

The Lincoln Writings of Charles P. T. Chiniquy

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IN 1891 John G. Nicolay, Lincoln's former secretary, received a note from Benedict Guldner, a Jesuit priest in New York, asking for information about a "libellous pamphlet" printed in Germany. The pamphlet, according to Guldner, was a translation of a work "originally written in this country . . . in which the author maintains that the assassination of President Lincoln was the work of Jesuits." Nicolay and John Hay, another former secretary to the President, had not mentioned the allegation in their biography of Lincoln, and Guldner wished to know if they had heard the charge and if they considered it false.¹ Nicolay consulted Hay and then replied:

To [y]our first question whether in our studies on the life of Lincoln we came upon the charge that "the assassination of President Lincoln was the work of Jesuits," we answer that we have read

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such a charge in a lengthy newspaper publication.

To your second question, viz: "If you did come across it, did the accusation seem to you to be entirely groundless?" we answer Yes. It seemed to us so entirely groundless as not to merit any attention on our part.²

Perhaps the decision of Nicolay and Hay to ignore the charge of a Jesuit conspiracy against Lincoln was unwise. A prompt and firm denial might have prevented further publication of the story.³

The originator of the conspiracy theory was Charles P. T. Chiniquy, a former Catholic priest who claimed to be a close friend and confidant of Abraham Lincoln's. According to Chiniquy, "emissaries

¹Guldner to Nicolay, Oct. 30, 1891, John G. Nicolay Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

²Nicolay to Guldner, Dec. 3, 1891, *ibid.*

³Nicolay did plan to incorporate the item in a projected volume of spurious Lincoln quotations. After Nicolay died, his daughter gave his notes to the Library of Congress. See David C. Mearns, "Our Reluctant Contemporary: Abraham Lincoln," *Abraham Lincoln Quarterly*, 6 (1950), 77-78.



Charles P. T. Chiniquy, former Catholic priest, who served a colony of French Canadians in Kankakee County from 1851 to 1860

of the Pope” were plotting to murder Lincoln for his defense of Chiniquy in an 1856 trial. Chiniquy’s autobiography, *Fifty Years in the Church of Rome*, published in 1885, attributes remarks to the President on a variety of subjects, particularly religion.⁴ Most of Chiniquy’s stories are so foreign to what is known about the Sixteenth President that scholars have ignored them. Nevertheless, many of the less sensational portions of Chiniquy’s reminiscences have been used by serious students of Lincoln’s life, and the most sensational passages have been widely quoted and disseminated by writers engaged in anti-Catholic polemics.

Charles Paschal T  l  sphore Chiniquy was born on July 30, 1809, in Kamouraska, Quebec. As a young man he was ordained a priest in the Roman Catholic church, and his labors to stamp out drunkenness caused him to be known throughout Quebec as “The Apostle of Temperance.”⁵ In 1851 he moved to Kankakee County, Illinois, to serve a colony of French-Canadians who

had migrated there. Chiniquy got into difficulty with his bishop, resigned his position in the church in 1860, and with some of his former parishioners established a new church. In time Chiniquy became a Presbyterian minister and published many books and pamphlets with an anti-Catholic theme. He also lectured extensively throughout the United States, Europe, and Australia on the evils of Roman Catholicism. He died in Montreal on January 16, 1899.⁶

It was while he lived in Illinois in the 1850’s that Chiniquy met Abraham Lincoln. According to Chiniquy’s *Fifty Years in the Church of Rome*, he hired Lincoln to defend him against a charge of personal immorality; the charge, Chiniquy said, had been brought by his enemies in the Catholic church. Chiniquy won the case, thereby incurring the wrath of the Jesuits. By Chiniquy’s account, when the verdict came in, Lincoln said: “I know that Jesuits never forgive nor forsake. But man must not care how or where he dies, provided he dies at the post of honor and duty.”⁷

Chiniquy claimed that he later met with Lincoln on three different occasions in Washington. The first interview, he said, took place at the White House “at the end of August” in 1861. Chiniquy had learned from another former priest of an assassination plot against President Lincoln, and considered it his duty to warn him. Chiniquy reported that Lincoln received

⁴Charles P. T. Chiniquy, *Fifty Years in the Church of Rome*, 43rd ed. (New York: Fleming H. Ravelle Co., 1886), pp. 692–96 (all references in this article are to the forty-third edition). The volume was first published in 1885, in both French and English. The first English edition was printed by the Craig and Barlow publishing Company of Chicago. Marcel Trudel, *Chiniquy* (Trois Rivi  res, Quebec: Editions du Bien Publiques, 1955), pp. xxi–xxii.

