

EFFECTUAL CALLING

A Reformed Treatise on Grace and Conversion



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by Francis Turretin

PASTOR IN THE CHURCH AND PROFESSOR OF SACRED
THEOLOGY IN THE ACADEMY OF GENEVA.

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On Effectual Calling

(*Locus Decimus Quintus: De Vocatione*)

QUESTION I

What is calling, how many kinds are there, and how do external and internal calling differ?

(*Quaestio Prima: Quid sit Vocatio, et Quotuplices; et Quomodo Vocatio Externa et Interna differant?*)

I.

Thus far we have spoken of the *office of Christ*; now we must speak of His *benefits*, which belong to the *application of the salvation* acquired for us—a *salvation which here begins by grace and in heaven is completed by glory*. The first of these benefits is *calling*; not that *special calling* to some particular office, whether political or sacred, in which sense Paul frequently calls himself a “called apostle” (*Rom. 1:1*), but that *general calling unto salvation*.

How great its excellence is appears even from this: that the *Church itself* has taken its very name from *klēsis* (calling), and is nothing else than a *gathering of the called*.

II.

This *calling* is an *act of the grace of God in Christ*, whereby He *calls men, dead in sins and lost in Adam, through the preaching of the Gospel and by the power of the Holy Spirit, unto communion with Christ, to obtain salvation in Him*.

In this, two *terms* are to be observed: the *from which* (*terminus a quo*) and the *unto which* (*terminus ad quem*).

- The *terminus a quo* is the *state of sin and condemnation* in which they exist (*Eph. 2:1*); *darkness* (*Eph. 5:8*; *1 Pet. 2:9*); *the world* (*John 15:19*); and those things which are behind—namely *earthly and worldly things* (*Phil. 3:13*).
- The *terminus ad quem* is:
 - *communion with Christ* (*1 Cor. 1:9*),
 - *holiness* (*Rom. 1:7*; *1 Cor. 1:2*; *1 Thess. 4:7*),
 - *marvelous light* (*1 Pet. 2:9*),
 - *the kingdom of God* (*1 Thess. 2:12*),
 - *eternal glory in Christ* (*1 Pet. 5:10*),
 - *eternal life* (*1 Tim. 6:12*).

III.

Hence it is called a *holy calling* (*2 Tim. 1:9*), not only because of its *source*, for *God*, the author of the calling, is holy (*1 Pet. 1:15*), but also because of its *end*, for it leads to *holiness*.

It is called *klēsis epouranios* (a heavenly calling) (*Heb. 3:1*; *Phil. 3:14*), and *anō klēsis* (an upward calling), because it is *from heaven* and *calls to heaven*.

There is also an *allusion to the Olympic Games*, in which not only was the *brabeion* (the prize) suspended above the goal, but *athletes*

ran below, and were crowned in the upper place, where the *agonothetes* (judges of the contest) sat. From there, the *herald* (*praeco*) summoned the competitors to the race.

IV.

There are three main purposes for which *calling* is appointed by God:

1. That it may be *fitting to the nature of man*, using the voice of the *Gospel* and the *preaching of the Word*, than which no form is more suitable or appropriate for rational creatures—since man is *logikos* (rational), and is to be called by *logos* (word).
2. That it may *display the various images* under which calling can be viewed:
 - as a *new creation*, wherein God calls things that are not as though they were (*Rom. 4:17*), translating us from the nothingness of sin to life, and shining in our hearts as He once commanded light to shine out of darkness (*2 Cor. 4:6*);
 - or as a *wondrous resurrection*, in which we are called by the omnipotent voice of Christ to rise from sin (*Eph. 1:20; 2:5*), similar to how He called Lazarus out of the tomb: “Lazarus, come forth”; and likewise on the last day, the dead shall hear Christ’s voice and rise (*John 5:25*);
 - or as the *exalted dignity of the sons of God*, and the *glorious office* to which we are called in communion with Christ—just as dignities and positions are conferred in the world by a formal calling;
 - or finally as a *racecourse* to be run (*Phil. 3:14; Heb. 12:1*), just as runners in the Olympic games were summoned to the race by the voice of the herald, to burst forth from the gates toward the finish line.

V.

This calling is distinguished in various ways.
Some describe it as *threefold*:

- *Real*, through works (i.e. creation/providence),
- *Verbal*, through the *Gospel*,
- *Spiritual*, through the *Spirit*.

The **first** is said to extend to *all people generally in the world*;
the **second** is *restricted to those called within the Church*;
the **third** is *proper to the elect and faithful alone*.

But the idea that there is a gracious calling to salvation through the *works of nature* is assumed without warrant—and has already been refuted.

VI.

We therefore acknowledge a *twofold calling*, corresponding to the *visible and invisible Church*:

External and Internal.

- *External calling* occurs through the *ministry of the Word and sacraments*, which are the *outward means of application*.
- *Internal calling* occurs through the *inward and omnipotent power of the Holy Spirit*.

External calling reaches only the *body and ears*;
internal calling *opens the heart*.

External is merely *objective*;
internal is also *effective*.

External *morally persuades*;
internal *efficaciously persuades and draws*.

VII.

Though both kinds of calling agree in certain respects:

- *In the author*, since God is the one who calls in both;
- *In the object*, since the ones called are in both cases dead in sin and weak, unwise, and mostly lowly (1 Cor. 1:26);
- *In the instrument*, which is ordinarily the *Word* in both;
- *In the end*, which is *God's glory and the salvation of the called*;

They **differ** in several important ways:

1. *In respect to the divine action:*

- In *external calling*, God acts **imperatively**, commanding duty without giving the strength to fulfill it;
- In *internal calling*, He acts also **operatively**, supplying strength to do what He commands and working within what He commands from without.

2. *In the mode:*

- External is *by the Word only*;
- Internal is *by the Word and the Spirit*.

3. *In extent:*

- External calling is for *many*;
- Internal is for *few*: “Many are called, but few are chosen.”

External calling is broader—reaching even the *reprobate within the visible Church*, like a *threshing floor* containing both wheat and chaff, or a *net* gathering good and bad fish alike (*Matt. 13:47*).

Internal calling corresponds to *election*, and is therefore called *κατὰ πρόθεσιν* (*Rom. 8:28*)—a calling “according to purpose,” through which *all and only the elect* are called.

4. *In outcome:*

- External calling remains **ineffective**;
- Internal calling is **efficacious** and reaches its intended goal: “Everyone who has heard from the Father and learned comes to Me” (*John 6:45*).

5. *In duration:*

- External calling is **temporary and revocable**, as seen in temporary believers and apostates who return to their former state;
- Internal calling is **immutable and irrevocable** (*Rom. 11:29*).

External calling establishes only a *visible and external communion with the Church*, by profession of faith...

External calling, therefore, constitutes the *visible and outward communion* of the Church in the profession of faith, in public worship, and in the use of the sacraments;

internal calling constitutes *invisible and inward communion*, in *faith and charity*.

From the external, people are called *saints* only equivocally; from the internal, they are *properly and univocally* saints.

VIII.

A question is raised here by the *Adversaries* regarding the distinction between these two kinds of calling: Whether *internal and efficacious calling* differs from *external calling* **only a posteriori**, and **merely in result**, or whether it differs also **a priori**, with regard to the *will and decree of God*, and the *nature of the calling itself*?

The *Lutherans* judge that internal and external calling are **essentially one and the same**—so that all who are outwardly called are also inwardly called. When asked why external calling is **efficacious in one person but not in another**, they respond: *It arises from the will of man.*

The *Arminians* explain this more clearly:

They claim that calling is efficacious in some and not in others—**not because God does more in the former**, but because *the good will of man adds efficacy* to the call, and because *some admit the Word by their own free choice*, while others reject it.

But the *Orthodox* do not base this distinction on the *free will of man* nor measure it only by the outcome; rather, they attribute it to *the very decree of God*, to *the nature of the calling*, and to the *difference in subjective grace*, which operates **far more effectively in some than in others**.

IX.

The reasons are as follows:

1. Because *internal calling* is *κατὰ πρόθεσιν* (according to purpose), and therefore depends on the *decree of God*, and is *eternal* and *irrevocable* (*Rom. 8:28; 11:29*).
It is not merely efficacious *by chance* or *eventually*.

2. Because the outcome itself depends solely on the *decree of God*, who directs calling so powerfully that it must necessarily have its effect in the elect.

As *Acts 13:48* says,

“As many as were ordained to eternal life believed.”

3. Otherwise, man would *distinguish himself*, against Paul’s words in *1 Corinthians 4:7*:

“Who makes you differ? What do you have that you did not receive?” It would no longer be “of *God who shows mercy*,” but rather “of *man who wills and runs*” (*Rom. 9:16*), even though God is the one who works in us *both to will and to do* (*Phil. 2:13*).

What the adversaries object here will be dealt with more fully when we treat the *efficacy of calling* in what follows.

X.

Calling is also commonly distinguished into **ordinary and mediate**, and **extraordinary and immediate**.

- *Ordinary calling* is that which God employs in the usual administration of grace, using *external means*—namely, the *ministry of men*.
- *Extraordinary calling* occurs outside the usual order, with respect to certain individuals, whom God *calls and converts immediately* and *by Himself*, without the intervention of men. This was the case with the *thief on the cross*, *Paul*, and others *immediately called by God*.

QUESTION II

On the Calling of the Reprobate

Quaestio II: De Vocatione Reproborem

Are the reprobate, who become partakers of external calling, called by God with the intention that they should become partakers of salvation? And if this is denied, does it follow that God does not act seriously, but hypocritically and with dissimulation? Or could He be accused of injustice?

We answer: No.

I.

This question arises between us and the Lutherans, the Arminians, and the patrons of *Universal Grace*, who—seeking to establish the universality of the call, at least as it pertains to the proclamation of the Gospel in the visible Church—argue that *all who are called by the Word are called by God with the intention of salvation*. Otherwise, they say, God would be mocking men and not dealing with them seriously, but hypocritically—offering grace which He is not willing to bestow.

II.

We, however, though we do not deny that the *reprobate who dwell in the outward communion of the Church* are called by God through the Gospel, yet we deny that they are called with the design and intention that they should actually become partakers of salvation, which God knows will never come to pass, for He has decreed otherwise concerning them.

Still, we do not for that reason judge that God can be accused of hypocrisy or dissimulation. Rather, we assert that **He always acts most seriously and sincerely.**

III.

That this may be understood more clearly, note:

External calling is extended both to the reprobate and to the elect—but in different ways. To the elect, **primarily and directly**, for the ministry of the Gospel was instituted **for their sake alone**—to gather the Church and to build up the mystical body of Christ (*Eph. 4:12*). When the elect have been gathered from the world, the preaching of the Gospel ceases—for the Word of God does not fall to the ground in vain (*Isa. 55:11*).

To the *reprobate*, on the other hand, external calling comes **secondarily and indirectly**, because they are mingled with the elect—whose identities are known only to God (*2 Tim. 2:1*). Therefore, since the call cannot be made with discrimination, both the reprobate and the elect become partakers of it, in accordance with God's ordering of events. Just as a fisherman, when he casts his net, intends to catch only good fish, but incidentally brings in bad ones as well, because they are mingled together.

IV.

2. The *end of calling* may be viewed in two ways: on the part of the *agent*, and on the part of the *act itself*—that is, the *intended end* and the *actual effect*. Though in the elect these two ends coincide, in others they are distinct.

As in the case of the giving of the Law: the *end of the Law itself* is life through obedience, but *God's purpose after the Fall* is not to give life through the Law (since that has become impossible), but to *convict*

man of his impotence and lead him to Christ, who is the end of the Law.

So also in the evangelical call: the end of the act, considered in itself, is *man's salvation*, because by its nature it tends to lead him to salvation through *faith and repentance*. But this is not, in every case, the end intended by God with respect to all the called—only with respect to those to whom He has decreed to give *faith and salvation*.

V.

Furthermore, the *end of God in calling* may be understood either *generally*, concerning all who are called, or *specifically*, concerning the elect and the reprobate.

Regarding the *general end*, there is no doubt: it is the *declaration of God's right and the duty of man*; a *demonstration of the method and way of salvation*; and a *promise of salvation* to those who fulfill the prescribed condition.

But with respect to the *elect*, this purpose goes further—to the *actual bestowal of salvation*. For them, God calls not only *imperatively*, but also *operatively*: He does not merely *prescribe the duty*, but *performs it Himself inwardly* through the Spirit, working within what He commands outwardly by the Word.

For the *reprobate*, on the other hand, the end is *conviction and inexcusability*.

VI.

Just as this *calling* arises from three principles, so also it has three ends.

It arises from:

1. The *authority of the Lawgiver*, who has the right to prescribe duty to man;
2. The *goodness and grace of the Lord*, who—even toward unworthy and guilty creatures—does not cease to do good, showing them the way of salvation and bestowing many benefits;
3. The *justice of the Judge*, who wills to convict the rebellious and render them inexcusable.

From these arise three distinct ends:

- **First**, the *prescription of duty*—that man may know what God requires of him, namely: to believe and to repent.
- **Second**, the *promise of benefit*, conditioned on that duty—that man may know what God has ordained to give to those who believe and repent.
- **Third**, the *disclosure of the wickedness of the heart* (Luke 2:35) and the *removal of excuse* (John 15:22), so that both in his own conscience and in the judgment of others, it may be manifest that **God's judgment is just**.

VII.

From this it is clear that the question is **not simply about the end of the call as considered in itself** (on the part of the thing), which we do not deny to be *salvation*. Rather, the question is about **the intention of God**.

It is not: *whether God imparts any grace to the reprobate*, as compared to those who are totally deprived of such benefit (like the heathen and other unbelievers);

but rather: *whether God intends to give them saving grace, or salvation itself*, and whether He calls them with that design—that they may truly become partakers of it.

If that were so, then when this result does not happen, it would follow that **something comes to pass contrary to the will of God**, and **by accident**—which is what our adversaries contend, but **we deny**.

Again, the question is not: *whether the outcome of external calling is the same for all, or whether all who are called are affected in the same way*. Even our opponents admit that the result is very different: that some reject the heavenly call and never come to saving repentance, thus rendering themselves *inexcusable*; while others, by contrast, obey—doing so by the *special grace of God*, through the *power and efficacy of His Spirit*, which inclines their minds and wills to obedience. From this they admit it follows that **the salvation these individuals obtain was in fact intended for them**.

But the real issue is this: **Does the disparity in the outcome argue a disparity in the divine intention?** Were *all* called with the same design—that they might become *partakers of salvation*? This our opponents affirm; **we deny it**.

VIII.

The reasons are:

Because **God cannot intend the salvation** of those whom He has *eternally reprobated*, and to whom He has *decreed to deny both faith and the means that lead to salvation*. Otherwise, He would be said to intend what He knows is contrary to His own will—something He *eternally knows will never happen*, because He Himself does not

will to bring it to pass, though He alone has the power to do so. No one can deny that this contradicts both the *wisdom, goodness, and power of God*.

IX.

2. Because **God does not intend faith in the reprobate**; therefore He does not intend *salvation*, which cannot be had without *faith*. That He does not intend to give faith is clear from the fact that **He does not grant it**, nor has He decreed to give it—rather, **He has purposed to withhold it**.

It is no help to reply that God does not intend to *produce* faith in the reprobate Himself, but that He still intends and wills that it *be had by them*.

Because such an intention would either:

– relate to the *actual future existence* of the thing itself (*faith in the person*), in which case God could not be said to intend it, since He has decreed not to grant it—and thus, **His intention would fail**;

or:

– it refers only to *God's preceptive will*—that is, His will in *commanding or approving* that faith be required of them.

In that latter sense, we do **not deny** that God intends faith—but this refers to His *preceptive and approving will*, which is **not the matter in question here**.

X.

3. Because in His calling of the *reprobate Jews*, **Christ Himself testifies** that His purpose was *their judicial hardening*. In *John 9:39*, He says,

“I have come into this world for judgment, that those who see may become blind”—

that is, **those who claim to see, yet truly do not**, are blinded even more.

Also, in *John 15:22*,

“If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have had sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin.”

Nor should it be said that Christ here speaks only of the *event* of calling, and not of the *intention of God*, as if God might have a most holy intention to save, but the event simply fails to align with it.

For **nothing can happen to God by accident or contrary to His intention**. Thus, such an event must have been *intended by God from eternity*.

When Christ says they would not have had sin if He had not come, this must not be understood absolutely, but rather in a particular sense—namely, that **they would not have had the specific guilt of rejecting the Gospel**, which had not yet been preached to them. Still, this does not mean they were without sin against the Law prior to that.

XI.

4. Because all who are called with the intention of salvation are called *κατὰ πρόθεσιν* (*according to purpose*), since such an intention is itself an *act of election* and a *fruit of predestination*. But it is certain that **no reprobate are called κατὰ πρόθεσιν**, for then they would also *love God*, as described in *Romans 8:28*, and would necessarily be *justified and glorified*, because “those whom He called, He also justified” (*Rom. 8:30*)—which cannot be said of the reprobate.

XII.

5. Because *salvation is promised by God's intention only to those who fulfill the prescribed condition*, such as:

- *the weary and burdened (Matt. 11:28),*
- *the thirsty (Isa. 55:1),*
- *believers and penitents (Acts 2:38).*

Since these things **cannot be said of the reprobate**, it likewise **cannot be said** that they are called by God *with the intention that they should be saved*.

XIII.

6. Because it is no more proper to say that **God calls each and every person with the intention that they be saved** than to say that He **calls each and every one with the intention that they be damned**. After all, a *conditional promise of salvation* necessarily includes the *opposite threat*—that “*whoever does not believe will be condemned*,” just as “*whoever believes will be saved*.”

So then, just as it would be **absurd** to say that *God calls the elect with the intention that they be damned*—when in fact He has decreed that they will fulfill the condition—so it is **no less absurd** to say that *God calls the reprobate with the intention that they be saved*, when He knows they will never fulfill the condition—indeed, when He has decreed *to withhold from them that condition*, which He alone is able to bestow.

Therefore, it no more follows from the *universal preaching* of the Gospel that *God wills all to be saved*, than it follows from the *universal threat* of judgment that He *wills all to perish*. That is, just as God threatens all with *curse and death* if they do not repent and turn, so He offers *remission and life* to all who do.

XIV.

Although God **does not intend the salvation of the reprobate** when He calls them, He nonetheless **acts with utmost seriousness and sincerity**, and no stain of *hypocrisy* or *simulation* can rightly be cast upon Him.

Not with respect to *God Himself*, for He **seriously and truly shows them the one and certain way of salvation**, earnestly **exhorts them** to follow it, and **sincerely promises salvation** to all who follow it—that is, to those who *believe and repent*. Nor does He only promise—it is **truly granted**, according to His promise.

Nor can the charge stand *with respect to man*, for the offer of salvation is **not made absolutely**, but *conditionally*, and **places nothing upon man** except when the condition is met—and it is **from the side of man** that this condition fails.

Hence, we embrace with both arms what was rightly stated by the **Synod of Dort**, on *Head of Doctrine IV, Article VIII*:

“As many as are called by the Gospel, are called seriously. For God shows in His Word, seriously and most truly, what is pleasing to Him—namely, that those who are called should come to Him.

He also seriously promises rest of soul and eternal life to all who come to Him and believe.”

XV.

One who, in calling men, *professes to will their salvation* and yet does not will it—acts *dissimulatively*, **if the same will is meant in both cases**. That is: if God declares that He wills something *by the will of decree*, yet does not actually will it; or if He declares that He

wills something *by the will of precept*, yet again does not actually will it—then that would indeed be *hypocrisy*.

But if we are speaking of **two different wills**, the charge does not hold. For example: if God professes to will something *by the will of precept* (e.g., “Come to Me”), but does not will it *by the will of decree*, **there is no simulation or hypocrisy involved**.

Just as in giving the Law, God declares that He wills men to fulfill it—in terms of approval and command, yet not in terms of decree—so also in calling, God indeed declares Himself willing the salvation of the called *by the will of precept and invitation*, but **not by the will of decree**.

For calling shows *what God wills to command man to do*, but not *what God has decreed to do Himself*. It reveals *what pleases God*, what is agreeable to *His nature*—namely, that those called should come to Him. But it does not reveal what He has decreed to bring about in any given person. It shows *what God is ready to give* to those who believe and repent, but not what He has decreed to give to *this or that individual*.

XVI.

It is one thing for God to will that the *reprobate come*—that is, to **command them to come and to be pleased with their coming**; it is another thing to will that they *do not come*—that is, **not to will to give them the power to come**.

God may, in calling them, will the former, and yet not will the latter—and this **without contradiction**. Why? Because the first concerns only the *will of precept*, while the second concerns the *will of decree*.

Though these wills are **distinct** (the first having as its object the *command of duty*, the second the *execution of the event*), they are **not opposed or contradictory**, but rather are **harmonized according to their different respects**.

It is true that one does not call seriously if he neither *commands* the person to come nor *approves* of his coming—I concede this. But it is **not true** that one does not call seriously if he does not *intend* or *decree* the person's coming—I deny that.

For *serious calling does not require* an intention or decree to bring a person, but only **a constant will to command the duty**, and **a readiness to bestow the promised benefit** upon the one who does it—which God indeed **most seriously wills**.

