point that he had already reported as controversial in 1587, but which he nonetheless defined as of secondary importance, as we have already discussed.⁷⁴ However, in the aforementioned letter dated December 31, 1610 (which we will consider again in the following pages), Bellarmino confessed that, at that time, he had defended Lessius' doctrine for being sure that Lessius taught that:

[...]praedestinationem ad gloriam pendere ex operibus praevisis, praedestinationem autem ad gratiam efficacem infallibiliter salvantem esse ex mera Dei voluntate.⁷⁵

That is to say that at the time, Bellarmino was convinced that Lessius at least accepted that those who are predestined to receive the efficacious Grace, were given this by God on the basis of His mere sovereign will.⁷⁶ This misunderstanding is quite curious considering the clarity of the two Jesuits' correspondence during the 1580s. Bellarmino was personally also convinced that predestination to the eternal Glory happened before the prevision of merits, and on the sole basis of God's sovereign will; but in the 1580s, he did not consider Lessius' divergent teaching as problematic in this regard. However, after the publication of the *De Gratia Efficaci*, he realised that Lessius did not make any real distinction between these two stages of predestination (i. e. to Grace and to Glory), and that he made predestination – evidently to both 'eternal' Glory and Grace – depend only on the prevision of man's good works, which Bellarmino considered unacceptable. He also identified such a doctrine with Faustus of Riez's teaching (408–495), and more generally with the doctrine developed in the Provençal monasteries and condemned by the Council of Orange (529),⁷⁷ which is not surprising. Bellarmino stigmatised Lessius' doctrine as being

⁷⁴ *Bellarmini Censurae*, 34r–35r; ARSI, Fl. Belg. 72, I, 119r–120r.

⁷⁵ *Bellarmino to Lessius*, December 31, 1610, in Le Bachelet, *Prédestination*, vol. 1, 156. The volume *Bellarmino avant son Cardinalat*, published by Le Bachelet also includes Lessius' the *Thirty-four* and *Six Propositions*, respectively at pages 153–157, and 194–198.

⁷⁶ See Proposition 23, in *Thirty-four Propositions: Quicumque salvantur, ab aeterno fuerunt electi ad gratiam, per quam Deus sciebat illos salvandos; idque ante praevisionem meritorum absolutam, et ex sola Dei voluntate*. This sentence refers to the first aspect of God's predestination act.

⁷⁷ Jean Orcibal, *Jansénius d'Ypres (1585–1638)* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1989), 20. On Faustus' *De Gratia* see, for example, Matthew J. Pereira, "Augustine, Pelagius, and the Southern Gallic tradition: Faustus of Riez's *De Gratia Dei*," in *Grace for Grace. The Debates After Augustine*

contrary to Thomas Aquinas, Jesuit General Francisco Borgia's prescriptions, and the *Ratio Studiorum*, and clearly stated that it fell into semi-Pelagianism. The most interesting divergence of opinion between Bellarmino and Lessius, which came to the fore in 1610, can be summarised in the quarrel surrounding the predestination *ante* or *ex merita previsa*. This point had enormous relevance not only in early modern theological controversies, but in a more general pastoral sense toward mankind, as we will see.

6 *Ex meritis praevisis*: Human agency as a consolation

In his aforementioned letter to Lessius, sent on New Year's Eve of 1610, Bellarmino claimed that the doctrine of predestination *ex meritis praevisis*, professed by Lessius, was considered as Pelagian by Augustine and several other contemporary theologians. This was a major reason for quarrels between the Jesuits and Dominicans, Augustinians, and Franciscans; and Bellarmino did not want to risk the Society being faced with the charge of Pelagianism or Semi-Pelagianism;⁷⁸ Acquaviva also remarked that such a doctrine should not be taught within the Order.⁷⁹

However, in Lessius' view, Bellarmino made the mistake of identifying the doctrine of predestination *ante merita praevisa* with the gratuitousness of Grace, excluding the possibility that predestining men after the prevision of merits could also imply such gratuity, as I have already mentioned in this paper. Bellarmino's concern was, in reality, especially motivated by the causal implications of Lessius' doctrine *ex meritis praevisis*, which went far beyond a simple chronological order. Again, it is not completely clear if Lessius saw a difference.