An examination of other editions of *Fifty Years in the Church of Rome* reveals that the editions vary only in the dedication pages. See, for example, the third edition—published in 1886 by William Drysdale & Co. of Montreal—and the forty-second edition—published in 1892 by the Craig Press of Chicago.

Chiniquy apparently was active in advertising the volume. The Illinois State Historical Library (hereinafter cited as ISHL) owns *Mr. Editor*, a broadside dated July 13, 1885, which was sent by Chiniquy to newspaper editors. The broadside warned of the dan-

him cordially and then made the following lengthy statement:

Your friends, the Jesuits, have not yet killed me. But they would have surely done it, when I passed through their most devoted city, Baltimore, had I not defeated their plans, by passing incognito, a few hours before they expected me. We have the proof that the company which had been selected and organized to murder me, was led by a rabid Roman Catholic, called Byrne; it was almost entirely composed of Roman Catholics. . . . A few days ago, I saw Mr. [Samuel F. B.] Morse, the learned inventor of electric telegraphy; he told me that, when he was in Rome . . . he found out the proofs of a formidable conspiracy against this country and all its institutions. It is evident that it is to the intrigues and emissaries of the pope, that we owe, in great part, the horrible civil war which is threatening to cover the country with blood and ruins.⁸

Also at that interview, according to Chiniquy, he was offered a position as a secretary at the American legation in Paris, a post from which he could not only investigate the evil designs of Napoleon III but also travel occasionally to Rome and check on the Pope and Jesuits there. Chiniquy declined the appointment; he offered as his reason the need to continue his work in America.⁹

Chiniquy reported that the President was so pleased with that meeting that he invited his visitor to return the next day. On that occasion Lincoln expressed his concern about a report in Democratic newspapers that he had been born a Catholic and baptized by a priest. "I have never been a

Roman Catholic," Lincoln assured his guest. "No priest of Rome has ever laid his hand on my head." Lincoln asked Chiniquy if he could explain the meaning of the reports. Chiniquy replied that the charges represented Lincoln's death sentence by the Catholic church. Lincoln then concluded the interview by stating that he was fighting the Civil War against the Pope and his Jesuits as well as against the Rebels of the South.¹⁰

Chiniquy's second reported visit to Lincoln in Washington, according to *Fifty Years in the Church of Rome*, took place at the "beginning of June, 1862"; but at that time Chiniquy could only shake hands with his friend. The President was too busy for conversation.¹¹

The third and last visit was alleged to have occurred on June 9, 1864, the day Lincoln received official word that he was renominated for the Presidency. The following day, June 10, the two old friends, according to Chiniquy, visited wounded soldiers in Washington hospitals. The President then invited Chiniquy to the White House for a long discussion of Catholicism. Lincoln assured his guest that the Pope and his Jesuits were responsible for the French invasion of Mexico, the New York draft riots, and other outrages. Lincoln also quoted appropriate passages from the Bible and indicated that he was prepared to die for the cause of liberty.¹² Chiniquy then took his leave, never to see Lincoln again.

It is unlikely that any of those meetings took place. As this paper will show, Chiniquy's autobiography contains numerous misrepresentations about his life and association with Abraham Lincoln.

Three years after the appearance of Chiniquy's account, Justin D. Fulton, a Baptist minister, published *Washington in the Lap of Rome*. The book was dedicated "to Americans Who Will Aid in Throttling Jesuitism, in Uncoiling the Serpent Encircling the Capitol of the United States, and in taking Washington Out of the Lap of Rome; That a Free Church and a Free School in a Free State May Make the Great Republic the Glory of the World."¹³ Fulton, a prolific writer, published a variety of books and newspapers with a religious

gers of Romanism, identified chapters about Abraham Lincoln, and requested a copy of the review when published. In a handwritten note at the bottom of the broadside Chiniquy asked the editor to "give the book such criticism it deserves."

