

Blaise Pascal: From Birth to Rebirth to Apologist

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INTRODUCTION

Blaise Pascal was a genius. He was revered as a great mathematician and physicist, an inventor, and the greatest prose stylist in the French language. He was a defender of religious freedom and an apologist of the Christian faith.

He was born June 19, 1623, at Clermont, the capital of Auvergne, which was a small town of about nine thousand inhabitants. He was born to Etienne and Antoinette Pascal. Blaise had two sisters, Gilberte, born in 1620, and Jacqueline, born in 1625.

Blaise was born into a very influential family. His father, Etienne, had been sent to Paris to study law. This type of education was very expensive and only the wealthy could afford such an opportunity. Returning to Clermont in 1610, Etienne began his influential career becoming a member of the lowest court which arbitrated disputes over taxation. Fourteen years later, because of his position and wealth, he was chosen as Deputy President of the Court of Aids at Montferrand. This led him to become one of the most prominent figures in his province.

Blaise had a rough time through the first few years of his life. When he was only one year old, Blaise almost died supposedly by a curse from a witch. Etienne, his

father, demanded that she remove the curse from him and shortly thereafter, he made a complete recovery. Tragedy came to the Pascals in 1626. Blaise's mother, Antoinette died, leaving Etienne with three small children to care for. Although Antoinette was unable to leave any marked influence on Blaise's life, her absence did.

Etienne struggled through his role as a leading citizen of Clermont and being both mother and father to his children for five years. In 1631 the Pascals moved to Paris. The reasons for this move are not certain. It is speculated that Etienne had reached his potential in Clermont and wanted to move to Paris for political advancement. Clearly, Paris was the fountainhead of intellectual thought during the seventeenth century and he wanted the best environment for his son.

While in Paris Blaise began his education and his father accepted full responsibility for his lessons without the help of a tutor. His education was not one of rote memorizing or the formal style which was common for the day. Though apparently rigorous, his schooling included a variety of subjects which were suited to his own aptitudes and interests primarily in the areas of history, literature, and life sciences. Such an education focused upon the answering of problems rather than memorizing massive amounts of material which would have been assimilated and repeated. Blaise had an inseparable curiosity for why things happened

and how they worked. According to Gilberte, Blaise showed signs of great intelligence in all this. "In her biography, Gilberte recalls that he showed signs of intelligence by the little answers he gave, but even more by the questions about the nature of things which astonished everybody."¹

Etienne did not want his son to be trained the way he was in Jesuit schools. He wanted him first and foremost to learn the humanities. He did not teach Latin or Greek to him until he was twelve unlike the Jesuit colleges which taught this at a much earlier age. This was followed by mathematics at the age of fifteen and sixteen which Etienne Pascal considered to be the capstone of young Blaise's education. He was afraid to teach him this subject earlier for fear that his interest in mathematics would hinder the progress of his other studies.

Etienne was unable to divert Blaise's curiosity away from mathematics. This young genius, at age twelve, by taking a piece of charcoal in hand, began drawing lines and circles on the floor and, after studying the results, discovered the thirty-second theorem of the first book of Euclid - - i.e., "The sum of the angles of a triangle is equal to two right angles."²

¹Roger Hazelton, Blaise Pascal: The Genius of His Thought (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), p. 16.

²Blaise Pascal only discovered the thirty-second theorem and not the first thirty two theorems as some have speculated and written. That would have been truly a miraculous event in his life if it were true. Jean Mesnard, Pascal: His Life

Etienne was excited but feared the result of his son's findings. He sought a long time friend who had been a fellow classmate of his in Paris, Jacques Le Pailleur. Le Pailleur and Etienne met at Madame Saintot's salon where poetry and other cultural matters were discussed. Etienne asked Le Pailleur what he should do with this new interest of his son. "Le Pailleur advised Etienne to water this interest, to nurture it, to feed it, to encourage it."³ Soon after this conversation, Blaise found himself in front of papers and books seeking to know the mysteries of mathematics.

Etienne also introduced young Blaise to the scientific circles for which he would later earn respect as a true scientific genius.⁴ At age sixteen, he wrote an Essay on Conic Sections that was eventually published in 1640 for the use of scholars of that day. This led him to discover what is known as Pascal's theorem dealing with

and Works (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1952), p. 12.

³Charles S. MacKenzie, Pascal's Anguish and Joy (New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1973), p. 9.

⁴Etienne began taking Pascal to the meetings of the Academie Libre (now the Academie des Sciences) in which he participated in conversations well beyond his age. F.T.H. Fletcher, Pascal and the Mystical Tradition (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc. 1954), p. 2.

conic sections which he called the "mystic hexagram."⁵

Christianity and religion were not a major part of young Pascal's thoughts at this time, though the influence of his father was apparent. He went to mass with his family at the neighborhood church, Saint Merri, but he seemed more interested in the Gothic arches that soared above his head. However, on Sunday afternoons Etienne would frequently sit down with Blaise and they would discuss Christianity. Etienne would read a passage of the Bible to him and they would discuss the passage as it related to Catholic Doctrine.

Etienne had an "intriguing formula which preserved due respect for revealed truth without hampering natural experiment: 'nothing that has to do with faith can be the concern of the reason'."⁶ This left an indelible impression on Blaise and he later wrote in his Pensées,

All religions and sects in the world have had natural reason for a guide. Christians alone have been constrained to take their rules from without themselves with those which Jesus Christ bequeathed to men of old to be handed down to true believers.⁷

⁵Emile Cailliet, Pascal: The Emergence of Genius (New York: Greenwood Press, 1961), p. 44.

⁶Ernest Mortimer, Blaise Pascal: The Life and Work of a Realist (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), pp. 34-40.

⁷Pensées, 902. All references to the Pensées will be taken from the W.F. Trotter translation. There does not seem to be a controversy over different translations. The only difference is the ordering of the numbers and it is only speculation which is the correct order. Blaise Pascal, Pensées, trans. W.F. Trotter (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co.

A chain of events would take the Pascals out of Paris to a revolutionary hot bed in upper Normandy called Avranches. This is where Blaise would eventually have his religious awakening. Avranches was a small town along the coast of Normandy. As was true of the American Revolution, the people in Avranches and the surrounding cities were oppressed by heavy taxes. A government official came to Avranches and the word was out that a new tax on salt was going to be added. They could take no more. The peasants elected an ecclesiastic which they nicknamed Jean "va-nu-pieds (John the bare-footed) as their leader.⁸ Soon there were nearly 20,000 followers in the revolt and all of Normandy was in an uproar. By the end of August 1639, Rouen, Normandy, became the center of the rebellion.

Cardinal Richelieu, the ruler of France, was back in Paris and wanted the rebellion to end. He sent Field Marshall Gassion and 4000 troops to complete the task. The tax office in Rouen was destroyed during the rebellion and Richelieu appointed Etienne Pascal to be "His majesty's deputy commissioner in upper Normandy for the levying of taxes and duties."⁹ Blaise Pascal and his family moved to Rouen which would be their home for the next seven years.

Inc., 1958).

⁸MacKenzie, p. 47.

⁹Ibid, p. 48.

Blaise watched his father toil long hours over columns of figures regarding his new tax structure. As a result, Blaise conceived the idea of a mechanism that would add, subtract, multiply and divide. Five years and fifty different designs and models later, he came up with the first successful calculating machine. He would also perform many experiments which would give birth to the science of pneumatics (the science of mechanical properties of air and other elastic fluids).

This hard work affected not only his social status as an inventor but also his health. In the fall of 1641, Blaise began to suffer from intense headaches and severe pains in his lower abdomen. Although these ailments constrained him at times, his pursuit for knowledge continued to press him on.

His education progressed rapidly during his stay at Rouen. He mastered Latin and Greek under the tutelage of his father, and he began to read Epictetus, Saint Augustine, and other ancient writers. He read the Bible using the 1615 Louvain edition but often referred to the Vulgate which was still in general use.

In January 1646 a turn of events led Pascal to have what has been called his "first conversion."¹⁰ Etienne was called out of his house to prevent a duel from taking place.

¹⁰J.H. Broome, Pascal (London: Edward Arnold Publishers LTD, 1965), p. 25.

While running to the scene he slipped on the ice and dislocated his hip. Two men, skilled in surgery and medicine, came to his aid and spent many hours with him tending to his needs. These two men were Adrien and Jean Deschamps, who were followers of a new movement within Christianity called Jansenism.¹¹ The Pascals and Deschamps became mutual friends and thus began the process of converting the Pascals to Jansenism.