In his *Responsio ad censuram alicuius e Societate*, sent to Acquaviva on November 24, 1610, Lessius tried to better explain his doctrine, in an attempt to convince his readers that his views had been misunderstood in some respects.⁸⁰ He particularly denied having taught that predestination depended simply and absolutely on the prevision of good deeds. On the contrary, Lessius claimed to

and *Pelagius*, ed. A. Y. Hwang et al. (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2014), 180–207.

⁷⁸ Bellarmino to Lessius, December 31, 1610, in Le Bachelet, *Prédestination*, vol. 1, 156–158.

⁷⁹ Acquaviva to Christophe de Los Cobos (professor of philosophy and theology at Salamanca), November 9, 1610, in *ibid.*, 167–168.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 174–189.

teach that nobody could earn his predestination, but that, nonetheless, predestination had also to be understood as God's prescience of the use of the divine Grace's gifts.⁸¹ Here in particular, it becomes clear that Lessius played with the Scholastic distinction between the two stages in God's act of predestining men, as already discussed: absolute and free predestination to Grace depending on God's sovereign will, and, at the same time, an immediate prescience of human consent deriving from divine foreknowledge of man's merits, namely *ex meritis praevisis*. In this sense, God's predestination coincides with His prescience of merits and, technically, can no longer be considered as predestination.

Lessius once again rejected accusations of Pelagianism, due to his acceptance of God's Grace as the first necessary element for man's act, and the indispensable basis of free will's response; moreover, he saw good deeds as depending on divine Grace's action, rather than on natural merits. Above all, Lessius maintained that this doctrine could be advantageous to the Society and the Church:

ut quae magnam consolationem conscientiae adferat, sollicitudinem salutis et omnis boni operis excitet, et haereses huius temporis perspicue refellat,⁸²

That is to say, in bringing great consolation to the conscience, stimulating an interest in salvation and good deeds, and confuting Protestants. Once again, counter-Reformation intents and pastoral concerns emerge. This is a major issue in understanding Lessius' theological production, including his doctrine of Grace. Such a concern was noticed by some fellow Jesuit theologians of his age; first of all by Bellarmino, who deplored Lessius' constant attempt to comfort human beings by teaching that salvation was in their hands, as it emerges in this passage:

In toto opere conatur consolari homines, docendo, salutem esse in manu nostra, et nos complere praedestinationem. At esset inanis, et deceptoriam consolatio, si doceret esse in manu nostra salutem, quoad meritum gloriae, sed non esse in manu nostra, quoad gratiam efficacem, sine qua gloriam mereri non possumus.⁸³

Such an attempt was indeed false and misleading, Bellarmino stated, as salvation and celestial Glory were not in man's hands.

However, the idea of comforting man in *valle lacrimarum*, and the anti-Calvinist value of this doctrine, were by contrast praised by well-known Jesuit theologians: first of all by Cornelius A Lapide (1567–1637), the renowned

⁸¹ Lessius to Bellarmino, February 18, 1611, in Le Bachelet, *Prédestination*, vol. 1, 189–190.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 197.

