The Graverobber Council

Part II: The Jansenist Heresy

Part I on the Hussite Heresy and Today:
https://catholicfamilynews.com/blog/2024/12/30/the-graverobber-council-the-hussites-and-vatican-ii/

By Murray Rundus

During one of his signature in-flight Papal interviews in 2021, Pope Francis shared an anecdote from a time he celebrated Mass in a rest home. As he prepared to distribute the Eucharist, he invited all present to indicate their desire to receive it by raising their hands. Among the attendees was an elderly woman who, after receiving Communion, revealed to him, "Thank you, Father, thank you: I'm Jewish." The Pope's response, laden with an attempt at humor, was, "No, the one that I gave to you is Jewish, too." He added in the interview that "those who are not in the community cannot receive Communion, like this Jewish woman, but the Lord wanted to reward her without my knowledge."

This event, astonishingly overlooked even by traditionalist commentators, carries an implicit endorsement of non-Catholics, even non-Christians, partaking in the Eucharist and being 'rewarded.' The anecdote, bizarre enough on its own, spiraled into further confusion as the Pontiff used it to symbolize a skewed theology of Communion — one starkly opposed to the sacramental standards upheld by traditionalists, whom he disparages by likening them to the oft-maligned Jansenists. "Communion is not a prize for the perfect, no? Let's think of Port Royal (des Champs), of the issue with Angélique Arnaud, Jansenism: those who are perfect can receive Communion. Communion is a gift, a present; the presence of Jesus in His Church and in the community. This is the theology."[1]

Who Are the Real Jansenists?

The accusation of Jansenism, which is now continuously wielded against the traditionalist movement, serves as a favored epithet by some Catholics, associating traditionalists with rigidity, a Calvinistic disdain for human nature, and a staunch resistance to Rome. Yet, upon closer inspection, this allegation drips with irony. It is not the traditionalists but the reforms of Vatican II that are steeped in Jansenist influences. In the highest echelons of the Church, we witness yet another macabre exhumation: the grave-robber Council of Vatican II, prying open the tombs of long-buried heresies to adorn them with a modern veneer. The intellectual necromancers have dug up the corpses of Jansenism, parading them in the guise of progressive theology. The result is a theological landscape haunted by the ghosts of error,

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masquerading as enlightenment and leading the faithful into a den of doctrinal disarray.

Intellectual Grave Robbing

In my last article of this series, I argued that the Hussite heresy, along with later Protestant ones, largely stemmed from the external crisis of the Black Death. A similar origin point can be found in a series of heresies that emerged about two centuries after the Protestant rebellion. This time, however, it wasn't a plague of the body but a plague of the mind that spread across Europe in the form of the so-called 'Enlightenment.' Just as the Hussite and Protestant heresies sought to address the issues of their time through *aggiornamento* (bringing up to date) and ressourcement (returning to the sources), so too did the Jansenists attempt to reform the Church under the guise of a purer, more rigorous adherence to doctrine. As Alexander Sedgwick notes in his book *Jansenism in Seventeenth-Century France*, "Many interpretations of French Jansenism have appeared since the seventeenth century. Often contradictory, these interpretations, in many instances, reflect the prejudices and ideals of particular eras. They make any attempt to define the movement more difficult."[2] Part of the reason for this complexity is that Jansenism was just one facet of a broader dissident movement against the Church's traditional teachings during the 17th and 18th centuries. It existed alongside movements like the liberal Josephinism of Emperor Joseph II, the proto-ecumenism of Febronianism in Germany, and the French Gallicanism, which Yves Congar would later call "the vanguard of Vatican II."[3] One understanding of Jansenism comes from Shaun Blanchard's *The Synod of Pistoia and Vatican II*, a work supportive of the conciliar reform effort which claims that Vatican II finds its origins and inspirations in Jansenism, and that this is actually a positive development. In this work, Blanchard says, "Jansenism came to denote a Catholic position that maintained various combinations of reformist ideas, pastoral tendencies, and theological or even political orientations and aversions."[4] This intellectual pestilence indeed took shape in many forms, but it began with the ideas of Cornelius Jansen, whose legacy would spark a movement both austere and contentious.