If He seriously shows what He commands man to do, and what the path of salvation is, and what is pleasing to Him, this does **not mean** that He thereby shows what He Himself has decreed to do—as we have already seen in the case of the Law.

Nor, if among men, a ruler or legislator commands nothing that he does not approve, can we therefore say that he also intends to cause it to be done by his subjects—because **that power does not lie in him**. Thus, the same principle applies to God, **on whom alone it depends not only to command, but to effect** what He commands in man.

And if there were a legislator among men with the power to do both, it would be rightly said of him that **he wills what he approves and commands**, even though he does not intend to cause it to happen.

XVII.

An *absolute promise* cannot be serious unless it is grounded in the *will and intention of the one making the promise* to give what is promised. But it is otherwise with a *conditional* promise: to preserve its sincerity, it is sufficient that there be an intention in God to **certainly connect** the promised thing with the condition—so that the condition never occurs without the promised blessing also following. Therefore, because of such a connection and dependence, the *offer of salvation* made to believing men is most serious—since **no one will ever have faith who will not certainly obtain salvation.**

XVIII.

The *word of external calling* ought to be a **sign of some divine decree** on which it rests—but not necessarily a decree concerning the salvation of particular persons. Rather, it rests on a decree concerning the **means** and their **connection with salvation.**

The foundation of calling is as follows:

- **In general** (as it is directed indiscriminately to all men): the *decree to gather the Church through the Word.*
- **With respect to the elect:** the *special decree to confer upon them the salvation acquired for them through Christ.*
- **With respect to the reprobate:** the *decree concerning the order and connection of the means of salvation, and their proclamation and prescription to men.*

Thus, the *word of calling* is a **sign of that decree**, by which God has made an **indissoluble bond** between *faith and salvation*. Because the Word presents this truth, **no simulation can be**

ascribed to God, since He proposes nothing that is not completely true.

XIX.

Since *faith in Christ*, which is prescribed to us in the call, is not prescribed with respect to **all its acts at once**, but rather **gradually and successively**—first in its *general and direct acts*, and then in its *special and reflexive acts* (first in *assent* and *refuge*, and only later in *personal acquiescence*, i.e., in Christ having died *for me*)—and since even these later acts are not commanded unless the former are already in place, it is wrongly said that, according to our view, the *promise of salvation* is made under a condition that **could not be fulfilled without falsehood**.

For it is both *true and sincere* that **Christ is a real and perfect Savior for all who truly come to Him** through faith and repentance. This is what men are commanded to believe in the *direct act of faith*. And it *can be believed without falsehood*, even by those for whom Christ did not die.

XX.

The *promises and threats* added to the commandments of God express **nothing more about the mind and intention of God** than the commandments themselves. They reveal:

- not the *will of His decree*, which is properly called *God's will*,
- but only the *will of His precept*, which shows what is pleasing to Him.

Thus:

- The *Holy Spirit* uses these promises and threats **toward the elect** as **suitable motives** for bringing about their conversion.
- But He wills them to serve **another purpose** with regard to those whom **God does not intend to convert** or bring to salvation:
 - **First**, to show the necessary *connection between faith and salvation*.
 - **Second**, to render them *inexcusable*.

XXI.

The invitation to the wedding feast, as presented in the parable of *Matthew 22*, indeed teaches that the King wills—that is, **commands and graciously offers**—that those invited should come, and that this is their duty. But it does **not** teach that the King *intended* or *decreed* that they should actually come. Otherwise, He would have given them the **power to come** and would have **inclined their hearts**. Since He did not do this, it is a sure sign that He **did not will** that they should come in that manner.

Nor, when it is said in *Luke 14:17*, “all things are now ready,” is there necessarily implied a divine intention to give them salvation—but rather only the **sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice**, because it has been prepared by God and offered on the Cross as a Victim of *infinite merit* to expiate the sins of men and to obtain salvation for all who come clothed in the wedding garment and take refuge in Him—that is, for those who truly *believe and repent*. This leaves no room for doubting the truth or the perfection of His satisfaction.

XXII.

Although the *intention of pastors* who call should be **conformable**

to the intention of God, who sends them to call men, this must be understood as follows:

- They are required, by God's own ordinance, to **invite all their hearers without distinction** to repentance and faith, as the *only way of salvation*.
- They must also intend nothing other than the **gathering of the Church** and the **salvation of the elect**, for which purpose they are God's *fellow workers (synergoi)*.

Yet there is also a distinction:

God, being *omniscient*, knows perfectly which among the hearers of the Gospel are *elect* and which are *reprobate*. He intends to save **only those individuals** whom He has elected and not the rest.

Ministers, however, being without this knowledge, do not know whose salvation their ministry will ultimately serve. They cannot distinguish between elect and reprobate and are thus required—out of charity—to hold a favorable judgment toward all, not presuming to judge anyone's reprobation. Therefore, by divine command, they address **all who are called** *promiscuously and without discrimination*, yet they do not **intend the salvation of all**, but only that of the elect—in *imitation of God*.

In this way, there is **nothing in their ministry** that does not correspond to both **God's command and His general intention**. Even so, God, being conscious of His own eternal decree, proceeds further, and in His own mind **distinctly intends either the conversion and salvation, or the inexcusability**, of each individual.

XXIII.

The **foundation of consolation** in the preaching of the Gospel is **not undermined** by the fact that there is some difference between the *intention of God* and that of the *minister*. For it is sufficient to establish true consolation that they agree in their **general intention** and **primary goal**: namely, to gather a Church for God, which He will sanctify and glorify, and to call to salvation **all who repent and believe**.

The difference that arises regarding the knowledge of the *individuals*—who among the hearers are *reprobate* and who are *elect*—does not belong to ministers, but to God alone. This **cannot overturn consolation**, nor can it give just cause for despair, any more than the particularity of election or the immutability of the decree of reprobation can. For although it is **not God's intention**, having eternally decreed the reprobation of some, to admit the reprobate into communion with Himself through calling, it is also **not the intention of ministers** to do so either. They are to **intend properly the salvation only of the elect**, though from the *duty of charity*, they may also *wish and seek the salvation of others*, as far as it lies within them to promote it.

XXIV.

It is one thing for God, by His Word, to *declare to those who will not believe* that faith and repentance are most *certain and infallible means* of obtaining salvation. It is another thing for God to make this *external declaration of His Word* to the unbelieving with the purpose that they *should believe and be saved*.

For if He truly intended this end, He would **add to the external preaching the internal power of the Spirit**, without which the call always remains ineffective.

XXV.

It does not contradict the *wisdom of God* to will to prescribe, and to actually prescribe, those things which He certainly knows will *not be fulfilled* by those to whom the command is given. For He desires to *declare His right*, the *duty of man*, and just as much, His *goodness* and *justice* in giving such a command.

But it would contradict His nature for God to *simply and absolutely will and intend* something which He **not only knows will never happen**, but which He has **also decreed not to happen**.

XXVI.

Although God offers the Word to the *reprobate* in order that, after their continued *obstinacy*, they might be rendered **inexcusable**, it does not follow that He offers it **with the purpose that they should reject it**. For rejection is a *sin*, which **God neither intends nor effects**.

Rather, He does this so that the *hidden perversity of their hearts* might be made manifest (*Luke 2:35*), and that through their rejection of the Word—which arises from *themselves*—He may have occasion to display **His justice in the infliction of punishment**.

Though man *could not receive the Word without grace*, and though God *does not will to grant that grace*, God is not therefore to be considered as calling them **in order that they might reject it**. Rejection does not flow *necessarily* from the nature of the call, but *accidentally*, from the wickedness of man himself. For although a man could not receive the Word without grace, his actual rejection of it **arises from his own obstinate malice**.

XXVII.

A man does not cease to be **inexcusable** simply because he does

what God *intended to occur*—for he does *not* do what God **commanded**. Herod and Pontius Pilate were not excused, even though they did nothing beyond what the *hand and plan of God had predestined to occur* (Acts 4:28). For the **decree** is not the rule of our actions—only the **precept** is.

XXVIII.

To render a man inexcusable, it is sufficient to **remove from him the pretext of ignorance**, not necessarily that of *inability*.

- Man often pleads *ignorance*; he **never pleads inability**.
- Because of his *pride*, man always persuades himself that he *can do* what is required.
- He is sufficiently convinced that he sins out of *obstinate malice* when he neglects his duty.

The pretext of **ignorance** must be removed because it excuses—unless it is *feigned and voluntary*. But regarding **inability**, the same rule does not apply—especially when that inability is *voluntary* and arises from *culpable depravity* (*blameworthy impotence*).

- A man is not held accountable for knowing what has not been revealed.
- But he **is accountable** for doing what he has become unable to do *because of sin*.
- Therefore, what he is unable to do through his own fault **can still rightly be demanded** of him.

QUESTION III

On Sufficient Grace (*De Gratia Sufficiente*)

Is subjectively and inwardly sufficient grace given to all individuals without exception?

We answer: No. (Against the Romanists, Socinians, and Arminians.)

I.

Among the various distinctions made regarding *grace*, especially as it is manifested in calling, the most common is the one that divides it into *sufficient* and *efficacious* grace. This distinction is what gives rise to the present question. But certain preliminary remarks must be made to clarify (1) how this distinction is proposed by our adversaries and rejected by us, and (2) in what proper sense it might be accepted by us.

II.

Bellarmino (Controv. 3, *On Grace and Free Will*, book 1, chapter 2) distinguishes sufficient and efficacious grace as follows:

“Sufficient grace is that by which God calls, awakens, and is ready to help man by guiding, protecting, and cooperating with him, such that man, so awakened, truly *can* will to believe, convert, and do good—although he *does not* actually will to believe, convert, or do good. Therefore, this grace remains **inefficacious**.

Efficacious grace, on the other hand, is that by which God calls and awakens man and is ready to help him by guiding, protecting, and cooperating with him in such a way that man, so awakened and called, *infallibly and actually* wills, believes, is converted, and does good.”

III.

But this distinction ought to be viewed with **serious suspicion**, and rightly so, for several reasons:

1. Because it **smuggles in the poison of Pelagianism**. What Pelagius called the “possibility of believing”—a grace of the Creator given to all men according to their own free will—these Romanists now call *sufficient grace*, supposedly given to all men so that they can believe, *if they will*.

What Pelagius called exhortation, instruction, or law, they now refer to as *moral persuasion* and even as *efficacious grace*. But whatever this “help” may be called, they insist that it is such that the effect depends entirely on *man’s will*—whether he wants to profit from it or not.

This is **pure Pelagianism**.

2. Because any grace that is *truly sufficient for conversion* must also be **efficacious**. Otherwise, it would be **sufficient in name only** and in reality *insufficient*, since it would require *another* grace to actually produce the intended effect.

3. Because **Christ Himself undermines this distinction**. When speaking of the efficacious grace He gave to the Apostle Paul to deliver him from the thorn that afflicted him, He did not call it *efficacious* grace, but rather **sufficient**: “*My grace is sufficient for you*” (2 Cor. 12:9).

By this very statement, He shows that **all grace given by God**

is both sufficient and efficacious—otherwise it would not have brought Paul comfort in his deep affliction.

Nor is it any help to say that *some* sufficient grace is efficacious, but not all. If the distinction were legitimate, then the two members (*sufficient* and *efficacious*) should be *mutually exclusive*, and **no sufficient grace should ever be ineffective**.

V.

We do not deny that this distinction between sufficient and efficacious grace may be **admitted in a certain sense**—if by *sufficiency* we mean not absolute and simple sufficiency, but a sufficiency *in a qualified sense*, either:

- with respect to **external means**,
- or with respect to **internal illumination**, such as unto a knowledge of the truth and *temporary faith* (*Heb. 10:26; Luke 8:13*),
- or unto **conviction and reproof** (ἐλεγξις and ἐλεγχομένη; *John 15:22*).

But as for conversion itself, we acknowledge **no sufficient grace** that is not **also efficacious**.

VI.

The question here is **not** about any kind of grace or divine help that may be found either in *nature* or in *grace*. It is certain that **God has never left Himself without witness** (ἀμάρτυρον) toward men in whatever state they have been.

Nor can it be denied that even **the heathen** are sometimes given a *restraining and convicting light*, by which they are held back from many gross sins and outrages.

Likewise, to the **reprobate who dwell among the elect**, there is often granted the **external preaching of the Word**, and even at times an **internal illumination of the mind**, by which:

- they may feel sorrow for their sins,
- or for a time rejoice in the Word they have received—as is seen in those with *temporary faith*.

But here we are dealing specifically with **help and grace that is salvific and sufficient unto conversion**.

VII.

Neither are we inquiring about **objective and external grace**, which is proposed to man *as an object*—for that has already been treated in the previous question. Rather, this concerns **subjective and internal grace**, which is received *as a faculty or act within man*.

We are not asking whether **all actually believe**, for it is evident that among all people, *countless remain in unbelief*.

The true question is: **Do all possess the ability to believe?**

Nor do we ask whether this grace is distributed to all *equally in measure*. Even the adversaries themselves acknowledge that *the help of divine grace* is **not equally present to all**, and does **not at every moment suffice** to raise one up from sin—as Bellarmine himself concedes (*On Grace and Free Will*, book 2, chapter 2).

Rather, the question is:

Is salvific grace ever, at any point, conferred upon each individual?

VIII.

Thus, the real inquiry reduces to this:

Does the free favor of God extend itself so generously that to *all*—whether **heathen or Christians, infants or adults, reprobate or elect**, in their state after the Fall, and according to time, place, or manner—He communicates:

- not just *any* grace,
- but that which is truly **salvific and sufficient unto conversion**,
- not merely *externally*, but also *subjectively and internally*,
- whether *ordinarily* or *extraordinarily*, *mediately* or *immediately*?

This is what our **adversaries affirm**, but what **we deny**.

VIII.

The **Roman Catholics** claim that **sufficient help unto salvation** is given to all men, according to place and time, so that there is no one who has not at some point received this help—either:

- **immediately**, in the case of adults, or
- **mediately**, in the case of infants, through their parents, who can present them for baptism.

Bellarmino speaks this way (*On Grace and Free Will*, book 2, chapter 5, fifth proposition):

"Sufficient help, according to place and time, is given to all—either mediately or immediately."

IX.

The **Arminians**, following closely in the steps of the Socinians, assert the same idea:

- That God, having a **universal will to save each and every person**, and having **redeemed all**, likewise **wills** to provide through a **universal calling** the means that are **sufficient for faith and repentance** to all individuals without exception.

However, they insist that the **use of these means is left entirely to man's free will**, upon which it depends whether this grace will be used or not, whether one will believe or not.

Indeed, they seem to go even further than the Romanists. The latter still admit that it was within God's liberty and right **to grant or withhold** this sufficient grace, and that **no injustice** would be imputed to Him if He denied it to some.

But the **Remonstrants** argue that in the *New Covenant*, **God is obligated** to administer such grace to all, lest He be burdened with the unjust charge of **demanding something beyond our ability**—as Arnoldus argues against Molinaeus.

X.

The aim of both these parties, in adopting this **Pelagian error**, is to *pay homage to the idol of free will*, and to establish their doctrine of

the *autonomy* (αὐτεξούσιον) of human will—by proposing a kind of grace that may always be **rejected or accepted** by man.

Their main arguments rest on two faulty assumptions:

1. That **God cannot require anything from man** which he does not have the strength to perform.
2. That **faith and repentance**, being the conditions of the New Covenant, are not precepts of the first covenant, nor are they owed by nature; and therefore, no one is obliged to fulfill them unless God first grants the power to do so.

XI.

But the **orthodox** deny both of these assumptions.

We deny that God is in any way **bound to give such grace to all**, or that He **wills to bestow it on all**, or that He **actually imparts it** to every individual. Rather, He gives it **only to those who are called according to His purpose** (κατὰ πρόθεσιν)—that is, to the **elect**.

XII.

The reasons are:

1. Because **salvific grace does not extend beyond the divine decree**, since it is the **effect of that decree**.

But God has not decreed that all should be saved. Rather, as it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

- Just as God has **chosen some** and appointed them unto salvation,

- so also has He **reprobated others** and appointed them unto wrath.
- He has mercy on whom He wills, and He hardens whom He wills.

No one would say that God gives **sufficient grace** to those whom He chooses to harden.

And it is no answer to say that God's decree is *not absolute*, but rather *conditional*, depending on the good or bad use of free will. That is to **assume the very point in question**—a claim we have already refuted when treating of the **decree of reprobation**.

XIII.

2. Because **external, objective grace** is not common to all (as previously shown). Therefore, **much less** is **internal, subjective grace**.

Hence, it is said that God in former times "**allowed the nations to walk in their own ways**" (*Acts 14:16*)—and He still does so in the case of Turks, Persians, and Indians.

Who, then, would dare to say that **sufficient grace** is given to those whom **God permits to go their own way**, and whose **times of ignorance** He still **passes over**?

XIV.

3. Because **faith is not of all men** (*2 Thess. 3:2*), but only of the **elect** (*Titus 1:1*)—that is, of those who were *ordained to eternal life* (*Acts 13:48*).

But if **sufficient grace** is given to all, then the grace of believing must also be given to all.

It should not be replied here that grace is indeed sufficiently given **on God's part**, but that the **obstacle lies in the perversity of the will**—that one rejects the grace offered while another receives it.

Because the question will always return:

What is the cause of this difference?

Why is it that one man, rather than another, receives grace?

- If he has it **from himself**, then man is making the difference, contrary to the apostle Paul (*1 Cor. 4:7*).
- If he has it **from God**, then the first grace cannot be called *sufficient*, since **another grace must be added** to determine the will.

And if it was truly sufficient, then why did it **not remove that same perversity** of the will in one as it did in another?

XV.

4. This so-called grace which is given to all—

Is it **equal** in all men, or **unequal**?

- If unequal, then it cannot be called **sufficient and universal**, but only *common* in some, *special* in others.
- If equal, then **why are the outcomes so unequal**?

You may say it arises from the **unequal dispositions of men**, and their free will: one accepts, another rejects.

But then:

- Either the **remedy was unequal**, since it healed one but not the other, or

- The **disease of nature is unequal**, which was the opinion of Pelagius but is denied by the apostle (*Rom. 3:12*).

And in whatever form the adversaries try to cast their doctrine, the conclusion must be this:

Unless a **discriminating, particular grace** is granted to those who are actually converted, then the *discretion* must be assigned to **man's free will**, placed upon a so-called *sufficient* grace.

This is **precisely the error of Pelagius**.

XVI.

5. Not a few of the adversaries themselves **reject this fiction**, including the entire **Jansenist school**.

See **Jansen** (*On Augustine*, book 3, chapter 3), where he proves that this sufficient grace, as explained by the moderns, is a *monstrosity*:

"It is a kind of help distinct from others, which from the beginning of man's fall until the day of judgment, never has had, nor ever will have, any effect in the human will."

In chapter 4, he shows from the **nature of grace** that no one is given such a *sufficient* grace, according to the modern definition.

And in chapter 10, section 11, he demonstrates that **many are utterly destitute** of this supposed sufficient grace, that it is a **Semipelagian invention**, and he refutes the **Jesuits' arguments** for it in the following chapters.

The same was asserted earlier by **Alvarez** (*De Auxiliis*, book 8, dispute 71), and many others have likewise condemned this fiction—

such as **Benius, Osorius, and Delphinus.**

XVII.

6. To this supposed *sufficient grace*:

- Either **something must be added** in order for it to become *efficacious*, or
- **Nothing is added.**

If something must be added, then it is **not sufficient.**

If nothing is added, then **its efficacy depends on man**, not on God or His grace.

Thus, what they call *efficacious grace* would only be **named from the outcome**, not from its **inherent power**. It would mean that the distinction is not **a distinction in grace itself**, but merely in **the result**—that is:

One and the same grace sometimes succeeds, sometimes does not.

XVIII.

The Word of external calling must indeed be a sign of some decree on which it rests.

But it is not necessarily a sign of God's decree to save particular individuals—rather, a decree concerning the means of salvation and their connection with the end.

We may distinguish three foundations of this call:

- The **foundation of calling in general**, as it is directed indiscriminately to all men, is the **decree to gather the**

Church through the Word.

- The **foundation of calling with respect to the elect** is the **special decree to confer upon them the salvation acquired for them through Christ.**
- The **foundation with respect to the reprobate** is the **decree concerning the order and connection of the means of salvation, and their proclamation and prescription to men.**

Therefore, the Word of calling is a sign of that decree in which God has inseparably joined **faith and salvation**—and because this connection is truly proposed in the Word, **no dissimulation can be attributed to God**, since He proposes nothing that is not altogether true.

XIX.

The faith in Christ that is prescribed in calling is not commanded in all its acts at once and simultaneously, but **gradually and successively**:

- First, in regard to its general and direct acts (such as assent and fleeing to Christ),
- Then, in regard to its specific and reflex acts (such as the personal application of Christ as having died for me).

Indeed, these latter acts are not commanded unless the former are already present.

Thus, it is wrongly asserted that, according to our view, the promise of salvation is made under a condition which cannot be fulfilled without falsehood.

