

LUCIEN CEYSSENS (1902-2001)¹

Friar Minor Luciaan Ceyssens passed away in Sint-Truiden on Tuesday, the 10th of April 2001, at the age of 98. He was born in Wijchmaal-Peer (Province of Limburg, Belgium) on the 8th of October, 1902, as the youngest child of a farmer's family with six children. He was christened Willem. After his secondary education at the diocesan college in Peer and the Friar Minor colleges in Lokeren and Rekem (Limburg), he studied philosophy, also in Rekem – Ceyssens had joined the Franciscan order as a novice in 1920. He chose Lucianus (Lucien) as his religious name. He studied theology in Turnhout and Sint-Truiden, where he was ordained as priest on the 8th of September 1927.

Because Ceyssens was at that time suffering from failing health, he was granted exemption to devote himself to his studies. During his stay in Turnhout he published a number of books on the history of education in Turnhout before 1830 and on the Friar Minors in Turnhout. During the period 1929-1931 he took, as a free student, for some time classes about the historical method in Leuven. Because of his aptitude for historical research, Ceyssens was sent to study at the Faculty of Church History of the Gregoriana in Rome in 1934. On the basis of his former publications he was immediately admitted to the second licentiate. For his doctorate he chose to work on the modern period. Under the guidance of the German Jesuit J. Grisar he wrote on the introduction of the Antijansenist form in the Low Countries during the period 1692-1694. He presented his doctoral dissertation, *Introduction du formulaire antijanséniste en Belgique. Premier essai (1692-1694)* in 1936. Contrary to the expectations of his promoter, Ceyssens came to the conclusion, based on a very thorough examination of records, that it was wrong to simply classify the opponents of Jansenism as "orthodox" and to point out the Jansenists as the only guilty party. Ceyssens' promoter, who was disappointed because the research result was rather disillusioning with regard to his order, agreed to award Ceyssens with the Ph.D. on the condition that the dissertation would not be published – it was not until the

¹ Exhaustive overviews on Ceyssens' life and work can be found in M. G. SPIERTZ, *L'œuvre du professeur Ceyssens. Son importance pour l'étude du jansénisme*, in I. VÁZQUEZ, *L'œuvre littéraire de Lucien Ceyssens sur le jansénisme et l'antijansénisme devant la critique* (Bibliotheca Pontificii Athenaei <<Antonianum>>, 20), Rome, 1979, pp. 125-137; J. A. G. TANS, *L'œuvre scientifique de Lucien Ceyssens*, in L. CEYSSENS & J. A. G. TANS, *Autour de l'Unigenitus. Recherches sur la genèse de la Constitution* (BETL, 76), Leuven, 1987.

publication of volume IV of the series *Jansenistica* in 1962 that the merits of the dissertation could be appreciated. From the time of his doctorate until the time of his death, Ceyssens' research would be largely determined by his interest for Jansenism and Antijansenism.

In 1934 Ceyssens was appointed as professor at the Antonianum, a task he fulfilled until 1963, with an interruption during the Second World War. He performed this task with devotion, but with little enthusiasm: the "hodie homo non sum", a Latin translation of the Flemish "vandaag ben ik geen mens" has led many a Spaniard and Italian to a metaphysical crisis with regard to the own identity. During his stay in Belgium (1940-1945) Ceyssens gave lectures on church history at the training house of his order in Leuven and he initiated the rebuilding of the Franciscan theological library, which had been destroyed by the war. He was also entrusted with the care of the provincial archives in Schaarbeek. Alarmed by the possibility of air raids, Ceyssens moved these archives to the cellars of the convent and in this way rescued them from a certain destruction: two weeks after the move to the cellars this convent too was badly damaged by the violence of war.

In 1963 Ceyssens decided to retire in order to have "a few years" left to occupy himself with scientific research. Ten years later, during a conference in Rome, he gave an overview of the urgent research desiderata regarding Jansenism². At that occasion, he explained that he wanted to make a start with the research regarding these desiderata, and he applied himself in such a way that one can state 30 years later that he has realised his own research project: until 2000³ articles were being published in specialist journals⁴.

² Cf. *Pour une histoire plus poussée et plus explicite de l'antijansénisme*, in *Actes du colloque sur le jansénisme, organisé par l'Academia Belgica*, Rome, 2 et 3 novembre 1973 (BRHE, 64), Leuven, 1977, pp. 1-25.

³ Cf. *La requête académique de l'Université de Louvain au pape Innocent XI (1684)*, in *Augustiniana* 50 (2000) 297-304.

⁴ For an overview of Ceyssens' numerous publications on Jansenism, see H. WILLEMS, *Les publications du Père Lucien Ceyssens concernant le jansénisme*, in *Miscellanea jansenistica offerts à Lucien Ceyssens O.F.M. à l'occasion de son soixantième anniversaire*, Heverlee-Leuven, 1963, pp. 7-57; I. VÁSQUEZ, *Les publications du Père Lucien Ceyssens concernant le jansénisme et l'antijansénisme 1937-1977*, in *Antonianum* 53 (1978) 194-266 (resumed in I. VÁSQUEZ, *L'œuvre littéraire de Lucien Ceyssens sur le jansénisme et l'antijansénisme devant la critique* (Bibliotheca Pontificii Athenaei <<Antonianum>>, 20), Rome, 1979, pp. 15-91); ID., *L'œuvre littéraire de Lucien Ceyssens sur le jansénisme et l'antijansénisme devant la critique. Premier supplément*, in *Antonianum* 60 (1985) 505-517; ID., *L'œuvre littéraire de Lucien Ceyssens sur le jansénisme et l'antijansénisme devant la critique. Deuxième*

