

***CHARLES PASCHAL
TELESPHORE
CHINIQUY***



***THE PRIEST,
THE WOMAN AND
THE CONFSSIONAL***

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The Priest, the Woman and the Confessional

EAN 8596547021865

DigiCat, 2022

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[Works Published by F. E. Grafton,](#)

[Montreal.](#)

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PREFACE.

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EZEKIEL.

Chapter VIII.

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1 And it came to pass in the sixth year, in the sixth *month*, in the fifth *day* of the month, *as* I sat in mine house, and the elders of Judah sat before me, that the hand of the Lord God fell there upon me.

2 Then I beheld, and lo a likeness as the appearance of fire; from the appearance of his loins even downward, fire; and from his loins even upward, as the appearance of brightness, as the color of amber.

3 And he put forth the form of an hand, and took me by a lock of mine head; and the spirit lifted me up between the earth and the heaven, and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem, to the door of the inner gate that looketh toward the north; where *was* the seat of the image of jealousy, which provoketh to jealousy.

4 And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel *was* there, according to the vision that I saw in the plain.

5 ¶ Then said he unto me, Son of man, lift up thine eyes now the way toward the north. So I lifted up mine eyes the

way toward the north, and behold northward at the gate of the altar this image of jealousy in the entry.

6 He said furthermore unto me, Son of man, seest thou what they do? *even* the great abominations that the house of Israel committeth here, that I should go far off from my sanctuary? but turn thee yet again, *and* thou shalt see greater abominations.

7 ¶ And he brought me to the door of the court; and when I looked, behold a hole in the wall.

8 Then said he unto me, Son of man, dig now in the wall; and when I had digged in the wall, behold a door.

9 And he said unto me. Go in, and behold the wicked abominations that they do here.

10 So I went in and saw; and behold every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, pourtrayed upon the wall round about.

11 And there stood before them seventy men of the ancients of the house of Israel, and in the midst of them stood Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan, with every man his censer in his hand; and a thick cloud of incense went up.

12 Then said he unto me. Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery? for they say, The Lord seeth us not; the Lord hath forsaken the earth.

13 ¶ He said also unto me, Turn thee yet again, *and* thou shalt see greater abominations that they do.

14 Then he brought me to the door of the gate of the Lord's house which *was* toward the north; and, behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz.

15 ¶ Then said he unto me, Hast thou seen *this*, O Son of man? turn thee yet again, *and* thou shalt see greater abominations than these.

16 And he brought me into the inner court of the Lord's house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, *were* about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the Lord, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east.

17 ¶ Then he said unto me, Hast thou seen *this*, O Son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here? for they have filled the land with violence, and have returned to provoke me to anger; and, lo, they put the branch to their nose.

18 Therefore will I also deal in fury: mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity; and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, *yet* will I not hear them.

CHAPTER I.

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the struggle before the surrender of womanly self-respect in the confessional.

There are two women who ought to be the constant objects of the compassion of the disciples of Christ, and for

whom daily prayers ought to be offered at the mercy-seat—the Brahmin woman, who, deceived by her priests, burns herself on the corpse of her husband to appease the wrath of her wooden gods; and the Roman Catholic woman, who, not less deceived by her priests, suffers a torture far more cruel and ignominious in the confessional-box to appease the wrath of her wafer-god.

For I do not exaggerate when I say that for many noble-hearted, well-educated, high-minded women to be forced to unveil their hearts before the eyes of a man, to open to him all the most sacred recesses of their souls, all the most sacred mysteries of their single or married life, to allow him to put to them questions which the most depraved woman would never consent to hear from her vilest seducer, is often more horrible and intolerable than to be tied on burning coals.

More than once I have seen women fainting in the confessional-box, who told me, afterwards, that the necessity of speaking to an unmarried man on certain things, on which the most common laws of decency ought to have for ever sealed their lips, had almost killed them! Not hundreds, but thousands of times I have heard from the dying lips of single girls, as well as of married women, the awful words: "I am for ever lost! All my past confessions and communions have been as many sacrileges! I have never dared to answer correctly the questions of my confessors! Shame has sealed my lips and damned my soul!"

