

ANGÉLIQUE DE SAINT-JEAN ARNAULD D'ANDILLY

Writings of Resistance



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Mother Angélique Arnauld d'Andilly (1624-1684), Abbess of Port-Royal. French School. Musée des Granges de Port Royal, Magny-les-Hameaux, France. Art Resource ART483246. © RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY.

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Introduction

The Other Voice

Whenever I return to Paris, I visit the Hôpital Cochin on the Rue Saint-Jacques. I walk to the hospital's interior garden, where I engage in meditation on one of the green benches. Centuries ago, the garden was part of the cloister for the convent of Port-Royal de Paris, the urban branch of the religious community noted for its Jansenism. Built in 1626, the stone colonnade and the mansard roofs of the old convent still stand. Next to the cloister garden is the baroque convent chapel, still used for religious services for the hospital's patients, staff, and visitors.

The chapel was the scene of one of the most violent episodes in the history of the tormented convent. On August 21, 1664, Archbishop Hardouin de Beaumont de Péréfixe of Paris arrived at the convent chapel in person and berated the nuns for their refusal to sign a document condemning the alleged theological opinions of Cornelius Jansen. He decreed that the nuns were placed under interdict and thus incapable of receiving the sacraments. Under armed guard, carriages in the courtyard took a dozen of the most recalcitrant nuns to house arrest in foreign convents. The expulsion of 1664 inaugurated a decades-long campaign of excommunication, house arrest, isolation, and military occupation, all of which failed to break the will of the nuns, who were convinced that church and state had erred in their condemnation of Jansen.

No figure is more prominent in this history of resistance than Angélique de Saint-Jean Arnauld d'Andilly (1624–1684). In each successive crisis of the signature, she emerges as the principal strategist of the convent's campaign of refusal. More importantly, she has left behind a large corpus of writings in which she expounds her theology of resistance to perceived abuses of authority. Her scholarly defense of the rights of conscience against demands of servile obedience is a gendered one. The right of women, specifically of nuns, to maintain a theological judgment against efforts at political and ecclesiastical coercion is her central preoccupation. I have chosen to introduce the Anglophone reader to her copious writings by translating several of her works where the narrative and theory of resistance to oppression are prominent.

The Life of Angélique de Saint-Jean Arnauld d'Andilly

The oldest daughter of Robert Arnauld d'Andilly and Catherine Le Fèvre de la Broderie Arnauld d'Andilly, Angélique Arnauld d'Andilly was born on November 28, 1624, at the family chateau of Pomponne. Her *noblesse de robe* family figured prominently in French politics. Her father was the overseer of the household of

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Gaston d'Orléans, the brother of Louis XIII, and her mother's family provided several members of the French ambassador corps.

Influential at court, the family was also deeply involved in the fortunes of the convent of Port-Royal. Her aunt Angélique de Sainte-Magdalene Arnauld began the reform of the Cistercian convent as its abbess in 1609. Five other aunts also became nuns at Port-Royal: Agnès de Saint-Paul Arnauld, Madeleine de Sainte-Christine Arnauld, Marie de Sainte-Claire Arnauld, Anne-Eugénie de l'Incarnation Arnauld, and Catherine de Saint-Jean Arnauld Le Maître. Four of her sisters ultimately became nuns at the convent: Anne-Marie, Catherine de Sainte-Agnès, Marie-Charlotte de Sainte-Claire, and Marie-Angélique de Sainte-Thérèse. Even her widowed grandmother Catherine de Sainte-Félicité Marion Arnauld entered Port-Royal. Many of the male members of Angélique's family also allied themselves with the beleaguered convent. Her uncle Antoine Arnauld was a prominent theologian who defended the nuns when the convent underwent persecution; a militant apologist for the convent among the French bishops was her uncle Henry Arnauld, bishop of Angers. A priest, her brother Charles-Henry Arnauld de Luzancy provided pastoral ministry to the Port-Royal nuns. A minister in the cabinet of Louis XIV, her brother Simon Arnauld, marquis de Pomponne, oscillated between defending the persecuted nuns at court and admonishing his sister Angélique for political and ecclesiastical critiques he found temerarious. Her cousins Louis-Isaac Le Maître de Saci, Antoine Le Maître, and Simon Le Maître de Séricourt distinguished themselves by their scholarship and their teaching when they joined the *solitaires*, a group of pious laymen who pursued a life of penance, prayer, and study in the environs of the convent. Intermittently, the *solitaires* conducted a series of schools, their most famous alumnus being the playwright Jean Racine.