⁸³ Bellarmino's dissertation on Lessius' doctrine, in *ibid.*, 158–159, here 159.

professor of Scripture in Leuven and later in Rome.⁸⁴ The case of A Lapide is particularly interesting, as he was known for his opposition to the doctrine of the *ex meritis praevisis*.⁸⁵ However, he appreciated Lessius' doctrine for being benevolent and providing some consolation to men, whilst also spurring them on to practice virtues, without deducting anything from God's Grace; he deemed taking the opposite stance as making men anxious and negligent:

[Lessii doctrina] est benignior et maioris consolationis, magisque excitat homines ad studium virtutum et bonae vitae, utpote quae totum negotium salutis cuiusque ponat in potestate et arbitrio ipsius hominis, ita tamen ut gratiae Dei nihil demat: cum e contrario adversa sententia plures reddat anxios, perplexos, negligentes, imo nonnullos hic in desperstionem adegerit. Rursum sententia haec P. Leonardi magis avertit fatum Calvini circa electionem et reprobationem hominum.⁸⁶

While A Lapide was certainly not a supporter of the *post merita praevisa* doctrine, he also opposed physical premotion and struggled with the idea of predestination.⁸⁷ As Wim François pointed out, in A Lapide's theology of Grace:

foreknowledge and predestination are rather two aspects of the same divine act, whereby God's predestination ultimately is given priority (a kind of *praedestinatio et praevisio meritum*). It positions A Lapide in the mainstream of post-tridentine Catholic writers on grace, free will and predestination, and distances himself from the adherents of a *praedestinatio post praevisa merita*, who were numerous in his Jesuit Order.⁸⁸

This twofold, simultaneously divine act, as postulated by A Lapide, is reminiscent of Lessius' doctrine putting forward the two stages in God's act of predestination, as has already been discussed. However, the idea of predestination as prescience (which was highlighted by Bellarmino in his comment on Lessius' doctrine, and admitted by Lessius himself), depending on the foreknowledge of good deeds, was certainly very far from A Lapide's theology. *A fortiori*, his praise of Lessius' book reminds us of a pastoral concern typical of a certain stream of early modern Catholicism, which can be roughly identified with probabilistic orientations in moral theology. The idea of being severe with oneself, but tolerant and open to the world, was embodied by theologians like Lessius and

⁸⁴ Cornelius Cornelii (*A Lapide*) to Lessius, December 3, 1610, in *ibid.*, 145–147.

⁸⁵ On A Lapide's doctrine of Grace and predestination see Wim François, "Grace, Free Will, and Predestination in the Biblical Commentaries of Cornelius a Lapide," *Annali di Storia dell'Essegesi* 34, no. 1 (2017): 175–197.

⁸⁶ Cornelius Cornelii (*A Lapide*) to Lessius, December 3, 1610, in Le Bachelet, *Prédestination*, vol. 1, 146.

⁸⁷ François, *Grace*, 183.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 195.

Juan de Caramuel (1606–1682),⁸⁹ who were also exponents of probabilism. Theologies of Grace open to humanity's contribution in the salvation process, viz. doctrines that make the election to the Glory and eternal life depend somehow on God's prevision of human merits, have to also be connected to the promotion of lenient moral theology. In this context of pastoral concern for man's hopes and cultivation of virtues, A Lapide's appreciation of Lessius' book, despite his different approach on matters of predestination, is more easily understandable.⁹⁰ Furthermore, it is key to emphasize that A Lapide also most certainly had a pastoral intent when he composed and published his *Commentaries*, which were used in the education of future priests, and were of significant value for preachers.

Jesuit theologian Martin Becanus (1561–1624) also expressed the same idea, by writing that Lessius' assertion concerning the predestination to the Glory had the merit of tranquillising human consciences:

haec sententia maxime valet ad tranquillandas hominum conscientias et sacrae Scripturae per omnia conformis est.⁹¹

Bellarmino, however, clearly stated that man should not be comforted with lies. Although he did not agree with Lessius' predestination to the Glory *ex meritis* or *operibus praevisis*, he tolerated it. However, the doctrine according to which predestination to the efficacious Grace depended on the divine foreknowledge of good deeds (this is how Bellarmino eventually read Lessius' doctrine) was unacceptable to him: the absolute gratuitousness of predestination had been established in the Society of Jesus, in fact, since Ignatius' time.