⁸*New York Times*, Jan. 17, 1899.

⁹*Ibid.*

⁷Chiniquy, *Fifty Years*, pp. 654-57, 664.

⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 691-92. For Morse's anti-Catholicism, see G. H. G. [George Harvey Genzmer], "Morse, Samuel Finley Breese," *Dictionary of American Biography* (1934).

⁹Chiniquy, *Fifty Years*, pp. 692-93.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 693-96.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 698.

¹²*Ibid.*, pp. 698-709.

¹³Fulton, *Washington in the Lap of Rome* (Boston: W. Kellaway, 1888), pp. iii, 115-35.

theme. Strongly antislavery in pre-Civil War times, he shifted his attacks to the Catholic church after the war. One historian judged his writings "reckless of fact and effect."¹⁴

Chiniquy's and Fulton's writings were the basis for several anti-Catholic tracts published in the 1890's. During that decade as the number of Catholics in America rose in proportion to the increasing immigration rate, many non-Catholics became alarmed at what they considered a danger to the United States. By 1893 the American Protective Association—a nativist group founded in 1887 by H. F. Bowers, an attorney from Clinton, Iowa—had seventy thousand members in twenty states. APA members took an oath to vote for and hire only Protestants.¹⁵

Other anti-Catholic authors also borrowed from Chiniquy. In 1893, for example, W. H. Burr wrote *The Murder of Abraham Lincoln: Planned and Executed by Jesuit Priests*.¹⁶ Thomas M. Harris's pamphlet *Rome's Responsibility for the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln* denounced Catholic schools as breeding grounds by which to "secure loyalty to the [Catholic] Hierarchy, and to prepare the minds of its children for disloyalty to any other power." Harris cited Chiniquy's story to demonstrate "conclusively the hand of Rome in this stab at our nation's life."¹⁷

The Chiniquy claims were repeated in 1924 by Burke McCarty in *Suppressed Truth about the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln*, which was "Affectionately Dedicated" to the author's "Patriotic Mother Who Also Left Rome." McCarty credited the Jesuits with the murders of Presidents William Henry Harrison, Zachary Taylor, James A. Garfield, and William McKinley, as well as Abraham Lincoln. McCarty also accused Catholics of an attempt on the life of President-elect James Buchanan, whom the Jesuits were alleged to have poisoned in February, 1857.¹⁸ In discussing Lincoln's assassination, McCarty quoted extensively from Chiniquy and added some embellishments of his own. McCarty, for example, stated that Chiniquy visited Lincoln in Washington "once each year." Chiniquy had claimed he was in Washington but

three times.¹⁹

By the time McCarty published what he called the "suppressed truth," there was a new audience in America for anti-Catholic literature. The resurrected Ku Klux Klan opposed American Catholics as well as Jews, immigrants, and Negroes.

In 1921 the Rail Splitter Press of Milan, Illinois, which called itself the "oldest, most resourceful, and most reliable Anti-Papal publishing house in America," printed Chiniquy's charges in pamphlet form. The press also advertised a special envelope with a drawing of Lincoln's face and a quotation from the Chiniquy book regarding Lincoln's fear of Catholics and Jesuits. The publisher estimated that at least five people read each envelope; readers, he said, should use the Lincoln envelopes to "save America" and perform "great missionary work."²⁰

In 1922 John B. Kennedy, the editor of *Columbia*, a Catholic magazine, requested information from Robert Todd Lincoln about Chiniquy's report. The reply was emphatic: "I do not know of any literature in which my father is quoted as attacking Catholics and the Catholic Church. Of course, in the years his name has been a peg on which to hang many things."²¹

But even the denial by Lincoln's son could not stop the circulation of Chiniquy's

¹⁴J. D. W. [John D. Wade], "Fulton, Justin Dewey," *Dictionary of American Biography* (1931).

