

DISPUTATIONUM ROBERTI BELLARMINI POLITIANI S. J.  
S. R. E. CARDINALIS DE CONTROVERSIIS CHRISTIANAE  
FIDEI ADVERSUS HUIUS TEMPORIS HAERETICOS  
(*DISPUTATIONS OF ROBERT BELLARMINE OF  
POLITIANUS S.J., CARDINAL OF THE HOLY ROMAN  
CHURCH, ON THE CONTROVERSIES OF THE CHRISTIAN  
FAITH AGAINST THE HERETICS OF THIS TIME*)

by **Roberti Cardinalis Bellarmini (Robert Cardinal Bellarmine), 1581-1592**

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- *OCR of the original text by AI (claude-3-7-sonnet-20250219).*
- *Translation of the original text performed by AI (claude-3-7-sonnet-20250219).*
- *Last Edit: March 20, 2025.*
- *Version: 1.0*
- *Selection pages: 491-494*

## De Romano Pontifice, Liber IV, Capitulum X

*Concerning Siricius, Innocent, and seven other pontiffs.*

The fourteenth is Siricius, whom John Calvin accuses in book 4 of the Institutes, chapter 12, § 24, of having called marriage “pollution” in his epistle to the Spaniards. But Calvin, in his usual manner, lies impudently. For Siricius does not call true and legitimate marriage pollution, but rather the illicit union of those who, after completing public penance, return again to the same union for which they once did penance. He never did penance for entering into legitimate matrimony.

The fifteenth is Innocent I, whom the Magdeburg Centuriators, in Century 5, chapter 10, in the life of Innocent himself, say gravely erred because in Epistle 2, chapter 12, he ordered that a consecrated virgin who has married or fornicated should not be received for penance while the man with whom she sinned still lives; for it seems unjust that a penitent woman should not be absolved unless the man who seduced her dies first. Likewise, that in Epistle 18 to Alexander of Antioch, he wrote that the baptism of the Arians was indeed null, but that the Holy Spirit was not conferred through them because they had separated themselves from the Church. Here he seems to maintain that the efficacy of holy baptism

depends on the goodness of the minister, which is contrary to the common teaching of the Church. Also, that in Epistle 22, chapter 1, he taught that a man who has taken a widow as his wife cannot be a priest, since Moses in Leviticus commands that a priest should take a virgin as his wife, as if the Christian religion were still bound by the judicial laws of the Old Testament.

I respond to the first objection: Innocent means to say that those virgins who are unwilling to separate from the adulterer should not be received for penance until after his death; and this is most just, for the Church should not absolve those who wish to persevere in sin.

To the second point, I say: Innocent speaks in this passage about those who are baptized or ordained by heretics, when they themselves are also tainted with the same heresy. For such persons truly receive the sacrament of baptism or ordination, but they do not receive the grace of the Holy Spirit, which cannot exist in heretics. And in ordination, those ordained by heretics not only fail to receive grace, but they also do not receive the right to legitimately exercise their orders: for the ordainer lost this right through heresy and could not bestow what he himself did not possess. See the Gloss on Causa 1, Quaestio 1, Canon "Arianos."

To the third point, I say: Innocent does not wish to say that we are bound by Jewish laws, but wishes to argue from similarity, or rather from the greater to the lesser, in this manner. The priests in the Old Testament were bound by divine command not to marry a widow; therefore, it is much more fitting that in priests of the new law, the Church should require that they not have been husbands of widows, evidently because of the excellence of the Christian priesthood.

The sixteenth is Celestine, whom Lorenzo Valla, in his declamation on the false Donation of Constantine, affirms was infected with the heresy of Nestorius. But Lorenzo plainly lies; indeed, Celestine was not only never charged with this heresy, but he himself was the one who principally condemned that heresy, as is evident from Prosper in his Chronicle of the year 431, and from the entire Council of Ephesus. Valla was deceived by an equivocation of names. For there was a heretic named Celestine who was a Pelagian, who held certain beliefs in common with the Nestorians.