¹¹Jansenism derives its name from Cornelius Jansen, Bishop of Ypres (1585-1638). Its followers believed the human nature to be radically corrupt, and that Christ did not die for all men. These and other doctrines were taken from Jansen's Book -the Augustinus - published after his death in 1640. Malcolm Hay, The Prejudices of Pascal (London: Aberdeen University Press, 1962), p. 5.

CHAPTER 1

Jansenism and its Influence on Blaise Pascal

The Origins of Jansenism

The impetus behind the Jansenist movement had its origin with Cornelius Jansen and Jean Duvergier de Hauranne, known as the Abbe Saint-Cyran.¹ Jansen and Saint-Cyran were fellow students at Louvain. Jansen believed that the Jesuits had wrongly interpreted St. Augustine and converted Saint-Cyran unto their more Calvinistic interpretation of him. At the University of Louvain, they began their search for a way to bring the Catholic Church away from what they saw as a man-centered theology. This struggle was the result of a controversy that began almost 90 years earlier.

Two professors at Louvain, Michel Baius and the Jesuit Leonard Lessius were particularly prominent in this struggle. Baius held a theological position close to that of Calvinism. Lessius opposed Baius holding to a more moderate position between human freedom and divine grace.² Baius' position was condemned by the pope but the movement

¹Alban Krailsheimer, Pascal (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 6.

²Francis X.J. Coleman, Neither Angel nor Beast: The Life and Work of Blaise Pascal (New York and London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1986), p. 98.

continued to gain supporters. These theories represented two major theological groups during the sixteenth century.

A third group was the Society of Jesus. The main representative of this group was a Spanish theologian, Luis de Molina. Molina published his Concordia liberi arbitrii cum gratiae donis, divina, praescientia, providentia, praedestinatione, et reprobatione, ad nonnullos primae partis D. Thomae articulos at Lisbon in 1588 in order to reconcile the debate between free will and divine grace.³ Molina's position taught that God has given sufficient grace to save everyone through His Son, and everyone is, therefore, predestined regardless of merit or what one does or does not do.⁴ This position was reviewed in Rome by Pope Paul V. However, it was not to be sanctioned by the Church.

Cornelius Jansen realized the effects of Molina's theology among the Jesuits and viewed it as a mortal threat to Catholicism. Jansen saw this doctrine as a revival of early Pelagianism.⁵

Pelagianism derives its name from the British monk and theologian Pelagius. He and Augustine engaged in a rather protracted polemical debate in the fifth century over

³Nigel Abercrombie, The Origins of Jansenism (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1936), p. 93.

⁴Francis X.J. Coleman, p. 98.

⁵Emile Cailliet, The Clue to Pascal (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1943), p. 54.

the nature of sin and grace. Pelagius believed that a person could earn salvation by his own merit, apart from grace. He denied original sin and asserted that man was created free like Adam, able to choose between good and evil.⁶ In 1628 Jansen began what is known today as one of the greatest theological works of the seventeenth century, the Augustinus, which combated this heresy.⁷ The Augustinus was not completed until 1636 which was the same year the author became bishop of Ypres. Cornelius Jansen died before his work was published in Louvain in 1640.

Jansenism And its influence on the Pascals

The views of Jansen became popular and many were converted including a parish priest, Guillebert de Rouville. This priest was active in promoting this new movement and converted two brothers, Adrien and Jean Deschamps to Jansenism. When Etienne Pascal dislocated his hip these two

⁶Earle E. Cairns, Christianity through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), p. 137.

⁷The Augustinus consisted of three parts. The first part explained Pelagian and semi-Pelagian, exposing their errors. The second part argued that Saint Augustine was the ultimate authority when it pertained to matters of divine grace. The third part considered the relationship between man's free will and divine grace. He proposed that after the Fall, man was only capable of evil and except for an impartation of divine grace, man is damnable in the sight of God. Alexander Sedgwick, Jansenism in the Seventeenth-century France: Voices from the Wilderness (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1977), p. 48.

brothers, who were physicians, came to his aid. They spent many days with Etienne helping him recover. The Pascal family grew to love and appreciate the Deschamps for the skill and attention they gave to their father.

The Deschamps spent three months at the Pascal's home and would often take the opportunity to talk to Blaise and Jacqueline about their newly found faith. The Deschamps told the young Pascals how Saint-Cyran had spread the message of the grace of God and how it affected their pastor at Rouville. They, as well, were stirred by his teachings and learned to love and respect the power of the grace of God. The Deschamps practiced what they taught by being examples of Christian humility and piety. They taught that man was helpless without the grace of God. Blaise Pascal in his physical condition could relate and understand this simple teaching about man's need for God.

Blaise was the first Pascal to be converted to the Jansenist view of Christianity. Jacqueline was soon convinced of their teachings as well, and together they reached their father, Etienne. Gilberte, Blaise's older sister who was now married, came later that year with her family to visit and she too was converted. Thus, by the end of 1646, the entire Pascal family was converted to Jansenism. They began to read the writings of St. Augustine, the Augustinus of Jansen, Arnauld's Frequente Communion, Saint-Cyran's Letters Spirituelles, and most of

all, the Bible.⁸ Although Gilberte would later write about Blaise's conversion as a complete rejection of worldly knowledge, her assertion cannot be completely true.⁹ His search for scientific knowledge continued for many years.

Blaise Pascal and His Experiments with Science and Theology

Blaise's conversion to Jansenism did not cause a radical change of behavior in his life. Although he did have a new interest in religion and theology, his commitment to scientific knowledge was not quenched. A friend of the family, Pierre Petit, came to Rouen in the summer of 1646 to investigate a new invention by Jean Praedine that would allow a man to stay under water for six hours. While he was at Rouen he also shared with Etienne and Blaise about the experiments of Torricelli. The experiments centered around the controversy of whether a vacuum could exist. Torricelli's experiment proved that when a tube filled with mercury is suspended in a pan of mercury, the tube of mercury falls leaving a void at the upper end of the tube.¹⁰

⁸F.T.H. Fletcher, p. 4

⁹Gilberte wrote in her biography "from this time he renounced every other subject of knowledge to apply himself solely to one thing that Jesus Christ calls necessary." Roger Hazelton, p. 26.

¹⁰The experiments of Torricelli and Pascal were in contradiction to medieval dogma which taught that "nature abhors a vacuum." If a vacuum existed the heavens would collapse inward to fill that void. MacKenzie, p. 58.

Later that fall, Petit returned and agreed to do similar experiments with the Pascals. Each time they conducted the experiments, they came up with the same results. Blaise continued experimenting for the next several months with tubes of various sizes and shapes which often drew great crowds of people. Although Torricelli is given credit for it, Blaise Pascal's experiments paved the way for greater studies in pneumatics.

Blaise continued making improvements on the calculating machine and his experiments with the vacuum throughout the winter until he was confronted with a theological debate over reason. Dr. Jacques Forton, Sieur de Saint-Ange, had come to Rouen and had stirred considerable debate over his assertion that one could prove the dogma of the Trinity and the Incarnation by reason alone.¹¹ Formal debate began over this matter on February 1, 1647, at the home of de Montflaines, a king's counsellor. This was the first of two debates that Blaise and his friends, Adrien Auzouldt and Raoul Halle, would attend. They listened intently but were appalled by some of Forton's views. Forton believed that a mathematician could estimate the number of people who would have lived on earth from its beginning to its end. That evening Blaise studied the theories of Forton and calculated that man would exist on

¹¹Jean Steinmann, Pascal (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc. 1965), p. 41.

the earth about four billion years. Pascal had noted during the debate that Forton had also said that the birth of Jesus Christ had taken place approximately in the middle of man's time on earth. This would mean that the Bible was inaccurate in reference to creation.¹²

The second debate was held at the home of Monsieur Courtin's, a doctor of the Sorbonne. Blaise and his friends objected to Forton's position because they believed in a biblical creation which did not permit a gap of two thousand million years between the creation of the world and the birth of Christ. Forton replied that the Bible was obscure. He was also considered a heretic by his listeners because of his position on biblical authority. He had published three volumes entitled La conduite de jugement naturel which attempted to resolve the tension between faith and reason. "Forton showed a tendency to do away with the mysterious element in Christianity and in consequence to make both Revelation and Grace seem unneedful."¹³ Forton did not believe that the body of Jesus Christ came from the blood of Mary but of a special substance created just for the incarnation. This meant that Jesus Christ was not a man at all.