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Jansenism: An Intellectual's Creed

Jansenism developed much over time but began as a strictly intellectual position rooted in the austere principles laid out by Cornelius Jansen in his posthumous work "*Augustinus*." The 1911 Encyclopaedia Britannica captures this nascent period of Jansenism well: "In Jansen's opinion the Church was suffering from three evils. The official scholastic theology was anything but evangelical. Having set out to embody the mysteries of faith in human language, it had fallen a victim to the excellence of its own methods; language proved too strong for mystery. Theology sank into a branch of dialectic; whatever would not fit in with a logical formula was cast aside as useless. But average human nature does not take kindly to a syllogism, and theology had ceased to have an appreciable influence on popular religion. Simple souls found their spiritual pasture in little mincing 'devotions'; while robuster minds built up for themselves a natural moralistic religion, quite as close to Epictetus as to Christianity."[5]

This period of Jansenism, shrouded in intellectual elitism, reflected the very spirit of Vatican II that now pervades the Church: a critique of Scholasticism, a distrust of logic, and an emphasis on mystery, coupled with a disdain for popular devotions. Positions of such high intellectual pretension, grounded in a critique of popular practice, rarely ignite mass appeal. But Jansen's ideas, with their focus on human depravity, the necessity of divine grace, and

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the transformative power of conversion, found a surprising resonance among some Catholics. To many, this stood in contrast to the perceived Jesuitical laxity of the era, offering a severe but seemingly "purer" path back to the roots of faith.

A Religion of Elitism: The Select Few of Port-Royal

When looking at the Jansenist movement, certain dynamic figures emerge, among whom Du Vergier, the abbot known colloquially as St. Cyran, stands preeminent. Although nurtured in the intellectual cradle of the Jesuits, St. Cyran emerged as one of their most formidable adversaries, earning the epithet "the hammer of the Jesuits."[6] The Jesuits of that age, were seen as lenient in the confessional and proponents of Molinism, we see these critiques especially in St. Cyran.

St. Cyran, having been a companion of Jansen, was not just a scholar but a man of action, translating the doctrines of Jansenism into tangible, rigorous practice as the spiritual director at Port-Royal, a convent of Cistercian nuns. It was here that his strictures on contrition and confession became actualized: "Saint-Cyran believed that a man must have contrition before he could be absolved of his sins, that is to say that a man's love of God had to be such that he was deeply penitent and fully resolved to change his life in order that he might more easily avoid sin. Genuine repentance, according to the abbe, should emanate from a love of God and not from attrition, or fear of God's punishment…Saint-Cyran insisted that attrition was based upon love of self, and that he who was motivated by attrition to confess his sins was acting in his own interests and was therefore not worthy of redemption."[7]

Consider the psychological ordeal imposed upon the poor nuns at Port-Royal, compelled to scruple in order to discern if their contrition was indeed flawless while under the threat of mortal sin! I think any of us who have struggled with scrupulosity might see this as a type of Dantean punishment we might see in the Inferno. Their relentless penance paradoxically drove them deeper into the recesses of self-examination, making Jansenism itself a religion of self-love. This regime, however, found favor with the Abbess Arnauld of Port-Royal, and under her aegis, the convent became nothing less than a laboratory for Jansenism's practical application. The effects were noticeable, rendering Port-Royal both a beacon of the Jansenist doctrines and disciplines, and a focal point of controversy within the broader world of Catholic doctrinal debates. In this context, the narrative of Jansenism began to not merely be a chapter of theological dissent but also a psychological and existential struggle played out within the walls of Port-Royal.

It should be noted that Jansenism was not a faith of the common man but one of the elite, those who saw themselves as the guardians of the Church's antiquarian traditions. "By its

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own theological tenets and disciplinary practice, it was an elite doctrine. It not only denied that all men were saved and affirmed that the elect were few in number, but its sacramental practice emphasized these theological dogmas in daily life."[8] These were the followers of Port-Royal, who fashioned themselves as a select cadre, tasked with restoring the early Church's pure principles and practices, but in the process promoting innovations. The parallels with the reformers of the Second Vatican Council are striking and unmistakable. There was no mass movement stirred by the humble prayers of the laywoman fingering her rosary beads; nor was it driven by the spontaneous desires of cloistered nuns, eager to shed their habits in the name of modernization. Rather, it was the intelligentsia, the theologians, and our trusted elite that clamored for reform, for a revolution in doctrine and practice. The dismantling of altars and the stripping away of statues were not the desires of the everyday faithful but the ambitions of an influential class seeking to reshape the Church under the guise of *aggiornamento*.

