

Evangelical Movements Within The Church Of Rome



I was offline for a week to get a broken bone fixed. Now I'm back to work!

This article is from chapter 31 of "Out of the Labyrinth: The Conversion of a Roman Catholic Priest" by former Roman Catholic priest Leo Herbert Lehmann, first published in 1947 and made available online by The Lutheran Library Publishing Ministry LutheranLibrary.org.

Leo Herbert Lehmann (1895-1950) was an Irish author, editor, and director of a Protestant ministry, Christ's Mission in New York. **He was a priest in the Roman Catholic Church who later in life converted to Protestantism** and served as the editor of The Converted Catholic Magazine. He authored magazine articles, books and pamphlets, condemning the programs and activities of the Roman Catholic Church. (Quoted from Wikipedia)

I'm posting this chapter because it has encouraging information I have never heard from anyone before, testimonials from members of the Catholic church including priests and nuns who had true saving faith in the grace of Jesus Christ but who remained in the Church.

CAN ROMAN CATHOLICS BE SAVED without breaking with their Church? Are there any Evangelical Christian believers within the Roman Catholic Church? These are questions which deserve, and require, extended answers.

It is **not generally known that movements toward acceptance of Evangelical Christian beliefs have always existed within the Roman Catholic Church** – both before and after the Reformation. Protestants have been so engrossed with the history of their own Church since the Reformation that they know little of the struggles toward the revival of Evangelical Christianity within the Church of Rome since the sixteenth century. Because of this, **Protestants today have lost perspective of their own teachings**, and a necessary sense of contrast between the Gospel teaching which they believe, and the opposite erroneous teaching and practice of Roman Catholicism from which the early Protestants broke away. These early Protestants saw that contrast etched in all its clarity because **they knew both sides**.

The shining of a bright light on a dark object shows up its true condition. In the same way, the actual doctrinal state of Roman Catholicism is fully seen only when justification of sinners through faith in the finished sacrifice of Christ is definitely and fully preached against the background of the errors of Roman Catholicism. **For the main dividing line in the struggle of Roman Catholicism against Evangelical Christianity is drawn between their opposing views as to how the grace of salvation comes to the souls of men.** It is upon this ground that the Jesuits have fought their Counter- Reformation – not only against Protestants, but **also against those who have tried to reassert Evangelical teaching within the Roman Church itself** after the example of the Protestant reformers of the sixteenth century.

Three-Cornered Conflict

There have been, in fact, not just two but three sides to the religious struggle during the four centuries since the Reformation – between Protestantism and Jesuit Catholicism on the one hand, and Jesuit Catholicism and Evangelical factions within the Roman Church itself, on the other. The Jesuits have been as harsh and uncompromising against those who opposed them from within their own Church, as against the Protestants from the outside. It is sad to have to admit that today, there is little, if any, life left in Evangelical movements within the Church of Rome. The Jesuits have succeeded, almost completely, in crushing out the remnants of criticism in the Catholic Church of their teaching about grace and the means of salvation. Their **Pelagian doctrine of salvation by works of man** himself, with all it implies in their moral theology and devotional practices, is now almost universally accepted or reluctantly acquiesced in by the universal Roman Catholic Church.

(**Note:** Pelagianism is a set of beliefs associated with the British monk Pelagius (circa AD 354–420), who taught in Rome in the late fourth and early fifth centuries. Pelagius denied the doctrines of original sin and total depravity. According to his theology, people are not naturally sinful, but can live holy lives in harmony with God's will and thereby **earn salvation through good works.**)

The very fury of Jesuit opposition to the Gospel teaching of salvation by faith, as reasserted by Luther, Calvin, and other sixteenth century reformers, has led to the denial today in Roman Catholic teaching of almost every truth upon which the Gospel teaching about the grace of salvation rests.

