

## ORIGINS OF JANSENISM

TO investigate the ancestry and relationships of the theological system expounded in the *Augustinus* of Cornelius Jansen, and to trace the history of the controversy about that system which arose in France in the seventeenth century, is a difficult task. It implies a knowledge not only of St. Augustine's writings but of Pelagianism and Semi-pelagianism, and to some extent of Predestinarianism. It supposes, further, a knowledge of St. Thomas' theology and of the writings of the Thomist commentators; and it includes an examination of the system of Baius, as well as of that of the Molinist school.

An analysis of the doctrine contained in the *Augustinus*, with its historical implications, has recently been attempted by Mr. Nigel Abercrombie.<sup>1</sup> His work is divided into two parts, the one theological and the other historical. The latter section, beginning with the career of Saint-Cyran and ending with the destruction of the Couvent Port-Royal, affords interesting reading and is not without merit, but it is vitiated by onesidedness. The author loses no opportunity of depreciating the Dominicans. To quote only a few passages out of many: "(Mother Angelique found it hard) to derive any benefit from the commonplace counsels of Capuchins and Dominicans" (p. 170); "They (Saint-Amour and deputies) had the support of the Roman Dominicans who foresaw the possibility of taking vengeance upon the Jesuits" (p. 227); "the Dominicans in Spain appear to have been minded like those of Rome, and were prepared to tolerate the errors of Jansen rather than co-operate with the Society of Jesus" (*ibid.*). He seems to ignore the fact that the Dominicans also combatted Jansenism and, in order to silence certain calumniators, demonstrated the abysmal difference between Jansen's doctrine and their own. He either does not know or deliberately disregards the works of two Dominicans who

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<sup>1</sup> *Origins of Jansenism*. By Nigel Abercrombie, M.A., Ph.D., (Oxon.). (Oxford University Press, 1936; 15/-.)

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wrote against Jansenism.<sup>2</sup> Had Mr. Abercrombie made use of other sources besides the Jesuit ones, upon which he has relied almost to the exclusion of all others, he would not have exhibited so decided a bias in the historical section of his work; and had he consulted some Dominican theologian, he would not have written so many ineptitudes in the theological section. It is to this latter that we now turn our attention.

Of the innumerable passages in this part of the book that call for comment a few only can be selected here. But first it must be said that, though the author seems to estimate to some extent the theological systems of Augustine and Aquinas, he is far from realizing the greatness of these two Doctors and the incomparable authority each of them obtains in the eyes of the Catholic Church. To recede in any detail from the doctrine of one or the other in matters that concern Grace, Predestination, and Justification spells disaster from the point of view of the Church. Mr. Abercrombie appears to be under the impression that Augustine initiated a system which Aquinas developed, but that it was left to Molina and Suarez in the latter part of the sixteenth century to modify, re-model, and amplify the thought of St. Thomas so as at last to give to the world the perfect system of theology.

Concerning the problem of predestination and whether it is determined by God *ante vel post previsa merita*, the author ingenuously declares (p. 30) that "the impossibility of knowing exactly what he (St. Augustine) thought upon the subject has enabled some writers to assume that he never pronounced a verdict upon the related question." But he has the courage to add: "It seems probable, however, that the majority of theologians are right in interpreting the teaching of St. Augustine as *Predestinatio ante previsa merita*." Now if there is anything certain in the writings of St. Augustine it is that he taught *Predestinatio ante previsa*

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<sup>2</sup> Alex. Sebille, O.P.: *De Augustini et SS. Patrum de libero arbitrio interpret thomisticus adversus Corn. Jansenii doctrinam*. (Mayence, 1652.) Bernard Guyard, O.P.: *Discrimina inter doctrinam Thomisticam et Jansenianam*. (Paris, 1655.)