How many times I remained as one petrified by the side of a corpse when, these last words having hardly escaped the lips of one of my female penitents, she was snatched

out of my reach by the merciless hand of death, before I could give her pardon through the deceitful sacramental absolution! I then believed, as the dead sinner herself believed, that she could not be forgiven except by that absolution.

For there are not only thousands, but millions, of Roman Catholic girls and women whose keen sense of modesty and womanly dignity are above all the sophisms and diabolical machinations of their priests. They never can be persuaded to answer "Yes" to certain questions of their confessors. They would prefer to be thrown into the flames, and burnt to ashes with the Brahmin widows, rather than to allow the eyes of a man to pry into the sacred sanctuary of their souls. Though sometimes guilty before God, and under the impression that their sins will never be forgiven if not confessed, the laws of decency are stronger in their hearts than the laws of their cruel and perfidious Church. No consideration, not even the fear of eternal damnation, can persuade them to declare to a sinful man sins which God alone has the right to know, for He alone can blot them out with the blood of His Son shed on the cross.

But what a wretched life that of those exceptional noble souls, which Rome keeps in the dark dungeons of her superstition! They read in all their books, and hear from all their pulpits, that if they conceal a single sin from their confessors they are for ever lost! But, being absolutely unable to trample under their feet the laws of self-respect and decency which God Himself has impressed in their souls, they live in constant dread of eternal damnation. No human words can tell their desolation and distress when, at

the feet of their confessors, they find themselves between the horrible necessity of speaking of things on which they would prefer to suffer the most cruel death rather than to open their lips, or to be for ever damned if they do not degrade themselves for ever in their own eyes by speaking on matters which a respectable woman will never reveal to her own mother, much less to a man!

I have known only too many of these noble-hearted women, who, when alone with God, in a real agony of desolation and with burning tears, had asked Him to grant them what they considered the greatest favour, which was to lose so much of their self-respect as to be enabled to speak of those unmentionable things just as their confessors wanted them to speak; and, hoping that their petition had been granted, they went again to the confessional-box, determined to unveil their shame before the eyes of that inexorable man. But, when the moment had come for the self-immolation, their courage failed, their knees trembled, their lips became pale as death. Cold sweat flowed from all their pores! The voice of modesty and womanly self-respect was speaking louder than the voice of their false religion. They had to go out of the confessional-box unpardoned—nay, with the burden of a new sacrilege on their conscience.

Oh, how heavy is the yoke of Rome—how bitter is human life—how cheerless is the mystery of the cross to those deluded and perishing souls! How gladly they would rush into the blazing piles with the Brahmin women, if they could hope to see the end of their unspeakable miseries through the momentary tortures which would open to them the gates of a better life!

I do here publicly challenge the whole Roman Catholic priesthood to deny that the greater part of their female penitents remain a certain period of time—some longer, some shorter—under that most distressing state of mind.

Yes, by far the greater majority of women, at first, find it next to impossible to pull down the sacred barriers of self-respect which God Himself has built around their hearts, intelligences, and souls, as the best safeguard against the snares of this polluted world. Those laws of self-respect, by which they cannot consent to speak an impure word into the ears of a man, and which shut all the avenues of their hearts against his unchaste questions, even, when speaking in the name of God—those laws of self-respect are so clearly written in their conscience, and they are so well understood by them to be a most Divine gift, that, as I have already said, many prefer to run the risk of being for ever lost by remaining silent.

