

**Toward the Christian Education
of the Poor
The contribution of Canon
Jean-Louis de La Salle (2/2)**

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Also, these events show that for many years relations between Jean-Louis and Jean-Baptiste were very close (Aroz, CL 27: 95). But then a belated decision by Louis XIV led to events in the life of this canon of Reims which changed things significantly. Because in spite of everything that had been done to destroy Jansenism in France it remained very strong there, the Sun King requested Pope Clement XI to issue a Bull condemning the Reflexions Morales of Quesnel which was seen as the latest expression of its doctrines. The papal response was the Bull Unigenitus of 8 September 1713 (Aroz, CL 27: 86; Treasure: 481) which the king hoped would definitively settle this matter. Unfortunately it didn't do so. And Jean-Louis became deeply involved in the quarrel this Bull created in France (Aroz, CL 27: 86-96). However to understand better what happened here it might be good to take note of some prior events.

After 1700 Reims stood out as a center of well organized support for Jansenism. Forbidden books from Paris as well as Holland which supported its ideas were readily available and widely circulated there. Then Archbishop Maurice Le Tellier strongly supported Gallicanism as well as Jansenism and showed himself a staunch opponent of the Jesuits. These stands on his part had allowed the University of Reims to become a stronghold of Jansenism. So even though he was dead when Unigenitus appeared in 1713, after Paris itself Reims had one of the largest number of Appellants, as those were called who opposed the papal decisions. For their part these individuals said they were not against the Church and did not reject the authority of the Pope — with whom they said they were united. But they did appeal to a better informed pope or a future General Council — thus knowingly or unknowingly echoing some words of Martin Luther. Leaders among the Appellants were the three bishops of Laon, Boulogne, and Chalons-sur-Marne who were joined by many members of the faculty of theology and the Cathedral Chapter of Reims. As senechal of this Chapter, from 7 March 1716 on Jean-Louis was noted for his opposition to Unigenitus. He seemed to imply that his position in the Chapter required him to support their decision regarding this papal document (Aroz, CL 27: 87, 90, 96-97).

What did these events mean for Jean-Louis personally? On 9 December 1716 he was suspended from his office and his benefice because of his opposition to Unigenitus. In January 1717 he was called on to submit to the papal decisions, and in March of that year he received a personal appeal from his archbishop to submit. Part of his response was to appeal this matter to a future General Council, an appeal he repeated in October 1718. In 1720, the Chapter of Reims as a body reversed its position, accepted Unigenitus, and called on all its members to concur

in this decision. However, Jean-Louis remained a leader of the small number of canons who still refused to accept the papal Bull. Therefore, in August 1721 he was one of the Appellants disowned by their fellow canons. Undeterred by the action of the Chapter as well as of his archbishop, until his death in 1724 Jean-Louis remained firm in his opposition to Unigenitus (Aroz, CL 27: 90-91, 93-94). Jean-Baptiste's awareness of his brother's actions in this matter necessarily affected how he would now relate to Jean-Louis.

No more than the archbishop and his fellow canons was Jean-Baptiste able to turn his brother away from his Jansenist beliefs which had led him to reject the papal decisions set down in Unigenitus. As a result, Blain asserted, this marked the end of any communication or exchange of letters between the two (II, 228). However, Aroz states that this silence of Jean-Baptiste with regard to Jean-Louis was broken when the affairs of the Institute required him to do so (CL 39: 26; CL 40-I: 209-10). Usually this happened when Jean-Louis initiated an exchange of letters in order to safeguard the interests of a work — which he seemed to have much at heart — and Jean-Baptiste had no alternative but to reply. For instance, in 1700 a societe civil consisting of four co-owners had been set up to take legal possession of a house for the Brothers in Reims. By 1714, Jean-Baptiste and Jean-Louis were the only surviving members of this group which had to be brought up to full strength. His younger brother then forcefully reminded the Founder of this situation which was of great importance to the Institute (Aroz, CL 26: 264). Similar problems facing other relevant societes civils in Reims and Rethel and perhaps elsewhere were also called to Jean-Baptiste's attention by Jean-Louis in a letter of 3 June 1717 (Aroz, CL 26: 261-63; La Salle: 258-60). What he wrote in each instance showed Canon de La Salle's good business sense as well as his concern for the work of the Brothers.

Likewise Jean-Louis's charity was very evident in other letters between the two brothers which date from this period (Aroz, CL 39: 86). His efforts to help the unfortunate wife and children of their brother Jean-Remy have already been mentioned as well as Jean-Baptiste's involvement in them. This led to a letter which the Founder wrote to Jean-Louis from the Seminary of Saint-Nicolas du Chardonnet in Paris on 2 March 1718. Through Jean-Louis his older brother took steps to help provide for his nephews after his death — which now he seemed to assume was imminent (Aroz, CL 39: 86; La Salle: 254-55). So contrary to what Blain said, communication between these two members of La Salle family did continue.

Against this background it seems easy enough to understand the letter Jean-Louis wrote the Founder on 3 January 1719. Up to this time Jean-Baptiste had done nothing to select new members for the societe civil which was entrusted with some of the property in Reims that supported the Brothers schools in that city. In this letter he proposed new members for the group — all known Jansenists. Because of this fact, the Founder did not concur in these appointments (Aroz, CL 26: 260-63, 284; La Salle: 258-60). But he did not ignore this letter of his brother — as has been asserted at times. On 3 April 1719, Jean-Baptiste's last letter to his younger brother entrusted the Reims property in question to Jean-Louis and those associated with him so as to assure the future maintenance of the Brothers schools in that city (Aroz, CL 26: 284). Among other things, what the Founder said and did at this time showed great confidence in his brother's business ability as well as an awareness of Jean-Louis's great concern for the work to which he himself had given his life.