*merita*; his words are so clear and concise, so vehement even, that no shadow of doubt is left as to his meaning. All Thomists, following St. Thomas, and the greatest of the Molinists (including Molina and Suarez) are witness of this. For example, Bellarmine writes: "This doctrine (of gratuitous predestination) understood in the Thomist sense, which is that of St. Augustine, must be said to be not the opinion of certain doctors, but the faith of the Catholic Church."<sup>3</sup> Yet 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."<sup>4</sup>

Concerning the *modus operandi* of Grace, the author asserts (p. 32): "He (St. Augustine) uses language which is obscure and has been variously interpreted." Before the advent of the Molinists, no one accused St. Augustine of obscurity of language upon such important matters as this. They alone (and apparently Mr. Abercrombie is content to follow their lead) discovered this obscurity the more easily to drag Augustine to their side; it is they themselves, and others such as the Jansenists, who with a very definite object in view have "variously interpreted" his language. "Deliberately misinterpreted" might have been a more accurate phrase to have used. And some, not content with this, have proceeded even to the mutilating or truncating of his words. The "modus operandi" of efficacious grace—the *adjutorium quo* of St. Augustine—seems to possess in Mr. Abercrombie's estimation nothing more than the qualities of final causality, whereas the obvious meaning of Augustine is that it fulfills the rôle of an efficient cause. And thus has he been interpreted by St. Thomas, all Thomists, and Jesuit theologians of high repute.

In the beginning of the chapter on "Aquinas" we read: "The following exposé . . . does as much injustice to

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<sup>3</sup> *Controv. Lib. 2. De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio. Cap. XI.*

<sup>4</sup> The italics are ours. The responsible theologians in question are the Jesuits Lessius, Vasquez, Becanus, Franzelin, etc.; the *irresponsible* theologians are St. Augustine, St. Thomas, all Thomists, Molina, Suarez, Bellarmine, etc.

Aquinas as we have already inflicted upon Augustine." We heartily commend these words.

Concerning the activity of God in relation to the actions of creatures, the author cites from the well-known *Art. 7, De Pot., Q. 3*. Herein it is shown by St. Thomas that God (1) *gives*, and (2) *conserves* the created power, that He (3) *applies* or moves the power to its action, and that the power produces its action (4) as *instrument* in virtue of the Divine activity. Mr. Abercrombie finds no difficulty with regard to (1) and (2), but as regards (3) he says (p. 74): "This is not the place, even if it were possible, for us to decide finally upon the correct interpretation of Aquinas' thought about this 'motion.'" We can assure Mr. Abercrombie that his final decision upon the point will not be awaited with any anxiety nor even interest. The meaning of St. Thomas is so obvious that no one has ever had the slightest doubt about it, neither Dominican nor Jesuit. Both his favourite theologians, Molina and Suarez, give the true interpretation, moved to do so by the obvious meaning of St. Thomas' words. The former openly rejects this teaching of St. Thomas; the other did his best to remain Thomist at any cost, and to this effect twists the meaning of St. Thomas' words, and at last, finding no escape, imposes upon St. Thomas a tacit retraction of the doctrine. He is nothing more than a *Pseudo-Thomist*. Molina, audacious and irreverent though he be towards St. Augustine and St. Thomas, is simply *Anti-Thomist*.

Mr. Abercrombie proceeds to examine the *Quarta Via*, in which St. Thomas says God is the Cause of the creature's action: "If . . . we attempt to apply it to voluntary agents, we can only say that while the created will elicits its own act of its own proper power as regards the essence of that act, yet as regards the being of that act the will is but the instrument of the Divine Causality. Once again there is no agreement among scholars as to the precise meaning Aquinas attached to this proposition." But no scholar ever had the slightest doubt as to St. Thomas' precise meaning, not excluding either Molina or Suarez. Molina openly rejects the doctrine because he says "it is prejudicial to

liberty."<sup>5</sup> Suarez also openly confesses that St. Thomas here teaches that God by His motion "determines the secondary cause and uses it as an instrument to produce its action; *de quo loco ingenuè fatemur D. Thomam ibi ita sensisse.*" Finding it impossible to misinterpret the obvious meaning of St. Thomas' words by some deft twist and yet wishing to remain, in appearance at least, a disciple of St. Thomas, he has recourse to the expedient of asserting that his teacher tacitly retracted the doctrine!<sup>6</sup> How falsely is only too well known. We must perforce pass over the many other animadversions made in this chapter which call for serious comment. They are too numerous to deal with here.

