**Bellarmine’s Critique of Protestantism:
Tridentine Roman Catholicism vs. the Reformation**

Written by Cardinal Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621), the [*Disputationes de controversiis christianae fidei*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disputationes_de_controversiis_christianae_fidei) (also called *Controversiae*) were the earliest attempt to systematize the various religious disputes between Catholics and Protestants. This work was used by Protestant theologians as representative of Tridentine Catholic theology. Bellarmine’s comprehensive and thoughtful critique of Protestantism provides a useful opportunity to review the core elements that were at stake in the theological debate after the Council of Trent. It is an enlightening source for all those interested in the Roman Catholic evaluation of Protestantism and vice versa.

**Leonardo De Chirico** is the pastor of Breccia di Roma, a church that he helped plant in Rome in 2009, and Vice Chairman of the Italian Evangelical Alliance. Previously, Leonardo planted and pastored an evangelical church in Ferrara, Italy from 1997 to 2009. He earned degrees in history (University of Bologna), theology (ETCW, Bridgend, Wales) and bioethics (University of Padova). His PhD is from King's College (London); it was published as Evangelical Theological Perspectives on Post-Vatican II Roman Catholicism. In 2015, he published *A Christian Pocket Guide to Papacy* through Christian Focus. He is a lecturer of historical theology at Istituto di Formazione Evangelica e Documentazione in Padova, Italy. Additionally, Leonardo is the director of the Reformanda Initiative, which aims to equip evangelical leaders to better understand and engage with Roman Catholicism, and the leader of the Rome Scholars and Leaders Network (RSLN).

1. **“Propugnaculum fortissimum” (the strong bulwark): A Life Dedicated to the Counter-Reformation**

A Survey of Bellarmine’s Life and Works

**2.** **A Battle Around the Ninth and Tenth Articles of the Creed**

An Analysis of Bellarmine’s Contention That the Dispute Against the Reformation Revolves Around These Two Articles

9. I believe in the holy Catholic Church, the communion of the saints

10. And the forgiveness of sins

1. **The Manifold Case Against the Reformation Unfolded**

A Sample of Bellarmine’s Discussions around the Word of God, the Church and Justification by Faith

**4**. **After Bellarmine What?**

According to Avery Dulles “theologians are called to do again, in a vastly changed context, something analogous to what Bellarmine did with remarkable success, for early modern times”.[[1]](#footnote-1) Rome is looking for another Bellarmine who will be capable of “updating” the Roman Catholic system, i.e. adapting it to the new “ecumenical” age that no longer thinks in terms of “controversies” but in terms of “unity”, so that the Protestant Reformation will be declared “over”.

***Selected Bibliography***

*Works by Bellarmine*

St Robert Bellarmine, *Controversies of the Christian Faith* (Saddle River, NJ: Keep the Faith, 2016)

*Robert Bellarmine. Spiritual Writings*, edited by J.P. Donnelly S.J. and R.J Teske S.J. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1989)

*Works on Bellarmine*

Stefania Tutino, *Shadows of Doubt. Language and Truth in Post-Reformation Catholic Culture* (Oxford: OUP, 2014).

Robert W. Richgels, *The Pattern of Controversy in a Counter-Reformation Classic: the* Controversies *of Robert Bellarmine*, “Sixteenth Century Journal” XI:2 (1980) pp. 3-15.

Luc Perrottet, *Un exemple de polémique religieuse à la fin du XVIe siècle: la défense de la tradition par Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621) et la réplique calviniste*, “Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie”, [Troisième série, Vol. 114, No. 4 (1982)](https://www.jstor.org/stable/i40182061) pp. 395-413.

1. Avery Dulles, *Saint Robert Bellarmine: A Moderate in a Disputatious Age*, “Crisis Magazine” (December 1994) pp. 39-44. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)