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Brian E. Strayer, *Suffering Saints: Jansenists and Convulsionnaires in France, 1640-1799*. Brighton, Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2008. xii + 424. Notes. \$95.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN: 978-1-84519-245-7.

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Over the last three decades, historians on both sides of the Atlantic have reaffirmed the centrality of Jansenism to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French history. Not only were the adherents of this Augustinian theology and way of life an almost constant irritant to Louis XIV and Louis XV, but in the name of conscience they also established important new forms of political resistance in their defiance of papacy, episcopacy, and monarchy. By the mid-eighteenth century, proponents of the Jansenist cause arguably had laid the foundation for some of the key ideals associated with the French Revolution, through their insistence on "ecclesiastical democracy" (p. 3). Culturally, the world of Port-Royal, the heart of Jansenism even after its destruction in 1709, created a space for creative and independent thinking for both women and men. Moreover, in the eighteenth century the Jansenist periodical the *Nouvelles Ecclésiastiques*, polemical writings, and even the notorious convulsionary movement helped politicize non-elites. Nonetheless, when asked about Jansenism's influence in early modern France, students and non-specialists either offer "blank stares" or noncommittal answers suggesting vague familiarity or outright ignorance (p. viii). In this ambitious volume *Suffering Saints*, Brian Strayer seeks to rectify this state of affairs by offering an English-language survey of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French Jansenism, more comprehensive than that of William Doyle's *Jansenism* (2000) and along the lines of French publications such as those written by Louis Cognet, René Tavenaux, and Françoise Hildesheimer.^[1]

Unlike Doyle's volume which succinctly covers Jansenism's influence on politics, Strayer also attempts to integrate the social, material, and cultural elements of the movement and place Jansenism in the larger context of early modern French history. The end result is a lengthy, synthetic study combining recent scholarship on Jansenist topics, published sources, and archival material from the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal and most notably, the Bibliothèque de l'Histoire du Protestantisme. (The absence of material from the Bibliothèque de la Société de Port-Royal is somewhat surprising.) Strayer's goal in covering this vast area of material is to reach a wide audience including students new to the subject, teachers and specialists. In order to demonstrate "how these suffering saints were people, not cardboard saints," (p. 294) Strayer blends biography, narrative, and analysis, offering "breadth over depth" (p. ix).

Suffering Saints begins with two chapters addressing the central questions, "who were the Jansenists" and "what was Jansenism?" In an effort to give readers some faces of who these Jansenists were, Strayer provides small biographies of fourteen figures central to the history of seventeenth-century Jansenism. This brief reference guide does indeed, alert the reader to the key individuals and untangle their ideas and roles in shaping the Jansenist controversies, although it does create a certain amount of repetition in subsequent chapters. Personalities include theologians such as Jansenius and the abbé Saint-Cyran whose ideas would shape the careers and lives of men like Antoine Arnauld and Blaise Pascal. What is striking is the absence of prominent women in this list, including Angélique Arnauld, Jacqueline Pascal, and Madame Marguerite de Joncoux, even as Henri Arnauld is given two paragraphs. Given that Strayer agrees with other historians regarding the importance of women to the Jansenist

movement, this omission or inconsistency, perhaps inadvertent, marginalizes them. Angélique Arnauld and Jacqueline Pascal are certainly featured in the lengthy chapters on Port-Royal, but Strayer introduces them within the context of the institution and not as individuals.

Strayer places Jansenist theology firmly within the Catholic Reformation. Theologians such as Michel Baius and Cornelius Jansen highlighted Augustine's notion of the corrupt nature of humanity and the importance of God's efficacious grace in predetermining salvation which also served as an indictment of the Catholic Church's worldliness. Although the Council of Trent did not repudiate Augustine's teachings, such positions put Augustinian Catholics at odds with those who took a more humanist approach to salvation, such as the Jesuits. Not only did the Jesuits favor free will over predeterminism, but the Jansenists saw them as corrupting the purity of Christianity with their willingness to comprise, to introduce innovation, as well as their use of casuistry. The theological differences were compounded by social and political differences. Detesting the Jesuits' hierarchical organization and their closeness to monarchs, Jansenists accused the Jesuits of embracing "a spirit of domination" and desiring nothing less than to take over the world.

The Jesuits' greatest ammunition against the Jansenists was to link them to Calvinists, and Strayer does an excellent job outlining the similarities and differences between Jansenism and French Calvinism. The two groups held a vision of the primitive church that demanded greater commitment from the individual and placed greater authority in the congregation of the Church as opposed to the hierarchy exemplified by bishops and popes. Both Jansenists and Calvinists benefited from the explosion of print culture, and both energetically used vernacular print to attack their enemies and to defend themselves. Beyond these parallels, there were some actual social connections. For example, the grandfather of the great Antoine Arnauld and Mère Angélique Arnauld of Port-Royal had converted to Calvinism only to reconvert in the aftermath of the St. Bartholomew's massacre in 1572. However, Jansenists insisted on remaining within the Catholic Church, seeing themselves as true Catholics, and thus were judged not as "heretics" but as "schismatics" (p. 17).

