

THE APPROVAL OF "DUTIES OF A CHRISTIAN I"

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In articles 28-8-A-125 and 29-6-A-129, as I referred to the recipient of De La Salle's work "The Duties of a Christian to God", I made a passing reference to the approbation that was given on the part of ecclesiastical censors. In the present article I want to produce literal evidence of a number of approbations. Judging from these the reader may draw certain conclusions about each of the topics, which I hereby take liberty to summarize:

1. The author is often controversial and sometimes is unknown by those in the house.
2. The end users: Who could they be? Who were they in fact?
3. The doctrinal content and its presentation.
4. Opportunity at the time of approval.
5. The judgment that the treatise merits according to the various censors.
6. The scope of the manual.

I will not render any personal judgment as to the contributed testimony. I will follow the chronological order of the presentation without dealing in any way as to a greater or lesser authority. I consider that they in themselves are enclosed within a certain historical importance and I point out again that they are one of the most important literary productions of De La Salle.

The list opens with a short acknowledgment in the first edition:

* On January 5th 1703, Ellies du Pin stated that he «had read the Illustrations Chrétiennes or the Duties of a Christian towards God and the means of fulfilling them well, and had found nothing in it that was not in keeping with sound doctrine and good morals».

* 1771. At the request of the Chancellor I have read a book entitled The duties of a Christian towards God...This work contains the most solid teaching that is necessary in order to know well the duties of Christianity and the purest and the most accurate doctrine. I think that a new edition cannot but be of great use to the public. Paris, 22/1/1771. Signed Riballier, Doctor.

* 1786. We have read and examined this reprint of the Duties of a Christian towards God...We have found nothing in it which is contrary to faith or to the Holy, Apostolic and Roman Catholic Church. We found this work appropriate for the instruction of children, useful for teachers who teach them, and for all kinds of persons. Rouen, 25/11/1786.

* 1829. This same approbation appears in the 1829 Lisieux edition.

* 1736. John Baptist d'=det d'Orsonnes, by the grace of God and the Apostolic See Bishop and Count of Lausanne, Prince du Saint Empire...As the book entitled The Duties of a Christian towards God...used in our schools for a long time, has become rare, we not only permit it to be reprinted, but we recommend it in particular to both fathers and mothers, and men and women teachers, as the most useful book that they could put into the hands of children. (Quoted by A. Carion)

* 1797. There can never be too many copies of a good book. A case in point is the work entitled Duties of a Christian towards God which I have read and examined at the request of the Rev. Fr. Maestro of the SPA. Given the dissipation of minds which is noticeable in many people nowadays, this book cannot but be opportune and interesting. It is small in size but its contents are copious and serious. It will make those who have been negligent take stock of themselves in an easy and succinct fashion, and return to the fulfilment of their Christian duties. Not only have I not found in it anything which is opposed to the faith, good morals and the Sovereign, but I have noted with great pleasure that it contains doctrine which is completely in accord with Holy Scripture, Tradition and the teachings of the Holy Fathers and of the Council of Trent. Consequently my opinion is that the above mentioned work is worthy of being published for the instruction of the Faithful and for their general benefit. Convento della Minerva, 1/2/1797. Fra Tommaso Vicentius, Pani Ordinis Praedicatorum.

* 1818. In the Amiens edition, one reads:

This work seemed to us appropriate for the instruction of children, useful for the teachers who teach them, and for all sorts of persons. Rouen, 25/11/1786, Bordier, Vicar General.

Also the 1818 Albi edition reproduces the approbation of the first edition of 1703.

* 1820. I have read carefully the book entitled The Duties of a Christian towards God...by Mr J.B. de La

Salle. I consider it useful for the education of the Faithful. Liège, April 14th 1820, N.Tilquin, examiner.

