

Charles Chiniquy

Fifty Years in the Church of Rome

I was born and baptized a Roman Catholic in 1809, and I was ordained a priest in the year 1833 in Canada. For twenty-five years I was a priest of the Church, and I tell you frankly that I loved the Church of Rome, and she loved me. I would have shed every drop of my blood for my Church and would have given my life a thousand times to extend her power and dignity over the continent of America and over the whole world. My great ambition was to convert the Protestants and bring them into my Church, because I was told, and I preached, that outside the Church of Rome there was no salvation, and I was sorry to think that those multitudes of Protestants were to be lost.

The Bible was Always Precious to Me

In the Church of Rome the Bible is a sealed book, but it was not so with me. I found it precious to my heart when I was a little boy, and when I became a priest of Rome I read it to make me a strong man and to make me able to argue for the Church.

My great object was to confound the Protestant ministers of America. I got a copy of the "Holy Fathers," and I studied it day and night with the Holy Scriptures in order to prepare myself for the great battle I wanted to fight against the Protestants. I made this study in order to strengthen my faith in the Roman Catholic Church.

A Voice Sometimes as of Thunder

But, blessed be God, every time I read the Bible there was a mysterious voice saying to me, "Do you not see that in the Church of Rome you do not follow the teachings of the Word of God, but only the traditions of men?" In the silent hours of the night, when I heard that voice, I wept, but it was repeated with the strength of thunder. I wanted to live and die in the Holy Roman Catholic Church, and I prayed to God to silence the voice, but I heard it yet still louder. When I was reading His Word, He was trying to break my fetters, but I would not have any fetters broken. He came to me with His saving light, but I would not have it.

I have no bad feeling against Roman Catholic priests. Some of you may think I have, but you are mistaken. Sometimes I weep for them because I know that these poor men, just as I did, are fighting against the Lord, and that they are miserable as I was miserable then. If I relate to you one of the struggles of which I speak, you will understand what it is to be a Roman Catholic priest, and you will pray for them.

I Establish a French Colony in the U.S.A.

In 1851, I went to Illinois to found a French colony. I took with me about 75,000 French Canadians and settled on the magnificent prairies of Illinois, to take possession in the name of the Church of Rome. After I had begun my great work of colonization, I became a rich man; I bought many Bibles and gave one to almost every family. The bishop was very angry with me for this, but I did not care. I had no idea of giving up the Church of Rome, but I wanted to guide my people as well as I could in the way in which Christ wanted me to lead them.

I Get the Bishop Dismissed

Now the Bishop of Chicago did a thing at that time which we Frenchmen could not tolerate. It was a great crime, and I wrote to the pope and got him dismissed. Another bishop was sent in his place that deputed his Grand Vicar to visit me.

The Grand Vicar said to me, "M. Chiniquy, we are very glad that you have got the former Bishop dismissed, for he was a bad man, but it is suspected in many places that you are no more in the Church of Rome. It is suspected that you are a heretic and a Protestant. Will you not give us a document by which we can prove to all the world that you and your people are still good Roman Catholics?" I said, "I have no objection." He rejoined, "It is the desire of the new bishop whom the pope has sent to have such a document from you."

Submission on a Biblical Basis

I then took a piece of paper, and it seemed to me that this was a golden opportunity to silence the voice which was speaking to me day and night and troubling my faith. I wanted to persuade myself by this means that in the Roman Catholic Church we were really following the Word of God and not merely "traditions of men." I wrote down these very words: "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." I signed that and offered it to my people to sign, and they did. I then gave it to the Grand Vicar and asked him what he thought of it. He said, "It is just what we wanted." He assured me that the bishop would accept it, and all would be right. When the bishop read the submission, he too found it right and with tears of joy said: "I am so glad that you have made your submission, because we were in fear that you and your people would turn Protestant."