It was while these events were happening that a last painful event involved the two brothers. Unwilling as he was at this time to attract attention to himself or to make any public declaration, Jean-Baptiste saw no alternative to

doing so when he became aware of a statement made by the Dean of Calais, well-known for his opposition to Unigenitus. In effect this cleric named the Founder as an Appellant in what seems to have been an effort to increase the prestige of this group, possibly while seeking to attract new members to its ranks. Though often portrayed as an act of dishonesty on the part of the Dean (Blain: II, 224-25), possibly it was an honest mistake on his part. For at times the Canon of Reims called himself Jean-Baptiste Louis as well as Jean-Louis de La Salle. Had this caused some confusion on the part of the Dean which led to the unpleasant incident? But in any case, the letter of Jean-Baptiste of 20 January 1719, addressed to the Brother Director of Calais, showed the error of the Dean and made his position in this matter perfectly clear (La Salle: 251-54). Still one might wonder to what extent Jean-Louis was aware of this incident and how he felt about what his brother had to say about this matter.

The death of the Founder in April 1719 did not immediately end Jean-Louis's involvement with his religious sons, particularly in Reims. True Jean-Baptiste had very clearly told Brother Barthelemy to avoid Jansenists and not have anything to do with them (Blain: II, 203). But as careful as his spiritual sons were before as well as after their father's death to follow his admonitions, in this instance at least things seem to have worked out differently. Of course, it might have been impossible for them to do otherwise. For following his brother's death, Jean-Louis was the sole legal proprietor of the properties which supported the Christian schools in Reims and perhaps elsewhere. Also he continued to show a practical interest in providing for the convenience of the Brothers by acquiring additional property for them, as when in 1720 he purchased a garden adjacent to their residence in Reims. Finally, as his death drew near he had taken means to see that the Brothers interests continued to be safeguarded by having his brother Pierre (†1741) assume responsibility for them (Aroz, CL 26: 285, 300; Cl 27: 108). Also, Jean-Louis was of service to the Brothers in yet other ways. At the request of Brother Assistant Jean Leroux he was one of those who checked Brother Bernard's manuscript dealing with the life of the Founder to ensure its accuracy. But since he was not the only one who did so, it is impossible to distinguish his corrections in this biography from those of others. A competent archivist in his own right, Jean-Louis had also helped collect and provide some materials for this pioneer biography. Likewise, he reviewed the first version of Maillefer's life of the Founder to ensure it was accurate and that it contained nothing which would cause pain to the surviving members of the Founder's family (Aroz, CL 26: 237; CL 27: 97-98, 100-102).

However, because of the stand he had taken in regard to Unigenitus his final years also had some painful moments. As in the case of all French kings since Clovis, the coronation of Louis XV (1722) took place in Reims Cathedral. Because he had been deprived of his functions and his benefice, Jean-Louis was not allowed to be present among the canons of Reims during this ceremony (Aroz, CL 26: 102). But events such as this did not shake him in his convictions. He remained a Jansenist and an Appellant until the day of his death, which happened while he was in prayer around 8:00 P.M. on 26 September 1724 (Aroz, CL 27: 71; CL 40-I: 150). He left behind him a reputation of having been a learned man who had devoted his time to study, works of charity, and pious exercises. Pierre's son, Jean Baptiste Louis de La Salle, OSB, of the Congregation of Saint-Maur, noted all these things as well as others in the epitaph he prepared for his dead uncle (Aroz, CL 27: 72, 76-77).

Because he had been suspended from his benefice and his functions as a canon, many took little notice of his

death. However, an interesting little book — supposedly published in Amsterdam in 1726 — made favorable mention of Canon Jean-Louis de La Salle because he was a Jansenist and an Appellant. It stressed both his strong convictions in these matters as well as his willingness to suffer for what he saw as the true teachings of the Catholic faith (Preuves: 94). At the same time, in spite of his Jansenist beliefs he was fondly remembered by the religious sons of his brother Jean-Baptiste. The Brothers recognized and appreciated his strong commitment to the work of the Founder which he had shown by being such a devoted benefactor of the schools in Reims as well as several other nearby towns. As one of the legal proprietors of these institutions, he had always shown himself to be a competent and hard working steward and manager of their funds. By using his talents thus he helped ensure the financial stability of these schools as well as their survival and their future prosperity (Aroz, CL 39: 62; Blain: II, 477).

So what might be the last word as regards Jean-Louis de La Salle, perhaps best remembered because of his support for the Jansenism that was so repellent to his older brother. Once when speaking of one of this canon's Gallican contemporaries, the great French bishop Bossuet, Pope Leo XIII said this cleric's Gallicanism would always be displeasing to him. But then he added, "One can excuse that error and forgive it today in consideration ... of so many services rendered by him (Salembier: 1321). And may this not be the best way to view Canon Jean-Louis de La Salle's attachment to Jansenism because of his numerous contributions to our emerging religious Institute and its work for the Christian education of poor boys?"

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