The seventeenth is Leo I, who in his 79th letter to Nicetas says that those women who, thinking their husbands to be deceased or never to return from captivity, married others, did not sin; yet if their husbands should return, he states they are bound to renew their first marriage; but if the husbands do not wish to take them back, they are not bound. Herein two errors seem to appear: one, that a woman does not sin if she marries another man when she believes her first husband to be alive but never to return; the other, that a woman may remain with her second husband if the first does not want her. The Magdeburg Centuriators noted this error in Century 5, chapter 10, in the life of Leo I.

I respond: In neither case did Leo err. For when he says that a woman who marries while her former husband is still living does not sin, he speaks only of the woman who marries because she believes her first husband to be dead, as he himself explicitly explains in that

same passage. However, concerning the woman who marries because she thinks her husband will never return, he neither says that she sins nor that she does not sin, because he considered the matter to be wrong in itself, namely, that she does sin. But when he states that the woman ought to return to her first husband if he wishes to have her back, he consequently wishes it to be understood that the husband ought to return to his wife if she desires him, even if he might otherwise have been unwilling. For in this matter, husband and wife are equal. Thus, if one spouse wishes to return to the marriage, the other is necessarily bound to comply; however, if neither wishes to return, they may remain separated regarding the use of marriage. And this alone is what St. Leo permits. Nor does it follow from this that a woman may remain with her second husband, for the same Leo in that very passage most clearly states that the first marriage is indissoluble and must necessarily be restored after dissolving the later one, which cannot be true otherwise.

The eighteenth is Gelasius, in whom the Centuriators have noted two opinions erroneous according to Catholics, in Century 4, chapter 4, concerning the Lord's Supper, and chapter 10, in the life of Gelasius. One is in the book against Eutyches, that true bread remains with the flesh of Christ in the sacrament; the other, cited in Gratian's Decretum, De Consecratione, distinction 2, "De permanente": that one part of the sacrament of the Eucharist cannot be taken without the other without committing a great sacrilege. For either Gelasius erred in these two matters, or we err, who hold the contrary opinion and follow it.

I respond to the first point: That book is not by Pope Gelasius, but is by Gennadius, who wrote a book of the same title to Pope Gelasius; or by a certain Bishop Gelasius, whom Jerome mentions near the end of his Catalogue of Ecclesiastical Writers. Indeed, Pope Gelasius wrote five books against Eutyches, as Trithemius reports, while this is only a single small treatise. Furthermore, this author promises to collect the opinions of almost all the ancient authorities concerning the incarnation of the Lord, and while he adduces 15 Greek Fathers, he presents only two Latins, Ambrose and Damascus, and omits Cyprian, Hilary, Jerome, Augustine, Innocent, Leo, Prosper, and similar authors, whom Pope Gelasius would never have omitted, nor indeed would any other Latin author. From this it seems manifestly clear that this author was Greek, not Latin. But whoever he may have been, we have shown in our book 2 on the sacrament of the Eucharist, chapter 27, that his statement has a sound meaning. To the second point I say: Gelasius in that canon speaks only of the sacrificing priest, who cannot without sacrilege take only one species, because he would render the sacrifice imperfect.

The nineteenth is Anastasius II, who is accused of three errors. First, that without the council of bishops, presbyters, and clerics of the whole Church, he communicated with Photius, who had communicated with Acacius the heretic. Second, that he secretly wished to restore Acacius, whom Popes Felix and Gelasius had condemned. Third, that he approved baptisms and ordinations conferred by the same Acacius, for which errors and sins the same Anastasius is said to have been divinely struck down, suddenly dying from a disease sent upon him.

This is written by the author of the Pontifical in the life of this Anastasius, and following him, Tilmannus Heshusius in book 1 on the Church, chapter 9, and indeed also Gratian in distinction 19, canon Anastasius, and the Magdeburg Centuries in century 6, chapter 10, in the life of Anastasius.

I respond: It is entirely false that Anastasius wanted to restore Acacius. For it is established from Evagrius in book 3, chapter 23, and from Nicephorus in books 13 and 17, and from Liberatus in chapter 19, that Acacius died during the time of Pope Felix, from whom Anastasius was the third successor. How, therefore, could Anastasius have wished to restore to his see someone who had long been dead? But some say that he at least wanted to restore his name.