Council Of Trent

But it was not so within the Roman Catholic Church at the time of the Reformation, and even within the Council of Trent (held between 1545 and 1563) itself, which was convened shortly thereafter for the special purpose of resisting the Evangelical teachings of the Protestant reformers. Many Roman Catholic churchmen in that council maintained that the only way to stop Luther and his associates from causing a rift in the Christian Church was **open opposition from the Church of Rome itself against the Pelagian error of the Jesuits**, and a firm declaration of salvation full and free by acceptance

of the grace of God through the merits alone of Jesus Christ.

Had these Catholic spokesmen been listened to, the history of Christianity from that day to this would have been different. But the Jesuits triumphed in the Council of Trent on this vital question, as they did in the Vatican Council of 1870 on the question of Papal Infallibility. They have now this latter weapon of undisputed papal power with which to whip everyone – priests, bishops and laity alike – within the Roman Church into blind acceptance of their peculiar teaching about salvation and their devotional practices.

In the Council of Trent the Archbishop of Sienna, two bishops and five others, fought long and hard against the Jesuits by upholding justification simply and solely by the merits of Christ through faith. The English Cardinal Pole, who presided at the Council in the absence of Pope Paul III, also entreated those assembled not to reject this doctrine simply because it was held by Martin Luther. But the Jesuits – through their spokesmen Lainez and Salmeron – were adamant against even a compromise, and in the end secured adoption of the long list of Tridentine canons and anathemas that were finally pronounced against Protestant Evangelical teaching. Cardinal Pole and the Archbishop of Sienna left the Council in despair. So bitterly has the Jesuit Lainez been hated by Catholic anti-Jesuit writers that they have gone so far as to interpret Rev. 9:1, as if he were the fallen star who let loose the scorpion-locusts – the Jesuits – on the world.

Rift Within Catholicism

But the opponents of the Jesuits in the Catholic Church itself did not submit at once after the Council of Trent. The fight went on, continually at first, intermittently ever since. The Jesuits' chief opponents on the teaching about grace have been the *Dominicans*, and to this day a wide rift still exists between these two Orders in the Church of Rome, in spite of apparent unity from the outside. The Dominicans follow their great theologian St. Thomas Aquinas, who adopted a watered-down interpretation of Augustine's teaching on grace as an entirely free gift of God, and put it in his medieval syllogistic form. This is enough in the eyes of the Jesuits to brand them as 'Calvinistic.' Few people today know of this serious rift within the Roman Catholic Church, or stop to think that it is actually wider than any doctrinal difference separating the denominations of Protestantism.

The conflict concerning the nature of grace was openly continued between the Jesuits and Dominicans till the end of the sixteenth century, and on into the seventeenth. In 1596, Pope Clement VIII consented to hear both sides and promised to give a decision. No less than sixty-five meetings and thirty-seven disputations were held on the subject in his presence. Pope Clement himself seems, from his writings, to have favored the Dominican side, but he put off giving a decision. The so-called infallible mouthpiece of God could not decide the most vital question of Christian teaching, on the question that really matters in the whole gamut of Christian doctrine: the truth about how men can be saved!

Pope Clement's hesitation can easily be explained. **The Jesuits by then had**

become, not only powerful, but violent and dangerous. They had made themselves the great political prop of the Roman Church that had been shaken to its foundations in the principal countries of Europe. They went so far as to threaten the Pope himself, since they counted on having King Henry IV of France on their side. Pope Clement was also well aware that the political power of the papacy at that time was on the wane, threatened by Protestant England under Queen Elizabeth on one side, and by Protestant Germany, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia on the other. He was advised by the astute French Cardinal du Perron to leave matters as they were, since even a Protestant could subscribe to the doctrines of the Dominicans.

