1806

Profession of faith.[[1]](#footnote-1)

15:XIV in Oblate Writings

Gravity of Jansenist errors.

Profession of Faith

[Aix]

1806

This is a precious book. By itself it suffices to reveal the character of the dangerous sects that have thrown France into a turmoil for more than a century and a half, and which were in the end one of the main causes and powerful instrument of the late revolution, which did more damage even to the Church than to the State.

Every fact is twisted and falsified. The most wholesome truths are destroyed. Error is advocated with an audacity and effrontery equalled only by the heretics who came before them and on whom they have battened.

The enormity of the principles contained in this book (which is the résumé of a work of Father Racine, larger and just as unorthodox), the enormity I say and the dreadful conclusions that one is compelled to deduce from them, means that they do not constitute a real threat to anyone who has received a little instruction. I think, at the same time, that it can serve a useful purpose in so far as the author, (contrary to the normal usage of the Jansenist sect), exposes the horrid principles that the sect professes, while normally it conceals them beneath a Catholic exterior or at least it seems such to the eyes of people who have had but little instruction and judge by appearances.

The Church fallen into error and teaching it as a principle of faith is one of the *trifles* to be found in this book of TRUTH. For who shall we label as Church if not the Sovereign Pontiff in communion with the *IMMENSISSIME* majority of the catholic bishops, or to be precise all the bishops in the world with the exception of four.

For both the Pope and all the other pastors-in-chief by their adhesion to the pontifical sentence, have condemned the errors of Baius, Jansen, and Quesnel, which the author holds for TRUTHS. So the Church has gone astray. So J[esus] C[hrist] has failed to keep the promise he made us to be with her until the consummation of the world, unless one chooses to believe that the Church subsists in the four refractory bishops and the small number of their followers. *How absurd!* I say no more.

In witness of my faith.

Eugene de Mazenod.

Jansenism.[[2]](#footnote-2)

16:XIV in Oblate Writings

History of Jansenism, condemnation by the Church. Why Eugene studies this teaching.

Notes on Jansenism

Aix,

1806

Until such time as I prove more fully that the new sectarians called Jansenists bear about them the marks that have always characterized the heretics of every age, that in part they rest their case on the same reasons, pride themselves on the same external show of virtue, rigorism, perfection, press their audacity so far as to hold themselves out as the only defenders of the truth which is no longer, they would say, the necessary prerogative of the Church, understood in a Catholic sense, namely, the union of the Pope with the majority of the pastors-in-chief, finally, that they maintain their disobedience to his decrees with as much and more obstinacy, subtlety, effrontery and hypocrisy, and deny it with no less violence, I will examine this sect under one special aspect, one which has not been sufficiently highlighted although in this it bears a perfect resemblance to every other sect, namely, in its novelty and the fewness of its followers.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Let no-one imagine that I am exaggerating their crimes. Alas! Their teaching is already monstrous enough in itself without adding to its enormity. I lay out the facts, facts confirmed and affirmed by the entire group. Anyway, what motive would I have for denigrating those people? Truth is the sole end of all my researches and this truth is found only in the Catholic Church. Complete impartiality has always guided my pen. Aloof from all partisanship, my eyes are under no spell. A simple layman, I apply myself it is true to my religion as I consider this study to be the first and most essential of my duties, but who will accuse me of belonging closely or loosely to any corps, any Society which is contrary to them? Coming into the world twenty year’s after the destruction of the Jesuits, those religious whom they have always regarded as their most redoubtable adversaries, against whom they directed all the blows that they did not direct against the Church, I have known them so to speak only by their works which I read, as well as those of the Jansenists, without being able to find in the former that moral laxity, those erroneous dogmas that are attributed to them; I speak of books that are in the hands of everyone and not at all of some old theological works in which one finds insinuated some opinions which, even making allowances for the times when these works were written, are not for that reason any less reprehensible, but which would be as unknown as other sustained with much passion by a very great number of theologians of every Order, and even by entire Universities not excepting the Sorbonne, if the Jansenists and the other enemies of the Jesuits had not taken the trouble to translate them with an altogether special attention at the risk of teaching many people what they ought never to have known and was clearly never written for them.

But before immersing myself in these readings, often tedious as they are, but at times useful, I wanted to put myself in a state to judge them, and so I drew from the Councils and the writings of the holy Fathers the pure Catholic doctrine, and it is in its light that I have judged them and saw myself forced to condemn the Jansenists and Quesnellist opinions, accordingly I cannot be accused, in any way, either of prejudice or of animosity. Nothing but the search for truth and the desire to satisfy myself about my faith and the judgments I make based on that unchangeable catholic, apostolic and Roman faith, could have brought me to put these things in writing, things which in all probability will serve no-one but myself.

