

## CORRESPONDENCE

### ORIGINS OF JANSENISM

To the Editor of BLACKFRIARS

SIR,—Having read the long and detailed criticism of my *Origins of Jansenism* by Father Aelred Whitacre in your issue of June, I am writing to take up a few points in that article which seem to deserve further consideration, and perhaps to explain how I came to merit the castigation I have received.

Father Whitacre complains that I am unfair in mentioning the occasions when his Order allowed party considerations to weaken their opposition to Jansenism: but it is true that this did sometimes happen. I do not “ignore the fact that the Dominicans also combatted Jansenism”; one could not read the earliest *Provinciales* and remain in doubt of that: but a fact so obvious as this does not, I think, deserve as much attention in an historical account as the less predictable waverings of certain sections of the Order.

“Upon the question whether the decree of Predestination depends upon a prevision of human merits we read in the book under review (p. 28): ‘A negative answer is usually given; but *responsible theologians* have decided otherwise.’” I now see that this sentence is ambiguous, and admit that Father Whitacre is within his rights in assuming, as he does in a footnote, that I meant “*all* responsible theologians.” But the context shows that I was treating the question of St. Augustine’s doctrine (not the question of theological fact); I meant, of course, *some* theologians; and Father Whitacre himself quotes a sentence from my book in which I express my own dissent from the view of these theologians (for which I am duly grateful).

I cannot agree that my treatment of the *adjutorium quo* is as Suarist as Father Whitacre thinks; but since I have in fact given a false impression, I must suppose that expressions which seem to me clear are in fact obscure, and be content to state that “the qualities of final causality” do not exhaust, in my view, the description of the *modus operandi* of this *adjutorium*.

It is true that I have alleged obscurity in the writings of St. Augustine, and occasionally in those of St. Thomas. I am still reluctant to suppose that the thought of these two holy Doctors is everywhere simple and obvious: and if the possibility of obscurity is not ruled out *a priori*, I think it natural to expect it most of all in the treatise of Grace. Whether there really is obscurity, or whether I am exceptionally stupid, I still do not know. Father Whitacre could have enlightened me by explaining, as to babes, what is the precise effect of applying the Thomist

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distinction of *ens* and *essentia* to the mode of the activity of the First Cause in second causes—surely there is here something other than a *praemotio*? and if so, what? This Father Whitacre was unwilling to do, which is natural enough since the answer is, for him, obvious; but I am left in my darkness. I am not consoled by the assertion that “no scholar ever had the slightest doubt as to St. Thomas’ precise meaning,” because this is not true; and that “Molina openly rejects the doctrine” I know only too well—I devoted some time to an attempt to explain this rejection, and concluded that Molina had misunderstood the doctrine. It is clear from the words of St. Thomas that the notion of “instrumentality” is here fundamental, and I believe that this notion deserves more attention than it has received, either from Thomists or from their opponents. Perhaps I am very wrong; but, if so, it is from that error (and not from malice) that my misunderstandings depend.

On the history of the *Congregatio de Auxiliis*, whether diplomatic or doctrinal, I am the less ashamed to admit a wide and comprehensive ignorance because I do not think it concerns Jansenism at all. However, I know something of the part played in this dispute by St. Robert Bellarmine; and when I speak of his failure to secure a conclusive decision, I mean that he failed to secure the condemnation of his opponents—it is true that he succeeded in avoiding the condemnation of his own party, but on the relative importance of these two aspects of the same fact there will be no agreement between two such determined partisans as Father Whitacre and myself. Similarly, in connection with the attitude of Molina, Suarez and their friends towards St. Thomas, what seems to Father Whitacre decisive and important may seem to me perfectly negligible.

For the “ancient fable” concerning the origin of Thomism, I sincerely apologize. Thomism entered so little into the scheme of my book that I had serious thoughts of omitting altogether the chapter which chiefly offended Father Whitacre. I finally included it for three reasons: first, because it seemed unfair and unhistorical to allow the Molinists to have the last word; secondly because Jansen and Conroy were almost as much concerned to show that Thomists were fools as that Jesuits were rogues, and it seemed right to explain both positions; finally in order to clear the Thomists in advance from the suspicion into which they might be brought by Nicole’s ingenious attempt to formulate a Thomist pseudo-Jansenism after 1654. Being thus led to attempt an account of the Thomist position, I was aware that my little sympathy would increase my difficulties, and made the account as brief as possible. I knew that Thomism was supposed to derive from St. Thomas at latest; but my immediate concern did not

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justify me in examining this tradition, and I conceived that even the Thomists themselves would admit that there was *some* "novelty" in the re-formulation of Thomism to meet the Molinist position. For this mistake, and for the unfortunate impression which it may have caused, I am sorry; and should it ever happen that I cover any of this ground again in a published work, I shall attempt to correct both.

I am, Sir,  
Yours faithfully,  
NIGEL ABERCROMBIE.

## CHRISTIAN ART

*To the Editor of BLACKFRIARS*

SIR,—Although I agree very largely with Ivan Brook's article on Christian art published in the May number of BLACKFRIARS, I felt I must encroach on your courtesy to give me room in your Review to express an opinion that there is a certain danger in holding "Art for Art's sake" as being altogether against Catholic principles.

"Art for Art's sake" is the same as saying art for contemplation's sake, that is, not for utility. Both forms of art are needed. It is true that at the present time the artist is pushed to dedicate himself almost entirely to the first form because society does not employ him as they should; and I greatly desire the artist to take a normal place in society again. But in desiring this there is no need to condemn "Art for Art's sake." Art may be the subject of art as thought may be the subject of thought in psychology. Naturally it can only appeal to a limited public in the same way as philosophy and abstract thought can only be followed by an *élite*. "Organization" of line, colour and rhythm is not just a sensuous arrangement, but being connected with order is rather an intellectual arrangement. Again, although it is true that art reflects the whole person and therefore the need of a Catholic Art, yet there should not be too much fear in taking inspiration from non-Catholic artists. Few knew better than St. Thomas how to utilize the fruits of thought gathered by pagan philosophers!

I should like to close by suggesting that it would be very useful if a Catholic Summer School Week at Oxford could be arranged to deal with Christian and Sacred Art.

I am, Sir,  
Yours faithfully,  
J. MORRIS, S.P.