¹⁵Winfred Ernest Garrison, *The March of Faith: The Story of Religion in America since 1865* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1971), pp. 211–12.

¹⁶W. H. B. [W. H. Burr], *The Murder of Abraham Lincoln: Planned and Executed by Jesuit Priests* (Indianapolis: Ironclad Age, 1893).

¹⁷Harris, *Rome's Responsibility for the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln* (Pittsburgh: Williams Pub. Co., 1897), pp. 6, 34.

¹⁸McCarty, *The Suppressed Truth about the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln* (Philadelphia: Burke McCarty, Pub., 1924), pp. 43–52.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 69.

²⁰Rev. Charles Chiniquy, *Assassination of Lincoln* (Milan, Ill.: Rail Splitter Press [1921]), pp. 1, 32.

²¹Thomas P. Meehan, "Lincoln's Opinion of Catholics," *Historical Records and Studies of the United States Catholic Historical Society*, 16 (1924), 88.

story. In 1924 the distinguished historian Carl Russell Fish found it necessary to use the pages of the *American Historical Review* to denounce an account titled "An American Protestant Protest against the Defilement of True Art by Roman Catholicism." According to Fish, the publication, which repeated the claims of Chiniquy's *Fifty Years in the Church of Rome*, had "circulated by the million." Fish argued that "the spirit of the [remarks attributed to Lincoln] . . . is contrary to the whole character of Lincoln's thought and expression." Fish concluded that Chiniquy's fabrication demonstrated the need for a definitive edition of Lincoln's writings and sayings—a project that would be completed almost thirty years later.²²

In 1928, when Al Smith, a Roman Catholic, won the Democratic nomination for the Presidency, the Chiniquy charges were again reprinted. The Rail Splitter Press brought out a pamphlet titled *Abraham Lincoln's Vow Against the Catholic Church*.²³ This pamphlet, like the earlier one from the same press, was based on Chiniquy's charges.

The Abraham Lincoln Association published Lincoln's collected writings in 1953. The nine-volume edition contained no reference to Chiniquy or his claims regarding Lincoln's comments about the Pope, Jesuits, and the Catholic church.²⁴ Yet in 1960 when the Catholic John F. Kennedy

received the Democratic nomination for the Presidency, the Chiniquy story about Lincoln again surfaced. One publication contained the statement that Chiniquy's interviews with Lincoln should serve as a "warning to all Americans who see no danger in having a Roman Catholic in the White House." That widely distributed pamphlet was printed by the Osterhus Publishing House of Minneapolis. The Osterhus pamphlet retold the most sensational portions of Chiniquy's account, taken second-hand from Fulton's *Washington in the Lap of Rome*. The publisher assured readers that the words were Lincoln's, even though "self-styled Lincoln experts may tell you the contents . . . are not among his writings."²⁵

In 1963 another former priest, Emmett McLoughlin, published a study of Lincoln's assassination; he concluded that the Pope and his Jesuits were responsible for Booth's crime. McLoughlin, too, acknowledged his debt to *Fifty Years in the Church of Rome*. The author was particularly impressed by Chiniquy's enduring friendship with Lincoln, during which "the ex-priest visited Lincoln in the White House and frequently warned him of the Church's antagonism and of its threats to the very life of the President."²⁶

Clearly, neither the denials by Nicolay and Robert Todd Lincoln nor the publication of the *Collected Works* would stop the reappearance of Chiniquy's charges. *Fifty Years in the Church of Rome* was translated into many languages and distributed, among other places, in French Canada, South Africa, Norway, France, New Zealand, Haiti, and Formosa.²⁷

Because Chiniquy's autobiography contains several supposedly first-hand observations of Lincoln's religious beliefs, it has been used, albeit cautiously, even by reputable Lincoln biographers. William E. Barton, for example, accepted many of the less sensational portions of Chiniquy's account, particularly the anecdotes describing Lincoln at prayer or quoting long passages from the Bible. Barton believed that Lincoln "trusted and believed in" Chiniquy. Barton did not believe that Lincoln made harsh statements about the Pope, Jesuits,

²²Fish, "Lincoln and Catholicism," *American Historical Review*, 29 (1924), 723–24.