For we proclaim Christ to be a **true and perfect Savior** of all who seriously flee to Him by faith and repentance—which is precisely what men are commanded to believe in the direct act of faith.

And this can be believed **without falsehood**, even by those for whom Christ has not died. The **promises and threats** that are added to God's commandments express nothing more clearly about the mind and intention of God than the commandments themselves do.

These show what is the will of God **commanding**, but not what is the will of God **effecting**—which alone should properly be called His will.

Therefore:

- Just as the Holy Spirit uses these things among the **elect** as suitable motivations to lead them to conversion,
- So also among those whom God does not intend to convert, He uses them to:
 - Manifest the necessary **connection between faith and salvation**, and
 - Make them **inexcusable**.

XX.

When it is said, “*Christ stands at the door and knocks*,” (Rev. 3:20), it cannot be concluded from this that sufficient grace is given to all.

1. Because this refers to those already called, who are within the Church, not to those who are yet to be called.

2. That standing and knocking do not necessarily signify inward motions, but may rightly be referred to external exhortations, which take place partly through the Word, and partly through afflictions—such as those mentioned in the preceding verse.

Therefore, He knocks upon the hearts of the elect and the reprobate in different ways:

- upon the elect both outwardly and inwardly, by the Word and by the Spirit, so that, in knocking imperatively through the Word, He also opens effectively through the Spirit—as was seen in the heart of Lydia;
- upon the reprobate only outwardly by the Word, that they might understand their duty, the promised benefit, the gravity of their sin, and the justice of the punishment if they neglect the voice of God.

Nor is it absurd for God to knock, even though He knows the man will not open—for it is no injustice to warn a man of his duty, and to convict him of rebellious obstinacy.

XXI.

Although men cannot come by their own strength, and although God does not grant them the power to come—because He is not obligated to do so—yet the call is not in vain.

By calling, He draws the elect to come to Him, and renders the reprobate inexcusable if they do not come—since they are bound to come, and yet they are unwilling. This is sufficient to justify their condemnation.

Nor is it just that a man's sin should benefit him, and that he should therefore be exempt, because he has made himself unable through his own wickedness. This inability not only does not excuse him—it

actually aggravates and increases his guilt, because it is **moral** and **voluntary**. Through it, he both cannot and will not believe.

The case is not the same as involuntary or purely natural inability, as in one who is blind or dead with respect to seeing or acting—for where a man is lacking faculties, he is not obliged to exercise them.

But the obligation by which the creature is bound to the Creator can never be removed, and certainly not by man's own wickedness—for man is never deprived of the faculty of understanding and willing, only of the right disposition of those faculties.

XXII.

It is absurd to say that sufficient grace is given to all, if not immediately, then at least mediately—on the basis that “to the one who does what is in him, God will not deny grace,” and that He is ready to give the light of the gospel to those who have used the light of nature well.

1. This is the Pelagian fiction, and cannot be confirmed by any passage of Scripture. Rather, it is overthrown by countless testimonies, in which gospel grace is attributed not to any good use of nature or merit in man, but only to the mercy of God and His sovereign good pleasure (2 Tim. 1:9; Rom. 9:16; Eph. 2:1, 4; Isa. 65:1).
2. It would make God ready to do what He knows will never happen, and what He has decreed not to do—knowing that the condition required is impossible for man.
3. The gospel would then have been revealed to the wiser and more virtuous among the Gentiles, who seemed better disposed to

receive it. Yet in fact it was denied to them, and more often granted to the ignorant and most corrupt—see Matt. 11:25.

XXIII.

Nor can the words of Christ in Matthew 13:12 be used to support this fiction—where He says, *“To the one who has, more will be given.”*

Because He is not speaking of the gifts of **nature**, but of **grace**—nor of the increase of the former, but of the latter.

This is evident to anyone who considers the context and purpose of Christ’s words in the two passages where this phrase occurs.

In Matthew 13:12, Christ is giving the reason why it was granted to the apostles to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but not to others: *“To the one who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.”* (cf. Luke 8:18).

And those who *“have not”* are identified by Mark (Mark 4:11) as *“those who are outside,”* who are opposed to those *“within,”* that is, the true elect in the Church.

Thus, Christ is implying that the saving gifts of God are joined together in a golden chain, so that whoever has received the first, to him God will add the rest—until the full measure of all gifts is completed in him.

Just as in a chain, when the first link is drawn, the rest must follow (Rom. 8:29).

XXIV.

Thus also in Matthew 25:29, in the parable of the talents, the same principle is repeated. By *“the one who has”* is meant not only one

who possesses, but also one who makes good use of the talents entrusted to him—both for his own salvation and for the good of others. For he who puts to no use what he has, and who profits neither himself nor others, is rightly said not to have it at all. Just as a miser is said to lack what he possesses no less than what he does not. Hence Augustine says (*On Christian Doctrine*, Book 1, Chapter 4), “Everything which, by being given, is not diminished—if it is held and not given—is not yet possessed as it ought to be, and so is rightly said not to be possessed.”

Therefore, it is a complete misapplication to draw this saying in favor of natural gifts, as though it pertained to the gifts of grace. As if God were promising, to one who possesses natural gifts while still in a state of nature, some leap into grace—as though without grace, one could do anything to merit or obtain God’s grace. It is clear that Christ’s intention is rather to indicate the inseparable connection and progression of gracious gifts, and their advancement until they reach their fullness.

XXV.

It is one thing for God, in His goodness, patience, and longsuffering, to delay the punishment of sins, and from the standpoint of the one addressed, to invite the sinner in a state of sin to repentance, insofar as He supplies the time and external occasions for repentance. But it is another thing entirely to say that God, on His part, and so far as He is concerned, actually gives sufficient help for conversion through that patience. For it is evident that this external longsuffering and forbearance of God is not sufficient to soften the heart or to incline the affections toward the good.

XXVI.

God is not bound, under the New Covenant, to provide man with

sufficient strength to fulfill it, so that there might be an imagined equality between the command and man's ability, as Bellarmine claims. For no new kind of obedience or faith is prescribed in substance beyond what was already required under the first covenant—toward the fulfillment of which man had been endowed with sufficient strength at creation. But since he lost those powers through his own fault, God is not obliged to restore them simply because He requires obedience. And the equity of what is required must be judged, not from the standpoint of man's sinful condition, but from the standpoint of his original creation. For what was once entrusted to him, he still owes, even if through his own fault he is no longer able to pay. As to whether Adam possessed the power to believe in Christ—about which the Arminians challenge us—see Locus VIII, Question II.

XXVII.

The examples of the Ethiopian eunuch and Cornelius, cited from Acts 8 and 10, as though God gave them the light of grace because of their good use of the light of nature, are not to the point. For they cannot be classified as unregenerate unbelievers when the Gospel reached them, but rather as proselytes—those already trained in the knowledge of the Jewish religion. God thus willed to give them further light, through the Gospel and the knowledge of the already-revealed Christ, so that they might not only believe in the promised Messiah in general, but in Jesus of Nazareth specifically, as the true Messiah sent by God.

QUESTION IV

On Effectual Calling

Is calling said to be effectual because of its outcome, or because of its congruity, or rather because of the supernatural operation of grace itself?

We deny the first two; we affirm the last — against the Romanists and the Arminians.

I.

To rightly grasp the true nature and cause of *effectual calling*, we must consider the differing opinions on the subject.

Bellarmino (De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio, Book 1, chapter 12) lists three principal views held among the Romanists:

- The first is that of Molina, Lessius, Becanus, and most Jesuits, who maintain that a calling is said to be effectual *merely from the outcome*.
- The second is that of Bellarmine himself, Suarez, and their followers, who derive its efficacy from its *congruity*.
- The third is that of the Thomists and Dominicans, who ground it in the *physical pre-determination* of God.

II. The First Opinion: Efficacy from the Outcome

This first view, says Bellarmine, locates the efficacy of calling in *the assent and cooperation of man* — so that a calling becomes effectual simply because it achieves its result, and it achieves that result because the human will cooperates with it.

In this way, it is in man's power to make sufficient grace effectual.

But this is nothing other than the very error of Pelagius — transferring the chief cause of conversion to man's free will.

Rightly does Bellarmine himself reject this view, and he refutes it with multiple arguments — chiefly this one:

“If that opinion were true, free will would be what distinguishes the believer from the unbeliever — contrary to Paul in 1 Corinthians 4:7: ‘What do you have that you did not receive?’

For if two people hear the same sermon and receive the same internal inspiration, but only one believes while the other does not, then the one who believed could say, ‘I made myself different from the unbeliever, because I was willing to believe, but he was not.’

And he could boast that he cooperated with the grace of God, which the other despised. But this the Apostle denies.”

This argument alone is enough to slay this dangerous error.

And it is supported by many others drawn from man's utter impotence to do good, and from the invincible power of grace — matters we will address more fully later.

III. The Second Opinion: Efficacy from Congruity

This view, which Bellarmine hints at but does not firmly assert (toward the end of the same chapter), is that of those who place the efficacy of grace in the “*congruity*” of the calling.

That is: in a certain kind of *moral persuasion*, which though it can be resisted by free will, still has an infallible effect — because God applies that persuasion which He knows to be suited to the disposition of those He has decreed to draw effectually, and which He foreknows will not be rejected by them.

Bellarmino explains this more clearly in Book 4, chapter 11, where he says:

“The efficacy of persuasion does not arise from the vehemence of the persuasion, but from the disposition of the will, which God foresees. That is, when God presents something by internal persuasion, He does so in a way that He sees the will is apt to consent.”

And again:

“The infallibility of the result does not arise from the power of the divine motion, but from the foreknowledge of the aptitude of the will.”

If we ask further what this “congruity” of calling consists in, Suarez (On Efficacious Grace, Book 3, ch. 15) tells us that some define it as a kind of proportion — namely, the proportion that exists between a kind of illumination provided by God and the person’s natural makeup, temperament, and situation.

Since God knows perfectly every person in their nature and condition, He also knows which manner of calling will suit each one — so that if their heart is touched in that particular way, they will consent.

But since such a calling must be a means suited to God’s *efficacious purpose*, which it would contradict not to fulfill — and since this congruity provides only a *moral certainty*, which does not exclude the possibility that free will may still resist —

Suarez concludes that the entire efficacy of calling must consist in this:

“That God, in His infinite wisdom, foreseeing how each will and cause would act in every circumstance if placed therein, knows when and by what calling each will freely consent — if given that

calling.

So, when He wills to convert someone, He also wills to call them at the time and in the manner that He knows they will consent.

And this calling is called *effectual*, not because it has the effect in itself, but because, under divine foreknowledge, it will infallibly have it.”

Thus, according to these authors, congruity consists mainly in three things:

- The persuasion itself,
- The fitting application of that persuasion to a person’s situation, temperament, time, and place,
- And God’s *middle knowledge*, by which He foresees what each will would do if placed in that situation.

IV.

But this opinion is rightly rejected by the Orthodox.

1. Because it falls into the same error as the first opinion (which Bellarmine himself rejects), even if it uses different words.

It attributes the efficacy of grace no less to the will of man, and the argument Bellarmine used to solidly refute the first opinion applies equally to this one.

If it lies within our power to assent or not assent to a congruous calling, as he himself admits (by making the efficacy of calling depend upon the disposition and aptitude of the human will when called in the way and time God foreknows will lead to assent), then the entire cause of the distinction is in man, not in God.

And it's not hard to show that, under this view, no other effective cause of conversion can be given except the human will.

For what else could it be?

- **Prevenient or assisting grace?** That is assumed to be the same for both the congruously and incongruously called — leaving the will in its natural indifference.
- **Congruity itself?** But that congruity, as Suarez admits, produces only a kind of *moral certainty*, which by no means excludes the possibility that free will may still resist.
- **External circumstances — time, place, situation?** These are mere adjuncts, external accidents, devoid of causal power.
- **The foreknowledge of God?** But foreknowledge is not a cause of things — it presupposes its object, it does not produce it.

Man is not going to act in a certain way *because* God foreknew it; rather, God foreknew it *because* man would act in that way.

Moreover, the so-called “middle knowledge” is a mere fiction, as we shall show in its place.

Therefore, the only remaining cause of this difference in conversion is the will and free choice of man —

who is called at the time and place that God foreknows he will consent.

V.

Second, this opinion assumes that there is *some aptitude* in the unregenerate will toward conversion.

But this is **pure Pelagianism** and is directly contrary to Scripture,

which repeatedly affirms man's total *inability* for spiritual good, often expressing it by the terms *death* or *nothingness*.

Who would dare say that a corpse has any disposition or aptitude for its own resurrection?

Or that nothing has any aptitude toward its own creation?

VI.

Third, it contradicts the biblical description of God's action in man's conversion.

That action does not consist in a bare *moral persuasion* (which is merely objective in nature),

but in the **almighty and invincible power of God**,

a work not less than **creation** or **resurrection** itself.

It operates **effectively**, not just **objectively**.

Who would imagine that to regenerate a man, to raise him from the dead, to create a new heart —

is nothing more than to morally persuade him?

To invite him with commands, arguments, promises, and threats — as an eloquent orator might do, persuading his audience by force of rhetoric?

But **Augustine** speaks very differently. In *De Gratia Christi*, ch. 24, he says:

“It is not by law and doctrine sounding outwardly in the ears, but by an inward, hidden, wonderful, and ineffable power, that God works in human hearts — not only true revelations, but also good wills.”

VII.

Fourth, if the efficacy of grace depended on the congruity of the calling and the arrangement of circumstances, then surely those would be converted who appear *more apt* and disposed to receive the gospel — especially those surrounded by favorable circumstances.

But in fact, the exact opposite is often the case:

- God **hides** His mysteries from the wise and prudent, and **reveals** them to infants (Matt. 11:25).
- He calls **Gentiles** — those alienated from Christ and the covenants, without God, and without hope, sunk deep in the darkness of superstition and idolatry.
- And He **rejects the Jews**, who were in covenant with Him, and who had in abundance all the outward aids needed to receive Christ.

They had:

- The knowledge of the Law,
- The oracles of the prophets,
- The testimony of John the Baptist,
- The presence, preaching, miracles, death, and resurrection of Christ — all confirmed by the clearest evidences,
- And the diligent instruction of the apostles.

All these things were **lacking** to the Gentiles.

By all human measure of “congruent calling,” the Jews should have been converted — not the Gentiles.

Yet the opposite happened.

Many Gentiles believed; very few Jews did — almost none.

Paul celebrates this miracle of grace using the words of Moses and Isaiah (Romans 10:19–21):

“But I say, did Israel not know?

First Moses says,

‘I will provoke you to jealousy by those who are not a nation;

I will move you to anger by a foolish nation.’

But Isaiah is very bold and says,

‘I was found by those who did not seek Me;

I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me.’

But to Israel he says,

‘All day long I have stretched out My hands
to a disobedient and contrary people.’”

And what “congruity of calling” or “aptitude for obedience” was there among **those who were not seeking Him**?

VIII.

Although effectual grace—by which the will is so moved that it infallibly gives its consent—can in a certain sense be called *congruous*, inasmuch as God moves the will congruously so that it consents, and in a way suitable to the nature of the will, yet this lends no support whatsoever to Bellarmine’s opinion. This is because such congruity is not drawn from any disposition in the will itself, nor from external circumstances added to the effectual help of grace, so that the motion, being congruous for one, might be incongruous for another depending on differing qualities of the subject. Instead, that

which is called *effectual grace* brings its own congruity with it—hence its distinction from *ineffectual grace*, which is given to the non-elect and does not result in conversion. Objections often raised in this context will be better addressed in the following question.

IX.

The third opinion is that of the Thomists and Dominicans, who ground the efficacy of calling in what they call *physical predetermination*. They assert that effectual grace is a real and physical action of God, by which He determines the will to will and choose the good which that very grace excites and inspires in it. And since it is not possible for God to predetermine the will in this way without the will itself being determined—and thus willing what God has predetermined—it follows that such grace cannot fail to achieve its intended effect.

This is how Bellarmine summarizes their view (lib. I, cap. 12), and though he rejects it on the grounds that it destroys free will, it comes closest to the truth—although it may be less precise in expressing this idea under the name of *physical predetermination*. The reason is that it appears to confuse the natural acts of divine providence, which are necessary for all agents in all states of man according to the nature of second causes, with the supernatural acts of grace, which in the fallen state are needed to heal the will. Moreover, it seems to exclude the rational and moral mode of divine working, which in conversion is rightly employed by God in accordance with human nature.

For this reason, Jansen (lib. 8, De gratia, cap. 3) provides various distinctions between divine *medicinal help* and the *physical predetermination* as taught by its defenders. Yet Francis Cumel, in *Disputationes variae*, 1ma pars, p. 109, gives a much clearer

explanation of his own and his school's position: "This grace of God," he says, "effectual and truly proceeding from God efficiently, which moves us and predetermines us—not in the sense of a physical force, but solely because of the priority of causality—ought to be called *physical predetermination*." The proponents of the opposing view were the first to use that term, for before their time, we simply said that the grace of God is *actual*, *effectual*, and that God Himself moves us efficiently by this grace.

He continues: "Therefore, there is no reason for them to insist so often on the term *physical predetermination*, for it is not 'physical' in the sense of natural, but supernatural and divine. Nor is it merely moral, but *supernaturally efficient*, drawn from the divine efficacy of grace, which perfects nature without harming the will. Indeed, the more the will is subjected to actual grace, the more freely and fully it acts."

X.

The orthodox, therefore, do not suspend the efficacy of calling on the outcome, nor do they derive it from any supposed *congruity*. Rather, they attribute it to the supernatural power of grace and the divine, ineffable operation of God, by which He sweetly and powerfully draws the soul in such a way that the one who is called cannot but follow, and be converted.

The nature of this calling—at least as far as we are able to comprehend it—will be stated in the next section by way of five propositions.

XI. First Proposition

The ways of the Lord are no less *unsearchable* in grace than they are in nature. Yet even if we cannot comprehend their rationale, or the precise *how* which God has willed to conceal from us, it does not

follow that the thing itself should be denied or even cast into doubt—especially that *what* which has been plainly revealed to us.

For if in the realm of providence we are unable to grasp the counsel of God or the manner in which His purposes are carried out—and must admit that His judgments are “unsearchable” (ἀκατάληπτον)—why would this not be even more true concerning the ways of predestination and the manner in which effectual grace and the Holy Spirit work within us?

Especially since Christ testifies in **John 3:8** that the Spirit is like the wind which “blows where it wishes,” and although we hear its sound, we do not know where it comes from or where it goes—thus implying that He works in us by wonderful and ineffable means, and although His power is deeply felt, yet His method cannot be traced or explained.

It is in vain, then, for men to demand a precise description of the manner of this operation:

- how these secret motions occur,
- what the nature and extent is of that soul-moving force by which the Spirit acts in the hearts of the elect,
- and by what steps and moments He advances His work—

for these things are perceived by experience rather than understood by reason.

It is no different than with a pregnant woman, who knows not by what processes the living child is formed and grows within her.

Yet it is a faulty inference to go from the ignorance of a mode not

revealed in Scripture—nor necessary for salvation—to the denial of the thing itself, which Scripture so clearly teaches.

XII. Second Proposition

The motion of effectual grace in man is not only in the manner of an act, or of simultaneous concurrence, but also in the manner of a *principle* and of *previous concurrence*, or what is called *predetermination*.

This opposes both ancient and modern Pelagians, who deny all previous concurrence in both nature and grace. They argue that God's concurrence in good is nothing more than an act that accompanies the effect but is not its cause—thus setting divine grace and human will side by side as two *co-equal causes* of the result, like two horses pulling the same chariot.

But just as we have previously shown the necessity of *previous concurrence* or *predetermination* in the order of providence (cf. **Loc. VI, Q. v.**), so much more strongly must we affirm it in the operations of grace.

For the will, having been not merely weakened by sin but rendered utterly impotent and dead (as shown in **Loc. X, de Lib. Arb. Q. iv.**, and to be further demonstrated below), cannot be converted by mere cooperative action between God and free will, unless God first works as a principle, entering into the will to renew and quicken it.

Only thus, being renewed and acted upon by God, can the will act—not as a co-equal cause alongside God, but as a subordinate one, drawing all its strength and efficacy from the influx of grace.

This is what Scripture indicates by terms such as:

- **creation,**
- **regeneration,**
- **resurrection,**
and similar expressions.

So also **Augustine** frequently teaches. In *Enchiridion*, ch. 32, he says:

“Many gifts of God precede a good will, but not all—for it itself is among the things that do not precede.”

And in *De Gratia Christi*, ch. 24:

“God works in the hearts of men not merely by law and doctrine sounding outwardly, but by internal and hidden, marvelous and ineffable power—not only true revelations, but also good wills.”

So also **Hugh of St. Victor**, in *On the Sacraments of Faith*, writes:

“Restorative grace first breathes a good will that it may exist, then breathes upon it that it may move—first it works it, then through it.”

XIII. Third Proposition

Just as conversion may be considered under a twofold form—**habitual** and **actual**—so in both God and man truly concur; yet in both, the whole glory of the action belongs to God alone and entirely.

- **Habitual conversion**, or *passive*, takes place by the infusion of supernatural habits by the Holy Spirit.

