



Freedom in Jacqueline Pascal (1625–1661)

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During her struggle with her family and with political and ecclesiastical authorities, Jacqueline Pascal developed a distinctive, gendered philosophy of personal freedom. Against family members attempting to block her entry into the convent of Port-Royal, she defends the right of a woman to pursue her own God-given vocation, even when the pursuit of this vocation encounters oppositions from one's father (Étienne) and brother (Blaise). Vocational freedom and fidelity outweigh patriarchal commands and desires. A partisan of Jansenism, she refused the summons to obedience issued by anti-Jansenist political and ecclesiastical authorities who attempted to force the Port-Royal nuns to assent to what they considered an erroneous condemnation of the theological opinions of Jansenius. The nun has the right to form her own opinion in theological controversies and to be faithful to her properly formed conscience on questions of religious and empirical truth. Jacqueline Pascal also opposed the efforts of leading Jansenist theologians, notably Antoine Arnauld, to encourage the nuns to give ambiguous signs of assent to declarations condemning Jansenius and his controversial theories of grace. Like all Christians, the nun must express her opinions in a forthright manner and accept any persecution caused by this honesty in the spirit of the martyrs.

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