



## UNIVERSALITAS & PERVASIVITAS

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

*Schede autori Sotto attacco*

### Cornelius Jansen

#### Jansenius and Jansenism

Cornelius Jansen, Bishop of Ypres ( Cornelius Jansenius Yprensis ), from whom **Jansenism** derives its origin and name, must not be confounded with another writer and bishop of the same name Cornelius Jansenius Gandavensis (1510-1576), of whom we possess several books on Scripture and a valuable "Concordia Evangelica."

The subject of this article lived three-quarters of a century later than his namesake. He was born 28 October, 1585, of a Catholic family, in the village of Accoi, near Leerdam, Holland ; died at Ypres, 6 May, 1638. His parents, although in moderate circumstances, secured for him an excellent education. They sent him first to Utrecht. In 1602 we find him at the University of Louvain , where he entered the College du Faucon to take up the study of philosophy. Here he passed two years, and at the solemn promotion of 1604 was proclaimed first of



118 competitors. To begin his theological studies he entered the College du Pape Adrien VI, whose president, Jacques Janson, imbued with the errors of Baius and eager to spread them, was to exert an influence on the subsequent course of his ideas and works. Having hitherto been on amicable terms with the Jesuits, he had even sought admission into their order. The refusal he experienced, the motives of which are unknown to us, seems not to be altogether unrelated to the aversion he subsequently manifested for the celebrated society, and for the theories and practices it championed. He was also associated with a young and wealthy Frenchman, Jean du Verger de Hauranne, who was completing his course of theology with the Jesuits, and who possessed a mind subtle and cultured, but restless and prone to innovations, and an ardent and intriguing character. Shortly after his return to Paris towards the end of 1604, du Verger was joined there by Jansenius, for whom he had secured a position as tutor. About two years later he attracted him to Bayonne, his native town, where he succeeded in having him appointed director of an episcopal college. There, during eleven or twelve years of studies ardently pursued in common, on the Fathers and principally on St. Augustine, the two friends had time to exchange thoughts and to conceive daring Projects. In 1617, while du Verger, who had returned to Paris, went to receive from the Bishop of Poitiers the dignity of Abbot of St-Cyran, Jansenius returned to Louvain, where the presidency of the new College de Sainte Pulcherie was confided to him. In 1619 he received the degree of Doctor of Theology, and afterwards obtained a chair of exegesis. The commentaries which he dictated to his pupils, as well as several writings of a polemical nature, brought him in a short time a deserved renown.

These writings of Jansenius were not at first intended for publication, in fact they did not see the light until after his death. They are concise, clear and perfectly orthodox in doctrine. The principal ones are "Pentateuchus, sive commentarius in quinque libros Mosis" (Louvain, 1639), "Analecta in



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Proverbia Salomonis, Ecclesiasten, Sapientiam, Habacuc et Sophoniam" (Louvain, 1644); "Tetrateuchus, seu commentarius in quatuor Evangelia" (Louvain, 1639). Some of these exegetical works have been printed more than once. Among his polemical works are "Alexipharmacum civibus Sy vaeducensibus propinatum adversus ministrorum fascinum" (Louvain 1630); then, in reply to the criticism of the Calvinist Gisbert Voet, "Spongia notarum quibus Alexipharmacum aspersit Gisbertus Voetius" (Louvain, 1631). Jansenius published in 1635, under the pseudonym of Armacanus, a volume entitled "Alexandri Patricii Armacani Theologi Mars Gallicus seu de justitia armorum regis Galliae libri duo". This was a bitter and well-merited satire against the foreign policy of Richelieu, which was summed up in the odd fact of the "Most Christian" nation and monarchy constantly allying themselves with the Protestants, in Holland, Germany, and elsewhere, for the sole purpose of compassing the downfall of the House of Austria.

The same author has left us a series of letters addressed to the Abbot of St-Cyran, which were found among the papers of the person to whom they were sent and printed under the title: "Naissance du jansenisme decouverte, ou Lettres de Jansénius à l'abbé de St-Cyran depuis l'an 1617 jusqu'en 1635" (Louvain, 1654). It was also during the course of his professorate that Jansenius, who was a man of action as well as of study, journeyed twice to Spain, whither he went as the deputy of his colleagues to plead at the Court of Madrid the cause of the university against the Jesuits; and in fact, through his efforts their authorization to teach humanities and philosophy at Louvain was withdrawn. All this, however, did not prevent him from occupying himself actively and chiefly with a work of which the general aim, born of his intercourse with St-Cyran, was to restore to its place of honour the true doctrine of St. Augustine on grace, a doctrine supposedly obscured or abandoned in the Church for several centuries. He was still working on it when, on the recommendation of King Philip IV and Boonen, Archbishop of Mechlin, he was raised to the See of Ypres. His consecration took place in 1636, and, though at the same time putting the finishing touches to his theological work, he devoted himself with great zeal to the government of his diocese. Historians have remarked that the Jesuits had no more cause to complain of his administration than the other religious orders.