It takes many years of the most ingenious (I do not hesitate to call it diabolical) efforts on the part of the priests to persuade the majority of their female penitents to speak on questions which even pagan savages would blush to mention among themselves. Some persist in remaining silent on those matters during the greatest part of their lives, and many prefer to throw themselves into the hands of their merciful God and die without submitting to the defiling ordeal, even after they have felt the poisonous stings of the enemy, rather than receive their pardon from a man who, as they feel, would have surely been scandalized by the recital of their human frailties. All the priests of Rome are aware of this natural disposition of their female

penitents. There is not a single one—no, not a single one of their moral theologians, who does not warn the confessors against that stern and general determination of the girls and married women never to speak in the confessional on matters which may, more or less, deal with sins against the seventh commandment. Dens, Liguori, Debreyne, Bailly, &c. —in a word, all the theologians of Rome—own that this is one of the greatest difficulties which the confessors have to contend with in the confessional-box.

Not a single Roman Catholic priest will dare to deny what I say on this matter; for they know that it would be easy for me to overwhelm them with such crowd of testimonies that their grand imposture would for ever be unmasked.

I intend, some future day, if God spares me and gives me time for it, to make known some of the innumerable things which the Roman Catholic theologians and moralists have written on this question. It will form one of the most curious books ever written; and it will give an unanswerable evidence of the fact that, instinctively, without consulting each other, with an unanimity which is almost marvellous, the Roman Catholic women, guided by the honest instincts which God has given them, shrink from the snares put before them in the confessional-box; and that everywhere they struggle to nerve themselves with a superhuman courage against the torturer who is sent by the Pope to finish their ruin and to make shipwreck of their souls. Everywhere woman feels that there are things which ought never to be told, as there are things which ought never to be done, in the presence of the God of holiness. She understands that, to recite the history of certain sins, even

of thoughts, is not less shameful and criminal than to do them; she hears the voice of God whispering into her ears, "Is it not enough that thou hast been guilty once, when alone, in My presence, without adding to thine iniquity, by allowing that man to know what should never have been revealed to him? Do you not feel that you make that man your own accomplice the very moment that you throw into his heart and soul the mire of your iniquities? He is as weak as you are; he is not less a sinner than yourself; what has tempted you will tempt him; what has made you weak will make him weak? what has polluted you will pollute him; what has thrown you down into the dust will throw him down into the dust. Is it not enough that My eyes had to look upon your iniquities? must my ears to-day listen to your impure conversation with that man? Were that man as holy as My prophet David, may he not fall before the unchaste unveiling of the new Bathsheba? Were he as strong as Sampson, may he not find in you his tempting Delilah? Were he as generous as Peter, may he not become a traitor at the maid-servant's voice?"

Perhaps the world has never seen a more terrible, desperate, solemn struggle than the one which is going on in the soul of the poor trembling young woman, who, at the feet of that man, has to decide whether or not she will open her lips on those things which the infallible voice of God, united to the no less infallible voice of her womanly honour and self-respect, tell her never to reveal to any man!

The history of that secret, fierce, desperate, and deadly struggle has never yet, so far as I know, been fully given. It would draw the tears of admiration and compassion of the

whole world, if it could be written with its simple, sublime, and terrible realities.

How many times I have wept as a child when some noble-hearted and intelligent young girl, or some respectable married woman, yielding to the sophisms with which I, or some other confessor, had persuaded them to give up their self-respect, their womanly dignity, to speak with me on matters on which a decent woman would never say a word with a man! They told me of their invincible repugnance, their horror of such questions and answers, and they asked me to have pity on them. Yes! I often wept bitterly on my degradation when a priest of Rome! I felt all the strength, the grandeur, the holiness of their motives for being silent on those defiling matters. I could not but admire them. It seemed, at times, that they were speaking the language of angels of light; that I ought to fall at their feet, and ask their pardon for having spoken to them of questions on which a man of honour ought never to converse with a woman whom he respects.

But, alas! I had soon to reproach myself and regret these short instances of my wavering faith in the infallible voice of my Church; I had soon to silence the voice of my conscience, which was telling me, "Is it not a shame that you, an unmarried man, dare to speak on those matters with a woman? Do you not blush to put such questions to a young girl? Where is your self-respect? where is your fear of God? Do you not promote the ruin of that girl by forcing her to speak with a man on such questions?"