Blaise and his two companions would not stand for

¹²Ibid, p. 41.

¹³Jean Mesnard, Pascal His Life and Work, p. 29.

such rejection of the Scriptures, and when the Archbishop Monseigneur de Harlay recovered from his illness and returned to Rouen, they confronted him regarding Forton's theology. The archbishop examined Forton on three separate occasions and compelled him to sign an unequivocal statement that he had rejected the errors accused of him.¹⁴ Forton refused to sign the statement. He would never change his views and died a few years later a heretic without the blessings of the Church. The extent to which Blaise took this matter shows not only his zeal for the beliefs of Jansenism, but also his personal commitment to the teachings of Scripture.

The Pascals Move Back to Paris

The strain of the winter experiments and this theological debate caused Blaise to become very ill. He responded to this illness by forcing himself to play tennis and by taking long horseback rides through the apple orchards in the countryside of Normandy. Although the pains subsided temporarily, he was soon bedridden once again. Etienne was very concerned about the health of his son and in the summer of 1647, he sent Blaise and Jacqueline to Paris to seek medical help.

¹⁴Emile Cailliet, Pascal: Genius in the Light of Scripture (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1945), pp. 60-61.

Blaise was examined by many medical experts and they each came up with a different diagnosis including cancer. They all agreed, however, that his illness was due to exhaustion and recommended bed rest for an extended period of time.

René Descartes came to visit Blaise on September 23 at ten thirty in the morning. Although he showed some interest in his calculation machine, Descartes' purpose for seeing Blaise was to discuss his experiments on the vacuum at Rouen. Experiments such as these were difficult, if not impossible, and could not be performed in Paris because there were no glass works like those found in Rouen. Leaving shortly after he arrived, Descartes promised to return the next day.¹⁵

The following day they discussed a variety of topics, including theology, but spent the majority of time disagreeing over the reality of a vacuum. Descartes suggested an experiment that would bring a conclusion to the whole matter. Blaise agreed out of respect for Descartes, though he knew he had already performed the experiment which would prove his thesis. Descartes gave Blaise a complete physical exam before he left, prescribing a long period of rest and a diet of soup.¹⁶ Meeting Descartes was an

¹⁵MacKenzie, pp. 65-69.

¹⁶Roger Hazelton, p. 27.

exciting experience for Blaise and a year later he would be healthy enough to perform the same experiments in Paris.

The Pain of Loneliness for Blaise Pascal

The Pascals were together once again when Etienne resigned his position in Normandy and came to Paris to join Blaise and Jacqueline. They did not stay long before they left for Clermont in the spring of 1649 to spend a year and a half with Gilberte and her family. Jacqueline discussed the possibility of becoming a nun at Port-Royal but the idea was dismissed by her father.

They returned to Paris in the fall of 1651 and once again Jacqueline entertained the idea of entering Port-Royal against her father's wishes. She did, however, get permission to visit the Jansenist convent twelve miles south of Paris at Port-Royal-des-Champs.¹⁷ She had to promise that she would not enter the convent until her father died and this she agreed to do.

However, Jacqueline did not have to keep this promise for long because after a brief illness Etienne

¹⁷Port-Royal was influenced by its spiritual director the Abbé de Saint-Cyran. These convents became the center of Jansenism. The Pope later condemned the Jansenist movement despite Blaise Pascal's Lettres Provinciales which defended the leading Jansenist philosopher and theologian, Antoine Arnould. In 1661 the two schools at Port-Royal were closed and the nuns had to sign submission to the church. Paul Edwards, ed., The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, vol 3 (The MacMillan Co. and the Free Press, 1967), p. 52.

Pascal died on September 24, 1651. Although Jacqueline and Gilberte were affected by their father's death, Blaise suffered the greatest. Etienne was not only his father, but someone who shared his interest in science and love for knowledge.

The death of Etienne was only the beginning of loneliness for Pascal.¹⁸ Three months after her father's death, Jacqueline shared her intention of entering the convent at Port-Royal. Jacqueline had been Pascal's nurse and confidante, and now she was going to leave him alone. Although under protest from Pascal, on January 4, 1652, she left her home forever.

When Jacqueline entered the convent, she was to bring a dowry with her as was common in Catholic teachings. When she became a nun, she was marrying Jesus Christ and forsaking everyone else. She was there only a few months when Arnauld D'Andilly, Mother Agenes and Mother Angelique agreed that Jacqueline was ready to be betrothed to Christ. On Trinity Sunday May 26, 1652, Jacqueline became a nun.

The events that followed may have been the result of the loss of his father or because Jacqueline left him alone. They were certainly not typical of Pascal who was now twenty-nine years old. Pascal retaliated against

¹⁸Throughout the rest of this thesis "Pascal" will be used in reference to Blaise Pascal. The death of his father, Etienne Pascal, ends the confusion as to which person is in view.

Jacqueline's decision by refusing to take the necessary steps to release her share of her father's property for the dowry. Pascal's lack of cooperation shocked the Jansenists at Port Royal.

The Jansenist teaching on worldliness was clear and no real Jansenist would have let financial matters stand in the way of the Church. Although Pascal objected, after much persuasion he reluctantly agreed to give Jacqueline half of his father's estate. This caused an immediate division between Pascal and the Jansenists of Port-Royal because he felt that the money could have been used more profitably. He would have rather used it for his experiments and to cover the cost of marketing his calculating machine. This matter helped to kindle a period within Pascal's life that has been described as his "worldly period."¹⁹

The Worldly Period

Pascal continued his scientific endeavors but not as piously as he previously did. He preferred a much more fashionable setting. Although she was a friend of the family, Pascal began to lecture in the home of the Duchess d' Aiguillon which was a much more exclusive setting. He

¹⁹Though Jean Mesnard believes this period began after Pascal's illness in 1647, it was at the end of 1651 and the beginning of 1652 that set Pascal into a great search for worldliness. Roger H. Soltou, Pascal: The Man and the Message (Connecticut: Greenwood Press publishers, 1970), p. 60.

demonstrated his calculating machine, hoping to persuade his wealthy listeners to buy it. Although they were impressed with his machine, he left without a sale.

Clearly, Pascal had abandoned Port-Royal and its more ascetic life style. Although he visited his sister on occasion, he was not happy with the convent. "He gave himself up to the amusements of life. Unable to study, the love of leisure and of fashionable society had gradually gained upon him."²⁰

One of Pascal's fashionable friends was Artus Gouffier, the Duke of Roannez. He was born into one of the highest ranks of nobility and had inherited land which, for the most part, was located in Poitou. Pascal lived with the duke for a while and this helped him forget his past experience at Port-Royal. Pascal and the Duke would often take trips to the royal court where they would enjoy the beautiful surroundings, luxury, music and the opera.

The Duke had a sister, Charlotte, who was fascinated by Pascal and had a high regard and respect for him. Unlike the Duke, she was not interested in his scientific accomplishments but was fascinated with Jansenism. She had sat and listened to the sermons preached at the church of Saint-Merri, and she persuaded Blaise to answer her questions about theology.

²⁰Principle Tulloch, Pascal (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1878), pp. 63-64.

The Duke invited Blaise to take a trip with him and some of his friends to Poitou.²¹ One of the gentlemen that rode with them on their seven day journey was Damien Miton. During the trip, Blaise listened to Miton and became disgusted with his apparent lack of concern for his wife, who was now seven months pregnant, and yet he was travelling away from home. Throughout his stay at Poitou, Pascal wrote down little notes and thoughts about his conversations with the Duke and his guests who seemed skeptical about Christianity. This may have been the beginning of Pascal's plan for writing the Pensées.

Everyone returned to Paris later that same fall except the Duke, who returned in the beginning of 1654. Pascal continued his experiments on air pressure. He began by writing his treatises on The Equilibrium of Liquids and The Pressure of the Mass of Air in an attempt to prove the usefulness of the science of physics. However, science was not the only interest of Pascal. He would often leave with his friends to attend "operas, plays, festivities and parties, but most frequently of all to the gambling tables."²²

²¹Though the date of this trip is debated, it most likely occurred in the fall of 1653.

²²M.V. Woodgate, Pascal and His Sister Jacqueline (St. Louis: B. Harder Book Co., 1945), pp. 103-104.

Pascal was particularly intrigued with the calculus of probability. He began to study those who gambled and the idea of wagering. Though he was continuously drawn back to the world, Pascal knew that he did not want to become a skeptic like Miton. The frequent discussions with Charlotte about his faith reminded him of his need for a spiritual awakening.

