

This article was downloaded by: [Douglas Kries]

On: 24 September 2012, At: 15:17

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Perspectives on Political Science

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/vpps20>

### A Review of "On Temporal and Spiritual Authority" ; "The Theological-Political Origins of the Modern State: The Controversy between James I of England and Cardinal Bellarmine" ; "Jesuit Political Thought: The Society of Jesus and the State, c. 1540-1630" ; and "Empire of Souls: Robert Bellarmine and the Christian Commonwealth"

Douglas Kries<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Gonzaga University

Version of record first published: 20 Sep 2012.

To cite this article: Douglas Kries (2012): A Review of "On Temporal and Spiritual Authority"; "The Theological-Political Origins of the Modern State: The Controversy between James I of England and Cardinal Bellarmine"; "Jesuit Political Thought: The Society of Jesus and the State, c. 1540-1630"; and "Empire of Souls: Robert Bellarmine and the Christian Commonwealth", Perspectives on Political Science, 41:4, 227-229

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10457097.2012.713270>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

**FEATURE REVIEW**

**American Citizenship and  
Patriotism**

Robert Bellarmine

**On Temporal and Spiritual Authority**

Edited, Translated, and Introduced by  
Stefania Tutino

Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund

500 pp., \$24.00,

ISBN 978-0-86597-717-4

Publication Date: April 2012

Bernard Bourdin

**The Theological-Political Origins of  
the Modern State: The Controversy  
between James I of England and  
Cardinal Bellarmine**

Translated from the French by Susan  
Pickford

Washington, DC: Catholic University of  
America Press

282 pp., \$59.00,

ISBN 978-0-8132-1791-8

Publication Date: November 2010

Harro Höpfl

**Jesuit Political Thought: The Society  
of Jesus and the State, c. 1540–1630**

Cambridge: Cambridge University  
Press

413 pp., \$77.00,

ISBN 0-521-83779-0

Publication Date: September 2004

Stefania Tutino

**Empire of Souls: Robert Bellarmine  
and the Christian Commonwealth**

Oxford and New York: Oxford Univer-  
sity Press

416 pp., \$74.00,

ISBN 978-0-19-974053-6

Publication Date: October 2010

During the first few decades of the twentieth century, a curious theory arose among certain American Catholics according to which the chief influence upon Thomas Jefferson and the American Founding was none other than Cardinal Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621) of the Society of Jesus. The theory was preposterous, of course, and scholars soon pointed out as much. Neverthe-

less, the “Bellarmine-Jefferson legend,” as it came to be called, articulated if not the historical truth at least the historical longings present among American Catholics who wanted some way to connect the history of their Church with the history of their country. Seizing upon some clear, if superficial, affinities between Bellarmine’s distinction between spiritual and temporal authority and Jefferson’s separation between Church and state seemed to them to be a promising way to proceed.

Understanding why these U.S. Catholics might attempt to read Bellarmine into Jefferson requires a brief review of Bellarmine’s basic position, which is usually referred to as the *potestas indirecta* or the theory of the indirect power of the spiritual authority (i.e., the papacy) in temporal affairs. The position can be summarized as consisting of three basic theses, the first of which is the distinction between temporal and spiritual matters. Temporal matters pertain to the politics of this world, the matters that we might understand as falling under the purview of secular governments; according to Bellarmine, Aristotle’s *Politics* showed that temporal governments arise from and belong to the realm of nature. Spiritual matters pertain especially to the Church, with the Roman pontiff at its head; its foundation belongs to revealed theology, with its basis in the Church’s scripture and tradition. The second basic thesis of the *potestas indirecta* is that the spiritual end of human beings is higher than the temporal end; stated differently, the purpose of the sacraments of the Church is more important than the purpose of the matters dealt with by kings and parliaments. The third and concluding thesis is itself twofold: the distinction between temporal and spiritual ends implies that the papacy does not govern peoples in their temporal lives directly, while the subordination of the temporal to the spiritual implies that the spiritual does provide indirect rule to temporal regimes when the latter work contrary to the salvation of peoples. The best arrangement, Bellarmine suggests, is for princes and popes to work independently but in support of

each other and for the benefit of all, but if conflicts should arise wherein princes undermine the spiritual realm, the pope may excommunicate such princes and absolve their subjects from their oaths of allegiance to them. In other words, in extreme cases of conflict, the Church may depose secular leaders.