The quarrel was not easily tempered, and was drawn out in another theological pamphlet by Lessius, titled *De Gratia Congrua*, and which was sent by Lessius to Acquaviva at the beginning of 1611.⁹² The pamphlet was intended to enhance the understanding of Lessius' doctrine of Grace, but instead provided more fuel to the fire.⁹³

89 Julia Fleming, *Defending Probabilism. The theology of Juan Caramuel* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2006).

90 For a closer look at the role of Grace in the religious understanding of man, see Stephen J. Duffy, *The Dynamics of Grace: Perspectives in Theological Anthropology* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1993).

91 *Martin Becanus to Lessius*, April 17, 1610, in Le Bachelet, *Prédestination*, vol. 1, 135.

92 Acquaviva confirmed that he had received the treatise, attached to Lessius' letter, on March 12, 1611. See *Acquaviva to Lessius*, March 12, 1611, in Le Bachelet, *Prédestination*, vol. 2, 13.

93 *De Gratia Congrua*, which had not been published in the seventeenth century, was then included by Le Bachelet in his work. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 203–273.

7 Conclusions: Grace and free will, man and God

Lessius' *De Gratia Congrua* reintroduced the idea that those who are elected to be saved are not predestined to Glory "absolute decreto ex nudo Dei beneplacito ante omnem operum praevisionem";⁹⁴ that is to say with an absolute divine decree depending on God's mere will, before any prevision of good deeds. In March 1611, Jesuit censor Nicolas Godigno provided a positive censure of Lessius' doctrine, and even highlighted that Augustine did not deny that the efficacy of Grace was connected to free will's cooperation.⁹⁵ In this sense, Lessius defined the *Gratia Congrua* as the divine Grace that adapts itself to man's dispositions.

A disciplinary and practical – rather than doctrinal – preoccupation spurred Acquaviva to compose his *Decretum de uniformitate doctrinae, praesertim de gratiae efficacitate* (1613), with Bellarmino's support. Acquaviva invoked caution on several occasions, worried that new theological disputes could jeopardize the decisions made in favour of Thomas' doctrine by the 5th General Congregation. Lessius' insistence on reopening fresh quarrels on matters of Grace surely carried some weight in Acquaviva's decision. The General, though not going into details, mandated for the requirement to follow the theology of Grace as taught by the majority of Jesuit fathers, and defended it during the *De Auxiliis*.⁹⁶

Referring to the Leuven controversies, Paolo Broggio wrote that the "accident" of Leuven "would go down in history as the antechamber of the *De auxiliis* dispute."⁹⁷ Lessius himself, in the late 1580s and early 1590s, expressed his concern to Bellarmino that Bañez (who opposed Molina in the dispute *De Auxiliis*) was teaching a doctrine very similar to that of the Leuven theologians.⁹⁸ In 1591, Lessius even suggested to Bellarmino, who at the time was working on his third book of the *Controversies*, that he ought to oppose in writing the Faculty theologians' doctrines, as well as those professed by Bañez.⁹⁹

Even after the end of the *De Auxiliis*, Lessius' doctrine continued to challenge the vertexes of the Order, who tried to respond to political and practical issues, as well as the pending accusations against the Society. The Flemish Jesuits, instead, seemed to be influenced by a counter-Reformation approach.

⁹⁴ Lessius' defense, in *ibid.*, vol. 2, 49.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, Godigno's dissertation on Lessius' doctrine, 53–76, here 63.

⁹⁶ See Sabina Pavone, *I gesuiti dall'origine alla soppressione* (Rome: Laterza, 2009), especially the chapter "La controversia 'De auxiliis'."

⁹⁷ Broggio, *La teologia*, 55–57. English translation is mine.

⁹⁸ E. g. Lessius to Bellarmino, December 29, 1587, in Le Bachelet, *Bellarmino avant son Cardinalat*, 175–177.

⁹⁹ Lessius to Bellarmino, January 9, 1591, in *ibid.*, 279–282.

