

Is Bellarmine's "Fourth Proposition" Identical with the "Extreme View" of Albert Pighius?

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Abstract

Christian Washburn has questioned my claim that the idea of a publicly heretical pope was formally excluded in *Pastor Aeternus*, by equating Bellarmine's "fourth proposition" with the extreme Ultramontanist school of Albert Pighius. Washburn argues that Gasser had merely indicated that Bellarmine's "fourth opinion" would be raised to dogmatic status, rather than the "fourth proposition." I attempt to address this critique by demonstrating how Bellarmine's own school of thought within the "fourth opinion" was markedly different from that of Pighius.

Keywords

Robert Bellarmine, Johann Baptist Franzelin, Gallicanism, heretical pope, infallible security, Albert Pighius, Guido Terreni, Juan de Torquemada, Ultramontanism, Vatican I

I would like to begin by thanking Christian Washburn for highlighting some of the finer details behind this particular controversy from the First Vatican Council, which concerns the confusion of Bellarmine's version of the doctrine of papal infallibility with the "extreme opinion" of Albert Pighius. By identifying the key figure in this controversy as Baron Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler, the Bishop of Mainz

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(1811–77), we can gain a better picture of the context which led to this confusion. First, I would like to acknowledge that there is no doubt that the controversy at hand in this portion of Gasser's *relatio* is centered on the proposed definition of papal infallibility itself—that is, the “fourth opinion” outlined by Bellarmine, which he ascribes with the theological note of “most certain and assured,” rather than “probable and pious.” I think we can both agree on this conclusion. There are numerous other points that are in contention, however, which I will attempt to summarize below.

The Two Schools of Thought within the Fourth Opinion

First of all, Washburn appears to overlook the fact that Bellarmine mentions two different schools of papal infallibility within the single broader category identified as the fourth opinion. Bellarmine summarizes the fourth opinion as follows: “The fourth opinion is that in a certain measure, whether the Pope can be a heretic or not, he cannot define a heretical proposition that must be believed by the whole Church in any way. This is a very common opinion of nearly all Catholics.”¹ Upon reading on a little further, however, we can see exactly how Bellarmine distinguishes between the two competing schools of thought which are categorized under the fourth opinion: “These authors seem in some way to disagree with themselves because some of them say the Pontiff cannot err if he should proceed maturely and listen to the counsel of other pastors, while others say the Pope can err in no way whatsoever, even by himself.”²

Therefore, there is a need to establish exactly which school of papal infallibility that Gasser confirmed was being elevated to dogmatic status. Bellarmine groups these two opposing schools of thought under the same broader category within the fourth opinion, since they both share common ground in two important areas. The first is in rejecting the Gallican argument that a pope could potentially define a heretical proposition unless he accrues the consent of the church by way of conciliar approval. The second is in rejecting the “extreme” Ultramontanism of Pighius, by allowing for the possibility that a pope could teach heresy as a private theologian.

Taking this wider context into account, we can determine that Bellarmine's use of the phrase “whether the Pope can be a heretic or not” is intended to denote whether or not the pope could potentially be a *public* heretic (i.e., that he is liable to teach heresy as part of his public Magisterium). Therefore, the key differences are that the first school of thought allowed for the possibility that a pope could teach heresy in his public Magisterium, while the second school did not. These opposing schools within moderate infallibilism would eventually coalesce into the majority and minority positions that were pitted against each other on the floor of the First Vatican Council. Since the fourth article of Gallicanism had already been condemned by Pope Alexander VIII in 1691, the minority bishops rallied together under a more moderate form of

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1. Robert Bellarmine, *Disputationes de Controversiis Christianae Fidei adversus hujus temporis Haereticos: De Romano Pontifice* (Lyon: Apud Ioannem Pillehotte, 1609), book 4, chap. II (hereafter cited as *De Romano Pontifice*).
 2. Bellarmine, *De Romano Pontifice*, book 4, chap. II.

neo-Gallicanism, which accepted the core tenets of papal infallibility, while allowing for the possibility that a pope could teach heresy outside of *ex cathedra* definitions. The ultramontane bishops in the majority closely adhered to the school of Bellarmine, who rejected the possibility that a pope could defect from the Catholic faith in his public capacity as Roman pontiff, even when he teaches non-definitively and acting alone.

