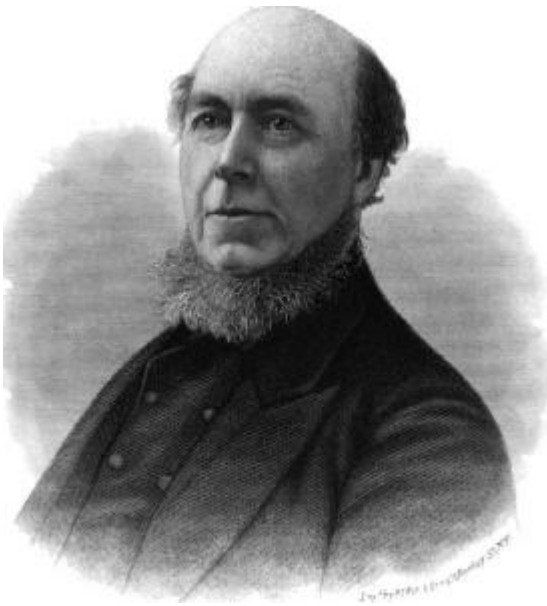


The Bible and the Priest of Rome



Charles Chiniquy

This is all of chapter 1 of [Fifty Years in the Church of Rome](#) by Charles Chiniquy

My father, Charles Chiniquy [pronounced, "Chi-ni-quay"], born in Quebec, had studied in the Theological Seminary of that city, to prepare himself for the priesthood. But a few days before making his vows, having been the witness of a great iniquity in the high quarters of the church, he changed his mind, studied law, and became a notary.

Married to Reine Perrault, daughter of Mitchel Perrault, in 1803 he settled at first in Kamoraska, where I was born on the 30th July, 1809.

About four or five years later my parents emigrated to Murray Bay. That place was then in its infancy, and no school had yet been established. My mother was, therefore, my first teacher.

Before leaving the Seminary of Quebec my father had received from one of the Superiors, as a token of his esteem, a beautiful French and Latin Bible. That Bible was the first book, after the A B C, in which I was taught to read. My mother selected the chapters which she considered the most interesting for me; and I read them every day with the greatest attention and pleasure. I was even so much pleased with several chapters, that I read them over and over again till I knew them by heart.

When eight or nine years of age, I had learned by heart the history of the creation and fall of man; the deluge; the sacrifice of Isaac; the history of Moses; the plagues of Egypt; the sublime hymn of Moses after crossing the Red Sea; the history of Samson; the most interesting events of the life of David; several Psalms; all the speeches and parables of Christ; and the whole history of the sufferings and death of our Saviour as narrated by John.

I had two brothers, Louis and Achille; the first about four, the second about eight years younger than myself. When they were sleeping or playing together, how many delicious hours I have spent by my mother's side, in reading to her the sublime pages of the divine book.

Sometimes she interrupted me to see if I understood what I read; and when my answers made her sure that I understood it, she used to kiss me and press me on her bosom as an expression of her joy.

One day, while I was reading the history of the sufferings of the Saviour, my young heart was so much impressed that I could hardly enunciate the words, and my voice trembled. My mother, perceiving my emotion, tried to say something on the love of Jesus for us, but she could not utter a word her voice was suffocated by her sobs. She leaned her head on my forehead, and I felt two streams of tears falling from her eyes on my cheeks. I could not contain myself any longer. I wept also; and my tears were mixed with hers. The holy book fell from my hands, and I threw myself into my dear mother's arms.

No human words can express what was felt in her soul and in mine in that most blessed hour! No! I will never forget that solemn hour, when my mother's heart was perfectly blended with mine at the feet of our dying Saviour. There was a real perfume from heaven in those my mother's tears which were flowing on me. It seemed then, as it does seem to me today, that there was a celestial harmony in the sound of her voice and in her sobs. Though more than half a century has passed since that solemn hour when Jesus, for the first time, revealed to me something of His suffering and of His love, my heart leaps with joy every time I think of it.

We were some distance from the church, and the roads, in the rainy days, were very bad. On the Sabbath days the neighbouring farmers, unable to go to church, were accustomed to gather at our house in the evening. Then my parents used to put me up on a large table in the midst of the assembly, and I delivered to those good people the most beautiful parts of the Old and New Testaments. The breathless attention, the applause of our guests, and may I tell it often the tears of joy which my mother tried in vain to conceal, supported my strength and gave me the courage I wanted, to speak when so young before so many people. When my parents saw that I was growing tired, my mother, who had a fine voice, sang some of the beautiful French hymns with which her memory was filled.