Cornelius A Lapidé even highlighted that Dutch Arminians agreed with the Jesuits on the value of man's response in refusing God's Grace, reinforcing the myth of Arminians being crypto-Jesuits.¹⁰⁰

Lessius has often been identified as a congruist, for fostering the idea of the divine Grace as complying with human dispositions. In particular, he taught that the *Gratia Congrua* is the divine inspiration to which man consents, whilst the *Gratia non congrua* is the divine Grace to which he does not consent; the first one being efficacious, the second one not.¹⁰¹ However, Lessius' position is more extreme than Molina's and Suarez's, and different from Bellarmino's congruism. Besides Lessius' continual emphasis on the gratuity of Grace, and on its primary role in the process of salvation, his doctrine implies not only that God's prescience of merits is a necessary element, but also that God's Grace is not efficacious *per se*, but needs human consent to be "activated"; although Lessius postulates this as acting to preserve the role of man's free will. In a letter to Provincial Ferdinand Alber, dated 1611, Lessius reiterated his conviction that his doctrine was equal to Molina's, Vasquez's, and Gregory of Valencia's, and complained that none of these authors triggered the same controversy.¹⁰²

In 1688, the Jansenist Pasquier Quesnel (1634–1719) stated that Bellarmino, during the *De Auxiliis*, implicitly condemned Lessius' doctrine that made the efficaciousness of Grace depend on human response.¹⁰³ It was not an isolated case: between the 1600s-1700s, different interpretations of Bellarmino's positions multiplied, due to the Cardinal's change of mind in various matters, including predestination. It was precisely Bellarmino's predestination doctrine that became an object of interest in the context of anti-Jesuit quarrels. As an illustration, the Dominican Antonius Reginaldus reported that, in reality, Bellarmino supported physical predetermination. This idea was rooted in the fact that the Jesuits of Ingolstadt, before printing Bellarmino's *Controversies*, made some unspecified changes to the manuscript, as referred to by the Cardinal's first biographer Giacomo Fuligatti (for bearing more fruit among the "heretics," Fuligatti says). These unspecified changes were identified by Reginaldus with the removal of Bellarmino's doctrine of physical predetermination from the text.¹⁰⁴ The Society of Jesus would have preferred, in other words,

100 A Lapidé to Acquaviva, December 3, 1610, in Le Bachelet, *Prédestination*, vol. 1, 145–146.

101 *Ibid.*, 203.

102 Lessius to Alber, February 28, 1611, in *ibid.*, 200–201.

103 Pasquier Quesnel (M. Gery), *Apologie historique des deux Censures de Leuven et de Douay sur la matière de la Grace* (Cologne: Nicolas Schouten, 1688), 172–178.

104 On this, and on Bellarmino's relationship with physical predetermination, see Motta, *Bellarmino*, from 455.

to modify Bellarmino's doctrine to reinforce their position in the early modern controversies over Grace; an idea questionable at best, precisely because Bellarmino, although supporting the doctrine of predestination *ante merita praevisa*, also clearly disagreed with physical predetermination.

Franco Motta, in an important work on Bellarmino, retraced the Cardinal's concerns on the matter which lasted until his death bed, when, annoyed by rumors of his adhesion to physical predetermination which were circulating at that time in Rome, asked his friend and Jesuit brother Andreas Evdemonojannis to officially note – as a sort of testament *De Auxiliis* – that he would die professing the same doctrine expressed in the *Controversiarum libris*, in the matter of divine *auxilium* and Grace.¹⁰⁵ In effect, Bellarmino had already rejected physical predetermination (*praedeterminationem liberii arbitrii*) in a letter addressed to Jean Deckers in 1591 (1560–1619), a Jesuit Molinist theologian, and who was later chancellor of the University of Graz.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, as Motta explained, the collation of chapters related to predestination in the manuscript of the *Controversies* and the edition of Ingolstadt, compiled by Le Bachelet in the early twentieth century, confirmed that the two texts are identical, although a complete collation on the entire text has not yet been effectuated.¹⁰⁷