The first school of thought in the fourth opinion is that which was first formulated by Bishop Guido Terreni (c. 1270–1342), before being further developed by the Dominican theologian Juan de Torquemada (1388–1468).³ This moderate form of papal infallibility allowed for the possibility that a pope could potentially teach heresy in a public capacity if he acted rashly, without consulting a body of counselors, such as the College of Cardinals. According to this version of the doctrine of papal infallibility, while the pope could potentially teach heresy as part of his public Magisterium, when he acts outside of the support of an advisory body, divine providence would always ensure that he could never define a heretical proposition *ex cathedra*. Since Torquemada's school acknowledged that infallibility resided in the pope alone, and not within the corporate body of pope-and-counselors, Bellarmine classified this position within the fourth opinion itself, rather than alongside the Gallicans in the second opinion. However, this school was ultimately rejected by the majority on the council floor as a type of "Crypto-Gallicanism," since it implied that the pope was capable of publicly teaching heresy outside of solemn *ex cathedra* definitions.

The second school of thought categorized within the fourth opinion is that of Bellarmine and Suárez, who promoted a moderate form of papal infallibility that navigated a middle ground between Pighius and Torquemada. Over the course of the four propositions that are marshalled in defense of the fourth opinion, Bellarmine argues that the pope could never teach heresy in his public capacity as Roman pontiff, even when he teaches in a non-definitive capacity, without securing counsel from an advisory body. Therefore, Torquemada's school of thought is clearly distinguishable from that of Bellarmine. Gasser's intervention was made in order to confirm that it was the school of Bellarmine that was being "raised to the dignity of a dogma" in *Pastor Aeternus*, rather than Pighius's extreme view in the third opinion.

3. For a comparison between the thought of Terreni and Torquemada on papal infallibility, see Thomas Izbicki, "Infallibility and the Erring Pope: Guido Terreni and Johannes de Turrecremata," in *Law, Church, and Society: Essays in Honor of Stephen Kuttner*, ed. Kenneth Pennington and Robert Somerville (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977), 97–111; see also Eugene S. Morris, "The Infallibility of the Apostolic See in Juan de Torquemada, O.P.," *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 46, no. 2 (April 1982): 242–66, <https://doi.org/10.1353/tho.1982.0033>. As Francis Sullivan notes, Terreni's view was virtually identical with the position being advanced by the minority at the First Vatican Council, who wanted to define a version of the doctrine of papal infallibility that was more strictly regulated, with a body of counsellors acting as failsafe against doctrinal corruption. See Francis A. Sullivan, *Magisterium: Teaching Authority in the Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1983), 93.

Ketteler's Mistake

Ketteler was numbered among the minority at the council who were arguing in favor of defining Torquemada's version of the doctrine of papal infallibility and made the mistaken assumption that Bellarmine had also subscribed to this view. This was because Bellarmine had clearly supported the fourth opinion, rather than Pighius's third opinion. As such, Ketteler had erroneously assumed that Bellarmine was endorsing the school of Terreni/Torquemada in the fourth opinion since Bellarmine had classified Pighius's view as "extreme," and came down in favor of the fourth opinion.⁴ Since Bellarmine only gave a brief outline of the fourth opinion in book 4, chap. II, this makes it difficult to distinguish his own school of thought from that of Pighius. Instead, Bellarmine chooses to deliver a terse summary of his own position, stating that "others say the Pope can err in no way whatsoever, even by himself." It is only the surrounding context that informs us that Bellarmine means that the pope cannot publicly teach heresy in any way in his capacity as Roman pontiff. Bellarmine's own more measured take on Pighius's view is only made explicit later, in the fourth proposition itself, wherein he extends the significance of Christ's prayer for Peter's faith to the non-definitive exercise of the Petrine ministry, rather than limiting it to *ex cathedra* definitions:

For the Pope not only should not, but cannot preach (*praedicare*) heresy, but rather should always preach the truth. He will certainly do that, since the Lord commanded him to confirm his brethren, and for that reason added: "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith shall not fail," that is, that at least the preaching of the true faith shall not fail in thy throne.⁵

Since Ketteler had correctly concluded that the logic behind the schema of *Pastor Aeternus* was ruling out the possibility of a publicly heretical pope, he confused the second group mentioned in the fourth opinion with the school of Pighius, not realizing that it was actually referring to Bellarmine's own more nuanced position. This confusion surrounding Bellarmine's fourth opinion is why Gasser needed to intervene in order to confirm to Ketteler that the doctrine being proposed in the schema of *Pastor Aeternus* was not that of Albert Pighius, but what Bellarmine taught in the fourth opinion. Gasser then proceeded to draw out the differences between Bellarmine and Pighius, by including the quote found in the fourth proposition in book 4, chap. VI.

