

Chapter 23

The Church Torn by Internal Strife: Jansenism and Gallicanism

The 17th and 18th centuries saw the rise of the absolute State in Europe and thus the decline of the secular power of the Church, while the Enlightenment continued to take its toll on the Church as an intellectual leader. In general, the Church retreated into a defensive position and adopted a siege mentality relative to the changes that were taking place in European culture. It was also during this time that the Church became involved in two major internal controversies: Jansenism and Gallicanism.

Jansenism

The Doctrine - Jansenism received its name from its founder Cornelius Jansen (1585-1683). Jansen was a Flemish theologian who was professor of Scripture at Louvain and later became bishop of Ypres in 1636. He was a student of Augustine and of the Belgian theologian, Michael Baius (1513-89).

Baius' interpretation of Augustine was judged by many to be along the lines of Luther and Calvin and therefore heretical. Baius held that human nature was fundamentally corrupt and determined to evil without divine grace. Also, human beings were not free, even when in the state of grace, and good works were solely dependent on grace - thus all good works of unbelievers (who lacked grace) were sinful.

As a professor at Louvain, Jansen was critical of the Jesuits in their approach to morality. He felt that the Jesuits put too much emphasis on reason and not enough on Scripture. He claimed that their brand of morality was hard to distinguish from the Enlightenment rationalists. Using a natural law approach, the Jesuits made human nature the norm of morality and claimed that grace was not necessary for people to perform acts that were morally good - human nature was not totally corrupt. Grace built on nature.

The Jesuits had become the teachers and confessors of the wealthy and powerful. As confessors, the Jesuits had to help penitents distinguish between mortal sins, venial sins and acts that were no sins at all (cauistry). Some took a strict approach, but most were considered very lenient. Thus they were accused of handing out "cheap grace" - forgiveness without contrition - and providing moral excuses for immoral acts.

To correct the perceived errors of the Jesuits, Jansen used the writings of Baius and Augustine to argue that human nature was basically sinful. He called for a rigorous moral code, especially for the clergy. He also argued for a strict view of predestination - only those chosen by God from the foundations of the world would be saved. Furthermore, as Augustine had argued against Pelagius, good works could never earn salvation without divine grace and divine grace was only granted to the predestined. Those who were not predestined persisted in sin and their "good works" were of no value to them. Human beings did not have free will to accept or reject God's grace and human

nature was radically corrupt, thus beyond any “self-salvation” through good works.

Jansen felt that the teachings of Augustine had been ignored, especially by the Jesuits, and that the Jesuit defense of free will and the value of good works had devalued the saving work of Christ. The Jesuits responded by claiming that Jansen was teaching the Protestant notion of grace alone (*sola gratia*), while they were teaching the Catholic doctrine, taught by St. Paul and proclaimed at the Council of Trent, that human beings can be renewed by the interaction of grace and free will and that salvation comes through good works as human beings freely responded to the grace of God.

Jansen’s ideas were expressed in his most important work, *Augustinus*, published in 1640, two years after his death and was condemned by the Inquisition in 1641. However, the book continued to circulate and was very controversial. In 1649 a theologian from the Sorbonne, Nicholas Cornet, extracted five propositions from Jansen’s works which he considered heretical, they included the claim that humans were not free to accept or reject the grace of God and that Christ did not die for all humanity. These five points would be used later by the official Church to condemn Jansenism.

The Movement - The death of Jansen and the condemnation of his works did not stop the influence of his thought. Many theologians in France and the Low Countries supported his views. The Jansenists continued to teach that Christ did not die for all, only the predestined. Prayers to the Blessed Mother and the saints are to no avail, all is predestined. The Council of Trent had encouraged frequent confession and communion, but the Jansenists held that absolution should be withheld until the penance was performed (as in the ancient rite), which could take weeks, months or even years. Holy Communion was to be received only a few times in a lifetime, because no one was is worthy to receive it. Respectful abstention from communion honored Christ more than frequent reception.