The first paragraph of the succeeding chapter (which concerns Baius) runs thus: "The ideas which we have seen originating in the mind of the 'Angel of the Schools' were developed and amplified . . . and at last bore fruit in the works of the great Jesuit writers and especially in those of Francis Suarez" (p. 87). Is it possible that Mr. Abercrombie does not realize that practically every Jesuit theologian since the *Congregatio de Auxiliis* has done his utmost to show that the Molinist doctrine is the very doctrine St. Thomas himself taught? If he does not he is lamentably ignorant of Molinist writings. Where then is the development and amplification of St. Thomas' doctrine? Does he not know that Ferd. Bastida, S.J., one of the greatest Jesuit advocates in the *Congregatio de Auxiliis*, one therefore who publicly defended Molinism and knew the writings of Molina and Suarez intimately, left the Society and its doctrine and ever afterwards most strenuously defended and taught the *Premotio Physica* and the intrinsic efficacy of grace held by St. Thomas?

In the chapter entitled "The Jesuits" the author attempts an analysis of what he styles "the justly celebrated but too little known *Concordia*" of Molina. "It is not so much Aquinas," he writes, "as scholastic theology as a whole that Molina comments and develops." Surely "comments and

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<sup>5</sup> *Concordia*, 14 a. 13, disp. 27, § *Adde*.

<sup>6</sup> *De vera intellig. Aux. Effic.*, Cap. 40, § *Octavus*.

develops'' are hardly the words to describe Molina's rash and irreverent endeavour to substitute his own reveries for the "inconcussa et tutissima dogmata," to use Pope Benedict XIII's words,<sup>7</sup> of St. Augustine and St. Thomas.

It is unfortunately impossible for us to comment here upon all the futilities that appear in the exposé of Molina's doctrine that is offered to us. We pick out one or two of them at random. Thus we read (p. 98): "Molina lays it down as a fundamental principle, that prevenient grace is always given to him who, of his own natural ability, does what in him lies; not because his endeavours in any way merit such a reward—that is semi-Pelagianism—but *because God has so disposed in His mercy the infinite merits of Christ*" (Italics ours).

The endeavours of Molina and his followers to bolster up the words we have italicized are worthy of admiration had they not been made in a lost cause. Neither in Scripture, nor in any of the Fathers, explore them though the Molinists will, can any vestige of an argument be found to substantiate such a claim. The endeavour to discover in St. Augustine's writings some text to this end resulted in the notorious mutilation of one of the texts of the Great Doctor—and with what consequences history knows. The mutilated text turned Augustine not into a Molinist but into something worse than Pelagius himself! Later (on p. 105), when discussing Molina's theory of actual grace, the author remarks: "It is characteristic of the method of Molina that he approaches the problem from the notion of human liberty which is comparatively simple, and thus succeeds in clarifying a discussion which viewed from another angle (arguing from the nature of efficacious grace) cannot but be obscure, and may easily become interminable."

Mr. Abercrombie apparently fails to realize that it is precisely Molina's definition of liberty which gave rise to a controversy that has lasted over three hundred years. We readily admit that this method is characteristic of Molina, namely to define freewill *a priori* and then try to square it

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<sup>7</sup> Benedict XIII, *Demissas Preces*. 6 Nov., 1724.

with irrefragable first principles, and finding it cannot be squared with those principles to change the principles! To make metaphysics stand up on Ethics (or pure mathematics upon applied mathematics), as Molina does (and Mr. Abercrombie apparently in his train), is the topsy-turveydom of thought. If a definition cannot be squared with first principles, the only logical thing is to suspect the truth of that definition. Molina's definition of human freewill, "*Positis omnibus requisitis ad agendum*," etc., is false, unless among the "requisites" he is at pains to include all that is entailed by the Universal Causality of God. The Omnipotence of God not only attains to, but is the efficient cause of, all being and every mode of being. But Molina, in order, as he says, to safeguard human liberty (he should have said "to destroy" it) excludes the mode of being, which is the freedom of the free act, from the causality of God. Lahousse, S.J., after having extolled human freewill as the most wondrous perfection, even went so far as to say that the freedom of the act is but a mode of being, and since a mode of being is so small an entity, why could not the Omnipotence of God accord its production to the sole activity of the creature?<sup>8</sup> Such a suggestion is open denial of God's Omnipotence.