Strayer provides an in-depth narrative of Port-Royal's history chronicling its "sunrise" and "sunset." During the seventeenth century, the convent came to embody the elements that defined Jansenism: the embracing of Augustinian "truth" or efficacious grace, the almost single minded efforts to lead a saintly life, political conflict with authority, and resistance to that authority. As Alexander Sedgwick's work has shown, the Arnauld family was the backbone of the convent.^[2] Strayer offers some lively anecdotes of the Arnauld family including a portrait of the abbess Angélique, née Jacqueline, Arnauld whose spiritual devotion and fierce desire to reform was so deeply admired by many of her contemporaries. This discussion is supplemented by illustrations of life in Port-Royal that are now housed in Bibliothèque de l'Histoire du Protestantisme.

Although many admirers, such as Madame de Sévigné, regarded Port-Royal as a paradise populated with human saints, the Bourbon monarchs regarded it as a nest of potential *frondeurs*, not in the least because of their association with Cardinal Retz. Louis XIV despised Jansenism as an offense to his monarchical dignity with its "republican" ethos and the willingness of adherents to dissent from Church and State orthodoxy. During the course of his reign, Louis XIV worked to stamp out this subversive community by interfering with its elections, shutting its doors to new entrants, and of course working to get the papacy to issue bulls outlawing Jansenist theology.

Despite exile, imprisonment, papal bulls, and royal threats, the Jansenist movement persisted and, at times, even thrived during the seventeenth century. No doubt powerful supporters from the *noblesse d'épée* and the royal family, including Anne of Austria, helped the cause. And in 1656, a miracle saved the convent from persecution when a thorn purportedly from Christ's crown of thorns, Port-Royal's most valuable relic, cured a young pensioner's eyes. More importantly, Jansenists perfected their ability to take their case before the public through print, as exemplified by Pascal's trenchant and popular

Provincial Letters. The Port-Royal nuns often deployed the traits commonly associated with women--weakness, ignorance, submissivness--to resist monarchical browbeating. few, like Jacqueline Pascal, did not hesitate to make their grievances public.^[3] Such tactics and events often stayed the hand of the Crown. And however determined Louis XIV was to eradicate Jansenism, he did not always receive complete compliance from the parlements, the Sorbonne, and even popes, such as Clement IX, who were not always willing to risk schism for the sake of the king. Nevertheless, at the end of his realm, Louis XIV appeared to have succeeded when Clement XI finally issued *Unigenitus* in 1713.

As historians of the eighteenth century now well know, the bull would create a host of new problems without resolving preexisting tensions.^[4] Instead of eradicating Jansenism, the promulgation of *Unigenitus* precipitated bitter debates over the next five decades over the nature of the Catholic Church in France with respect to its organization, relations between clergy and laity, and papal authority. Led by recusant bishops, including the archbishop of Paris Cardinal Noailles, members of the clergy declared themselves as *appelants* who wished to appeal the bull before a church council; although only three percent would openly oppose *Unigenitus*, the influence of these clerics would be far reaching. In addition to this active voice of dissent within the clergy, the Crown also had to face growing parliamentary resistance to unequivocal acceptance of the bull. Through the *appel comme d'abus*, opponents of *Unigenitus* were able to use secular courts to protest against ecclesiastical judgments and individuals that were too ultramontane. Much of this political narrative concerning the 1730s and the 1750s, during the refusal of sacraments crisis, may be found elsewhere in accounts by Van Kley, Maire, and Doyle.

Strayer enhances the story of Jansenism's increased politicization with a sustained discussion of the movement's diffusion. He provides his reader with statistical data regarding the policing and imprisonment of Jansenists during the reigns of Louis XIV and Louis XV, and includes anecdotal material on obscure figures associated with the *convulsionnaires* as well as the Jansenist periodical *Nouvelles Ecclésiastiques*. Until the early 1730s, censors were kept busy with the proliferation of publications that condemned the bull. The most influential work was of course, the *Nouvelles Ecclésiastiques* which began in 1728 and survived until 1803. It possessed a complex organization where the anonymity of all involved, authors, printers, booksellers, was maintained within the organization as well as kept secret from authorities. Significantly, the journal enjoyed a national readership, an unusual feat for an underground paper of this era, and its competitive prices made it accessible to groups beyond elites such as shopkeepers and artisans. The *Nouvelles* kept readers abreast not only of all the political events surrounding *Unigenitus* but also the plight of the hundreds of individuals suspected of Jansenism. More importantly, the periodical carried on a relentless attack on the enemies of *la Vérité*, notably the Jesuits. These attacks were buttressed by satirical political pamphlets such as the "sarcelades" produced by Nicolas Jouin, which railed against the ultramontane clergy in rough dialect.^[5]