Perhaps the most important development in the spread of what was to be known as “Jansenism” occurred when Jansen’s friend, Jean DuVergier, abbot of Saint-Cryan, was appointed confessor for a Cistercian convent of devout women called Port-Royal, located sixteen miles from Paris. The convent was noted for its rigorous piety and as a center for contemplation and learning. Its supporters included many influential and wealthy members of Parisian society. The sisters welcomed the teachings of Jansen as introduced by DuVergier and Port-Royal became the center of the Jansenist movement.

Jacqueline Arnauld was the abbess of Port-Royal and after the death of Jean DuVergier, her brother, Antoine Arnauld, took up residence at Port-Royal and became the leader of the Jansenist movement for the next thirty years. Arnauld defended the rigorism of DuVergier in his paper *Frequente Communion* (1642). He then launched an attack on the Jesuits for their moral laxity. The Jesuits reacted by calling on the pope to silence “these Calvinists in Catholic garb”. In 1653, the five points (mentioned above) were condemned by Pope Innocent X in the bull *Cum Occasione*. Arnauld, however, continued his attacks on the Jesuits and the Sorbonne considered expelling him from the faculty. Thus,

Arnauld sought help. He turned to the brilliant scientist, mathematician, inventor and writer, Blaise Pascal (1623-1662).

Pascal first encountered Jansenists when his father fell on the ice and dislocated his hip, the physicians who successfully treated his father were devout Jansenists. They taught Pascal that physical suffering - most of which is medically untreatable - illustrated a religious truth: human beings are helpless, wounded, miserable creatures. Only God can help them.

After his father's death, Pascal's sister joined the convent at Port-Royal and Pascal was alone. He decided to live "the good life" of pleasure, but after a few years he became disgusted with "the good life" and retreated into a life of "quiet desperation", where he felt abandoned by God. While reading the crucifixion account in John's Gospel, Pascal had a religious experience that brought him "certainty, feeling, joy, peace". Pascal's revival in faith brought him to his sister and Port-Royal. In 1654 he became a member of the community. It was there that he met Arnauld and came to his assistance.

Pascal launched an attack on the Jesuits in his eighteen, satirical, *Provincial Letters*. In these letters he exposed the Jesuits' theology and practices. The pope condemned the *Letters*, but the public bought them in great numbers and they were a sensation with educated Frenchmen. He finished his letters in 1657 and while preparing other manuscripts he died suddenly in 1662. Eight years after his death friends put some of his unfinished writings into a book entitled *Pensees* (Thoughts).

His writings were focused on the helplessness of humans without God. Against the Enlightenment thinkers he declared that nature and reason alone were no sure guide to the Creator. God and the meaning of life must be felt by the heart, rather than discovered by reason: "*The heart has its reasons which reason does not know*".

Pascal and Arnauld won over many of the laity and some of the clergy, including bishops, to their point of view. However, pressure from King Louis XIV and Pope Alexander VII resulted in a papal bull, *Ad Sanctam Beati Petri Sedem*, in 1656 which again condemned Jansen. Arnauld replied that the "five propositions" set forth by Cornet were not representative of Jansen's thought. While agreeing that the pope had the "right" (*droit*) to condemn heresy, Arnauld argued that the pope's judgment about the "fact" (*fait*) of whether Jansen really taught heresy was another matter (denying papal infallibility on matters of fact), however, he agreed to maintain a "respectful silence" about the accuracy of the papal bull.

In response, Pope Alexander forced the French clergy to sign a document admitting both "right" and "fact". Most signed, but twenty-three bishops agreed with Arnauld that the pope was not infallible in "matters of fact" (*fait*) and declared that the issue of whether or not the five propositions could be found in Jansen's writings was indeed a "matter of fact". The Port-Royal nuns were also asked to sign, many refused and were exiled.