Blaise Pascal's Second Conversion

Pascal began to visit his sister Jacqueline. She could sense that he was empty inside and was unhappy. He confessed to her that his interests tended to be more worldly than spiritual. He began to visit Jacqueline more often but had to agree to submit to the spiritual director of Port-Royal Monsieur Singlin. Pascal and Jacqueline attended Vespers together, and although Pascal would rarely pray, Jacqueline prayed for Blaise.

On the evening of November 23, 1654, Blaise's life changed directions.

Blaise had gone to his bedroom. The door was locked. He was alone. There he sat reading from his father's Bible . . . John 17:1-3. Slowly, Blaise put down the book. He pictured Jesus on the eve of the crucifixion. He thought of the Saviour about to be crucified.²³

Pascal realized what Christ had done on the cross for him and he wrote that evening what has been called the Memorial

²³MacKenzie, p. 118.

and his "second conversion . . ."

The Year of Grace 1654

Monday, 23 November, feast of Saint Clement, Pope and Martyr, and of others in the Martyrology.

Eve of Saint Chrysogonus, Martyr and others.

From about half past ten in the evening until half past midnight.

Fire

'God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob,' not of philosophers and scholars.

Certainty, certainty, heartfelt, joy, peace.

God of Jesus Christ.

God of Jesus Christ.

My God and your God.

'Thy God shall be my God.'

The world forgotten, and everything except God.

He can only be found by the ways taught in the

Gospels. Greatness of the human soul.

'O righteous Father, the world had not known thee, but I have known thee.

Joy, joy, joy, tears of joy.

I have cut myself off from him.

They have forsaken me, the fountain of living

waters. 'My God wilt thou forsake me?'

Let me not be cut off from him for ever!

'And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus whom thou has sent.'

Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ.

I have cut myself off from him, shunned him, denied him, crucified him.

Let me never be cut off from him!

He can only be kept by the ways taught in the

Gospel. Sweet and total renunciation.

Total submission to Jesus Christ and my director.

Everlasting joy in return for one day's effort on earth.

I will not forget thy word. Amen."²⁴

Pascal kept this memorial of his conversion sewn on the inside of his coat where it was found after his death. This does not mean, however, that Pascal was silent about

²⁴Blaise Pascal, The Memorial (Translated by A.J. Krailsheimer, Penguin Classics, 1966), pp. 309-310.

his faith. The first person he shared his conversion with was the Duke of Roannez.²⁵ Pascal continued his testimonial by traveling in January to Port-Royal des Champs in which he discussed his conversion experience as well as theological studies with Monsieur de Saci.

It would be inaccurate to say that he completely withdrew himself from the world. He did renounce marriage, the sciences and experimentation. He did not, however, accept the ascetic mode of life which was typical of the Jansenists.²³ His jovial attitude towards life would later be expressed stylistically in his Provincial Lettres.

Pascal and the Provincial Lettres

Pascal not only gave his mind and his heart to Christ, but he also gave his talents to the Jansenist movement, particularly in the defense of his friend Antoine Arnold. The writing of the Provincial Lettres found its genesis from a continual religious battle between the Jesuits and the Jansenists. This battle was a

²⁵The Duke of Roannez was later converted by Pascal's testimony in the spring of 1655. He gave up his influential career which angered his great uncle, Comte d' Harcourt, who had initiated the Duke's career. Pascal was almost assassinated by a killer sent by d' Harcourt to the hotel where Pascal was staying. Jean Mesnard, Pascal: His Life and Works, pp. 62-64.

²³Jean Mesnard, Pascal: His Life and Works, p. 64.

recapitulation of the controversy between Baius and Molina's teaching over the issue of grace.

The Jesuits and the Jansenists continually fought a verbal battle with each other trying to control the religious thought of the day. In 1643 Arnauld wrote La Fréquente Communion which became the topic of discussion in many parlors. Arnauld accused the Jesuits of being immoral and too free with "granting absolution and access to the Sacraments."²⁴ The Jesuits responded in 1649. They reviewed Jansen's Augustinus and sent seven propositions which they considered to be heretical to the Sorbonne. The faculty reviewed the propositions, reduced them to five and sent them to the Vatican for review.²⁵

On May 31, 1653, Pope Innocent X, after discussing the propositions at length, stated in the papal Bull Cum occaisone that four of the propositions were heretical and a fifth was false. The Jesuits thus could proceed to denounce Jansen's Augustinus as heretical, even though Arnauld continued passionately to defend it. Arnauld agreed with the pope that the propositions were heretical and declared that there needed to be a distinction between "droit" and "fait." Arnauld said that the pope had a "right" to declare

²⁴Patricia Topliss, The Rhetoric of Pascal: A Study of His Art of Persuasion in the Provinciales and the Pensées (Amsterdam, Leicester University Press, 1966), p. 34.

²⁵The five propositions can be found, among other places, Alexander Sedgwick, p. 68.

those propositions as being heretical but they were in "fact" not the positions of Jansenists. Arnauld did not believe that the Jansenists should be condemned for a religious position they did not hold.

The following year, many anti-Jansenists "pamphlets" were written to suppress the movement.²⁶ However, in February 1655, Arnauld became infuriated when he heard that "the Duke of Lincourt was refused the sacraments by a Parisian priest because of his Jansenist connections."²⁷ Arnauld wrote in response to this persecution, Lettre á une personne de condition. He received nine responses to his letter but the most important was from Francois Annat who accused Arnauld of being a Calvinist. On July 10, 1655, Arnauld wrote Second lettre á un duc et pair which was addressed to the Duke of Luynes, stating again that he objected to the treatment of the Duke of Lincourt, and that the five propositions did not accurately reflect the Augustinus. These two letters caused the Sorbonne to censure him because of his refusal to submit himself under the authority of the Church. Antoine Arnauld was removed from the faculty of the Sorbonne on February 16, 1656.

²⁶Pamphlets were the new style of responding to religious controversy instead of books which took longer to write. Patricia Topliss, pp. 31-32.

²⁷Alexander Sedgwick, p. 72.

Shortly before Arnauld was expelled from the Sorbonne, an anonymous pamphlet was circulated defending Arnauld. This was the first of eighteen letters written between January 1656 and March 1657. They later became known as Pascal's Provincial Lettres. These letters upheld Arnauld's religious beliefs and poked fun at the Jesuits ethics which tended to be swayed by self-interest. Pascal, being a convert of Jansenist teachings, desired religious freedom for the Jansenists and their interpretation of the teachings of Augustine. This freedom, however, was not to be attained.

On February 9, 1657, the Parliament of Aix ordered the burning of the first seventeen pamphlets. Then on March 11, Alexander VII, who succeeded Innocent X, set forth a Bull Ad sanctam sedem, which upheld the Bull Cum occasione. Soon after this Bull, Jansenism was condemned. Pascal had only completed one other pamphlet and he knew that if he continued he would defy not only the pope but the king.²⁸

Although his goal was not attained through these Provincial Lettres, the fame of Pascal's writing abilities had been established. His comical sarcasm within the Provincial Lettres even made Louis XIV laugh though he despised the cause they represented. Pascal was just

²⁸Patricia Topliss, p. 38-39.

beginning his religious influence on the world.²⁹

The Origin of the Pensées

In 1658 the religious leaders of Port-Royal came together to hear Pascal lecture on a work he was intending to write which would amount to an apologetic for the Christian faith. Pascal lectured for about two or three hours leaving his audience spellbound by his intellect and clarity of thought.³⁰ Ten years later, Filleau de Lachaise and Etienne Perier were so impressed by his ideas, that they wrote works which were representative of this lecture. These two men would later be invaluable to the ordering of the Pensées.

The next three and a half years were very difficult for Pascal. He continually struggled with his health. The battle with the Jesuits and other religious leaders had taken a great deal out of him. He was no longer a fighter, but simply a pious, God-fearing man. He also became much more subservient to the Church.

By July of 1662 Pascal was bedridden for the rest of his life. He requested last rites but was refused them by his doctors and relatives. They feared that if he received the sacrament that he would give up hope to live. However,

²⁹Walter E. Rex, Pascal's Provincial Lettres: An Introduction, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977) p. 7.

³⁰Roger H. Soltau, pp. 105-106.

on August 18, 1662, a priest was finally permitted to give him the sacrament. That evening he went into convulsions and by morning Blaise Pascal, at age thirty-nine, died.