He succumbed to an epidemic which ravaged Ypres and died, according to eyewitnesses, in dispositions of great piety. When on the point of death he confided the manuscript which he cherished to his chaplain, Reginald Lamaeus, with the command to publish it after taking counsel with Libert Fromondus, a professor at Louvain, and Henri Calenus, a canon of the metropolitan church. He requested that this publication be made with the utmost fidelity, as, in his opinion, only with difficulty could anything be changed. "If, however," he added, "the Holy See wishes any change, I am an obedient son, and I submit to that Church in which I have lived to my dying hour. This is my last wish."

The editors of the "Augustinus" have been wrongly accused of having intentionally and disloyally suppressed this declaration, it appears plainly enough on the second page in the original edition. On the other hand its authenticity has been contested by means of external and internal arguments, founded notably on the discovery of another will, dated the previous day (5 May), which says nothing regarding the work to be published. But it is quite conceivable that the dying prelate was mindful of the opportunity to complete his first act by dictating to his chaplain and confirming with his seal this codicil which, according to the testamentary executors, was written only half an hour before his death. It has been vainly sought, a priori, to make the fact appear improbable by alleging that the author was in perfect good faith as to the orthodoxy of his views. Already, in 1619, 1620, and 1621, his correspondence with St-Cyran bore unmistakable traces of a quite opposite state of



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mind ; in it he spoke of coming disputes for which there was need to prepare; of a doctrine of St. Augustine discovered by him, but little known among the learned, and which in time would astonish everybody, of opinions on grace and predestination which he dared not then reveal "lest like so many others I be tripped up by Rome before everything is ripe and seasonable". Later, in the "Augustinus" itself (IV, xxv-xxvii), it is seen that he scarcely disguises the close connection of several of his assertions with certain propositions of Baius, though he ascribes the condemnation of the latter to the contingent circumstances of time and place, and he believes them tenable in their obvious and natural sense.

Nothing, therefore, authorized the rejection of the famous declaration, or testament, of Jansenius as unauthentic. But neither is there any authorization for suspecting the sincerity of the explicit affirmation of submission to the Holy See which is therein contained. The author, at the time of his promotion to the doctorate in 1619, had defended the infallibility of the pope in a most categorical thesis, conceived as follows: "The Roman Pontiff is the supreme judge of all religious controversies, when he defines a thing and imposes it on the whole Church, under penalty of anathema, his decision is just, true, and infallible." At the end of his work (III, x, Epilogus omnium) we find this protestation perfectly parallel with that of his testament: "All whatsoever I have affirmed on these various and difficult points, not according to my own sentiment, but according to that of the holy Doctor, I submit to the judgment and sentence of the Apostolic See and the Roman Church, my mother, to be henceforth adhered to if she judges that it must be adhered to, to retract if she so wishes, to condemn and anathematize it if she decrees that it should be condemned and anathematized. For since my tenderest childhood I have been reared in the beliefs of this Church ; I imbibed them with my mother's milk; I have grown up and grown old while remaining attached to them; never to my knowledge have I swerved therefrom a hair's-breadth in thought, action or word, and I am still firmly decided to keep this faith until my last breath and to appear with it before the judgment-seat of God." Thus Jansenius, although he gave his name to a heresy, was not himself a heretic, but lived and died in the bosom of the Church. In view of the fact that he consciously and deliberately aimed at innovation or reforming, it would certainly be difficult to exculpate him entirely or declare that his attitude was in no wise presumptuous and rash; but impartial history may and should take into account the peculiar atmosphere created about him by the still smouldering controversies on Baianism and the widespread prejudices against the Roman Curia . To determine the extent to which these and similar circumstances, by deluding him necessarily diminished his responsibility, is impossible, that is the secret of God.

**Cfr.:** <http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=6263>

La bolla di condanna *In eminenti* pronunciata dal papa nel 1643 nei confronti dell' *Augustinus* di Jansen costituisce, insieme a quella nei confronti di Du Moulin del 1602, un caso eccezionale in quanto il suggello papale conferiva al provvedimento un valore universale che, almeno in linea teorica, non era attribuito alle deliberazioni del Sant'Uffizio e della Congregazione dell'Indice.

**Vedi anche:** *Giansenio, Cornelio*, in *Dizionario di filosofia (2009)* nel sito dell'Enciclopedia Treccani - [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/cornelio-giansenio\\_%28Dizionario-di-filosofia%29/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/cornelio-giansenio_%28Dizionario-di-filosofia%29/)

Wikipedia - <http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giansenio>