I was compelled by all the Popes, the moral theologians, and the Councils of Rome, to believe that this warning voice

of my merciful God was the voice of Satan; I had to believe, in spite of my own conscience and intelligence, that it was good, nay, necessary, to put those polluting, damning questions. My infallible Church was mercilessly forcing me to oblige those poor, trembling, weeping, desolated girls and women to swim with me and all her priests in those waters of Sodom and Gomorrha, under the pretext that their self-will would be broken down, their fear of sin and humility increased, and that they would be purified by our absolutions.

In the beginning of my priesthood, I was not a little surprised and embarrassed to see a very accomplished and beautiful young lady, whom I used to meet almost every week in her father's house, entering the box of my confessional. She used to go to confess to another young priest of my acquaintance, and she was looked upon as one of the most pious girls of the city. Though she had disguised herself as much as possible, that I might not know her, I thought that I was not mistaken—she was the amiable Mary

Not being absolutely sure of the correctness of my impressions, I left her entirely under the hope that she was a perfect stranger to me. At the beginning she could hardly speak; her voice was suffocated by her sobs; and, through the little apertures of the thin partition between her and me, I saw two streams of big tears trickling down her cheeks.

After much effort, she said: "Dear Father, I hope you do not know me, and that you will never try to know me. I am a desperately great sinner. Oh! I fear that I am lost! But if there is still any hope for me to be saved, for God's sake, do

not rebuke me! Before I begin my confession, allow me to ask you not to pollute my ears by the questions which our confessors are in the habit of putting to their female penitents. I have already been destroyed by those questions. Before I was seventeen years old, God knows that His angels are not more pure than I was; but the chaplain of the Nunnery where my parents had sent me for my education, though approaching old age, put to me in the confessional a question which, at first, I did not understand; but, unfortunately, he had put the same questions to one of my young class-mates, who made fun of them in my presence, and explained them to me; for she understood them too well. This first unchaste conversation of my life plunged my thoughts into a sea of iniquity, till then absolutely unknown to me; temptations of the most humiliating character assailed me for a week, day and night; after which, sins which I would blot out with my blood, if it were possible, overwhelmed my soul as with a deluge. But the joys of the sinner are short. Struck with terror at the thought of the judgments of God, after a few weeks of the most deplorable life, I determined to give up my sins and reconcile myself to God. Covered with shame, and trembling from head to foot, I went to confess to my old confessor, whom I respected as a saint and cherished as a father. It seems to me that with sincere tears of repentance I confessed to him the greatest part of my sins, though I concealed one of them through shame, and respect for my spiritual guide. But I did not conceal from him that the strange questions he had put to me at my last confession

were, with the natural corruption of my heart, the principal cause of my destruction.

"He spoke to me very kindly, encouraged me to fight against my bad inclinations, and, at first, gave me very kind and good advice. But when I thought he had finished speaking, and as I was preparing to leave the confessional-box, he put to me two new questions of such a polluting character that I fear neither the blood of Christ nor all the fires of hell will ever be able to blot them out from my memory. Those questions have achieved my ruin; they have stuck to my mind as two deadly arrows; they are day and night before my imagination; they fill my very arteries and veins with a deadly poison.

"It is true that, at first, they filled me with horror and disgust; but, alas! I soon got so accustomed to them that they seemed to be incorporated with me, and as though becoming a second nature. Those thoughts have become a new source of innumerable criminal thoughts, desires, and actions.

"A month later, we were obliged, by the rules of our convent, to go to confess; but this time, I was so completely lost that I no longer blushed at the idea of confessing my shameful sins to a man; it was the very contrary. I had a real, diabolical pleasure in the thought that I should have a long conversation with my confessor on those matters, and that he would ask me more of his strange questions.