Pascal was never able to finish his Christian apologetic. He left behind a mass of papers which were arranged in no apparent order. Small pieces of paper were attached to larger ones, some writings were illegible and others were disconnected unfinished sentences. There were some finished pieces, but they were assembled with others which were incomplete. These were merely compilations of his thoughts which were written as he had the opportunity to do so.

The first publication of the Pensées was by a former friend, the Duke of Roannez, in 1670. This was not a complete work. Many of Blaise's thoughts were illegible and not recorded or they were omitted and altered because the Duke feared the thoughts would arouse old controversies. There were many editions which followed using the Duke's work as a guide.

But when, nearly two centuries later, editors went back to the original manuscripts they found, to quote M. Cousin, that 'there were instances of every kind of alteration of words, of phrases - suppressions, substitutions, additions, arbitrary compositions, and, what is worse, decompositions more arbitrary still' while another editor, Faugère, states that 'there were not twenty lines that did not show some change. As for omissions, partial or whole, they were innumerable'.³¹

³¹Ibid, pp. 106-107.

Today, there is very little controversy over the text itself. The only difference between editions concerns the ordering of the text. Clearly, there are many more thoughts included in the Pensées than originally planned by Pascal for his Apologetic of the Christian faith. Although we have a complete work available, it is only speculative which order and the number of thoughts that Pascal would have included in his final draft. The works of Filleau de la Chaise and Etienne Perier have been helpful in understanding Pascal's plan.

CHAPTER 2

Pascal and His Means of Belief: Faith and Reason

"Blaise Pascal was not a philosopher. He was a scientist and an apologist for the Catholic religion."¹ He should not be viewed as a philosopher, but as an intellectual genius struggling through the inconsistencies of scientific thought and a religious influence that would ultimately mold his view of God and the work of Jesus Christ.

Although he is remembered mainly as a religious thinker and an apologist, he spent the majority of his life studying the sciences and experimenting with uncontrollable curiosity. As a child Pascal was always pondering about the reasons why things happened and would invariably seek to know their answers. This would occupy a great deal of Pascal's life and it would be futile to begin a study of faith and reason in the Pensées without first investigating the influences which helped to form Pascal's means of belief.

¹Emile Brehier, The History of Philosophy: The Seventeenth Century (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1938), p. 126.

The Influences on Pascal's Means of Belief

There were many different approaches to scientific study during Pascal's life. Pascal was influenced by some of these approaches and employed them until the Jansenists and his conversions convinced him of their errors. There was the rational and metaphysical approach to physical science which was Aristotelian in nature. Rene Descartes (1596-1650) and Benedict Spinoza (1632-1677) used this rationalistic deductive methodology. Although Pascal believed in reason, he would later realize its limitations and servitude to faith. There was Francis Bacon's approach which despised philosophy and mathematics and tended to be purely empirical in nature. Bacon used inductive reasoning rather than deductive reasoning. Pascal was a great scientist and employed this method of epistemology in relation to his scientific method. However, after his second conversion, he no longer seemed to hold to this view.

There was also a current debate over Galileo's metaphysics which Etienne and Blaise attended on occasion.² In 1613 Galileo had written his Lettres on Sunspots which openly supported the Copernican theory, which allegedly contradicted the Bible. His position was refuted by

²For a more detailed description of the debates see Emile Cailliet's, Pascal: The Emergence of Genius, pages 44-45. The fact that Pascal would have attended a debate of this nature shows a major transition from the time of the debate to the time of the writing of the Provincial Lettres and the Pensées.

philosophers and priests on religious grounds but Galileo contested that the Bible "had no authority in scientific controversies, and that the language of the Bible should be interpreted in the light of man's knowledge of natural phenomena, gained through reason and observation."³

According to D.G.M. Patrick, Pascal was influenced by Galileo's teachings especially in his geometrical approach, which allowed for the greatest amount of scientific freedom. Patrick sees this in Pascal's writings on Conic Section which employed his entire method of understanding mathematics.⁴

In addition he was also very committed to the teachings of his father who rejected the servitude of faith to reason and believed in the teachings of Scripture. Although Pascal changed his emphasis over a number of years, there always seems to be a division in his approach to science and religion. In relation to science, Pascal was an empiricist, relying on experimentation to prove his hypothesis. In religion he held to faith which was reasonable. Pascal would later write in his Pensées, however, that he did not approve of the study of Copernicus'

³Paul Edwards ed., s.v. "Galileo Galilei" The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, vol. 3 (The MacMillan Co. and the Free Press, 1967), pp. 263.

⁴D.G.M. Patrick, Pascal and Kierkegaard vol. I (London: Lutterworth Press, 1947), pp. 108-109.

theories.⁵

Pascal's family had a profound effect on his theological thought. His father influenced him first by being directly responsible for his instruction. Jacqueline influenced him later in his life by her faithful prayers and consistent lifestyle. Jacqueline may have had the greatest influence of Pascal's second conversion. Together they became active in the movement at Port-Royal. She died before Pascal in 1661.

Although Pascal was influenced by reading ancient philosophers such as Epictetus and Augustine, he was also influenced by his modern contemporaries René Descartes and Michel Montaigne. Pascal had mixed feelings about Descartes. He had a great deal of respect for his mathematical intellect, and Pascal was greatly encouraged and excited when he heard Descartes was coming to visit him while he was bedridden in Paris. Descartes was a great mathematician and Pascal's respect for him is evidenced in his own work. Pascal also appreciated Descartes' rejection of skepticism. However, Pascal despised Descartes' means of belief. Descartes believed that it was not possible to work a priori in matters where experiment and observation had not

⁵"I approve of not examining the opinion of Copernicus; but this. . .! It concerns all our life to know whether the soul be mortal or immortal." Pensées, 218.

taken place. Descartes also believed "human knowledge appears to be one of continuous and unlimited growth, depending only on the discovery of a rational method, and to the right point of departure."⁶ Pascal was not as optimistic about Je (the ego) as Descartes was.⁷ Pascal particularly saw this ego in Descartes' Discourse on the Method and Essays (part IX), where we find his famous "je pense, donc je suis."⁸ Pascal saw Descartes as just one more thinker who had unsuccessfully attempted to raise man to a higher status than what was acceptable. In Pascal's thinking, Descartes was a deist who could even do without God accept that he needed Him to set the world in motion with a brush of His hand. Apart from this, there was no need for God.⁹

Montaigne may have influenced the writing and thoughts of Pascal more than any other individual. Michel Montaigne (1532-1592) was a French essayist and Rationalistic philosopher. In 1568 Montaigne published his French translation of Theologia Naturalis sive Liber

⁶For a complete study of Pascal's relationship to Descartes and Montaigne see J.H. Broome, Pascal, pp. 75-81

⁷Pensées 323.

⁸"I think, therefore I am." René Descartes, The Philosophical Works of Descartes volume I Discourse on the Method and Essays Part IV. Trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 101.

⁹Pensées, 76-79.

Creaturarum which was originally written by Raimonde de Sebond. Sebond had claimed, and Montaigne agreed, "that unaided human reason could comprehend the universe and establish the existence and nature of God."¹⁰ Montaigne would later write his Apologie de Raymond Sebond which was written to endorse Sebond's Rationalism. These writings had a profound effect on Pascal. His intentions and writing of at least the formation of the Pensées was greatly influenced by Montaigne's work.¹¹

It cannot be questioned that the Jansenists as well had a profound effect on Pascal, not only in reference to his "conversions" but also in his means of belief. Jansenism, as mentioned in chapter 1, was reacting to the Spanish Jesuit, Molina. Molina believed that grace was necessary in order for a person to be saved but that the person was free to accept or reject God's grace. The Jansenists held to Baius' position on the sovereignty of God and they were accused by the Jesuits as "favoring Protestantism."¹² The Jesuits often questioned anything that was associated with the Protestant Reformation.

Pascal read Cornelius Jansen's work, the Augustinus. It did not specifically speak to the debate over faith and

¹⁰Paul Edwards, vol. V, p. 366.

¹¹Pensées, 60-65.

