

LECTIO XXIV, 12th December 1611.

CHAPTER SEVEN.

The Calumnies of Bellarmine Against Wycliffe and Calvin Are Refuted.

1. He falsely presents the position of Wycliffe and Calvin.

§ We have demonstrated.

2. He opposes it with three examples.

§ Which position.

3. He adds reasoning to the examples.

§ By all these.

EXPLANATION AND CORRECTION.

I. In this chapter, Bellarmine truly acts as a Jesuit, that is, a sophist and a calumniator. He is a sophist in that he does not address the point of controversy but instead argues for something no one denies; he attacks what no one asserts, mixing in many irrelevant matters, as sophists are accustomed to do. He is a calumniator in that he ascribes to Calvin a position that is alien and false and then heavily accuses him based on it. I will make both points manifest.

At the beginning, he claims to have demonstrated up to this point that there is some distinction among sins—that is, that some can rightly be called mortal, and others venial. Yet this was not in question but whether some sins, and not all, are mortal by their very nature, while others are venial. Neither of these points has the adversary demonstrated. Thus, his claim, we have demonstrated up to this point, is an empty boast. Now, he says, those who admit the distinction but distort it through perverse interpretation must be refuted. Here he takes on Wycliffe and Calvin, intending to refute what he calls their perverse interpretation.

But what precisely is this interpretation? See above, Chapter 4: All sins are mortal by their nature. The sins of the faithful, which are mortal in themselves, become venial through the mercy of God. This is the error he promises to refute in the chapter's title. Therefore, he ought to have demonstrated these two points against Wycliffe and Calvin:

First: That not all sins are mortal by their very nature.

Second: That the sins of the saints do not become venial through God's mercy but are such by their very nature.

However, this so-called demonstrator does not touch upon either point, even in passing. Therefore, he falsely claims to refute the error of Wycliffe and Calvin. His sophistry is evident. He continues: Wycliffe and Calvin, he says, claim that all the sins of the predestined are venial, while all the sins of the reprobate are mortal.

The latter part I dismiss, as it has no relevance to the issue at hand. Regarding the former, who would not notice the sheer boldness of the adversary? I ask, where in Calvin (for he opposes him alone here, leaving Wycliffe aside) has he read that all the sins of the predestined, without

limitation, are venial? Nowhere has Calvin said, written, or thought this. The adversary's claim is pure and blatant calumny.

He says above, we have demonstrated. He lies. For in Chapter 4, he quoted Calvin's position from the Institutes of the Christian Religion in these words:

"The children of God have every sin as mortal, because it is rebellion against God's will, etc. The sins of the saints are not venial by their nature but because they obtain forgiveness through God's mercy."

And more clearly:

"Moreover, the sins of the faithful are venial, not because they do not deserve death, but because, through God's mercy, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus; because they are not imputed; because they are blotted out by forgiveness."

By these words, Calvin plainly professes:

FIRST, that all sins are mortal. Hence, Bellarmine's first calumny is that Calvin allegedly holds only the sins of the reprobate to be mortal.

SECOND, that the sins of the faithful saints are venial. Thus, Bellarmine's second calumny is that Calvin claims the sins of the predestined to be venial. Concerning the reprobate, he does not even mention them in this argument, but the sophist has fraudulently substituted the term predestined for faithful saints.

THIRD, that the sins of the faithful merit death. Thus, Bellarmine's third calumny is that Calvin allegedly claims they are not mortal.

FOURTH, that the sins of the faithful are not venial by their nature. Thus, Bellarmine's fourth calumny is that Calvin asserts they are venial without qualification.

FIFTH, Calvin explicitly states the reason why they are venial: God's mercy, through which they are not imputed and are blotted out by forgiveness on account of Christ. Thus, by Bellarmine's fifth calumny, he omits this reason here and fabricates another elsewhere.

Reader, you see through how many calumnies Bellarmine ascribes to Calvin the position that all the sins of the predestined are venial. He undertakes to attack this strawman and claims it has been refuted not only by Catholic doctors but even by Lutherans. This is Bellarmine's sixth falsehood. No Papist or Lutheran, except Bellarmine, has attacked this utterly baseless strawman.