Several times, when the fine weather allowed me to go to church with my parents, the farmers would take me into their caleches (buggies) at the door of the temple, and request me to give them some chapter of the Gospel. With a most perfect attention they listened to the voice of the child, whom the Good Master had chosen to give them the bread which comes from heaven. More than once, I remember, that when the bell called us to the church, they expressed their regret that they could not hear more.

On one of the beautiful spring days of 1818 my father was writing in his office, and my mother was working with her needle, singing one of her favourite hymns, and I was at the door, playing and talking to a fine robin

which I had so perfectly trained that he followed me wherever I went. All of a sudden I saw the priest coming near the gate. The sight of him sent a thrill of uneasiness through my whole frame. It was his first visit to our home.

The priest was a person below the common stature, and had an unpleasant appearance his shoulders were large and he was very corpulent; his hair was long and uncombed, and his double chin seemed to groan under the weight of his flabby cheeks.

I hastily ran to the door and whispered to my parents, "M. le Cur'e arrive ("Mr. Curate is coming"). The last sound was hardly out of my lips when the Rev. Mr. Courtois was at the door, and my father, shaking hands with him, gave him a welcome.

That priest was born in France, where he had a narrow escape, having been condemned to death under the bloody administration of Robespierre. He had found a refuge, with many other French priests, in England, whence he came to Quebec, and the bishop of that place had given him the charge of the parish of Murray Bay.

His conversation was animated and interesting for the first quarter of an hour. It was a real pleasure to hear him. But of a sudden his countenance changed as if a dark cloud had come over his mind, and he stopped talking. My parents had kept themselves on a respectful reserve with the priest. They seemed to have no other mind than to listen to him. The silence which followed was exceedingly unpleasant for all the parties. It looked like the heavy hour which precedes a storm. At length the priest, addressing my father, said, "Mr. Chiniquy, is it true that you and your child read the Bible?"

"Yes, sir," was the quick reply, "my little boy and I read the Bible, and what is still better, he has learned by heart a great number of its most interesting chapters. If you will allow it, Mr. Curate, he will give you some of them."

"I did not come for that purpose," abruptly replied the priest; "but do you not know that you are forbidden by the holy Council of Trent to read the Bible in French."

"It makes very little difference to me whether I read the Bible in French, Greek, or Latin," answered my father, "for I understand these languages equally well."

"But are you ignorant of the fact that you cannot allow your child to read the Bible?" replied the priest.

"My wife directs her own child in the reading of the Bible, and I cannot see that we commit any sin by continuing to do in future what we have done till now in that matter."

"Mr. Chiniquy," rejoined the priest, "you have gone through a whole course of theology; you know the duties of a curate; you know it is my painful duty to come here, get the Bible from you and burn it."

My grandfather was a fearless Spanish sailor (our original name was Etchiquia), and there was too much Spanish blood and pride in my father to hear such a sentence with patience in his own house. Quick as lightning he was on his feet. I pressed myself, trembling, near my mother, who trembled also.

At first I feared lest some very unfortunate and violent scene should occur; for my father's anger in that moment was really terrible.

But there was another thing which affected me. I feared lest the priest should lay his hands on my dear Bible, which was just before him on the table; for it was mine, as it had been given me the last year as a Christmas gift.

Fortunately, my father had subdued himself after the first moment of his anger. He was pacing the room with a double-quick step; his lips were pale and trembling, and he was muttering between his teeth words which were unintelligible to any one of us.

The priest was closely watching all my father's movements; his hands were convulsively pressing his heavy cane, and his face was giving the sure evidence of a too well-grounded terror. It was clear that the ambassador of Rome did not find himself infallibly sure of his position on the ground he had so foolishly chosen to take; since his last words he had remained as silent as a tomb.

At last, after having paced the room for a considerable time, my father suddenly stopped before the priest, and said, "Sir, is that all you have to say here."

"Yes, sir," said the trembling priest.

"Well, sir," added my father, "you know the door by which you entered my house: please take the same door and go away quickly."

The priest went out immediately. I felt an inexpressible joy when I saw that my Bible was safe. I ran to my father's neck, kissed and thanked him for his victory. And to pay him, in my childish way, I jumped upon the large table and recited, in my best style, the fight between David and Goliath. Of course, in my mind, my father was David and the priest of Rome was the giant whom the little stone from the brook had stricken down.

Thou knowest, O God, that it is to that Bible, read on my mother's knees, I owe, by thy infinite mercy, the knowledge of the truth to-day; that Bible had sent, to my young heart and intelligence, rays of light which all the sophisms and dark errors of Rome could never completely extinguish.