Treating of the *Scientia Media*, which theory he calls "literally epoch-making," Mr. Abercrombie realizes that it was invented to explain a difficulty (that of the Divine Pre-science and human freewill), but he does not seem to realize that *Scientia Media* is the biggest difficulty of all! Owing to the insoluble problems to which it gives rise, the various attempts made by Molinists to explain the "how" of *Scientia Media* may be summed up thus: *tot sensus quot capita*. The contradictions are so many that at last De Regnon, S.J., wrote: ". . . de toutes les explications proposées aucune n'est complètement satisfaisante. . . . Il faut renoncer à expliquer le *comment* de cette science divine que nous appelons la science des conditionnels. . . . Expliquer cette science, c'est l'œuvre de *dilétantisme philosophique*."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Lahousse, S.J., *Theol. Nat.*, Louvain, 1888, Cap. 9, art. 3, No. 502.

<sup>9</sup> De Regnon, S.J., *Bañez et Molina*, pp. 113-115.

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The manner in which Suarez<sup>10</sup> explains the *Scientia Media* is rejected by Molina<sup>11</sup> as destructive of freewill (that is, as determinism). But the manner in which Molina explains it, namely by a *supercomprehension* of the freewill placed in such and such circumstances, leads necessarily to fatalism, since the supercomprehension of a free cause which is indeterminate can never see in it a determination that is not there. If it be said that this determination is known through the circumstances in which the will is placed, then we have determinism pure and simple. This objection against Molina's explanation is made not only by all Thomists but by Suarez himself, who declares that "it is contrary to St. Thomas' doctrine and *destroys liberty*."<sup>12</sup> In this fashion do Molina and Suarez, the two theologians of Mr. Abercrombie's predilection, reproach each other mutually for explaining the *Scientia Media* in such wise that it destroys freewill or that it leads of necessity to fatalism!

Thus are the defenders of the *Scientia Media* between the Devil and the deep blue sea! The *Scientia Media* is indeed, to use the words of Mr. Abercrombie, "literally epoch-making." Desperate attempts have been made to save the ship from sinking, but in spite of all efforts it is well on the rocks. The last serious attempt at an explanation of the "epoch-making" invention was made by De Regnon, S. J.,<sup>13</sup> and Père d'Alès,<sup>14</sup> and their attempt is pitiable. They both obviously confuse the *possible* with the *futurible*, and the whole question concerns the latter, not the former. To know what a man *could* do if placed in certain circumstances is rather different from knowing what he *would* do.

Speaking of Suarez the author says (p. 114): "His extraordinary acute mind enabled him to find in the texts of Augustine, Aquinas, and other weighty authorities far greater wealth and variety of doctrine and opinion than the

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<sup>10</sup> Opusc. II, *De Scientia Futur. Conting.*, II, Cap. 7, n. 15.

<sup>11</sup> *Concordia*, q. 14, a. 3, disp. 52 (Paris, p. 322).

<sup>12</sup> Suarez, Op. II, *De Scient. Futur. Conting.*, II, Cap. 7, n. 3-6.

<sup>13</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 118.

<sup>14</sup> D'Alès: *Recherches de Science Relig.* (Janv.-Mars, 1917), p. 23.



normal student would ever discover." If twisting and mutilating texts so as to find in an author exactly the opposite of what he intended to say, and imposing upon him tacit retractions of doctrine that militate against one's own reveries, is the mark of an acute mind, then Suarez had an extraordinarily acute mind. He continues: "His interpretations are rarely forced" (should they ever be forced?) "even when they are most original" (that is, never dreamt of by the author thus interpreted), "and his reverence for indisputable authority . . . is almost excessive" (even when he is tampering with that authority's text!).

Another section is entitled *The Dominicans*. During the course of this chapter the author frequently refers to *Modern Thomists*. There are no modern Thomists where it is a question of such fundamental importance as grace; all teach exactly what St. Thomas teaches. Of Bañez he writes that his "devotion to the authority of Aquinas was such that he proudly claimed *never to have swerved a hair's breadth from the strictest adherence to the whole doctrine of Aquinas*" (italics ours). Is not this a claim worthy of honest pride? The words underlined are the very words used by Benedict XIII<sup>15</sup> and applied by him to the Dominican Order, and they are quoted by Pius XI and similarly applied by him in the Encyclical "*Studiorum ducem*."

Mr. Abercrombie summarily dismisses the *Congregatio de Auxiliis* and its agenda. He says (p. 118): "The *Congregatio de Auxiliis* heard an infinity of arguments upon both sides; but even the great power and authority of a Bellarmine was insufficient to bring it to a definite and conclusive decision. He is apparently wholly ignorant of the history of the *Congregatio*; were he acquainted with it he would have found that the then Cardinal Bellarmine did his utmost to *prevent* a decision because he knew the decision would have meant the formal condemnation of Molina's *Concordia* by the Holy See. He continues: "In 1607 the deliberations were ended, their positive result being formu-

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<sup>15</sup> *Demissas Preces*, 6 Nov., 1724.

lated by Paul V in a prohibition to both parties . . . of mutual accusations of error or heresy.”