In 1667 Clement IX (d. 1669) became pope and tried to initiate a truce, (the Clementine Peace), which allowed the Jansenists and the twenty-three bishops to maintain a “respectful silence” on the question of the *droit* and *fait*. For nearly ten years an uneasy peace prevailed while Arnauld and the Jansenists continued to write and teach. They had some small victories as when Pope Innocent XI (1676-89) seemed to take their side when he condemned 65 moral propositions developed by the Jesuits and when one of their sympathizers, de Noailles, was consecrated Bishop of Paris.

The tide turned again after Arnauld died in exile in 1694. Arnauld was succeeded by Pasquier Quesnel (1634-1719) who was a priest and a member of the Congregation of the Oratory (Oratorians). He reiterated all the teachings of Jansenism in his book *Reflexions Morales* based on the New Testament written in 1693. He also was accused of questioning papal infallibility and the primacy of the Roman See in his book on the writings of Pope St. Leo I, which was placed on the Index of Forbidden Books.

After refusing to sign anti-Jansenist decrees of the Oratorians, he was expelled from the Order and fled to Belgium where he lived in exile with Arnauld. After being imprisoned for a short time in 1703 by the bishop of Maline, he fled this time to Amsterdam where he spent the rest of his life defending Jansenism and promoting his work, *Reflexions Morales*.

Quesnel’s writings and teachings remained controversial and with the election of Pope Clement XI (1700-21) relationships between Rome and the Jansenists deteriorated. In 1705 Clement issued a bull, *Vineam Domini*, which condemned the Jansenist tactic of “respectful silence”. King Louis XVI then ordered the nuns out of Port-Royal and tore down its facilities. In 1708 Quesnel’s *Reflexions* were referred to Rome and was censured by a papal brief. The arch-bishop of Paris, Cardinal de Noailles who had approved *Reflexions*, asked for an explanation of the censure.

Therefore, in 1713, Pope Clement, at the urging of the King, issued his bull *Unigenitus Dei Filius* which condemned 101 propositions taken from Quesnel’s writings. The bull dismissed the issue of *fait* and concentrated on papal rights (*droit*). For some fifteen years *Unigenitus* caused a division in the French Church and a number of bishops, including de Noailles, refused to submit. These bishops appealed to a “future pope better informed and to a general council”. The pope excommunicated all those who refused to accept his decision. Finally, de Noailles did submit in 1728, the Sorbonne in 1730 and by 1760 only some six bishops and a few lower clergy refused to submit. With the death of de Noailles, Jansenism in France effectively ceased to be an organized movement. The remaining small sect of Jansenists were persecuted and fled to Holland where they elected a schismatic bishop of Utrecht and became known as the Old Catholic Church.

The internal conflict of Jansenism combined with the forces of the Enlightenment, sapped the energy of the French Church and introduced into Catholicism a strain of Puritanism that degraded human nature and limited the love of God for all humanity. Jansenism was introduced to Ireland from France and from Ireland to the United States. Much of

exaggerated concern over sexual ethics and a pre-Vatican II narrow Eucharistic piety that resulted in infrequent communion - and that only after confession - is directly traceable to the Jansenist heresy. Some of that strain remains with the Church today.

Gallicanism

Gallicanism was another internal Church struggle that also took place in the 17th and 18th century. In part, it was fueled by the condemnation of Jansenism, which was seen by many clergy and laity alike as an unwarranted interference by the papacy in the affairs of the French Church. The word Gallicanism is based on the Latin word *Gallus*, (English Gaul), the ancient name for the territory of France. (Those who took Latin in high school remember translating Caesar's Gallic Wars.)

Gallicanism has been described as a program, an attitude and a doctrine that shaped the relationship of France and the French Church to the papacy. It sought to severely restrict interventions by the papacy in the affairs of French politics and the French Church. It also developed a theology that denied the personal infallibility of the pope apart from the bishops and therefore supported the concept of the primacy of the General Councils over the papacy as enunciated in the Council of Constance.