Tommaso Campanella (1568–1639),¹⁰⁸ a Dominican and anti-Aristotelian philosopher, pointed out that the *De Auxiliis* doctrines, which violently opposed each other and were spreading across Europe during that period, did not do justice to the deepest and most underlying message of Christianity, namely the value and autonomy of human will:¹⁰⁹ God's coercive action should not be postulated by Catholic authors. In his work, Campanella explicitly criticized Bellarmino's opinions in the matter of efficacious Grace and, very similarly to Lessius' take, maintained that it is the free will's responsibility to "make salvation operative, which is always potentially accessible to anybody."¹¹⁰ Debates concerning Grace and free will could be resolved by one major question, which is understanding why in some human beings Grace is efficacious, and in other human beings it is not. Replying that it happened on the basis of predestination

105 Motta, *Bellarmino*, 460, footnote 38. On Bellarmino's *Controversiae* see Robert W. Richtigels, "The pattern of controversy in a Counter-Reformation Classic: The Controversies of Robert Bellarmino," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 11, no. 2 (1980): 3–15.

106 *Bellarmino to Deckers*, October 5, 1591, in Le Bachelet, *Bellarmin avant son Cardinalat*, 311.

107 Motta, *Bellarmino*, 457.

108 A supporter of religious-political reforms, Campanella spent almost thirty years in prison after being arrested and tortured for his participation in a conspiracy in Naples.

109 See Moiso, *La Libertà*, 133.

110 *Ibid.*, 131. English translation is mine.

and reprobation, for Campanella would mean implicitly admitting that reprobates are damned due to God's sovereign decision of denying them His Grace. The concern of Protestant drifts often emerges among sixteenth-seventeenth century authors; and complementarily, we see a concern for the risk of falling into the opposite heresy among Catholic orthodox authors, namely Pelagianism, in the case of lenient doctrines, such as that of Lessius.

In a classical article on the history of Jansenism, Pierre Chaunu referred to the strict theology of Grace professed in border areas, such as the early modern Low Countries. Bellarmino also adhered to such a mindset, as a peculiar form of Augustinism that can be denominated "Augustinism of the frontiers of Catholicity."¹¹¹ Paraphrasing Chaunu, we could argue that even Lessius' doctrine on Grace and free will can be considered as the product of the border land where it was produced; albeit on another, contrasting side of the Catholic formation. Highlighting the role of free will in the process of salvation was in fact meant to have a counter-Reformation value, and to provide Catholics with consolation and comfort. After all, the necessities of the Flemish people, in a land of trade and merchants (especially the commercial and financial port of Antwerp), also influenced Lessius' lenient moral theology and economy. In any case, Lessius' extreme positions in the matter of predestination *ex meritis praevisis* were considered as a dangerous drift toward ancient heresies and were condemned by the *Doctor Gratiae* himself.

Besides Bellarmino's personal support of the *ante merita praevisa* theology of Grace, strategic reasons spurred him on to censure Lessius' doctrine in the early 1600s, namely, the safeguarding of his Order. After the *De Auxiliis*, the Cardinal clearly understood that even less compromising theologies (such as Molina's) could raise attacks against the Society. Certainly, Lessius' mindset and attitude toward man's abilities (as also emerges from his moral theology and especially his moral economy) influenced his doctrine of predestination; resulting in a lenient and optimistic theology, in terms of its contribution to the subject of human agency. Soteriology represents the primary concern for Christians: therefore, it should not be surprising that Lessius, caring for man's consciousness and wellness, proposed such a positive outlook. Postulating the value of human contribution to salvation, by means of free will, had the effect of raising human beings' hopes and encouraging ethically sound behavior, with a view to achieving eternal life. Despairing of one's salvation, within Catholicism, is indeed a sin against the Holy Spirit.