The dispute was continued under Pope Paul V, who became Pope in 1605. Seventeen meetings were held in his presence, but he too failed to condemn the Jesuits. Venice at that time was at war with the papacy, and the Jesuits fought so well for the Pope that they suffered expulsion by the Catholic rulers and people of the Venetian Republic rather than yield to the Pope's enemies. It thus seemed more important to the Pope to please the Jesuits than to uphold the most vital doctrine of the Christian Church. In the end Pope Paul issued the Bull *Unigenitus*, in which he promised that a decision would be published "at the proper time," and that in the meantime, neither side was to malign the other. And so it remains to this day in the Roman Catholic Church: **no official decision has ever been made as to how the grace of salvation comes to the souls of men!**

Jesuits Vs. Dominicans

This was a triumph for the Jesuits, and they have used it to great advantage ever since against both Protestants and those within the Roman Church who would dare to dispute their Pelagian doctrine of grace.

They have ruthlessly crushed any priest, bishop or even pope who seemed to veer in any way to the doctrine of the Reformation, namely that we can do no good works acceptable to God without the grace of God through Christ 'preventing' us; that the will to good, and the works we perform as a result of this good will, are all a free gift of God.

This was the teaching of Augustine against Pelagius and his followers, which was revived by the Protestant reformers. The Dominicans have always tended to this Augustinian doctrine of grace because St. Thomas Aquinas incorporated some of Augustine's teachings about grace into his *Summa Theologica*. But even **the Dominicans never have dared to carry Augustine's teaching to its logical conclusion, as Calvin did, since it would have led to the complete rejection of papal power.** The Jesuits have made sure to this day that the Dominicans would never be allowed to go so far. But certain sections of the Roman Church are still accused by the Jesuits as "tainted" with Calvinism because of their advocacy even of the watered-down teachings of Augustine as expounded chiefly by the Dominican theologians.

A particular instance of this may be seen in the fact that most Roman Catholic priests, especially of the Dominican order, who renounce the Church of Rome join up with the Presbyterian Church and ministry. Two examples recently noted by *The Converted Catholic Magazine* are Rev. Dr. George

Barrois, formerly a Dominican priest and professor at Catholic University in Washington, D. C., now a Presbyterian minister and Professor at Princeton Seminary, and Rev. J. A. Fernandez, for sixteen years a priest of the Dominican Order, now a Presbyterian pastor in Philadelphia.

The most notable example of the opposition to Jesuit Pelagianism is that of the Jansenists, who publicly professed their belief in the Evangelical teaching of salvation and justification by faith alone in the merits of Jesus Christ, but who still steadfastly continued within the Church of Rome. The suffering they endured from the Jesuits, the wonderful example and encouragement they supplied to those within the Roman Church who secretly resented the domination of the Jesuits, should give hope that it may not yet be too late for a second Reformation within the Church of Rome in our day.

Jansenius

The Jansenists got their name from Cornelius Jansenius, Bishop of Ypres, who was born in 1585 and died of the plague in 1638, after being bishop for only two years. It was only after his death that his opposition to the Pelagian teaching of the Jesuits became known. But for many years he had made it his business to study the writings of Augustine on the vital subjects of grace, free will and human impotence, original sin, election, faith, etc. Whereas Calvin used Augustine's teaching on these subjects to oppose the whole nature and structure of Roman Catholicism, Jansenius used it only for one immediate object – to check the rising power of the Jesuits and their false teachings within the Church of Rome. His object was not to undermine the Roman Catholic Church as a whole, but to save it from complete corruption in matters of faith and morals.

He put his findings in a book, entitled, *Augustinus*, which was published in Louvain two years after his death and was made the chief weapon by his followers to save the Catholic Church from the evil influence of the Jesuits. For there were many within the Church of Rome at that time who sighed for some real spirituality and who, like Bishop Jansenius, **found in the doctrine of salvation by grace, even though only partially and imperfectly apprehended, a great solace and an assurance** which the ritualistic observances of the Church of Rome could not supply.