By the 1620s Port-Royal had become a model of austere conventual reform, imitated by other Catholic reform movements. In the 1630s the convent became a bastion of Jansenism under the influence of Port-Royal's chaplain, Abbé Saint-Cyran. A personal friend and disciple of the Belgian theologian Cornelius Jansen, Saint-Cyran promoted the controversial tenets of Jansen's Augustinian theology: radical human depravity, predestination, the small number of the elect, and moral rigorism. The convent's endorsement of these Jansenist positions would lead to its censure by the church and the French court. By the 1640s the burgeoning convent had established two locations: its original Parisian countryside location in the valley of the Chevreuse, Port-Royal des Champs, and its new urban location in Paris's Faubourg Saint-Jacques, Port-Royal de Paris.

From the moment she entered the Port-Royal convent school in 1630, Angélique impressed observers by her intelligence. She excelled in classical languages, quickly mastering both Latin and Greek. A sympathizer of Port-Royal, Madame de Sévigné summed up the astonishment many visitors experienced when they

heard her speak: "All the languages and all the sciences have been infused into her. In short, she is a prodigy."¹ Her erudition in discussions of the Bible and of the church fathers caused widespread admiration. Even the Jesuit Father Rapin, usually hostile to the Jansenists, expressed amazement at the young pupil's mastery of the complexity of Saint Augustine's theories.² If her erudition garnered universal praise, Angélique's moral character was a matter of dispute. Her aunts Mère Angélique and Mère Agnès criticized her tendency toward intellectual arrogance. Her uncle Antoine reprimanded her for her tendency toward sarcastic intransigence.³

Long attracted to a vocation as a Port-Royal nun, Angélique easily shifted from the status of boarding pupil to that of a postulant for the convent. She became a novice on June 27, 1641, and a professed nun on February 25, 1644. Her name in religion was Angélique de Saint-Jean. The intelligent and industrious nun quickly assumed major positions of trust within the convent: headmistress of the convent school, novice mistress devoted to the formation of young nuns, and subprioress. Observers noted her courage during the civil wars of the Fronde (1648–1653), when she helped to shelter terrified refugees within the convent and organized charitable assistance for convent neighbors ravaged by the famine and epidemic caused by the civil unrest.

Angélique de Saint-Jean's early years as a nun paralleled the emergence of the controversy over Jansenism. In 1640 Jansen's *Augustinus* was posthumously published. The massive theological tome defended what it considered to be the authentic interpretation of Saint Augustine's teaching on grace. It emphasized the incapacity of fallen humanity to save itself and the utter necessity of God's grace, freely given to whomever he elected, for salvation. Themes of divine sovereignty and the depravity of the world were emphasized. Led by the Jesuits, critics argued that the theories of the book were dangerously Calvinistic and destructive of human freedom. Champions of the book, led by Saint-Cyran and his disciples, insisted that the book had restored the church's authentic doctrine of grace and constituted a useful antidote to the exaggerated claims of human freedom and moral virtue made by the Jesuits.

The Vatican published increasingly severe censures of the book. Urban VIII's *In eminenti* (1642) removed the book from circulation and forbade its reading, but the bull seemed to object primarily to the book's reigniting the old quarrel over grace and thus dividing the church. For good measure, the pope also

1. Madame de Sévigné to Madame de Grignan, November 29, 1679, in Marie de Rabutin-Chantal, marquise de Sévigné, *Lettres*, vol. 2, ed. Émile Gérard-Gailly (Paris: Gallimard, 1953–1963), 517.

2. See René Rapin, *Mémoires du P. René Rapin de la Compagnie de Jésus sur l'église et la société, la cour, la ville, et le jansénisme*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gaume et Duprey, 1865), 443.

