



Ethics of Resistance in Agnès Arnauld (1593-1671)

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As the persecution of the Jansenist convent of Port-Royal intensified, the abbess Agnès Arnauld developed a code of resistance for the nuns in the event that their self-governance was suspended and a hostile order was imposed on them. She imagined two scenarios: one where the convent was occupied by new anti-Jansenist superiors and another where the nuns were exiled to foreign convents. She develops a moral casuistry distinguishing between acceptable and unacceptable material cooperation with oppressive authorities.

In the case of a complete takeover of the convent, the nuns should practice spiritual resistance. They should refuse to open their consciences to the new superiors and allied confessors. They should refuse to participate in ceremonies foreign to the rule of Port-Royal and to sign any document proffered by an illegitimate superior. Only a limited amount of manual work could serve as acceptable material cooperation with the new regime. In the case of exile to a foreign convent, the Port-Royal nun should give greater cooperation to the legitimate superior of that convent. She should participate in the worship, the dietary regime, and the work regime of the convent as any good guest would. Even here, however, the nun must refuse to open her conscience and assent to theological opinions which violate her conscience. In both scenarios of persecution, the nun should resist oppression through a strict practice of silence and by the cultivation of virtues proper to the martyr.

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