

The Conversion of a Catholic Priest

By Charles Chiniquy

For twenty-five years Charles Chiniquy served the Church of Rome as a highly respected priest. Canadian born, in 1851 he was sent, along with about 75,000 French Canadians, to Illinois to found a French colony, to take possession in the name of the Church of Rome. During this venture, he became a rich man. He bought many bibles and distributed them to nearly every family.

The Bible

Chiniquy's interest in the bible began as a child when his mother used it to teach him to read. He took great pleasure in reading the "Holy Book." Though priests and people may read the bible, they are continually warned that they may never, under any circumstances, interpret a single word according to their conscience, their intelligence, or in their own mind. Every priest, as part of the ordination oath, agrees to always interpret the Scriptures only according to the unanimous consent of the "Holy Fathers." All Roman Catholics will admit that their church does not allow them the freedom to interpret Scripture according to their own conscience. Instead, they are taught that the bible is a difficult book, that it cannot be understood apart from the interpretation of the church, that it is a serious sin to interpret it on one's own. Who, then, would want to read such a book? Very few indeed. As a rule, Roman Catholics do not read or study the bible. Most know few, if any, of the verses their church uses as "proof texts" for various doctrines.

Those early years of bible reading had a profound impact on Chiniquy that later changed his life. It was when his bishop asked him to speak on the Virgin Mary at the huge cathedral in Montreal that things started to change. This is what he said:

Mary

"My dear friends, when a man has rebelled against his king, when he has committed a great crime against his emperor, does he come himself to speak: to him? If he has a favor to ask from his king, dare he, under the circumstances, appear himself in his presence? No. The king would rebuke him and would punish him. Then, what does he do? Instead of going himself, he selects one of the friends of the king, some one of his officers, sometimes the sister or the mother of the king and he puts his petition into their hand. They go and speak: in favor of the guilty man. They ask his pardon, they appease his wrath; and very often the king will grant to these people the favor which he would refuse to the guilty man.

"We are all sinners; we have all offended the great and mighty King, the King of Kings. We have raised rebellious colors against Him. We have trampled His laws under our feet and surely He is angry against us. What can we do today? Shall we go ourselves with our hands filled with our iniquities? No! But, thanks to God, we have Mary, the mother of Jesus, our King, at his right hand, and as a dutiful son never refuses any favor to a beloved mother, so Jesus will never refuse any favor to Mary. He has never refused any petition which she presented to him when he was on earth. He has never rebuked his

mother in any way. Where is the son who would break the heart of a loving mother when he could please her by granting her what she wants? Then I say, Jesus, the Kings of Kings, is not only the Son of God, but he is the Son of Mary, and loves his mother. And as he has never refused Mary any favor when he was on earth, he will never refuse her any favor today. Then what must we do? Oh! We cannot present ourselves before the great King covered as we are with iniquity. Let us present our petitions to his holy mother, she will go to the feet of Jesus herself--Jesus, her God and her son, and she will surely receive the favors which she will ask. She will ask for our pardon and will obtain it. She will ask a place in the Kingdom of Christ, and you will have it. She will ask from Jesus to forget your iniquities, to grant you true repentance, and he will give you anything his mother may ask of him." The congregation was so happy at the idea of having such an advocate interceding for them day and night that many burst into tears, and were beside themselves with joy that Mary was to ask and obtain their pardon. Even the bishop blessed Chiniquy and thanked him, saying that the sermon would do great good in Montreal.

Matthew 12:46

That night, however, Chiniquy opened his Bible and read Matthew 12:46: "While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with Him. Then said one unto him, 'Behold thy mother and thy brethren stand without desiring to speak with thee.' But he answered and said to him that told him, 'Who is my mother, and who are my brethren?' And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples and said, 'Behold! My mother and my brethren, for whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."

Upon reading these words, Chiniquy realized that his sermon had not been accurate. Jesus didn't just ignore Mary's petition, his response was a public rebuke. The people were astonished, puzzled, almost scandalized. He then read parallel passages in Mark 3:31-35 and Luke 8:19-20. He realized that while Jesus was a child he obeyed Joseph and Mary, but as soon as he presented himself before the world as the Son of God, as the Savior of the world, as the great Light of humanity, things changed. It is to Jesus alone that the eyes of the world must be turned to receive Light and Life.