- **Actual conversion**, or *active*, occurs through the exercise of those infused graces, whereby the acts of faith and repentance are both given by God and elicited by man.

By the former, man is renewed and converted by God.

By the latter, the man—having been renewed and converted by God—converts himself to God and acts.

The first is more properly called **regeneration**, as it corresponds to a new birth wherein man is reformed into the image of his Creator.

The second is properly called **conversion**, as it includes the operation of man himself.

Although in adults these two are scarcely distinguishable in time—since God’s act in converting man is never without the man’s act of turning to God—yet by order of *nature* and *causality*, habitual must precede actual, and God’s action must precede man’s.

For:

- a thing must exist before it can act;
- just as the soul cannot produce acts of understanding and willing unless it is endowed with the natural faculties of intellect and will,
so too it cannot rightly understand and will in moral and spiritual things unless it is first renewed through supernatural dispositions and habits.

A bad tree cannot bring forth good fruit unless it first be made a good tree.

The **second act** must necessarily presuppose the **first**, and the object to be apprehended requires that the faculty itself be rightly

disposed to receive it.

Hence this is the **first degree** of effectual grace:

whereby God, by a certain deep and marvelous operation, regenerates the souls of the elect, and creates them anew by infusing the life-giving Spirit, who—penetrating into the inmost recesses of the soul—refashions the man himself, heals his depraved inclinations and prejudices, and imparts to him the strength and formal principle necessary for producing spiritual and saving acts.

In this sense we are said to be:

“God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works”
(Eph. 2:10),

and to experience a **new birth**, from which flow the acts of **faith** and **love** (cf. 1 John 4:7; 5:1).

Thus, this **habitual conversion** consists in the implanting of principles of action into the faculties of fallen man—qualities that are supernatural, that is, habits and dispositions—from which arises an active power to convert oneself.

These are what Scripture refers to by such terms as:

- a **new heart**,
- the **seed of God**,
- **eyes, ears, and understanding**—
all of which denote something inward and abiding.

XIV.

But since that *first degree* of grace would be in vain without the second, habitual conversion is followed by *actual conversion*, wherein man performs acts—God, from the healed and renewed will itself, producing the act of believing and turning, while the soul, so moved, freely elicits its own vital act.

In this sense, God is said to give not only the *power* to believe, but also **τὸ πιστεῦειν**—the act itself—(**Phil. 1:29**), and both **τὸ θέλειν καὶ τὸ ἐνεργεῖν**, "to will and to work" (**Phil. 2:13**), since the Holy Spirit awakens the intellect, the will, and the other faculties—now endowed and sanctified with new qualities—to bring forth good actions.

As when restoring sight to the blind, Christ did two things:

1. He opened the eyes, thus restoring the power of vision;
2. Then, in the same moment, He caused the man to see.

So also in the raising of Lazarus:

1. The soul was first restored to the body;
2. Then vital actions followed.

In like manner, God by His omnipotent operation produces new qualities in man—particularly in the will—and then excites those faculties to action.

XV.

Though in both types of conversion—habitual and actual—God and man are said to concur, yet they do so in different ways.

- In **habitual conversion**, God alone is the cause. The Spirit of God works this inward renewal *without any cooperation from man*, who, since the matter concerns his own renewal, is merely passive and receptive, the subject who receives the divine action.
- In **actual conversion**, God indeed is the *principal* cause, but man is the *proximate and immediate* cause. Stirred by the Holy Spirit and imbued with the habits of faith and love, man believes and loves. Thus, although the act of believing is produced by God, it is exercised by man as the immediate cause and is therefore attributed to him, not to God.

In this, man is both **passive**, in receiving the motion of prevenient and awakening grace—for the will does not act unless first acted upon—and **active**, in actually believing and working under God.

He is said to be the cause of his own conversion in such a way that he is not such from himself, but from grace. For:

- The power to believe comes entirely from God;
- And even the act itself of believing depends on God, who excites the faculty to act.

Hence, no conclusion in favor of the power of *free will* can be rightly drawn from this.

XVI.

It is evident, therefore, that man is not like a stock or a log in his regeneration—as is falsely charged against us by our opponents.

1. Because the *will* is the subject of grace's working, which cannot be said of a log.

2. Because the Spirit does not compel the will or forcibly drag it to conversion against its inclination, but rather He enters the soul most sweetly and, though by a marvelous and ineffable operation, He works in a manner most fitting to the will itself—through the infusion of supernatural habits by which it is gradually freed from its innate depravity, so that from being unwilling it becomes willing, and from being dead it becomes living.
3. Because the will, being thus renewed and acted upon, immediately acts—turning to God and believing.

XVII.

Though in this twofold conversion both the *Word* and the *Spirit* have their respective roles, lest anyone imagine some mystical or enthusiastic regeneration, it must be maintained that the Spirit does not act apart from the Word—at least not in the ordinary and common manner of working which He uses toward adults.

Indeed, that He may work *extraordinarily* without the Word—by secret motions and internal inspirations, as has often been the case with extraordinary men (άνδρες θεϊοί)—no one, I believe, would deny.

However, the mode and causality of the Spirit and the Word are not the same.

- The **Spirit** is the *principal efficient cause*, acting in both types of conversion: infusing the power to act rightly, and then exciting that power to action—captivating the mind to the obedience of Christ, and transforming the inclinations of the will and affections.

That which once seemed foolish and offensive to the natural

man in the Gospel now appears most sweet and wise to the spiritual man, and altogether worthy of our love and admiration.

- As for the **Word**, although it too acts efficiently:
 - both in the preparatory acts leading up to regeneration,
 - and afterward in the actual conversion—being received by faith unto salvation,

yet in *habitual conversion*, which consists in the infusion of habits by the Spirit, the Word does not properly act efficiently. It does not belong to the class of instruments that directly cause the effect, but rather to those *whose presence* the principal cause chooses to use in acting.

Thus, the Spirit is rightly said not to act *without* the Word, but not *through* the Word alone—rather He acts *immediately* and *distinctly* from the Word. This will be further demonstrated below.

XVIII. Fourth Proposition

The motion of effectual grace is not to be called either purely *physical* or merely *moral*, but is *supernatural* and *divine*—a motion that includes aspects of both.

It is **not merely physical**, because it concerns a *moral faculty*, which must be moved in accordance with its own nature.

Nor is it **merely moral**, as though God acted only objectively and employed gentle persuasion—this is the claim of the Pelagians.

Rather, it is *supernatural and divine*, transcending all these categories.

Yet it *shares in part* the characteristics of both:

- From the **physical** it partakes in that the Spirit powerfully creates, regenerates, gives a heart of flesh, and efficiently infuses into us the supernatural habits of faith and love;
- From the **moral**, in that through the Word He teaches, inclines, persuades, and draws us by various reasons as cords of love.

Thus Augustine often refers to it by the name of **victorious delight**, which, united with supreme sweetness and pleasantness, possesses supreme efficacy and power, subduing all the hardness of the heart.

It is:

- **Powerful**, that it may not be frustrated;
- **Sweet**, that it may not be forced.

It is an irresistible force, overcoming the corruption of nature and man's total inability to do good, as well as his bondage to evil.

Yet it is also friendly and gracious—fitting for a nature that is rational and intelligent.

XIX.

Nor should this appear strange. For the bondage of sin is not only inescapable, but it holds the sinner bound as with an iron yoke—and that, indeed, joined with his own pleasures. His inability to do good and his necessity to do evil are both *utterly great* and yet *entirely voluntary*. The sinner is dragged into subjection under sin, and is **ἄνθρωπος ψυχικός**—destitute of all strength to do good.

He is an *enemy of God*, **ἄσεβής**, a profane rebel, exercising fierce hostility toward God, and, as Paul says in *Romans 7:23*, he is **ἀντιστρατεύμενος**, warring against the law of God—not only estranged from God by inability, but opposed to Him by malice.

No remedy could be more fitting for such a condition than that the grace of God—*invincible in power* and *incredible in sweetness*—should be applied. A grace which can both overcome man's helplessness and correct his wickedness. For if the grace by which we are converted were not equipped with supreme power, it would not be able to overcome and uproot sin, which has struck such deep roots within us. And unless it also bore the fruit of sweetest joy, such that the filthy delight of sin might be conquered by a contrary delight, man would not be drawn willingly but only by compulsion, and in a way hardly suitable to human nature.

XX.

This is precisely what Scripture subtly teaches, in that it describes the operation of grace with expressions that reflect both divine **power** and moral **persuasion**.

It uses terms which:

- Reflect a **physical mode** and point to the greatness of God's power—calling grace *Creation, Resurrection, Regeneration, Drawing*, and so forth.
- And others which indicate an **ethical mode**—describing grace as *illumination, teaching, persuasion*, and similar expressions.

Indeed, in many places, Scripture joins together both **efficacy** and **sweetness**.

- As when the Bride in *Song of Solomon 1:2, 4* unites “*running*” with “*drawing*.”
- Or when Christ, in *Matthew 11:30*, combines His “*yoke and burden*” with “*gentleness and lightness*.”

- Or when in *John 6:44–45* we are said to be *drawn* and at the same time *taught*.
- Or in *1 Corinthians 2:4*, persuaded by the *power of the Spirit* and also by His *demonstration*.
- Or in *Ephesians 1:18–19*, where we are converted by *immense power*, but with an *illumination full of joy*.
- Or in *Jeremiah 20:7*, where we are *constrained* and yet also *enticed*.
- Or in *Hosea 11:4*, where we are bound by “*cords of love*.”
- Or in *2 Corinthians 5:14*, where love is the chain that draws us.

These are like golden chains by which the faithful are drawn to Christ—far more truly than the orators are said to draw men by their eloquence.

Hence the Gospel itself, by which we are converted, is called:

- the *power and wisdom* of God (*1 Corinthians 1*),
- the *arm of the Lord*, than which nothing is mightier,
- and also *milk and honey*, than which nothing is sweeter (*Psalms 19, 1 Peter 2:2*).

The same Spirit by whom we are renewed is called:

- the *Spirit of might*,
- the *Spirit of grace*,

- the *Scepter of power*,
- the *Oil of gladness*,
- the *Spirit of truth and holiness* (2 Timothy 1:7)—so that His omnipotent power may be understood as also most friendly and gentle.

XXI.

From all this, it is not obscure how liberty and necessity harmoniously conspire in this work of grace—a truth our adversaries will not acknowledge.

As often as they hear the sweet working of grace described, they cry out that it cannot then be *irresistible*. And when they hear its power preached as invincible, they lament the loss of the will's freedom and accuse us of turning man into a block of wood or a senseless trunk.

But anyone who pays attention to the *twofold nature* of effectual grace will easily perceive that these things are not opposed to one another, but in fact most fittingly coexist. Our calling is indeed the work of divine omnipotence—lest anyone should imagine it to be resistible—and yet it binds us by the necessity of the most amiable and sweetest persuasion, lest anyone should suppose it to be forced or involuntary.

The very nature of those things which are presented to the soul is such that they work *more powerfully* the more *sweetly* they influence the soul.

There is no force greater than love, and no necessity stronger than that of charity:

- Which, like oil poured out within us, fills us with sweetest delight;
- And like an unbreakable chain, binds us fast, *2 Corinthians 5:14*.

Thus, **the highest truth cannot be rightly known or possessed unless both with the highest willingness and the highest necessity.**

So the omnipotent and effectual operation of the Spirit is in no way hindered by God's gentle manner of working—through commands, exhortations, and such means—by which He speaks after the manner of men, even as He works mightily according to His own.

XXII.

However the motion of effectual grace may be described, it is of such a kind and of such magnitude that it is altogether *invincible* and *irresistible*. If God wills to convert a person, no power of human will can stand against Him.

This is the chief mark and proper characteristic of **effectual grace**, by which it is distinguished from all other divine gifts—some of which God does at times bestow even upon the reprobate. For while other gifts may influence and affect a person in various ways—enlightening, restraining, and even altering him to a degree (especially in terms of outward moral behavior)—yet **this alone** truly *converts, recreates, and renews* the man.

And it does so with such efficacy that it infallibly produces its intended effect and overcomes every resistance of the will—something which shall be further demonstrated in the following sections.

XXIII. Fifth Proposition:

Although the Spirit in effectual calling does not work *without* the Word, yet neither does He work *merely through* the Word. Rather, He works **immediately** upon the soul *alongside* the Word, such that the calling must necessarily attain its effect.

I affirm that the Spirit does not act without the Word.

For, as we have already indicated, God wills to act here in a manner suited to rational nature. And according to the Apostle, *Romans 10:17*, “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” It is therefore certain that, by the appointment of God and the constitution of the covenant of grace (*Isaiah 59:21*), the Word must always accompany the Spirit in bringing about our conversion—at least in adults.

Indeed, there is no doubt that the wise and suitable administration of the Word—clearly and solidly proposing the truth at the proper time—contributes greatly to the success of the Spirit’s work.

But no matter how great the Word’s persuasive power may be, **it is not sufficient** without the **immediate operation** of the Spirit.

Even if the Word were presented with the utmost clarity and in the most favorable circumstances, and adorned with every persuasive aid, **it could never produce this effect** unless there also came the **secret, ineffable, and hyper-physical** working of the Spirit—a power that acts immediately upon the soul and bends it with omnipotent force.

For conversion requires two things:

- **First**, the *object* of faith must be set forth externally before the mind.

- **Second**, there must be an *internal faculty* capable of receiving it.

But because, through sin, such corruption has entered into the soul that—though the natural powers of understanding and will still remain—the **moral disposition** and fitness to rightly judge and choose good is utterly lost, man can no longer be moved to proper exercise of those faculties merely by the presentation of the object, as was possible in the original state of innocence.

Therefore, the soul must **first be renewed** before it can rightly respond.

Hence, in every true conversion, **two forms of grace** are always necessary:

1. **Objective grace**, which consists in the external presentation of the object (i.e., the Word).
2. **Subjective grace**, which works immediately upon the internal faculties to make them capable of receiving that object—not only to elicit right acts concerning it, but even to produce such acts.

And both are administered by the Holy Spirit, who works in a *twofold way*:

- **In the Word**, as *objective grace*, acting morally through revelation and persuasion.
- **In the heart**, as *efficient grace*, working effectually and above nature by:
 - the infusion of new habits of righteousness,

- the creation of a new heart,
- and the powerful impressing of the object upon the soul.

XXIV.

That this was indeed the judgment of the ancient Church in opposition to *Pelagius*, who denied this **immediate grace**, is made sufficiently clear by the writings of *Augustine*.

For when Pelagius attributed the entire operation of grace either to **nature** (which he admitted was a gift of God), or to **law and doctrine**—through which God illuminates the mind, reveals His will, and teaches and exhorts us to do what is good—Augustine responds decisively.

“He helps us,” says Pelagius (as cited by Augustine in *On the Grace of Christ*, Book 1, against Pelagius and Coelestius, ch. 7), “by His doctrine and revelation, when He opens the eyes of our heart, shows us things to come that we may not be preoccupied with the present, exposes the snares of the Devil, and enlightens us with the manifold and ineffable gift of heavenly grace.”

But the orthodox firmly insisted that a very different kind of grace must be acknowledged:

Not only such as enables us to *know* what must be done, but also such as enables us to *do* what we now know. Not only such as leads us to *believe* in what is to be loved, but such as causes us to *love* what we believe.

If this grace is to be called “doctrine,” then certainly it must be said that it is **infused** by God more deeply and inwardly, with an ineffable sweetness—not only through those who externally plant

and water, but through God Himself, who secretly gives the increase. For He does not merely show the truth, but **imparts love**.

Thus, God teaches those who are called according to His purpose—teaching them both what they must know and how they must do it, as Augustine says in Chapters 12 and 13. And again in Chapter 24:

“Let them read and understand, and confess that it is not through a law or doctrine sounding outwardly, but through an *inward, hidden, wondrous, and ineffable* power that God works in the heart—not only true revelations, but even good wills.”

This he confirms again in *City of God*, Book 15, Chapter 6:

“The Holy Spirit works inwardly so that the medicine applied from without may be effectual. Otherwise, even if God Himself were to speak audibly to man—using some creature in human likeness to address our bodily senses, or even those internal senses which resemble them in dreams—still, unless He also rules and acts upon the mind by inward grace, all proclamation of the truth is in vain.”

Prosper of Aquitaine wonderfully pursues this same line of thought in his *Poem Against the Ungrateful*, Chapter 14:

“Grace does not act merely by good counsel or gentle exhortation, as if it only gave a rule like the law. Rather, it changes the mind inwardly, renews it, and reshapes the vessel broken—by a creative power. This is not accomplished by the commands of the Law, nor by the words of the Prophets, nor by nature endowed with its own powers. Only the One who made us, remakes us.”

XXV.

That this also reflects the mind of the **Synod of Dort** is evident from their Canons *on the Corruption and Conversion of Man*, where they oppose the Remonstrants—who explained the operation of grace as **moral persuasion** only, which could *always be resisted*, and who acknowledged no other mode of operation but one that was *objective, moral, and mediate* through the Word alone.

As stated in the *Collatio Hagiensis*, p. 308:

“We,” they say, “together with the Word of God, believe that the Holy Spirit exerts no power in us unto conversion except through the Word, which alone is the seed of our regeneration.”

Again on p. 314:

“The efficacy of divine power must either be considered as the *efficient cause* of our faith—which they reject—or merely as the *foundation* upon which faith is built.” That is, as they explain shortly after, the Word is said to excite faith only **by way of being an object**.

This is made even clearer by *Simon Episcopus* in his private theses, *Disputation 46*, where he adds the following as his final conclusion:

“Whether an immediate operation of the Spirit upon the will or the mind is necessary, or promised in Scripture, so that one may be able to believe the Word externally proposed—**we deny**.”

Elsewhere, in his *Disputation on the Perspicuity of Scripture* (Theological Theses, vol. 1, question 3), echoing *Socinus* in his Catechism, chapter 6, Episcopus argues:

“That anyone who possesses reason, without any particular or immediate inward illumination, can easily understand and apprehend all the senses of Scripture that are necessary to be known, believed, hoped for, or practiced for salvation.”

XXVI.

To counter this most dangerous error, the **Fathers of the Synod of Dort** thus explain the manner of grace’s operation (cf. Canons, Heads III & IV, Articles 11–12):

"When God executes His good pleasure in the elect, or works true conversion in them, He not only takes care that the gospel is outwardly preached to them, and that their minds are powerfully illuminated by the Holy Spirit—so that they may rightly understand and discern the things of the Spirit of God—but the same regenerating Spirit also penetrates to the innermost parts of man. He opens the closed heart, softens the hardened, circumcises the uncircumcised, infuses new qualities into the will, and makes it from being dead to become alive, from evil to become good, from unwilling to become willing. He acts upon it and strengthens it so that, like a good tree, it may bring forth the fruits of good works.”

This is that **regeneration**, that **new creation**, that **resurrection from the dead**, that **vivification**, so greatly extolled in Scripture—which God works **in us without us**.

In the **Rejection of Errors**, Article 6, the Synod condemns those who teach:

“That in true conversion no new qualities, powers, or gifts can be infused by God into the will, and that therefore faith itself, by which we are first converted and by which we are called

believers, is not a quality or gift infused by God, but only an act of man, and that it can only be called a gift with respect to the ability to attain it.”

This, they say, contradicts the sacred Scriptures, which testify that:

- **God does infuse new qualities** of faith, obedience, and love for Himself into our hearts (cf. *Jer. 31:33; Isa. 44:3; Rom. 5:5*).

In **Article 7**, they also condemn those who teach:

“That the grace by which we are converted to God is nothing other than a gentle persuasion—or, as some say, the most noble manner of operation in human conversion, perfectly suited to human nature—accomplished merely by persuasion; and that therefore there is nothing to prevent merely moral grace from turning natural men into spiritual ones; and even that God produces the consent of the will only in a moral way; and that the efficacy of divine operation consists only in the fact that God sets before us eternal rewards, whereas Satan promises temporal ones.”

This, they rightly assert, is entirely **Pelagian**, and flatly **contrary to all of Scripture**, which teaches that—**besides** this external moral suasion—there is also a **far more powerful and divine operation of the Holy Spirit** in the conversion of man, as God promises:

“I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you.” — Ezekiel 36:26

XXVII.

This same teaching is also clearly affirmed by **Calvin**, in his dispute

with *Pighius* on free will.

For Pighius, like Pelagius, acknowledged **no other means** of our conversion than those which were external and objective. Calvin, by contrast, insisted that God works **in a twofold manner in the elect**:

“Outwardly by the Word, and inwardly by the Spirit.” (*Lib. IV, p. 252*)

He explains:

“The Spirit illuminates the mind, forms the heart unto the love and worship of righteousness—so that they become new creatures. The Word, meanwhile, stirs them up to desire, seek, and obtain that same renewal.”

When Pighius objected—thinking he had trapped Calvin in contradiction—he posed the dilemma:

“Either the Spirit’s action is prior to the preaching of the Word, or it comes afterward. If it comes afterward, that’s unreasonable—for why would believers seek a regeneration they already possess? But if it comes before, it contradicts your own doctrine, which teaches that a man in the old nature cannot even desire what is good.”