¹²Alexander Sedgwick, p. 7.

reason, but it did direct man away from a haughty view of himself. Jansen opposed the Jesuit's acceptance of what he saw as a Pelagian heresy in the phrase "quod in se est" - - i.e., that God would work grace in one who did his part. The first of his three volumes treats this Pelagian or Semi-Pelagian heresy specifically in regard to sin and the results of the fall of man.¹³

The debate between faith and reason cannot be adequately approached if one has too high of an opinion of one's own capabilities. Reason must be constrained in view of man's depravity and Pascal could not have been converted to Jansenism without an understanding of this position. If man can reason his way to God without the act of grace then man as well could reason himself away from God which was not accepted by Jansenist teachings. Jansen rejected Pelagius' teachings on human freedom with rhetoric reminiscent to that of John Calvin. This was clearly a Calvinistic influence which cannot be ignored.

In his book, Faith and Reason, James Roberts suggests that the Pensées were written to specifically treat the problem of faith and reason.¹⁴ An analysis of this

¹³An important study of the Augustinus was written by Nigel Abercrombie in his book The Origins of Jansenism which is indispensable to the study of Jansenism. Nigel Abercrombie, pp. 125-158.

¹⁴James D. Roberts, Faith and Reason: A Comparative Study of Pascal, Benson, and James (Boston: The Christopher Publishing House, 1962), p. 21.

problem will be provided below.

Pascal and His View of Reason

It certainly cannot be said that Pascal did not believe in "la raison" or that he was not a reasonable person. Although there are many limitations to reason, without using the principles of reason "our religion will be absurd and ridiculous."¹⁵ The problem with the limitation of reason is that there is an infinity beyond it. Pascal understood that the human mind is finite and incapable of comprehending the infinite and the eternal which can only be understood as being God.¹⁶

Although man's ability to reason is limited, it is submission in the use of reason that is the key to true Christianity.¹⁷ Pascal saw two extremes. There were those who excluded reason, and those who would hold to reason only.¹⁸ It is evident throughout the Pensées that Pascal placed himself in between the two, not directly in support of either side alone.

For Pascal there are three sources of belief: reason, custom, and inspiration. Although reason is a part

¹⁵Pensées, 273.

¹⁶Pensées, 72.

¹⁷Pensées, 268.

¹⁸"Two extremes: To Exclude Reason, to Admit a Reason Only." Pensées, 253. Also Pensées, 273.

of the Christian religion, without inspiration it is impossible to be a child of God. It is not that reason and custom are excluded. Pascal says, "on the contrary the mind must be open to proofs, must be confirmed by custom, and offer itself in humbleness to inspirations, which alone can produce a true and saving faith."¹⁹ It should be noted that Pascal interchanged la raison and preuve.

Although Pascal had a great intellect, his vocabulary lacked precision.²⁰ Proofs are called evidences which our reason can interpret as true or false about something. Reason is man's cognitive ability to find the answers to our questions. It cannot give complete assurance, as faith can, but it can help.²¹

Truth is not only known by reason, but also by the heart.²² When it is in relation to the heart, Pascal makes an unequivocal break between faith and reason. "It is the heart which experiences God, and not the reason. This then is faith: God felt by the heart, not by the reason."²³ He also says, "The heart has its reasons, which reason does not

¹⁹Pensées, 245.

²⁰Henri Peyre, Historical and Critical Essays (University of Nebraska: The University of Nebraska Press, 1968), p. 155.

²¹F.T.H. Fletcher, p. 92.

²²Pensées, 282.

²³Pensées, 278.

know."²⁴ The heart is the experiential aspect of a relationship with God which cannot be felt by the reason. The experience of the heart is a proof of the life within. This cannot be interpreted as meaning that there is no place for reason in the life of a believer. Just as the Bible cannot be interpreted by one passage of Scripture, so the Pensées cannot be interpreted by one thought either. What Pascal is saying is that the reasons of the heart are neither anti-rational nor irrational. They are more supra-rational, as they go beyond what our reason can establish.

Pascal viewed the proofs for God's existence as only moral and historical ones. Pascal saw no hope in the typical ontological, cosmological, and teleological arguments for the existence of God according to Filleau de la Chaise.²⁵

Even Christian apologetic can do no more than establish, by historical and moral evidence, the fact that God has indeed made His presence known in various ways. Those who follow the true light follow it through faith, never through reason.²⁶

He also saw no hope for those who used metaphysical proofs of God because they were only rational approaches as well.²⁷

²⁴Pensées, 277.

²⁵F.T. H. Fletcher, p. 94.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Pensées, 542.

What then is his assessment of the whole matter of reason? It may be summarized in four main points:

- 1) Without reason Christianity is absurd.
- 2) With reason man is limited.
- 3) The heart has its reasons.
- 4) The reasons from the heart are from God.

Pascal's apology was not intended to convert his countrymen. This could only be accomplished by the Grace of God. However, it was intended to persuade the reader that by reason alone man is incapable of knowing God. "The apologist does not convert; he testifies to the limited or exemplary futility of reason as such."²⁸

Pascal and His View of Faith

While Pascal certainly believed in the primacy of faith over reason, he did not, however, view faith in the same way that Søren Kierkegaard would later interpret it. Faith, according to Kierkegaard, was a leap into the absurd.²⁹ He did not believe that historical evidences

²⁸Robert Nelson, Pascal: Adversary and Advocate (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 248.

²⁹Søren Kierkegaard's position on faith and his leap into the absurd can be found in volume 6 of his works entitled, Fear and Trembling: Repetition. An important section of this work would be his Eulogy of Abraham. Kierkegaard believed that when Abraham believed that his son Isaac was going to be spared, even after God had told him that his son was to be sacrificed, that this act was true faith which was clearly a leap into the absurd. Søren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling: Repetition, vol. 2, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. 15-23. However, there is a major alternative rendering of Kierkegaard's thoughts on reason and evidence which holds that the works above are said to be authored by pseudonyms and are not Kierkegaard's

could support one's faith like Pascal who held to miracles and prophecies. Kierkegaard said that Jesus Christ could not be known by historical evidence because Christ is a "paradox, the object of faith, existing only for faith."³⁰ Pascal would not have accepted this thesis. He believed that man would make Christianity absurd if he violated the principles of reason.³¹

Pascal had two major purposes in mind when he wrote the Pensées. The first was to convince the libertines of the need to evaluate their own spiritual welfare and secondly "to show that the credentials of the Christian religion amply suffice to vindicate the act of faith as a rational act."³¹ Faith goes beyond reason into the supernatural. This does not mean that Pascal did not believe in the usefulness of reason and proofs, as was mentioned above. It simply means that Pascal saw the limitations of reason and for a person to become a Christian they must receive the gift of God which is faith.³²

actual view, but are perhaps a parody of a view he is actually attacking.

³⁰Sören Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity, trans. Walter Lowrie, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 28.

³¹Pensées, 273.

³¹Marie L. Hubert, Pascal's Unfinished Apology: A Study of His Plan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), p. 65.

³²Pensées, 279.

This gift of faith is only attainable by the grace of God. Pascal said that "if you are united to God, it is by grace, not by nature . . . Grace is indeed needed to turn a man into a saint; and he who doubts it does not know what a saint or a man is."³³ Pascal understood the depravity of man and anyone who thinks that a personal knowledge of God is obtainable through reason alone does not understand his own depravity.³⁴

Pascal attempts to describe faith as a "feeling in the heart."³⁵ This is not an abstract feeling nor is it an independent feeling like Friedrich Schleiermacher would later believe. Schleiermacher believed that man could find religion within himself and tended to confuse human subjectivity with objective, historical revelation. God was found internally through the natural capacities of man and not externally and specially through the activity of God. Men only need to search their feelings to find Him. For Pascal, it is God who establishes these feelings and it is man who must wait on His grace.

Pascal describes this "feeling in the heart" as the difference between "scio" and "credo." Reason lets us say

³³Pensées, 430, 508.

³⁴Pensées, 439-441.

³⁵Pensées, 248. See also 278, 282.

"I know," but faith in the heart lets us say "I believe."³⁶ Faith is a "spiritual insight" that God imparts to those who wait on Him and it is made known by the heart.³⁷ When Pascal wrote, "The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know," he was saying that the reasons of the heart are supernatural and the supernatural cannot be comprehended by reason.³⁸ "This then is faith: God felt by the heart, not by the reason."³⁹ It is important to remember that Pascal is preparing people for faith. He is intentionally playing "down the work of reason to an exaggerated extent."⁴⁰

Faith does not only affect our relationship to God in the eternal, but also affects the way we view things in the present. All men seek the same thing: happiness. However, men never find what they continually seek. They can only find this happiness in God and without faith men cannot know the true good nor justice.⁴¹

Pascal places men in regard to their experience with God into three categories. The first type of person is the one who serves God, having found Him. This person is both

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Pensées, 282.