I must add that, attached as I am by bonds of blood and friendship to one of the most enlightened of Jansenists and one who is at the same time one of the most obstinate of them,[[4]](#footnote-4) I often engage in conversation with him about these matters, and it can well be imagined that he spares no pains in presenting his sect’s doctrine to me in the best light possible in an effort to get me to join, knowing how inflexible my character is in the matter of duty as to which I do not tolerate any kind of tampering.[[5]](#footnote-5) So I am in a better position than anyone to know if anyone is attributing to them opinions they do not hold; for I can guarantee that their doctrine is the same as that we read in their books with the difference that in talking with them you force them to admit certain consequences that they take great pains to conceal in most of their works, but which are not difficult to deduce from their principles which are set out in all the publications with which they have inundated the public.

“Much more again would emerge if, penetrating deeper into their system, I set out for you their errors concerning the sacrament of penance, the Eucharist and orders, on the Church’s discipline, etc. Does one need more to demonstrate the incredible outrages of the Jansenists? Will you ever again let yourself be taken in by the fine words that are ever on their lips? My patience is at an end and I cannot continue my exposition of their blasphemies

To his father, in Palermo.[[6]](#footnote-6)

17:XIV in Oblate Writings

M. de Mazenod and his brothers should come back to France.

Mazenod C.A. de

[Aix]

July 4, 1806[[7]](#footnote-7)

My dear, good friend, let’s try this way again of sending you my news; I suspect a number of my letters are still on the way is it possible you have not received a single one?

I have not received any of yours since the one you wrote dated May 2, and my impatience is matched only by the worry I cannot help feeling, however hard I try to find reasons for not worrying.[[8]](#footnote-8) I cannot hide the fact that I do not have the courage to face the challenge of this new trial and that the courage and resignation with which up to now I have withstood blows of every description are failing me on this occasion. Separated from people who form part of me, the happiness of keeping in touch by means of a correspondence that is very dear to me has helped me wait in patience for the happy moment of our reunion for which I am continually longing. My dear friends, life is not meant to be like this, watching our days flit by, separated from one another by three hundred leagues. Just think for a moment, can we really bring ourselves to make the cold-blooded decision that we will not see each other ever again before the day of Resurrection? We are doing our best to undermine the order established by the Author of nature who, when he made us out of the same flesh and blood, could not have intended us to live out our lives in stubborn separation. I can well imagine that the ties of an honourable attachment as well as gratitude make the thought of the moment when you will have to leave a country and people whom you have so many reasons to love, painful to contemplate. I applaud these feelings, indeed I share them, but when all is said and done does one have to sacrifice in the name of these duties, that I value just as much as you do, other duties no less essential? Or to express it better, could one not, while fulfilling the latter, go on treasuring, deep down in one’s soul, love and eternal gratitude towards all those who have acquired rights over your chivalrous hearts? Personally I intend to keep on hammering away with this argument. So long as I had hopes of going to join you, I could argue without insisting, but now that all my plans have gone down the drain, I will keep on at you, until you give way to my arguments; I have gone over all the objections you could raise; the old ones and yet fresh ones, and I can refute them every one. In short, there is only thing for it: surrender to the desires and into the bosom of a family which opens wide its arms to you

To his father, in Palermo.[[9]](#footnote-9)

18:XIV in Oblate Writings

M. de Mazenod’s absence sets Eugene’s destiny on a course quite contrary to his original dreams.

Mazenod C.A. de

[Aix,]

September 15, 1806

My dear friend, if my mind were not so preoccupied with the loss we have suffered,[[10]](#footnote-10) I would come back again on what I said in my letter of July 4 which you believe you have successfully refuted, but I would need to be more at peace within myself than I actually am. I will just ask you to take note of the fact that your intention seemed to be to make me understand that you are never going to be reunited with your family since you seem to make it a condition that it compensate you for the sacrifice of the three thousand francs per annum that you would be obliged to abandon. Now, as neither your son nor anybody else in your family will be able, however well-intentioned they may be, to benefit you in this way, therefore you must stay where you are. This is an argument that my tender feelings would not allow to go unchallenged, but I will let it pass for now.[[11]](#footnote-11)

As to myself, it is more than likely that my father’s absence has set my destiny on a course quite contrary to what the feelings of my heart, in the past so eager for glory, seemed to hold out for me. I will perhaps be all the happier for it if I am able to turn my scarcely voluntary inactivity to my heavenly profit, an inactivity that I would never have shrugged off without the advice and counsel of a father an enlightened as mine.

Short reflections on a discourse by M. Blanche, Vicar General of Aix.[[12]](#footnote-12)

19:XIV in Oblate Writings

Harsh judgment passed on Vicar General’s sermon, in which instead of preaching Christ Crucified he proposed for the meditation of the faithful the reestablishment of the monarchy and applauded French military power.