3. For a discussion of the criticism of her personality by members and allies of the convent, see Brigitte Sibertin-Blanc, "Biographie et personnalité de la seconde Angélique," *Chroniques de Port-Royal* 35 (1985): 74–82.

condemned works that were attempting to refute the book of Jansen. Innocent X's *Cum occasione* (1653) condemned five theological propositions concerning grace and freedom as heretical; it also cited the *Augustinus*. But the link between the censured propositions and the book was less than clear. Alexander VI's *Ad sanctam Beati Petri sedem* (1656) clarified the issue by insisting the church was condemning the five propositions precisely in the sense in which Jansen had held them. Faced with increasing demands that clergy, teachers, and members of religious orders swear that they accepted the church's condemnation, Antoine Arnauld devised the *droit/fait* distinction. According to Arnauld, the church could bind the conscience of its members on matters of faith and morals (*droit*), since the church had the right and duty to guide its members to salvation. On issues of fact (*fait*), however, the church could only demand respectful consideration of its judgments. Error was always possible. The application to the current controversy was clear. Jansenists would gladly assent to the condemnation of the five propositions; they agreed that they were heretical or at least could be interpreted in a heretical way. But they could not assent to what they believed to be an erroneous judgment of fact concerning the text and beliefs of Jansen. The legitimacy of the *fait/droit* distinction as well as the substantive dispute over Jansen's theology would become central to the burgeoning Jansenist controversy.

As the opposition to Jansenism and Port-Royal intensified, Soeur Angélique de Saint-Jean became the convent's leading apologist. Starting in 1651 she and her cousin Antoine Le Maître began to collect documentation concerning Mère Angélique's reform of the convent. A reluctant Mère Angélique was persuaded to write her autobiography in 1654.⁴ This project of historical documentation was quickly amplified. Soeur Angélique de Saint-Jean urged other nuns to write memoirs of the reform and to elaborate their own spiritual autobiographies. Ever the lawyer's daughter, she collected biographical sketches, eyewitness accounts, legal documents, transcripts of interrogations by canonical visitors, abbatial conferences, and abbatial letters to refute what she considered a libelous portrait of Port-Royal concocted by the enemies of Jansenism in the pamphlet wars of the period. A tool of polemic, this vast documentation often assumes a hagiographic tone. The documents present the nuns as the heroic victims of a process of misunderstanding, censure, persecution, and final abandonment to God's inscrutable providence. As Thomas Carr argues,⁵ the immense documentation amassed by the nuns of Port-Royal is unique among the literary remains of the century's convents. In large part its existence is due to the authorial and editorial work of Soeur

4. For a critical edition of this autobiographical sketch of Mère Angélique Arnauld, see Jean Lesaulnier, "Relation écrite par la Mère Angélique Arnauld sur ce qui est arrivé de plus considérable dans Port-Royal," *Chroniques de Port-Royal* 41 (1992): 7–93.

5. See Thomas M. Carr, *Voix des abbesses du Grand Siècle: La prédication au féminin à Port-Royal* (Tübingen: Narr, 2006), 1–25.

Angélique de Saint-Jean as she constructed a lawyerly defense of the orthodoxy and sanctity of Port-Royal against its critics.

Soeur Angélique de Saint-Jean emerged as the leader of the intransigent faction of Port-Royal nuns as the conflict over Jansenism reached its climax. In the spring of 1661, Louis XIV's agents expelled the postulants, novices, lay students, and confessors from the convent. External superiors were imposed on the community. In the summer of 1661, the community faced its first crisis of the signature. On June 8 the archdiocesan vicars of Paris presented the convent with a formulary that each nun was ordered to sign. The formulary condemned five propositions dealing with freedom and grace as heretical; it further affirmed that Jansen had defended these propositions in the *Augustinus*. In their accompanying instruction concerning the formulary, however, the irenic vicars explicitly endorsed the *droit/fait* distinction as a legitimate tool for interpreting the meaning of one's signature. Given this concession, Antoine Arnauld urged the nuns to sign without reservation. Allied with Soeur Jacqueline de Sainte-Euphémie Pascal, the sister of Blaise Pascal, Soeur Angélique de Saint-Jean demurred, insisting that the signature still indicated assent to a proposition concerning Jansen that she did not believe. Under pressure from their clerical counselors, Soeur Angélique de Saint-Jean and the other nuns signed the formulary but against the counsel of Antoine Arnauld, they added a postscript to their signatures, indicating that they were assenting only to matters of faith (*droit*) and not to matters of fact (*fait*) in the document.