He adds a seventh falsehood at the end of the paragraph: Moreover, Wycliffe and Calvin, and before them Jovinian, claimed that the sins of the predestined could not be mortal. This diabolical calumny surpasses the others in its atrocity. To this, he adds an eighth, similar to the preceding, at the end of § Eadem, that Calvin claims that the predestined faithful cannot sin mortally. Finally, he adds a ninth, equally malicious, in § Videtur, suggesting that Calvin wishes to assert that God grants the faithful the license to commit adultery, murder, perjury, and other such crimes with impunity and freedom.

I have shown what I said: that in this chapter Bellarmine acts as a Jesuit. His spirit is evident, the same of which Christ spoke: He is a liar and the father of lies.

II. POTERAM

I could, therefore, easily disdain this entire masked battle: since it affects neither Wycliffe, nor Calvin, nor us, nor any sane man, as I think. However, since the adversary mixes in numerous points as if our doctrines were absurd, so as not to trouble or offend the reader, we will briefly examine them one by one.

MENTIONED

Calvin's opinion is attacked first with three examples from Scripture, then with a single reasoning. The examples contain one syllogism:

Adam, David, and Peter sinned mortally;

And they were predestined.

Therefore, some predestined individuals have sinned mortally.

Why not? You have won, Bellarmine. But examine the examples separately, for they are dissimilar.

THE FIRST EXAMPLE

The first example is Adam: He sinned mortally and was predestined. Therefore, predestination sins mortally. The assumption is proven by the authority of Irenaeus, Tertullian, Epiphanius, and Augustine.

The proposition is expanded: Adam indeed truly fell from the grace of God, losing the faith which, Calvin asserts, cannot be lost. This is proven at length by the authorities of Tertullian, Ambrose, Augustine, and Prosper.

RESPONSE

The conclusion is presented, but not well-formulated, because FIRST, the assumption is false. Adam fell, not as predestined, but as one to be predestined. I prove this from Bellarmine, who later defines predestination as the providence of God, by which certain individuals, mercifully chosen from the mass of perdition, are directed through infallible means to eternal life.

But Adam, before his fall, was not of the mass of perdition. Bellarmine says in the same place that predestination, according to the view of [Greek text] Augustine and the divine Scriptures, did not precede but followed the foreknowledge of original sin, because of which the entire human race became the mass of perdition. And more clearly later: Even if Adam had not sinned—if, indeed, God had foreseen that man would not sin—nevertheless, predestination as it now stands would follow the foreknowledge of sin.

Thus, Adam, when he fell, was not yet predestined, but rather one to be predestined—not because predestination is temporally posterior to man's fall, but because it is posterior in order within the eternal counsel of God, as the order of predestination is delineated by Bellarmine in the same place. The authorities of the Fathers agree, for they do not say that Adam was predestined, but that he was saved, against the Tatianists. Correctly so, for after the fall, he was saved through faith in Christ.

SECOND, the proposition is indeed true, but its amplification is ambiguous and false. Adam fell from the grace of creation, which he had, but he did not fall from the grace of justification, which he did not yet need. He lost the faith of the commandment he had, believing

the devil more than God; but he did not lose the faith of the promise of grace, which he did not yet possess, but later received as a remedy for his fall.

This latter faith, not the former, Calvin believes cannot be utterly lost once truly possessed, because the faith that is lost is temporary, not the true faith, whose seed, according to Scripture, is immortal. This will be discussed further below, where Bellarmine himself will argue that Papists, sacrilegious individuals, adulterers, murderers, thieves, etc., do not lose their faith.

The question of Adam's faith, whether he lost it, will also recur below.

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THE SECOND EXAMPLE IS DAVID

David, committing adultery and murder, sinned mortally and was predestined. Therefore, it is false that the predestined cannot sin mortally. The assumption is proven from Scriptures: Luke 13:28, Acts 13:22, and the Psalms, which testify that David was full of faith and the Holy Spirit.