Professor Lucien Ceyskens belonged to that generation of scholars who could still indulge in going one's own way, averse from any bureaucratic and other administrative obligations or pseudo-obligations. His life consisted of working in archives in Rome, Utrecht, Mechelen, Paris. He rendered invaluable services to the scientific research with the publication of his *Sources relatives aux débuts du jansénisme et de l'antijansénisme*, nine voluminous parts covering the period 1640-1682⁵. He also supplied an interpretative reference frame by situating the Jansenistic controversy within two spiritual movements of the Renaissance: strict Augustinism and Molinism⁶, at which it was apparent to Ceyskens that Jansenius, in accordance with the direction indicated by Clemens VIII, hoped that Augustinus would supply him with the "final" answer. In over 400 books and articles, covering everything from the person of Jansenius to the bulle *Unigenitus*⁷, Ceyskens tried to do justice to that group of sincere believers, who were labelled Jansenists because of their serious avowal of the Christian faith. Ceyskens protested his whole life against the fact that deeply religious people, Jansenius first and foremost, were labelled as "heretics" because they regarded to be a Christian and to live as a Christian as serious matters. He demonstrated repeatedly that personal profit, small-minded actions and flattery were the real motivations of some of the so-called orthodox Church figures⁸. Through his publications Ceyskens acquired a place among the great historical researchers on Jansenism: there was no one better acquainted with the history of Jansenism in Belgium. In addition he succeeded in presenting results of scientifically high-minded research in a captivating way to the reading public. He was an excellent storyteller, whose stories were well documented and worth reading!

supplement, in *Antonianum* 68 (1993) 375-390. For his other publications, it is advisable to consult *Franciscana*, which offers an overview of the literary activities of the Flemish Minor Friars on a yearly basis.

⁵ For this, see J. A. G. TANS, *a.c.*, p. IX: "On peut dire sans restriction qu'aucune étude sur l'histoire ecclésiastique du dix-septième siècle ne peut impunément négliger cette riche documentation."

⁶ Cf. TANS, *a.c.*, pp. IX-X.

⁷ Cf. L. CEYSSENS & J. A. G. TANS, *Autour de l'Unigenitus. Recherches sur la genèse de la constitution* (BETL, 86), Leuven, 1987; L. CEYSSENS, *Le sort de la bulle Unigenitus. Recueil d'études offert à Lucien Ceyskens à l'occasion de son 90e anniversaire*. Présenté par M. LAMBERIGTS (BETL, 104), Leuven, 1992.

⁸ Compare his synthetic article: *Que penser finalement de l'histoire du jansénisme et de l'antijansénisme*, in *RHE* 88 (1993) 108-130.

Ceyssens' work was innovative, but not in the modern sense of the word. Ceyssens chose to stick to his sources, he did not invent any new historical methods, he did not make any statements beforehand that turned out to mistaken afterwards. By means of publications, he preferred to use publications to demonstrate that in the end the so-called orthodox truths regularly did not check out: e.g. in 1967 he published in *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* an article on Paray-le-Monial: the traditional interpretations of the so-called apparitions were thus far explained as a reaction against the dangers of Jansenism. Ceyssens' research showed that a meticulous reading of the preserved material indicates rather the opposite: reactions against the Antijansenism⁹.

During his lifetime professor Ceyssens received many honours: in 1963 on the occasion of his 60th birthday he was offered a Festschrift¹⁰ by the 'Augustijns Historisch Instituut'. The 'Université catholique de Louvain-la-Neuve' awarded him a honorary doctorate because of his mind-broadening research¹¹. The Faculty of Theology of the K. U. Leuven organised in 1979 a colloquium in honour of the researcher Ceyssens: *Le jansénisme au Pays-Bas*¹², invited him to attend in 1985 the conference *L'image de Jansénius*¹³, and honoured him especially on the occasion of his 90th birthday in 1992 with the publication of *Le Sort de la bulle Unigenitus*, a intrinsically coherent collection of Ceyssens' publications mainly about Jansenism in France. The 'Oud-Katholieke Kerk van Nederland' paid tribute to Ceyssens in 1989 with the Blaise Pascal-award. Peer made him honorary citizen of their city. Ceyssens was deservedly proud of this last distinction. During his lifetime, Ceyssens did not limit his time and energy to the research of subjects which were internationally appreciated and respected, but he dedicated himself with as much enthusiasm to the so-called local history: his publications on Peer or

⁹ See his *Paray-le-Monial et le jansénisme*, in RHE 62 (1967) 49-69.

¹⁰ *Miscellanea Jansenistica offerts à Lucien Ceyssens à l'occasion de son soixantième anniversaire*, Heverlee-Leuven, 1963.

¹¹ Cf. R. AUBERT, *Discours prononcé à Louvain-la-Neuve le 24 avril 1978*, in I. VÁZQUEZ, *L'œuvre littéraire de Lucien Ceyssens sur le jansénisme et l'antijansénisme devant la critique*, pp. 11-14.

¹² Cf. J. VAN BAVEL & M. SCHRAMA (éd.), *Jansénius et le Jansénisme dans les Pays-Bas. Mélanges Lucien Ceyssens* (BETL, 56), Leuven, 1982.

¹³ See his *La défiguration de Jansénius*, in E. VAN EIJL (éd.), *L'image de C. Jansénius jusqu'à la fin du XVIIIe siècle*. Actes du Colloque, Louvain, 7-9 novembre 1985 (BETL, 79), 1987, 23-31.

on (remarkable) family members, ancestors and/or friends need to be mentioned in this regard.

Ceyssens was a hard worker: "Il n'avait pas simplement parcouru les années (...), il les avait aussi vécues"¹⁴. This fertile life has now come to an end. May he rest in peace. Ceyssens scribens mortuus est. Requiescat in pace cum sanctis.

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¹⁴ VAZQUEZ, a.c., p. 475.