4. "At last, you may permit me, by adding only a few words, to confirm it on the authority of Cardinal Bellarmine. Hardly any theologian has surpassed that venerable man in asserting the prerogatives of the Apostolic See. But perhaps in our time, he too would not have escaped the label of Crypto-Gallican (laughter)?" Giovanni Domenico Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* (Paris: H. Welter, 1901), vol. 52, col. 897 (own translation).

5. Bellarmine, *De Romano Pontifice*, book 4, chap. VI.

Bellarmino on the Non-Definitive Public Teaching Capacity of the Pope

In advancing his fourth proposition in defense of papal infallibility, Bellarmine adds his own important nuance to Pighius's opinion, by asserting that a pope cannot teach heresy when acting as pontiff (*uti pontificem*). While the fourth proposition sounds similar to the formula used to describe Pighius's position, Bellarmine's own view is actually quite different. Pighius had maintained that a pope could not teach heresy in any way—even in his capacity as a private doctor (*doctor privatus*). If we make a side-by-side comparison of the fourth proposition and the third opinion, we can see how these important nuances are made more clearly:

The Third opinion is on another extreme, that the Pope cannot in any way be a heretic (*Pontificem non posse ullo modo esse haereticum*) nor publicly teach heresy, even if he alone should define some matter, as Albert Pighius says. (Pighius's third opinion)⁶

The supreme Pontiff is not only not able to err as Pontiff (*uti pontificem*) but that even as a particular person he is not able to be heretical, by pertinaciously believing something contrary to the faith. (Bellarmine's fourth proposition)⁷

We need to take this important distinction into account, since it establishes that Bellarmine's fourth proposition is qualitatively different from the view of Pighius. Washburn appears to favor the opinion of theologians such as Edmond Dublanchy, who assumed that Bellarmine held that the pope always teaches as a private doctor when he is not defining a doctrine *ex cathedra*.⁸ However, Bellarmine lists four different modes in which papal teaching authority can be considered: "1) As a particular person or a private teacher; 2) As Pope, but by himself; 3) As Pope, but joined to a customary body of counsellors; 4) As Pope together with a General Council."⁹

Moreover, this section of *De Romano Pontifice* contains evidence that Bellarmine understood that the pope could teach in a non-definitive, yet authoritative mode in his public capacity qua Roman pontiff. Here, Bellarmine notes that the pope can teach something not covered by the prerogatives of infallibility in his capacity as teacher of the universal church, such as in matters of particular fact or in ecclesiastical laws or disciplines which lie beyond the remit of the revealed deposit. As such, Bellarmine recognizes that this type of non-definitive public teaching capacity is sometimes open to doubt. Yet he goes on to insist that even when a pope or a council proposes a teaching non-definitively, they should still be "obediently heard," since this type of public teaching authority is still binding on the consciences of the faithful.¹⁰ After defending

6. Bellarmine, *De Romano Pontifice*, book 4, chap. II.

7. Bellarmine, *De Romano Pontifice*, book 4, chap. VI.

8. Edmond Dublanchy, "Infaillibilité du Pape," *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, vol. 7 (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1927), cols. 1638–1717.

9. Bellarmine, *De Romano Pontifice*, book 4, chap. II.

10. Bellarmine, *De Romano Pontifice*, book 4, chap. II.

his argument *ab eventu* (i.e., that no pope has ever taught heresy), Bellarmine attempts to demonstrate how it is morally binding for Catholics to submit to the non-definitive “indirect power” (*potestas indirecta*) of the pope in temporal affairs, such as when he proposes ecclesiastical laws or disciplines in an authoritative manner in his public capacity as teacher of the universal church.¹¹ This non-definitive, yet authoritative mode of papal teaching authority described by Bellarmine is clearly different from the pope acting in his capacity as a private person.