On the contrary, there exists a letter from Pope Anastasius to Emperor Anastasius, in which he asks that the Emperor order the name of Acacius to be silenced in the Church, since he had been most justly condemned by Pope Felix, his predecessor. As for what Gratian says in Distinction 19, canon "Ita Dominus," that Anastasius erred in this letter because he wished the sacraments of baptism and ordination conferred by Acacius to be considered valid, this shows not that Anastasius was a heretic, but that Gratian was ignorant. For who among Catholics does not know that those baptized by heretics are truly baptized, and similarly those ordained are truly ordained, when the heretical ordainer was and still remained a true bishop, at least as far as the sacramental character is concerned?

That claim regarding Photius is perhaps a falsehood, just like the alleged revocation of Acacius's excommunication. But even if it were true, would Anastasius therefore not be Catholic? Is it not lawful for the Supreme Pontiff, without a council of all bishops, priests, and clerics of the entire Church, to absolve someone who has been excommunicated? The belief that Pope Anastasius died by a sudden death inflicted by God seems to have originated from the fact that it is established that the heretical Emperor Anastasius perished by a lightning strike at that very time, as Evagrius, Cedrenus, Zonaras, and Paul the Deacon write in his life; otherwise, it is undoubtedly a fable.

The twentieth is Vigilius, whom Liberatus in Breviar. chapter 22 reports to have written a letter to the Empress Theodora and other heretics, in which he confirmed their heresy and pronounced anathema on those who confessed two natures in Christ.

I respond: Many believe that this passage of Liberatus was corrupted by heretics, because in the pontifical book the opposite seems to be narrated. But since no trace of corruption appears in the book of Liberatus, and the narrative of Liberatus does not truly conflict with the narrative of the pontifical book, a different response must be given. I say therefore: Vigilius did write that letter and did condemn the Catholic faith, at least in external profession; but this does not obstruct our cause. For he did this while Pope Silverius was still alive, at which time Vigilius himself was not the pope, but a pseudo-pope: for two true Supreme Pontiffs cannot exist simultaneously, and it was evident to all at that time that Silverius was the true pontiff, even though he lived in exile.

It should be known that Anthemius, a heretic, was deposed from the bishopric of Constantinople by Agapetus, the Roman Pontiff. Subsequently, the Empress asked Silverius, Agapetus' successor, to restore Anthemius. When Silverius refused, Vigilius, then an archdeacon, promised the Empress that he would recall Anthemius if he could be made Roman Pontiff. Soon after, by order of the Empress and through Belisarius' efforts, St. Silverius was expelled from his See into exile, and Vigilius was created Pope, or rather, Antipope. During this time, it would not be surprising if he could have erred in faith, or even have been plainly heretical. Although even then he did not define anything against the faith as Pontiff, nor was he a heretic in his heart. Indeed, he wrote a wicked letter unworthy of a Christian man; however, he did not openly condemn the Catholic faith, nor with a heretical intent, but secretly, due to his desire to preside, as Liberatus says in the same place, and as appears from Vigilius' own letter. For he writes instructing them to take care that no one sees that letter, and that everything remain hidden until the appropriate time. Vigilius was then in extreme difficulties, into which his ambition had drawn him. For if he openly professed himself a heretic, he feared the Romans, who would never seem to tolerate a heretic sitting in Peter's chair; if, on the contrary, he professed himself a Catholic, he feared the heretical Empress, through whose aid he had obtained the pontificate. Therefore, he devised this strategy: to act as a Catholic in Rome, while meanwhile pretending to be a heretic to the Empress through letters.