³⁸Pensées, 277.

³⁹Pensées, 278.

⁴⁰Frederick Copleston, A History of Philosophy 4 (New York: The Newman Press, 1958), p. 171.

⁴¹Pensées, 425.

reasonable and happy. The second type of person is the one who is seeking after God, not having found Him. This person is foolish and unhappy. The last type of person is the one who does not seek God and has not yet found Him. This person may be unhappy but is reasonable.⁴² It is unreasonable to seek after God. God will seek them.

"When God reveals Himself it is not only so that we may affirm His existence, it is also so that we may embrace His religion."⁴³ Pascal believed that when we embraced Him, "God owes it to men not to lead them into error."⁴⁴ God will not lead men astray.

Pascal's purpose was clear. He wanted to convince the reader that Christianity is reasonable but not obtainable through reason. To try and analyze Pascal as if he were a systematic philosopher, or a constructive theologian would be futile. This is not to say that he was ignorant of theology or philosophy, but this was not his aim nor within his temperament to build up systems. "He is, above all, an apostle, a prophet on fire with a message, and to see him as a cold logician is to misunderstand him completely."⁴⁵

⁴²Pensées, 257.

⁴³Jean Mesnard, Pascal, trans. Claude and Marcia Abraham (University Alabama, University of Alabama Press, 1969), p. 58.

⁴⁴Pensées, 842.

⁴⁵Roger H. Soltau, p. 196.

CHAPTER 3

The Pensées: Pascal's Apologetic for the Christian Faith

Pascal did not publish his apologetic of the Christian faith. It was published for him. He did not have the opportunity to edit his thoughts before they went to print. The order in which he would have placed each Pensée or what he would have changed, deleted or added is unknown. His Pensées must then be viewed as a collection of his thoughts and not a systematic philosophical treatise. Nevertheless, the Pensées contain a wealth of insight profitable for any reader.

Though the Pensées is viewed today as a great intellectual work, in its time this was not so. "His friends believed that none of his work would remain: 'he will be little known to posterity,' wrote the Jansenist Nicole."¹ The Pensées, however, have not been forgotten and is still pointing men and women away from themselves and directing them to believe in Jesus Christ.

The Pensées include various arguments to persuade the skeptic to believe in the validity of the Christian

¹Francois Mauriac, The Living Thoughts of Pascal (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1940), p. 13.

faith. The following will be an overview of three of those arguments including: the wager argument for God's existence, the miracles of Holy Scriptures, and the Prophecies. Each one will be considered as to the legitimacy of its arguments.

The Wager Argument²

Pascal's famous Wager Argument has stimulated numerous works and articles written to prove and disprove its validity as an argument for the existence of God. The wager has even been viewed as an argument for not believing in God.³

There are two primary questions that need to be answered regarding the legitimacy of the wager. First, if Pascal had published his Pensées, would he have included the wager argument in support of his apology? Second, if he did intend the wager to be added, what purpose and validity did it have for being included?

²This will only be an overview of the current positions regarding Pascal's wager and will not be a study of the Wager Argument itself. A good resource for such a study would be Nicholas Rescher's, Pascal's Wager: A Study of Practical Reasoning in Philosophical Theology (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985).

³ Michael Martin, a Professor of Philosophy at Boston University has formulated the position that Pascal's wager could be used for the advantage of the unbeliever who did not believe that any Supernatural Being exists. Michael Martin, "Pascal's Wager as an Argument for not Believing in God," Religious Studies vol. 19 pp. 57-84.

The answer to the first question is only speculative, but it is possible that Pascal never intended this to be published in his apology. The formation of this argument most likely occurred during his "worldly period" while he was attending the various places gambling occurred. The word wager (*pari*) means to bet, to gamble, or to take a risk. Pascal was fascinated by probability and enjoyed gambling not only for sport but as an intellectual curiosity. If the wager was formulated during this period then Pascal may not have had the spiritual insight to see where this argument could lead. If belief in God can only be arrived at by subjective means or through the heart and if by reason man is incapable of knowing Him, then the wager is sacrilegious.⁴ The wager is a brilliant piece of literature and extremely noteworthy but may not be consistent with the other Pensées.

Frederick Copleston in his History of Philosophy believed that Pascal was not using the wager argument to prove the existence of God but was simply writing to those "who are not yet convinced of the truth of the Christian religion."⁵ If Pascal was trying to convince the skeptic then he could not have believed so absolutely his other

⁴Mina Waterman, Voltaire, Pascal and Human Destiny (New York: Kings Crown Press, 1942), p. 57.

⁵Frederick Copleston, A History of Philosophy 9 vols. (New York: The Newman Press, 1958), 2:169.

words that "faith is a gift of God."⁶

The second question concerning Pascal's intentions here has varying answers. If Pascal intended the wager to be included in his apology was it to prove the existence of a God, or to prove the existence of the Christian God? In his article, "The Role of the Wager in Pascal's Apologetic," Charles M. Natoli has concluded that Pascal did not intend the wager to be used to establish belief in the Christian God, but to establish belief in a God.⁷ Natoli begins his argument by stating three things about Pascal's wager. First, Pascal never identifies "God" as the Christian God. Second, before the wager argument begins, Pascal suggests that "we may know that there is a God without knowing what he is."⁸ Third Pascal's first words of the argument itself ("If there is a God") cast "doubts on the contention that the Christian God was meant to be the subject of the wager," because of the inclusion of the indefinite article.⁹ Natoli suggest that his argument is the best solution to give legitimacy to Pascal's wager. Although he admits there are still problems with his thesis they are not as insurmountable as other positions.

⁶Pensées, 279.

⁷Charles M. Natoli, "The Role of the Wager in Pascal's Apologetics," The New Scholasticism 57 (1983): 105.

⁸Pensées, 233.

⁹Charles M. Natoli, p. 99

Bernard Ramm in his book Varieties of Christian Apologetics suggests an alternative approach to the validity of Pascal's wager. Ramm suggests that because Pascal was confronted with such varying religious groups as Atheists, Deists, and Skeptics who were indifferent toward Christianity, he merely wanted to shock them into spiritual sensibility rather than offer some definitive proof.¹⁰ According to Ramm, Pascal realized three prevailing dilemmas that hindered man from knowing God. First, God is the Deus absconditus (Isaiah 45:15). Second, Reason alone cannot solve man's religious problems. And third, man was too proud to see his need for God. Ramm believes that Pascal's use of the wager was intended as an existential shock to his countrymen.

By existential shock we mean Pascal's method of shocking Frenchmen out of their complacency by vivid contrasts by sharp jabs at frightful inconsistencies, by penetrating analysis of the foolish modes of existence, by pictures of despair placed along side of pictures of grace and redemption.¹¹

Pascal was not trying to use a philosophical argument to prove the existence of God. He was attempting to jolt his reader to consider God.

Geoffrey Brown suggests that "one of the most deceptive features of the Wager Argument is its superficial

¹⁰Bernard Ramm, Varieties of Christian Apologetics (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1982), pp. 31-47.

¹¹Ramm, p. 33.

simplicity."¹² He suggests the key to Pascal's argument is that if you believe in God "then you will gain in this life, and . . . in the end you will realize that you have wagered on something certain and infinite for which you have paid nothing."¹³ Brown believes that the wager is valid because it shows "at the very least, that there is good reason to take the religious option seriously."¹⁴ Brown also argues, like Ramm, that the wager is used not to prove the existence of God but to admonish the unbeliever to seriously consider Him.

Thomas Morris in his article, "Pascalian Wagering," suggests that the most common arguments against the wager "neglect to take seriously an important feature of its original context."¹⁵ Thus, the majority of arguments against Pascal's wager are not justifiable. Although it was not his intent to "defend Pascal's wager against all extent criticism," he believes that it is much more defensible than most recent commentators have allowed.¹⁶

There have also been various other positions which

¹²Geoffrey Brown, "A Defence of Pascal's Wager," Religious Studies 20 (Spring 1984): 465.

¹³Pensées, 233.

¹⁴Geoffrey Brown, p. 473.

¹⁵Thomas V. Morris, "Pascalian Wagering," Canadian Journal of Philosophy 16 no. 3 (September 1986): 438.

¹⁶*Ibid*, p. 453.

do not support the validity of Pascal's wager as an argument to prove the existence of God.¹⁷ Pascal may not have wanted this argument to be the main focus of his apology. The wager argument has been overemphasized at the expense of the other *Pensées* which better represent his apology for the Christian faith.