Bellarmino’s theory seems most persuasive when it is simplified into a sort of three bears’ story: those who argue for the absolute rule of kings in temporal and spiritual affairs belong to one extreme; those who argue for the absolute rule of the Church in both temporal and spiritual affairs belong to another; the Cardinal’s theory of the indirect power is “just right.” The three bears’ version, however, does not get the theory quite right, for Bellarmine does not simply split the difference between the two extremes so as to fall exactly in the middle. Rather, the Church always has an indirect power over the state which the state does not have over the Church. This follows necessarily from the superiority of the spiritual to the temporal ends, at least in Bellarmine’s view.

In any case, Bellarmine’s position, which is much more subtle and sophisticated than has been explained here, dominated Roman Catholic political thinking for approximately 350 years, after which time it suddenly fell out of favor but without being replaced by anything obviously better. This brings us to the subject at hand—a number of new books by important scholars that might prompt not just Catholics but all those who think about the question of religion and politics to reconsider what Bellarmine has to say.

Stefania Tutino’s *Empire of Souls* provides us with a remarkable resifting of the evidence on Bellarmine. Her work has been aided by the recent accessibility of certain archives, some of which make available the private, epistolary thoughts of Bellarmine as he engaged in the controversies of his time. One of the advantages of studying Bellarmine, however, is that he published his speculative ideas prior to his involvement in the political disputes of the seventeenth century, so one can view his initial thinking relatively undistorted by the

particular historical circumstances that it would be faced with later. Tutino's first chapter thus explains Bellarmine's views as he expressed them serenely while working at the Roman College of the Society of Jesus. No sooner were his *Controversies* published than they became themselves controversial, and even though politics was not the dominant theme in this dispassionate treatment of the theological disputes of his time, Bellarmine soon found himself under siege from politicians on all sides. Tutino's book treats in its subsequent chapters all of the major political disputes that Bellarmine became involved in after the publication of his main work.

The first of these was a dispute within the Roman Catholic Church itself. Tutino explains how it was only the death of Pope Sixtus V that saved Bellarmine's writings from being placed on the Index, for he was interpreted by some of his co-religionists as undermining the authority of the papacy by watering down the pope's direct authority over temporal affairs into an indirect one. He was more trusted by subsequent popes, however, and quickly became an intimate advisor to them. This meant that Bellarmine was soon forced to apply his theory of the indirect power to the various political crises of the age. Tutino thus devotes individual chapters to a detailed examination of Bellarmine's thoughts on the controversies in Venice, England, and France—all places where he was often criticized for giving too much rather than too little authority to the Church and her leadership. Tutino thinks that Bellarmine may have argued inconsistently against his Venetian critics, and she notes that the Society of Jesus and the papacy as a whole were backtracking in France after the assassination of Henry of Navarre. She thinks, however, that he argued admirably in his conflict with the King of England, James Stuart.

Bernard Bourdin's *The Theological-Political Origins of the Modern State: The Controversy Between James I of England and Cardinal Bellarmine*, despite its subtitle, is really much more about James I (James VI of Scotland) than it is about Cardinal Bellarmine. Prior to becoming king, James had offered some hints that he

