



Certitude and Doubt in Angélique de Saint-Jean Arnauld d'Andilly (1624–1684)

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A leader of the intransigent faction of nuns during the persecution of the Jansenist convent of Port-Royal, Angélique de Saint-Jean Arnauld d'Andilly warned against any compromise with anti-Jansenist political and ecclesiastical authorities. In the abbatial conference *On the Danger of Hesitation Once We Know our Duty*, she warns against the danger of even doubting one's convictions and examines the relationship of doubt and certitude to issues of power. Doubting is never a neutral exercise. It emerges in a network of power relations where a more powerful party is attempting to pressure a weaker party into becoming skeptical about its beliefs and into ultimately abandoning those beliefs and adopting the convictions of the more powerful adversary. The act of doubt is not a disinterested search for the truth; it is often the fruit of a mental manipulation by the powerful who cannot abide the conscientious dissent of a resistant minority. In Mère Angélique's epistemology the noetic agent is rightly certain about basic religious truths grounded in divine revelation and the supernatural virtue of faith. Such a certitude should characterize one's beliefs concerning the nature of grace, as defended by Saint Paul, Saint Augustine, and Jansenius. A willingness to exercise doubt in such an area not only opens the noetic agent to manipulation by powerful adversaries, who seek submission by the weaker party; it imperils his or her salvation, rooted in grace. Effective resistance to oppression involves vigilance over the power-ridden dynamics of doubt.

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