CHAPTER 6

The Limits of the Kingdom of God

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De Christi servatoris efficacitate (1592)

Francesco Pucci’s *De Christi servatoris efficacitate* was published in Leiden in 1592 and is undoubtedly his best-known work. The way that it closely relates to the previously described events in France is clear from its very first lines. As stated in the dedicatory epistle to Pope Clement VIII, the work was conceived to “silence my most evil enemies and prepare Your Holiness and all the most equitable theologians to accept gratefully the things that the Lord has revealed to me.”1 Pucci addressed the new pontiff by expressing the joy and hope that his election had triggered: he felt that the day on which “a Florentine pope had been elected” had been “the brightest for Italy and above all for our homeland”.2 He turned to him following a suggestion by Henry IV (“the King judged it opportune for me to inform Your Holiness of the things that the Supreme Father revealed to me”)3 to redeem the humiliation suffered in Paris “in the month of February this year by a high-ranking prelate who shall not be named out of respect [Cardinal Charles de Bourbon]”4 when he had debated the topic of the salvific effectiveness of the benefit of Christ with some “theologians and doctors of the Sorbonne”. His opponents had tenaciously denied that “the salvific benefit of Christ is efficacious for individual men” and had invented “some sufficient grace which is not efficacious at all, except for those who receive special grace and baptism”, concluding that as “numerous men are without it”, in their opinion they “perish into eternity”.5 As Pucci felt that this thesis was simply untenable, even “unholy” (“empia”), much of the book is dedicated to demonstrating—on the basis of analysis of the Scriptures—that

1  Dedicatory epistle to the Supreme Pontiff, Ter Gouw, dated July 1592, in Pucci, *Efficacia salvifica*, 2–3; for the original Latin version of the letter, see Pucci, *Lettere*, 1, 139–141.


3  “Il Re giudicò opportuno che io comunicassi alla Santità Vostra le cose che mi aveva rivelato il Sommo Padre”; *ibid.*, 2.

4  “Nel mese di febbraio di quest’anno presso un altissimo prelato che non nominiamo per riguardo;” “teologi e dottori della Sorbona;” *ibid.*, 7.

5  “Che il beneficio salvifico di Cristo sia efficace per i singoli uomini;” “una qualche sufficienza per nulla efficace se non per chi riceva la grazia speciale e il battesimo”; “innumerevoli uomini ne sono privi”; “periscono in eterno;” *ibid.*, 7.
“Christ was ordained to be the efficacious Saviour of all and of each man.” The battle that Pucci pursued was directed against all “lovers of the partisan spirit” that are “caught up and involved in love of themselves or other creatures”, preferring “certain lower forms of earthly goods to the supreme universal good that is God”. He wrote against the many “sects and factions fighting with each other about holy matters and the cornerstones of the religion”, against all enemies of “common reason that enlightens individual men” and opponents of the “mercy of God that embraces every mortal”, against “the foolish credulity and blind imitation of shepherds and commentators”. He was therefore against all those that rejected “natural faith that is innate and inherent in all men”, the form of faith that man has from the maternal womb onwards and that is directed at the “God of heaven and earth, extremely radiant and highly worthy of faith and love”. This point of view was closely connected to Pucci’s concept of original sin, namely that God judged Adam’s sin to be “atonable” (“espiabile”) and that the Scriptures demonstrate that “eternal ruin is not incumbent on anyone with regard to that sin” and clearly illustrate that “the blessed resurrection and the liberation from that mortality” set aside for humankind are “destined in an effective way for individual men” by God. Pucci outlined a scenario in which the role of the sacraments was reduced almost to the point of irrelevance (“not simply a lack of them, but only contempt for them is a cause of ruin”) and even knowledge of the Gospel was superfluous to purposes of the salvation of man: “The simple lack and ignorance of the Gospel and the lack of baptism [...] must not be confused with the incredulity or the lack of faith of those people who do not have faith in the ambassadors of God, who deserve supreme trust, and make themselves worthy of the most serious torment”. Only a conscious rejection of faith, which was only possible after achieving adulthood, constituted a deviation from the path of salvation mapped out by God: “There is no threat of eternal death incumbent on anyone, unless he has

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6 “Cristo fu destinato a essere efficace Salvatore di tutti e di ciascuno degli uomini;” ibid., 10.
7 “Amatori dello spirito di parte”; “presi e occupati dall’amore di sé o delle altre creature;”
“beni inferiori e particolari al sommo e universale bene, che è Dio;” ibid., 7.
8 “Sette e fazioni che si combattono tra loro sulle cose sacre e sui capisaldi della religione;”
“ragione comune che illumina i singoli uomini;” “benevolenza di Dio che abbraccia qualunque mortale;” “sciocca credulità e la cieca imitazione dei pastori e degli interpreti;”
“fede naturale e innata e insita in tutti gli uomini;” “Dio del cielo e della terra, oggetto luminosissimo e degnissimo di fede e di amore;” ibid., 6.
9 “Rispetto a quel peccato non incombe su nessuno l’eterna rovina;” “la beata resurrezione e
la liberazione da quella mortalità;” “destinate in modo efficace ai singoli uomini;” ibid., 11.
10 “Non la loro semplice mancanza ma solamente il loro dispregio è causa di rovina”; ibid., 65.