Among such elite for the Jansenists was Blaise Pascal, a figure of immense intellect, whose disdain for the moral compromises of his era drew him to the austere life at Port-Royal. Here, amidst the Jansenists, Pascal found his spiritual refuge and his critique of society: "The great have wished to be flattered. The Jesuits have wished to be loved by the great. They have all been worthy to be abandoned to the spirit of lying, the one party to deceive, the others to be deceived. They have been avaricious, ambitious, voluptuous. Worthy disciples of such masters, they have sought flatterers and have found them."[9]

Pascal's critique was not just of moral failings but of a profound betrayal of the Gospel's simplicity and purity, but he attempted to find a solution that would remove the foundations of a simple layman's spirituality. In our modern times, we witness a similar pattern with the luminaries of the Conciliar period, figures such as Yves Congar, Henri de Lubac, and Jacques Maritain. These were no mere academics but profoundly intelligent thinkers who desired to rectify the perceived corruptions around them, and revivify a theological and philosophical world that had (according to them) grown stale with Neo-Thomism. But in doing so they ironically overlooked the common faithful, those most in need of the Church's steadying hand in providing stability. For the Jansenists, the casualty was easy access to God's mercy through confession; for our contemporaries, it was the entire traditional doctrine, liturgy, and Catholic spirit that were compromised. Thus, in both ages, we see a remarkable symmetry: the elite, driven by perhaps noble but severely misguided intentions, reshaping the spiritual life in ways that unsettled the foundations of the ordinary believer. This calls us to both correct and critique these elites and their devastation but also to an empathy for those like Pascal and his modern counterparts, who, in their quest to purify, forgot that true reform must always nurture the roots even as it seeks to prune the branches.

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A Jansenist crucifix set, notice Christ's arms going straight up, a symbol showing that He only died for some.

The Rise of Erroneous Reform: From Pistoia to the Present

The Jansenist controversy seemed largely buried after the Papal Bull *Unigenitus* marked the end of its toleration in France. But as we saw in the previous part of this series, heresies tend to zombify, arising long after they are put to rest. This would come in the form of what Shaun Blanchard calls a "forerunner to the Second Vatican Council,"[10] the pseudo-Synod of Pistoia held in 1786 within the diocese of Pistoia. As previously mentioned, Jansenism was one of many so-called "reform" movements of the 17th and 18th centuries that sought to change the Church to be more in line with the Enlightenment, and Pistoia can be seen as the culmination of those movements, brought together by the brother of Joseph II, the emperor whose policies we now call the liberalizing "Josephinism." The uniting factor that brought this synod together was, in fact, Jansenistic tendencies, as recognized in the first

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article of the bull that condemned it, *Auctorem Fidei*. "The first article of *Auctorem Fidei* attacked Jansenism as the root of Pistoia's cluster of errors."[11] While the synod's errors were condemned, their echoes reverberated through history, finding new life in the modern era.

The most striking of these similarities to Vatican II can be found in its opinions on religious liberty. The Synod declared that Our Lord "did not want to found a kingdom or a temporal monarchy and restricted all the powers He gave to the Church to things spiritual." Moreover, it insisted that the Church must reject "the use of force and violence to obtain external subjection to its decrees." Their witty quip became, "The mind is not persuaded with the lash, and the heart is not reformed by prison and fire."[12] How familiar this sounds to those acquainted with the Church of *Dignitatis Humanae*, a Church that has fervently pushed for the abolition of the Catholic State. Vatican II had merely accomplished what the Jansenist rebels at Pistoia had long sought to achieve. In this modern reenactment, the principles of Pistoia were brought up from the grave and fulfilled, cloaked under the name of progressive reform, yet rooted in the same rebellious spirit that sought to separate the union of faith and state, replacing it with a nebulous ideal of liberty and conscience.

Much of the liturgical destruction that followed Vatican II finds its origins in the Synod of Pistoia. This gathering of reformers, in their misguided zeal, deemed it pleasing to have only one altar in each church, claiming to follow the "ancient customs of the Church" — a notion condemned by *Auctorem Fidei*. Do we now find any side altars in *Novus Ordo* parishes that aren't mere decorations? The days when the beautiful practice of multiple private Masses being celebrated simultaneously in diocesan parishes are long gone. The Synod's reformist fervor didn't stop there. They clamored for the vernacular to replace Latin in the liturgy, for the Mass to be recited aloud, and for the Breviary and Missal to be purged of any so-called "legends." They sought to strip away the complexity of the Mass, calling instead for a stark, simplified rite.[13] Did we not see the same revered "legends" of saints like St. Philomena and St. Simon of Trent discarded, their stories seen as fanciful relics of a bygone era? Did we not see our altars stripped and simplified; the liturgy made into the barren wasteland that it is now? The condemned reformers at Pistoia would merely have to wait two centuries for the Second Vatican Council to exhume their errors and impose them on the Church.