¹¹¹ Pierre Chaunu, "Jansénisme et frontière de catholicité (XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles). À propos du Jansénisme lorrain," *Revue Historique* 227 (1962): 115–138.

In the end, the intra-Jesuit dispute between Lessius, on the one hand, and Bellarmino and Acquaviva, on the other, can be condensed into two specific issues: first, the use of the expression *ex* (or *post*), rather than *per* (as in Molina), *meritis praevisis*. In fact, the expression *per propria merita*, which alluded to the middle knowledge, was considered to be at least tolerable by the Society of Jesus. The word *ex*, however, carried serious consequences, and a different understanding of predestination and man's contribution to the salvation process. We are dealing here with one single word that was nonetheless intended to reinstate humanity's role in the history of salvation, although with a risk of Pelagian drift; a single word that went almost entirely unnoticed, or more likely was consciously overlooked, by Bellarmino during the 1580s. The primary role of merits, as foreseen by God, and the possible intrinsic causality of Lessius' theology seemed to have been greatly underestimated. In 1618, Francis of Sales praised Lessius for his doctrine *post merita praevisa* (omitting any mention of the real formula), which he considered to be the most accurate and most admirable among the opinions, and to be in compliance with God's mercy and Grace.¹¹²

The second issue was represented by Bellarmino's conviction that Lessius' doctrine of predestination eventually led to the idea that God's accordance of His Grace to man depended on the divine foreknowledge of human merits, rather than it being a product of God's sovereign will; and this despite the distinction of the two stages of God's predestination act postulated by Lessius.

In a recent article regarding the role of Acquaviva's Generalate in the years of formation of the Society of Jesus, Franco Motta dedicated some pages to the role of theology in shaping early modern Jesuit identity, and opened the paragraph by proposing two questions to the reader. Namely, he wonders which role theology had in the construction of the Jesuit historical identity, and whether a specific theology can be considered as "an identifying trait of the Order."¹¹³ The Jesuit *modus operandi*, not only in doctrinal terms, but also from a pastoral and missionary perspective, included a certain elasticity and a "principle of

112 "[...] quod (Lessius' doctrine – as understood by Francis of Sales – of predestination *post merita praevisa*) mihi gratissimum fuit, qui nimirum eam semper, ut Dei misericordiae tam ac gratiae magis consentaneam, veriorem ac amabiliorem existimavi [...]. *Francesco of Sales to Lessius*, August 26, 1618, in *Œuvres complètes de saint François de Sales, évêque et prince de Genève, Lettres*, vol. 3 (Paris: Gaume Frères, 1833), 532, 413–415. A copy of the letter is stored in the Apostolic Vatican Library (BAV), Mai XI. C. X 44, 15.

113 Franco Motta, "Jesuit Theology, Politics, and Identity: The Generalate Acquaviva and the Years of Formation," in *The Acquaviva Project: Claudio Acquaviva's Generalate (1581–1615) and the Emergence of Modern Catholicism*, ed. P.-A. Fabre and F. Rurale (Boston, Mass.: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2017), 353–374, here 363.

opportunity,” with an inclination for Aquinas’ doctrine and scholastic theological system, as established by Ignatius in the Constitutions.¹¹⁴

Even in such a flexible environment, where we can find multifaceted theological and moral opinions, and a general openness to humanity in terms of pastoral care and theology of Grace, Lessius’ doctrine was considered to be pushing the boundaries. In fact, it was charged with depriving God of his sovereign will, because it accorded to human nature some autonomy in the salvation process: a doctrine that had been radically condemned more than one thousand years earlier by Augustine, the highest Catholic authority in matters of Grace and predestination. Lessius’ case shows how, in effect, theology has been an element of the utmost importance for the construction of early modern Jesuit identity during the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, in the context of both counter-Reformation impulses and intra-Catholic controversies over Grace and free will.

114 *Ibid.*, 364.