"In fact, when I had told him everything, without a blush, he began to interrogate me, and God knows what corrupting things fell from his lips into my poor criminal heart! Every one of his questions was thrilling my nerves, and filling me

with the most shameful sensations. After an hour of this criminal *tête-à-tête* with my old confessor (for it was nothing else but a criminal *tête-à-tête*), I perceived that he was as depraved as I was myself. With some half-covered words, he made me a criminal proposition, which I accepted with covered words also; and during more than a year, we have lived together in the most sinful intimacy. Though he was much older than I, I loved him in the most foolish way. When the course of my convent instruction was finished, my parents called me back to their home. I was really glad of that change of residence, for I was beginning to be tired of my criminal life. My hope was that, under the direction of a better confessor, I should reconcile myself to God and begin a Christian life.

"Unfortunately for me, my new confessor, who was very young, began also his interrogations. He soon fell in love with me, and I loved him in a most criminal way. I have done with him things which I hope you will never request me to reveal to you, for they are too monstrous to be repeated, even in the confessional, by a woman to a man.

"I do not say these things to take away the responsibility of my iniquities with this young confessor from my shoulders, for I think I have been more criminal than he was. It is my firm conviction that he was a good and holy priest before he knew me; but the questions he put to me, and the answers I had to give him, melted his heart—I know it—just as boiling lead would melt the ice on which it flows.

"I know this is not such a detailed confession as our holy Church requires me to make, but I have thought it necessary for me to give you this short history of the life of the

greatest and the most miserable sinner who ever asked you to help her to come out from the tomb of her iniquities. This is the way I have lived these last few years. But last Sabbath, God, in His infinite mercy, looked down upon me. He inspired you to give us the Prodigal Son as a model of true conversion, and as the most marvelous proof of the infinite compassion of the dear Saviour for the sinner. I have wept day and night since that happy day, when I threw myself into the arms of my loving, merciful Father. Even now I can hardly speak, because my regret for my past iniquities, and my joy that I am allowed to bathe the feet of my Saviour with my tears, are so great that my voice is as choked.

"You understand that I have for ever given up my last confessor. I come to ask you the favour to receive me among your penitents. Oh! do not reject nor rebuke me, for the dear Saviour's sake! Be not afraid to have at your side such a monster of iniquity! But before going farther, I have two favours to ask from you. The first is, that you will never do anything to know my name; the second is, that you will never put me any of those questions by which so many penitents are lost and so many priests for ever destroyed. Twice I have been lost by those questions. We come to our confessors that they may throw upon our guilty souls the pure waters which flow from heaven to purify us; and, instead of that, with their unmentionable questions, they pour oil on the burning fires which are already raging in our poor sinful hearts. Oh! dear father, let me become your penitent, that you may help me to go and weep with Magdalene at the Saviour's feet! Do respect me, as He

respected that true model of all the sinful but repenting women! Did Our Saviour put to her any question? did He extort from her the history of things which a sinful woman cannot say without forgetting the respect she owes to herself and to God? No! You told us, not long ago, that the only thing our Saviour did was to look at her tears and her love. Well, please do that, and you will save me!"

I was a very young priest, and never had any words so sublime come to my ears in the confessional-box. Her tears and her sobs, mingled with the so frank declaration of the most humiliating actions, had made upon me such a profound impression that I was, for some time, unable to speak. It had come to my mind also that I might be mistaken about her identity, and that perhaps she was not the young lady that I had imagined. I could, then, easily grant her first request, which was to do nothing by which I could know her. The second part of her prayer was more embarrassing; for the theologians are very positive in ordering the confessors to question their penitents, particularly those of the female sex, in many circumstances.

I encouraged her, in the best way I could, to persevere in her good resolutions by invoking the blessed Virgin Mary and St. Philomène, who was then the *Sainte à la mode*, just as Marie Alacoque is to-day, among the blind slaves of Rome. I told her that I would pray and think over the subject of her second request; and I asked her to come back, in a week, for my answer.

The very same day, I went to my own confessor, the Rev. Mr. Baillargeon, then curate of Quebec, and afterwards Archbishop of Canada. I told him the singular and unusual