The proposition is amplified: David, having fallen into the gravest mortal sins, cast off the Holy Spirit and fell from grace. This is proven from Psalm 51, where David confesses that he sinned against God, did evil, and prays for a clean heart to be created within him and a right spirit to be renewed in his innermost being. He would not ask for these to be created or renewed if he had not lost them. This is further supported by the testimonies of Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, and Gregory, who describe David's sin as grave and mortal.

RESPONSE

The entire argument is accepted. However, the amplification of the proposition requires qualification: it is only partially true. Many mortal sins—adultery, murder, malice, deceit, treachery, etc.—coexisted in David. Thus, he gravely disturbed, cast off, and lost the Holy Spirit with respect to many of His gifts. David lost the purity of his heart, uprightness, renewal of spirit, joy of salvation, solace of grace, goodness of conscience, etc., and therefore prays for these to be restored to him.

However, he did not entirely lose the Spirit or grace in all its gifts. The immortal seed of faith remained in his heart, though, when overcome by sinful desires, it was so obscured and oppressed by the filth of the flesh that it was neither recognized by others nor felt by himself. Yet he never entirely defected from God, nor did he renounce his intention to repent or his hope for forgiveness.

This is proven FIRST, by David himself in Psalm 37:24: "Though the righteous fall, they shall not be utterly cast down, for the Lord upholds them with His hand." David, though righteous, fell, yet he was not utterly cast down, for the Lord upheld him.

SECOND, by the testimony of St. John: "Whoever is born of God does not commit sin, for His seed remains in him, and he cannot sin," meaning not with his whole heart or persistently,

for God's seed remains in him. David was born of God; therefore, though he sinned due to the weakness of the flesh, he did not sin with his whole heart, for God's seed remained in him.

THIRD, the very fact of this seed remaining in David after his fall is evident. This is demonstrated by Nathan's rebuke: "You are the man who deserves death," which in David's confession of his crime, sorrow, and repentance, prompted him to exclaim, "I have sinned; I have done evil; have mercy on me, O God, according to the greatness of Your mercy." This seed he prays will not be taken from him: "Do not take Your Holy Spirit from me." Therefore, David had not entirely lost the Holy Spirit with respect to all gifts; otherwise, he would neither have been able to pray thus nor to repent.

OBJECTIONS

The adversary raises three objections:

The Holy Spirit did not remain as a dweller in David while he sinned because the Spirit does not dwell in the unjust.

The Holy Spirit, according to Augustine, began to be present to him again when He inspired David to repentance.

When David said, "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation; You will give me joy and gladness," he was still seeking and requesting reconciliation, implying he did not yet have it.

RESPONSE TO OBJECTION 1

It is one thing for the Holy Spirit to be in the saints, and another for Him to dwell in the saints. He is said to dwell properly when, through the effects of grace, He rules and opposes sin. Thus, He did not remain as a dweller in David while he sinned. However, He is also said to be in saints who are weak or fallen when He does not rule but is overcome by the flesh, yet preserves them from utter ruin and ultimately raises them up again after their fall.

Saints consist of flesh and spirit, as the Apostle testifies: "The flesh desires against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh." This struggle is perpetual, with victory alternating. When the spirit conquers the flesh, the flesh does not cease to be in the saints, but remains subdued. Conversely, when the flesh conquers the spirit (as in David's fall), the spirit does not cease to be in the saints but remains overcome and disturbed, as the Apostle describes.

Thus, just as it does not follow that the flesh ceases to exist in the saints because it is at times defeated by the spirit, so it does not follow that the spirit ceases to exist in the saints who have fallen because it is then overcome by the flesh.

RESPONSE TO OBJECTION 2

The gloss does not align with the text. David simply says, "Do not take Your Holy Spirit from me," not "Do not take Him from me again," which he would have said if the Spirit had once been entirely removed from him. Nor does Augustine say otherwise: He states that the Spirit was, in a certain way, disturbed by earthly desires, which is why David prays for the uprightness of his spirit to be restored to him, along with the joy of his salvation. Augustine remarks, "He does not say, 'Give me,' but 'Do not take from me,'" indicating that the Holy Spirit remained in David even in his confession.