* 1891. At the request of His Eminence Cardinal Richard, Archbishop of Paris, I have read the book on the Duties of a Christian attributed to Blessed de La Salle. I found in it a complete and enlightening presentation of Catholic doctrine. It would be difficult to express more clearly our most noble dogmas, and to make more accessible to readers these truths of the Christian faith. Paris, March 11th 1891, Fr. S. Constant, O.P.

* 1891. I am also including the opinion that the work merits according to Antoine Carion, the last editor. This work is neither a catechism nor a manual of piety, but a clear, solid and complete treatise, which provides in few pages, a theological Summa accessible to educated minds. On every page, one feels that the eminent Doctor knows his subject well enough to present doctrine confidently, without omitting anything essential, but leaving out anything that could burden the mind excessively or cause attention to flag. A. Carion, Introduction, P.IX.

Related to these ecclesiastical approbations are the recommendations of several Superior Generals of the Institute concerning the Duties of a Christian towards God...I think now would be a good time to summarize these since they show that the memory of the Duties of a Christian Part I has been present throughout the history of the Institute.

* 1727. Brother Timothy, in the prologue to the edition of the same year, recommends:

This catechism, filled with such solid and holy teachings was composed by its pious author for persons who dedicate themselves to instructing those who are normally profoundly ignorant of the Mysteries of our Holy Religion.

Brother Agathon recommends it as a reading book for the students in the 4th grade.

* 1810. On June 24, Brother Gerbaud writes to all the Brothers: "We are sending you two reading books for the students: The Psalter for reading in Latin and the Duties of a Christian for reading in French.

* 1829. Brother Guillaume shows, in Circular 52, the need for reviewing the treatise of Duties of a Christian Part I. The wise and pious reviewer expresses himself in this way:... "On the other hand, if the work is examined closely, it struck me that, in order that it might be more useful to the young people who will read it, it turns out that while there may be great need to retouch the style, without altering it nevertheless, the fear is that the work might turn out to be another one entirely".

* 1846. Brother Philippe, in Circular 148, comes out in defense of the use of Duties I, as a reading book in

the schools and he writes: "Such a notice is false and contradictory, since the government cannot prohibit its employ since it has approved it previously".

* 1884. The General Chapter of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, meeting this year, recommends the Duties I as a reading book in the schools.

* 1897. Brother Joseph recommends to the Brothers: "Use reading books in your classes, the life of Jesus Christ and Duties I...the students will not find in their reading of technical knowledge, today so much in vogue and, sometimes of relative usefulness; but they will acquire the knowledge of their duties and the science that surpasses all sciences, the science of the one who said: "I am the way, the truth and the life".

* 1901. Brother Gabriel Marie, in a long and interesting Circular about Catechism and Catechesis, devotes a very well deserved mention of the Duties I.

* 1922. Brother Imiex of Jesus, in Circular 234, again insists on it: "the reading gives one a hands-on knowledge of the Duties of a Christian..."

* 1930. Brother Adrien, in Circular 270, referring to our Founder, writes: He himself first followed the path he would later trace out for his young pupils in the Duties of a Christian: Children must obey their parents promptly and joyfully in all the good things they order them to do.

* 1950. Brother Athanase Emile, in Circular 330, gives a special mention of Duties I. In bold type he presents it to us as: "a book of religious instruction; a book for reading, that is listed in the catalogues of 'classic' books; in clear style, concise, without leaving anything to one's imagination".

* 1966. The General Chapter, meeting this year, reviewed the Founders' works in order to get a better sense of his thinking and his spirit. The review of Duties I brought to light for the capitulants De La Salle's obedience and submission to the Church. Circular 386, page 30.

* 1979. Finally, Brother José Pablo Basterrechea, in Circular 410, uses Duties I to show the love that the Founder had for prayer, to which he devotes 100 pages in that work: "pages that are destined for the general public and especially to students". Cf.. page 67.

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So these are some first hand notes from many different sources in time and place. The readers of LASALLIANA now have another piece of data from which to form an opinion about the Duties of a Christian towards God, the unrivaled work in the saga of De La Salle's catechisms. •