It came to pass shortly thereafter that Silverius died, and Vigilius, who until then had sat in schism, began now to be the sole and legitimate pontiff, indeed, with the Roman clergy and people confirming and accepting him. From this time forward, however, neither error nor semblance of error was found in Vigilius, but rather the utmost constancy in faith until death, so that it appears that with the pontificate itself he received firmness of faith, and was transformed from light chaff into most solid rock. For when the heretical Empress Theodora, relying on secret letters and Vigilius's promise, asked him to restore the aforementioned Patriarch Anthemius, as he had promised, he wrote back that he had rashly promised and had gravely sinned by that promise, and therefore could not and would not fulfill what he had promised, lest he should add sins to sins. For this reason, he was sent into exile by the enraged empress and miserably persecuted until death. This is recorded not only in the Pontifical, but also noted by Paul the Deacon in his Life of Justinian, and by Aimonius in book 5, chapter 32, of Deeds of the Franks, and even by the Magdeburg Centuriators themselves in Century 6, chapter 10, in the Life of Vigilius, and the same is also very briefly indicated by Liberatus at the end of chapter 22, where he says that Vigilius was later miserably afflicted by that very heresy which he had secretly fostered in the beginning.

Finally, that Vigilius, after the death of Silverius, was a true and holy pontiff is attested by all those who, living at that very time, wrote something about Vigilius. Gregory I, in Book 2, Letter 36 to the Bishop of Hibernia, says: "*Pope Vigilius of revered memory, stationed in the royal city, promulgated a sentence of condemnation against Anthimus and the Acephali.*" Cassiodorus in his book On Divine Readings, chapter 1, states: "*It is well known that Origen was condemned in our present time by Pope Vigilius, a most blessed man.*" Arator, in the preface to the Acts of the Apostles, which he wrote in verse and dedicated to Pope

Vigilius, begins thus: *“To the holy Lord, most blessed apostolic, and first of all priests in the entire world, Pope Vigilius.”* Finally, it is established from Evagrius, Book 4, chapter 37, that the Fifth General Council was confirmed by Vigilius, in which that heresy which Theodora fostered was condemned, and of which Vigilius himself is accused by his adversaries.

It could also be said that the letter of Vigilius, which Liberatus mentions, was fabricated by heretics, and that Liberatus believed a false rumor spread by heretics. For it was discovered by certain evidence in the Sixth Council, Act 14, that heretics had forged a certain letter in the name of Pope Vigilius to Theodora and Justinian. But whatever the truth of this may be, it is sufficient for us that he erred in no matter during the time he was the true pontiff.

The twenty-first is St. Gregory I, who is accused of error by Durandus in Book 4, distinction 7, question 4, because in his Epistle 26, Book 3, to John, Bishop of Caralana, he permitted priests to administer the sacrament of confirmation, which by divine law belongs solely to bishops. Because of this passage from Gregory, Hadrian, in his question on confirmation, final article, asserts that the pontiff can err in defining dogmas of faith.

I respond first: It was not blessed Gregory who erred, but rather Durandus and Hadrian. Indeed, the Council of Florence, in its instruction to the Armenians, and the Council of Trent, session 7, final canon, teach that the ordinary minister of confirmation is the bishop, from which it follows that, extraordinarily, even a non-bishop can be the minister of this sacrament. Furthermore, Gregory did not issue any decree on this matter, but only granted to certain priests that in the absence of bishops they could confirm; therefore, if St. Gregory had erred in this, it would not have been an error of doctrine, but of example or fact. There is also another certain error attributed to St. Gregory, but falsely so, which we shall discuss below when we treat of Gregory III.

The twenty-second is Boniface V, whom the Magdeburg Centuriators severely criticize in Century 7, chapter 10, because in his epistle to Edwin, King of England, which Bede cites in Book 2 of his History of England, chapter 10, he taught that Christ liberated us from original sin alone.

I respond: The Centuriators have added that word *Solo* [Alone/Only] on their own. For Boniface says thus: *Come therefore to the knowledge of Him who created you, who breathed the spirit of life into you, who for your redemption sent His only-begotten Son, that He might rescue you from original sin.* These are his words. The reason he did not mention other sins was because original sin is the principal one, and it was primarily for the removal of this sin that Christ died. In Luke [sic] John 1, we read: *Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him who takes away the sins of the world.* In Greek, τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου, that is, *that sin of the world*, which means *original sin*, which alone is common to the entire world: for many have no other sin, as is the case with all children.