Reflection

Aix

December 2, 1806

It is perhaps an event unparalleled since the establishment of Christianity for a Catholic priest, a minister of the God of peace, charged by his vocation to instruct and edify, in short to preaching nothing but Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ crucified; it is I say an unparalleled event that a man charged with so elevated a mission should open his mouth in the assembly of the faithful, in full view of the altars, the seat of Truth, and propose for the meditation of the faithful the reestablishment of the monarchy and the victories of the French military, and nothing else.

No one will deny that the speaker would have been worthy of praise if it had been in an academy that he had manifested the praiseworthy sentiments of a good Frenchman rejoicing over the success of the military forces of his country. But in the temple of our God who is also the God of the Italians, the Austrians, and the Prussians, who are all our brothers, whom we are severely enjoined to love as being all children of the same Father, before whom as the Apostle says there is no acceptance of persons or of nations once they profess the same belief; I have my doubts, I say, that it is in conformity with the excellence of the precept of Christian charity to congregate in this temple to rejoice over their disasters. For do not let us deceive ourselves: it is one thing to thank God for the victories he has been pleased to accord to our armies, as is the duty of a grateful Christian, it is another thing to gloat over the gory details of our various successes, to make as it were an exact count of the mortal blows we inflicted on our brothers, taking a lingering pleasure in the shedding of buckets of blood. It is difficult not to nourish some feeling of vengeance, when as we remember our achievement we make no effort to forget what those we have defeated would have wished to make us suffer. My question then is, is it not against the spirit of Christianity to put ourselves to such a test? Religion, it is true, bids us fight for our country, but this precept does not displace that of charity which is essentially wounded by the complacency with which we relish, if I may so put it, the discomfiture we have inflicted on our brothers. Thus, it comes about that what is legitimate in its origins, like fighting the enemies of the State, becomes criminal in its consequences by giving too much scope to this exception, this dispensation from the usual rules of charity.

I will say no more on this count, not that there are not many more things that could be said, but the few lines I have sketched suffice to reveal my disapproval and the pain I feel on seeing the scandal resulting from this profanation of the evangelical ministry

To his father, in Palermo.[[13]](#footnote-13)

20:XIV in Oblate Writings

Reflections on the occasion of the death of the Princess of Vintimille. The goodness of God, who creates and sustains us in being.

Mazenod C.A. de

[Aix]

December 3, 1806

While the news in your letter of September 24 of the good health you are all enjoying was very consoling, I could not but be infinitely saddened at the same time by the continuing condition of the Prince of Vintimille and Madame de Vérac[[14]](#footnote-14) the continual stress they are undergoing cannot but be prejudicial to their health, and I have no doubt but that if they do not each of them put some limit to their understandable mourning they will eventually give way under it. But what use are the strongest arguments when one finds oneself in a situation like that? One may convince the mind but the heart still yields to the feelings that overwhelm it, and if it were not that it is against nature for situations of such violence to last, but are rather gradually and with time brought back to normality, one would be driven to despair of ever seeing our friends again in a lucid condition. God knows how sorry I am for them, but looked at in another way, don’t they deserve a lot of praise too and shouldn’t I be offering them my congratulations that in an era when the most sacred ties are valued by most people as simply a greater chance to pick up an inheritance, we find two creatures who can worthily mourn a kind of wealth for which there is no replacement. I take some satisfaction in coming across people with hearts like my own, and am happy to detect in others a force of feeling that I see in myself. In this light it does not surprise me at all that a heated imagination thinks it sees coming to pass in the silence of the night the dreams that fill it all during the day,[[15]](#footnote-15) and although I know that there have been cases when pure spirits have borrowed our mortal coils, like the angel guide of young Tobias, for example, even so I cannot believe that God permits such marvels simply to satisfy an individual. I would rather believe that the Sovereign Lord of all, wishing in his mercy not to allow one of his creatures, on whom perhaps he has designs for his glory, to die of grief, decided to send him one or more dreams to give him some ease from the pangs of grief he is yielding himself to. This hypothesis, which has support in Scripture, would not appeal, I know, to the taste of me who want to believe that there is no kind of relation between their outlandish God, passive and powerless, and poor creatures, but it is no way repugnant to my own opinions or rather to my faith and the idea it gives me of the bounty of God who is not only our creator but also sustains us in being. But although the possibility of visions in general has been proved to my satisfaction, why appeal to a miracle in this case where there is a natural explanation? But hold hard, I must call a halt before it is too late, you see how one is led on almost imperceptibly. I was on the point of embroiling myself in a theological treatise. Even so, before leaving the topic of the Vintimilles, I want to ask you first not to forget to remember me both to the Prince whom I love more than ever and to the splendid Madame de Vérac, and also to ask the latter for me, if you think you can still broach these topics, if she will be so kind as not to refuse me a favour I get for with insistence, namely, to let you have something for me which belonged to and was used by her sister; it is quite true that I don’t have to look farther than my own heart for a picture and souvenir of a lady whom I have always counted amongst my dearest friends, and whom I loved as tenderly as if I were her brother, but I would find a special satisfaction in possessing something of hers, however trivial it might be …