Infuriated both by the vicars' compromising pastoral instruction and the nuns' qualification of their signature, the Vatican annulled the first formulary and insisted that the nuns sign a new formulary, unencumbered by any softening postscripts. On November 28, 1661, the nuns signed the new formulary. Instead of postscripts next to their names, the nuns added a paragraph-length preface to the document, explaining how the signatures were to be interpreted. Further inflaming the controversy, Soeur Angélique de Saint-Jean added her own postscript to the preface, in which she explained that her signature in no way represents any departure from Saint Augustine's theory of grace, which the church had endorsed on so many occasions in the past.

The predictable rejection of this new signed formulary by church and throne led to a graver impasse. In 1664 the new archbishop of Paris, Paul Philippe Hardouin de Beaumont de Péréfixe, attempted to find a resolution to the conflict. He informed the Port-Royal nuns that they must sign without reservation a new version of the formulary. They were forbidden to use the *droit/fait* distinction in relationship to their signature. However, they could distinguish between divine faith (assent to a truth divinely revealed by God) and human faith (assent to a claim because the person making the claim is trustworthy) in distinguishing their degrees of assent to the formulary's provisions. The Jansenists rejected this

distinction as inapplicable to their situation since they could not in conscience assent in any way to what they considered an erroneous judgment of fact. Prodded by Soeur Angélique de Saint-Jean, the majority of nuns once again added the *droit/fait* distinction to their signatures as they signed the new formulary on July 14, 1664.

Enraged by this act of disobedience, the archbishop personally appeared at Port-Royal de Paris to condemn the nuns for their intransigence and to announce new disciplinary measures of punishment. The resisting nuns were placed under interdict, a canonical ban on receiving the sacraments. Twelve of the leaders of the *nonsigneuse* majority were exiled to house arrest in foreign convents. Soeur Angélique de Saint-Jean was exiled to the Annonciade convent in the Marais neighborhood of Paris. Soeur Catherine de Sainte-Flavie Passart, the leader of the *signeuse* minority (those Port-Royal nuns who had given an unreserved signature to the formulary), was named as the assistant superior to a Visitation nun imposed by the archbishop to govern Port-Royal. In her *Report on Captivity* Soeur Angélique de Saint-Jean recounts the ordeal of solitude and deprivation she suffered during her ten-month sojourn in the Annonciade convent.

When the campaign of exile failed to make the recalcitrant nuns submit to the signature, the archbishop changed tactics. In June 1655 the archbishop regrouped Soeur Angélique de Saint-Jean and the other *nonsigneuses* at Port-Royal des Champs under a virtual regime of martial law. Soldiers surrounded the convent. All visits from externs and all communication with externs were forbidden. The penalty of interdict turned into outright excommunication. Ever intrepid, Soeur Angélique de Saint-Jean quickly outmaneuvered the penal regime. Clandestine letters were exchanged. She even managed to seek spiritual direction from her cousin Isaac Le Maître de Saci, now a distinguished biblical scholar.

The rigors of exile and excommunication only hardened her intransigence. The vitriolic rhetoric of her *Report on Captivity* alarmed Antoine Arnauld. It denounced the Annonciade nuns as jailers and condemned the Annonciade convent as a jail. She mocked the good faith of the *signeuses*: “They never truly entered into the spirit of the convent, although the second one of these [Soeur Flavie de Passart] certainly talked about it enough. But that was the very thing she did not understand: the kingdom of God does not consist of words. Still, that was all the poor girl had.”⁶ When sympathetic laity attempted to find a compromise between the Vatican and the nuns, she denounced them. Her letter to Madame de Sablé, a pro-Jansenist aristocrat who hosted a committee charged by the church to find a solution to the crisis, indicates her adamant position: “As far as I am concerned, I still find consolation in my [alleged coldness], because I am persuaded by my

6. Soeur Angélique de Saint-Jean Arnauld d'Andilly to Antoine Arnauld, December 28, 1668, *Lettres de la Mère Angélique*, Ms. Bibliothèque de la Société de Port-Royal: P.R. Let 358, 176. Hereafter cited as *LMASJ*.