Johann Baptist Franzelin identifies book 4, chap. II of *De Romano Pontifice* as an early witness to the third level of assent which is due to the non-definitive exercise of the ordinary Magisterium—the religious submission of the mind and will (*obsequium religiosum*).¹² This is important to note, since Franzelin has been identified as the author of the response to Ketteler in this particular portion of the *relatio*.¹³ Consequently, we know that Franzelin had interpreted Bellarmine in this exact sense, since he appeals to this section of *De Romano Pontifice* in support of his ideas on the “infallible security” (*infallibilis securitas*) of the teachings of the ordinary Magisterium.¹⁴ Franzelin followed Bellarmine in rejecting the possibility that a pope could bind the consciences of the faithful to a heretical proposition taught in his public capacity as Roman pontiff. While recognizing that such non-definitive teachings of the pope are not necessarily “infallibly true,” Franzelin argued that they were always “infallibly safe” for the faithful to accept, since such teachings could never be spiritually harmful. Franzelin’s thought on the “infallible security” of the ordinary Magisterium and the obligation for the religious submission of the intellect and will to such non-definitive teachings eventually culminated in the articulation of a third level of assent in *Lumen Gentium* 25. Franzelin’s concept of the “authority of divine providence” and the closely related obligation for religious submission of the will and intellect was later affirmed in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which teaches that the divine assistance of the Holy Spirit is offered even toward the non-definitive exercise of the ordinary Magisterium:

11. “Therefore, now we only treat on the Pontiff as he is the Pontiff of the whole Catholic Church. Moreover, we ask whether he may have true power over all the faithful in spiritual matters just as temporal kings have in temporal affairs, to the extent that, just as they can make civil laws, so also the Pope can make ecclesiastical laws truly obliging in conscience as well as punish transgressors with spiritual penalties at least, such as excommunication, suspension, interdict, irregularity, etc.” *De Romano Pontifice*, book 4, chap. XV.
12. Johann Baptist Franzelin, *On Divine Tradition*, trans. Ryan Grant (Post Falls, ID: Sensus Traditionis Press, 2016), 203. The original Latin text was published as *Tractatus de Divina Traditione et Scriptura* (Rome: Typis S. C. De Propaganda Fide, 1870), Sectio II, Caput II., Th. XII., Princ. VII.
13. As Bernhard Knorn states, “an analysis of the (anonymous) manuscripts shows that it was Franzelin, too, who wrote the official responses of the Deputation on Faith to the interventions of Cardinal Guidi and Bishop Ketteler, who criticized the proposed formula. He also contributed considerably to the discourse of Bishop Gasser, which gave an official explanation of the final dogmatic formula.” Bernhard Knorn, “Johann Baptist Franzelin (1816–86): A Jesuit Cardinal Shaping the Official Teaching of the Church at the Time of the First Vatican Council,” *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 7 (2020): 614, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22141332-00704005>.
14. Franzelin, *On Divine Tradition*, 179–80.

Divine assistance is also given to the successors of the apostles, teaching in communion with the successor of Peter, and, in a particular way, to the bishop of Rome, pastor of the whole Church, when, without arriving at an infallible definition and without pronouncing in a "definitive manner," they propose in the exercise of the ordinary Magisterium a teaching that leads to better understanding of Revelation in matters of faith and morals. To this ordinary teaching the faithful "are to adhere to it with religious assent" which, though distinct from the assent of faith, is nonetheless an extension of it.¹⁵

Conclusion

We can conclude that Bellarmine's proposition that the pope could never teach heresy in his public capacity qua Roman pontiff, even when acting outside of solemn *ex cathedra* definitions, is different from the extreme opinion of Albert Pighius. Unless we are careful to distinguish between the different schools of Pighius, Bellarmine, and Torquemada, we are susceptible to the same logical trap as Ketteler, in refusing to recognize Bellarmine's position as a separate median category of moderate infallibilism. Since there were two different schools of thought represented under the "fourth opinion," Gasser needed to indicate that it was the version of papal infallibility taught by Bellarmine that was about to be elevated to the "dignity of a dogma." Gasser then proceeded to use the fourth proposition to demonstrate how Bellarmine's view differs from that of Pighius. Since the neo-Gallican position of the minority bishops was the only version of papal infallibility that allowed for the potential of a publicly heretical pope, we can determine that *Pastor Aeternus* formally adopted Bellarmine's version of this doctrine, by dismissing the possibility that the Apostolic See or its individual occupants could ever publicly defect from the Catholic faith.

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15. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §892, https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/___P2A.HTM.