



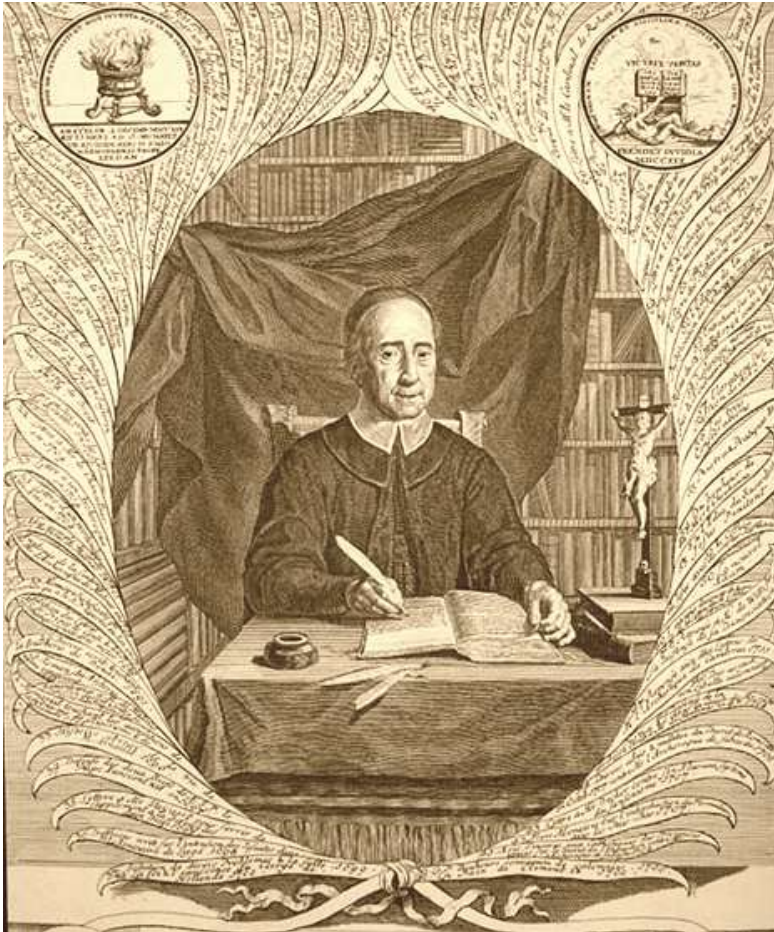
UNIVERSALITAS & PERVASIVITAS

il costituirsi e diffondersi della S.J. e suoi echi (1540 - 1773)
di A. Pisani

Schede di approfondimento di argomenti generali

QUESNELLISMO

The theological errors of **Quesnel** found their most complete expression in his "Reflexions morales". Although they appear there only on occasions, disjointedly, in a fragmentary way, and are moreover hidden in the expression of pious considerations, they really form a systematic whole; they show their author to have adopted a radically false but coherent system, which is fundamentally only a synthesis of the systems of **Baius** and **Jansenius**. To make this clear, one has



only to compare the hundred and one propositions condemned in the Bull "Unigenitus", and faithfully extracted from the "Réflexions morales" with the theories previously defended by the Bishop of Ypres and his predecessor in the University of Louvain. For Quesnel, like Baius, conceived human nature in its three successive states: innocence, fall, and restoration. All his essential theses are based on a confusion between the natural and the supernatural order, which necessarily entailed the assertion of an intrinsic difference in regard to gratuity as well as to efficacy, between the grace of the Creator and the grace of the Redeemer. "The grace of Adam produced only human merits" (prop. 34); but "being a consequence of the creation, it was due to nature when whole and unimpaired" (prop. 35). Its loss through the original fall mutilated our nature, and man having become "a sinner is, without the grace of the Liberator, free only to do

evil" (prop. 38). Moreover, this grace "is never given except by faith" (prop. 26). Faith which "is the first grace and the source of all the others" (prop. 27), is to be understood as "operative faith, and it works only by charity" (prop. 51). Consequently "outside of the Church no grace is given" (prop. 29), and "the first grace given to the sinner being the remission of sins" (prop. 28), all his acts, as long as he remains a sinner, are sins (prop. 44-8), so that "the prayer of the wicked is a new sin, and what God grants to them is a fresh condemnation" (prop. 59).