Gallicanism can trace its distant roots as far back as the fierce French nationalism of the 8th and 9th centuries. More importantly the political and theological ground was prepared by three important eras in Church history (discussed in Chs. 16-18): 1) the Avignon Papacy (1305-78) during which the French nobility controlled the Church, 2) the Great Schism (1378-1417) when three men simultaneously claimed to be pope and which ended with the Council of Constance deposing all three "popes" and declaring that Councils were superior to popes (conciliarism), 3) the century of the Renaissance popes (1447-1555) who were basically engrossed in worldly affairs and corrupt papal practices.

During these 200 plus years, (1305-1555), the papacy had lost respect and credibility and became weak politically. In 1398, King Charles VI had refused to give obedience to the Avignon antipope claiming autonomy for the French Church on the basis of certain traditions and rights that he had supposedly rediscovered. This special status was described as *libertes de l'Eglise gallicane* - thus the term Gallicanism.

In 1438, Charles VII issued a royal ordinance called the "Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges" which the French courts used to block papal interventions. This sanction was replaced in 1516 by a concordat in which the French crown received the right to nominate Church officials and thus control the French church.

As the European nation-states emerged, the national churches became subordinate to the state and there was strong resistance from both the nobility and national bishops to any attempt by the papacy to interfere in internal affairs. Sometimes historians make a distinction between royal Gallicanism, based on the Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges, and episcopal Gallicanism, based on the Council of Constance which subordinated the papacy

to the General Councils.

Louis XIV (the Sun King) became king of France in 1643, he would reign until 1715. He was a very dominating figure who made France the most powerful country in Europe. He believed that he ruled by “divine right” and thus he wielded both secular and ecclesiastical authority. Louis adopted Gallicanism and enforced the *regale* - the right to take the revenues of certain bishoprics during their vacancy and also the right to fill episcopal vacancies. Furthermore, in 1673 he extended the *regale* to all the bishoprics of France..

When challenged with spiritual sanctions by Pope Innocent XI, Louis sought the support of the French clergy who also supported Gallicanism. He called the Assembly of the Clergy (1681-82) out of which were formulated the famous *Four Articles*:

1. The pope has no authority over temporal affairs or temporal rulers
2. The pope is subordinate to the General Councils as decreed in the Council of Constance.
3. Papal decrees are conditioned on the acceptance by the Gallican Church
4. The pope has no personal infallibility apart from the Church.

King Louis ordered that these articles be taught in all seminaries and formally accepted by all who received degrees in theology. Pope Innocent naturally objected and annulled the proceeding of the Assembly. He also refused to confirm the appointment of any bishop who had participated in the Assembly. Louis retaliated by insisting that only bishops who had participated in the Assembly should be confirmed. The lines were drawn and the battle was on. By 1687, more than thirty bishoprics were vacant. Louis threatened to invade Italy and seized the papal province of Avignon.

In the end, a schism was avoided when Louis yielded and withdrew his edict compelling the acceptance of the four articles and in return the pope - now Innocent XII - confirmed the King’s nominees on the condition of signing a retraction annulling the Assembly. For his part, the pope relented on the *regal*. The issue of personal infallibility was simply put aside. However, it would arise again at Vatican I in 1870 with the papacy coming out the victor.

The pope’s victory was somewhat muted, because Gallicanism continued to be taught in the French universities and was generally accepted by the French clergy and laity. Only the Jesuits continued to defend the rights of the pope. Furthermore, Gallicanism in various forms spread throughout Europe. In general the divine authority of the princely power was taught and the pope was seen as elected head of the Church with limited powers.

Febronianism

Gallicanism was known as Febronianism in Germany. This tenets of this movement

were expressed in a book by Nicholas von Hontheim (d. 1790), auxiliary bishop of Trier, who wrote under the pseudonym of Febronius. Febronius had studied at the University of Louvain under the famous Gallican professor Van Espen. He also conducted a detailed study of the history of the early Christian Church.