²³M. H. Wilcoxon, *Abraham Lincoln's Vow Against the Catholic Church* (Milan, Ill.: Rail Splitter Press, 1928).

²⁴Roy P. Basler, ed., Lloyd Dunlap and Marion Dolores Pratt, asst. eds., *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953–1955)—hereinafter cited as *Collected Works*. Neither is there any reference to Chiniquy in the supplement to the *Collected Works*, published twenty-one years later: Basler, ed., *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln: Supplement 1832–1865* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1974).

²⁵Fulton, *Lincoln's Assassination* (Minneapolis: Osterhus Pub. House [1960]), p. 2.

²⁶McLoughlin, *An Inquiry into the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Lyle Stuart, 1963), p. 8.

²⁷Trudel, pp. 306–07.

and Catholics but did accept Chiniquy's version of his 1856 trial. Barton wrote:

Lincoln believed thoroughly in the justice of his cause, and of the bad motives of those engaged in the prosecution. . . . I think there is good reason to believe that in this trial Lincoln spoke with some severity of the ecclesiastical machinery that could be made available for the crushing of a man who had incurred the ill will of priests. But his words were not recorded at the time, and those who remembered them afterward probably colored them greatly. Father Chiniquy's account of this affair is within easy reach of any one who wishes to read it, and I think it is essentially truthful, though I do not accept any such account, made from memory years afterward, as reliable in its detail.²⁸

Barton also accepted Chiniquy's recollections of visits to Lincoln in the White House. Barton suspected that the incidents were "colored by the imagination" of the former priest but that the account contained "a basis of fact in accord with what we might have expected Lincoln to say." Barton warned, however, that the conversations sounded "much more like Chiniquy than Lincoln." "It is not safe," Barton concluded, "to put Abraham Lincoln on record except in words that he is known to have written or uttered. And to say this is not to impugn Father Chiniquy, who, I think, intended to be truthful."²⁹

Influenced by Barton's views, Lloyd Lewis unwittingly helped perpetuate Chiniquy's claims. In *Myths After Lincoln*, Lewis agreed that the disclosures were based on actual incidents but "were far more Chiniquy than Lincoln." Lewis advanced the view that Chiniquy's "unbalanced imagination" prompted him "to expand some simple remarks of the President into a metaphysical monologue which, though it retained, in all likelihood, some of Lincoln's words, misrepresented him wholly."³⁰ Emanuel Hertz followed in the Barton tradition and frequently cited *Fifty Years in the Church of Rome* as a source for Lincoln's religious views.³¹

The evidence is conclusive that reliance on Chiniquy was unfortunate, for his claims were baseless. Chiniquy did meet Lincoln in 1856, and he did engage Lincoln's services as an attorney. But the facts of the trial bear little resemblance to the account presented

in *Fifty Years in the Church of Rome*. According to Chiniquy, the Bishop of Chicago, Chiniquy's superior, had induced a land speculator named Peter Spink to bring charges of immorality against Chiniquy in 1855. Chiniquy said that the court found him innocent but that Spink obtained a change of venue. Chiniquy was then retried, he said, at Urbana. At that time Lincoln was hired as defense attorney and was influential in producing a key witness from Chicago who exposed Spink as a perjurer. After the acquittal, according to Chiniquy, Lincoln declared, "Jesuits never forget nor forsake."³²

The court records and attorneys' notes from that trial contradict almost every point in Chiniquy's autobiography. The original documents show that *Spink v. Chiniquy* involved little more than a personal feud between two embittered friends. Peter Spink, the plaintiff in the case, charged in his complaint that "on or about the 10th day of January A.D. 1854" he was accused by Chiniquy, "in a public assembly," of committing perjury. Apparently the public assembly was a church service, and Chiniquy, then a priest, had announced to his congregation that Spink, a land speculator, was advising clients to enter public lands on which French-Canadians had cut timber. Spink's plan, Chiniquy told his parishioners, was to make the French-Canadians pay

²⁸Barton, *The Soul of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1920), p. 188; Barton, "Abraham Lincoln and the Eucharistic Congress," *The Outlook*, 143 (1926), 375.

