



UNIVERSALITAS & PERVASIVITAS

IL COSTITUIRSI E DIFFONDERSI DELLA S.J. E SUOI ECHI (1540 - 1773)

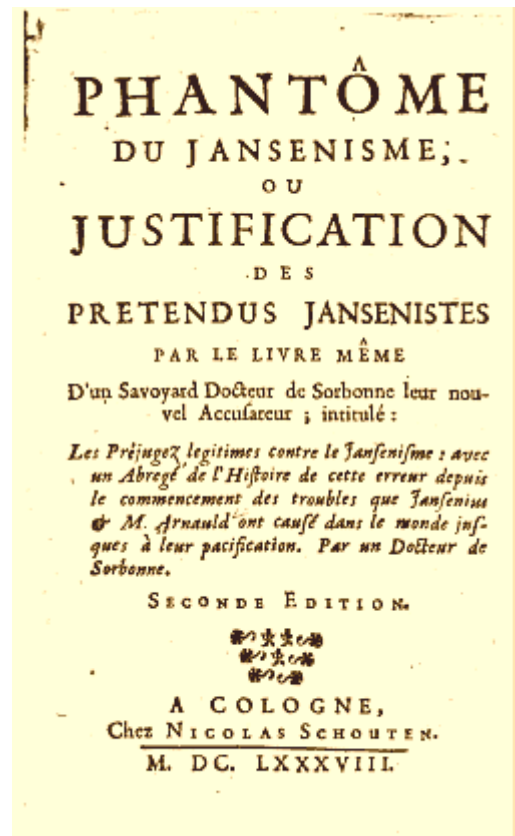
di A. Pisani

Schede autori Sotto attacco

Antoine Arnauld

“France in the seventeenth century was wracked with interconnected political and religious conflict. In politics there was the conflict between the nobles and the rising central authority of the crown. In religion there was first of all the conflict between Protestants and Catholics, and in the Catholic fold between Jesuits and **Jansenists**. Antoine Arnauld played a significant role in both sets of religious controversies... [H]is name is connected indissolubly with the Abbey of Port Royal... The Abbey of Port Royal des Champs, was founded in 1204 as a cloister and school for women. The abbey had the privilege of offering retreat to seculars, lay persons (including men) who could, without taking formal vows, live in solitude within the abbey. In 1626 a sister-house was established in Paris. In 1634, the charismatic spiritual leader of the Abbey was **Jean du Vergier de Hauranne**, Abbé de Saint Cyran (1581-1643). Saint Cyran steered the young Antoine Arnauld away from the law towards theology. While a student at the Sorbonne, Saint Cyran introduced him to the works of Saint Augustine, and he wrote his dissertation defending an Augustinian theory of grace. This thesis was widely admired except by the most important theologian at the Sorbonne, Lescot. Arnauld had not consulted Lescot because he disagreed with his views. Lescot was not only the Canon of Notre Dame, but the confessor of Cardinal Richelieu, the powerful prime minister of Louis XIII. When Arnauld came to apply for admission to La Societe de la Sorbonne, his admission was delayed through the influence of Lescot. Richelieu at this time was holding Saint Cyran a prisoner in the fortress of Vincennes.

Saint Cyran was a schoolmate, correspondent and advocate of the views of **Cornelius Jansen**, Bishop of Ypres (1585-1638) whose posthumously published book *Augustinus* attacked the doctrine of grace of the 16th century Spanish Jesuit **Francisco de Molina** (1535-1600). Jansen's book, published in 1640, was condemned by Rome in 1641, and linked with the condemnation of an earlier book by a Michael de Bay. Saint Cyran persuaded Arnauld to return to the issues of his earlier thesis and to show that Jansen's doctrine of grace essentially resembled that of Saint Augustine and not those of de Bay. Arnauld with equal boldness defended Jansen and attacked the