Why does Mr. Abercrombie withhold from his readers the fact that Molina's *Concordia* was four times condemned by the Board of Theologians of the Congregation? Why does he not inform them that in the assembly of Cardinals convened by Paul V on March 8th, 1606, ten of the Cardinals voted for the condemnation of Molina, the remaining two (Bellarmine, and Du Perron acting on behalf of the Jesuits for Henry IV of France) voted against the condemnation, that Paul V then issued a Rescript giving instructions how the Bull of Condemnation was to be drawn up by the Board of Theologians, that the specimen of the Bull was drawn up and approved by Paul V, but that unfortunately a political crisis supervened, owing to which and to the finesse of Cardinal du Perron, Paul V did not sign the Bull, deferring the condemnation to some future date? Why does Mr. Abercrombie also withhold from his readers that, owing to the moral defeat of Molinism in the *Congregatio de Auxiliis*, Aquaviva, the General of the Jesuits, and his council, among whom the most ardent was Bellarmine, issued a Decree (December 14th, 1613) forbidding pure Molinism to be taught in the Society and substituting the Congruism of Suarez as being more in conformity with the doctrine of Augustine and Aquinas, and that the Jesuits were obedient to that Decree for two hundred years, after which time some began to teach the doctrine again? All this he passes over, presumably in an endeavour to whitewash Molina. He must surely know that *à vouloir blanchir un nègre on perd son savon!*

“For all practical purposes such was the historical origin of the so-called ‘Thomist’ theory of grace” (p. 119). The ancient fable is here reproduced, namely that Bañez and his contemporaries were the originators of the Thomist doctrine of grace. Does Mr. Abercrombie not realize that so great is the dissension regarding the origin and age of Thomism among his pet theologians that the testimony of any one of them is useless? What one affirms another denies. Thus Baudier, S.J., and innumerable Molinists assert that Bañez,

O.P., was the originator of Thomism. Now Bañez published his commentaries in 1584. Suarez refutes the above Molinists and says Medina, O.P., first taught Thomism; Medina published his commentaries in 1577. Suarez is refuted by the writings of Toletus, S.J., and Pererius, S.J., both of whom taught *Præmotio Physica*. But Toletus wrote in 1573 and Pererius in 1572. Delrio, S.J., says the Thomist doctrine is taught in the Catechism of the Council of Trent; this was published in 1566. Frins, S.J., discovers that *Præmotio Physica* is taught by Soto, O.P.; and the latter wrote in 1551. Molina then discovers the doctrine in a previous work of Soto which was published in 1547. Then Frins discovers the doctrine in Vittoria, who died in 1546. Now, Suarez discovers the doctrine in Ferrariensis, O.P., and Molina, Becanus, and the Conimbricenses, S.J., discover the same; but Ferrariensis published his commentary in 1516. Eventually, Molina, Becanus, Azorius, and the Conimbricenses (all Jesuits) discover the doctrine clearly taught in Capreolus, O.P.; the latter died in 1436. Lastly, both Molina and Suarez discover the doctrine in Scotus, and Molina says Banez differs from Scotus only in words (*solis verbis differt a Scoto*). Now Scotus wrote his commentaries about 1300.

But Scotus is not the originator, for Toletus, Molina, Suarez, Bellarmine, Becanus, Pererius, the Conimbricenses (all Jesuits) assert that the doctrine is found in St. Thomas; and all the compilers of the Jesuit *Ratio Studiorum*, namely Azorius, Gonzalez, Tirius, Busæus, Guisanus, and Tuccius (all Jesuits) witness to the same fact. To these must be added *all* Thomists, whose authority in interpreting the mind of the Angelic Doctor is the greatest of all. These latter demonstrate that the doctrine is that of St. Augustine, who received his inspiration from the Holy Scriptures.

This must suffice in criticism of a book that could hardly have been written more unfairly. Mr. Abercrombie had done better to give a simple *exposé* of the various systems of grace without interspersing his own comments upon the relative value of any particular one.

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