²⁹Barton, *Soul of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 196; Barton, "Abraham Lincoln and the Eucharistic Congress," p. 375.

³⁰Lewis, *Myths After Lincoln* (New York: Harcourt, 1929), pp. 343-45.

³¹Hertz, *Abraham Lincoln: A New Portrait* (New York: Horace Liveright, 1931), I, 55-56. See also Edgar DeWitt Jones, *Lincoln and the Preachers* (1948; rpt. Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), pp. 27-28; Clarence Edward Macartney, *Lincoln and the Bible* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1949), pp. 92-96. A more recent student of Lincoln's religious views, William J. Wolf, was suspicious of Chiniquy but believed that he "did have interviews" with the President. See Wolf, *The Almost Chosen People: A Study of the Religion of Abraham Lincoln* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1959), p. 26.

³²Chiniquy, *Fifty Years*, pp. 617-42, 653-61, 664.

³³"Complaint of Peter Spink, Feb. 3, 1855," photo-

for the wood. Spink charged that the accusation was "false and malicious" and had caused his clients to lose confidence in him. As a result Spink was unable "to do business as before, wherefore he was greatly injured and sustained great damage." Spink further charged that the priest had "at divers times before the instituting of this suit—slandered and defamed this deponent." Those statements are recorded in the official complaint, "Sworn and Enscribed," on February 3, 1855, in the circuit court of Kankakee County.³³ The official charge brought by Spink was slander, not immorality. The Bishop of Chicago (who was not, in any case, Chiniquy's superior) had nothing to do with the complaint. The trial was shifted, as Chiniquy said, from Kankakee to Urbana, but before, not after, the first court proceedings. There was first a mistrial, and the jury chosen for the second hearing could not agree. Lincoln then became Chiniquy's attorney. In the words of his friend H. C. Whitney, Lincoln "abhorred that class of litigation [slander]," and was influential in bringing about a compromise before a third trial.³⁴ A statement of agreement, in Lincoln's handwriting, is extant. It reads:

This day came the parties and the defendant denies that he has ever charged, or believed the plaintiff to be guilty of Perjury; that whatever he

stat, *Spink v. Chiniquy* file, ISHL. Henry Clay Whitney stated in 1892 that Chiniquy's offending statement was made in a sermon. Whitney, *Life on the Circuit with Lincoln*, Introduction and notes by Paul M. Angle (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, 1940), pp. 73–75.

³⁴Whitney, p. 75. Spink petitioned for the change of venue; he claimed that he could not receive a fair trial in Kankakee because of "the prejudice of the judge." See "Petition of Peter Spink," Nov. 13, 1855, photostat, *Spink v. Chiniquy* file, ISHL.

³⁵"Peter Spink vs. Charles Chiniquy [1856]," Herndon-Weik MSS, Library of Congress (microfilm in ISHL). The ISHL Lincoln Collection contains a photostat of a second copy, mostly in Lincoln's handwriting, but with three lines written by others, probably other attorneys involved in the compromise settlement.

³⁶The ISHL does have a photostat in its Lincoln Collection of the handwritten bill for services that Lincoln gave Chiniquy. The document reads: "Urbana, May 23—1856 Due A. Lincoln Fifty dollars for value received." It is signed "C. Chiniquy."



Lincoln's Assassination

Traced Directly

—to the—

Doors of Rome.

By *FATHER CHINIQUY.*

Title page from an undated book in which Chiniquy charges that "every person connected with the murder was a Roman Catholic"

has said, from which such a charge could be inferred, he said on the information of others, protesting his own disbelief in the charge; and that he now disclaims any belief in the truth of such charge against said plaintiff—It is therefore, by agreement of the parties, ordered that this suit be dismissed, each party paying his own cost—the defendant to pay his part of the cost heretofore ordered to be paid by said plaintiff.³⁵

It is difficult to believe that Chiniquy and Lincoln would have had reason or occasion at Urbana for a discussion of the evils of the Catholic church—which in any case had no connection with the trial.³⁶

