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Letter from George Sibley to Thomas Lindsay, February 5, 1831

George Champlin Sibley
Lindenwood College

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Lindenwood February 5th, 1831

Dear Sir,

I return you "Pascal's Provincial Letters". Which I have read with attention and pleasure. No, I retract the word pleasure, for in truth I have derived nothing but pain and disgust from the perusal of that much celebrated work- It exhibits a system of wickedness and depravity, that I confess myself unable to believe, could have existed even at the time those letters were written in the year 1656 – One hundred and Seventy five years ago – If Pascal has given a correct account of the principles that governed the order of the Jesuits when he wrote, and if that order is still governed by the same principles and Laws,- then the conclusion follows irresistibly that Satan has an organized corps composed of men and women like ourselves, distributed all over the earth plotting the destruction of Mankind, and if such be the fact, the present rapid progress of that Order in the United States, is in every point of view alarming, and should be checked – I cannot bring my mind to admit even for a moment that such is the fact.

I cannot thus arrogate to myself the right of pronouncing a sentence So awful against my fellow Men – That the Jesuits may aim at political as well as Religious Power, I shall not affirm or deny. Still less shall I condemn them for their religious trusts, so far as to declare that with the lights I have, I do not approve them – their condemnation rests with God alone.

Pascal wrote his Provincial when the whole of Christendom was agitated, heated and exasperated by Religious disputations and the most bloody persecutions – When Sectarians contended more for Party victory than for the establishment of true Religion – When if ever, Satan exercised a most despotic power over the reason of Christians of every sects and denominations urging them to enforce blind obedience to doctrines founded on the most subtle and unreasonable construction of the scriptures – thus gratifying all the baser passions of our Nature under the cloak and as they all affirmed by the authority of the Christian Religion --- It is too much to suppose that it was a good deal in this spirit that the Jansenists and the Jesuits conducted their disputation in 1656? And may it not be true that parties were actuated then by doctrine (founded on nice subtleties) that neither would now for a moment admit? Has not this been the case with other (even Protestants) Sectarians? So far as the Jesuits avow their present principles of Action, they appear to be zealous in the great work of conduction Mankind to future and everlasting happiness, according to their understanding of the scriptures, they at least declare so, and whatever I may think of their construction of the authority they profess to be guided by; I claim no right to denounce them – nor am I disposed to apologize for the or uphold them further than in Christian charity I feel bound to exercise towards them as well as to all other Sectarians, the heavenly virtue of Toleration.

I believe the Jesuits are at present tolerated, as a sect, in no other countries except France and the United States, and perhaps in Belgium- At any rate they are persecuted even individually, in nearly all the Christian Nations of Europe- In the United States we find them identified with the Catholic Church, many of them enjoying its highest dignities and honours – It is the same in France – We know that the Catholic Church is by far the largest and most extensive of any other that claims to be founded on the Religion of Christ – It is doubtless the most ancient – and I will add, that among its supporters are to be found an infinite number of the best, the wisest, as exists in any other Church whatever – It seems to me impossible therefore, that the Jesuits can have imposed upon the Catholics such abominable and

ridiculous doctrines as Blaise Pascall imputes to them in 1656 – and will it be said that the Catholic Church is itself corrupt? Such denunciation must necessarily include not only all its ministers but also the mass of its intelligent and respectable members – it is not reasonable to suppose that so great a portion of our fellow men can be so grossly deceived, especially those who profess the free light of reason and the advantages of education, free ___ with the world, and free access to the Scriptures, as is now known to be the case, at least in France and in this country – What possible motive could such men have to Support & cherish a corrupt church – An instrument of eternal ruin, knowing it to be such, instead of a sure guide to that everlasting bliss that all must desire – They may be in error (as who may not) but I dare not believe them corrupt – If they are then it is certain that the evil spirit possesses a might power in the Christian World – who shall decide this point – Shall man with all his prejudices, his imperfections & his vile passions dare to attempt it? No – to God alone belongs the right and the power to Judge in such matters – Let us then leave it to his decision who cannot err – Let us confine ourselves to our own duties as they are pointed out to us by the lights of our own consciences and such other lights as we believe to have been given us by God – Let us look upon our neighbors of different opinions with kindness and Christian charity – Let us, all blind as wer all are, be tolerant to another – Thus it may happen that the barriers that sectarians have raised between the Christian Churches may be thrown down, the chains of Superstition burst asunder, Bigotry and Fanaticism prostrate, Holy Truth established, and the great family of Man join in one voice as with one heart in pure devotion to the true God-

But let us return to the Jesuits a moment – It seems to me to be in strict accordance with human ideas of justice, that these people should be heard in their deference at least, whatever they may be & whatever their supposed views – the charges against them are certainty of an important nature – vitally so to them at least – Until we have heard both sides, how can we possibly pronounce a correct Judgement? – Is it just to condemn the Jesuits of this day for doctrines held by their order 175 years ago? Those doctrines may have been long since renounced, and it may be that a reformation has taken place in the order, as well as there has in the old Christian Church – It is at least fair and honourable to enquire – I think it is the duty of those to do so, who entertain prejudices or doubts on the Subject – I confess I have doubts, but I feel no morsel of prejudice –

Yrs respectfully

G. C. Sibley

Mr. Thos. Lindsey Senr.

#Note – Since writing this letter to Mr. Lindsey, I have been induced to examine and enquire into the subject of which it treats more minutely than I had ever done before – and I find that in many respects (favorable to the Jesuits and Catholicism) I was much in error – I am now convinced of the corruption of the Roman Catholic Church, and that the Jesuits are now what they were when Pascal wrote, and what ge represents them to have been in his time – April 1833 – G. S. Sibley