A Conversation with the Bishop

All night Chiniquy struggled with the realization that what he had been preaching contradicted Scripture. As he spoke with the Bishop the next morning he said, "Yesterday you paid me a great compliment because of the sermon in which I said that Jesus had always granted the petition of his mother. But, my lord, last night I heard another voice, stronger than yours, and my trouble is that I believe that voice is the voice of God. That voice has told me **that we Roman Catholic priests and bishops preach a falsehood every time we say to the people that Mary always has the power to receive from the hands of Jesus Christ the favors which she asks.** This is a lie, my lord. This, I fear, is a diabolical and damning error." The Bishop responded, "Chiniquy, what do you mean? Are you a Protestant?" He exclaimed, "You go too far!" "No, my lord," I said, "it is of no use to talk. Here is the Gospel, read it." I put the Gospel into the hands of the Bishop, and he read with his own eyes. My impression was that he read those words for the first time. He asked, "What does that mean?"

Chiniquy Questions the Bishop

"Well," I said, "this is the Gospel, and here you see that Mary has come to ask from Jesus Christ a favor, and he has not only rebuked her, but has refused to consider her as his mother. He did this publicly that we might know that Mary is the mother of Jesus as man, and not as God." I then asked, "My lord, who has saved you and saved me upon the Cross?"

He answered, "Jesus Christ." "And who paid your debts and mine by shedding his blood, was it Mary or Jesus?" He said, "Jesus Christ." "Now, my lord, when Jesus and Mary were on earth, who loved the sinner more, was it Mary or Jesus?" "Did any sinner come to Mary on earth to be saved?" "No." "Do you remember that any sinner has gone to Jesus to be saved?" "Yes, many." "Have they been rebuked?" "Never." "Do you remember that Jesus ever said to sinners, 'Come to Mary and she will save you?'" "No." "Do you remember that Jesus has said to poor sinners, 'Come unto me?'" "Yes, he has said it." "Has he ever retracted those words?" "No." "And who was then, more powerful to save sinners?" "Oh! It was Jesus!" "Now, my lord, since Jesus and Mary are now in Heaven, can you show me in the Scriptures that Jesus has lost anything of his desire and power to save sinners, or that he has delegated this power to Mary?" "No." "Then, my lord, why do we not go to him and him alone? Why do we invite poor sinners to come to Mary, when, by your own confession, she is nothing compared with Jesus, in power, in mercy, in love, and in compassion for the sinner?" The poor Bishop pleaded business and left the room.

Demand for A Letter Of Submission

Because of many rumors and suspicions that Chiniquy was a heretic and a Protestant, the bishop sent his Grand Vicar to ask Chiniquy for a document by which he could prove to the world that he and his people were still good Roman Catholics. Chiniquy wrote the following: "My lord, we French Canadians of the colony of Illinois want to live in the Holy Catholic Apostolic and Roman Church, out of which there is no salvation, and to prove this to your lordship we promise to obey your authority according to the Word of God, as we find it in the Gospel of Christ." The document was signed by both Chiniquy and his people. The Grand Vicar said, "This is just what we want." The Bishop then gave him a "letter of peace," by which he declared that Chiniquy was one of his best priests. Chiniquy later said, "But God looked down upon me in His mercy, and He was to break that peace which was peace with man and not with God."

The Bishop telegraphed the submission to other bishops and soon was challenged by them that it was not to the Bishop that Chiniquy had submitted, but to the Word of God and that submission must be destroyed. The Bishop, then, demanded a promise of submission to his authority without any condition. Chiniquy responded, "My lord, what you require of me is not an act of submission, but an act of adoration, and I refuse it to you." The Bishop threatened, "If you cannot give me that act of submission, you cannot any longer be a Roman Catholic priest." As Chiniquy left the room he raised his hands to God and said, "May Almighty God be forever blessed."

A Traitor

It was back in his hotel room that the Lord revealed to Chiniquy that the Church of Rome could not be the church of Christ that he could not remain in it except by giving up the Word of God in a formal document. In tears he cried for God to show him the way, knowing that the Pope, Bishops, priests, and people would attack him in the press and in the pulpit. They would take away his honor and his name, perhaps even his life. He would be looked upon as a traitor.

Free At Last

As he opened the Word of God, the Lord showed him the way of Biblical Salvation in Christ alone, by faith alone and the doctrines of Rome "went away ... as falls a tower which is struck at the base." He cried with joy, "Oh!" Gift of God, I accept Thee' Take my heart and keep it forever Thine ..."

The whole congregation responded to the Gospel when Chiniquy explained the way of salvation to them. First a thousand, six months later, two thousand, a year later four thousand and on to nearly twenty-five thousand trusted Christ and left Romanism.

Rumors circulated that he had called for a priest and would have made his last confession had his tongue not been eaten by worms. Still, though brutally maligned, he continued his life boldly preaching the true Gospel and urging believers to pray for the Biblical salvation of Roman Catholics.