A Church on Living Rock

In tracing the lineage of the Council of our time, we uncover a persistent thread of elitism and antiquarianism masquerading as reform. There is no trace of that beautiful Medieval spirit that was built upon what was laid. Rather, the spirit that occupies these elites is one of wanting to dig the whole foundation up in vain hopes of finding the antiquarian bones of a fabricated past that doesn't exist. When a man of faith asks the elite why he digs up his

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foundation, that man of faith is told that he simply doesn't understand, that he is not predestined to be one of the elite, and that he is too rigid to understand. Let us resist these graverobbers; let us go back to the spirit of our fathers in the Faith, recognizing the good and bad and opposing the errors and corruptions of our time. The true foundation of faith is built on Living Rock, not the dust of dead doctrines.

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"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." (Matthew 16:24)

Understanding the Crusades
Part One – The Islamic Aggression

By Phillip Campbell

The Crusades are a topic of perennial debate. Despite ending more than 750 years ago, they still provoke passionate discussion among Catholics and non-Catholics alike. For some, the Crusades are a sign of the vibrancy and strength of medieval Catholicism at the pinnacle of its influence. For others, the Crusades are reprehensible acts of religious violence – a blot on the Church's legacy that Catholics should be ashamed of.

As with other historical controversies, the truth about the Crusades tends to be overshadowed by partisan bickering; people get so invested in what they think the Crusades symbolize that the actual history becomes obscured. They are less interested in learning history and more interested in using the Crusades as a club to bludgeon home a point. Today we will begin to rectify this with a series of articles on the Crusades, beginning with the backstory of the Crusading movement, which will give important historical context to the events that unfolded during the crusading era.

Too many histories of the Crusades begin with 1095, when the First Crusade was summoned at the Council of Clermont by Pope Urban II. This is an undesirable starting point, as it deprives us of the important background context that leads up to Clermont. Today we will focus on understanding the history of Islamic-Christian relations in the East up to the eve of the First Crusade, which will set the stage for further study of the Crusades proper in future installments.

The essential point we should understand at the outset is that the Crusades were primarily defensive wars – they were a Christian response to increasing Islamic aggression in the Middle East. They were also an act of Christian solidarity, witnessing Latin speaking Christians of the West aiding Greek speaking Christians of the East despite the tragic schism that had split the two churches back in 1054. We should keep these points in mind when reviewing the history of this period.



Templar Knights, by Giuseppe Rava

The religion of Islam traces its origin to the year 610

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The Modern Crusade: The Church vs Organized Naturalism

Brian M. McCall

Catholic Family News held its first in person conference since 2019 on March 1 and 2 in Florida. The theme was Christ's Program for Peace v. Satan's Plan for Disorder according to the writings of Father Dennis Fahey. About 100 people attended from around the country. Traditional Latin Mass was offered each morning by our two invited priest speakers, Father Michael McMahon, SSPX and Father Matthew, OSB. We had a public recitation of the Rosary every day after lunch. For those who purchased the meals, there was a great opportunity to visit with the speakers and to get to know new Catholics from around the country.

Saturday opened with Mass being offered by Father McMahon. We knew the devil was not happy at the goal of this conference to expose his plans. During the Post Communion the hotel's speakers started blaring pop music. As a few men scrambled to find a hotel worker to shut it down, I realized all the devil could do is lash out with little annoyances and this mean our goal was worthwhile.

The Six Point Plan

After breakfast the conferences opened with an introduction of the overall theme and the six points of Christ's Plan for order, according to Father Fahey:

- The Church is supernatural and supranatural. All people must acknowledge the nature of Christ's Church as the only means of salvation.
- Nations are obligated to recognize Christ's Church and that the Church has the power to intervene in temporal affairs as guardian of the divine and natural law.
- The Christian family



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[1] All quotes of this interview are from https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2021/09/15/pope-francis-biden-abortion-plane-241435.

[2] Alexander Sedgwick, *Jansenism in Seventeenth-Century France*, p. ix.

[3] Shaun Blanchard, *The Synod of Pistoia and Vatican II,* p. 62.

[4] Ibid., p. 68.

[5] 1911 *Encyclopedia Britannica* article on Jansenism.

[6] Brian E. Strayer, *Suffering Saints,* p. 27.

[7] Sedgwick, *op. cit.,* p. 28

[8] William Ritchey Newton, *Port-Royal and Jansenism* (1974), p. 562.

[9] Pascal's Pensees, 918, translated by W.F. Trotter.

[10] Blanchard, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

[11] Ibid., p. 140.

[12] Ibid., pp. 156-157.

[13] Ibid., pp. 165-173.

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