might convert to Catholicism, which was a very welcome notion to the Catholics of England, grown desperate after their rough treatment—indeed persecution—by Henry VIII and especially Elizabeth. But early overtures toward James came to nothing, and after the Gunpowder Plot was discovered, the English monarch embarked on a policy requiring Catholics in his realm to swear an oath of allegiance to himself as their sovereign. A dispute of pamphlets erupted between James and Bellarmine (and others) regarding the question of whether Catholics could swear such an oath and yet remain loyal to their Church. Bellarmine's view was that they could not, for in so doing they would necessarily be denying the Church's superiority to the temporal realm. Stated more concretely, they would be denying the pope's right to declare wayward monarchs to be heretics and to absolve Catholic subjects of their allegiance to them. The matter is extremely complicated, but Bourdin is of the view that Bellarmine failed to see that James was not just another Elizabeth or Henry trying to usurp spiritual authority from the Church. Rather, he says, James was insisting only that the temporal does not proceed from the spiritual, and that therefore the king was under the authority of God alone and never under the authority of any spiritual intermediary. Tutino comes to an opposite conclusion, for she thinks that James was indeed encroaching on the realm of the Christian conscience with his oath and that Bellarmine was only insisting on the rights of the spiritual realm in arguing that kings do not rule by divine right.

Bourdin and Tutino not only have different judgments on the controversy about the oath but also differ thoroughly on the question of Bellarmine's originality, which goes right to the heart of how one understands the Cardinal. Tutino thinks that Bellarmine is a novel thinker—indeed the first to understand the vision of the Counter-Reformation, Tridentine papacy as the office that rules an international empire of souls (as opposed to souls and bodies). In her eyes, it is this new politics of a transnational association of souls that justifies Bellarmine as a forward-thinking and insightful author of a modern notion of politics and religion. Bourdin thinks

that Bellarmine is simply a defender of the Gregorian reform movement, a sort of leftover from the Middle Ages, and that James is the disputant offering a modern political vision of a territorial political unity.

All in all, this reviewer generally prefers Tutino's book to Bourdin's and agrees with her assessment of the controversy over James's oath rather than his, but on this particular question of the novelty of Bellarmine, Bourdin's argument would seem to have more force. The Cardinal understood himself as standing firmly within the tradition of Thomas and Augustine, both of whom made distinctions between temporal and spiritual affairs while affirming the ultimate superiority of the latter. Bellarmine thus would seem to stand with Catholic tradition against the absolutizing tendencies of both the Renaissance popes (or at least some of them) and the monarchs they often struggled against. The empire of souls that Tutino finds in Bellarmine's politics is indeed there, but that vision of the empire of souls (the communion of saints?) is hardly new to Bellarmine.

For readers unfamiliar with Bellarmine's views, the path to reading either Tutino or Bourdin on the subject was nicely paved by an earlier book by Harro Höpfl, which covers not only Bellarmine's thought but the whole of Jesuit political thinking from the origins of the Society until 1630. This means that Höpfl studies Bellarmine's political thinking in relation to such luminaries as Suarez and Lessius. Höpfl is also willing to compare Jesuit political thinking of the time period to non-Jesuits, so comparisons are also often made to Vittoria, Machiavelli, and Hobbes. Only one chapter of the book is devoted expressly to the *potestas indirecta*, but then it would be a mistake to reduce the whole of Jesuit political thought or even the whole of Bellarmine's political thought to that theory alone.

What is disappointing about all three of these books—by Tutino, Bourdin, and Höpfl—is that while their authors are writing about important developments in political thought that profoundly influenced the rise of the modern Western regimes, none of them is especially articulate in explaining just why we ought to care about Bellarmine

anymore. Tutino is clearly the most appreciative of Bellarmine's efforts, but even her concluding chapter does not explain well his significance. Indeed, the "Jefferson-Bellarmino legend" mentioned in the opening paragraph, for all its historical inadequacies, was better at this task than these three erudite volumes. Like it or not, religious people living in modern liberal regimes today must come to grips with the distinction between religion and politics in some form or other, and the value of Bellarmine for us is that he thought very seriously about this problem, at least as it presents itself to those who harbor religious commitments. He was quite willing to accept the distinction between the temporal and the spiritual, despite its many critics, for he understood the distinction as belonging to the tradition of the Church herself. What he could not accept was any suggestion that political authority, grounded in nature, is in any sense equal to spiritual authority, grounded in the supernatural. Bellarmine thus points to a challenging problem that even easygoing Americans sometimes have to face squarely if they take their faith commitments at all seriously.