The most spectacular example of such popularization remains the convulsionary movement of the 1730s that signified the "democratization" of Jansenism.^[6] Initially, followers in the late 1720s claimed either to be witnesses or the beneficiaries of miracles generated around the tomb of the revered Jansenist deacon François Pâris. By the summer of 1731, the movement transformed into a spectacle featuring bodies wracked with spasms and screams; certain groups engaged in the sado-masochistic *secours* (aids or assistances) in which participants did violence to themselves and one another, and went so far to enact the crucifixion in the *grand secours*. Thus, "the movement degenerated from miracle working to masochism, from spiritual entertainment to social eroticism" (p. 257). The convulsionary movement not only introduced an entirely different dimension to Jansenism but also involved a population separate from the legal and religious world of Jansenist elites as members of the lower orders and particularly women dominated the scene. Indeed, Strayer's analysis of the police records from the Archives de la Bastille indicate that 90 percent of individuals arrested for participation in convulsionary activity were women mainly from the Third Estate. The radical movement as a whole burned out quickly by 1740 with small underground cells persisting into the 1780s, but in the long run, it created divisions within the larger Jansenist movement between defenders and detractors of the convulsionaries.

It is somewhat unfortunate that Strayer chose to examine the convulsionary movement in two chapters distinct from the larger discussion of Jansenism. His organization is grounded in the contention that this separation was necessary given the divide between Jansenists and convulsionists. Nevertheless, in this writer's opinion, Strayer's decision undermines one of the strengths of the books—the inclusion of details on the spread of Jansenism with close attention to demographics and the dissemination of printed material. Strayer thus misses the opportunity to query the division between popular or "proletariat" Jansenism and the "purer" Jansenism of Port-Royal as well as the distinction between "religious" and "political" Jansenism, distinctions made by contemporaries in the 1730s and indeed, to some extent maintained by many historians today.

The details found in *Suffering Saints* convey the complexity of the Jansenism and bring to life the people and passions of the movement. Nevertheless, the book's effort to be comprehensive, if not exhaustive, can potentially lose one of Strayer's target audiences—"readers unfamiliar with the persons, places, and events in the history of French Jansenism" (p. viii). In his introduction, Strayer sets up twelve major themes, far too many to serve as a useful organizational structure for the reader. Moreover, problems with organization create a tendency toward repetition such as multiple recounts of the "Miracle of the Thorn." In addition, there are a number of inaccuracies, such as references to Louis XIV as Philippe d'Orléans' grandfather, to Mme. de Grignon as Mme. de Sévigné's friend and not daughter, and typos such as "Maupeau." Despite these flaws, *Suffering Saints* is an heroic effort and will lead historians to think more about ways in which the story of French Jansenism might be tailored for larger audiences.

NOTES

[1] William Doyle, *Jansenism: Catholic Resistance to Authority from the Reformation to the French Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000); Louis Cognet, *Le Jansénisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968); Françoise Hildesheimer, *Le Jansénisme en France aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Paris: Publisud, 1991); René Tavenaux, *La Vie Quotidienne des Jansénistes aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Paris: Hachette, 1973). Major works on Jansenism and politics include: see Alexander Sedgwick, *Jansenism in Seventeenth-Century France: Voices from the Wilderness* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1977); Dale Van Kley, *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution: From Calvin to the Civil Constitution, 1560-1791* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1996); Catherine Maire, *De la Cause de Dieu à la cause de la nation: le jansénisme au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998).

[2] Alexander Sedgwick, *The Travails of Conscience: The Arnauld Family and the Ancien Régime* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998).

[3] Daniella Kostroun, "A Formula for Disobedience; Jansenism, Gender, and the Feminist Paradox," *Journal of Modern History*, 75 (2003): 483-522.

[4] In addition to the works cited above, see the following for discussions on Jansenism in the eighteenth century: Monique Cottret, *Jansénismes et lumières: pour un autre XVIIe siècle* (Paris: A. Michel, 1998); Pierre Chaunu, Madeleine Foisil, and Françoise Noirfontaine, *Le Basculement religieux de Paris au XVIIIe siècle: essai d'histoire politique et religieuse* (Paris: Fayard, 1998).

[5] Citing D.A. Coward's article on the *Nouvelles Ecclésiastiques* (*British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 4 (1981), Strayer notes that the *sarcelades* began appearing in 1784. However, the Bibliothèque Nationale and Bibliothèque Mazarine have an extensive collection dating back to the early 1730s.

[6] On the convulsionnaires, see Catherine Laurence-Maire, *Les Convulsionnaires de Saint-Médard: Miracles, Convulsions et Prophéties à Paris au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985); B. Robert Kreiser,

Miracles, Convulsions, and Ecclesiastical Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century Paris (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978); Daniel Vidal, *Miracles et convulsions jansénistes au XVIII^e siècle: le mal et sa connaissance* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1987).

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