Based on his education and study, Febronius accepted the request of German archbishop-electors to present their complaints against the papacy and the curia and to detail a religious-political system that would explain and describe the proper relationship of the pope to the German Church and government. Its outline went something like this:

- 1) The primacy of the pope was simply “first among equals” and basically an administrative office whose purpose is to unify rather than to rule.
- 2) Primacy in the Church rests with the General Councils.
- 3) The abuse of papal powers could be checked by a General Council, a national synod or by the secular prince in each country.
- 4) The personal infallibility of the pope, apart from the Church, is rejected.
- 5) Bishops operate by divine right.

Febronius’ book was immediately condemned by Clement XIII in 1764, but was translated and spread throughout Europe. Sixteen of the twenty-six German bishops refused to publish the pope’s condemnation. Later, in 1778, Febronius did officially disavow his doctrines at the insistence of Pope Pius VI.

However, the archbishops of Cologne, Mainz and Trier adopted his doctrines and issued twenty-two decrees, known as the “Punctuation of Ems”, that demanded certain episcopal rights against Rome, which included the rights of the bishops to have authority over convents and monasteries; that faculties granted to bishops every five years by Rome be granted *in perpetuum*; that papal acts could not be published in a diocese without the permission of the bishop; and that a new episcopal oath be written. In the end, the rest of the German bishops refused to follow their lead. Like Gallicanism, Febronianism was finally laid to rest at Vatican I, in 1870.

Suppression of the Jesuits

Ignatius Loyola founded the Jesuits in the 16th century. By the 18th century the order consisted of some thirty thousand members. They had been quite influential and successful, but their success and independence had won them many enemies.

Their successful missionary efforts around the world earned them the envy of other religious orders, like the Dominicans and Franciscans. The Jesuit approach was called “inculturation”, because they adapted themselves, their message and rituals to the local cultures, rather than packaging Christianity in the European culture, scholastic philosophy

and demanding the use of Latin in the liturgy.

For example, in China, the Jesuit Ricci included certain forms of Confucianism, ancient names for God and ancestor worship in introducing Christianity to their culture. In Japan, Xavier adopted clothing, language and customs of the upper class.

The success of this approach caused the Dominicans and Franciscans to complain to Rome. Rome responded by rejecting their innovations in 1715, (they were not again approved until the time of Pope Pius XII in the 20th century.)

They were also attacked by the Gallicanists because of their loyalty to Rome and by the Jansenists who accused them of laxity in moral issues. The intellectual community accused them of being too conservative and not keeping up with the times. The Protestants hated them because of their intellectual attacks on their theologies

Rulers, especially those in Spain and Portugal, disliked them because of their independence and their presence in the colonies of Central and South America where they defended the natives against exploitation by the colonists and were accused of fomenting revolution.

Thus for a number of reasons, including the bankruptcy of the Order, the Jesuits were suppressed in Spain, Portugal and France. Finally, fearful of a total break in relations with these Catholic countries, the weak Pope Clement XIV succumbed to political pressure and suppressed the order in 1773. The head of the Jesuit order was thrown into prison, where he died. Jesuit religious houses were destroyed, 200 seminaries and 614 high schools and universities were closed and some twenty thousand priests and brothers were uprooted from their places of service. The Jesuits were finally restored by Pius VIII in 1814.

Summary

The 18th century was another down era for the Church and especially for the papacy. The Church had come to be dominated by the rulers of the European nations. Catholic intellectuals, especially theologians and philosophers, seemed to be out of touch with the advances in science and philosophy. With the suppression of the Jesuits and the abandonment of inculturation, the missionary efforts in the East floundered.

The union of Church and State, with the Church having the final word (Christendom), still seemed to be the ideal situation from the standpoint of Rome. However, the domination of Church by the state had become the reality. Both the Church and the State would have to wait for the American “experiment” to be comfortable with the ideal of the separation of the Church and State.