To which Calvin replies:

“I respond that the Word is preached to those already regenerated—and it is preached **effectually and fruitfully**, not so that they might become new creatures, but so that they might grow and mature.”

And further:

“Paul, when he glories that the ministry of the Spirit has been committed to him, reconciles these two things in a single phrase, and shows what he means: namely, that **God effectually engraves upon human hearts by the Spirit what He simultaneously speaks to the ears by the mouth of the preacher.**”

“Thus, preaching casts the seed—but for it to take root, to sprout, and to bear fruit, it is the Spirit of God who works **inwardly.**”

Calvin concludes:

“Let us therefore hold fast to that sacred link between the **mysterious operation of the Spirit** and the **external preaching of the Word**, which Paul describes—then we shall be freed from all difficulties.”

Later (*Lib. VI, p. 275*), after reporting how Pighius desired God to convert man simply by His goodness and patience—“not by punishing us immediately, but by giving us time and space for repentance, and by urging us to it with many means, occasions, exhortations, blessings, and chastisements”—Calvin responds:

“Here indeed we find Pelagius, whole and entire, pouring forth the very blasphemies he once spewed in full. For he places before us only **external means** by which God invites man, and limits the **entirety of converting grace** to those means. Of the **inner movement of the heart**, and the **renewing work of the Spirit**, he says not a word.”

XXVIII.

With these things established, we now ask:

Does grace consist solely in that *objective and mediate* work whereby the Spirit, through the preaching of the Word—no matter how opportunely delivered, no matter how surrounded with circumstances and helps—acts upon the mind?

Or is there required a **second grace**, one that is *subjective and immediate*, by which the Spirit works directly upon the very faculties themselves, so as to dispose them for the saving reception of the Word—and by whose efficacy conversion is necessarily and infallibly brought to pass?

We answer **affirmatively**—as the Church of old decreed against the **Pelagians**, and as she has more recently affirmed against the **Remonstrants**.

XXIX. The Necessity of Immediate Grace

Argument I: From the Depth of Human Corruption and Inability

The need for immediate grace is first proved from the **magnitude of corruption and impotence** which sin has brought upon man.

For if those things are true which Scripture so often declares concerning the *miserable condition of sinners*, and their *total and absolute inability* for what is good, then certainly more is needed than mere moral suasion or a timely presentation of the gospel.

Consider what Scripture says of man in sin:

- He is not merely weak or sick, but **dead in trespasses and sins** (*Eph. 2:1–2*),
- Not only blind, but **darkness itself** (*Eph. 4:18; 5:8*),

- An **animal man**, who cannot understand or receive the things of the Spirit of God (*1 Cor. 2:14*),
- A **slave of sin** (*John 8:34; Rom. 6:19*),
- An **enemy of God**, (*Col. 1:21*),
- Not merely disobedient to the Law of God, but **unable to be subject to it** (*Rom. 8:7*),
- And finally, he is one who can **do nothing good**, not even **think** it, of himself (*John 15:5; 2 Cor. 3:5*).

If all this is true, **how can it be maintained** that moral persuasion and the mere objective presentation of the gospel are sufficient to convert a sinner?

If nothing more is required to heal the soul, how can it be said to be *utterly impotent* for good—indeed, *dead*?

Who would believe that a soul **dead in sin** could be raised to life **merely** by the presentation of truth, which acts only morally and objectively, no matter how timely or compelling?

Who would not rather acknowledge the necessity of some **almighty grace**, a grace which imparts new life and strength to believe and to act?

Just as to bring about sight in the blind, or movement in the dead, it is not enough to place an object before the eye or shout a command—the **faculty of sight** must be restored, and **life itself** must be revived—

so also, to bring about spiritual sight by faith, the revelation of

doctrine in the Word is not enough unless the inner faculties, corrupted by sin, are healed and disposed to receive the object.

Nor is it sufficient to call a dead man to rise, as though he were merely asleep, unless the outward voice be accompanied by **inward and omnipotent power** restoring life.

Granted, there is a distinction between *spiritual blindness or death* and their *bodily counterparts*—

for in the latter, the faculties of vision and life are utterly removed, whereas in the former, the **rational faculty remains** though corrupted.

But this distinction does not eliminate the reality that, in both cases, there is an **invincible impotence**, so that man not only does not will, but **cannot even will** what is good.

Though the natural power of understanding and willing survives in man, the **moral disposition** to judge rightly and to will rightly is altogether lost.

Such a loss cannot be remedied by the mere **objective presentation of truth**, but requires the **real infusion of divine power**.

If, as the Remonstrants and others claim, Scripture's descriptions of the sinner's death are intended not to signify his **inability**, but rather to mark his **negligence or carelessness**—as if men are called blind and deaf not because they *cannot* see or hear, but only because they *will not*—then they have plainly committed a **category error**, exchanging the cause for the effect, and reducing emphatic scriptural language to **mere hyperbole**.

What else is this but to **do violence to the Scriptures**, and to transform those vivid expressions—used repeatedly to describe the

depths of our corruption—into empty figures of speech, devoid of doctrinal weight?

Why would the Scriptures so often portray the sinner as **utterly impotent**, unable to know truth or perform good, if in reality the matter lay within his own grasp, and if the only thing lacking were *actual knowledge* and not *the capacity to know*?

Why would grace be needed, not to confer the **power to believe**, but only to **stir up** the already sufficient faculties through the objective presentation of truth?

Who does not see how such reasoning undermines the truth of **original sin**, as taught in Scripture and constantly confessed by the Church?

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XXX. The Necessity of Immediate Grace from the Nature of the Faculties

Moreover, since it is certain that no object ever acts to form or dispose the faculty for the exercise of its function—but rather presupposes the faculty as already disposed and rightly constituted—(for it cannot act upon the faculty unless it be received by the power of apprehension proper to that faculty, and unless it acts upon it with suitable proportion, which is here required), it follows that **no matter how clearly the object is presented to the mind**, the presentation will always be **fruitless**, unless the mind is already disposed for its reception.

But this disposition is not brought about by the **Word itself**, whose reception is the issue at hand, but rather by the **immediate action of the Holy Spirit**, who **prepares the faculty** for reception.

For if a thing cannot act before it exists, and if every second act presupposes a first—then how can a sinner elicit an act of faith or love unless he first receives the principle and habit, or moral disposition, of believing and loving, which was lost through sin?

Who would dare say that the faculty **must act in order to be renewed** and regenerated?

Is it not rather the case that it **must be regenerated** in order to act, since it **can do no good** until it is born again?

It is vain, then, to appeal here to natural faculty, and to claim that it can always receive the presented object, and is naturally apt to be moved by it.

For although man can still understand and will with regard to *that*

which is (τὸ ὄν) and in the general realm of being, he **can do nothing** regarding *that which is morally good* (τὸ δέον) or *truly true*, because of the inborn **habit of sin** and an **invincible inability for good**.

Thus we are forced to conclude one of two things:

- Either deny with **Pelagius** the total corruption of our faculties and our inability for good—so that the soul may act upon the Word by its own strength to recognize the truth;
- Or acknowledge the **necessity of some immediate and subjective grace**, by which the soul is **disposed** for the reception of the Word.

XXXI. The Objective Word Alone Not Only Fails, But Can Even Increase Rejection

Far from it being the case that the Word, presented to the corrupt mind, is able to move it or free it from its prejudices—on the contrary, the Word **itself**, if not by design then at least by consequence, **confirms** and **increases** such prejudices.

For "the Word of the cross," when preached to the **natural man**, is declared to be **a scandal and folly**, according to Paul:

"We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks." – 1 Cor. 1:23

"The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them because they are spiritually discerned." – 1 Cor. 2:14

There, Paul clearly teaches that the **mystery of the gospel**, though presented by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the Word as

the **wisdom of God**, is **reckoned by the natural man as nothing but foolishness**, and so is **rejected with contempt and aversion** as something most unworthy.

If such prejudices arise from and are confirmed by the preaching of the Word,
how can it be said that **they are removed by the Word alone?**

And what of this: Scripture testifies that original corruption does not consist merely in prejudices and false ideas.

If that were so, **infants**, who are incapable of such ideas, would be **free from original sin**.

But in fact, original sin lies in **perverse habits**, and in a **universal depravation of the faculties**, and in a total and inborn **inclination toward evil** in all mankind.

From this fountain of corruption flow all prejudices.

And the **Word**, no matter how clearly it is presented, **can never remove** this depravity—unless the **power of the Spirit**, who **creates and reshapes the heart anew**, is added to bring the mind into **captivity to Christ**.

XXXII. The Case of Infants Proves the Necessity of Immediate Grace

This same truth is even more clearly confirmed by the case of **infants**, in whom **original corruption** is evident from birth.

For if it is true, as Scripture so often testifies, that infants are:

- “*children of wrath*” (Eph. 2:1–2),

- “*conceived in iniquity*” (Ps. 51),
- “*unclean,*” *born of flesh* (Job 14:4; John 3:6),
and thus *cannot enter the kingdom of God unless they are first born again* (John 3:5; Rev. 21:27),

then how can they be cleansed from their uncleanness and born of water and the Spirit—that is, of **the Spirit**, who works as **water** (cf. John 3:5)?

Indeed, Christ is elsewhere said to **baptize with the Spirit and with fire**, that is, with the **fiery Spirit** (Matt. 3:11).

But if **no other grace is granted** than the *objective* grace of **knowledge of truth**, which they are **incapable** of receiving, then either **original sin in infants must be denied**, or it must be held that **they are sanctified by some immediate and real grace**, so that they may be received into the kingdom of God.

This is indeed what we see in the examples of **Jeremiah, John the Baptist**, and others, who were **endowed with the Holy Spirit** even before they had the use of reason.

And if such grace is **infused into infants** to bring about their regeneration, why should it not be **communicated also to adults** for the same purpose?

Although the Spirit does not work in adults *without* the Word, **nothing prevents** the Spirit from working **distinctly from the Word**, just as He works **without the Word** in infants, by that **most**

powerful efficacy that is to Him **easy and ready**, but to us **incomprehensible and marvelous**,
as Calvin rightly notes (*Institutes*, IV.16.18).

XXXIII. Second: The Mode of Grace's Operation in Our Conversion Proves Its Necessity

The *mode* by which grace operates in our conversion further and unshakably confirms the necessity of immediate and internal grace.

For the work of conversion is frequently described in Scripture by such terms as:

- **Creation**
- **Resurrection**
- **Regeneration**
- **The removal of the heart of stone and the giving of a heart of flesh**
- **Drawing** (John 6:44)
- **The bestowal of the Spirit**

All of these expressions signify the **supreme and invincible power of God**.

Now if the entirety of God's action consisted only in a clear and timely presentation of the gospel—
why, then, would *omnipotence* be required for such a task?

What in this, one must ask, would exceed the ordinary mode of human persuasion and teaching?

Would not such a notion *diminish* the action of God to almost nothing?

Why then are such **majestic expressions** used by Paul to describe the **power God exercises in us**?

“That you may know... the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe—according to the working of His mighty strength, which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead.”

—Ephesians 1:18–20

If God acts in no other way than morally and objectively, as men typically do,
could He rightly be said to **create** us anew, if His only work were to **teach** and **persuade**?

Surely the **wisdom of God** would not allow such things to be described in terms so **emphatic and forceful**,
if the reality they signify were so weak and mild.

No, such language demands that we speak of a power that is not only **effective**, but if not *physical*, then *hyperphysical*—and most certainly **real**.

And even if Scripture commands us, “*Make yourselves a new heart*” (Ezek. 18:31),

it does **not follow** that this command rests in man's own power—nor that regeneration begins from **man's effort** to perform what God has commanded, as the Remonstrants falsely claim.

For that command merely **declares what man ought to do**, not **what he is able** to do in his fallen state.

It is required of him *while he is dead*, and it is **not fulfilled** until he is **made alive**—
with **God Himself effecting in us** what He commands.

XXXIV. Third: The Analogy of Generation Proves the Need for Internal Grace

The analogy of **generation**, so often used in this argument, further strengthens the case.

For just as in the **generation of man**—or of any other thing which is brought forth—two elements are always necessary:

1. **The seed**, which comes from outside,
2. And an **internal power** in the womb or soil, which **receives** the seed and makes it **life-giving**.

This internal power is not imparted by the seed itself, but is **presupposed** by it;
for the seed would be sown **in vain** if there were not an internal and vital capacity to **receive and root it**.

So also in **regeneration**, along with the **Word** (which is like the seed),
there must be **an internal and life-giving power of the Spirit**, which prepares the heart to **receive** that Word.

Otherwise, the seed will fall among **thorns**, or upon **stony ground**, or on the **wayside**,
where it is either choked, scorched, or snatched away—
and will bear no fruit.

But when it falls on **good soil**—that is, on a **good and honest heart** (Luke 8:15)—it bears fruit.

Not a heart good by nature,
but one made such **by the immediate grace** of the Holy Spirit.

Just as the **barren** or **withered womb** (such as Sarah's) could never conceive even with a seed,
unless a **power** was added to overcome its **weakness** and **make it receptive**,
so also the heart of man—which is not only **barren** and **withered**, but **spiritually dead** and utterly lacking in power to conceive anything truly good—
could never, from the **seed of the Word**, bring forth the fruit of a **new creation**,
unless the **vivifying power of the Spirit** were **supplied** to cause conception.

Of Sarah it is written: *“Through faith she received power to conceive seed.”* —Hebrews 11:11

Likewise, the heart of man must receive **from the Spirit** the power to conceive spiritual life.

XXXV. Third: Testimonies from Scripture in Which Grace Is Set Forth as Necessary for Receiving the Word

This truth is further established by various passages of Holy Scripture, in which **grace is plainly presented as necessary** in order to receive the Word.

- Thus the Psalmist prays, *“Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy Law”* (Psalm 119:18).

- Likewise, Paul beseeches for the Ephesians *“that God would give them the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of their understanding being enlightened, that they may know what is the hope of His calling”* (Ephesians 1:17–18).
- And it is said of Christ, *“Then He opened their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures”* (Luke 24:45).

Here, it is not said merely that He *explained* (διηρμήνευεν) the Scriptures to them, as He had done earlier with the disciples on the road to Emmaus (v. 32), which pertains to outward preaching; but that He **opened their mind itself**, which implies the **power and inward efficacy of the Spirit** at work—illuminating their understanding from within.

So also, God is elsewhere said to have **opened the ear** (Isaiah 48:8; 50:5), thereby **disposing men to hear the Word**, for the Word is preached in vain and appears as mere signs and symbols unless God gives:

- **Eyes to see**
- **Ears to hear**
- **Hearts to understand** (Deuteronomy 29:3–4)

In the same manner, Acts 16:14 states that **God opened the heart of Lydia**—

“whose heart the Lord opened, to pay attention to the things spoken by Paul.”

The phrase προσέχειν τοῖς λαλουμένοις (“to attend to the things

spoken") shows that this **opening of the heart** was the **means** whereby she came to hear with faith.

From this it is abundantly clear that **the opening of the heart and understanding is a prerequisite** for the reception of the Word. For:

- If the heart must be opened **in order to attend** to the Word,
- Then it **cannot be opened by the Word** itself,
- But must be opened **prior to the Word's reception**.

And the very nature of the thing demands it. For attention to the Word cannot exist in a **closed heart**, but only in one already **opened**.

And this opening cannot be accomplished solely by the Word, since the Word **cannot act upon** the soul unless it is **already received**, and such reception **presupposes** the prior **removal of the obstacles** that hinder the Word from entering in and bearing fruit.

Such obstacles—present in the mind, the will, and the affections—must be **removed by grace**, and this **distinctly** from the Word.

XXXVI. Objection: That the Heart May Be Opened by the Word Alone

One might object, with the Remonstrants, that such **opening of the heart** could happen *by the Word* itself.

After all, Paul is said in Acts 26:18 to have been sent “*to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light.*”

So, they say, this *opening* differs not from *attention* and may simply mean that Paul’s preaching was **effective**, and that the **praise of such efficacy** should be attributed to **God**, as the First Mover of all things.

Now, it is true that the **opening of the heart** may in a certain sense be attributed to the **Word**, as a **moral cause**, inasmuch as this act is ordinarily performed *not apart from* the Word but **in its presence**, and that the ministers of the Word are rightly called **instruments**, by which God is pleased to work this effect.

However, it is false to say that such opening can be **simply effected by the Word**, or **through the Word alone**, without the **distinct and internal power of the Spirit**.

For apart from the Spirit’s inward action,
the externally preached Word will never be received by faith.

This distinction is carefully noted by Luke, who first records that Lydia **heard Paul**, that is, she attended his preaching and received it **with the ears**.

But because **the ears alone do not suffice** unless the **heart** also is opened—
and because the Word, apart from such opening, would merely knock at a heart closed by unbelief and ignorance—
Luke adds that **the Lord opened her heart**, that she might **pay attention** to the things Paul spoke.

Thus the **end and effect** of this divine opening is clearly marked.

So then we find here **three distinct actions** that occur in effectual calling:

1. The action of **Paul**, the preacher;
2. The action of **God**, who opens the heart;
3. The action of **Lydia**, who receives the Word with an opened heart and embraces it by faith.

These three clearly flow from the text itself.

Therefore, there is no need to resort to rhetorical figures, such as hendiadys, to merge the opening of the heart and attention into one and the same thing— an interpretation which, though convenient to the Remonstrant cause, is clearly forced and inconsistent with the plain sense of Luke's words.

And though elsewhere Scripture **commands man to open his heart**, as in Revelation 3:20, this is to indicate his **duty**, not his **ability**.

Moreover, that text refers properly to **those already called**, and not to the unregenerate.

Even there, it is not without the grace of God, who not only **knocks objectively** through the Word, but also **opens subjectively**, by working inwardly what He commands.

XXXVII. Fourth Argument: From Passages Where the Operation of the Spirit Is Distinguished from the Word

A powerful case for the necessity of **immediate grace** is made by those passages of Scripture in which the **power of the Holy Spirit working in us is clearly distinguished from the Word** itself.

- “*Our gospel,*” says the Apostle, “*came not to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance*” (1 Thessalonians 1:5–6).

Such language would be inappropriate if the Spirit operated **in no other way** than through the Word, and merely in an **objective** sense.

So too, elsewhere, when speaking of ministers of the Word, Paul writes:

- “*I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase... We are God’s fellow workers*” (1 Corinthians 3:6–9).

Here, not only are **God and man contrasted**, but the **outward action** of man in planting and watering by the Word is **clearly distinguished** from the **inward action of God**, who gives the increase—namely, the power to germinate, grow, and bear fruit.

Thus, the one who plants and the one who waters are said to be **nothing in themselves**—not absolutely, as if their ministry were useless, but **comparatively**, in view of the fact that **they contribute only outward labor**, which is **vain apart from God**, who not only cooperates in the outward ministry but, above all,

performs the inward work of life and growth, in which man has no share.

Hence, Paul exhorts the Corinthians to unity, to silence the factions that arose due to undue exaltation of ministers.

All are one, united in office and labor, serving the one Lord.

Calvin well summarizes this argument against Pighius, saying:

- *“God works in His elect in a twofold way—outwardly through the Word, inwardly through the Spirit”* (Inst., Bk. IV).
- And shortly thereafter: *“The preaching of the Word casts the seed; but it is the Spirit of God within who makes it take root, sprout, and bear fruit.”*

This is echoed by **Cameron** in his *Disputation on Grace and Free Will* (Thesis 20), where he affirms immediate grace:

“That the ministers of the gospel are called God’s fellow workers pertains to this very comparison: namely, between the outward preaching of the Word (which is by the intervention of man), and the inward efficacy upon the souls of men (which proceeds immediately from the Spirit of God). Here we see the image of true cooperation—man speaks outwardly, but the Spirit persuades inwardly.”

XXXVIII. Fifth Argument: From Texts That Attribute to God an Inward Operation in Our Conversion

This same truth is no less solidly established by **those texts which ascribe to God an internal action** in the work of conversion:

- *“For it is God who works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure”* (Philippians 2:13).
- *“That our God would fulfill the work of faith with power”* (2 Thessalonians 1:11).
- *“Working in us that which is well-pleasing in His sight”* (Hebrews 13:21).

To this category also belong those gracious promises of God, such as:

- *“I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts”* (Jeremiah 31:33),
- and *“A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you... and I will cause you to walk in My statutes”* (Ezekiel 36:26–27).

These statements are either void of meaning or they clearly express

a most **intimate and powerful inward action of God upon the heart.**

Nor can it be rightly said that this inward action is merely the Spirit’s **mediate operation** through the Word—since the Word, though it reaches the mind, does so **by way of the senses**, and **not immediately**.

If such an action were to be called "inward" simply because it affects the mind, then we would have to say the same of any human speech that reaches the understanding and persuades—something no one would assert.

The contrast here is evident:

It is a deliberate antithesis between **God's mode of working** and that of man, who operates only through **external proposals**;

whereas God **penetrates the heart itself**, and **acts upon it directly and immediately**.

Indeed, this distinction helps us to rightly **contrast the efficacy of the Spirit in the Covenant of Grace** with God's method of working under the **Covenant of Law**.

For under the Law:

- The Spirit, through **human agents**, outwardly declared the commands of God,
- And He did in some measure affect the mind,
- But He **merely commanded**—He did not **empower**,
- Nor did He supply the strength to perform.

