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William Doyle. *Jansenism: Catholic Resistance to Authority from the Reformation to the French Revolution.* New York and London: St. Martin's Press, 2001. x + 109 pp. $14.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-312-22676-3.

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This slight volume appears in a "Studies in European History" series designed to present the "state of the debate" on important themes in a clear way for undergraduate students. It may appear unusual to review such a book in a venue usually reserved for more extended monographs. However, this little book is so well done and on a topic of such great interest to anyone interested in the history of Catholicism in France and Europe that it seems appropriate to draw attention to it here.

In this case, the promotional blurb on the back cover of the book has it right: "It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of Jansenism as a religious phenomenon in European life....Jansenism...powerfully infused French political life from the mid-seventeenth century to the Revolution 150 years later. It influenced the Enlightenment, the development of French constitutional thinking, the destruction of the Jesuits, and the modernisation of the Catholic Church." The blurb is accurate as well in saying that William Doyle's book "explains exactly why Jansenism was so important, recreates the religious and intellectual world which fostered it, and examines the critical issues, such as the all pervasive role of the Jesuits in Catholic life and the importance of the movement in sowing the seeds of resistance to absolute monarchy, which led to the French Revolution." A well known and highly respected historian of the Ancien Regime and the Revolution, Doyle describes himself in his preface as the "unbelieving son of a lapsed Catholic, brought up as a 'non-playing Anglican,' " and admits that he "is perhaps not the obvious person to write about tangled episodes in the history of the Catholic Church" (p. x). Be that as it may, he has done a truly admirable job of assessing and synthesizing the literature and providing an extremely clear and concise guide through the tangled and controversial history of Jansenism.

There are a number of reasons why the history of Jansenism is so tangled. Although the people known as Jansenists usually denied that such a thing existed, Jansenism was nevertheless "the most persistence problem afflicting the Catholic Church for almost two centuries" (p. 1). From its origins it involved bitter theological quarrels between different factions within the Church, difficult issues in the relationship between church and state in France, and tensions between the papacy and both the French crown and the French episcopacy. By the eighteenth century, controversies over the history and significance of what had happened in the seventeenth century complicated what continued to be a confused mixture of theological disagreements, internal church feuds, conflicts between the church, the crown, and the parlements, and between all parties in France and Rome. Although Jansenism as a movement disruptive of either church or state was destroyed by the French Revolution, old antagonisms lived on in the historiography. From the publication of C.A. Sainte-Beuve's multi-volume *Port-Royal* in 1840, much of literature on Jansenism was characterized by sympathy for and an almost exclusive interest in the seventeenth-century "heroic" era of Jansenism. It has only been in the last few decades that historians, especially English-speaking scholars such as B. Robert Kreiser, John McManners, Timothy Tackett, and Dale K. Van Kley, have come to appreciate the importance of Jansenism in the eighteenth-century and provided a more critical and balanced assessment of the phenomena.[1] Jansenists are now seen to have a played a major role in the suppression of the Jesuits and to have been the main source of discourses of resistance to the crown and thus of the "desacralisation" of the monarchy both before and during the French Revolution. Ironically, much that has been blamed on the Enlightenment is now being reassigned "to those whom the *philosophes* regarded as their direst enemies" (p. 4).

Doyle's brief chapters trace the long history of Jansenism. A background chapter explains the move-

ment's remote origins in St. Augustine's theology of grace and predestination, its more immediate origins in the revived Augustinianism of the late fifteenth century that informed the thought of both Luther and Calvin, the Council of Trent's condemnation of these theological innovators largely on practical pastoral grounds, and the ongoing unresolved debate over these issues among Catholic theologians (in Latin) in the decades between 1560 and 1640. He shows how these debates involved rivalry between the Jesuits and older religious orders, the Dominicans in particular, and how in France by 1640, the date of the publication of Cornelius Jansen's vast Latin treatise, *Augustinus*, this conflict exploded into public controversy in French.

Subsequent chapters on Jansenism as a movement provide a succinct guide to the personalities, issues, institutional interests, and key dates involved, and to royal and papal attempts to control a disruptive conflict that rent both state and church. The story is so complicated and involved that it is impossible to provide even an outline within the compass of a review. Suffice it to say that Doyle succeeds in rendering this convoluted history remarkably intelligible, in keeping all the threads and their interconnections in view, and in persuading the reader of the importance and significance of his subject for our understanding of the religious and political history of France in the century and a half preceding the Revolution. In addition, readers wanting to explore any aspect of these developments in more detail will find Doyle's notes and bibliography a sure guide.

I have only one reservation about this fine little volume. It seems to me that in his long immersion in Jansenist literature Doyle may have picked up some of their animus against the Jesuits. In particular, I detect a certain tone of reprobation in his descriptions of the "flexibility" of Jesuit spiritual directors, the "intemperance" of certain Jesuit authors, and the "laxity" of their moral teachings, as well as more than a little sympathy with the Jansenist contention that "much of what was called Jansenistic was a figment of Jesuit suspicions" (p. 68). For the most part, however, Doyle's treatment of all parties in these contentious disputes is very well balanced. This is a book that can be recommended highly as an enormously helpful introduction to Jansenism.

Note

[1]. See especially B. Robert Kreiser, *Miracles, Convulsions and Ecclesiastical Politics in eighteenth-century France* (1978); John McManners, *Church and Society in Eighteenth Century France* (1998); Timothy Tackett, *Priest and Parish in eighteenth-century France: A Social and Political Study of the Cures in a Diocese of Dauphin, 1750-1791* (1977); and Dale K. Van Kley, *The Jansenists and the Expulsion of the Jesuits from France, 1757-1765* (1975).

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