1. A page written in Eugene’s hand and glued at the front of the volume entitled: *Oeuvres posthumes de M. l’abbé Racine.* Avignon, 1759, 330 pp. Orig.: Rome, salle des reliques, n 52. This work of Father Bonaventure Racine (1708-1755) was edited by Dom Clemencet, Mauriste and Jansenist sympathizer (+1778). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Orig.: Rome. Postulation Archives, OMI II 6a. In a notebook for 11 pages, Eugene makes a resumé of the history of Jansenism and its condemnation by the Church; he refutes the theory according to which infallibility resides only in the decisions of Councils. We publish some of the more personal passages only where he affirms that he has drawn “from the Councils and the writings of the Holy Fathers pure Catholic doctrine”. He seems to write as if trying to convince a listener, however he says that these notes will probably be of service only to himself.

In the course of this script Eugene refers several times to the *Abrégé chronologique des principaux evenements qui ont* *précedées et suivi la Constitution Unigenitu.s* (Chronological Abridgment of the principal events before and after the Constitution *Unigenitus*), by Father Nicolas Le Gros, Utrecht, 1730, cf. J. Leflon, *Mgr. de Mazenod,* I, 269. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Eugene adds the note: Cf. Bossuet, Letter to the Religious of Port Royal. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Eugene adds the note: No one can doubt, says Vincent de Lerins, but that antiquity is to be preferred to novelty, and universality to private opinions (Comm. I, p. 369, etc)

And in this regard I shall be treading in the footsteps of the Church which has always employed these weapons to impose silence on her rebellious children ... [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Eugene adds the note: He told me once that I was made to be one of them and that with my firm and decisive character, and with principles as severe as mine, he could not understand how I was not one of the most zealous of Jansenists. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Orig.: Aix, bibl. Méjanes, papiers Boisgelin. B. 69. On the second page of this letter Eugene speaks about Queen Marie Caroline, and Fortuné’s property in Provence. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Eugene writes the date in Italian: “Luglio”. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Napoleon’s wars and England’s mastery of the seas made communication with Sicily difficult. Father and son continued to write regularly, by overland post, but we have only 4 of Eugene’s letters and 6 of M. de Mazenod’s for 1806, letters which are not so long as usual and in which Eugene never stops urging the Mazenods to return to France, especially after Queen Marie Caroline made cutbacks in the help she was giving. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Orig.: Aix, bibl. Méjanes, papiers Boisgelin. B.69. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. On the first page of this letter Eugene expresses his grief of the death of the Princess of Vintimille. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. M. de Mazenod had replied on the first of August: “The desires you express for our reunion are like our own, you have a marvellous grasp of that, and when you see me putting off an arrangement that I so much desire, you must believe that it is not without the strongest reasons. We can undertake it only after a most serious heart-searching, for if it should turn out badly, there would be no going back. You tell me that you have weighed the pros and cons, but have you really considered that it entails for us giving up an income of more than three thousand pounds to find ourselves with nothing and at everyone’s mercy? Is it physically impossible for you to replace what we would lose, and I cannot face in cold blood the extreme hardship to which you would be reduced to take care of us. Dear child, let neither of us be deluded with illusions springing from our love and be patient a little longer as we wait the arrival of the moment so desired by us all. For the rest your microscope magnifies things out of all proportion. M. de Mazenod returned to the same theme in the letter dated November 4: “Would not your mother have every reason to say: This is a fine state of affairs: they supported themselves when they were away at no cost to us, and they come to rejoin us to live off us and reduce us to a state of misery. I really do not know how I would reply to that argument, and then how to endure the daily assaults of a host of creditors wanting to be paid and being unable to. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Orig.: Rome, Postulation Archives, DM II 7. The person referred to is Joseph Louis Blanche, former Oratorian, then vicar general of Aix. who died in 1814. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Orig.: Aix. bibl. Méjanes, papiers Boisgelin. B. 69. We omit the first paragraph and the ending of this letter in which Eugene asks his father to write the life of his own father Charles Alexander. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Madame de Vérac was the sister of the Princess of Vintimille, who died during the summer. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. The President, in his letter of September 24, tells how the Prince sees his dead wife each night in her room; she shows him a snuffbox with her portrait that is placed on a piece of furniture in the room, and then disappears. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)