Jesuit Opposition To Grace

That was before the blight of Jesuitism had descended completely on the Roman Catholic Church as we find it today. But the Jesuits were then, a hundred years after their Order was founded, rapidly consolidating their power by their lax system of casuistry and other teachings which deadened the conscience. They had by then introduced themselves everywhere as confessors, and had gained great influence by softening all ideas of guilt. Their main purpose was to introduce into Catholic teaching the exclusion of real repentance before God as a prerequisite for forgiveness of sin. In this way salvation would become entirely dependent upon the priest, to the ultimate advantage of the Jesuits themselves – who have always aimed to make themselves the ruling caste of priests in the church of Rome. They have achieved this objective today, and hold the whip hand not only in religious

matters, but also as the high political rulers of the Vatican.

What the Jesuits most abhorred, and continue today to abhor, is the true Christian teaching of justification of sinners through faith in the one finished sacrifice of Christ, and repentance for sin directly toward God. They were quick to see the danger to their aims in Jansenius' book, *Augustinus*, which upheld this true Christian teaching. They therefore had the book banned, and began by venting their enmity on Jean Baptiste du Vergier de Hauranne – better known as St. Cyran, after the monastery of that name of which he was abbot. St. Cyran had secretly studied the doctrine of grace together with Jansenius at Louvain. He was also connected with the celebrated Abbey of Port Royal in France, a community of nuns which had grown very lax in discipline and morals. Yet, it was through this French convent that what is known as "Jansenism" began, and which for almost seventy-five years carried on its remarkable fight to rid the Catholic Church of the perverse teachings and control of the Jesuits. The cruel methods used by the Jesuits to crush out the Jansenists were equalled only by the atrocities of the Nazi Gestapo in our time. **The inmates of Port Royal and their friends were hounded, brutally persecuted, excommunicated, and jailed, because they professed, above all else, the Evangelical doctrines of justification by grace.**

Port Royal

There are two things about the nuns of Port Royal and their friends that Protestants and Catholics alike today may well be amazed at. One was that they persisted in remaining within the Church of Rome while professing absolute faith in the saving grace of Jesus Christ alone. They strenuously objected to being called Protestants.

The second extraordinary fact is that the abbey of Port Royal, which was to become the great champion of this Evangelical teaching, was so lax in discipline in 1602, that Mother Angelique – under whose later guidance Jansenism thrived there – was appointed abbess when she was but a girl of eleven years old. The church authorities in France and her family connived at this, and had her certified as abbess by the Pope, by pretending she was seventeen!¹

How thoroughly Evangelical the inmates of Port Royal later became – while still remaining within the body of the Roman Catholic Church – may be judged from the story of the last prioress, Mother Dumesnil Courtinaux, as she lay on her dying bed. Port Royal had been finally suppressed and uprooted by the Pope eight years previously, but this last Mother prioress still retained her faith in salvation by grace alone. But she desired to die in good standing in the Catholic Church and begged for the last sacraments. The Bishop of Blois came but refused to administer the sacraments to her, unless she first renounced her faith in the saving grace of Christ. But she remained steadfast in her Evangelical faith.

"What will you do when you have to appear before God, bearing the weight of your sins alone?" the bishop asked her.

The dying prioress replied: "Having made peace through the blood of His cross, my Saviour has reconciled all things unto Himself in the body of His flesh through death, to present us holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in His sight, if we continue in the faith grounded and settled, and not be moved away from the hope of the Gospel."

She then added, with clasped hands, "In Thee, O Lord, have I trusted, nor wilt Thou suffer the creature that trusts in Thee to be confounded." The bishop reviled her, but she meekly urged, with tears, that she be permitted to receive the sacraments. He firmly rejected her plea as coming from a "confirmed heretic."

"Well, my Lord," she replied, wiping her eyes, "I am content to bear with resignation whatever deprivation my God sees fit. I am convinced that His divine grace can supply even the want of sacraments."

She fell asleep in the Lord that same night, March 18, 1716, in her seventieth year. Such was the Evangelical spirit of the followers of Jansenius at Port Royal.²

Sufferings And Persecutions

The abbess Mere Angelique brought about an Evangelical reformation not only at Port Royal, at the head of which she had been so strangely placed at the age of eleven, but also in many others, such as the rich abbey of Maubuisson, which also had become very corrupt. A group of men famous for their scholarship and piety also became her disciples. Among them may be mentioned Pascal, Le Maitre, Quesnel, Lancelot, Le Maitre de Sacy, Nicole and Singlin.