Hence, Paul describes it as *“the letter written on tablets of stone”* (2 Corinthians 3:6–7).

But under the Covenant of Grace:

- The Spirit not only **commands** obedience through the preaching of the Word,
- He also **produces** inward docility and obedience **immediately and powerfully**,

- Hence, He is said to **write the law upon our hearts**, and to **cause us to walk in His statutes**.

XXXIX.

This truth is made even more evident by the **gift of the Holy Spirit**, which is bestowed upon us through Christ. Just as He is **distinguished from the Word**, so too He operates in a way that is **distinct from the Word**.

Not only is the Spirit **not a mere force** exerted upon man, but He is **a divine Person**, who comes to dwell within our hearts as in His **holy temple** (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19), and remains with us **forever** (John 14:16).

Moreover, the Spirit performs works in us that clearly testify to His **immediate and inward grace**. For why would it be said that “*one and the same Spirit works all these things in us*,” both the extraordinary gifts proper to some, and the ordinary graces common to all believers (1 Corinthians 12:11), unless the Spirit were Himself actively and immediately present within us?

It is He who:

- **Bears witness with our spirit** that we are the children of God,
- **Speaks and cries within us**,
- **Helps our infirmities and intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words** (Romans 8:26),
- **Seals us unto the day of redemption** (2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 4:30),

- And searches the hearts, penetrating to the **deepest recesses** of the soul, like **fire, oil, light, and life**.

If the Spirit's power extended **only to mediate operations** through the Word, and not to the **immediate regeneration** of the soul, infusing life, faith, holiness, and joy, how could He be said to work these things in us?

Indeed, the antithesis set forth by the Apostle in Romans 8 between the **flesh and the Spirit** demands this: just as the flesh is an **internal and immediate principle** in the natural man, the **source of all evil**, so the Spirit must be an **internal and immediate principle** in the regenerate man, the **source of all good**—that through Him, the believer might **live and walk** in accordance with the Word of God.

To this end, Christ speaks of the Comforter in John 14 and 16, who *“shall teach you all things,”* and *“lead you into all truth.”* And lest this be confined to the Apostles alone, John extends it to **all believers** in his first epistle:

“You have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. And you have no need that anyone should teach you, for the anointing itself teaches you all things” (1 John 2:20, 27).

This **anointing** is clearly the Holy Spirit, who **inwardly and immediately** instructs believers—not merely by the Word externally, but by direct operation on the heart.

Thus Christ's people are called *“taught by God”* (John 6:45), not only because they are instructed by His Word, but because they are **drawn by the Father** and inwardly enlightened to come to the Son.

XL. Sixth Argument: From the Necessity and Possibility of Immediate Grace

If **immediate grace** is to be denied, it must be either because it is:

1. Not **necessary**,
2. Not **possible**, or
3. Because it **violates human liberty**.

But none of these objections holds:

- Its **necessity** has already been demonstrated from the depth of our **corruption and impotence**, and confirmed by the **necessity of regeneration in infants**, which clearly cannot come by the Word.
- Its **possibility** is proven not only by the **extraordinary and immediate conversions** recorded in Scripture—such as those of **Zacchaeus**, the **thief on the cross**, and **Paul** himself, who were renewed and drawn to Christ in a moment, without prior preaching—but also from the **divine men** of old: the **prophets**, the **apostles**, and others whom the Spirit immediately inspired and moved.

These men were, as Peter says, “*carried along by the Holy Spirit*” (2 Peter 1:21), and the Spirit “*spoke through them*” (Matthew 10:19–20).

Now, if the same **immediate grace** could operate in them **without violating their liberty**, why should it not operate in **others**? After all, the same Spirit who was the **author of prophecy** is also the

author of faith in believers. Hence, such grace does not **injure** the will, but **enables** and **ennobles** it.

XLI. Seventh Argument: From the Absurdities That Follow If Immediate Grace Is Denied

Finally, setting aside many more arguments that could be brought forth, consider the **absurdities** that follow from denying this doctrine, which strongly confirm its truth.

For if there is **no operation of the Spirit in calling** beyond what is **mediate through the Word**, and by way of **moral persuasion**, then the **reason why some are converted and others are not**—though both hear the same Word—must lie **not with grace, but with man**.

This stands in direct contradiction to the Apostle: “*What do you have that you did not receive?*” (1 Corinthians 4:7).

If the Word is preached **equally** to both persons, at the same time, by the same minister, with the same motives and clarity—then what explains the difference in response?

You cannot appeal to the Word itself, for it was **identical** in both cases. Nor can the **outward circumstances** explain it, for they were the same. If any **intrinsic difference** in the person is to account for the result—such as **attention, humility, or docility**—then either:

- These qualities are **from nature**, in which case **Pelagius has triumphed**, and man is the author of his own salvation, or
- They are from **grace**, and if this grace is not through the Word (which is common to both), then it must be the **immediate**

grace which we affirm—grace that disposes the heart **inwardly and effectually**, and thus makes the decisive difference.

XLII.

Furthermore, if **a diversity of circumstances** truly accounts for a diversity of spiritual outcomes, then it should follow that wherever such differing circumstances are found, differing effects would always follow—and likewise, wherever circumstances are the same, the effect should be the same.

But this clearly does **not** align with reality.

For often **the same circumstances** produce **divergent** effects, and **different circumstances** produce the **same** effect. How many are there who enjoy a good upbringing, a godly education, blessings and even chastisements—yet respond to these in radically different ways? Some are softened and drawn to God, while others are hardened in rebellion.

Likewise, how many are **converted by grace** from entirely different backgrounds and conditions?

Take, for instance, the **two thieves crucified beside Christ**. They shared the **same circumstances**: the same place, the same exposure to Christ's person, the same words spoken in their hearing. Yet one **believed and was converted**, while the other **remained obstinate in unbelief**. What reason can be assigned for this striking difference?

Was it due to differing birth, education, or previous life experiences? Not only are such assumptions **unproven**, they are ultimately **irrelevant**, for they cannot furnish a **true and adequate cause**

for such a spiritual distinction. Those earlier circumstances, after all, did **not prevent both men** from engaging in the same crimes prior to that moment. So how could those same conditions then cause **one** to blaspheme and **the other** to repent, when both were given the **same opportunity** to turn to God?

Clearly, no other cause can be assigned except the **mysterious motion of the Holy Spirit**, who, though both were alike in condition, **chose not to give the same grace** to both—that He might display that **He blows where He wills** (John 3:8), has mercy on whom He will, and hardens whom He will (Romans 9:18).

Again, what explains the fact that **some believed** under the preaching of Peter and Paul—delivered at the **same time**, in the **same place**, with the **same message**, and under the **same outward circumstances**—while others remained in unbelief?

There can be **no other sufficient explanation** but this: a difference in **inward disposition**. And since such disposition, if it is to be saving, cannot arise from **nature**, but must be wrought by **subjective grace**, we conclude that this **inward change** comes **not from man**, but from **God**.

XLIII.

Thirdly, if the **efficacy of effectual calling** depends on the **fit conjunction of circumstances**, which God in His wisdom orders according to each man's condition, disposition, and temperament—then what follows?

The same view espoused by **Molina**, and embraced by many **Roman Catholics**, would prevail. They teach that the **efficacy of calling** arises from its **congruence**—that is, God uses such

persuasion as He sees to be suitable to the temperament and inclination of those whom He decrees to draw effectually.

Thus, as **Bellarmino** writes (Theol. 3), “*God applies that persuasion which He foresees to be congruent with the character of those whom He decrees to draw,*” and “*as He sees the will to be fit for consent,*” He so acts.

Now, since this **congruity hypothesis** has been consistently rejected by the Reformed Church as a **false and deceptive invention**, how **suspect** must any theory be that, even if it does not openly embrace the same teaching, nevertheless **approaches it so closely?**

Any scheme of doctrine that makes the **efficacy of grace** depend upon **conditions within man**, or **outward suitability**, rather than upon the **sovereign and immediate working of God**, deserves to be firmly and faithfully resisted.

XLVI.

From all these things, it is easy to conclude that the **true cause of the difference** among those who hear the Word lies **not** in anything else but in the **secret and immediate power of the Holy Spirit**, who touches some more than others. For whatever other factors may be introduced—whether from **birth and temperament, upbringing and instruction, precepts and examples, benefits received or afflictions endured**, or other such **external aids and circumstances**—not only do these **equally apply** to the unbelieving and the faithful alike, but it is also certain that **none of them**, by their very nature, can **rightly be called the true cause** of conversion.

They may indeed **stir and excite** the heart to some extent, but they cannot **reach the soul** to truly change it. They **do not convert** the heart—they may prepare the soil, but they cannot cause the tree to grow.

I readily grant that certain qualities such as **attentiveness** and **teachability**, by which men become what John calls “*taught of God*” (John 6:45), occur in **some** and not in others, and thus mark a real distinction. But since these qualities **cannot arise from nature**, and all are by birth equally **deaf to God's voice** and spiritually **dead**, it follows **necessarily and unavoidably** that such attentiveness and docility must be the **gracious fruit of immediate divine operation**. Hence, this is yet another **clear and invincible argument** for the **necessity and truth of immediate grace**.

XLVII.

The **effectiveness** that is ascribed to the **instrumental cause**—that is, to the Word—**does not detract** from the **principal cause**, which is God Himself. Indeed, it **presupposes** and requires the primary cause.

Therefore, all the **honorable expressions** which Scripture attributes to the Word—when it is called the **seed of regeneration**, or said to **enlighten the mind**, to **sanctify the heart**, or to **pierce more deeply than any two-edged sword**, even to the division of soul and spirit—these things truly prove that **conversion is not accomplished without the Word**, and that the **Holy Spirit makes use of it** as His **most powerful instrument**.

Yet they **do not imply**, nor may it be concluded, that the Spirit operates **only by the Word**, or in **no other manner**. For as we

have shown already, **even the most powerfully presented Word**, left to itself, will always remain **ineffectual**, unless the **immediate power of the Spirit** comes alongside to breathe life into dead hearts.

XLVIII.

Though the Word **is not sufficient by itself** to bring about conversion **without the aid of immediate grace**, yet God is **not to be blamed**, as though He were using an **insufficient instrument** to achieve the end He intends, nor can sinners find in this any **pretext for excuse**.

For the Word remains truly **sufficient in its own order**, namely, **on the part of the object** presented. And if it proves **ineffectual among the reprobate**, this is **not because of any defect in the Word itself**, but **accidentally**, because of the **corruption and perversity of man**.

And far from this exonerating the sinner, it only serves to **increase his guilt**. For the fact that the Word was brought to him, and he remained unmoved, proves not the **weakness of the Word**, but the **deadness of his own heart**.

XLIX.

Although man in the state of sin is never entirely stripped of the *natural* faculty of understanding and willing—by which he may be drawn toward a proposed object, and even comprehend it to some extent in terms of verbal meaning and bare historical knowledge—yet he is so corrupted that **no moral capacity or disposition for doing good remains** in him, until he is disposed by **immediate**

grace to receive the Word savingly and to apprehend it in a practical and effectual way.

L.

Since the Spirit, who acts immediately in us, never works apart from the Word, His movement cannot be called brutish or irrational, as if directed toward logs or lifeless stumps; it is always conjoined with knowledge and light. For this immediate operation aims at **engraving the proposed Word upon the heart**, subduing the blind reason into the obedience of Christ, and so transforming the *perverse inclination of the will* by a conquering delight that what was once pursued with hatred and disdain as the greatest evil is now embraced with fervent love as the supreme good.

LI.

The Spirit works **immediately in us**, not so much *before* or *after* the Word, as **together with** the Word. Thus, the conversion that the Spirit produces is, in its proper order, also wrought by the Word: the Word acting *objectively* and *morally*, the Spirit *efficiently* and *subjectively*. Hence, the faith that is said to be “by hearing” (Rom. 10:17) is nevertheless **from the Spirit** as its cause—He who is therefore called the *Spirit of faith* (2 Cor. 4:13), insofar as the same object, which is proposed outwardly through the Word and received by man only theoretically or historically, is inwardly impressed upon the soul by the Spirit, so that it may be believed *practically and savingly*.

LII.

Just as the Word does not exclude the necessity of **immediate grace**, so **immediate grace does not exclude** the use of the

Word and other external means, but rather *presupposes* them. Although, in the absence of the Word and the accompanying circumstances, conversion ordinarily does not occur, it does not follow that the presence of those means is sufficient *unless* immediate grace also attends them.

LIII.

Even if man's impotence were merely moral, it would not follow that it could be healed by a merely moral remedy through **grace objective alone**. On the contrary, because this impotence is **invincible** in the moral realm, it demands a power *greater than moral*—namely, **hyperphysical and divine**—to overcome it. Nor is this moral condition remedied by moral reasoning any more than natural death is remedied by natural means. And even if this impotence were first produced by the devil's persuasive word, it cannot therefore be undone by divine persuasion alone. For in man's original, upright nature, mutability was essential to his being, making it possible for him to turn easily from good to evil. But in his corrupted nature, there remain **no powers** by which he can rise from his dreadful estate to the highest good.

Moreover, it is gratuitously assumed that man's sinful impotence is only moral. In fact, it is also **physical**, and may rightly be so called, as shown previously (Loc. X, Qu. 4). This is because it is inborn, and just as *invincible and insurmountable* as any natural incapacity; and because it introduces a **real and physical disorder** and corruption—not into the substance of the soul (as Flacius falsely held and rightly has been refuted), but into its very faculties: both the lower appetites, through rebellious affections, and the higher powers of mind and will, through innate sinful dispositions. These can be restored only by a **hyperphysical and most effectual**

operation, which turns the soul away from what is merely sensible and corruptible, and draws it to what is eternal and spiritual.

LIV.

The **immediate grace** taught by the orthodox bears **nothing in common with Enthusiasm**, but differs from it in various and crucial ways.

1. **Enthusiasm** seeks *new revelations* outside the Word; but immediate grace seeks none, for it **always accompanies the Word** and aims solely to imprint it upon the mind.
2. In Enthusiasm, the objects impressed upon the mind are **not externally received**, but rather *suggested inwardly* by the Spirit through secret inspiration. But in the doctrine of grace, the object is always assumed to be externally received and drawn **from the Word**.
3. Enthusiasm occurs through sudden impulses which often **bypass or exclude reasoning and reflection**. But the Spirit's operation does **not exclude reason**, but draws it along and works together with it, leading to a **gracious consent of the will**.

Finally, to mention no more distinctions, **Enthusiasm does not effect a change of heart**, and may stir the mind without transforming the will—thus it may be found even in the wicked, as in Balaam and others. But the operation of grace **necessarily brings about heart-renewal** and a sincere pursuit of holiness.

LV.

Since the Spirit who works immediately in us is **the same Spirit in all the elect**, inspiring in them a love for the truth, a willingness to believe, and imparting all other saving gifts, it is a **false and slanderous charge** when it is said—especially by Romanists—that such a Spirit must be “private.” This accusation is unjust, for the Spirit is **common to all believers**, and His operation is in full harmony with the Word.

LVI.

Although deliberate and rational movements of the will naturally presuppose prior understanding in a well-ordered and upright nature, it **does not follow** that this must hold true in the **disordered state** of sin. For there are many **impulsive and irrational movements** that arise from corrupt affections, which not only precede the judgment of the intellect but **bias and distort it**—as is often observed: “*As a man is inclined, so he judges.*” Therefore, the will and mind **cannot be corrected merely by intellectual judgment**, but must be **healed by immediate grace**.

LVII.

Though the **mode** by which immediate grace works within us **cannot be fully conceived or expressed**, this does not mean that its **truth must be denied**. For there are **innumerable things whose reality none can doubt**, yet **whose manner of operation no one can comprehend**.

QUESTION V

Whether in the first moment of conversion, man behaves in a purely passive manner, or whether his will in any way cooperates with the grace of God?

The former is affirmed, the latter denied, against all Synergists.

I.

This question places us in conflict with the Papists, Socinians, Remonstrants, and other heirs of Pelagian and Semi-Pelagian thought, who, fearful that man's free will be harmed or taken away in the act of divine calling, assert that it has some **synergy** or cooperation with the grace of God—hence the name *Synergists*.

II.

We are not inquiring about the **second moment** of conversion, in which it is certain that man does not remain purely passive, but rather **cooperates** or more precisely **sub-cooperates** with God. At that point he believes and turns to God, actively exercising his new life, being already regenerated and moved by God, and now moves himself toward the exercise of that life.

But we ask concerning the **first moment**, wherein he is first turned and receives new life through regeneration. In this moment, we contend, **he is purely passive**, as a **recipient subject**, not as an **acting principle**.

III.

Again, we are not asking whether a man can convert himself without grace. For even the Papists acknowledge the necessity of some **prevenient and exciting grace**; nor would anyone maintain the contrary except one who outright denies original sin.

Rather, we ask: **Can a man cooperate with that exciting grace?**

IV.

Nor are we asking whether **any dispositions** are necessary in a man by which he may be prepared for conversion. We freely admit that in **spiritual generation**, just as in natural generation, many preparatory operations precede before one arrives at the birth itself.

God does not perform this work in man by **violent seizures** or **enthusiastic raptures**, but in a manner suited to our nature, and He brings it forward **gradually** and by **steps**.

Thus, He makes use of various **dispositions** to prepare the man for the reception of saving grace—at least in the case of ordinary calling. These include **external acts** which man can perform (e.g., attending church, hearing the Word), and **internal motions** stirred by grace even in the hearts of the unconverted (e.g., the reception and grasp of the Word presented, knowledge of God's will, a certain sense of sin, fear of punishment, and some longing for deliverance).

But the question is this: **At the very moment of conversion**, with respect to the **degree of the thing itself**, does man contribute anything of his own by which he might cooperate with **efficacious grace**, such that the work may be ascribed not to grace alone but also to **free will excited by grace**?

This the **Papists** and the rest of the **Pelagianizers** affirm.

We **deny** it—together with the **Orthodox**, who acknowledge **no efficient cause properly so called** except God Himself the Regenerator, that is, the **Spirit of regeneration**.

Man, therefore, in his regeneration is regarded as a **purely passive subject** of the regenerating Spirit and of the **new qualities** infused by Him. **Afterwards**, once these new qualities have been infused, he conducts himself as an **active, free instrument** in the performance of his own actions.

V.

The *Socinians*, who, along with *Pelagius*, deny that original sin is propagated to us through corrupt generation, and who assert that whatever fault or defect is in us is contracted merely through frequent acts of sin and a kind of sinful habit, do not acknowledge regeneration as anything other than a **change of evil habit and life**, and a **reformation according to the doctrine of Christ**, as Socinus defines it in his book *De Baptismo*, and Smalcus in *De Filio Dei*, chap. ii.

Accordingly, they hold that man **cooperates with God** even in the **first moment** of conversion.

VI.

As for the *Roman Catholics*, the Council of Trent clearly expresses its view in *Session 6, on Justification, Canon 4*:

“If anyone shall say that man’s free will, moved and excited by God, does nothing at all by assenting to God when He excites and calls, whereby he might dispose and prepare himself to receive the grace of justification, and that he cannot dissent if he

so wills, but that he acts merely as something lifeless, and is altogether passive—let him be anathema.”

Hence *Tirinus, Controversies*, 14, no. 4, remarks:

“To be excited, drawn, invited by God—this is not in my power, for these are motions immediately sent into us by God alone; but it is free for me to **consent or not to consent** to the One exciting, drawing, and persuading—to **follow or not to follow**.”

VII.

Since the adversaries often make use of the distinction of grace into **exciting and assisting, operating and cooperating, prevenient and subsequent**, we must first of all examine **in what sense** this distinction is either **acceptable** or **ought to be rejected**.

If by **exciting, operating, and prevenient grace** they understand the **first motion of efficacious grace**, by which we are aroused from the death of sin unto new life, and are **actually converted**, *prior to* any cooperation or concurrence of our own will; and by **assisting, cooperating, and subsequent grace**, they mean that **second motion** by which God **cooperates with those already converted**, and assists them in their works—this distinction we would readily admit, as Augustine himself often used it.

So in his *Enchiridion*, chapter 32, he writes:

“Both are read concerning the holy elect: ‘His mercy has gone before me,’ and, ‘It shall follow me.’ He goes before the

unwilling, that they may will; He follows the willing, that they may not will in vain.”

And again, in the same place, he says the Apostle rightly states,

“It is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy,”

so that all may be attributed to God, who both **prepares the will** to be helped, and **helps** it when prepared.

In *De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio*, chapter 17, he says:

“Therefore, that we may will, **He works in us without us**; but when we do will, and will so that we act, **He cooperates with us**. Yet we are able to do nothing of the works of godliness without Him—whether as the One working in us that we may will, or as cooperating when we do will.”