This is all resumed in the thesis of the double contrary love: "There are only two loves, from which all our volitions and all our actions spring: the love of God (charity properly so called) which refers everything to God and which God rewards; and love of self and of the world, which is evil as it



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does not refer to God what should be referred to Him" (prop. 44). From this follow not only the uselessness, but the malice and the evil effects of attrition, that is, of all repentance which does not arise from pure charity; for, "fear restrains only the hands; the heart remains attached to sin, as long as it is not led by the love of justice" (prop. 61); and "he who refrains from evil only through fear of punishment has already sinned in his heart" (prop. 62). Thus, the erroneous conception of the really gratuitous and supernatural character of the original grace bore its legitimate fruits, rigorism and despair; it resulted, as far as concerns attrition, in a conclusion: already condemned by the Council of Trent. In Quesnel we find likewise the doctrine of the "Augustinus" (see Cornelius Jansen). Like that famous book, the "Reflexions Morales" did not admit either purely sufficient grace or real liberty of indifference; on the contrary, it denied them in many formulas "Grace is the operation of the omnipotent hand of God, which nothing can hinder or retard" (prop. 10), "it is nothing but the omnipotent will of God who commands and who executes his commands" (prop. 11). "When God, no matter when or where, wishes to save a soul, the will of God is infallibly carried into effect" (prop. 12). "When God wills to save a soul and touches it with the interior hand of his grace, no human will can resist it" (prop. 13); "there is no attraction but yields to the attraction of grace, because nothing resists the Omnipotent" (prop. 16). In a word, the action of grace can and must be likened to that by which God created the world, realized the Incarnation, raised Jesus Christ from the dead, and by which He worked every other miracle (prop. 20-5).

Having admitted all this, it is not astonishing that the Divine precepts cannot be observed by men of good will who make the effort. For, on the one hand, "the grace of Jesus Christ, the efficacious principle of all good, is necessary for any good work whatsoever; without it not only is nothing done but nothing can be done" (prop. 2); "the will without prevenient grace has no light save to go wrong, no zeal but to hasten to destruction, no strength but to wound itself; it is capable of all evil, and incapable of any good" (prop. 39). On the other hand, when grace is present and acting one never resists it. If therefore anyone fail in his duty, it can only be because he has not received the indispensable grace. For "grace is that voice of the Father teaching men interiorly and leading them to Jesus Christ; whoever, having heard the exterior voice of the Son, does not come to him, has not been taught by the Father" (prop. 17). And yet, according to Quesnel, man will be held guilty and condemned for those transgressions which he cannot possibly avoid (prop. 40). But, since the observing of commandments and therefore of the conditions necessary for salvation is not within the reach of all, it is evident that neither the intention of God to save nor the efficacy of the sufferings of the Savior extend to all mankind. So "all those whom God wishes to save through Christ are infallibly saved" (prop. 30), and if "Christ Himself delivered Himself up to death", it was solely "to snatch the first-born, that is the elect, from the hand of the exterminating angel" (prop. 32).

All these extraordinary ideas of Quesnel's concerning grace, and his obstinate defense of them against legitimate authority had, as a practical and logical result, a second group of errors no less serious about the Church, its membership, discipline, and government in general. According to Quesnel, the Church is invisible; for it comprises "as members only the saints" or "the elect and the just" (prop. 72-7), and "a person is separated from it by not living according to the Gospel as much as by not believing in the Gospel" (prop. 78). It is an abuse in the Church "to forbid Christians to read the Holy Scriptures and especially the Gospel" (prop. 85), for this reading "is necessary to all, in every place and at all times" (prop. 79-84). "It is the Church that has the power of excommunicating, to be used by the chief pastors with the consent, at least presumed, of the whole body" (prop. 90). This, as the author states explicitly in his seventh "Memoire", supposes that the multitude of the faithful, without distinction of rank, is properly speaking the sole depository of all



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ecclesiastical power; but, as it cannot exercise this power by itself, the community entrusts it to the bishops and the pope, who are its agents and its mandatories; and, in this sense, the pope is only "the ministerial head" of the episcopal body. Moreover, "the fear of an unjust excommunication must never keep us from doing our duty" (prop. 91), "to suffer in peace an undeserved excommunication and anathema rather than betray the truth is to imitate St. Paul" (prop. 92). The directly personal character and object of these last declarations are apparent. The same may be said of the articles that protest against the abuse of multiplying oaths among Christians (prop. 101), or speak of the contempt, intolerance, and persecution to which truth is subjected (prop. 93-100), and which, crowning this sad arraignment with an assertion more offensive than the others, see in the abuses pretended to have been discovered "one of the most striking proofs of the senile decay of the Church" (prop. 95).

Cfr.: J. FORGET, *Pasquier Quesnel*, in Catholic.com -

[http://oce.catholic.com/index.php?title=Pasquier Quesnel](http://oce.catholic.com/index.php?title=Pasquier_Quesnel)