No fewer than four popes – Urban VII, Innocent X, Alexander VII, and Clement XI – fulminated bulls of excommunication, at the instigation of the Jesuits, against these defenders of Evangelical teachings. They had also against them King Louis XIV of France and his infamous mistress, Madame de Maintenon, Cardinal Richelieu and Cardinal Mazarin. Four French bishops favored and tried to help them. The Dominicans, the Franciscans, and the Benedictines, who to this day still timidly oppose the Jesuits on the teaching of grace, defended the Jansenists of Port Royal as much as they dared. But all the power of the Church of Rome and the King of France was in the hands of the Jesuits, and they used it mercilessly to wipe out every trace of the Jansenists and their Gospel teaching of salvation which they detested and condemned as an "abominable heresy."

Finally, on July 11, 1709, Cardinal de Noailles, archbishop of Paris, was forced by the Pope and the Jesuits to order the complete suppression of the abbey of Port Royal. On the following October 29, the valley was filled with the king's troops, the abbey taken over and the nuns arrested and placed in confinement. The following year the cloister was pulled down; in 1711 the bodies of those buried there were dug up with gross brutality and indecency; two years later the church itself was destroyed. Cardinal de Noailles had ordered it all done according to the bull, *Vineam Domini*, of Pope Clement XI, in which he attacked the doctrines of grace. The cardinal later repented of his deed, and made a visit to the ruins of Port Royal, where on bended knees,

he made public testimony of repentance for his weakness. After the death of King Louis XIV and his mistress, Cardinal de Noailles interceded for the imprisoned nuns of Port Royal and had them released.

Jansenism continued in Holland and other countries of Europe after the destruction of Port Royal. Ranke, the historian, says of the Jansenists: "We find traces of them in Vienna and in Brussels, in Spain and Portugal, and in every part of Italy. They disseminated their doctrines throughout all Roman Catholic Christendom, sometimes openly, often in secret."³

But it was in the Protestant country of Holland that they found best shelter and most freedom. It was there that they were able to organize into a regular Church body under their own bishops. Almost all the Roman Catholics in Holland, to the number of 330,000, at the end of the seventeenth century were Jansenists. The Jesuits had little power there, and they themselves had gone so far in their intrigues and immoral teachings that Pope Clement XIV – who had Jansenist sentiments – yielded to the demands of the Catholic countries of Europe and completely abolished the Jesuits in 1773.

Catholics Today (1947)

Today also there are many sensitive souls within the Roman Catholic Church who sigh for true spirituality and an assurance of salvation that their priests cannot offer. They fear, however, to break with their Church, and continue to accept the sacraments in order to remain in good standing. Strictly speaking, there is nothing in Roman Catholic teaching to prevent Roman Catholics from professing secretly (*in foro interno*) their faith in the absolute saving power of the Gospel. What is forbidden, under pain of excommunication, is the public profession (*in foro externo*) of such belief.

Thus a Roman Catholic who comes to the true knowledge of Christ, is faced with making the decision of either risking excommunication and the opprobrium of his family and friends by openly professing and demonstrating his faith in Christ as all-sufficient Saviour, or avoiding the penalties by keeping it secret in his heart while conforming outwardly to the rules and ritual as commanded by his Church. But today in America, where freedom of religion is guaranteed to all, no one can be excused if he fails to profess openly his faith in Jesus Christ, who warns (Matt. 10:33): "Whosoever shall deny me before men, him also will I deny before my Father which is in heaven."

1. See, *The Jansenists, Their Rise, Persecutions by the Jesuits, and Remnants*, by S. P. Tregelles, London, 1851.↵

2.cf. *The Jansenists*, ut supra, pp. 40-41.↵

3.Op. cit. p. 45.↵