Therefore, David had not entirely lost the Holy Spirit.

TO THE THIRD POINT, I RESPOND

He did not have in his heart the joy that he now prays to be restored, nor the sense of reconciliation, but rather the sense of God's wrath. For God truly becomes angry with the sins of His people and reveals His wrath inwardly through terrors and outwardly through chastisements. At such times, the sense of grace flees from the heart, and joy vanishes.

Meanwhile, God does not entirely reject, hate, or renounce His sinning children, who remain His elect, [Greek text], but rather recalls them to the way through correction and gradually restores the sense of reconciliation and joy to those who pray. After all, no earthly father immediately expels or disinherits a gravely offending son; how much less does the heavenly Father do so to His children, whom He chose and adopted in Christ before the foundation of the world?

The testimonies of the Fathers demonstrate only that David's sin was grave and mortal, which is undisputed. Therefore, there was no reason for the adversary to fill a page with so many authorities on a point already confessed.

THE THIRD EXAMPLE IS PETER, THE APOSTLE

By denying the Lord three times, Peter committed a mortal sin. That he was predestined and is now saved, sanctified, and blessed is not doubted by anyone. Therefore, the predestined can sin mortally.

The assumption is shown through the Lord's testimonies about Peter. The proposition is amplified, noting that Peter committed a most grievous mortal sin: he not only denied the Lord but confirmed his denial with an oath and curses. For this, he repented with tears. This is confirmed by Augustine, who testifies that Peter's soul was spiritually dead.

The adversary should have added that Peter cast off the Holy Spirit, lost faith, and fell from grace, as he claimed about David. But he cunningly omitted these points, perhaps to avoid entangling himself.

RESPONSE

The entire argument is accepted. However, omitting the amplification of the proposition, I argue as follows:

Either Peter, the Apostle, by denying and renouncing the Lord three times, completely cast off the Holy Spirit, lost faith, and fell from grace—or he did not.

If he entirely lost these, it would follow that Christ's prayer for Peter was ineffective: "I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail." This is absurd. One might claim that Peter's faith was interrupted by his fall but later restored. This is futile. Christ does not say, "I have prayed for you that your faith may be restored," but "that your faith may not fail." Interrupted and later restored faith would not have been the same faith, numerically, for which Christ prayed that it would not fail. Thus, Christ's intercession would have been invalid—God forbid.

If Peter did not entirely lose faith, the Holy Spirit, or grace, then the conclusion stands: the saints, when overcome by desires (as in the case of David, the prophet) or by fear (as in Peter, the apostle), through the weakness of the flesh, may sin mortally without entirely losing the Holy Spirit, faith, or grace.

Although Satan inflicts mortal wounds upon them, which, unless healed by the mercy of God's forgiveness, would eventually tear them away entirely from God and plunge them into eternal ruin, they are not utterly forsaken.

This view is supported by Sacred Scripture in many places: as when it says, the elect are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation; that God grants His fear into the hearts of people, so that they may never depart from Him, that is, according to Augustine, that they may perseveringly cling to Him. He does not extinguish the smoldering wick nor break the bruised reed; when the righteous fall, they are not cast down because the Lord upholds them with His hand; the elect cannot be deceived or perish; being born of God, they cannot sin (with the whole heart) because the seed of God remains in them; temporary faith, which withers away, has no root and was never true faith. Augustine also supports this view concerning Peter specifically: Who would be so frivolous as to think that the Apostle Peter possessed in his heart what he expressed with his lips? That is, to have denied Christ with his whole heart. And immediately: Indeed, in that denial, he held to the truth inwardly while outwardly uttering falsehood. Thus, it is understood that Peter, in the lapse of his speech, did not lose the faith of his heart.

From this is derived the sentence received under Augustine's name: Peter's faith did not fail in his heart when his confession failed on his lips. This, Bellarmine asserts, is supported by the same: that Peter, even when spiritually 'dead' in his soul, must be understood as such only concerning the flesh, not the spirit; otherwise, Augustine would contradict himself. Elsewhere, Bellarmine himself denies that Peter's faith ever failed, saying, We know that Peter lost charity and grace (which is not entirely true) when he denied the Lord, but we do not know that his faith ever failed. And later: The Lord procured for Peter that he could never fall in regard to faith. Therefore, we have an accuser confessing against himself.