In fact, it turns out that there are certain unexpected similarities between Bellarmine's position and Alexis de Tocqueville's observations on the relationship between religion and politics among the Americans. The latter argued famously in the next to the last chapter of the first volume of *Democracy in America* that the Americans observed an absolute separation of Church and state, by which he meant that the Americans had opened up a region for politics that was quite free from religious authority, but that this sphere of political liberty was bounded by the moral teaching of religion. When it comes to the authority of religion, because Americans agree that Christian morality reigns supreme, there is no debate and political liberty ends, Tocqueville claimed. Bellarmine does seem rather "American" in agreeing that there is a sphere within which temporal authority should be permitted to operate without the immediate interference of the spiritual authority. He even suggested that within this realm

the people should be free to establish any form of regime they preferred. This temporal region is bounded, though, by the spiritual, which includes the moral, and thus if the temporal authority should do anything in opposition to even the natural law, it must be resisted by the spiritual authority.

We can see the sorts of struggles Bellarmine's theory sought to resolve churning daily within the political life of the United States. Sometimes the issues are very apparent, such as in the question of legalized abortion. If securing or providing abortions is an issue pertaining to morality, it is a matter pertaining to the spiritual welfare of the people. Bellarmine argues that in such a situation, temporal authority must yield to the spiritual, or rather that temporal authority is trespassing into the realm of spiritual, where it has no authority. If we press the logic of the argument, it would seem that he would have to absolve the faithful from any obligation to obey a government that, say, taxed the faithful to secure or provide abortions. On the other hand, sometimes the issues that Bellarmine's theory seeks to resolve are much more subtle and not immediately before our eyes. An example might be the Pledge of Allegiance. To be sure, there is open debate just now regarding whether the words "under God" may be deleted from the pledge; more hidden at present, however, is the general question of what believers should think about the whole of idea of such a pledge. Bellarmine was not about to tolerate James's oath of allegiance, but is the Pledge of Allegiance any different? That is, by stating the pledge, is one promising to obey the republic for which the flag stands even if that republic should author laws that are immoral and hence a threat to salvation? To connect this issue with the former one, we can ask, for example, whether it is permissible for Christians—or other religious groups, for that matter—to pledge allegiance to a republic that secures and provides abortions. And if the believer is not worried about abortion, there are plenty of other moral problems for which temporal authorities are inclined to legislate. The problem is that once one grants that there are two au-

thorities at work in the life of a single believer, perplexities quickly abound.

If the three books already mentioned show no extensive interest in bringing Bellarmine's insights to bear on such contemporary problems—if they do not seem to grasp the full relevance of the topics they are discussing—they nevertheless at least remind us of the possibility of returning ourselves to the sources of our modern predicaments. Such a project has not been especially easy in Bellarmine's case. English translations of many of the relevant texts are either quite old or are wanting completely, and indeed even the original Latin has not been all that accessible, since the most recent printing of the Cardinal's collected works is now well over a century old. Fortunately, Liberty Fund's Natural Law and Enlightenment Series has just released a volume of new English translations that partially removes such obstacles. The volume, edited and translated by Stefania Tutino, is largely devoted to the Cardinal's *On the Temporal Power of the Pope, Against William Barclay*, which bears the advantage of being Bellarmine's most nuanced statement on the controversy surrounding James's oath of allegiance as well as the disadvantage of sometimes pursuing details pertaining to the concrete, historical situation of the work's composition rather than topics of more general, theoretical interest. Some of Bellarmine's other important political texts are also included, but some—as has to be expected in a one-volume collection—are noticeably absent. Be this as it may, Tutino's selection is surely defensible and must be welcomed as a great boon to all those desiring to explore Bellarmine's insightful if controversial writings for themselves. Indeed, given the new resources provided by Tutino's translations and the three monographs treated above, we have every reason to hope that the project of recovering Robert Bellarmine's political thought, which is already beginning to bear fruit, will in future yield an even greater harvest.

DOUGLAS KRIES  
Gonzaga University  
kries@gem.gonzaga.edu