But because our opponents often use this distinction in **a different sense**, whereby:

- by **exciting, prevenient, and operating grace**, they understand only **sufficient grace** that works through **illumination** and **moral persuasion**, which does not **subject the free will**, nor effectually incline or determine it to act, but rather is **subject to free will**, so that it is always left to man to accept or reject it, to consent or dissent; and
- by **cooperating grace**, they mean one that works together with a will not yet converted, and which likewise is aided by that still unconverted will—

this is the understanding implied by *Bellarmino, De Gratia*, book 2, chapter 3, where he says:

“He calls all that they may come to Him—not that they are able to come by the powers of nature alone, but so that He may exhort them to **cooperate with prevenient grace.**”

This is openly confessed by the **Synergists**.

See also *Jansen, De Gratia*, book 4, where he extensively treats this argument, and shows how far those who employ this distinction in such a way depart from the mind of **Augustine**.

VIII.

We, however, more helpfully distinguish the **grace of God**, not into *gratia gratis dans* (grace giving freely), or *gratia gratum faciens* (grace making one acceptable)—that is, the **free love of God**, by which He pursues us in Christ, to which we are related objectively—but into **grace freely given**, which includes **all saving benefits** that flow to us from the freely giving God as from an abundant fountain. To this grace we are subjectively related, for it inheres in us.

This grace is rightly distinguished into two principal kinds:

1. That by which we are **efficaciously called out of the state of sin** and transferred into the state of grace. This is rightly called *prevenient and operating grace*, though in a **sounder sense** than the Romanists intend.
2. That by which we who are already converted and in a state of grace are **strengthened and guided**. This is appropriately termed *cooperating and subsequent grace*, in the orthodox sense.

The Exclusion of Human Cooperation

IX.

Upon this foundation, we proceed to the confirmation of our doctrine, and we assert it primarily with four main arguments.

1. From the depth of human corruption, which excludes any cooperation on our part. For by nature we are sinners and children of wrath, nothing but flesh, whose imagination is only evil from youth (John 3:6; Eph. 2:3; Gen. 6:5); we can do nothing—not even think anything good—of ourselves (2 Cor. 3:5); we are dead in trespasses (Eph. 2:1); we bear hearts of stone (Ezek. 36); we are wholly impotent for any spiritual good (Rom. 5:6). Therefore, we are unable either to cooperate with grace or dispose ourselves toward conversion. (For exceptions, see *Locus X, De Libero Arbitrio*, Question 4.)

X.

2. From the nature of regeneration, which, being a transformation and renewal of nature, must be the work of God alone, not man. First, because such renewal is utterly impossible for man (1 Cor. 2:14; Rom. 8:7; Jer. 13:23); second, because as God alone at first created man in His image, so He alone can restore him to that image (Col. 3:10). As in natural generation, children cannot beget themselves, nor contribute anything to their own birth, but are entirely passive—so also in supernatural regeneration no one can regenerate himself, but it is the work of God the Father alone. Thus, regeneration is universally ascribed to God and denied to man: Psalm 100:3; John 1:12–13; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:3, 23; John 3:5–6; Titus 3:5.

XI.

3. From the infinite power required in the work of regeneration. Since it is an act of divine omnipotence, it must belong to God alone. It cannot be attributed to the human will, which is finite, as though it were a proper cause of such a work. Hence it is called a creation (2 Cor. 5:17) and a resurrection (Col. 2:12)—both of which exclude any cooperation, just as those who are created or raised cannot contribute to their own creation or resurrection.

XII.

4. **From absurdity.** For if this position were granted, the glory of conversion would be divided between the **creature and the Creator**, and man would have grounds for boasting in himself—that he distinguished himself and possessed something he did not receive. Yet this is repeatedly and most clearly denied by Paul (1 Cor. 4:7; Eph. 2:8–9; Rom. 3:27; 4:1–2).

XIII.

The passage in **1 Corinthians 15:10** is of no use to the Synergists. (1) Because Paul is speaking of his **apostolic ministry**, not of his **conversion**. (2) Because the entire success of that ministry he ascribes not to himself, but to **the grace of God**. He does not say that grace *labored with him*, as if sharing in the credit, but rather—correcting himself with a kind of emphatic reversal—that it was not he, but **the grace of God which was with him**. Thus, the phrase *gratia Dei mecum* is not to be interpreted, as some Romanists would have it, “grace worked alongside me,” but rather, “the grace of God that was with me,” to show that all his labor should be attributed to divine grace alone.

XIV.

It is one thing to speak of **cooperation with God in the work of**

ministry; it is another to speak of **cooperation in the work of conversion**. In the former sense, believers are rightly called *fellow workers* (2 Cor. 6:1; 1 Cor. 3:9), because God uses their labor for the preaching of the Gospel and the building up of the Church. But in the **giving of life and grace**, God has no co-worker (1 Cor. 3:6). In the latter case, no one can be said to be a co-worker with God in the **first moment of calling**, when the very power to believe is first given.

XV.

When the Spirit is said to “**help our infirmities**” (Rom. 8:26), the reference is not to the **unconverted**, but to **those already converted and believing**, whose weakness He strengthens—especially when He intercedes for them and teaches them how to pray. So if men are said to be *helped* by God, it is not with respect to **first and prevenient grace**, by which they are converted, but to **concurrent grace**, by which the converted are sustained in faith and led to perfection.

XVI.

It is one thing to say that man has **free will**; it is another to say that by **free will he can cooperate with grace**. We do not deny that man, when he is first converted, possesses free will—otherwise he would not be human. But we do deny that he is able either to **cooperate with God**, or to remain in a posture of neutrality regarding the reception or rejection of grace.

XVII.

Although man cannot cooperate with God in calling, it does not follow that:

- all **diligence and effort** in the exercise and growth of faith are nullified;

- or that **precepts and promises** have no place;
- or that those who desire to believe and repent are not to be praised, nor the unwilling blamed.

(1) Because such diligence and effort do not belong to man's cooperation with God in the moment of **initial conversion**, but rather follow upon it—once he has been awakened and converted by God—to **work out his salvation**.

(2) Because **precepts and promises** are rules of duty, not **measures of ability**; and from the existence of a command, one cannot infer power, nor from the presence of obligation, the strength to fulfill it. God wisely uses His law to reveal both man's duty and his **inability**, thereby pressing him toward the grace that He alone can give.

XVIII.

Although in regeneration man preexists—something that cannot be said of natural generation—he exists only as the **passive subject** of another's operation, not as the principle of action himself. And though he may perform certain **vital acts**, these belong only to **natural and animal life**, not to the spiritual life of grace, with respect to which he is rightly said to be **utterly dead**.

XIX.

Far from impairing the will of man, the grace of God—excluding any cooperation on man's part—**perfects** it. For it translates the will from the slavery of sin into the liberty of grace, with God, the Creator of the will, **not destroying its nature** or manner of acting, but **confirming and renewing** it. It is absurd, therefore, to speak of man being turned into a block or trunk, since he is not only a subject that is **capable of and conscious of grace**, but also a **living and**

moving instrument by which God brings about actual conversion in him—both of which are qualities that no mere trunk could ever possess.

XX.

Although the Holy Spirit is frequently promised and given to the faithful already **born again and converted**—whether for the **progress and increase** of regenerating grace (Luke 11:13; John 7:38–39), or for the **confirmation and sealing** of the same grace until the day of redemption, or for the **comfort and consolation** that He brings (Eph. 1:13–14)—it does not follow from this that the Spirit is **not also given** with respect to regeneration itself, as the **Spirit of regeneration and illumination**. On the contrary, since regeneration can only be wrought by the Spirit (John 3:5–6), who is the author of our spiritual life (Gal. 5:25), it must be assumed that He is indeed given for this purpose.

XXI.

The actual **mortification of the old man** and **vivification of the new**, which takes place through the renunciation of vices and the reform of life and conduct—wherein man does indeed **cooperate**—follows habitual regeneration as its proper **fruit** (Gal. 5:22–23; Col. 3:5). It cannot be separated from it, and yet it must be **distinguished** from it as **effect from cause**, and **acts from the infused habit** (Eph. 2:10; Rom. 6:4; Ezek. 36:26; Jer. 32:39). For this reason we are said to be made **new creatures by God**, in order that we might **walk in newness of life**.

QUESTION VI

Whether efficacious grace operates only by a certain moral persuasion, which man can either admit or reject? Or rather, by an invincible and omnipotent power, against which the will of man cannot prevail?

We **deny** the former and **affirm** the latter—against both Roman Catholics and Arminians.

I.

This is the chief hinge of the controversy, especially as it was later revived by the Arminians after the Romanists, concerning the **mode of conversion**, which was definitively settled by the Synod of Dort, Article 4.

II.

As to the **state of the question**, note the following:

1. The question is not *whether grace concurs* in the production of faith, but **how** and **to what extent** it concurs.

For the Arminians appear willing to concede everything to grace and admit that free will by itself can do nothing. But when it comes to **explaining the mode** by which grace operates, they insist that it always acts in such a way that it remains in man's **power either to admit or reject it**, either to place or not to place the “obex” (the obstacle).

Hence, if two are offered the same grace, and one is converted while the other remains in unbelief, they claim the reason is not to be sought in grace—since it is the same in both cases—but in the **disposition of the subject**, that is, of the man: one placed

an obstacle, the other did not; one rejected the grace which the other accepted.

Thus, while they seem with one hand to **lavishly ascribe the beginning, progress, and completion of all good to grace**, they subtly with the other hand **steal it away** again, making the mode of its operation **resistible**, by which term they **conceal the idea of human consent and cooperation**, by which a man is said to be always able either to receive or reject grace—thus **discerning himself** from others.

III.

Although the terms *resistible* and *irresistible* grace are foreign and less than ideal for expressing the matter at hand—since *resistible* means that which can be hindered, yet to resist is one thing and to overcome is another—we are nevertheless compelled to use them out of necessity, in order to **unmask our adversaries**. For under this novelty of language they endeavor to **propagate the old poison of ancient heresy**.

IV.

2. The question is not whether man has a **power to resist**, or whether he may **begin to resist but fail to complete it**—whether, that is, a man may resist God's calling and in fact does resist. This we freely concede, and to our great sorrow we too often experience—not only that man **can resist**, but even that he **cannot but resist**. But the question is about **total and complete resistance**—not just a resistance attempted but a resistance successful. Can man resist grace to such an extent that he overcomes it and prevails, so that the will always remains in suspense, equally poised between yes and no? This is what our opponents affirm; we deny it.

V.

3. The question is not whether man can resist **external and objective grace**—whether he can resist the Word, or the other outward means used by the Spirit for his conversion. No one denies that these may be resisted by man, so that they often remain **ineffective and fruitless**. Rather, the question concerns **internal and subjective grace**—whether, when God applies it unto conversion, a man may still resist it in such a way that the outcome God intends does **not** follow.

VI.

4. Nor is the question whether grace may be **resisted in the understanding or affections**. Even the Arminians concede that man's intellect may be **irresistibly enlightened**, and his affections **irresistibly stirred**, and that he may be **genuinely affected by grace**. The debate concerns **the will alone**, which they insist is **always moved resistibly**, so that its consent remains **forever free**: that although the power to believe and to convert is given irresistibly, the actual act of believing and turning may still be delayed or hindered by the human will. For they wish to assert in it an essential power either to admit or to reject grace. But just as we have already proven this to be utterly false, so we now firmly deny that grace can be **efficacious** and yet **resistible** in this sense.

VII.

The question therefore comes to this: Is the mode of operation of efficacious grace always resistible? That is, when all the workings of grace are present—those which God uses to produce conversion in us—does the conversion itself still remain so within man's power that he may either place or not place an obstacle, receive or reject it, convert or not convert himself accordingly? This the adversaries affirm; but we deny. Rather, we assert that efficacious grace works in

such a way in man that, though he may indeed be unable not to resist at the beginning, he nevertheless never resists so far as to finally overcome that grace or hinder the work of conversion.

VIII.

The reasons are as follows:

1. **From the side of man.** Because he labors under a total and invincible inability for spiritual good, as we demonstrated in Locus X, Question IV, which Scripture variously describes as death, blindness, a heart of stone, and the like. This inability cannot be overcome by mere moral persuasion, which acts only objectively—it requires omnipotent power, which works effectively, if not physically, then at least supernaturally and divinely. Therefore, there is nothing in man that can rightly receive grace or make that grace efficacious by turning it from resistible to irresistible. For what disposition can there be in a dead man unto life, in a blind man unto sight, in a stone unto feeling? And just as the presentation of an object does not suffice for the operation of sense when the sense is corrupted, but prior healing of the diseased faculty is required for it to rightly apprehend the object and exercise its act—as was shown above in Question IV—so too, with the faculties of the rational soul corrupted by sin, it is not enough to propose the object morally: there must also be an effective, even hyperphysical, renewal of the corrupted faculty itself.
2. **From the side of God who converts.** Because He applies in this work a power so efficacious and omnipotent that it is plainly irresistible. This is the force of such terms as *creation*, *generation*, *resurrection*, which imply invincible power and an infallible outcome—when Scripture speaks of God creating us

(Psalm 51; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:10), regenerating us (John 3:5; Titus 3:5; 1 Pet. 1:3), raising us from the dead (Eph. 1:19–20; 2:4–5; Col. 2), removing the heart of stone and giving a heart of flesh (Ezek. 36), or drawing us to Himself (John 6:44). Just as no one can resist God when He creates, generates, or raises from the dead, so no one can resist Him when He truly converts.

Though God's action in conversion is not identical in every way to creation, resurrection, or generation, and differences may be noted, the force of the argument stands. For in such metaphors, the particular circumstances are not to be pressed, but rather the main point must be observed—which is none other than this: to describe the immense and invincible power of grace in conversion, likened to the power God exercised in creation and resurrection.

Nor do the magnificent descriptions used repeatedly by the Apostle mean anything else—such as when he says in 2 Corinthians 4:5–6 that “God, who commanded light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ,” or in Ephesians 1:19–20, where he declares that the same power God used to raise Christ from the dead is exercised in our conversion: “That you may know what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead.”

Here Paul so extols the power of God that he seems never satisfied. He does not merely mention power (*dynamis*), lest we think it common or ordinary. He adds *megathos*, the **greatness** of the power—and then *hyperballon*, that it **exceeds** our comprehension. And lest even that seem insufficient, he appends its omnipotent and irresistible mode: *kata tēn energeian tou kratous tēs ischyos autou*

—“according to the working of His mighty power”—that same supreme power demonstrated in Christ’s resurrection is also required to raise sinners from the tomb of sin.

Now, if God does not operate in us beyond leaving us in suspense—so that it remains in our power to receive or reject grace—why all this language? And what truth is there in saying that such invincible power is exercised in us as in the resurrection of Christ? Surely, these words are either meaningless, or they prove the **irresistibility and invincibility** of efficacious grace.

X.

Nor can it be said, as the Remonstrants attempt, (1) that the passage speaks of the *resurrection of the body*, and not the *conversion of the soul*. For the context and the flow of the Apostle’s argument clearly show that he is speaking of our conversion, not of the resurrection. This is further confirmed by chapter 2:5–6, where Paul returns to his earlier point: “Even when we were dead in sins, [He] made us alive together with Christ”—a statement that cannot be understood of bodily resurrection, nor can the following verse (v.10): “We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus.” Finally, had Paul intended to refer to bodily resurrection, he would not have spoken of that power as presently active toward us, but as something to be exerted only in the future.

XI.

(2) They say the passage does not concern the *production* of faith, but only its *preservation and increase*, since the Apostle is addressing believers who already have faith—just as in 2 Thessalonians 1:11. But although Paul is addressing those who already believe, that does not prevent him from reminding them of the manner in which they came to believe, and of the invincible

power of God by which they were brought to faith—so that they may be stirred all the more to glorify Him. Moreover, if such great power is required to preserve and increase faith, then certainly not less, but even more, is needed to produce it in the first place.

(3) They claim the act of conversion cannot depend solely on God, as the resurrection of the dead depends solely on the one who raises them—since conversion is often commanded of man, and sometimes even ascribed to him. But although conversion is indeed commanded as a duty, this does not prevent it from being vindicated to God as His own proper work. In commanding such things as He alone gives, God shows the obedience owed to Him, and in part accomplishes what He commands by commanding it. And although actual conversion may be ascribed to man in its second act—inasmuch as he acts—yet never in its first, habitual act.

XII.

That same efficacy is solidly confirmed by those passages which explain our calling in terms of *drawing*, such as John 6:44, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.” Whoever rightly considers this phrase will soon realize that it cannot stand together with a supposed ability to dissent at will. For where such liberty is left to man, one might speak of being led, but not of being drawn. This word does not suggest coercion or force—for it turns the unwilling into the willing—but it does imply an *infallible result*, such that the one drawn must necessarily follow and cannot but come. As the Bride says in Song of Solomon 1:4, “Draw me, and we will run after You.” And in the verse following in John 6, Christ speaks of the *effect* of this drawing: “Everyone who has heard from the Father and learned from Him comes to Me.” Two points of great weight are implied by Christ here: (1) the **necessity** of grace, without which it is impossible to come to Christ—that is, to believe—since no one can

come unless he is drawn; and (2) its **efficacy and irresistibility**, for whoever is drawn and taught by the Father most certainly comes.

Augustine rightly observes this in *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians*, Book 1, Chapter 19: “He does not say, ‘He will lead,’ lest we imagine that the will must first go ahead. For who is drawn, if he already wills? Yet no one comes unless he wills. Therefore, he is drawn in a wondrous way so that he wills, by Him who knows how to work inwardly in the very wills of men—not that they may believe against their will (which is impossible), but that out of unwilling ones He makes them willing.”

XIII.

It cannot be replied here, as the objectors suggest, “All who believe are indeed drawn—but not only those.” For the words themselves prove the contrary: just as Christ says in verse 44, “No one can come to Me unless the Father draws him,” He clearly affirms that only those drawn by the Father come to Christ. Likewise, in the next verse, He adds: “Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me,” thus asserting that all who are drawn necessarily and infallibly do come. These two statements reinforce one another, so that it is declared both that only the drawn come, and that all who are drawn do come to Christ in faith.

It is no stronger to object that “this drawing is not irresistible, because it occurs through hearing and learning—neither of which can happen irresistibly.” For the instruction of men and the teaching of God differ: men, by teaching, may persuade but cannot convince; but those who are taught by God are indeed drawn—they necessarily follow and obey, because they are taught not merely mediately by the Word, but immediately and inwardly by the Spirit (1 John 2:20), and in being taught, they are drawn. “Each one is drawn by his own

desire,” said the poet. “The soul is drawn by love,” said Augustine. God convinces not merely by argument, but draws with a friendly necessity, moving the soul with conquering delight—nothing more sweet, nothing more powerful. When God teaches, He not only advises and moves, but **persuades** and **effectually moves**; when man learns from God, he is not forced unwillingly, but he is truly conquered and overpowered by joy. Hence, all who hear are said not merely to receive the ability to come, but the very act itself. As Augustine rightly observes (*De Gratia*, I.18): “Everyone who learns from the Father not only can come, but comes indeed—where possibility, desire, and actual action are all joined together.” Thus, the highest sweetness is joined with the highest efficacy: the former through instruction, the latter through drawing—*that is, a kind of instruction which, by persuading, effectually persuades and brings about obedience.*

Lastly, it is futile to add: “If drawing refers to an inward action produced in a man before he can come to Christ, then he would be converted before he comes to Christ—that is, converted before being converted.” But what prevents us from saying that one is converted in the first act—that is, regenerated—before he is converted in the second act? Indeed, it is necessary that God come to us before we come to Him; that He take hold of us and anticipate us with His mercy before we lay hold of Him; that He be found by those who did not seek Him (Isaiah 65:1). For no one is a believer, except he who has first received mercy from God to become one.

XIV.

Third, the invincible operation of God is proven by those passages in which God is said to give us a new heart, remove the heart of stone, and cause us to walk in His statutes—such as Ezekiel 36:26–27: “I will give you a new heart, and put a new spirit within you; I will

remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes.” Here, every phrase is a weighty argument. He says, *I will give*—not merely offer or prepare. He speaks of *the heart*, not merely the mind, but the very sanctuary of the soul. He promises a *new heart*—not a reformed or improved old one, but a completely new and different one. He does not merely combine His heart with ours but *removes* entirely the stony, dry, and senseless heart. He gives instead a *heart of flesh*—that is, tender, pliable, and obedient, full of living sensation.

Then, to show how powerful and effectual this grace is, He says: *I will put My Spirit*—not merely passing through like a guest, but as Lord and Ruler He will dwell within—not in our nostrils, but in *our very midst*, to exercise sovereign dominion. And lest we suppose this gift conveys only the *ability* to do good, He adds the actual result: *I will cause you to walk in My statutes*—not merely exhorting, but persuading; not simply enabling us to will, but making us will; not only making it possible for us to walk, but causing us to walk, both to will and to do. Who could possibly make room for such a magnificent promise if God acted in us only by mild persuasion, and in a resistible manner? Who does not see that this passage cannot be more clearly framed to express the **invincible and unconquerable grace** of God?

The same reasoning applies to the promise found in Jeremiah 31:31ff, where God promises under the New Covenant to write His law on the hearts of His people, so that all will know the Lord. This cannot refer to a resistible action, but rather an **irresistible** one—since the result is certain and effectual. For when God writes the law on the heart, it must be written; and the one whom He teaches must be taught, and be converted.

XV.