Bellarmino's Reasoning

His argument is as follows: The sins of Adam, David, and Peter could either coexist with justifying faith, or they could not. If not, then these sins expelled justifying faith, and thus they were mortal sins. If they could coexist, then it follows that justified men could freely transgress God's commandments, commit adultery, murder, deny Christ, etc., without incurring any guilt or punishment, as such sins would be forgiven and absolved by God. This, however, is Calvin's doctrine, Bellarmine argues, which anyone can see is absurd and pernicious. Calvin is thus reduced to admitting either that the predestined can sin mortally or granting the predestined a license to commit adultery, murder, perjury, etc., with impunity and freedom. Bellarmine adds: Calvin seems to prefer the latter, as he elsewhere writes that true and living faith remains in a man despite grave lapses, even though it may not manifest externally; and we are certainly persuaded that faith justifies and ensures that no sins are imputed.

Response

Since no one fails to see that this is a harsh and sophistical calumny, let me clarify it plainly to remove any doubts.

First, it is admitted that the sins of Adam, David, and Peter were mortal sins. Therefore, Calvin is not compelled to admit what he never denied: that the predestined can sin mortally. However, there is no logical connection here. Their sins were mortal, not because they could or could not coexist with faith, as the adversary alleges, but because they were transgressions of divine law, for which death is universally imposed as the penalty. Hence, they are called mortal sins.

Second, the entire reasoning of the second argument is flawed. The categorical syllogism would be as follows: If sins can coexist with justifying faith, then those once justified have the liberty to commit such sins freely and with impunity, for faith always justifies, and no sins are imputed to the justified by God. Calvin's supposed teaching is pure slander. Calvin states that in saints who have fallen, as in David and Peter, a small seed or particle of true and living faith remains, which eventually leads them to repentance. This is also supported by Sacred Scripture in many places and by the examples of Peter.

Calvin does not claim, however, that adultery, murder, perjury, etc., can coexist with justifying faith or that true, living, and justifying faith remains in a person amid grave lapses. This is pure calumny.

Third, even the proposition itself is false. Whether or not mortal sins can coexist with faith, it is false to assert that the justified are granted permission to commit such sins. Examples demonstrate that God does not overlook the lapses of saints but chastises them with severe punishments to bring them to repentance.

Lastly, in response to the sophistical reasoning: Faith is said to justify when it exercises its proper act of receiving the remission of sins through the mercy of God. This proper act is not exercised by faith when it is sick, wounded, oppressed by the defilements of the flesh, or bound by the chains of sin. Therefore, faith justifies only when it is healthy and free, not when it is sick or wounded. Just as a man walks when he is healthy and free, but a sick man bound by chains cannot exercise the act of walking, so faith justifies when it is active and alive but not when it is inert. For saints who have fallen, faith remains habitually but not actively; it ceases to function as an act receiving justification until they repent. Hence, the reasoning of the proposition and its assumptions are sophistical, calumnious, and false.

Now I turn this against the adversary. Bellarmine, in chapter 8 of his work against the Lutherans, will soon confirm that wicked papists who have fallen into fornication, theft, murder, or another mortal sin do not lose justifying faith, which he claims is the only true faith. Therefore, according to Bellarmine, justifying faith can coexist in papists who are fornicators, adulterers, murderers, etc. From this, if Bellarmine's reasoning were sound, it follows that sinful papists, through justifying faith which they do not lose but retain, could have the power to freely and with impunity commit adultery, perjury, murder, theft, sacrilege, and other such crimes. For justifying faith, remaining in them, either always justifies them or at least always disposes them toward justification, as Bellarmine will teach later.

This doctrine, which everyone can see is absurd and pernicious, forces the adversary, if he does not acknowledge his own position, to swallow all the slanders with which he has insolently smeared our doctrine on justifying faith.