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Jesuits in *De la fréquente communion* [...] Arnauld's bold defense of Jansen and his attack on the Jesuits made him the center of intense controversy. In 1649 Nicolas Cornot, a former Jesuit who had joined the faculty of theology at Paris, produced a list of five heretical propositions about grace which he claimed to find in Jansen's *Augustinus*. These propositions were condemned by the faculty at Paris and by Pope Innocent X in 1653. In 1655 a friend of Port Royal, the Duc de Liancourt was refused the sacrament because of his connections with Port Royal. Arnauld wrote two long public letters defending Port Royal and protesting this abuse of ecclesiastical authority. Francois Annat, the Jesuit Provincial of Paris, claimed to find the first of the five condemned Jansenist theses in one of these letters, and on this basis Arnauld was removed from the faculty of and the society of the Sorbonne. At this time Pascal came to Port Royal des Champs for a two week retreat (his sister had become a nun at Port Royal in 1651) and on one of his subsequent visits to the two sister-houses, met Arnauld. Pascal, perhaps with the help and collaboration of Arnauld, and Pierre Nicole, wrote the *Provincial Letters* defending Arnauld and satirizing his Jesuit opponents.

In 1656 a document, known as the Formulary, was drawn up by a group of French bishops led by Pierre de Marca, the Archbishop of Toulouse, who was a friend of Cardinal [Mazarin](#), who had succeeded Richelieu as prime minister. The Formulary was an oath which condemned the five propositions which Cornot had claimed to find in Jansen's book *Augustinus*. The Formulary was rewritten several times more to include new papal condemnations of the five propositions. There were attempts to stigmatize those who refused to sign the Formulary as heretics.

Arnauld's response to the Formulary was to engage in vigorous pamphlet writing in which he tried to persuade the faculty of the Sorbonne and Rome that the five condemned propositions were not to be found in Jansen's book, and that [...] "...a man in good conscience could not swear to *any* matter of non-revealed fact which he disbelieved or of which he was ignorant." In particular, the question of whether particular propositions are found in a particular text, as opposed to whether such propositions are heretical wherever found, must be left to the decision of the individual knower. Amongst those who refused to sign the Formulary were the religious of the Port Royal Abbey. This provoked the crown in 1661 to disperse the religious, students and retreatants of Port Royal. The difficulties involved in the Formulary occupied Arnauld and Port Royal until 1669 when Pope Clement IX along with Louis XIV declared the peace of Clement IX to end the affair of the Formulary. Silence was imposed on an unresolved issue. During the period from 1669 to 1679 during which the peace of Clement IX lasted, Arnauld was recognized as the foremost spokesman of the Catholic church in France against the Calvinists. Along with his collaborator Pierre Nicole, Arnauld engaged in polemics against French Calvinism. In 1679 with the death of Madam de Longueville, the cousin of Louis XIV, and the last of Port Royal's powerful friends at court, opposition to Port Royal once more became active. Arnauld went to the low-countries in self-imposed exile. In 1709 Port Royal des Champs was razed by order of Louis XIV.



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Arnauld collaborated with Pierre Nicole and Blaise Pascal. He also made important criticisms of the works of Descartes, Malebranche and Leibniz. In 1641 Arnauld was asked by Father Marin Mersenne to comment on *Meditationes de prima philosophia* along with a number of other illustrious philosophers of the day, including Hobbes and Gassendi. Arnauld wrote the fourth set of objections which were published along with the *Meditations*. Arnauld raised for the first time, the problem of the Cartesian circle - that Descartes requires clear and distinct ideas as a criterion of certainty of any proof, thus the proof for the existence of God must involve clear and distinct ideas, but God is required to guarantee the certainty of clear and distinct ideas. The Cartesian circle represents one of the most significant challenges to Descartes' system posed by any of his critics.”

Cfr.: Oregon State University, *The History of Western Philosophy from 1492 to 1776*, Antoine Arnauld (1612-1694) www.orst.edu/instruct/phl302/philosophers/arnauld.html

Vedi anche: [profilo di Antoine Arnauld nel sito dell'Enciclopedia Treccani](#)