Chiniquy's accounts of later visits with Lincoln and discussions of religion and fears of Catholic plots against the President's life are equally unreliable. David Davis had warned in 1866 that Lincoln was a "secretive man." That Lincoln would discuss his religious views with strangers Davis considered "absurd."³⁷ John G. Nicolay, writing shortly after Lincoln's death, asserted that he had never heard Lincoln explain his religious views.³⁸ If such close associates of the President's as Davis and Nicolay never heard Lincoln speak of his religious views, it is not likely that Chiniquy would have had long theological discussions with him. Moreover, there is no available documentary evidence that Chiniquy was friendly with Lincoln or visited with him privately in Washington.

According to *Fifty Years in the Church of Rome*, Chiniquy visited Lincoln in August, 1861, and June, 1862. At the first interview Chiniquy claimed that the President not only spoke of the evils of Catholicism but offered his friend a secretaryship in the American legation in Paris. On September 29, 1862, three months after the second meeting was supposed to have taken place, Chiniquy wrote to Lincoln and thanked him for services rendered in Urbana in 1856. Nothing was mentioned of any meeting in Washington or any offer of a position for Chiniquy in the foreign service. The letter, preserved in the Robert Todd Lincoln Collection in the Library of Congress, reads:

MR. PRESIDENT,

I have the honor [and] the pleasure of forwarding to You the adress of my countrymen adopted in a meeting of our whole Colony.

Our gratitude for the good you are doing to our beloved & bleeding Country, is increased by the great services you have rendered me personally, in a very solemn circumstance, at Urbana, Ill.

I have, then, a double reason to bless the name of Abraham Lincoln, & to assure you of the respect & devotedness with which I have the honor, to subscribe myself, Mr. President,

Yr. Nble Ser[vant].
CHARLES CHINIQUY³⁹

One finds it difficult to believe that the author of this letter was the confidant de-

scribed in *Fifty Years in the Church of Rome*. It is safe to assert that the two men never shared long friendly conversations at any time—especially between May 23, 1856, and September 29, 1862.

Chiniquy's autobiography is more specific about his reported third and last visit to Lincoln, which, he said, took place on June 8, 1864. According to Chiniquy, he was invited to return on June 9 for Lincoln's official notification of renomination by the Republican party. Chiniquy said that he attended the affair, and his descriptions of the Republican delegations conform to the newspaper reports.⁴⁰ Chiniquy claimed that he was invited by the President to return the following day, June 10. On that day, Chiniquy said, the two men visited a number of hospitals, and later at the White House had their final conversation about the Bible and the evils of Romanism.

Chiniquy may have attended the ceremony on June 9 and may have met with the President on June 10. If so, it was not as an old friend of Lincoln's, however. The Robert Todd Lincoln Collection contains a letter of June 10, 1864, from one A. Chester to the President.⁴¹ The letter is a request for funds for the school operated by Chiniquy in Kankakee County.⁴² In the note Chester expresses "high appreciation" of

³⁷Davis memorandum, Sept. 20, 1866, Herndon-Weik MSS.

³⁸Nicolay to William H. Herndon, May 27, 1865, Herndon-Weik MSS.

³⁹Chiniquy to Lincoln, Sept. 29, 1862, Robert Todd Lincoln Collection, Library of Congress (hereinafter cited as RTL Collection).

⁴⁰*Evening Star* (Washington, D.C.), June 9, 10, 1864; *New York Times*, June 10, 1864; *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia), June 10, 1864. The account quoted in *Collected Works*, VII, 380–82, is taken from the *New York Tribune*, June 10, 1864. All newspaper accounts agree on essentials regarding the event.

⁴¹Apparently this is the same A. Chester who edited the *Kankakee Gazette* from 1853 to 1856; see *Collected Works*, IV, 30. Chester is known to have been a friend of Lincoln's; he was a lawyer at one time, campaigned for Lincoln in 1864, asked the President for political jobs for friends and himself, and provided some letters of recommendation for people wishing to see the President. See Chester to Lincoln, April 25, June 25, Dec. 16, 1863, and March 3, Aug. 8, Oct. 21, Nov. 15, Dec. 8, 1864—all in RTL Collection.