It is vain to object:

1. “That the grace of conversion cannot be described in these passages, because even under the Old Testament God always gave His elect a new heart, whereas here a unique benefit peculiar to the New Testament is being promised.” But although the giving of faith and a new heart is not a benefit exclusive to certain elect persons, but common to all, yet we must acknowledge some *privilege* here in respect to believers under the New Testament—not necessarily in regard to the essence of the thing, but in respect to the manner and degree of it. For in this era, He bestows a new heart more *illustriously*, more *solemnly*, and upon *many more* than under the Old Testament. And those things which are not illustrious are sometimes, in Scripture, not accounted of—as though they were not—just as the Spirit is said “not yet to have been given,” in John 7:39, not because He had not been given at all, but because He had not yet been given in such *richness and splendor*.
2. “That the giving of the heart is commanded,” as in Ezekiel 18:31. Yes—but it is commanded as man’s *duty*, whereas in the promise it is declared to be God’s *gift*. The precept shows what man *ought* to do; the promise reveals from whom he ought to *expect* what he *cannot* do of himself. Add also that this command is directed to those already called; they are not so much commanded to make themselves a new heart *at the beginning* of conversion, as to *progress* in it through the pursuit of sanctification and repentance. Finally, even according to the Arminian hypothesis, God commands us to have spiritual understanding and affections inclined toward spiritual good,

while at the same time they say that such things must be *inspired* by God in an irresistible manner.

3. “That these promises are not absolute, but conditional,” as from Ezekiel 11:18–21. It is true, a condition is proposed and required by God—but it is a condition which He *Himself supplies*, and which, when required in the elect, is *secretly wrought* by the power of the Spirit. Thus, the Spirit is promised to those who *remove* their detestable things—not because they have already done so, for how could they remove them before the stony heart, which is the *source* of all those abominations, has been removed by God Himself? Rather, they remove them *by the power of the Spirit*, so that the condition is not antecedent, but *subsequent*—and is in fact, in this passage, more promised than required.

The reason is clear: this promise contains the very *principle* of all good in man and the *cause* of all that is demanded of man—namely, the Holy Spirit, who not only *perfects* every good work in us, but also *initiates* it.

4. “That this promise was made to the whole people, and yet was not fulfilled in many, since Israel was hardened.” But even if it was not fulfilled in Israel *according to the flesh*—for “not all who are of Israel are Israel” (Rom. 9:6)—it has most *certainly* and *infallibly* been fulfilled and is being fulfilled daily in the Israel *according to the Spirit*, which is the true people to whom the promise was made, the people whom God has foreknown (Rom. 11:2; 1 Pet. 2:9).

XVII.

Nor should it be said here:

1. “That the act is said to be given when the ability is given to perform it.” For this is contradicted by the philosophical axiom: *From ability to act, no conclusion follows regarding actual performance*. God gave to Adam the power *not* to sin, but He did not therefore give him the *act* of not sinning—otherwise Adam would never have sinned.
2. “That this divine action is not irresistible, because it must be joined with the operation of man, who also must work out his salvation with fear and trembling.” But man's diligence and obedience do not exclude, but rather presuppose, the necessity of *irresistible grace*—not only that he *can* perform it, but that he actually *does*, according to the promise of the new covenant. And that “fear and trembling” are no more at odds with the irresistibility of the cause than they are with the certainty and infallibility of the outcome—as the example of Christ Himself demonstrates, who, though assured of victory, yet is said to have been moved with godly fear (*Heb. 5:7–8*). Moreover, this fear is not that of uncertainty or distrust, but of *humble and pious reverence*, which is among the very means through which God produces in us that most effectual willing and doing.
3. “That the very act of faith cannot be produced irresistibly, since it would then not be an action, but a passion.” But this divine operation does not destroy the freedom of the will, but confirms it; and nothing prevents the same action from being *truly voluntary* on man's part, and yet accomplished through the *invincible grace* of God, which perfectly harmonizes the infallibility of the result with the liberty of the will. For God so works in us as not to overturn the distinctive nature of things, but to preserve the unique mode of operation of each. *Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty* (2 Cor. 3:17). So then,

though the act of faith is infused by God, because it is exercised by man, it is rightly attributed to him.

4. “That it is not faith but salvation that is called the gift of God,” as in *Ephesians 2:8*. But if salvation is the gift of God, so too is faith, which is the *first part* of salvation. Moreover, in verse 10, believers are said to be *His workmanship*, created in Christ Jesus—this necessarily includes faith as the principle of our regeneration. Otherwise, if faith were not a gift of God, man could boast in himself, contrary to the Apostle.
5. “That Paul is speaking of those already believing and converted, for whom he prays,” as in *Hebrews 13:21* and *2 Thessalonians 1:11*. But if, even when converted, we cannot do the will of God unless He works it in us, how much less can we do so *before* conversion or *in* the act of conversion itself?

XVIII.

Fifth, we argue from the absurd consequences that follow the opinion of the Adversaries:

1. If grace always operates in us in such a way that it is resistible—so that it is left to man’s free will either to make use of it or to resist it—it necessarily follows that more is attributed to man’s free will in conversion than to God, and that the one who makes good use of grace distinguishes himself from others by his own doing, contrary to *1 Corinthians 4:7*: “Who makes you to differ? And what do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?”

For if after all the operations of grace the will of man is still left in equilibrium, then it follows necessarily that not God through grace, but man through free will, is the principal cause of faith and

conversion—he contributes the greater part, while God provides the lesser. Moreover, if the will is left in suspense to determine itself, who does not see that man becomes the true cause of his own distinction, since grace, being common and resistible, could not have effected this? And because moral suasion acts only objectively, it cannot be counted as an efficient cause—the man himself must be.

But Paul flatly denies this, for he does not ask whether one has received grace, but insists that whatever distinguishes one man from another has been *received*. And though in that context he is speaking of more eminent ministers as compared to those with fewer gifts, it does not prevent the principle from being rightly applied to the distinction between believers, for the rule is general. Whatever is true of one kind of good applies to all others, whether natural or supernatural—especially to the grace of election, which is the greatest of all, and the root and cause of all others.

Indeed, by the argument from the lesser to the greater: if a believer can claim no glory for acquiring or increasing spiritual gifts, how much less in the laying of the very foundation of faith itself, which is far more difficult?

XIX.

2. This opinion also undermines the earnestness of prayer and thanksgiving. For what would the faithful ask of God concerning faith and conversion, if these do not depend on His grace but on the free will of man? And how could they render thanks to God for this gift, if it ought instead to be ascribed to their own will and not to the power of God?

And yet, nothing is more frequent in the writings of Paul than prayers and thanksgivings poured out for the faith and conversion of men: see *Ephesians 1:17; 3:16–17; 1 Thessalonians 3:12–13; 5:23; 2*

Thessalonians 1:11; Hebrews 13:21; Romans 1:8; 1 Corinthians 1:4–5, 7; Ephesians 1:3, 15–16; 2 Corinthians 1:3–4; 2 Thessalonians 1:3.

But if the act of faith is always within man's own power—no matter how much grace is applied—then why should it either be asked of God or thanked Him for?

XX.

3. On this view, the foreknowledge of God is rendered uncertain and doubtful. For if, after all the operations of grace have been put in place by which the will is disposed to be moved, the will still retains the power, according to its innate liberty, *not* to be moved—then it cannot be certainly known which way the will is going to incline.

And there can be no certain knowledge of that which can just as easily be otherwise, as was shown at length in *Part I, Locus III, Question 13, on Middle Knowledge, Thesis 12.*

XXI.

Fourth, in this way the grace of Adam is confused with the grace of Christ. For Adam too was given the *power to stand*, just as we are given the *power to believe*; thus, our condition under grace would be no better than his in the state of nature—nor would it be less subject to failure and change. Yet it is manifest that a great difference exists between nature and grace: the former is always mutable, the latter always sure and immutable—since in nature, man is left in the hand of his own counsel (*Eccl. 15:14*), but under grace, he is kept by the power of God (*1 Pet. 1:5*). That assistance which Adam had was merely *a help without which he could not act*—that is, power to do good; but grace adds not only *the help without which not*, but also *the help by which*—that is, the very act and willing itself.

XXII.

Fifth, if grace acts always in a resistible way in man's conversion, then God would operate no more effectually in converting sinners than Satan does in deceiving them—for Satan also uses suasion, enticements, promises, and threats to pervert men. Nor can the difference lie in the fact that God promises eternal and incorruptible goods, while Satan only promises temporal and corruptible ones. For though the goods Satan offers are false and fleeting, he presents them as though they were true and everlasting, promising happiness—as when he told our first parents they would be like gods.

Furthermore, no matter the quality of the goods promised, the *mode of operation* would remain the same for both, if God acts by mere suasion and in a way that can be resisted. Nor does it follow that, because Satan by his suasion corrupts many more than God converts, that therefore Satan is stronger. The difference lies not in power, but in purpose: sin is something man already lies in, and to which he is naturally inclined—even without Satan's help—whereas holiness is something man abhors in his sinful state, and cannot return to except by *omnipotent power*.

And though far fewer feel the power of this grace than are passed over in reprobation, it must not be said that Satan prevails more than God—for this difference arises not from weakness in God, but from His freedom in choosing to exert His effectual grace only in the elect.

XXIII.

It must also be understood that there is a difference between **resisting the Holy Spirit externally** in the Word that commands, and resisting Him **internally** in His operative grace; and likewise between resisting the Spirit who only convinces and restrains, and resisting Him who also **converts and renews**.

The Jews are said to have resisted the Holy Spirit, *Acts 7:51*, in the former sense—not the latter. This is clear from the words that follow: “Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Righteous One.” It is also evident from the example of Stephen: they resisted the Holy Spirit speaking through him, because they refused to receive his word; indeed, they raged against him like wild beasts—such is the force of the term *ἀντιπίπτω* (“to rush against”).

It is also said in *Acts 6:10–11* that they were not able to resist the wisdom and Spirit by which he spoke. But in that case, “resist” does not mean *to oppose successfully*, but rather *to overcome*, as in *Luke 21:15*. Though they were convicted by the truth spoken through the Spirit by Stephen, it does not follow that the Spirit applied to them that grace which is necessary for conversion. For what was lacking was the *circumcision of the heart*, which is expressly said to have been absent in them, *Acts 7:51*, just as it had been with their fathers, *Deut. 29:4*.

XXIV.

And although the Holy Spirit neither decreed nor intended to convert them, it does not follow that they could not resist the Holy Spirit—though not in the sense of resisting converting grace, yet certainly by resisting His appointed office, and the way of salvation which He revealed, and the external means He applied, which were necessary for their conversion.

Thus, they resisted the *revealed will* of God, which pertains to duty—not His *secret will*, which determines the event. Nor does the fact that they could not believe without the special grace of the Spirit, which was withheld from them, remove the justice of God’s complaint about their rebellion.

1. Because they were not forced to offer so great and so deliberate resistance to the Spirit speaking by the prophets as they did.
2. Because they were still bound to the duty that had been prescribed, and their inability was willful and self-inflicted, and therefore does not excuse them.

XXV.

"The eyes to see, and ears to hear," mentioned in *Ezekiel 12:2*, cannot denote the grace of conversion, or the *eyes of faith*, because it is added there concerning the house of Israel that it is a *rebellious house*, which, by consequence, did not possess the eye of faith. Rather, the passage refers only to the eyes of the *mind*, that is, the faculty of understanding and perceiving the things proposed to them—which faculty they, by their own wickedness, refused to use. Otherwise, had God given them the spiritual eyes and ears of the new man, they could not have failed to see and hear. Nor does it follow that because in *Deuteronomy 29:4* God is said to have denied eyes to see and ears to hear to the people, and that there it refers to the grace of regeneration, therefore it must be taken in the same sense here—*since the circumstances are different*.

XXVI.

There is a great difference between **resisting God's outward and external calling** and resisting His inward and effectual calling, which is intended for conversion. The former is asserted in *Isaiah 65:2–3*, where the prophet says, "I have spread out My hands all day to a rebellious people..." The latter is not. The spreading forth of God's hands signifies His kind and gracious invitation, whereby He sought to draw them by external means—whether by the Word or by His benefits—not once, but daily, through the ministry of His

servants. Yet this cannot denote that powerful and effectual operation by which the arm of the Lord is revealed to those who are taught of God and drawn by the Father, and of whom it is said that God manifested Himself to those who did not ask for Him, and was found by those who did not seek Him—*Isaiah 65:1*—which clearly refers to the **effectual calling of the Gentiles**.

XXVII.

Although in *Matthew 23:37*, Christ declares, "How often would I have gathered your children, and you would not," it does not follow that grace is therefore resistible.

1. Because Jerusalem here is clearly distinguished from her children. By "Jerusalem" are meant the elders, scribes, priests, and other city leaders, who are designated by the city's name, as in *Matthew 2:1, 3*. These were regarded as the "fathers" of the people. And Christ does not say that those whom He would have gathered refused to be gathered, but rather that *Jerusalem herself*—that is, her leaders—*refused to allow her children to be gathered*: "how often would I have gathered your children... and you would not!" The "you" here refers specifically to the *chief men*. Thus, Christ is not so much lamenting those who were called and would not come, but rather those who hindered others from coming as much as they could—*withdrawing the key of knowledge*, not entering themselves, and hindering those who would have entered, as we see in *Luke 11:52*.

And yet Christ did not cease to gather *those whom He willed*, despite the opposition of the city's rulers—as Augustine rightly observes (*Enchiridion*, c. 97).

2. Even if "Jerusalem" were not distinguished from her children, but were taken for the inhabitants generally, it still would not follow that they resisted *effectual grace*, because what is noted here is not God's *decretive will* (*voluntas decernens*), but His *preceptive will* (*voluntas praecipiens*), whereby He had repeatedly called them to their duty. Furthermore, **congregation** is one thing, and **conversion** another. The former belongs to the *external calling*, by which men are gathered together by the Word into the communion of the Church; the latter pertains to the *internal calling*, wrought by the Spirit, to which none can resist.

Therefore, Christ truly willed that they do what He commanded—that is, He approved and had decreed to command it. Yet He did not will it *with respect to the event*, that is, He had not decreed that it should certainly come to pass. For had He truly willed it in that way, no reason could be given why they were not gathered—*since none can resist His will* (*Rom. 9:19*).

XXVIII.

When the Pharisees are said, in *Luke 7:30*, to have “**rejected the counsel of God against themselves**,” the will referred to is not the *decretive will*, which is unchangeable and irrevocable (*Isaiah 46:10*; *Hebrews 6:17*), but rather the *preceptive will*, which is often designated by the name “counsel” (*Proverbs 1:24–25*; *Acts 20:27*; *Revelation 3:18*). They are thus said to have rejected the counsel of God unto their own destruction, inasmuch as they despised the command of God set before them by John, who called them to faith and repentance—and so they shut the door to the way of salvation shown to them and, to their own great harm, scorned the grace of God.

XXIX.

The reproach that Christ directs against **Chorazin and Bethsaida** for their stubbornness and unbelief (*Matthew 11:21*) indeed shows how grievous and intolerable it was, especially by comparing them to the most corrupt nations—those whom the Jews themselves considered infamous and detestable above all others. Yet, this cannot prove that the grace Christ exercised toward those cities, and which they so obstinately resisted, was *sufficient unto conversion*.

Nor can this be concluded from Christ's words that *Tyre and Sidon would have repented* had the same mighty works been done among them. For:

1. These words are not to be understood strictly of an actual future conversion, which cannot be produced by miracles alone, but rather **hyperbolically and popularly**, to heighten the guilt and impenitence of the Jews. Their obstinacy surpasses even the corruption of those notoriously depraved Gentile nations. Such comparative exaggerations are common in Scripture.

For example, in *Ezekiel 3:6*, God tells the prophet, "I am sending you to the house of Israel, not to a people of foreign speech and difficult language... for had I sent you to them, surely they would have listened to you." Not that those nations would actually have been more inclined to listen—especially since they could not have understood—but to sharpen the accusation against Israel's hardness.

In the same spirit, the prophet later asserts that the Israelites were worse than the Samaritans (*Ezekiel 16:51*), saying that Judah had justified her sisters by sinning more grievously than they. This form of rebuke is also found in *Luke 19:40*, "If these keep silent, the very stones would cry out."

So too in ordinary speech we often say: “If I had done this, even the stones would have softened, or the brute beasts would have been taught, or the deaf would have heard, or the blind would have seen”—not that stones can be softened or beasts taught, but to emphasize the *incomparable hardness and stupidity* of the person addressed.

In the same way, Christ says here that *Tyre and Sidon would have repented* if the same works had been done among them—not to indicate that their conversion would certainly have followed, had the hypothesis been true, but rather to **highlight the grievousness** of the Jews' sin. As if to say: *There is no nation so wild and stiff-necked—not Tyre, not Sidon, not even Sodom—that would not have been moved, if not converted, by the many signs and wonders done among you. But you, O Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, remained unmoved.*

Furthermore, the basis of Christ's rebuke need not be found in grace sufficient for conversion having been given to the Jews but withheld from Tyre and others. Instead, it can be understood:

- Either as a **probable inference**, according to human judgment and by way of accommodation;
 - Or as a statement drawn from the **certain knowledge of Christ**, who knew the dispositions of men, and saw that the hearts of the Jews were even more corrupt and obstinate than those of others who had received less light, and therefore had sinned less and were to be punished more lightly.
2. It may also be rightly said that Christ was not here speaking of **inward saving conversion**, but only of **external repentance**. This is suggested by the mention of *sackcloth and*

ashes, which are outward signs of penitence. But to sit in sackcloth and ashes and to express sorrow in some measure is one thing; to be truly converted by *effectual grace* is quite another.

Moreover, the response in view is attributed to the **sight of miracles**, which are only external means and are not sufficient for true conversion unless joined with the *inward and secret power of the Holy Spirit*. Though such a repentance would not have sufficed for their salvation, it would have been sufficient to **condemn the Jews**, who, despite the abundant miracles of Christ, had shown no movement—not even toward that lesser, external repentance.

XXX.

An act of obedience, which is produced with such efficacy that, once that efficacy is exerted, the act must necessarily follow, does not therefore cease to be **free**, nor does it cease to be a true act of obedience—**so long as** that efficacy does not impose any violence upon the person, nor induce a brute or physical necessity, but rather **preserves his spontaneity and prohairesis** (that is, his rational deliberation). This, indeed, is precisely what we assert grace to accomplish. For man does not cease to will freely what he wills, even if he wills it necessarily; and grace, which makes the unwilling become willing, **does not destroy liberty, but restores it**—for to serve God willingly and with joy is true freedom. It is a *false supposition* of the adversaries that liberty consists in indifference (ἀδιάφορον), and cannot coexist with necessity. We have often refuted this error by the example of the angels and the glorified saints, whose acts of obedience are indeed necessary and infallible, yet entirely voluntary and free.

XXXI.

Although grace inclines and bends the will of man irresistibly, **no coercion** is to be imagined in such action.

1. Because coercion implies a principle wholly external, to which the one coerced contributes nothing; but here there is also an **internal principle**, for grace is the soul of our soul.
2. Coercion does not act in a way suited to nature, but **conversion perfects nature**.
3. It is impossible and indeed a contradiction in terms for the will to be coerced—for then it would cease to be will and become non-will.

XXXII.

Although none are actually converted except those whom God effectually converts, it **does not follow** that others are called **in vain or hypocritically**. For there are other ends to this outward calling—as has been stated earlier—which fully **vindicate God from all pretense or hypocrisy**.

XXXIII.

There is a distinction between a **partial and incomplete resistance**, which may oppose and struggle against grace for a time, and a **total and complete resistance**, which not only contends for a while, but ultimately succeeds in preventing the work of grace and rendering it utterly void.

We do not deny that man can resist the call of God; indeed, we acknowledge that, at first, he **cannot not resist**—this is what we may call **initial resistance**. But we deny the second kind: we **deny** that man can **finally and totally** resist **effectual grace**.

XXXIV.

Those whom God ordinarily calls by the *external preaching of the gospel alone*, He does not will to convert with such **efficacy** that they **cannot but believe** and be converted. But this is not the case with those whom He calls by the *Word and the Spirit together*—which He does with all the elect—for in them the Spirit applies a power **which overcomes all resistance of the will**. Now the Spirit acts in conjunction with the Word, and the Word with the Spirit, **not collaterally**, as though the Word were doing something distinct from what the Spirit does, but **subordinately**—not by *successive* subordination (as if the Spirit begins to act only after the Word ceases to be effective), but by a *simultaneous subordination*, such as exists between an instrument and a principal cause.

In this case, the **Holy Spirit** is the **principal cause**, who acts in twofold fashion: both in the *Word*, and in the *heart*—in the Word, by persuading; in the heart, by **effectually persuading**; in the Word, **objectively**; in the heart, **powerfully**. If the Word operated by itself, its influence would be entirely **resistible**. But since, in the elect, the Word is never separated from the Spirit, grace is never **ineffectual** in them.

XXXV.

The **irresistibility of grace** cannot give rise to **carelessness**, or spiritual **sloth**, or contempt for the means of grace. For God's irresistible action upon the soul, though **immediate**, does **not exclude**, but rather **presupposes**, the use of **external means**, by which He chooses to accomplish this work.

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