My friends, to show you my blindness, I must confess to my shame that I was glad to have made my peace with the bishop, a man, when I was not yet at peace with God. The bishop gave me a "letter of peace," by which he declared that I was one of his best priests, and I went back to my countrymen with the determination to remain there. 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, after my departure, went to the telegraph office and telegraphed my submission to the other bishops and asked them what they thought of it. They unanimously answered him the very same day: "Do you not see that Chiniquy is a disguised Protestant, and he has made a

Protestant of you? It is not to you that he makes submission; he makes his submission to the Word of God. If you do not destroy that submission, you are a Protestant yourself.”

Biblical Submission, Yes—Adoration, No

Ten days later I received a letter from the bishop, and when I went to him he asked me if I had the “letter of peace” he had given me the other day. I produced it, and when he saw it was that letter, he ran to his stove and threw it into the fire. I was astonished. I rushed to the fire to save my letter, but it was too late; it was destroyed.

Then I turned to the bishop and I said, “How dare you, my lord, take from my hand a document which is my property and destroy it without my consent?”

He replied, “M. Chiniquy, I am your superior, and I have no account to give you.”

“You are indeed, my lord, my superior,” I said, “and I am nothing but a poor priest, but there is a great God who is as much above you as above me, and that God has granted me rights which I will never give up to please any man. In the presence of that God, I protest against your iniquity.”

“Well,” he said, “do you come here to give me a lecture?”

I replied, “No, my lord, but I want to know if you brought me here to insult me?”

“M. Chiniquy,” he said, “I brought you here because you gave me a document which you know very well was not an act of submission.”

Then I answered, “Tell me, what act of submission do you require of me?”

He said, “You must begin by taking away these few words, ‘according to the Word of God, as we find it in the Gospel of Christ,’ and say simply that you promise to obey my authority without condition, and that you will promise to do whatever I tell you.”

Then I got to my feet and I said, “My lord, what you require of me is not an act of submission but an act of adoration, and I refuse it to you.”

“Then,” said he, “if you cannot give me that act of submission, you cannot any longer be a Roman Catholic priest.”

I raised my hands to God and said, “May Almighty God be forever blessed,” and I took my hat and left the bishop.

Alone on My Face Before God

I went to the hotel where I had engaged a room and locked the door behind me. I fell on my knees to examine what I had done in the presence of God. Then I saw for the first time clearly that the Church of Rome could not be the Church of Christ. I had learned the terrible truth, not from the lips of Protestants, not from the Church’s enemies, but from the lips of the Church of Rome herself. I saw that I could not remain in it except by giving up the Word of God in a formal document. Then, I saw that I had done well to give up the Church of Rome. But oh, my friends, what a dark cloud came upon me. In my darkness I cried out, “My God, my God, why is it that my soul is surrounded with such a dark cloud?”

With tears I cried to God to show me the way, but for a time no answer was vouchsafed. I had given up the Church of Rome. I had given up position, honor, my brothers, and sisters, everything that was dear to me. I saw that the pope, the bishops, and the priests would attack me in

the press and in the pulpit. I saw that they would take away my honor, my name—and perhaps my life. I saw that war to the death was begun between the Church of Rome and me, and I looked to see if any friends had been left to me to help me fight the battle, but not a single friend remained. I saw that even my dearest friends were bound to curse me and look upon me as an infamous traitor. I saw that my people would reject me, that my beloved country where I had so many friends would curse me, and that I had become an object of horror to the world.

Then I tried to remember if I had some friends amongst the Protestants, but as I had spoken and written against them all my life, I had not a single friend there. I saw that I was left all alone to fight the battle. It was too much, and in that terrible hour—if God had not wrought a miracle—I should not have been able to bear it. It seemed impossible for me to go out from that room into the cold world where I should not find a single hand to shake my hand, or a single smiling face to look upon me, but where I should see only those looking upon me as a traitor.