Chiniquy's character and commends him to Lincoln "as worthy of your highest confidence—a man and a Preacher of ability and integrity whom you cannot too much encourage." Chester is clearly not writing about an old friend of the President's. Along with Chester's note is one from Chiniquy, also dated June 10. It reads:

MY DEAR MR. LINCOLN

It was my privilege, yesterday, to bless you in the name of ten [?] thousand French Canadians settled in our Colony of Illinois. To day, I approach you to offer you a new opportunity of doing one of the things you like the more; and by which your life has been filled: "a good action."

In the Providence of God I have brought some six hundred families of my countrymen from the errors of Rome; to the Knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus Christ. Now, I am trying to give to the Children of those converts the best possible Christian & American education, and I have founded a College: "The Saviour's College" where about 130 boys & girls are taught to serve their God & love their country.

But, alone, I can not meet all the expenses of that new Institution. Our Presbytery have advised me to make an appeal to our Freinds [*sic*] in Washington. The eminent services you have already rendered me, gives me, surely, the privilege of looking to you as our first & noblest Friend.

It is then to you that we go first to get some help for the education of that colony which has already sent more than 150 men to the defense

of the Country, 12 of them have shed their blood on the battle fields of the West.

For God's sake, My dear Mr. Lincoln, do receive with your usual Kindness, my humble requests

and Believe me
Your most devoted Servant
C. CHINIQUY

My residence in Washington is 58th Missouri [*sic*] Ave.

No reference is made of past intimate conversations. Nothing in the letter suggests that two old friends from the Illinois prairies might have spent the day visiting wounded soldiers or holding a long conversation on theology. Lincoln did visit hospitals in and about Washington while he was President, but there is no record that he did so on June 10, 1864. Also, he never visited more than one hospital on any of the days listed for that activity in *Lincoln Day by Day*. On the evening of June 10, 1864, the President met with Orville H. Browning and discussed an Illinois patronage matter.⁴³ Lincoln may have met with Chiniquy that evening, but there is no evidence of it. If such an interview did occur, the subject was probably Chiniquy's request for money.

It is clear that Charles Chiniquy met Lincoln in 1856 in Urbana and engaged his legal services. The facts of the case differ significantly, however, from those reported in Chiniquy's autobiography. As to the three separate interviews in Washington, it is reasonable to assume that the first two never took place. If a third did occur, it was for the purpose of obtaining a charitable contribution from the President. One may also conclude that Lincoln never offered Chiniquy a post in the foreign service, nor did he engage the former priest in long conversations about the Bible and assassination plots.⁴⁴

As the by-no-means exhaustive list of pamphlets and books cited in this essay suggests, Chiniquy's charges against the Catholic church will be kept alive by sectarian battlers disposed to believe what was said in *Fifty Years in the Church of Rome*.⁴⁵ Scholars, however, even when tempted to use less sensational passages from Chiniquy's book, should be wary. There is no evidence to support his claim that he was a close friend of the Sixteenth President's.

⁴²Enclosed with the letter is a broadside that endorses the school and requests funds: Alex. F. Kemp, *To the Christian Public*, Montreal, May 9, 1864.

⁴³Earl Schenck Miers, William E. Baringer, C. Percy Powell, eds., *Lincoln Day by Day: A Chronology, 1809–1865* (Washington, D.C.: Lincoln Sesquicentennial Commission, 1960), III, 264; Theodore Calvin Pease and James G. Randall, eds., *The Diary of Orville Hickman Browning: Volume I, 1850–1864*, Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library, Vol. 20 (Springfield: Illinois State Historical Library, 1925), p. 672.

⁴⁴Chiniquy's Canadian biographer presented what he considered only a partial list of Chiniquy's untruths and concluded "les mensonges de Chiniquy sont légion" ("The lies of Chiniquy are legion"); Trudel, pp. 260–62.

⁴⁵The most recent pamphlet of this genre seen by the author is Father Charles Chiniquy, *The Gift* (Philadelphia: Continental Press [ca. 1974]). Chiniquy was described as a "friend of Abraham Lincoln."