The Miracles of Holy Scripture

Amid the unveiling signs of God, there is one that set a lasting impression on Pascal: miracles. Pascal interpreted the miracles of the Old and New Testament in a literal manner. Although they do not occur very often, Pascal maintained that by the power of God, miracles are performed even today.¹⁸ "Pascal was profoundly moved by the so-called Miracle of the Holy Thorn, by which on March 24, 1656, his niece and god-child Marguerite Perier was cured of a lachrymal fistula that had been considered incurable."¹⁹ This was just one of the personal events which influenced Pascal's thoughts. Some of the oldest notes that make up

¹⁷It will be profitable for the reader to review the works of Antony Flew, God and Philosophy (London: Hutchinson Press, 1966) chapter nine; R.G. Swinburne, "The Christian Wager," Religious Studies IV (1969), pp. 217-228; and J.L. Mackie, The Miracle of Theism (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 200-203.

¹⁸Pensées, 838

¹⁹Jean Mesnard, Pascal, trans. Claude and Marcia Abraham (University Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1969), p. 59.

the Pensées reveal this interest in miracles.

C.S. Lewis defines a miracle to be "an interference with nature by supernatural power."²⁰ Pascal said that "miracles are an effect which exceed the natural power of the means which are employed for it; and what is not a miracle is an effect."²¹ Miracles are one of the two fundamentals for Pascal, grace being the other, and both are supernatural.²² Miracles are not natural events which spark spiritual interest within man. They are a sign from God which reveal to man that He is God and it is reasonable to believe in Him. Likewise, Pascal contests that it is not possible to have a reasonable belief against miracles.²³ Reason by itself is not capable of understanding the infinite. God is incomprehensible. He is the "Deus absconditus."²⁴

The God who is hidden "has set up in his Church visible signs to make Himself known to those who seek Him sincerely."²⁵ Miracles are one of those visible signs which God uses to reveal Himself to man. "I should not be a

²⁰C.S. Lewis, Miracles (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co, Inc. 1947), p. 5.

²¹Pensées, 803.

²²Pensées, 804.

²³Pensées, 814.

²⁴Pensées, 194.

²⁵Ibid.

Christian, but for miracles, said Saint Augustine."²⁶

Miracles are the test of religion. "They have been the test of the Jews; they have been the test of Christians, saints, innocents, and true believers."²⁷ Miracles confirm our faith. Pascal used Abraham and Gideon as examples of this.²⁸

The Scriptures and the prophecies do not prove that Jesus Christ was the Messiah. This was always accomplished through His miracles.²⁹ Man would not be guilty of rejecting Jesus Christ if it had not been for his miracles.³⁰ This does not mean that miracles are a replacement for the Word of God. "Miracles and truth are necessary, because it is necessary to convince the entire man, in body and soul."³¹

Miracles do not save a person from their sins, but reveal their sinfulness.³² It is not a miracle that God saves the ungodly, according to Thomas Aquinas. A miracle occurs only "when a natural thing is moved contrary to its

²⁶Pensées, 811

²⁷Pensées, 850.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Pensées, 807. See also John 3:2.

³⁰Pensées, 810. See also John 15:24.

³¹Pensées, 805

³²Pensées, 824.

inclination."³³ It is God's inclination to save men from their sins. Thus it is not a miracle when God saves a person from their sins. Pascal agreed with Aquinas. Salvation is not a miracle, it is gracious.³⁴

Pascal was greatly influenced by the Scriptures. A careful view of the Pensées can see the Word of God brilliantly sewn throughout His work. The Gospel of John not only directed Pascal's heart and life to the cross but also to his understanding of miracles.

There are eight miracles (signs) recorded in the Gospel of John. This list is not all inclusive as John mentions in John 20:30. Why are these miracles recorded? John answers this question in the following verse: "But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God: and that believing ye might have life through his name." (John 20:31). Pascal was moved by the Word of God and believed its teachings. A miracle is then "any revelation of God, any insertion of the supernatural into the human, and sign of proving the truth of religion."³⁵

³³Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologica Part 1 of Second Part Question 113 Article 10 Reply to objection 2. Encyclopedia Britannica, Great Books of the Western World, Thomas Aquinas 20, Summa Theologica (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1952), p. 370.

³⁴Pensées, 508.

³⁵Jean Mesnard, Pascal, p. 62.

The Prophecies

The strongest proof of Jesus Christ is the prophecies.³⁶ Pascal believed that the prophecies of the Old and New Testaments and their fulfillment throughout the Scriptures leaves a great sign for the whole world to embrace. The skeptic can read the Scriptures and see the hand of God moving in a supernatural way to draw all men unto Himself.

The salvation of men and women was the purpose of fulfilled prophecies. Whether it was the saving of the children of Israel when they crossed the Red Sea or the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, the fulfillment of the prophecies shout: believe.³⁷

Jesus Christ is the substance of the prophecies. It is only through Jesus Christ that one can truly believe God. Pascal said:

We know God only by Jesus Christ. Without this mediator all communion with God is taken away; through Jesus Christ we know God. All those who have claimed to know God, and to prove Him without Jesus Christ, have had only weak proofs. But in Jesus Christ we have the prophecies, which are solid and palpable proofs.³⁸

Pascal uses many different arguments in light of fulfilled prophecy to convince the skeptic to believe in the

³⁶Pensées, 705.

³⁷Pensées, 705.

³⁸Pensées, 546.

claims of Christianity. One argument he uses rejects the validity of other religions on the basis that they cannot claim fulfilled prophecies themselves.

I see many contradictory religions and consequently all false save one. Each wants to be believed on its own authority, and threatens unbelievers. I do not therefore believe them. Everyone can say this: everyone can claim himself a prophet. But I see that Christian religion wherein prophecies are fulfilled; and that is what every one cannot do.³⁹

Another argument that Pascal uses, claims that the many testimonies of Scripture are all united in their testimony to Christ, without contradiction, even while spanning some four thousand years. Pascal contests that "if one man alone had made a book of predictions about Jesus Christ, as to the time and the manner, and Jesus Christ had come in conformity to those prophecies, this fact would have infinite weight."⁴⁰ Pascal sees the overwhelming consistencies of not only one man but several men and was convinced that this truth should persuade men to believe.⁴¹

In the final argument, Pascal offers to the skeptic a multitude of prophecies from the Old Testament that were fulfilled. He gives examples from Moses, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Joshua, Joel, Hosea as well as many others.⁴² Pascal

³⁹Pensées, 692.

⁴⁰Pensées, 709.

⁴¹Pensées, 711.

⁴²Pensées, 547.

attempted to overwhelm the skeptic with numerous reference to such prophecies.

The fulfilled prophecies were an integral part of Pascal's apologetic for the Christian faith. The Word of God had pierced his heart and made him not only understand who Jesus Christ was but his own sinfulness as well. In Pascal's own words:

Not only do we know God by Jesus Christ alone, but we know ourselves only by Jesus Christ. We know life and death only through Jesus Christ. Apart from Jesus Christ, we do not know what is our life, nor our death, nor God, nor ourselves. Thus without the Scripture, which has Jesus Christ alone for its object, we know nothing, and see only darkness and confusion in the nature of God, and in our own nature.⁴³

⁴³Pensées, 547.

CONCLUSION

The Pensées offer a great deal of insight which may profit anyone who will read them. The skeptic will be challenged to consider his own human limitations. As God's ways are not comprehensible to man's own intellect nor his ways subject to quod in se est, the skeptic must not seek his answers by reason alone but by faith in God. "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith," (Romans 1:17).

Those who are new to the Christian faith will be encouraged by Pascal's faith even through adversity. He believed that Christianity was reasonable but beyond that it was supernatural. Christianity is the only reasonable solution to the Fall of man in his sinful state. Pascal believed the Scriptures and used them to defend his position. The new believer will be compelled to study the Scriptures which provide the answers for all of life's conditions.⁴⁴ "Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17).

Pascal understood the weakness of man because of the physical infirmities that he faced throughout his life. The

⁴⁴Pensées, 531.

Apostle Paul struggled with his health and asked God for deliverance. God's reply was "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness," (I Corinthians 12:9). Pascal challenges his readers to realize their weakness so that God might be their Savior.

It is a tragedy that Pascal did not live longer as a Christian. His contributions to science and technology influenced many great thinkers. However, his contributions to Christianity and theological thought not only influenced great thinkers, but men and women's souls for eternity.

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