The Joy of Knowing I Am Perfectly Saved

It seemed that God was far away, but He was very near. Suddenly, the thought entered my mind: “You have your Gospel; read it, and you will find the light.” On my knees and with trembling hand, I opened the Book. Not I, but God opened it, for my eyes fell on First Corinthians 7:23: “*Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men.*”

With these words the light came to me, and for the first time I saw the great mystery of salvation, as much as man can see it. I said to myself, “Jesus has bought me; then, if Jesus has bought me, He has saved me; I am saved. Jesus is my God. All the works of God are perfect. I am, then, perfectly saved—Jesus could not save me by half. I am saved in the blood of the Lamb; I am saved by the death of Jesus.” And these words were so sweet to me that I felt unspeakable joy, as if the fountains of life were open and floods of new light were flowing in upon my soul. I said to myself, “I am not saved, as I thought, by going to Mary; I am not saved by purgatory, or by indulgences, confessions, or penances. I am saved by Jesus alone.” And all the false doctrines of Rome went away from my mind as falls a tower that is struck at the base.

That I May Show the Joy of Salvation to Others

I then felt such a joy, such a peace; the angels of God could not be happier than I was. The blood of the Lamb was flowing on my poor guilty soul. With a loud cry of joy I said, “Oh, dear Jesus, I sense it, I know it; Thou hast saved me. Oh, Gift of God, I accept Thee. Take my heart and keep it forever Thine. Gift of God, abide in me to make me pure and strong; abide in me to be my Way, my Light, and my Life; grant that I may abide in Thee now and forever. But, dear Jesus, do not save me alone; save my people; grant me to show them the Gift also. Oh, that they may accept Thee and feel rich and happy as I am now.”

It was thus I found the Light and the great mystery of our salvation, which is so simple and yet so beautiful, so sublime and yet so grand. I had opened the hands of my soul and accepted the gift. I was rich in the gift. Salvation, my friends, is a gift; you have nothing to do but to accept it, love it, and love the Giver. I pressed the Gospel to my lips and swore I would never preach anything else but Jesus.

To the Thousand at the Colony I Share

I arrived in the midst of my colony on a Sabbath morning. The whole people were exceedingly excited and ran towards me and asked what news I had. When they were gathered in the church, I presented to them the Gift. I showed to them what God had presented to me—His Son Jesus as a gift and, through Jesus, the pardon of my sins and life eternal as a gift. Then, not knowing whether they would receive the Gift or not, I said to them, “It is time for me to go away from you, my friends; I have left the Roman Catholic Church forever. I have taken the gift of Christ, but I respect you too much to impose myself on you. If you think it is better for you to follow the pope than to follow Christ, and to invoke the name of Mary rather than the name of Jesus in order to be saved, tell it to me by rising up.”

Will You Cross the Red Sea With Me?

To my exceeding great surprise, the whole multitude remained in their seats, filling the church with their sobs and tears. I thought some of them would tell me to go, but not one did so. And as I watched I saw a change come over them, a marvelous change which cannot be explained in natural ways, and I said to them with a cry of joy: “The mighty God who saved me yesterday can save you today. With me you will cross the Red Sea and go into the Promised Land. With me you will accept the great gift; you will be happy and rich in the Gift. I will put the question to you in another way. If you think it is better for you to follow Christ than the pope, to invoke the name of Jesus alone rather than the name of Mary, that it is better to put your trust in the blood of the Lamb shed on the Cross for your sins than in the fabulous purgatory of Rome where they say after your death you can be saved; and if you think it better for you to have me preach to you the pure Gospel of Christ than to have a priest preach to you the doctrines of Rome, tell me by rising up that I am your man.” Then all, without a single exception, rose to their feet and with tears asked me to remain with them.

The Gift, the great unspeakable Gift, had for the first time come before their eyes in *Its* beauty. They had found *It* precious. They had accepted *It*, and no words can tell you the joy of that multitude. Like myself, they felt rich and happy in the Gift. The names of one thousand souls, I believe, were written in the Book of Life that day. Six months later we were two thousand converts. A year later we were about four thousand. Now we are nearly twenty-five thousand who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

The news spread quickly all over America, and even into France and England, that Chiniquy, the best-known priest of Canada, had left the Church of Rome, at the head of a noble band of men. And wherever it was said, the name of Jesus was blessed, and I hope you will bless the merciful and adorable Savior today with me, when it is my privilege to have told you what He has done for my soul. Today more than ever, we hear the good Master's voice, “*Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are white already to harvest*” (John 4:35).